



## **From the desk of the Chief Minister**

Christmas is a wonderful time for children and families, a time when we share happy times and lots of good food, a time when we exchange gifts and wish everyone well. Of course, I join in the wishes to everyone in the Norfolk Island community for a healthy, happy and restful Christmas and New Year. At this time of the year, we often also get the opportunity to take a step back from the responsibilities of work and earning our way and have time to reflect on the achievements of the past year and the opportunities which will open up in the year to come.

### **New governments**

2007 has been a year of many major changes, achievements and challenges. In many respects we are confronted with the same difficult issues as other communities - small islands and global challenges as well. The big picture for Norfolk Island, as always, is to protect our environment, enhance our prosperity and plan a future that is sustainable. I have no hesitation in stating that our current Assembly has left no stone unturned in exploring better opportunities for our island home. We have also made many of the difficult and sometimes overdue decisions in many areas.

In 2007, both Norfolk Island and the Commonwealth of Australia held elections which resulted in changes of government. I think that in both cases, the new governments hit the ground running. In Norfolk Island, we have certainly racked up many achievements and have seen a substantial improvement in our economy based on growing tourist numbers and steadily increasing population. The groundwork has been laid for more exciting changes in 2008 and beyond, especially in areas such as the diversification and growth of the business sector, the broadening of our tourist markets into new and exciting areas we have barely touched before and the creation of new public infrastructure to enhance our tourism industries and underwrite marine freight and activities associated with a new port or harbour.

We are determined to work closely with the new Australian Government to strengthen mutual ties and to pursue critical goals from our strategic plan. We have taken early steps to communicate with the incoming Rudd Labor Government, inviting the Prime Minister and several other portfolio Ministers to visit Norfolk Island, and offering to provide detailed personal briefings here or in Australia on the many services we provide and on relevant policy issues. Of course, we will also take the chance to explain our priorities and to seek assistance where it is available on important projects.

### **Strategic Plan - New Directions for Norfolk Island**

Early in the new year, you will receive a copy of the Strategic Plan for 2008-09, which is a comprehensive document setting out the goals and measurable objectives of the Norfolk Island Government over the remainder of the term of the 12<sup>th</sup> Assembly. Among other important goals, it sets out our plans for economic growth and diversification, infrastructure development and maintenance, improving the quality and delivery of community services, enhanced consultation and the promotion of fairness, opportunity and responsibility. I want to thank the many people who have provided comment and input on the consultation draft of the Plan, especially those community members who supplied constructive and detailed comments.

I do not intend to make this Christmas message a detailed chronicle of the things we have done in 2007, nor of all the important tasks that await us in 2008. But I want to mention just a couple of areas as an indication of our key priorities.

### **Tourism and air services**

Tourism remains the lifeblood of the Norfolk Island economy, and we are devoting lots of resources to keep that industry in good shape. I commend the Tourist Board and the outgoing General Manager for a very strong performance in 2007, with overall growth in numbers of about 11% and encouraging bookings for next year. The Board has implemented a five-year strategy and has trialled a number of successful initiatives, with many more to come. The Government has approved various necessary upgrades to the airport infrastructure, terminal and equipment which will be required in the short term to ensure that we maintain our current tourism momentum, and have the capacity to deal with further growth.

Norfolk Air has displayed our tenacity and ability to compete in a challenging international marketplace. Using minimal staffing with maximum effort and expertise, we have exceeded comparative historic results for scheduling and yield while maintaining continuous contact and negotiation with our business partners OzJet. Norfolk Air has also produced substantial profits which have been allocated to promotion of Norfolk Island in major markets in unison with Norfolk Tourism. Norfolk Air is exploring new markets and expanded schedules and will make some exciting announcements as 2008 progresses.

### **New community facilities and restructured public services**

The creation of the new Hospital working group has enabled the use of various local expertise to assist in the development of plans and evaluation process of funding options for construction. The public service has recently completed an assessment of all financial processes and has progressed well towards implementing our international financial reporting systems, that will not only ensure our compliance with international standards, but also enable us to gather accurate and relevant financial data whenever required. This process initiates a program to upgrade our data management systems and will no doubt enhance our efficiency with regard to financial matters, an important stage in the review of the public service that this Government has undertaken.

On Radio Norfolk earlier this week, I attempted to thank the myriad of people and groups who contribute toward making Norfolk Island such a special place. I won't try to list them all here, but I do want to say a special thank you to all of the community groups such as service clubs, cultural and sporting organisations and volunteers in many great causes who have given of their time to the community this year. I also want to acknowledge the advice and support of my Ministerial colleagues, Members of the Assembly, Assembly support staff, CEO and every member of the public service, statutory bodies and advisory boards and committees for their support and efforts over the last year – thank you very much.

I would like to finish by wishing everyone at home or away the very best festive season and a happy, healthy and prosperous 2008. I look forward to putting every effort into the New Year on Norfolk Island and to working together to make this an ever better place for all of us.

André Nobbs  
**Chief Minister**

21 December 2007