



From the desk of the Chief Minister

This last week of January is always a watershed time in some ways. School goes back, marking the start of the educational experience for many of our younger sullen and some pain/elation of separation for parents. For others who have recently completed their school education, the return to school of younger siblings and friends marks a significant step into adulthood as they head off to tertiary study, vocational training or paid employment. Perhaps in this time of extraordinary world economic events, it is comforting that many things in our lives are returning to more normal and predictable patterns.

Plenty of life at The Bay

It's been a great January at Emily Bay, whether you've been camping there or not. Last weekend saw a hugely successful Summerfest in great weather and with a good crowd enjoying the festivities. It's great to see some of our younger community members taking the initiative in events such as this. My congratulations and thanks to all concerned – at least this year you didn't have any false starts because of inclement weather! There have also been several very successful live music nights at The Bay – let's hope that these also become regular events for everyone to enjoy. The live lunchtime jazz concert in December was a great event, and I'm told by Norfolk Tourism that it is likely to be repeated at the 2009 Jazz Festival. With plenty of warm weather left, I hope to see you enjoying Emily Bay, the Salt House, Munna's and in fact the whole area in coming weeks.

It's okay to complain

Great news from Admin that the new complaints system is nearly ready to roll! This will mean that any person with a complaint about an administrative action or decision will have the chance to have their complaint dealt with in a transparent and accessible way. Congratulations in particular to George Plant and Melissa Yeats, who have designed the new procedures with input from outside experts and with reference to the appropriate Australian Standard. They are in the final stage of testing the complaints brochure (with a theme that "It's okay to complain") and the new system will be operational during February. The launch of the new system will be accompanied by a full public announcement and relevant training for public sector staff.

Workers compensation is in everyone's interest

In recent times, I have been working closely with Employment Officer Gary Dowling and many private sector employers to ensure that the workers compensation scheme is performing well. Workers compensation is part of the suite of programmes – including workplace safety education and occupational health and safety measures – designed to benefit employees and employers through ensuring safer and more productive work practices and workplaces. A comprehensive workers compensation scheme is essential to ensure income protection and treatment for those employees who do suffer workplace injury or illness, and of course it also effectively insures employers who might otherwise face large claims. I have talked to a considerable number of employers about these issues in recent days, and it is good to see that we have a very high level of compliance with what I believe to be a well-designed and managed Norfolk Island workers compensation scheme.

The "G" words

I've managed to get this far without mentioning the big "G" words on everyone's lips lately – GFC (Global Financial Crisis) and Governance. In some ways, these two issues have converged in our ongoing negotiations with the Commonwealth about economic and political

relations between Norfolk Island and Australia. There have been some recent developments, a few of which still involve confidential Minister-to-Minister communications, but I can tell you that we continue to make progress. A week ago, I sent a long letter to Minister Debus detailing the financial statements made in the Legislative Assembly and setting out a timetable and processes to move forward. I expect to be having another personal teleconference with Minister Debus in the week commencing on February 9th.

Yesterday, I also wrote to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, putting forward the Norfolk Island case for consideration in any Commonwealth stimulus package to deal with the effects of the global slowdown. The Prime Minister is consulting with state premiers about what steps to take, and we have sought access to ensure that Norfolk Island is included in the Commonwealth's deliberations.

We have suggested that one way to ensure that Norfolk Island remains involved in discussions about economic policy would be to make us an observer at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). We are already a full member or an observer at a number of ministerial councils, including the Ministerial Council on Gaming, the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG), the Tourism Ministers' Council, the Cultural Ministers' Council, the Ministerial Council for Corporations and the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. We see real advantages for both Norfolk Island and the Commonwealth in us also taking a seat at the COAG table, bringing stability to the relationship between our two governments and assuring Norfolk's long-term future. Naturally, I will keep the community informed on the progress of our discussions with the Australian Government.

Well, school may be back and the daily schedule returned to normal, but I reckon there is still plenty of summer to come. So don't miss the opportunity to get out and enjoy the warmth while at the same time we all continue to promote the delights of Norfolk to the world, so that everyone can play a part in economic recovery. But it's not just warmer days which mean that my door is always open! Feel free to contact me - as always, I value your views and would love to hear from you about anything that could improve our way of life or our manner of governing Norfolk Island.

André Nobbs
Chief Minister

30 January 2009