



From the desk of the Chief Minister

Seems as if summer is a bit late this year – but at least we've had a bit of rain to go along with the hot days and steamy nights! We have been quite busy at the Legislative Assembly, with two meetings within a week to deal with a range of important issues. Minister Vicky Jack has put out plenty of information about the latest phase in the campaign to eradicate Argentine Ants, and so I'll cover a few other matters.

Clarifying COAG and the stimulus package with the Prime Minister

In recent times, I have written twice to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in relation to Commonwealth plans for a stimulus package and the manner in which Norfolk Island can take part in considerations of major economic issues. I proposed that as a self-governing Australian jurisdiction we be included in current consideration of the next round of Commonwealth responses to the evolving world situation by being granted observer status at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). Norfolk Island is already a full member of the Ministerial Council on Gaming and has observer status on many other ministerial councils, including 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. I would see our membership at COAG as being a further communication link that will support Norfolk's ongoing stability in the Commonwealth for our future.

I have also sought urgent clarification from the Prime Minister that the Norfolk Island Central School is included in the 9540 schools nationwide which can seek funding under the Building the Education Revolution. That programme is aimed at providing facilities from multi-purpose halls to better technological equipment for classrooms. I am still awaiting replies from the Prime Minister, but will again raise these matters during my visit to Canberra next week.

A note from New Zealand

Back in November 2008, I wrote to the new Prime Minister of New Zealand, Hon John Key MP, congratulating him on his election and inviting him to visit Norfolk Island if the opportunity arose. I also said *"...Norfolk Island has a long history of social, economic, cultural and political ties with New Zealand. A substantial number of our permanent residents originated from New Zealand and many still have family, property and business ties with your country. New Zealand is also a valued and important source of tourists to Norfolk Island, and we wish to continue to work closely with you to develop and expand our two-way tourist traffic in the interests of both of our communities"*.

This week I received a gracious reply from Mr Key, who is no doubt a very busy man with the global financial crisis bearing down especially heavily in New Zealand. In part, Mr Key said *"...communities in New Zealand and in Norfolk Island have strong and enduring ties, and it is appropriate that this is so given our geographic proximity and the shared heritage of many of our residents. Many older New Zealanders still recall from their own experience the courage of Norfolk Islanders during your island's time as an important airbase during World War II. Norfolk Island's deserved reputation as a tourist destination is certainly a strong drawcard to many New Zealanders. Norfolk Islanders are also very valued visitors to New Zealand, and I hope we will see increased tourist traffic and further official visits between us over the next few years."*

A good week for culture

The coming week will be a real feast for culture vultures. This week each year is much anticipated, as it brings together Opera in the Ruins and Poetry in the Park – well actually Community Arts is going to call it Poetry in the Parish from this year on, with the finale to be held in the Parish Centre. These two wonderful events are great for our visitors, but I also highly recommend them to everyone in the community, especially families. Check the list of events in the newspapers or at the Visitor Information Centre and you will find things which will appeal to all the family. I particularly love to see and hear the kids perform their own poems in a greatly supportive atmosphere of parents and friends and with the symphony of a sausage sizzle in the background. By contrast, you will hear some of the great voices in our region if you can get along to any of the Opera in the Ruins events. Congratulations to Community Arts and to Norfolk Tourism for once again hosting these great cultural events.

Real progress in the governance discussions

I have already made comment in the Assembly and on radio about the positive progress made in my discussions about governance with the Hon Bob Debus MP, Minister for Home Affairs. I am travelling to Canberra next week and will meet with Minister Debus on Thursday. At my suggestion, His Honour the Administrator, Owen Walsh, will also be at the meeting. We will be discussing the real progress made on administrative complaints and ombudsman services. Administration will officially launch their complaint service in early March, which is a great initiative.

While in Canberra, I am also meeting Professor John McMillan, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, who has agreed that he will underpin the complaint service once it is fully effective. That will require some legislative change and a formal service agreement, but I am hopeful that those formalities can be finalised quite quickly through cooperation between our two governments. Also on the agenda for our intergovernment discussions will be anti-corruption programmes, some service delivery areas and the longer- term fiscal relationship between Norfolk Island and the Commonwealth. I expect to be able to report to the community on progress after my return.

Jonno is off island at an important sporting meeting, so there will not be any Mythbusters this week, and I will be in Canberra next week. But I will go on radio on my return and will endeavour to keep you up to date on the latest government news.

André Nobbs
Chief Minister

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