



THE GOVERNMENT OF NORFOLK ISLAND

MEDIA RELEASE

Norfolk Island self government achieves greater maturity and transparency: Chief Minister

Chief Minister André Nobbs said today that the recent Australian Government Cabinet decision on Norfolk Island governance demonstrates the growing maturity of the self-government arrangements for Norfolk Island and its long-term relationship with Australia. This was particularly significant because Norfolk Island would celebrate 30 years of self determination in August this year.

Mr Nobbs had further discussions today in Australia with the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Bob Debus MP, on the specifics of the Commonwealth decisions and on the processes to be followed in their development and implementation.

“While there are many areas of detail still to be settled, in general I welcome the decisions by the Commonwealth to share in our moves toward greater transparency and accountability and to work together for structural change which will strengthen our administrative and financial systems and lay the foundations for long term stability in our mutual relationship”, Mr Nobbs said. “I have continually reported to the Norfolk Island community that we have moved in many areas to build stronger transparency and accountability mechanisms but needed the cooperation of the Commonwealth in undertaking legislative and programme changes at the Canberra end to make further progress. The Commonwealth has now agreed to both make the necessary changes and to provide the funding to ensure that they are effective”.

Mr Nobbs said that the major areas of progress will include the establishment of ombudsman services and a robust external audit function incorporating financial, programme and performance auditing. He also welcomed the commitment of the Commonwealth to assist in the design and implementation of a more modern and effective financial management framework.

“We have recognised for a long time the need for more sophisticated financial and information technology systems, but lacked some of the specific internal expertise and financial resources to implement integrated change across the whole public sector”, Mr Nobbs said. “In my discussions with Minister Debus, I have raised our need for assistance with training, hardware and software to greatly enhance our

financial management and IT systems and provide us with much better data to enable forward strategic and budget planning”.

Mr Nobbs said that some of the other Commonwealth proposals in relation to legislative and governance changes appeared to have arisen more from past parliamentary reports than from the recent discussions between the two governments. He pointed out that there was already a legislative code of conduct for Members of the Legislative Assembly and that some of the measures suggested would impose greater bureaucracy and cost on Norfolk Island than applied to states and territories and could in some areas produce outcomes at odds with accepted democratic principles. He understood that the Commonwealth was prepared to discuss the manner in which it wished to develop and apply these decisions and said that the Norfolk Island Government was ready to enter into detailed discussions in those areas.

“We already aspire to achieve the highest possible standards in democracy, openness and good practice in government”, Mr Nobbs said. “While the Commonwealth wants to set the bar higher for us than it does for itself in areas such as codes of conduct and anti-corruption measures, we do not back away from our commitment to achieving the highest possible probity standards. Hopefully Norfolk Island can be a pilot programme which will show the way in which the Australian Government can apply similar measures within its own jurisdiction”.

The Chief Minister said that he had discussed with Minister Debus the need for an ongoing series of meetings at both ministerial and departmental officer level to move ahead with the governance reforms and would keep the community informed on progress.

André Nobbs
Chief Minister

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