



THE GOVERNMENT OF NORFOLK ISLAND

MEDIA RELEASE

Resettlement of Guantanamo Bay detainees

Norfolk Island Chief Minister André Nobbs has responded to misleading Australian media reports that Norfolk Island was “seeking to take detainees from Guantanamo Bay without telling Canberra”.

Mr Nobbs said that there had been awareness in the Norfolk Island community that Palau had agreed the United States had agreed to resettle a small group of former detainees.

“There were informal discussions about this and other issues among Members of the Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly”, Mr Nobbs said. “I consulted all Members of the Assembly (with the exception of one Member who was off-island), who agreed that further information should be sought. Since the American Consul-General had recently paid a courtesy visit to Norfolk Island, I made an informal preliminary request for information to her office. Naturally, in asking for background information, I indicated that I was not seeking in any way to impinge on the diplomatic relationship between the United States of America and Australia”.

“There was no formal offer or representation from Norfolk Island, simply an informal information gathering exercise, during which I made it clear that we understood the complexity and diplomatic sensitivity of the issues involved. I further reiterate that this informal contact was made after consultation with all of my parliamentary colleagues with the exception of one Member who was not on the Island at the time.”

Mr Nobbs said that the governments of Australia and the United States had made it clear that the matter was one to be dealt with at a national level between them, and that Norfolk Island understood and respected that position.

The Chief Minister said that Norfolk Island is in a unique situation unlike other Australian territories or states. It is self-governing, with its own customs, immigration, quarantine and tax systems. Norfolk Island fully funds and delivers its own health, education, welfare and community services. Norfolk Island has its own team in the Commonwealth Games, and is a member of international sports, cultural and political organisations in its own right. For historic and cultural reasons, Norfolk Island has warm friendship ties with Great Britain, the Isle of Man and Pitcairn Island. It is also a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

The unique local language (Norf’k) is recognised by UNESCO and Norfolk Island is frequently consulted on governance and other issues by its South Pacific neighbours and other jurisdictions facing similar challenges. In the absence of assistance from Australia, it

has contracted with a French-backed consortium to obtain high speed broadband through undersea fibre optic cable by the end of 2010 and holds contracts with Nauru-based Our Airline to supply air charter services to its own international airline, Norfolk Air.

Mr Nobbs said that in order to ensure close communication and coordination with the Commonwealth, Norfolk Island had made approaches to be included in the Council of Australian Governments as either a full member or as an observer. However, the Commonwealth had rejected these suggestions and at times it was difficult for Norfolk Island to have its voice heard. Norfolk Island remains a territory under the authority of the Commonwealth, yet it has been excluded from most Commonwealth funding programmes. This means that, for example, the Norfolk Island Central School is the only one of 9,540 Australian schools not eligible to apply for funding under the Commonwealth's Building the Education Revolution financial stimulus plan.

André Nobbs
Chief Minister

16 July 2009