



From the desk of the Chief Minister

This week's "From the Desk" is a bit of a recap of issues the Government has discussed in many forums and the media that we have available to us on Norfolk. Even though we do our very best to keep everyone updated through detailed discussion on radio, in parliament, in print, online and in person, sometimes it seems that the message does not get through and that it is easier to believe "dem tull" than to refer to the facts. Perhaps a long letter in last week's paper, mostly inaccurate and based on rumour, was a good illustration of that. But I don't intend to go over all of those things which have been canvassed so many times. This week I'll just try to give an update on some current events and issues.

Focus on the future

With the 2009/10 budget now in place, we are focussing on revising our strategic plans and bedding down the many reforms already in place or being implemented. One of the most important of these is the restructure and reform of the public sector, which was identified as one of the priorities for this Assembly. We have already introduced a number of reforms to improve transparency and accountability, and this week I have written to both the Minister for Home Affairs and the head of the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, asking them to progress the legislative and administrative changes necessary at the Canberra end to keep the momentum going. In a number of areas, the ball is in the Commonwealth's court.

In the meantime, we will continue to focus on the future and get on with the job of governing in a positive way. Part of the strategic direction of the 12th Legislative Assembly has been to rigorously consider the core business of government, and to look at how we can do things better and smarter. This year's budget and some surrounding policy directions illustrate this. We have looked carefully at all of our assets and have decided that some areas might be better transferred to the private sector. Over coming months, some of these assets will be offered for sale through seeking expressions of interest from the community. We will also sound out the market for possible sale of wholesale licences to import alcohol, in the belief that it is not necessarily desirable to tie up large amounts of public capital in liquor stocks or the wholesale and retail sale of alcohol. This will involve careful assessment of our current revenue streams against what ongoing revenue could still be gathered under new arrangements. We are also continuing to implement the public sector efficiency dividend, which will reduce expenditure and improve productivity.

This week, the Manager of Norfolk Telecom and the Minister for Finance have travelled to New Caledonia for the formal launch of the South Pacific Islands Network network, which will bring Norfolk Island very high speed broadband next year. They are also holding discussions with interested customers who may wish to lease capacity and thus to underwrite the cost of the broadband project. This new broadband capacity will open up all sorts of business and educational opportunities for our community, giving us a competitive edge over many of our larger neighbours. It will help us to diversify our economic base away from such heavy dependence on tourism – which we all know remains severely depressed due to the effects of the global recession and the pandemic 'flu that are causing huge reductions in tourist numbers in our region. But it is encouraging to see that there is now a growing consensus among economists and national leaders, including US President Obama and central bankers, that the worst may be over and that more and more "green shoots" of recovery are appearing.

This week there were the first tentative signs that retirement incomes in Australia might be making a recovery, but we can expect that confidence in that critical sector of our market will take time to rebound and that the tourism industry still faces tough times. That said, some of

my recent contacts with tourism industry insiders have indicated some very positive trends in forward bookings which will show up in our visitor numbers later in the year. Some wholesalers are very positive, with one reporting that they had just experienced their best week ever of forward bookings for travel to Norfolk Island, with a very high rate of conversion of enquiries into positive sales.

It has been good to see the positive reaction to the new community information centre and its expanding email network, which provides to community members a huge range of information on funding and subsidy programmes, business and training opportunities, recent reports and publications, events in our community and elsewhere, invitations to make submissions and current public or private sector investigations and inquiries. We hope that the community information centre will become a permanent part of the communication network to keep everyone informed on what's happening.

Golden Oldies Rugby Tournament

Rugby enthusiasts will tell you that it is the "game played in heaven". Detractors tend to say that rugby is "a form of unarmed combat played by gentlemen". Whichever you believe, we still offer a warm welcome to the teams arriving this weekend to take on our very own Creaky Ol' Convicts in the Golden Oldies Rugby Tournament. The Norfolk team has travelled abroad in the past to perform with distinction on and off the field, and this year it is their turn to host teams visiting Norfolk Island. The weather forecast looks promising and we wish all the teams and successful tournament and an enjoyable stay in Norfolk Island.

30th anniversary of internal self-government

August this year marks 30 years since the first sitting of the Legislative Assembly upon the granting of self-government to Norfolk Island in 1979. We have been honoured that Her Excellency the Governor-General of Australia, Ms Quentin Bryce AC, in recognition of this important event, has accepted our invitation to attend Norfolk Island to mark this most significant anniversary. Her Excellency has agreed to address a Ceremonial Sitting of the assembly, which is scheduled for 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday 19 August 2009, and will also be in attendance at several public events in Norfolk Island on August 19 and 20. The Speaker of the Assembly is the official host of the celebrations, and will publicise the full programme. I hope that as many members of the community as possible will attend the public events and have the opportunity to meet Her Excellency.

I am taking a short break with my family to visit relatives and friends in New Zealand. While there, I intend to look closely at how Norfolk Island is promoted to potential visitors, and hope to make some guest appearances on radio to get out the message about all of the great tourism experiences we have to offer. I'll be back in print and on the radio when I return.

André Nobbs
Chief Minister

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