



From the desk of the Chief Minister

With so much happening lately in our region and in Norfolk Island, it's hard to know where to start in this week's "From the Desk". Perhaps the unifying theme is the wonderful way our community comes together in good times and in adversity to provide support for those around us – not just in our beautiful small homeland, but in the wider world. A whole lot of scenarios have brought this home to me over the past week or so.

Sharing in the grief and the recovery

So many people in diverse places in the Pacific and South East Asia have suffered through natural disasters since the start of October, that the numbers affected are hard to comprehend. Earthquakes and tsunamis have devastated Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga, while typhoons and floods have hit the Philippines, Japan and India. Even by Indonesian standards, the earthquake in Sumatra has been huge and the scope of human loss and destruction is almost unimaginable.

Just over 12 months ago, I joined with many other Pacific leaders in celebrating the Tenth Festival of Pacific Arts in American Samoa, where Governor Togiola Tulafono and the local community made all of us extremely welcome. This week, I wrote to Governor Tulafono expressing the shock of the Norfolk Island community at the death and destruction caused by the earthquake and tsunamis in his country. I expressed the solidarity of the Norfolk Island community with the people affected, and offered any help which we are able to provide.

It has been great to see that individuals, service clubs and churches in Norfolk Island have responded rapidly with cash donations and offers of assistance to our Pacific neighbours Western Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga. I encourage everyone to support the appeals for these countries and the other organisations such as Red Cross who are supplying aid to Indonesia, the Philippines and India in the wake of the week's terrible natural disasters.

The Art of Friendship

Many will remember that last year Community Arts and the Norfolk Island Government assisted local artists to display their works at the exhibition held by our sister city of Mosman in New South Wales. This week I received a gracious letter from the Mayor of Mosman, Councillor Anne Connon, who was a guest in Norfolk Island for our Sesquicentenary celebrations in 2006. The Mayor wrote as follows:

*It is my pleasure to advise you that **The Art of Friendship Exhibition** held at the Mosman Art Gallery last year as part of the Mosman Festival has received a national award from Sister Cities Australia. The award is presented for the most outstanding and imaginative project that furthers the development of the local sister cities program within the community. The award comprises a trophy for all the participants in the project and I am very happy to enclose the trophy for Norfolk Island.*

The Art of Friendship Exhibition was displayed in the Mosman Art Gallery & Community Centre from 18 October to 9 November 2008 and was an unqualified success, being greatly appreciated by gallery visitors and guests. The exhibition provided Mosman residents and visitors with a wonderful opportunity to see and appreciate many different aspects of life in

our Friendship Communities of Mudanjiang, China; Glen Innes, NSW; Norfolk Island and Paciano, Italy.

Once again, I would like to thank you and your art community on behalf of Mosman Council for supporting and participating in **The Art of Friendship Exhibition** and making it possible for Mosman to win this award and share it with you.

Congratulations to everyone in Norfolk Island who contributed to this great outcome. Once again, we have shown that we can match it with the big players and that our artistic standards are of the highest order. I have not yet decided where to display the handsome trophy – perhaps it could go in the next “treasures” exhibition at the Museums.

A wedding, 11 plays and a Royal Show

Wow! What a week for events to celebrate in Norfolk Island! I was pleased to meet with the winners of the Running of the Brides competition, Sefton Paske and Belinda Paiti from New Zealand, who are here for part of their great prize – an all expenses paid honeymoon in Norfolk Island. Belinda outsprinted 17 other contenders in wedding dresses to claim the prize, which also included a new wedding dress, wedding rings and a reception for 40 guests. Congratulations to Sefton and Belinda, and wishes for many years of happy married life together.



This is Belinda (left) on her way to victory

The Norfolk Island Theatre Festival was also held this week, in the wonderful intimate surroundings of the Ferny Lane Theatre. This year festival organisers excelled themselves with 11 theatre groups from New Zealand, Australia and Norfolk Island performing some really entrancing plays. Congratulations to all who took part, and to those who took out awards. We hope that you will all want to perform again in the 2010 Theatre Festival.

And so to the 2009 Royal Norfolk Island Agricultural and Horticultural Show on Monday. Every year, dozens of volunteers give endless hours of work to make the Show a great success – the organisers, stewards, judges, service clubs and exhibitors to name just a few. I really must commend the A & H Society’s Secretary Jack Marges and President David Buffett for the huge efforts they put in to ensure that every year’s show is bigger and better than the one before. If you haven’t been before – get along to the Show on Monday afternoon for a truly enjoyable experience – and if you have, I won’t need to encourage you to go, because I’m sure you’ll be there again!

CIRCA and the Community Information Centre spread their wings

This week saw the first in what will become an ongoing series of free public seminars at our thriving new Community Information Centre, operated by Norfolk CIRCA. Nicola Kennedy presented a well-received session for a full house of participants on applying for employment and preparing for job interviews. Many thanks to Nicky, a qualified human resources specialist who volunteered her time and gave a very professional presentation. Thanks also to Pixie Saxby and George Plant, who presented segments on what they look for when recruiting staff in the private and public sectors respectively.

CIRCA met on Thursday and now has planned a number of future sessions. These will include excellence in customer service; a session for employers on how to recruit the best staff; household budgeting; how to write a professional resume or curriculum vitae and more. CIRCA will publicise each session well in advance, and would welcome suggestions from the community about other possible topics (and of course volunteers willing to run sessions!).

CIRCA is also holding a stall at Monday's Royal A & H Society Show, where it will distribute information on the services it offers and will even give you a chance to win a free return trip to Australia (including taxes) in its 2009 Major Raffle. Many thanks to Norfolk Air as major sponsor and to the banks and businesses who have sold tickets in this fundraiser to help expand the information services provided by CIRCA.

Intergovernment relations

Early in 2009, we approached the Australian Government seeking economic stimulus assistance to deal with the loss in government and community revenues directly resulting from the decline in visitor arrivals caused by the global financial crisis. While the Commonwealth has yet to decide on that request, the Norfolk Island Government recently received advice from the Australian Minister for Finance and Deregulation (the Hon Lindsay Tanner MP) that *"...I have written to the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP, asking him to consider other options to provide the Norfolk Island Government with short term financial relief, in the context of the Australian Government Budget process generally"*.

I have followed up this encouraging news by requesting a meeting within in the next two weeks with the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP. We have also requested a teleconference of senior officials from Norfolk Island and the Commonwealth to develop firm recommendations for consideration by both governments. Hopefully, this will complement the longer-term task force which we have asked to consider a new and sustainable fiscal relationship between the Commonwealth and Norfolk Island.

These steps should help to strengthen our mutual relationship, but I remain concerned about the formula for communication and cooperation between our two jurisdictions. Because of this, I recently wrote to the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader proposing that we develop more sophisticated and outcome-oriented means of communication in the interests of better services for all in Norfolk Island. I again invited the Prime Minister to visit Norfolk Island, but in recognition of his heavy schedule I advised that I was willing to travel to Canberra to meet with him at any time in the interests of improved communication and governance outcomes.

One reaction to my letter was a very supportive media release from the Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs, the Hon Sussan Ley MP, who visited Norfolk Island last year and impressed us with her friendly and intelligent personality. The full text of her message can be viewed at <http://www.liberal.org.au/news.php?id=3870>

That's all for this week. See you at the Show!

André Nobbs
Chief Minister of Norfolk Island

9 October 2009