

TRANSCRIPT

**Radio interview – Hon Andre Nobbs MLA
Radio Norfolk – Darlene Buffett
16 October 2009**

Progress on governance and accountability issues

ANDRE NOBBS: On a serious but positive note, for some time we've been a little bit concerned about the formula for communication and the implementation of some of the agreed objectives of both the Norfolk Island Government and the Cabinet decision made with regard to the transparency and accountability measures. I think that I made the community aware that I'd written to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on this issue that perhaps the formula that is supporting and has supported Norfolk for some years just needs a little refinement in better communication systems and implementation of the agreed areas and things like that.

On a positive front, in the last few days I have been advised that we will shortly be having some officers to do with the Ombudsman's office as well as administrative law or freedom of information arriving on Norfolk and that should take place next week. Additionally over the next several weeks there may be some other officers attending who no doubt are going to work with us to get some of these mechanisms across the line. They have been mechanisms that I can certainly say I have dedicated a lot of time to since we first commenced the Twelfth Assembly. And they were specifically part of the platform that I spoke of at the time of the election, which was to bring a bit more transparency and accountability to our method of governance, but more so on the point of opening the communications between Norfolk and the Australian federal ministers and the way that we could operate to prevent the almost biannual reviews of how we are operating brought on sometimes by the misinterpretation of information or lack of information.

Hence the reason we have carried out a significant amount of work directly with the Independent Commission Against Corruption and also with the Ombudsman's Office and the Australian National Audit Office – which, for those people who were listening to the last Assembly, we appointed them as the Norfolk Island Auditor for our annual audit process. The reason for that is that, once again it creates a conduit between Norfolk Island and the Commonwealth to better demonstrate how we are operating, what our mechanisms are and no doubt also to provide us some feedback if there are efficiency audits that can be carried out and there may be better ways for us to provide services and programmes.

I certainly welcome the next steps, which start next week with regard to those officers being on island. I understand that there will be a fair degree of community consultation with those officers while they are on the Island, so that is a great step forward for us in getting those measures across the line. Personally I was becoming a little despondent that perhaps they were not going to be introduced as mechanisms prior to the end of this Assembly. I didn't want the momentum to be lost and that not to occur.

In other areas, our Secretary to Government will be in Canberra next week, and he will be having some discussions with officials from Finance and Deregulation. That is actually to follow up some of the infrastructure grants that the Norfolk Island Government submitted at the time when Minister Debus was our Federal Minister and he invited us to apply for those under that programme at the same time as the stimulus funding was discussed. We subsequently put four applications in, and they were to do with broadband communications, airport infrastructure, roads and renewable energy. What I envisage is that the Secretary to Government will meet with those officials from Finance and Deregulation, assess where those applications are currently at, whether we need to provide additional information, what their likelihood for success is and any other actions we can take on them to move them forward, just so that we can get an answer and move on from there.

I sent a facsimile and a formal letter to Minister Brendan O'Connor's office last Friday evening and I think that there was a crossover at the same time whereby he sent a response back to a letter which I had written in July, that dealt with some of the outstanding queries with regard to stimulus fund and the sale and leaseback of the fire engines and things like that. Now there is a response from that letter that relates to stimulus funding, and that is that at this stage the Minister does not see that stimulus funding is appropriate to Norfolk. Given the time lag, I guess that may have something to do with it, but stimulus funding at the time of the major impacts of the global financial crisis was seen to be more appropriate. Unfortunately in our case, this has dragged on some nine months, so we are now changing gears I suppose and we are also looking now at where the infrastructure grants may appear.

Many people will be aware that the construction of the budget for this year accounted for no stimulus funding which would appear to have been a very responsible methodology. However, within that was the consideration for sale and leaseback which was a commercially accepted option for refinancing the fire engines and thus putting further cash at bank, given the 15% decline in tourism numbers and the ongoing financial effects. That had been considered within the budget process, so as a result of that it will form part of the ongoing discussions with Finance and Deregulation in the next week.

I'll move on from there to talk about immigration, and I've recently had a response back from Anthony Albanese with regard to how the trans-Tasman

smart kiosk/smart gate gateways are working at the moment in their progress to making tourism travel between Australia and New Zealand a little bit more fluid and a little bit less restricted than the international travel requirements. In the response to that, I've gained some insight into where it is travelling, although it still has a long way to go. I've further made our point that we certainly want to be part of that process, given our location and also that we see a major benefit in the smart gate/smart kiosk system, which is basically an electronic travel authority processing system. Now that has some major advantages both in timeframes of managing arrivals and departures, but more specifically from my perspective as the Minister responsible for immigration, it enables us to ensure that arriving passengers comply with our immigration requirements as well as Australian visa requirements as well as any Australian immigration policy requirements or highlights that may come up on that system and that is the beauty of that system.

Ends.