



Norfolk Island People for Democracy Ltd.

NORFOLK ISLANDERS CALL ON THE LABOR PARTY TO INTERVENE IN ISLAND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Norfolk Island People for Democracy today called on the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party to intervene to protect the workers in Norfolk Island and to reverse proposed Commonwealth governance changes which will remove Islanders' democratic and human rights, based on misleading and inaccurate information provided to the Commonwealth Parliament by successive Liberal ministers.

Former Minister responsible for territories Hon Jamie Briggs MP and current minister Hon Paul Fletcher MP have continued to maintain that the majority of Norfolk Islanders support the changes, despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary.

On 8 May 2015, a democratic referendum was held on Norfolk Island addressing the "reform" process being implemented by the Commonwealth. This referendum was conducted under legislation originally implemented by the federal parliament in 1964. Almost 70% of voters rejected the Commonwealth approach, yet the federal ministers and the on-island Administrator ignored the result and continued to contend that a strong majority of Islanders supported the removal of self-government.

Further evidence that Norfolk Islanders rejected the Commonwealth takeover came through a clear majority of community opinions expressed at three very well-attended public meetings in Norfolk Island. At a recent independent university

seminar in Canberra, the Commonwealth-appointed chair of the first of those meetings presented a paper indicating that it was clear that a vast majority of Norfolk Island attendees rejected the suggestion that there had been adequate consultation and were, in fact, opposed the proposal to remove self-government.

During his only visit to Norfolk Island earlier this year, Minister Fletcher met with only a few hand-picked supporters and refused to hold discussions with the two largest private sector organisations (the Chamber of Commerce and the Accommodation and Tourism Association), as well as rejecting meetings with NIPD and other supporters of democracy. Yet he continued to repeat the contention that a majority of Norfolk Islanders supported the Commonwealth “reforms”, without producing a shred of evidence that this was the case.

The unprecedented abolition of the democratically elected Norfolk Island parliament resulted from these false contentions, as well as from selective use of consultancy reports commissioned by the Commonwealth.

For example, the coalition government ignored numerous negative conclusions in a report from the Centre for International Economics (CIE) it commissioned in 2014, as well as even more dramatic findings in an earlier report from the same consultant. Among other things, the 2014 report forecast that if the Commonwealth implemented its governance “reforms”, new taxes would reduce household income by 15.3%, leading to a decline in private consumption of around 12% and an overall fall in Gross Territory Product of 6%.

CIE also forecast that the introduction of mainland laws would increase the cost of labour by 29%, and thus be likely to substantially reduce on-Island employment levels. It estimated that the implementation of the Commonwealth’s “reforms” would initially cause severe contractions in Norfolk Island’s economy for at least five years. In the unlikely event that the private sector survived that long, it felt that the changes would “eventually” prove beneficial. Given the fragility of the Norfolk

Island economy and the likelihood of substantial job losses, NIPD calls on the Labor Party to reconsider its position and to work with Norfolk Islanders to achieve much greater economic stability both for the present and in the longer term.

The recent seminar on Norfolk Island governance convened by the University of Canberra canvassed alternative approaches which would result in ongoing economic, social and environmental sustainability for Norfolk Island while at the same time costing much less to Australian taxpayers.

A favoured approach was for the continuance of democratic self-government in Norfolk Island without the previous financial constraints and the lack of assured Commonwealth financial contributions, resulting in the underwriting of the annual Norfolk Island budget in much the same way as is done for the Northern Territory, while at the same time freeing up the Norfolk Island economy to build on the resilience and strength it showed for more than 30 years after the granting of limited self-government in 1979.

Remarkably, the coalition government is promoting a scheme for Norfolk Island totally at odds with its proclaimed economic ideology. It wishes to promote large central government by remote control from Canberra, higher taxes and a projected consumer boom on the back of welfare payments.

Based on the lack of consultation, the distortions and misrepresentations presented to parliament, the ignoring of consultants' warnings and the bizarre economic strategies proposed by the coalition government, now is the time for the Labor Party to re-examine its support for the anti-democratic takeover of Norfolk Island by Canberra.

NIPD and other supporters of democracy in Norfolk Island would be happy to meet with representatives of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party to discuss practical and equitable alternatives to the current Commonwealth plans which would protect

and enhance the human and employment rights of Islanders, while at the same time reducing financial costs to Australian taxpayers.

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