



Norfolk Island People for Democracy

Norfolk Island is undergoing a huge transformation of its economic and social life as a result of the Norfolk Island Amendment Act 2015 recently passed in the Commonwealth Parliament. As a part of this transformation process the Commonwealth has appointed an unelected Norfolk Island Advisory Council (NIAC) to provide community input to this process. The NIAC held a public forum on Wednesday 30 September 2015 at the Sirius Room, Paradise Hotel, Norfolk Island, to provide community feedback on issues relating to the service delivery model that may be appropriate for a future Norfolk Island Regional Council (see NIAC Discussion Paper 2). Mary Christian-Bailey was one of the speakers at that forum.

Norfolk Island People for Democracy (NIPD) believe that the questions raised by Mary Christian-Bailey are of significant interest for all the Norfolk Island community, and is proud to assist in making Mary Christian-Bailey's submission available to the community at large, as a public service.

Mary Christian-Bailey

Members of the Advisory Council, I am afraid I do not stand before you with concrete recommendations about service delivery and how it should be paid for. I do not have access to the information I need about the availability or the affordability of these things. It is a bit like asking us to comment on life on another planet!

But I would like to provide a bit of perspective to the issues of service delivery.

When the Pitcairners came to settle on small, remote Norfolk Island, having left Pitcairn, which was even smaller and more remote, I don't think any of them thought it would have been better to live closer to areas of greater population or facilities. They did not think of themselves as being "a long way" from anywhere. Because this island was their home, it was the centre of their world, and they just saw it as their responsibility to make the island a pleasant and productive place for the people who lived here. And those people chose to live here under those challenging conditions.

When I came here nearly 50 years ago, I was struck by the fact that the people of this island did not envy anyone else or compare themselves with anyone else. They lived modestly, for the most part, but were contented. But they were prepared to work hard to meet the needs of the people who lived here, and provide island solutions to island needs and problems.

I started to make a list of services this community has provided for its people over the years. Each day I found myself adding more, so I will no doubt omit several.

There are the philanthropic gifts and bequests, such as the Emily Channer District Nursing Service, the Tony Redstone Dental Clinic, the Cecil Barkman building at the school, the Eldon Foote Foundation scholarships, Queen Victoria's Garden, the Mawson Units.

Then we have institutions established by community groups, such as the Wives and Mother's Club and Banyan Park pre-school, the Volunteer Rescue Association, the Op Shop, Community Markets, NISEDU, NATIN, Daa Side F'Uklun, Hettai Uklun, the Sunshine Club, EcoNorfolk, Foodcare, CareNorfolk, the Friends of St Barnabas, the Youth Assembly.

Submission made by Mary Christian-Bailey to the unelected Norfolk Island Advisory Council at their public forum held on 30 September 2015 at the Sirius Room, Paradise Hotel, Norfolk Island

There is the contribution from associations, churches, and service clubs, such as the Red Cross, with its telecross service, ST John's Ambulance, White Oaks, numerous projects funded by the Lions Club, Rotary and Quota, providing services and facilities at the school, the hospital and many other places. There is the A&H Society and the Flora & Fauna, Community Arts, Country Music, Baunti Byutis, all making a contribution to culture, tourism and the environment.

I think of those who volunteer through Meals on Wheels, the Hospital Auxiliary, Mental Health Awareness, the Bounty Day Committee, Police Charity Days, Government House sitters and guides.

There are industry and recreational associations such as the Fishing Club, Ballroom Dancing, the Primary Producers Association, The Chamber of Commerce, The Accommodation and Tourism Association, the Historical Society, and Sporting Groups who not only help our young people to a healthier lifestyle, but bring visitors for special events. And we will not forget those who pitch in and put on Benefits when people have health and financial difficulties.

And of course all those who serve on boards and committees, and those who regularly give sponsorship to events.

I have not even started on what has been provided by Norfolk Island Governments over the years, but I would like to focus on some key areas. Our Legislative Assembly, contrary to what has been said by some Commonwealth personnel, made enormous achievements in services and infrastructure in the years of self-government. The beautification of Burnt Pine, the Bicentennial Centre, tarsealing kms of road, upgrading of the airport, the Waste Management Centre, bringing the school up to Year 12, meeting the enormous challenges of modern communications and the Internet, meeting the needs of the Tourist Industry, and the hospital, which until recent years provided an enormous range of medical, surgical, specialist and diagnostic services, as well as caring for our elderly. And let us not forget our Government's efforts and financial input into restoration at Kingston, and the creation of a highly skilled Restoration Team, after successive Australian Administrators had sold much of the stone at Kingston and let many buildings fall into ruin.

So I would say Norfolk Islanders are the Service Delivery experts.

Now any morning or weekend, if you drive around the island, you will often see Norfolk people out walking, carrying a bag to pick up rubbish. I have no doubt they will continue to do so, but you can't blame them for saying "I will not feel like bothering when we have to pay Municipal Rates." What I want to say is that the high level of volunteerism, island pride and self-reliance on this island is a cultural issue, and the decisions and choices you make will have just as much cultural impact as getting rid of free burials or abolishing Bounty Day.

The minutes of the Council's first public meeting read: ***Mr Beadman asked Ms Adams, in drawing on her expertise and experience in Government, by what measure should success for a Regional Council be defined? It was a good question and I would like to respond to it with more questions. 20 questions, in fact. These are matters that members of the Advisory Council needs to consider in its deliberations on the issue of service delivery. Call them yardsticks, or a checklist – but please understand these are very real concerns that weigh heavily on the hearts of many Norfolk Island people.***

1. Will the promised future service delivery be an improvement on what we are experiencing this year under Commonwealth management, where roads are in an appalling state, where promises and commitments are being renegeed on, where services are dropping rather than increasing, where there are no answers to questions or requests, and where no one seems to know what is going on?
2. Will the NIAC guarantee that future service delivery will not cost more than we receive in revenue, putting us in the same debt situation that made the Commonwealth say it was necessary to abolish our government?

3. Will local people be employed and local businesses be given preference when awarding contracts? Or will "local" no longer mean anything when we are just another part of regional Australia?
4. Are you satisfied that voluntary and not for profit enterprises and activities that currently serve the needs of this island and its people will not be negatively affected by red tape, increased regulation, liability and insurance issues and compliance costs?
5. Will those engaged to deliver services be prepared – or required - to avail themselves of all the expertise that has been developed in this island over many years in both government and private sector level? Are locals being trained for the new positions? Or will they continue to be sacked, as has just happened to our Tourist Board and Tourism Manager?
6. Can you find service delivery systems that are prepared to work in partnership with local initiatives, such as Care Norfolk, the BreastScreen Trust, Banyan Park?
7. Will decisions about what is needed be determined by our needs as a small remote Pacific Island which has developed separately from Australia, and not by measuring us against some so called comparable Australian community (which doesn't exist)?
8. Will there be an observable improvement in the level of health services when compared with what we currently receive, or will we face a lessening in the services we receive, as has happened with our hospital in recent years?
9. Can you reassure us that, in the name of efficiency, we will not have to travel to the mainland to avail ourselves of services that are currently available on the island? Will our elderly be forced to die away from here? Will we have to travel away for an increasing range of medical services?
10. Will commercial services such as an optometrist still be able to operate in a high tax and regulatory environment ? If you cannot answer these last two question with a YES, then the term "access to services enjoyed by other Australians" becomes a joke.
11. Will the tax accountants get very rich over the next few months as we turn to them for the answers that no one else seems to be able to give us?
12. Have you considered the cultural impacts of overlaying a new system of service delivery on one that has developed separately to meet the needs of Norfolk Island over many generations?
13. Will locals continue to have a real say in managing infrastructure and services in those areas in of which they have a very real ownership, and have contributed to financially and with work and skills over the years -such as the Kingston and KAVHA area, the hospital, the school?
14. Can you offer some certainty and reassurance to those presently delivering services in areas like child care, preschool education, aged care, tourism and many other areas? I refer to those in private enterprise and in the public and not for profit sector who are currently in limbo, and hoping against hope that they will survive the new regulatory environment and the costs involved with taxation and compliance. They do not know what funding will be available, where that is applicable. July 1st is rushing on us, and they have so little information, no one can answer their questions, they are unable to carry out any forward planning. The same problems are being experienced by business and the tourist industry. Can you give some hope to those who are just hanging in there?

15. Will your plans to raise revenues through rates bring about an end to that part of Norfolk's culture whereby we hold our land in trust for our children because it is the only thing left that enables them to call Norfolk Island home?
16. Will you put at risk the spirit of self-reliance, resourcefulness and island pride that has sustained this community for decades? Will Norfolk people feel frustrated because they cannot fix things and get things done as soon as it is needed, as has happened in the past?
17. When we have questions, comments, suggestions or complaints about service delivery, will there be a real person at the end of the line to listen to us, or will we have to negotiate layers and levels of bureaucracy?
18. Is it cost-effective to replace one level of government providing for all the needs of the community with three separate levels of government, operating from three different places, with all the inefficiencies, duplications and communication problems involved?
19. Will the regional council model be sustainable? I note in your Discussion Paper 2 the following:

 "...it is not uncommon for local government entities to operate at a loss" and also "the ongoing objective of a Regional Council should be to serve the community in a sustainable way..."

 But it also says that some services may be provided at a loss. What happens if it proves unaffordable?
20. We are entering unknown territory. We are told our governance model will not be based on the Indian Ocean Territories model. What if the system of service delivery that is decided on doesn't work? Who will take the blame? Who will pick up the pieces?

These are serious questions. They are on our hearts and minds, and they should be on yours too. I suspect that you will find it difficult to deal with some of them, if you are honest. Will you tell your Commonwealth superiors that their plans raise far more problems than they think they are solving?
