

To: H.E. Mr Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations
The Hon Jim Lloyd MP, Australian Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads
The Hon Geoff Gardner MLA, Chief Minister, Norfolk Island Government
Mr Alan Morris, Commonwealth Grants Commission, Canberra
Mr Derek Gore & Mr Jonno Snell, Joint Editors, *The Norfolk Islander*
The Editor, *The Sydney Morning Herald*

Small is Governable:
An Open Letter on the End
of Norfolk Island Self-Government

Dear Sirs,

Interesting, that you're all men. And that I, as a woman with no "voice" or power, except my vote and "pen", feel I can pass on to you some lessons learned about the surviving community here on Norfolk Island. Minister Lloyd, through your department, and Mr Morris, through your commission, you have said that you want feedback, to listen and learn, from those living on Norfolk Island, to inform Australian Government intentions to dismantle Norfolk Island self-government. So here are some personal observations on Norfolk – from the perspective of an outsider, currently living on the island. I preface these lessons learned with facts (correct me if I'm wrong):

Fact 1: Norfolk Island currently pays its own way with locally-raised revenues of approx A\$28m a year.

Fact 2: Norfolk residents currently pay more in Australian Government taxes than Australia gives back to Norfolk Island Government.

Fact 3: On 20.02.06 Australia declared it was revoking Norfolk Island powers over Customs, Immigration and Quarantine that currently provide the island with its major sources of revenue.

Fact 4: The Australian Government proposes to provide Norfolk with a form of Australian tax-based benefits that will cost future Australian taxpayers tens of millions of dollars annually.

Fact 5: I have never lived in a busier community.

For over half a century I have lived and walked byways and goat tracks in many places: small country towns, large metropolitan and capital cities, other islands, both small and large. But the wide range of responsibilities and jobs managed by the small number of people living here on Norfolk, and the large number of community organisations actively maintained by them, has impressed me. Norfolk Island shows no sign of *ennui* or lack of activity that can afflict small or remote communities. Aside from island-based businesses, Norfolk Island also has a tourism industry that services the largest number of visitors compared to the number of residents of any part of Australia. Cynically tired granny newswriters denigrate hardworking efforts of islanders unfairly.

These five simple facts relate directly to the five lessons learned that I offer to you all:

- 1. There is no "comparable community" to use as a basis for imposing change.**
- 2. Fairness demands that we allow this small island room and time to change.**
- 3. This could be the first real-time documented case of fatal (psychological) impact.**
- 4. Size is no measure of Sustainability.**
- 5. Small Island States, just like large states, need control over their own economic resources.**

1. Mr Morris, you say that the Grants Commission will provide the Australian Government with information about Norfolk Island calculated on needs and costs in other comparable communities. Norfolk Islanders claim **there is no such thing as a comparable community**. No other Australian community or Australian territory self-provides for the same whole-of-government responsibilities and services, from a remote island funding base as Norfolk does. Islanders fear with good reason that comparison with less-well-provided-for mainland communities could only result in a lesser outcome for Norfolk. This island has developed local and adaptable mixes of self-provided community supports and business enterprises, that have worked in varying ways to underpin the community's survival through 150 years of change. This includes more than quarter of a century of developing their own manageable level of self-governing regulation and revenue-raising, suitable for a community where daily costs of living for ordinary families are high because of their remoteness.

For the Australian Government to take away self-governing powers from Norfolk, without consultation, as well as seek to put in place a wide range of rates and taxes, designed for larger rather than smaller governance and populations, is ill-advised. Small businesses and island-based families already have high costs to bear. Adding to this burden by imposing a 'normalisation' policy of applying mainland rates and taxes could see half the businesses and families have to leave this remote island community. A direct cyclone hit would be preferable – at least island families could recover from that. What the island needs is to maintain some comparative advantage (lower wages and taxes balancing high import and utilities costs) not to be compared with theoretical statistical clumpings of "comparable communities". It would also have been good if your Commission had been tasked to do a comprehensive comparative analysis, updating your 1996/97 baseline data (seen by all parties as a sound approach and reasonable analysis) rather than the current limited task you have been given to do on Norfolk.

2. Allow this small island room and time to achieve its own change. Tread gently. My mum would say, don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Big Brother impacts on small island communities do not always end up with better outcomes for those living on a thin knife-edge of island self-provision. (Australian Treasury surely doesn't want to pay handouts if/when Norfolk Island's current full employment becomes 60% plus unemployment like that on Cocos Island, since Australian Government "assistance" there.) Consult and listen well, by all means suggest alternatives, your views of pros and cons for various options. Then allow those who have managed for themselves to make decisions and take their own actions to shape the future that is, after all, theirs.

3. This could be the first documented case of fatal (psychological) impact where no related physical disease was needed to shake the foundations, deprive a self-identifying indigenous population of its rights and depopulate a Pacific island in favour of new and wealthier migrants able to afford high costs of remote living and high levels of taxation. So many recent high-level reports and government investigations, so much intense (often ill-based) media scrutiny and probing, have focused on this small island for its residents to respond to – with little if any in the way of positive or constructive outcomes. This latest round of investigatory probes by departmental representations could unwittingly (I hope not intentionally) have the disastrous impact of irretrievably splitting and dismantling this small community, that has been built on a balance of personal, public and private enterprise efforts to successfully maintain its current manageable if uniquely small form of self-government. Yes, change is needed (and the island's government is taking measured steps to manage necessary changes) but not at the cost of losing identity and adequate self-provision.

4. Size is no measure of Sustainability. Yes, there may well be different challenges confronting governments of different sizes that seek to provide effective governance for their citizens. But there is no rule of thumb that says you have to be big to be viable. There are, however, governance and accountability mechanisms that all state and business enterprises, large and small, need to implement to maintain sustainable systems. Furthermore, like all worthwhile disciplines, effective governance is best when managed from within, rather than just imposed from outside. So by all legitimate means, larger states can provide assistance for smaller states, such as access to analytical tools or shared use of resources that might normally be beyond the limited capacity of smaller states. Larger states can discuss options with small states, through open and consultative processes. All sides involved in "big brother" mandates should also, if they can possibly help themselves, avoid coming to the discussion table with high-handed or *fait accompli* attitudes. Instead, be open to each other's needs.

5. Allow Small Island States their own economic footing to ensure viable and sustainable governance. United Nations' (UN) research on economic vulnerabilities shows that small island states face considerable forces outside their own control. Smallness, remoteness, geographical dispersion, vulnerability to natural disasters and highly limited internal markets are difficulties faced by small island states in providing for their own future. These are enough barriers without larger states taking away from small island states rights and capacities to develop independence. The Australian Government is taking away Norfolk Island's right to raise customs revenue, which goes directly against practical experience of other island-based economies. Norfolk Island has been denied authority over its 200-Kilometre Exclusive Economic Zone and control of fish and seabed resources.

The island has also been advised in the recent Australian Government-funded Acumen report that it should spend \$86 million on roads. Roads that are 'Crown' land, yet the 'Crown' has felt no need to help maintain them. Island residents are stunned by what appear to be mainland preferences (for having guttered highways and high-speed road networks) driving this report's recommendations. Islanders would no sooner prioritise for such a road replacement program (equivalent to more than three times the island's entire annual budget) than they would want to emulate Big Brother spy networks. It would be interesting to know whether those who guided Acumen reporting also had some secret men's business ready and able to provide what would equate to a mountain range of road gravel to complete such huge road works on such a small island. Resolving longstanding issues of difficult and expensive freight and transport links to Norfolk is much more important for island financial sustainability than fanciful future road programs. A deep sea wharf or motorised barges with containerised freight handling would help bring down costs on what is one of the most expensive sea freight lanes in the world, between Norfolk and Australia. More constructive Australian Government support for negotiations to secure long-term air services to the island would also be good.

Norfolk Island Government is apparently still waiting for the Australian Government to come to the discussion table, to consider the basis (sound or not) of Acumen report recommendations. Australian Government stated intentions to revoke self-governing powers without consultation with Norfolk Island also pre-empts other promised consultations with the government and people of Norfolk. What is clear to those with more than a blow-in familiarity of the island, is that first-grab guesstimates have ill-advisedly been used as a basis for Acumen report modelling. The report also shows ignorance of current government programs on the island, where it claims that education and health programs are currently provided for Norfolk by the Australian Government.

UN Members are urged to be good neighbours, to promote self-government and sustainability for smaller states. From my reading of UN documents concerning administration of territories, I would have thought that Australia might consider it important to support rather than dismantle Norfolk Island self-government. Articles 73 and 74 of the UN declaration regarding non-self governing territories could provide a worthy guide for self-development while also encouraging a supportive political relationship between Australia and Norfolk Island. Article 73 speaks of the 'sacred trust' and 'obligation to promote' the 'well-being of inhabitants of territories'. In line with this trust, UN members administering territories seek 'to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions'. Article 74 highlights that UN Members agree that their policy in respect of territories is 'based on the general principle of good neighbourliness'. From any point of viewing, events of the past month here on Norfolk Island have failed to be played out on anything like a 'good neighbour' basis. The *fait accompli* recently presented to Norfolk by the Australian government represents retrogressive action, and an attempt by Australia to take away the island's self-government.

In 2005 the Norfolk language was recognised in law as an official language. Submissions to UNESCO need to be expedited for the language to be included in the atlas of world languages. Consideration could again be given to seek world heritage listing, as well as professional management under UNESCO, of Norfolk Island's historic Kingston area. This unique precinct of colonial Georgian buildings, an impressive remnant of the penal past, has direct relevance to global issues of forced migrations and population resettlement. The UN could also be asked to provide an independent broker to help negotiate and resolve current and longstanding contentions between Norfolk and Australia.

In terms of basic sustainability, the capacity of a small island to support any size population is a finely balanced mechanism that appears not to have been appreciated by those working with assumptions framed around recent border protection experiences. Quarantine issues for small ecosystems require an understanding of the particular needs and conditions specific to the small island, not necessarily similar to or even amicable with conditions that might apply to bigger mainland states. Small island states in the Pacific, like Norfolk, reasonably rely on customs revenue as an accountable and manageable means of sustaining financial viability. If the Australian Government toys with these areas of administration without consultation, as has already been declared unilaterally, then the fine balance of sustainability for Norfolk Island may have been dismantled in this one step. Quite the opposite to Australia's declared intention of better supporting the island's future financial sustainability.

Yours sincerely,
Boni Maywald

PS: Who am I? To presume to write to you all on Norfolk Island's imminent loss of self-government, to encourage islanders and mainlanders to respond and jointly develop more positive visions of life *Beyond Bounty*?

I am not ashamed to be an enthusiastic supporter of the Pacific past, present and future. I have an honours degree in Pacific history that focused on how Tonga constructed itself to gain status as a nation in the age of roving European gunboats. I have a Master of Arts in International Relations, that specialised in Asia Pacific security and non-military resolution of conflict. I am currently completing research that looks at Tongan events in the 1820s, on how Pacific Islander men and women both supported and opposed change in critical crosscultural contacts. I have lived and worked in various parts of the Pacific – Bougainville in Melanesia, Tonga in Polynesia, Fiji with its mix of Melanesian and Polynesian cultures, and currently on Norfolk Island with its unique cultural heritage born from Tahitian and English *Bounty* mutineer experiences on Pitcairn.

I am quietly proud to be a mother of two – a son, who is a financial analyst and lives in Sydney; and a daughter who is a lawyer, currently living in Kenya, who has worked in Southern Sudan on the constitutional development process under the Comprehensive Peace agreement. Prior to this year, our daughter also spent three years living in New York working at the UN as an Adviser for one of the Pacific island states. Our son recently spent two months with us here on Norfolk Island. He witnessed the announcement of Australia's proposed changes, but maintains that his own recent suggestions on microeconomic reforms, that Norfolk could do for itself, would better underpin the island's financial sustainability. (Copy attached)

I am married to the current Secretary to Government here on Norfolk Island. For the duration of my husband's three-year contract with the Norfolk Island Government, we are living on Norfolk, but we have no business or property interests here on the island. Coincidentally, three years ago I came out of the closet and admitted, again unashamedly, that I was a poet. As unfashionable as it may be to be any or all of the above, I am thankful, to have been born in Australia, and to have warm southern hemisphere currents nurture me. Of pecuniary interests or investments I (and my husband) have none, save ownership of our small timber and tin roofed Boab Book Cottage in Queanbeyan, southwest New South Wales, and our (future) superannuation pensions. This completes the declaration of my interests.