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SUBMISSION TO THE GRANTS COMMISSION EQUITY INTO NORFOLK
ISLAND 2006 BY JOHN KELLY

I am the optometrist on the island and my practice is my own- I receive no funding from the government.

My wife and I (Dominique is also an optometrist) purchased this practice with the intention of remaining here for 10 years and then sell the practice. We came upon the understanding that we were entering a low tax environment that would remain so for the entirety of our stay. The purchase price was negotiated under this assumption. In Australia an optometrist requires a community of 10,000 to be viable (figure from the Optometrists Association of Australia), and on Norfolk there are 2000 odd people. The only reason the practice is viable is because of the low tax environment and low compliance costs. If Australian taxation is introduced here (state taxes included) our practice will cease to be viable and it's closure highly probable. A sale of the practice will be improbable, as it would cease to be financially attractive.

If this happens, my family stands to suffer significant financial hardships, in fact a loss of our life savings.

Whilst you are overlaying comparable communities over Norfolk, you might like to look at Optometric services available to them. I think you will find that a. there are no communities this size with a full time optometry practice, b. some might have a visiting optometrist infrequently, and c. most, if not all will have no service at all. Keep in mind that if there is no service at all then a person may have to drive to their nearest optometrist. The option of driving is not available here and so it would add tens of thousands of dollars to the collective community health costs in the form of airline tickets, accommodation costs, loss of wages and incidental expenses.

But the financial costs are insignificant when compared to the impact of visual impairment. I can state unequivocally that at least 24 people here have been saved from either becoming legally blind or totally blind by the presence of an optometrist on island for emergencies and the treatment of people who were unable to travel for financial and/or medical reasons. Amongst the Pitcairn descendants there is a significantly higher occurrence of eye diseases like glaucoma than on the mainland. Furthermore, there is a further 30 people here requiring very close monitoring of eye disease as they are in danger of total blindness in the near future if not medicated adequately.

The implications both as a community and personally of blindness are enormous both financially and personally. This community needs an optometrist full time. Not to mention the trips that occur twice yearly from an ophthalmologist that are sponsored by my practice and the Rotary club. These trips were initiated by my predecessor and continued by myself.

We want to stay here and provide much needed eye care to this community. Taxes will most likely stop that from happening. Please consider.

Yours truly,
John Kelly.