

PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO THE NORFOLK ISLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL

**South Pacific Hotel Board Room
110 Taylors Road, Norfolk Island 2889**

Before: Ms Carolyn McNally, Commissioner

Counsel Assisting:

**Mr Paul Bolster
Ms Kathleen Morris**

On Friday, 4 June 2021 at 10.00am NFT

(Day 5)

1 THE COMMISSIONER: Now, Mr Bolster.

2

3 MR BOLSTER: Good morning, Commissioner. The last witness
4 for the Norfolk Island hearings will be Mr Nobbs, if he
5 could come forward, please.

6

7 <CHRISTOPHER LEWISON NOBBS, sworn: [10.01am]

8

9 <EXAMINATION-IN-CHIEF BY MR BOLSTER:

10

11 MR BOLSTER: Q. Mr Nobbs, for the benefit of the record,
12 could you please tell the Commissioner your full name?

13 A. My name is Christopher Lewison Nobbs.

14

15 Q. And, you were born on Norfolk Island?

16 A. I was.

17

18 Q. Correct me if I'm wrong, but your lineage on the
19 Island traces back to George Hunn Nobbs?

20 A. That's correct.

21

22 Q. And he came here from Pitcairn with his wife who was a
23 descendant of the Christian family?

24 A. That's correct.

25

26 Q. The family has been on the Island ever since?

27 A. Yes.

28

29 Q. And you yourself, you have academic training in what
30 fields?

31 A. I have a PhD in chemistry and science and degrees in
32 economics from London and Cambridge.

33

34 Q. You've made a submission to the Inquiry dated 7 May,
35 if that can be brought up, please. CNOB.PSUB.002.0002.

36 Can you see that on the screen in front of you?

37 A. Not at the moment, but I have a hard copy.

38

39 Q. You have a hard copy, all right. Is that easy for you
40 to see there now?

41 A. Yes.

42

43 Q. In your submission you've referred to a number of
44 academic papers and one of those was a paper published by
45 the Economic Society of Australia by Sinnewe, Kortt,
46 Dollery and Hayward. You're familiar with that?

47 A. Yes, I am, but not to word perfect on it, it's a while

1 since I looked at it.

2

3 Q. It's the paper that makes the case for special
4 treatment differentiation in the case of the other island
5 councils in Australia: King Island, Flinders Island, and
6 Kangaroo Island, and I take it you referred to that article
7 to draw a comparison between the situation facing Norfolk
8 Island and those other islands?

9 A. That's correct.

10

11 Q. Could you tell us, expand a bit, about what those
12 particular challenges are?

13 A. I think smallness and severe isolation brings very
14 specific requirements that are generally not considered in
15 the Acts which govern local authorities in Australia and
16 that was the point that Sinnewe and their co-authors made
17 in that paper, I believe, and the issues they brought
18 forward were about, in particular, that services provided
19 by island councils are especially reliant on intricate
20 knowledge of local needs; that information which would not
21 be available to higher tiers of government, consequently
22 service provision on island councils makes local
23 decision-making and local resource allocation even more
24 essential than in other remote Australian local
25 authorities.

26

27 Q. Just pausing there, I thought we might bring up the
28 summary of the policy considerations in that article. If
29 we could go to CNOB.PSUB.001.0003_10, and if we could
30 highlight the paragraph beginning with, "Given" halfway
31 down starting there, if we could focus on that, there are
32 five points. The first of those:

33

34 *Local Government is of far more importance*
35 *to these islands than in Australia as a*
36 *whole particularly in terms of maintaining*
37 *the economic and social fabric of these*
38 *small islands and articulating their*
39 *unusual needs.*

40

41 Can you speak to that briefly? How does that policy
42 consideration apply on Norfolk Island?

43 A. In my view, the laws that Norfolk Island are now
44 subject to and the administration which we have imposed
45 from Canberra are not perceptive of the needs of small
46 islands.

47

1 And, one of the damaging influences particularly that
2 I've seen is the consequences for local culture, local
3 history, and in particular the dignity and self-respect of
4 Islanders because, in my view, the legal overlay that we
5 now have is ill-designed for the circumstances of the
6 island.

7
8 Q. The second point that's raised is that:

9
10 *The services provided by island councils*
11 *are especially reliant on an intricate*
12 *local knowledge of local needs, information*
13 *which would not be available to higher tier*
14 *governments. Consequently, service*
15 *provision on island councils makes local*
16 *decision-making on local resource*
17 *allocation even more essential.*

18
19 Can you speak to that about the particular service
20 needs on this Island?

21 A. Most recently one of the acts of the Commonwealth
22 Government has been to remove certain powers, or to remove
23 Norfolk Island's justice system and to absorb it into an
24 Australian system which has been - it was done without, to
25 my knowledge, any consultation and that's, the Norfolk
26 Island Lawyers Association was not consulted in the matter
27 and they have just taken that away. I think though --

28
29 Q. Just pausing there. Given that this is an Inquiry
30 that's concerned with financial management, the operation
31 of the council, I'm talking about the council's ability to
32 deliver services. How important is it that you have
33 someone who is locally involved, in charge of the service
34 delivery aspect of council?

35 A. Well, I think it's imperative, and that comes out of
36 the relationships that exist on the Island amongst the
37 people who are representatives and the community in general
38 and --

39
40 Q. And the staff?

41 A. Indeed, yes. I think I'm not privy to a lot of the
42 things which have gone on, for example, in the provision of
43 health services because I have no special knowledge of
44 those. It's certainly true that the Commonwealth
45 Government has provided beneficial services on the Island,
46 but a lot of people are concerned about the - and I am -
47 about the lack of what we might see as the Island input to

1 the provision of those services.

2

3 Q. Over the lifetime of the council, have you seen a
4 weakening of Islander involvement or a strengthening of
5 Islander involvement compared to what was in place under
6 the Norfolk Island Government? Was there more or less
7 Island involvement?

8 A. No, in my view there is less right across the board.
9 I think there has been underlying that a certain
10 disillusionment in the approach of the Commonwealth
11 Government here which has downgraded the - what you might
12 call the Island contribution, and I think that goes back a
13 very long way, and I could give you a number of examples if
14 you wish, but I think it's systematic and I think it's also
15 exemplified in the fact that there's no immigration control
16 on the Island now.

17

18 Now, to my knowledge there is no island anywhere in
19 the world to which Norfolk might be compared that has an
20 open immigration policy, and in fact the Commonwealth
21 doesn't have an open immigration policy for itself and I
22 think that's - I don't want to discount the significance
23 and value to the community of people joining the community,
24 but they come with other values and other approaches and
25 that has been a diluting factor on what I believe to be
26 culturally and enriching factors of Norfolk Island life.

27

28 Q. The third point that they make about council service
29 delivery is that:

30

31 *Australia's island councils deliver a range*
32 *of services which would ordinarily be*
33 *provided by state, Commonwealth and public*
34 *agencies.*

35

36 We understand that here. Then there's this comment
37 made:

38

39 *Put differently, in many respects local*
40 *authorities on the Islands represent*
41 *governments of last resort to Islanders.*
42 *As a result the absence of these local*
43 *municipalities would thus place a much*
44 *greater administrative burden on the*
45 *Commonwealth and State Government to*
46 *provide the same level of services.*

47

1 Do you have a comment to make about that and how
2 applicable that is to the council, to the Norfolk Island
3 Regional Council and about the importance of that council
4 to this community?

5 A. Could you just identify for me again where that is?
6

7 Q. If you go to that page, it's basically the last six
8 lines of that page after the word, "Thirdly". "Thirdly" is
9 in the sixth-last line, I'll highlight that for you there.

10 A. Well, I think that's pretty evident with the broad
11 range of services that the council is asked to administer,
12 including the airport, electricity and telecom and so on.
13 I think it also reflects something to do with the
14 relationship that the councillors have with the community.
15

16 Q. How good is that relationship?

17 A. I don't think it's as good as it could be.
18

19 Q. Why is that? Where has council fallen down in
20 developing that relationship with the residents?

21 A. I think that my own, my own feeling, is that the
22 councillors - was your question directed about councillors
23 or about the Administration?
24

25 Q. We're talking really about the council and its
26 governing body.

27 A. Both?
28

29 Q. Both. For the person on Norfolk Island who is a
30 ratepayer, even though they don't want to be, how does the
31 council and the governing body engage with them?

32 A. I think, in my view, the administrative arm of the
33 council has been exceedingly aloof to the community in
34 general.
35

36 Q. In what way?

37 A. In some of its written policies which were adopted at
38 the first meeting of council back in July 2016 which, in my
39 analysis of them, was very much a hands-off view, that you
40 couldn't approach the council unless you went through this
41 labyrinthine system of, okay, you had to write to them what
42 you wanted to know, you'd always have to go through the
43 general manager. In my view, and it's my view, the council
44 staff became very much captive to a view of how councillors
45 should work that was promoted by the then general manager.
46

47 Q. How different was that from the experience dealing

1 with comparable services under the Norfolk Island
2 Administration?
3 A. I wasn't here living on the Island in those years
4 basically recently. I don't think in my recollection that
5 anybody would say that the representatives in the
6 Legislative Assembly were not immediately approachable. So
7 that, in those days my understanding would be that the
8 legislators and the council staff were much more open,
9 accessible to the public, and there's a much more flexible
10 relationship between what was required, what could be done
11 and the responsibilities that each part of the community
12 actually saw themselves to have.
13
14 Q. When did you come back to the Island before 2016?
15 A. About 2015, I think.
16
17 Q. So, after 1 July, in terms of engaging with the
18 council members themselves, how would you describe that
19 dynamic? Was that something that was easy to do or not?
20 A. With councillors?
21
22 Q. Yes.
23 A. Well, I never personally found that a problem; I could
24 ring up and ask what I wanted.
25
26 Q. Were there many community engagement meetings where
27 both councillors and staff would explain particular
28 decisions or take questions on particular decisions that
29 you can recall?
30 A. There were certainly some, but my recollection is not
31 good on that.
32
33 Q. In relation to the airport runway project, do you have
34 any recollection of the processes that were employed there?
35 A. Only from the outside. I know --
36
37 Q. Did you attend any of the meetings?
38 A. Yes, I attended some.
39
40 Q. Were council staff helpful in explaining the need for
41 that contract and what was involved?
42 A. I can't form a judgment on that.
43
44 Q. The final matter in that document which begins at the
45 foot of that page is a reference to the - sorry, it's the
46 fourth, we'll come to the final one in a minute - it's the
47 distance between administrative centres, and we're talking

1 about, in the case of Kangaroo, King and Flinders, much
2 less significant distances than we're dealing with here and
3 much less, according to this paper, transportation and
4 shipping costs than you have to face here. What would be
5 your message to the Commissioner about that sense of
6 isolation, that distance that we need to consider when it
7 comes to assessing the performance of the council?

8 A. I have two things I would say. The first is that,
9 given Norfolk Island's circumstance relative to the islands
10 you've just mentioned, the significance of the issues that
11 Sinnewe and co have brought up in their paper, the
12 importance of them is re-doubled, at least re-doubled, but
13 the points that they have raised are even more important
14 given the immense isolation that this Island has.

15
16 The corollary to that for me is that the idea that the
17 many aspects of the administration of the Island can be
18 absorbed into a bureaucracy in Canberra which is over
19 1,000 kilometres away, and I guess dominated by people who
20 have virtually no experience of small islands, is not a
21 recipe for a happy future.

22
23 Q. Commissioner, if I could please tender Mr Nobbs'
24 submission and the attachments to it. That's, for the
25 record, CNOB.PSUB.002.0002.

26
27 **#EXHIBIT 7 - SUBMISSION OF MR NOBBS AND THE ATTACHMENTS TO**
28 **IT, DOCUMENT CNOB.PSUB.002.0002.**

29
30 Q. Mr Nobbs, was there anything in closing? We've got
31 your submission and that will be in the evidence and on the
32 records of the Commission as well as all of the documents
33 you refer to. Was there anything else in particular that
34 you wanted the Commission to know referable to the terms of
35 reference of the Inquiry? Let's deal, perhaps firstly,
36 with financial management of the council: was there
37 anything in particular that you wanted to raise with the
38 Commissioner about that, giving a community perspective of
39 someone who has a longstanding link to the Island?

40 A. I personally was very concerned with the terms of
41 reference given to the Inquiry by the department; as you
42 say, it focused on financial and asset management. One of
43 the things that concerned me was that, reading the terms of
44 reference, there seems to be very little or no concern with
45 causation; that if there's going to be a policy to improve
46 the asset and the management of the council, then one
47 really has to find out exactly what the reasons for the

1 situation are, and I was very concerned that the terms of
2 reference were looking at whether this was done right or
3 wrong rather than - and there seemed to be very little
4 direct recognition of what the underlying circumstances
5 might have been.
6

7 Q. I think we've made clear that we're very interested in
8 hearing the underlying circumstances and we'd be happy to
9 hear from you if you want to explain to us what you think
10 are the critical underlying circumstances and background
11 against which the financial and asset management and risk
12 management of the council should be assessed, so we're all
13 ears. What would you like to tell us about that, Mr Nobbs?

14 A. The first thing I think I'd say is that, given the
15 circumstances in Norfolk Island, it's unlikely in the near
16 or middle distant future that it's going to make a profit.
17 That should surprise nobody. I think virtually no island
18 to which Norfolk Island is comparable anywhere in the world
19 makes a profit. I don't think that view was - I don't
20 think that the Joint Standing Committee which made the
21 decisions leading up to the changes in the legislation in
22 2016, I don't think - well, I should say that nowhere in
23 all their deliberations do they say anywhere that they're
24 aware of that as an issue. They seem to think that, you
25 change the government then it'll all be right and the free
26 market will flow and things will happen and so on. So,
27 that's the context.
28

29 Given that fact, I think Norfolk Island is always
30 going to be reliant on the Commonwealth for monies, it's
31 the terms under which that reliance, I suppose, is made
32 which is important for Norfolk Islanders. At that point it
33 becomes a political issue so that fundamentally it's an
34 issue of, it's not just a matter of economics and
35 bureaucracy, although those are important, it's actually an
36 ethical issue in relation to the Commonwealth's
37 responsibilities for a small external territory.
38

39 It seems to me that there are - I think it's important
40 that this Commission does its work and clarifies things
41 about the financial and asset management in council, but
42 that is only a very small piece of what I would see as the
43 general problem, and so, my concern and mentioning the
44 issue of causation, was that it's very difficult for a
45 Norfolk Islander to see that as the issue that this
46 Commission is dealing with as the whole problem because
47 it's a part, and a significant part, but it's not the

1 whole.

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To go back to what I took to be your initial question there, was that, I think there really needs to be some sort of very substantial negotiation around between representatives of the Island and the Commonwealth about how things could better work.

I might just add that I think that one of the problems has been that the Commonwealth seem to want, (a) Norfolk Island to pay its way, and (b) that it needed to be the same as the rest of Australia in its rights and responsibilities, and I think that when you try and put those things together as the Joint Standing Committee tried to do, I think it's a recipe for failure.

But what happened before was that - that's what the Australian Government was doing - there was a certain amount of flexibility in the governance set up on Norfolk Island which allowed it to absorb difference which it no longer - just to respond to things and maybe things were a little more informal than they are now. I think one of the issues that hasn't been canvassed very much here in the Inquiry is the actual cost of the bureaucracy implied by all the New South Wales laws which have been put in place here with administering regulations of testing and so on, and they're all legitimate in many respects, that's why they're there, but they represent a huge cost to the system here and I think that's distressing.

Q. Finally, I wanted to take you to the last of the points raised in that article on page 13 and that will be highlighted for you there. It says there:

Finally, the importance of local leadership in the economic development of island councils can hardly be overstated given the special circumstances of island inhabitants. Any reduction in locally elected representation would be particularly devastating for island communities where stark differences may exist between cultural identities of island communities and those on the mainland.

Is there anything you wish to add to that? I'm assuming you would adopt and embrace that as a concept?

1 A. I do.

2

3 Q. Is there anything you wish to add to that from the
4 perspective of Norfolk Island?

5 A. Two things. I think, regrettably, I think the
6 Commonwealth Government is going in the opposite direction
7 in particular with regard to the opening up of immigration
8 onto the Island and the dilution of what has been the
9 circumstance here. And, I'm not saying there should be no
10 immigration here or anything like that, but I think that,
11 like every other country, island territory in the world,
12 there should be some control and here there is none.

13

14 The other thing I'd say is that I think it's crucial
15 for this community, I think in the last few years it's
16 taken a real battering. I think, in my view, its
17 self-respect and its dignity has been undermined,
18 regrettably. I think this point that you highlight is
19 where the Island can regain some of what it's lost.

20

21 MR BOLSTER: Thank you. Commissioner, I have no further
22 questions for Mr Nobbs.

23

24 THE COMMISSIONER: Okay. Thank you, Mr Nobbs, I just want
25 to ask you a couple of things to elaborate on some things
26 that you've already said. It says in the next paragraph of
27 this paper:

28

29 *The characteristics of these island*
30 *councils suggest that scope for top-down*
31 *reform by those relevant governments is*
32 *severely limited.*

33

34 You also mentioned that things could work better.
35 Have you got a view in your mind of how things could work
36 better particularly in trying to - I know you've mentioned
37 the fact that the Island will find it hard to ever raise
38 significant revenue to meet all of the demands and
39 challenges here, but have you got in your mind how you
40 think financial and asset management issues could be better
41 managed or overcome?

42 A. Not immediately, I'd have to take that on notice.

43

44 Q. But I think it's interesting that this paper talks
45 about that, you know, the top-down processes won't work and
46 that's largely what you've got here, and I think I guess
47 what I'm struggling to think through my mind is how you can

1 get a sort of more bottom-up process to explain what would
2 be something that would work.

3
4 Now, I've heard a lot about the need for
5 self-government and I totally respect people's right to
6 representation and things like that, but that's not my
7 remit. But it seems to me that there were issues under
8 self-government and there are issues here; there needs to
9 be some way of actually getting an agreement on what it
10 takes to run the Island, and then those challenges then
11 need to be met in a proper sort of decision-making
12 framework, whether it's by a Legislative Assembly or it's
13 by a council or whatever.

14
15 I mean, some islands have boards and so on and that's
16 not a matter for me, that's a matter for the government,
17 but I guess I'm just interested in any views that someone
18 such as yourself who's lived on the Island and studied a
19 lot of these issues would have on how these sort of issues
20 around asset management and financial management could be
21 overcome. I guess what I'm hearing is, it's
22 work-in-progress.

23 A. I guess, I think two things. I think one possibility
24 is to untie the requirement that Norfolk Island be the same
25 as everywhere else in Australia, so that, as a bit of float
26 in the sort of things that it can do because - I mean,
27 there are things on the Island that people have done
28 without, and that's fine, the environment is beautiful, the
29 community is what it is and they've been able to accept
30 that as part of what makes life here good. I think that's
31 one possibility.

32
33 I think a sympathetic Australian Government would be a
34 very good start and, to be fair, I'm not sure that the
35 Territories branch has much resource in the way of dealing
36 anything more than the administrative issues with which
37 they're confronted, rather than thinking about these
38 things, because I don't think they have or they've given no
39 evidence of it.

40
41 I think the idea of a standard grant that was given to
42 the Regional Council which was stable and that they didn't
43 have to go out and scramble every year for another grant or
44 another justification of a project. I think that if there
45 was, I don't know, a quinquennial grant that the council
46 was aware that they had and that they can therefore adjust
47 what they did, I think that might be worth looking at.

1
2 Many people on the Island that I talk to would like to
3 see a return to something like the distribution of powers
4 and responsibilities that existed here in the period
5 between 1979 and 2016. However, I'm aware that the
6 Commonwealth may not want to look backwards, but I think
7 there ought to be a forward-looking means of getting for
8 this Island some of the rewarding and enriching things that
9 that period provided while looking forward rather than
10 backwards.

11
12 And I think one of the key things for this Island
13 going forward is the issue of climate change and that is
14 going to be important for everybody, but Norfolk Island is
15 its own system when it comes to climate and it's got to
16 respond to issues like that on the ground here, and that in
17 a sense I would see as an exemplification of this
18 document that we've been looking at here; that it's
19 actually, the control has got to be - or adequate control
20 has got to be on the ground, because they're the people who
21 have the knowledge, we're the people who have the
22 knowledge, we're the people who have to live it, and that's
23 something I think which also requires a much better
24 perspective on the way Norfolk Island's funded. I don't
25 know whether that answers your question.

26
27 Q. I think it does. Do you think, you know, in the
28 political environment there's always this sort of thinking
29 around expenditure of taxpayers' money, and do you think
30 that the people that make those sorts of decisions, if they
31 have lots of bids for funding, would benefit from some kind
32 of clarity around the sort of things that could be achieved
33 over what period of time?

34
35 So, the asset management plans and things like that at
36 the moment are - I guess, they don't communicate with what
37 could be achieved. Like I said, outcomes-focused on those
38 sorts of plans is hard for people that make decisions about
39 money in higher echelons than we are to grasp, you know,
40 the impacts and the benefits and the outcomes that could be
41 achieved. So, do you think there's more need for a greater
42 information flow between those people that make the
43 decisions and people on the Island?

44 A. I do, I think information, in the hands of anybody, is
45 valuable provided it's true. I think that one of the
46 problems that Norfolk Island has in terms of politics is
47 that it's always the last cab off the rank. The busy

1 politicians in Canberra, from their perspective, have got
2 much more important things to do. The changes to the
3 Norfolk Island Act - I forget what it was called - in the
4 Parliament in 2015, I think there was a handful of people
5 in the House when that all went through, so that there's a
6 reality there which is unfortunate. The Island also has
7 difficulty, for the same reasons, about getting publicity
8 for what it thinks ought to happen. I think there's an
9 assumption in Canberra that "Canberra knows best" amongst
10 public servants. Norfolk Island has had, I think, it's
11 seven distinct Ministers in six years, so that there's very
12 little continuity there about what this Island is, what it
13 does.

14
15 And I think, to be fair, I think it's very difficult
16 for somebody outside to understand how small and isolated
17 communities work, because often it's done on symbols and,
18 if you don't know what the symbol is, you miss the meaning.
19 There was a good example about, there's a - one of the old
20 weld (indistinct) which was done in Kingston and that has a
21 lot of imaginative nuances about the history for Norfolk
22 Islanders here and it's slowly, slowly crumbling away. But
23 for an outsider, and this is written in the KAVHA plan - or
24 not in the plan but in some of the documents - that it was
25 an old thing that you had to get rid of. And so, there's
26 these things which make it really difficult, even in a
27 situation of good information exchange, to actually
28 understand what the meaning of, you know, of events or
29 symbols and so on.

30
31 So that, although I think more information would be
32 really valuable, I think there are a lot of barriers in its
33 way of being effective in a political sense.

34
35 Q. Okay, all right. Thank you for that, Mr Nobbs.
36 Mr Bolster.

37
38 MR BOLSTER: Thank you, Commissioner, might Mr Nobbs be
39 excused from his summons? And we thank him for his
40 submission and his attendance today.

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42 THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Mr Nobbs, for sharing all of
43 your information with us and your history of the Island and
44 giving us an understanding from an Islander's perspective
45 what exactly it is that is of concern to the Island and
46 helping us understand some of those other key points you
47 think we should consider as part of the Inquiry. So, thank

1 you.

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<THE WITNESS WITHDREW

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MR BOLSTER: Commissioner, that concludes the oral evidence from these Norfolk Island hearings of the Inquiry. Next week in Sydney we will hear from the members of the audit committee of council during the relevant period. They will give evidence about the role they played in identifying problems in the financial accounts of the Island.

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We will hear from some of the chief financial officers, including Mr Van Gaalen who was in that position after transition and was involved in preparing the council's first long-term financial plan. At the same time we'll hear from Mr Wilson who was the CFO during the period in 2019 when the airport and road contracts were made. Finally, we will hear from Ms Lotta Jackson, the general manager during those periods and the general manager from the period of transition onwards.

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Finally, Commissioner, I would like to say something to those who have expressed a concern about the breadth of the witnesses that have been called here at Norfolk Island.

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Whilst we have received submissions that go to many more issues than those that we have addressed in this hearing, we are limited in the ability that we have to investigate every single matter that's put to us. The vast majority of the matters that have been put to us, whilst important and significant to the people involved, really have little to add to the terms of reference of this Inquiry. In saying that, we don't underestimate for a moment the importance of those issues to the people involved and, whilst we've read all of those submissions carefully, we don't think it was appropriate for us to adduce evidence about them at this Inquiry.

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So, with that said, Commissioner, that's all I wish to say. We'll resume again in Sydney on Wednesday of next week.

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THE COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you, Mr Bolster. Thanks for that, Mr Bolster, for outlining the next steps in this Inquiry, including the Sydney-based hearing next week and the process for compiling the counsel assisting submission.

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47

1 Counsel will be preparing a submission for consideration
2 which I'll get to further in my statement.
3

4 As Mr Bolster said, this brings us to the end of the
5 first week of hearings for the Public Inquiry into the
6 Norfolk Island Regional Council. I would like to
7 acknowledge everyone who has assisted the Inquiry team so
8 far, in particular I would like to thank the people who
9 appeared as witnesses over the last five days. I know it
10 is difficult to take the stand and respond to questioning.
11 Having attended many budget and Senate estimates in my
12 career, I know that every time I turned up one was
13 concerned to make sure that you could answer questions to
14 the best of your ability without being clear what questions
15 were going to be asked, so I thank everyone for their
16 efforts in that regard.
17

18 Your testimony has been critical to developing my
19 understanding of the challenges that you have faced and
20 continue to face on Norfolk Island. I would like to thank
21 the people and organisations who have produced documents in
22 response to our summons and thank you for responding in
23 such a timely and fulsome way.
24

25 Thank you also to the people and organisations who
26 provided submissions, some who have joined us this week; I
27 value the time you have taken to describe the issues as you
28 see them.
29

30 I would like to thank the legal teams representing the
31 Inquiry and the witnesses as well as the team of finance
32 and asset management specialists who have provided me with
33 an independent analysis of the issues.
34

35 I would particularly like to say a special thank you
36 to Ann-Maree Pike who has worked tirelessly in the
37 background to ensure the smooth running of the hearing.
38 When we finish each day Ann-Maree stays back to make sure
39 the transcripts are being checked and that they're loaded
40 up on the websites. So, I'd really like to thank Ann-Maree
41 whose dedication to this process is something I've seen
42 limited times before in terms of the hours she's putting in
43 and the expertise she's providing.
44

45 I'd like to speak briefly about what happens next. As
46 I mentioned in my opening address, we will be hearing from
47 witnesses in Sydney. It will start from Wednesday till

1 Friday. We will post a video and written transcripts each
2 day of those hearings on the Inquiry website.
3

4 There have been questions asked about whether we can
5 stream to the Island. We are endeavouring to put all
6 efforts in to make sure that that's a very real
7 possibility, and I won't be clear about whether that can
8 actually happen until Monday, so I do have people back in
9 Canberra looking into that for me.

10
11 Following the Sydney hearing counsel assisting will
12 draft detailed written submissions outlining the facts of
13 the case and the findings and recommendations that they
14 think I should make. That will be based on the evidence we
15 have heard and all of the documents we have received.
16 These submissions will be provided to the people who have
17 attended the hearing as witnesses as well as their legal
18 representatives. They will be given time to review the
19 submissions and provide a reply. The purpose of this
20 process is to ensure that all the people who have been
21 called as witnesses are provided with an opportunity to
22 have their responses fully considered before any final
23 findings are made.
24

25 Counsel assisting will then consider any comments from
26 those people and then provide me with submissions in reply.
27 I will consider all of these submissions and then go about
28 writing my report which I hope to provide to the Minister
29 in six to eight weeks' time. Any actions taken in response
30 to my report are at the discretion of the Assistant
31 Minister for Regional Development and Territories, the
32 Honourable Nola Marino MP.
33

34 So, on that note I'd really like to thank everyone
35 again for their attendance, people in the audience that
36 have given time to come and listen to what's been said at
37 the Inquiry.
38

39 I'd like to even thank the Pacific Hotel Resort who
40 have bent over backwards to accommodate all of our needs.
41 We've had the staff running around trying to make sure all
42 the audio works, making sure we've got photocopying
43 equipment, providing food and so on, so they've been very
44 helpful; we've pretty much taken over their whole
45 administration. So, I'd really like to thank them as well.
46

47 On that note, one final thing I want to say, if people

1 have any questions, they should just forward them to the
2 Inquiry website. So, if you think there's something I
3 haven't touched on in what's going to happen in the next
4 few weeks, please send through the questions to the Inquiry
5 website.

6
7 So, thank you then everyone. I will call today's
8 hearing to a close and we will be reconvening Wednesday, at
9 10am in Sydney. Thank you.

10
11 **AT 10.55AM THE PUBLIC INQUIRY WAS ADJOURNED TO**
12 **WEDNESDAY, 9 JUNE 2021 AT 10.00AM**
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