

AUSTRALIAN STATE PRACTICE v. TERRITORY
COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS

On 6 April 1984 the people of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands made an act of self-determination to integrate with Australia. The act was observed by a UN mission. Of the 261 votes cast 229 recorded a vote for integration with Australia. Accordingly, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands self-determination (Consequential Amendments) Bill 1984 was introduced into the Australian Parliament. The text of the Ministerial Declaration preceding the act, made to the House of Representatives (Hansard Parl. Debs., H. of R., 28 March 1984) a statement following the act (Commonwealth Record 9 April 1984) and the Second Reading Speech on the Bill (Hansard Parl. Debs., H. of R., 9 May 1984) follow:

COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS

Ministerial Statement

Mr UREN (Reid—Minister for Territories and Local Government) —by leave—I wish to inform the House that the United Nations has accepted an invitation by the Government to send a visiting mission to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands to witness the making by the people of Cocos of an Act of self-determination. The visit is to occur in the first week of April 1984. The United Nations mission will consist of representatives of Sierra Leone, Yugoslavia, Fiji and Venezuela. This will be the third United Nations mission to visit Cocos. Earlier missions visited in 1974 and 1980. We have appreciated the degree of friendly co-operation that has developed over the years between Australia and the United Nations in regard to the advancement of the Cocos people. We expect that this process will reach culmination in 1984.

In issuing the invitation to the United Nations, the Government acted upon the advice of the Cocos leaders who, on behalf of the community, recently informed the Government that they were prepared to proceed with the act of self-determination and asked the Government to make the necessary arrangements with the United Nations. The Cocos people living in the islands will be determining their future in accordance

with the United Nations requirements. The visiting mission will witness the plebiscite which will be oversighted by the Commonwealth Electoral Commission.

The requirements of the United Nations provide for non-self-governing territories whose development is considered by the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation—known as the Committee of 24—to exercise their right to self-determination, in accordance with the United Nations resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV) which set out the principles by which a territory has achieved a full measure of self-government by choosing, (a) firstly, independence, (b) secondly, free association with an independent state, or (c) thirdly, integration with an independent state. The Government recently presented the details of the three options—**independence, free association with Australia, and integration with Australia—to the community.**

Under the independence option, the Cocos-Malay community would be completely responsible for all aspects of their lives, including foreign affairs and defence. It would be up to them to determine how they would govern themselves and how they would raise revenue and establish their own social and economic strategies. Australia would obviously seek to have a close and friendly relationship with the new State, and would offer all assistance that is within our power to give. The newly independent State would be entitled to apply to join the United Nations and its agencies.

Under free association, Australia would conduct defence and foreign affairs matters on behalf of the Cocos community, and would negotiate with a new Cocos government the way it could assist that government to take full responsibility for a wide range of functions undertaken by Australia at present. These include health, education, transport, quarantine, radio communication and the conduct of the airfield at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

As with the independence option, members of the community would have to determine how they were to govern themselves, the standards of services that would be provided and the ways by which revenue would be raised. The Cocos (Keeling) Islands would not be eligible for United Nations membership but Australia, as part of its responsibility for foreign affairs, would seek to obtain whatever United Nations assistance was available.

Under integration, the Cocos people would have the full rights, privileges and obligations of other Australian citizens:

Local arrangements would be modified to give the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Council wider powers and ownership of the plantation lands, at present leased by the Commonwealth to the Cocos Co-operative.

The electors of Cocos would be included in an existing territory electorate for the purposes of House of Representatives and Senate elections and national referendums.

Appropriate Commonwealth legislation not already applying would be extended to Cocos, including the social security and health Acts.

A review in three years time would examine the introduction of tax. At present levels of income, the Cocos-Malay people are under the existing tax threshold and therefore they would not pay income tax in present circumstances.

The Commonwealth Government would take measures to raise services and standard of living to comparable Australian levels within 10 years, and use the Commonwealth Grants Commission to review standards.

Consistent with its commitment to the United Nations, Australia has, since the Cocos (Keeling) Islands were accepted as a Territory of Australia in 1955, taken many measures particularly in recent years for the political, social and economic advancement of the people of the Cocos to bring about conditions which would enable the people to exercise freely their right to self-determination in full knowledge of the choices open to them.

In November 1982, the previous Government presented general elements of act of self-determination options for the consideration of the Cocos community. In response, the Chairman of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Council wrote to the then Minister for Home Affairs and Environment indicating that the community believed it could not proceed towards the making of the act of self-determination in full confidence without knowing what the Australian Government intended to do about the presence at Cocos of Mr John Clunies-Ross. That letter was written in the light of long standing grievances held by the community about what it sees as interference by Mr Clunies-Ross in its affairs. The relationship between the community and Mr Clunies-Ross was commented upon by the 1974 United Nations visiting mission to Cocos and the 1980 mission which expressed the view that the interdependence of the community and Mr Clunies-Ross should be discontinued. I will quote briefly from that letter of 12 December 1982:

There is one question which is worrying us and to which we should very much like an answer. As you will be aware

from your knowledge of the history of Cocos, the people of our community have suffered many hardships because of the control John Clunies-Ross had in our land for many years. After the Australian Government made its purchase of \$6.25 million of Clunies-Ross's land in 1978, we were confident that his influence on the affairs of our community would cease. The Australian Government gave us assurances at the time that we would not have to worry about Clunies-Ross any more. But this has not been the case. He has continued to interfere in the affairs of our community: his ships still come to and from Cocos; he employs on his property labour from the community at rates more favourable than those set by the Co-operative; he brings in foods (goods) of the same kind as those sold by the Co-operative but sells it to the community far more cheaply than our own Co-operative can; he and his manager have made it known to some of our community in recent months that they are opposed to integration and favour the choice of free association but what they have said has been deliberately aimed at creating confusion and division. These are all serious matters which show that his efforts to interfere in our community have persisted. In 1981, our Council passed a motion calling for the removal of Clunies-Ross. We should like to know now if the Australian Government is prepared to take positive steps to carry out the terms of our motion. After all, Clunies-Ross is not even an Australian citizen, as many of us are, yet he enjoys great privileges because of tax exemption for his companies and the advantage given to his ships.

We realise that the Act of self-determination is an important step for our community. But we do not believe we can proceed with this in full confidence without knowing what the Australian Government intends to do about removing Clunies-Ross.

That then was the position when this Government came to office in March 1983 and I became Minister responsible for the external territories. The House will recall that the Commonwealth purchased the bulk of Mr Clunies-Ross' property in the islands in September 1978 to make possible the implementation of policies for the advancement of the Cocos people. Following upon the purchase, a number of reforms were implemented such as the ending of the use of token currency issued by Mr Clunies-Ross and freedom of movement for the people. A fully elected form of local government body, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Council, with extensive advisory powers was established. The village area was transferred to the ownership of the Council for the benefit of the people. The plantation lands were leased at a nominal rental to the Cocos Islands Co-operative Society, established to run the plantation and undertake a range of commercial activities.

I visited Cocos in April 1983 to ascertain for myself the wishes of the people about all matters affecting their future, including their attitude to Mr Clunies-Ross. What they had to tell me reflected what they had told the 1980 United Nations mission and various Ministers before me. In the light of unanimous views expressed to me at a joint meeting of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands

Council and the management committee of the Cocos Islands Co-operative Society and other discussions I had with members of the community, I told the leaders that I would recommend that the Australian Government acquire the remaining property interests of Mr Clunies-Ross at Cocos with the intention that the property would be given to the Council, as had been the village area, for the benefit of the Cocos people.

I announced in July the Government's intention to acquire the property using the provisions of the Lands Acquisition Act for the public purpose of the political, social and economic development of the Cocos people. While the terms for the intended acquisition have yet to be determined, the Act provides for settlement on just terms. Mr Clunies-Ross decided to take legal action to resist the proposed acquisition under the Lands Acquisition Act. The present position is that the case is expected to be heard by the Full Bench of the High Court of Australia later this year.

As the matter is before the Court, I do not propose to comment further than is necessary at this stage. But so that the views of the Cocos Malay community are clearly understood by this Parliament I was seeking leave to incorporate in *Hansard* a copy of a letter recently sent to the *Bulletin* by the Chairman of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Council, Parson Bin Yapat. Because I am unable to have it included in *Hansard*, I have no other option than to read it into the record.

Mr Ruddock-- You have not asked for leave.

Mr UREN-- Unfortunately, a standing order was levelled by the previous Speaker. I have spoken to the present Speaker and to the Clerks of the House. Under the Standing Orders, because of that previous ruling, I am unable to have the document incorporated in *Hansard*. I have no other option than to read it into the record. The letter is dated 16 March 1984. It is addressed to the Editor of the *Bulletin* in Sydney. It states:

Dear Sir

I am writing this letter as Chairman of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Council and in the name of the entire Cocos (Keeling) Islands Council.

For the last few months we have read many letters and articles about Mr Clunies-Ross in 'The Bulletin' and we are growing tired of reading all these letters and articles. It is already past the time that the people of Australia should know the real situation in Cocos. Mr Clunies-Ross is very fortunate because there are not many Australians who do know about the situation here.

First of all, it is necessary for me to say that we do not accept that Mr Clunies-Ross is one of our people. It is our opinion that he is not a Cocos Malay. It is quite clear from what he does in Cocos that he does not consider himself to be one of our people.

Supposing Mr Clunies-Ross is one of our people, why does he live in a house which is very fine whereas our houses are not so good? It is the Australian Government, not Mr Clunies-Ross, who will give us good houses. The Government has a plan to build new houses, beginning from July of this year.

If Mr Clunies-Ross is one of our people, why did he not go looking for coconuts every day, why did he not husk coconuts as we did, which he made us do before the Australian Government began to exercise effective control in Cocos. Every week, all males of 15 years of age upwards had to go and gather coconuts and husk them, the number of coconuts which had to be gathered and husked was fixed by Mr Clunies-Ross or his manager.

If Mr Clunies-Ross is one of our people, why is his food different from ours, why does he not follow our customs, but rather why, in past times, did he always go by launch whilst we Cocos Malays had to go by Jukongs to our work. He would not want to do these things if he was one of us.

In 1978, the Australian Government paid Mr Clunies-Ross more than 6 million dollars when it bought most of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands from him, apart from an area of land where he and his family live at present. Why did Mr Clunies-Ross not divide all the money he had received among our people? Or why did he not use that money for the welfare of our people? You must remember that it was the Cocos Malays who did all the work, but Mr Clunies-Ross who received a lot of money.

Is there a people in the world today which does not yet have children who have completed their high school studies? It is only this year (1984) that Cocos Malay children will complete Class 12, that is, they will gain a certificate after having studied to Class 12 (the final year).

Mr Clunies-Ross' children went overseas to study. Why did Mr Clunies-Ross not want to give such opportunities to our children? It is necessary for the Australian people to know that before the Australian Government began to exercise control in Cocos, it could be said that our children did not have the opportunity of a good education.

Mr Clunies-Ross has said that there is nobody in Cocos who has told him it would be good if he left Cocos. Indeed, Mr Clunies-Ross knows that not so many Australians know about Malay customs. According to Malay culture, Malay people must be good to and respect other people whenever they meet them. Despite this, we are certain that our people will not progress if Mr Clunies-Ross remains here. So the Cocos (Keeling) Islands council has asked the Australian Government to settle this question. It is our firm resolve that he and his family leave Cocos.

Until 1978 our wages were paid in plastic coins - our wages were very low. Mr Clunies-Ross received Australian money from the Australian Government because he carried out contracts which the Australian Government gave him. We were the ones who did the work but he continued to pay our wages in plastic coins. Mr Clunies-Ross had enough money if he wanted to go overseas, if he wanted to buy something from overseas. We did not.

For a very long time our fundamental human rights were taken away from us completely. Mr Clunies-Ross would not allow us to leave Cocos. If we did go we were not allowed to return. In the period before the Australian Government took over control of Cocos, we were not allowed to speak to Australians. If Mr Clunies-Ross knew that we had spoken with an Australian, we were punished. (It is necessary for me to explain that the Cocos Malays

live on Home Island whilst the Australians live on West Island on the other side of the lagoon). We have just heard Mr Clunies-Ross has applied to become an Australian citizen. Almost all Cocos Malays are already Australian citizens.

In the years following the last war many Cocos Malays left their homeland. Some went by themselves, others were forced to leave. At that time there was no court to hear the case of whether a person wished to go or not, a person could not bring the matter of whether he wanted to go or not to a court. Last year the Australian Government, after receiving a request from the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Council that the Government settle the question of Mr Clunies-Ross and his family, took the decision to acquire his land and the house he still owns on Cocos and give it all to our people. Mr Clunies-Ross has the right to take this matter to the high court. In past times those of our people who had to leave Cocos, did not have any right of this kind.

It seems that Mr Clunies-Ross is now seeking the support of the Australian people with the intention of not being removed from the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. It is our feeling, that if the Australian people all knew the true situation, if they knew how he had treated us in the past, if they knew that Mr Clunies-Ross had taken away all our fundamental human rights, they would not want to support him at all.

Mr Clunies-Ross says that he is of the same race as us. Why has he not been pressing for the right to vote in our council elections? It is only now that he is seeking the right to vote. His intention is to participate in the election in April, that is the Act of Self Determination or the election which will be held so that the Cocos Malays can determine their own political future.

What does Mr Clunies-Ross want for the Cocos Malays? Does he want independence? He has sold many T-Shirts with the word 'merdeka' on them. (Merdeka means independence.) Mr Clunies-Ross has given the name 'merdeka' to his launch. Does he want to give himself independence so that he can regain control in Cocos? Why does Mr Clunies-Ross wish to interfere in the matter of our Act of Self Determination?

Who has given our children the opportunity to study overseas, who has endeavoured to give us higher wages? Who will give us new houses? Who has restored to us our fundamental human rights? When Mr Clunies-Ross was in control in Cocos we had no rights at all.

The Australian Government has done all these things and wishes to ensure our future. We do indeed believe that the Australian Government will do all it has promised to do.

Mr Clunies-Ross can go anywhere he likes in the Kampong everybody else has to seek approval of the Chairman of the Council if they wish to visit the Kampong. Whenever he goes for a walk in the Kampong, Mr Clunies-Ross always wears a dagger. Why? No Cocos Malay wears a dagger in this way.

It is not necessary for me to continue. My principal purpose has been that the Australian people should know that Mr Clunies-Ross is not one of our people as he said he was in a letter he wrote to 'The Bulletin'. It is necessary also for the Australian people to know how Mr Clunies-Ross treated us in the past so that we had no fundamental rights at all.

Yours faithfully

(Parson Bin Yapat)
Chairman
Cocos (Keeling) Islands
Council

16 March 1984

I read the letter out because I thought it was important. Although it was laborious to do so I had to read it to get it into the record. It is important that those Cocos Malay people be heard and their views placed on the record at this historic time because it is only a short time before they decide on self-determination. Australia's commitment to the United Nations is for the political, social and economic advancement of the Cocos community, to enable them to determine their future by free choice in accordance with United Nations principles.

An ordinance which contains the rules for the conduct of the referendum has been laid before the Parliament. In the act of self-determination, a person will be eligible to vote if:

- (a) He or she has attained the age of 18 years;
- (b) His or her principal residence is on Home Island; and
- (c) He or she has had such residence on Home Island for the period of 12 months before the date fixed for the closing of the electoral role, 26 March 1984.

Mr and Mrs Clunies-Ross will be eligible to vote in the referendum if they wish. We have made this decision after consultation with the Cocos Malay leaders and for the purpose of preventing any obstruction to the conduct of the referendum. The leaders of the Cocos people have made it clear to me personally that they do not see Mr Clunies-Ross as one of their community and they do not want Mr Clunies-Ross seeking to influence the people as to how they vote in that act of self-determination. Finally, I would like to put on record the great respect which the Australian Government has for the Cocos people and our full confidence in their capacity to determine their future.

Mr RUDDOCK (Dundas) (4.26)—by leave—I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the House for the courtesy in enabling me to respond on behalf of the Opposition to the statement made by the Minister for Territories and Local Government (Mr Uren) relating to the future of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. It is an important matter. I regret in a sense that the Minister is making the statement only one week before the visit of a United Nations mission to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands for the purpose of dealing with the matter of the act of self-determination. The notice seems very short. It may be that the United

Nations gave the Minister only that length of notice. If that was the case I think it would have been appropriate that the House be informed of that matter.

The fact is, of course, that there has been a long standing interest of Liberal and National parties and Ministers of Liberal and National Party governments in the future of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and its people. In 1955 the islands were accepted as a territory of Australia. This was an important event. In 1978 the Australian Government purchased from Mr Clunies-Ross all his property interests on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands except for his home and its curtilage. That was a very important initiative. Of course, it was a very momentous occasion so far as the history of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands was concerned. The Government then leased to the Cocos-Malay inhabitants of the island for \$1 per annum—except Mr Clunies-Ross—the areas that had been acquired.

There have been a number of benefits from that acquisition. I understand there have been significant pay increases made possible to the Cocos-Malay people. That would be seen as a significant benefit in terms of giving them a rising standard of living. As the Minister mentioned, there was an abandonment of the old token currency, about which a lot has been written and about which there was a great deal of complaint. There were opportunities to improve the facilities in which the Cocos-Malay people lived. Provision was made for electricity and sewerage—so many of the things we take so much for granted.

Freedom was granted to people of Cocos-Malay origin to enable them to visit relatives in Australia at reduced fares. Of course, there was the attainment for many of Australian citizenship. I think that was a very important factor so far as the Cocos-Malay people were concerned. Freedom was given to issue stamps for Cocos Island from which revenue would be derived for the local people. Of course, there were employment opportunities for Cocos-Malay people in many areas of activity associated with Australian Government activities on the island itself. The high security quarantine station, which has been so important so far as Australia and the future of its animals is concerned, was put in place.

It is very important from the point of view of maintaining the integrity of Australia's breeding stock that we are able to introduce stock from other parts of the world and have a place that is sufficiently isolated to ensure that no disease that might affect Australia is likely to be introduced by

Territories and Local Government

Future of Cocos (Keeling) Islands

9 April 1984 — Following the decision of the Cocos Malay people to intergrate with Australia, the Minister for Territories and Local Government, the Hon. Tom Uren, met today with the Cocos Malay leaders as well as with the UN mission that observed the act of self determination.

The Cocos Malay leaders included the Chairman of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Council, Parson bin Yapat and the Chairman of the Cocos Co-operative, Cree bin Haig. They returned to Canberra with UN mission to discuss with Mr Uren a number of matters arising out of the decision to integrate with Australia.

Mr Uren confirmed earlier Government decisions to transfer ownership of most of the land in the Territory to the ownership of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Council. He said that it would be the decision of the Cocos Malay people as to who came to the Territory to settle on the land.

Mr Uren advised the leaders that government activities on the Island would continue, that a program of increasing the number of Cocos Malays holding government positions would also continue and that the Government would, as in the past, assist and advise the Cocos Co-operative as well as the Cocos Philatelic Bureau. The Minister gave the leaders a cheque for \$200 000 which represented profits made by the Philatelic Bureau.

The leader of the UN mission, Ambassador Koroma, reported to the Minister on his mission's observance of the act of self determination. He said that the act had been free and fair and thanked the Australian Government for facilitating his mission's role.

The Ambassador said that press reports that he had criticised the political education program leading to the act of self determination as being inadequate,

were not intended as a criticism of the Australian Government.

Mr Uren expressed the view that an election in which there were only two informal votes in 261 indicated that in fact the political education program had been very successful. The rate of informal votes was far lower than in Australian elections.

The Cocos leaders explained that the means by which political education had been conducted was consistent with Malay cultural practices. Suggestions that more use should have been made of the radio station and of public posters were not consistent with their ways.

COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS SELF-DETERMINATION (CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS) BILL 1984

Bill presented by Mr Uren, and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr UREN (Reid—Minister for Territories and Local Government) (6.45)—I move:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On 6 April, the people of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands made an act of self-determination to integrate with Australia. The Government welcomes that historic decision. The act of self-determination was observed by a United Nations mission which visited Cocos at the invitation of the Australian Government. The people could have chosen free association with Australia or independence. They chose to integrate with Australia.

The Australian Government's policy with regard to Cocos has been to bring about conditions which would enable the people of the Territory to exercise freely their right to self-determination in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the principles of the United Nations Charter. To this end, the Australian Government has implemented a wide range of programs for the political, social, economic and educational advancement of the people in accordance with our obligations under Chapter XI of the Charter.

The Government views the choice by the people of integration with Australia as a successful outcome of its policies for the Territory. All 261 eligible voters voted in the referendum and only two informal votes were recorded. The result was:

For integration with Australia	229 votes
For free association with Australia	21 votes
For independence	9 votes

The visiting mission will prepare a report for the United Nations Secretary-General on the conduct and outcome of the Act. We expect that this report will form the basis of a resolution to be placed before the next regular session of the General Assembly to remove the Cocos Islands from the United Nations list of non-self-governing territories. This process should be completed by the end of December 1984.

There were reports in the Press that the Chairman of the United Nations mission was critical of the extent to which Australia had prepared the people for the act of self-determination, and

educated and informed them of the consequences of the various options. It appears that these reports have magnified a minor comment about the placement of election posters around the island into a major criticism. The chairman of the mission told me that the reports dramatized and overplayed his comments, which had not been intended as a criticism of the Australian Government. The Cocos leaders have explained that the means by which political education had been conducted was consistent with Malay cultural practices.

I informed the House on 28 March of the details of the three options from which the people would choose. I said that under integration the Cocos people would have the full rights, privileges and obligations of other Australian citizens and I outlined specific measures that would be taken by the Government to give effect to that promise. Amongst those measures were the measures now before the House. I will not take the time of the House in presenting in any detail other measures we have taken and will take to honour our commitment to the people of Cocos. Those are a matter of public record.

I again draw the attention of the House to Australia's commitment to observe the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the principles of the United Nations Charter in relation to the act of self-determination. Principle (viii) attached to United Nations Resolution 1541 provides that integration with an independent state should be on the basis of complete equality between the peoples of the Territory in question and those of the independent country with which it is to be integrated. Equality should include opportunities for effective participation at all executive, legislative and judicial levels.

There are four measures addressed in this Bill.

Amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918

The Government enthusiastically acknowledges its obligation to extend to the island community full voting rights in relation to the Australian Parliament. To meet that obligation, this legislation provides for the Commonwealth Electoral Act to be amended to incorporate the Territory of Cocos (Keeling) Islands as a district in the Federal Division of the Northern Territory. The right to vote is a precious right in a parliamentary democracy and marks the acceptance by the people of Cocos of their full responsibilities as Australian citizens.

I emphasise that the inclusion of Cocos in the federal electorate of the Northern Territory will

not affect access of the Cocos people to the Federal Government through me, as the Minister responsible, or my Department. I also emphasise that the Government of the Northern Territory will have no role or responsibilities in relation to Cocos. The electors of Cocos will benefit from the additional representation of the honourable member for the Northern Territory, who I am sure will effectively represent their interests in this House. The financial implications of this action are minimal, and are restricted to those expenses incurred in registering the names of eligible voters on the Islands, freighting of ballot papers and other documentation on the occasion of elec-

tions and referendums, and the casual engagement of polling officials. Expenditure of only \$2,000 to \$3,000 on each occasion of election is envisaged.

Commonwealth Grants Commission Act 1973

The legislation also amends the Commonwealth Grants Commission Act to provide for a reference to be given by the Minister to the Commission in relation to the Territory. The Government will be looking to the Grants Commission to determine methodologies and procedures which will enable it to recommend to the Government appropriate forms of assistance to the Islands community to ensure that it enjoys a standard of living comparable to that on the Australian mainland. Costs incurred by the Commission in pursuing this task are expected to be minimal, mainly involving travel expenses of the commissioners and associated staff to and from the Islands.

Health Insurance Act 1973 and National Health Act 1953

The effect of the extension of this legislation will be to place the people on Cocos in a similar position to mainland residents in respect of public medical and hospital services, provided that the Cocos hospital charging arrangements are brought into line with those of public hospitals on the mainland; that is, no charges being levied for public medical and hospital services. This will require the consequential repeal of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Medical Charges Ordinance 1963. The financial impact of the changes resulting from these amendments will be negligible.

Social Security Act 1947

This measure is essential for equality for the people of the Territory. It is estimated that the cost of payment of pensions, benefits and allowances to residents of Cocos (Keeling) Islands will amount to \$240,000 in a full year. In accordance with the community's wishes, it is proposed to make arrangements for payment to be made to

the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Council. This is in line with the community's practice of pooling its resources to maximise the benefit to all members of the community. Further, this arrangement will ensure that local wage structures will not be disrupted following the extension of the legislation.

I am pleased that at the table is the honourable member for Darling Downs (Mr McVeigh), who is the former Minister for Home Affairs and Environment and was responsible for the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. I know that he personally has a similar commitment to that of the Government and I am pleased that he is in the House on this very historic occasion when we are introducing this Bill on behalf of the Cocos Island people. I commend this Bill to the House.