

FALKLAND ISLANDS



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Statement by
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chairman, your Excellencies, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity, for the people of the Falkland Islands, to explain their position through their democratically elected representatives.

I represent a people who originate from a number of different countries, historically and in recent times. There is a strong link with people from the British Isles but other nationalities have arrived and stayed for a number of reasons from surviving shipwrecks in the nineteenth century to immigrants seeking new land and opportunities and deciding to make the Falklands their home. From the nineteen eighties to the present day we have had a slow but constant flow of immigrants joining our community from a variety of countries including 30 whose birthplace is Argentina. Today we boast the greatest number ever of native Falkland Islanders but also people living in our community from over 60 different countries. Is this any different from any other New World countries. Today Islanders and potential immigrants alike, see the Falklands life style and society as a safe, stable, personable community with many ways to better ones self.

The Falkland Island economy has developed remarkably in the last thirty years moving from an agricultural base which was struggling to provide the basics, to today where we have fisheries, agriculture, tourism and revenue generated from the return on government's investments and taxation as the major contributors. Taxation is fairly low but the revenue is still significant when you consider it is produced by such a small country with a small

population. We don't have any borrowing and we have resources which are 2 ½ times the annual operating expenditure which demonstrates a strong and well managed economy.

The fisheries contribute in a number of ways. Through licence fees and the right to fish in Falkland's water, through to fishing companies that have grown from nothing to large businesses that compete in world markets and have large taxable incomes. We are proud, as the government of the Falklands, to boast one of the best managed fisheries in the world with the aim to deliver a sustainable fishery. We believe that it could be even better and impact on the whole of the SW Atlantic if we worked together with other jurisdictions. Certainly a coordinated approach could bring better control to the High Seas which is part of the SW Atlantic fisheries.

Tourism is our second and fastest growing industry bringing many opportunities to the private sector with both full and part time work. Over 62 thousand cruise ship passengers visited the Islands last season, an increase of 21% and there was also a rise of 18% of land based tourists that stayed with us for a week or more. We understand from the industry that more are expected for next summer. It is an opportunity for us to show thousands of visitors from all over the world who we are and what we stand for.

Prices in both wool and meat have improved greatly in this last season providing many farmers with the incentive to use government development funds to improve pastures and the genetics of their livestock. These improvements, which have been

running since the early years of this century, are designed to improve animal productivity as well as realising better prices for finer wool and heavier stock for the abattoir. The rural community isn't only about farms and the recent creation of a Rural Development strategy Group will be a catalyst for further sustainable business opportunities outside Stanley.

Hundreds of miles of roads have been built in the last twenty years and in a few more years we will see the completion of the basic road network which ties in all the farms, settlements and our town together. East and West Falkland roads will be connected by a regular ferry service from two purpose built ports with a new, custom built vessel, which will start to operate in the next few months. We also hope it will enable us to enhance the provision to the smaller Islands even if it is only the capacity to deliver machinery to support bigger projects. These developments have improved living in camp and have led to opportunities in many areas, but especially tourism.

Two years ago I told this committee how Education has been transformed from the basic to a sophisticated system from Early Child Care and Pre-School to University. This year we are working hard to develop a management structure which will give teachers a career pathway in all areas of education and the function to monitor teaching and learning to encourage and promote best practice. We build a strong foundation in the Islands up to GCSE and then a healthy cross section of students go on to further education in academic or vocational fields with further opportunity to carry on to degree level.

Our aim is to educate our students to the best of our ability and deliver them to the work place with the means to have choices. We are now reaping the rewards of this investment with tradesmen and skilled people who have internationally recognised qualifications, joining our workforce. Keeping young people in isolated communities is a world wide problem but in the Falklands the majority return to make a difference and to commit their futures to their country. Young people have a strong Falkland Island identity and talk about the qualities of their community and themselves as individuals.

We have a well funded, modern health and social services department with skills and expertise in areas that were virtually unheard of here 25 years ago. An improvement in Dental facilities is the most notable, recent development in health care with waiting lists being greatly reduced and the overall service being enhanced. This year an external Clinical Governance Audit identified high standards of treatment, health care and service delivery which is reassuring for all involved. All these improvements, over a number of years, have been carried out by our Government with our money.

Houses continue to be built at a rapid rate reflecting not only the strength of our economy, but people's confidence in the Falklands future. Most people live in houses that have modern conveniences with some properties using cutting edge technology like solar energy. The majority of homes boast modern furniture and fittings. People in the Falklands have a comfortable existence throughout

the spectrum of our society with the social welfare system helping the vulnerable and the less fortunate members of our community.

Telecommunications are continuing to develop in the Falklands. There are now more mobile/cell phones than any other type of phone in Stanley. C&W in partnership with the Falkland Island Government have started investing money in an upgrade to deliver modern telecommunications to the rural community including broadband, with the capacity to incorporate mobile phones and therefore deliver mobile phone coverage Island wide. We are hoping that this initiative will lead to e commerce. This will give everyone the opportunity, wherever they live in the Falklands, to develop 'E' businesses.

As a modern country we are very aware of our responsibilities to the environment. Falkland councillors past and present have embraced the concept of 'think global act local' with a number of green issues. The waste heat from our power station is used to heat the swimming pool, hospital and the community school. We have set up a wind farm which can produce more than a third of our energy needs in Stanley. Also we have invested in glass imploders in Stanley that turn glass bottles into a material that can be used in filters or construction. A private company also recycles aluminium cans. Outside Stanley most of our rural communities have wind turbines which charges batteries which in turn power the houses through an inverter that converts DC electricity to AC.

Politically we continue to improve our democratic processes developing a system where local politicians drive policies and are

accountable for their actions to the electorate. Much of the workings of government are open to the general public and the press. We replaced the Governor in Legislative Council a number of years ago, and now have a Speaker of the House who is voted into the position by Legislative Councillors. We invite the Governor to address the House at our budget session, to deliver a speech highlighting the issues of our society and outlining the Government's vision for the future.

A select committee has been working on our constitution since April 2000 following the suggestion from the 1999 UK white paper on the overseas territories that all OT's should examine and consider modernising their constitutions. New Constitution negotiations with the UK are in their final stages. In the last two years we have done much to update the partnership that we have with the UK founded on self-determination. The process of the constitutional review in itself is a democratic process that gives people the opportunity island-wide to engage in the process which included island-wide consultation with the electorate.

The partnership with Britain is based on our right to self-determination and like all Overseas territories the right to remain British for as long as we wish.

This partnership brings with it responsibilities and obligations to both parties. Britain is pledged to defend us and to encourage sustainable development and to look after our international interests. We on the other hand strive to deliver good governance

throughout our society and this intent is enshrined in our constitution.

The connection between ourselves and the British government is cemented by our constitution which is derived at by bilateral negotiation. The United Kingdom retains sufficient powers to be able to discharge its responsibilities to such things as its international obligations. It is worth noting however that the new constitution, that is nearing completion, will make the governor bound to the advice of Executive Council in internal matters unless there are very good governance grounds not to. In that event he would have to report to the Secretary of State relaying the views of Executive Council.

How different this is to the first councils of the Falklands that were made up from members nominated by the crown in 1843. Or even from the first elected members on Legislative Council by universal suffrage in 1949. There was still however a majority of non elected members on Legislative Council and Executive Council was still solely appointed by the Governor. It wasn't until 1985 that ex-officio members of the Legislative Council couldn't vote and there were no nominated members.

Today, due to our own efforts, we have a vibrant economy with an ever strengthening private sector. We have a strong identity which runs through all that live in the Falklands. We want better relations with Argentina, however we are not, prepared to stagnate and wait for others to decide our fate. We want to continue evolving. There is a lot more still to do and Falkland politicians and people will

strive to make a successful and stable future for generations to come.

Mr. Chairman, your Excellencies, I have described our society and the economy that generates the finances to build a modern, stable and distinct country, shaped with our political policies and I would say reasonably successfully. I ask you as members of the Committee of 24, and the people of the Falkland Islands urge you, fulfil the mandate of the Committee and support that fundamental right of Self Determination.