



# News from Gilbert House

31/07/2020  
Vol 1 Issue 15

## Message from the Chair

*MLA Roger Edwards - Public Works*

Did you know that from 1843 until 1985 the Island of South Georgia was a Dependency of the Falkland Islands?

It was during the 'Voyages of Discovery' that Captain James Cook discovered the Island of South Georgia, he named it after King George 3<sup>rd</sup>. Cooke landed in Possession bay and claimed the Islands for his King 'under a discharge of small arms'.

Britain did little with this new discovery until 1843, when, under 'Letters Patent' the Island was formally made a 'Falkland Islands Dependency'. The Letters Patent were revised and amended in 1876 and again in 1892.

On 21<sup>st</sup> July 1908, with King Edward 7<sup>th</sup> on the throne, "all lands in the area South Georgia, South Sandwich Islands, South Shetlands, South Orkney, Graham Land (& Antarctic Mainland)" were 'constituted dependencies of the Falkland Islands by Letters Patent under the Kings Sign Manual'. The Executive Council of the Falkland Islands were to be the Executive Council of the Dependencies.

On 28<sup>th</sup> March 1917 these Letters Patent were amended to clarify and better define the geographical limits of the Falkland Islands Dependencies. 50 degrees South Latitude to the Pole between 20 degrees West and 50 degrees West and 58 degrees South to the Pole from 50 degrees West to 80 degrees West.

After the Falklands' war of 1982 the Falkland Islands lost its Dependencies when the United Kingdom Government in 1985 established the separate Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands making the Falkland Islands Governor 'Commissioner' to the new Government.

Interestingly Argentina did not lay claim to South Georgia until 1927 and even later, in 1938, for the South Sandwich Islands.

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Have you ever looked at the advert for a job you're possibly interested in, read the role responsibilities, and thought "there's no way I could do that job"? I know I have. In reality, you probably do have a reasonable shot at having what it takes. However, if you don't have detailed knowledge of what a job entails and how well suited to it you may be then you are obviously less likely to apply for it.

Why do I raise this? It's related to a recent discussion I took part in regarding arranging a programme of sessions for prospective election candidates next year. MLA Roberts and I met recently with Clerk of the Assembly Cherie Clifford and the Speaker of the House Keith Biles to talk about what could be arranged to demystify the role of MLA and to give a better understanding about what it involves. It's not actually that long until this Assembly's time is up with the next General Election taking place in November 2021 and we are currently looking at a series of sessions being held early next year. Some of the sessions could include hearing the experiences of former MLAs, going through how policy is developed and approved or how the Government financial processes work.

I feel that it's our responsibility as Elected Members to do what we can to try and get more people to put their names forward so that the electorate have more choice. It is of course down to each person to have the motivation to stand but there is plenty that can be done to provide more information to those interested. Of course, potential candidates need to show some initiative and do their homework if they're thinking about taking the leap into politics. It's a piece of oft-quoted advice to potential election candidates but I'll repeat it anyway – read everything you can. Read all the committee papers, minutes and ExCo reports that are published. It will be really invaluable for building up your background knowledge.

Anyway, it is early days but we are hoping to be able to provide a range of sessions so that interested people can come along and get more of a feel for what they may be getting themselves into. I'd encourage anyone mulling it over to come and talk to any of us and let us know which areas you would be interested in learning more about.



## MLA Ian Hansen

*Health and Social Services*

The last few months have been very different to what we are accustomed to here in the Falklands, to say the least. Many people have had to self isolate for a long period of time including three MLAs and government officials. Working virtually from home had it's challenges to be sure, but hopefully we can learn from this experience and improve the system as we move into the future.

All Government Departments had to adjust, but possibly Health and Social Services and Emergency Services more than others. To mention my portfolio, the staff of KEMH - from the Director and Chief Medical Officer right through - all deserve a huge round of applause for the way they had to react to a potentially disastrous situation.

Many financial aid schemes have been put in place, not least the Falklands Government purchasing remaining unsold wool from farmers. Contracts are now being signed and payments made to individuals, which will undoubtedly be of great help to cash flows at this time of year.

Normally by now, Farmers Week would have taken place. Unfortunately because of Covid this was cancelled but there will still be chances for the agricultural sector to attend sessions later this month with Department of Agriculture staff and Woolco.

Also at the end of June the Honourable Roger Edwards and myself should have been attending the C24 meeting in New York. We expect with the new Argentine Government the rhetoric will ramp up considerably at both the C24 and OAS.



It has been very pleasing to see the Falklands being able to open up internally after having to shut down to control the Covid-19 outbreak we had at Mount Pleasant. The hardship does seem worth it when we are able to be more relaxed than most countries around the world. Vigilance is however still required as no quarantine scheme is water tight. During this shut down many local businesses have experienced a difficult period that we as FIG were able to assist with, but support from the local community is also needed to help get those businesses back on their feet - especially in the hospitality sector. I would urge everyone to support our great local products and businesses.

Looking forwards, our tourism sector looks set to have a difficult year ahead. The Government is working hard to produce some proposals to support this industry over the next year or so. It is likely there will need to be some adjustments by businesses to adapt to the much lower demand combined with FIG support.

The wool purchase scheme for farms has been well received and we need to ensure that FIMCO is well run and has a well thought-out business plan to provide cost effective support for farms.

There has been much talk about rent controls. It is important people understand that what is commonly thought of as rent control-nominal caps on rent levels is hardly found today. Those countries that do combine strong rent regulation with sizable private rental sectors usually have systems that permit rents to adjust to near-market levels even though they are formally "controlled".

The growth of the private rented sector over the past ten years has been a great success. That success in the Islands has been mainly market driven, yet still it is one in which policy has played an important part. Success has come about by allowing a free market to operate and the forces of competition within it to work. Government has a key role to play in setting the right policies to allow the private sector to operate whilst providing social housing for rental and the opportunity for our young people where possible to own their own home. The forces of supply and demand are far more likely in my view to bring rental rates to more realistic levels. Government has a key role to play in creating those conditions.

## MLA Teslyn Barkman

*Natural Resources*



The long-awaited public consultation on Housing analysis, needs and options is due to be published soon. We've seen the development of the document and how it builds upon the socio-economic work done that looks at the population growth and projected demands for housing up to 2035 so we can aim to keep above the curve. The work, titled 'Housing for our Future' looks at the current amount of owned and rented properties and considers the differences of occupancy and needs between the temporary population and the permanently resident population who have rights to hold land.

Taking into consideration the known FIG and private sector plans, including Bennett's Paddock coming online in Stanley, the work exposes there is and will continue to be an undersupply of rental housing unless action is taken.

Owner-occupied housing could be redirected to absorb some of this deficit in the rental market. We also know that an estimated 10% of total housing is vacant due to condition or owner preference across the islands though.

The work then presents a list of options to try and remedy a rebalance of housing supply across the islands. This includes measures to reduce demand on rental accommodation, increase supply, improve affordability of renting in Stanley, affordability of homeownership in Camp, affordability homeownership for those on lower incomes, housing quality, and rental agreement security.

Public surveys that look at what you think within the different areas of work and options will be made live when work is published and presented. There is also to be focus groups that will help inform whether we take recommendations forward.

There is a lot of information to absorb but feedback on what options to take is going to be vital to how we develop housing across the Islands. We really hope as many people as possible can engage with the work and have their voice heard.



I had intended not to talk about Covid in this article, but straight out of the blocks am going to fail on that! When this newsletter goes out there will still be one week left to complete the questionnaire about FIG's response to Covid and I would encourage everyone to take the time to do this.

The purpose of the survey is not to seek praise or allocate blame, but to understand what worked well and what didn't during the crisis we experienced this year. Hopefully this will never be repeated, but there is always that possibility and, if the time comes, we want to know what we – as a Government, as individuals and as a community – can do better. Every single person in this community has experiences and views which are valuable, so please do give your feedback - [www.fig.gov.fk/covid-19/survey](http://www.fig.gov.fk/covid-19/survey)

This year has been strange in that it has both flown by and seemed endless, but I was almost surprised to realise that this Assembly has less than 14 months left in office. We have achieved a great deal, but much remains to be done. Some of our goals may well be more difficult to reach in the 'new normal' in which we are living, but there is no lack of desire and drive to get things done.

We held a session recently to review the 'long-list' of objectives and establish our highest priorities. Priorities include (but are not limited to) housing, the port and the capital programme generally; telecoms; further improving Camp connectivity; and continuing developments in education and Early Years provision. Some of my personal priorities are the push on with environmental issues (eg the Environment Strategy, Wildlife & Nature legislation, renewable energy policy and – of course – to get the new waste management facilities in place; but I also want to see some completion on workforce development and social policies, including welfare reform and the mental health strategy.

As well as this, we have been working hard to develop plans to help our community through what will be strange times, and these will be shared soon. While it will inevitably be challenging, every crisis offers opportunity and we should use this time to look at what we can improve and strengthen, so when things settle and the world starts to open up again, our fantastic Islands and community are better than ever...

Many congratulations to Cherie Clifford, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council, who recently celebrated 20 years service with FIG!

Cherie with her celebratory cake, made by her daughter





Economic Development - what are we doing to combat the effects of Covid-19 on our economy?

Perhaps first I will set out what effect it has had. We have seen a sudden end to the tourist season and will no doubt see a huge reduction of the next one. We have seen non-essential businesses asked to stop operating. People have been furloughed and some have lost their jobs. Flights to South America have stopped altogether and the airbridge to UK is available for essential travel only. Wool prices have plummeted (not necessarily Covid-19 related) and non-essential construction stopped. People have been asked to self-isolate or quarantine on mass. More recently we have seen a partial lifting of some of these restrictions, but many continue to remain.

So, what have we done? A range of economic measures were introduced. Grant schemes, a furlough scheme, an unemployment scheme, the offer to buy unsold wool, a reduction in electricity rates and a temporary waiver on service charge have hopefully helped many throughout this period.

What is next? We will continue to consult with businesses and listen to how well existing schemes are working as well as looking to implement a new range of measures. We will firstly look to reduce restrictions as and when we can and try to accommodate businesses as long as it is safe to do so. We will continue to listen to government officers and others about what is possible and how safe is safe enough. Continually trying to strike a balance between freedom and safety. Also looking to extend many of the measures currently introduced.

On tourism, I believe we are getting very close to agreeing a range of measures to more specifically help businesses working in this industry. I apologise for the time taken, but it is the vast range of business types and sizes that has made this very difficult to try and cater for.

We have to consider how this affects all businesses including the cornerstone of our economy - fishing. How the restrictions on movement will affect crewing vessels.

It is vital during this period that you convey your thoughts and difficulties. We don't have unlimited reserves, but we do have some put away for times such as these. Our job will be to ensure that we come out of this ideally stronger, but more importantly able to rebuild.

There is going to be a referendum on Thursday 24th September 2020. People on the electoral role in the Falklands will be asked this question:

**Should there be two constituencies, Stanley and Camp, or should there be one constituency for the whole of the Falkland Islands?**

We as MLAs will happily share our opinions about how we feel, but also feel it is important for the people of the Falkland Islands to debate the issue and help inform the vote.

The Single Constituency Referendum EXCO paper can be found on the following link or requested from Gilbert House by calling 27451.

<http://www.fig.gov.fk/assembly/public-papers/executive-council-papers/send/411-13-11-december-2019/2612-161-19p-single-constituency-referendum-draft-bills-and-other-instruments-for-approval>

# Key Dates & Contacts

MLA recess	Monday 10th - Friday 21st August 2020
Falklands Day	Friday 14th August 2020
Next sitting of Legislative Assembly	Thursday 27th August 2020

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## CONGRATULATIONS!

Members of Legislative Assembly & Gilbert House staff would like to congratulate Meghan Law and Dylan Stephenson on the safe arrival of their daughter, Aurora Stephenson.

Meghan, who is the Administrative Assistant at Gilbert House, welcomed baby Aurora on Wednesday 25th March 2020.



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