



**Australian High Commission  
Colombo**

**DRAFT MEDIA RELEASE**

---

**2 November 2015**

**Australian High Commissioner visits the Eastern Province**

Australian High Commissioner, HE Robyn Mudie, visited Eastern Province from 28 to 30 October to discuss Australia's ongoing development assistance program with national and provincial counterparts and other partners.

The High Commissioner met the Governor of Eastern Province, the Honourable Austin Fernando, Chief Minister of the Eastern Province Nazeer and other local officials. She reiterated Australia's commitment to supporting Sri Lanka's economic development and to contributing to Sri Lanka's reconciliation efforts.

After briefing interlocutors on a new development partnership, that, subject to national government approval, will create more local jobs in tourism-related businesses across the Eastern Province, the High Commissioner said "While Australia has been investing in education and economic infrastructure in Eastern Province for the last four years, we are turning the attention of our development cooperation towards the creation of economic opportunities for local people. Working with public officials, we hope to support partnerships between training providers and businesses of all sizes in the tourism industry, to drive a greater alignment between the needs of industry and the skills of prospective employees".

In Batticaloa District, High Commissioner Mudie declared open an anicut that was constructed with Australian aid funds, in partnership with IOM, in the village of Illupadichenai. The anicut regulates water flow during periods of heavy rain and contains water during periods of drought for both cultivation and drinking. The 275 farming families who cultivate the surrounding land will now benefit from a doubling of their average income per harvest.

The High Commissioner also met with local health experts to discuss the challenge of combating gender based violence. Through Oxfam, Australia provides support to the Batticaloa GBV network, which supports local organisations involved in aiding women, children and men who have been the victims of violence.

The High Commissioner also thanked partners for ongoing cooperation with Australia to combat the shared challenge of maritime people smuggling. "Since the

introduction of Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders in 2013, every Sri Lankan people smuggling boat that has attempted to come to Australia has failed. The Australian Government's policy on maritime people smuggling remains unchanged – if you travel illegally to Australia by boat, you will never be settled there” Ms Mudie said.