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**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities**

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**

**Wednesday, 25 June 2003**

**Members:** Mr Wakelin (*Chair*), Ms Hoare (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Cobb, Mrs Draper, Ms Gillard, Mr Haase, Dr Lawrence, Mr Lloyd, Mr Snowdon and Mr Tollner.

**Members in attendance:** Mr Cobb, Mrs Draper Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Mr Snowdon, Mr Tollner and Mr Wakelin

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

Strategies to assist Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders better manage the delivery of services within their communities. In particular, the committee will consider building the capacities of:

- (a) community members to better support families, community organisations and representative councils so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities;
- (b) Indigenous organisations to better deliver and influence the delivery of services in the most effective, efficient and accountable way; and
- (c) government agencies so that policy direction and management structures will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people.

**WITNESSES**

**CARMICHAEL, Mr Tony, Assistant Secretary, Department of Family and Community Services..... 719**

**DEMPSTER, Ms Fiona Anne, Assistant Secretary, Family and Children’s Policy, Department of Family and Community Services ..... 719**

**SMITH, Mr Barry, Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Policy and North Australia Office, Department of Family and Community Services ..... 719**



**Committee met at 4.45 p.m.****CARMICHAEL, Mr Tony, Assistant Secretary, Department of Family and Community Services****DEMPSTER, Ms Fiona Anne, Assistant Secretary, Family and Children's Policy, Department of Family and Community Services****SMITH, Mr Barry, Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Policy and North Australia Office, Department of Family and Community Services**

**CHAIR**—Welcome to today's hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. I remind witnesses that these are proceedings of the parliament, and I invite you to give a very brief opening statement.

**Mr Smith**—We provided a written submission in September of last year, and I thought it would be useful to refresh the committee's memory that we tried to provide that in a number of parts: quite a lot of theoretical, contextual information; a bit of a summary of the literature that is around in terms of community, what community capacity building is, social capital and a range of other things; and actually identifying the responses to the committee's questions and also actions that the department is taking. All I wanted to do by way of opening statement was simply to read some of the summary dot points at the front, and then we will open to questions. I will just leave it as crisp as that.

**CHAIR**—That would take about two or three minutes?

**Mr Smith**—Yes. The word 'community' has several meanings and a lot of embedded assumptions. What we were saying in the document is that care should be taken with its use and to make sure that the context is very clear when it is being used. Indigenous communities cannot be assumed to be easily defined and cannot be assumed to be homogeneous. A lot of the things that we refer to as communities are in fact population centres and are not necessarily communities in a true sense of the meaning of the word 'community'. 'Community capacity', we indicated, refers to a mix of things such as knowledge, skills, motivation and resources. We indicated in the paper that this includes but is not limited to infrastructure, governance and leadership capacity. We said that the degree of strength, resilience and adaptability exhibited by a community really depends on its internal capacities and these include different capitals. In the paper we refer to economic capital, physical capital, natural capital, human capital, cultural capital and social capital. Therefore, it indicates that it is quite a complex array of resources that mix and produce strength in community.

We indicated that social capital is a major contributor to community strength and it really underpins the development of other capitals because it enables collective action. If you do not have the social capital networks, then you will probably have a lot of individual activity but not necessarily cohesive or community level activity. The social capital usually underpins the mobilising of resources required, and it also fosters responsibility and care for others. One of the indicators of community strength and community capacity is in fact around its ability to mobilise activities, take responsibility and care for others, particularly children, in those communities.

We indicated that capacity building involves enabling people to determine their own values, goals and priorities and, importantly, to act on them. It starts from recognising existing strengths and assets. Recognising existing strengths and assets is a very important thing, rather than simply focusing on problems to be resolved. It is building on the positives and building on the hope that those positives can offer. Maybe, in some of the presentation or in answers to your questions, we can indicate some projects that we are doing at the moment that are contributing in that way. Meaningful community participation in the process is essential to building local ownership and control and to obtaining and achieving sustainable solutions. That is the sort of thing that we covered in the paper. I will leave it there and then make it available.

**CHAIR**—That is much appreciated, Mr Smith. As I say, you are very welcome, and we appreciate the time and appreciate your colleagues being here as well.

**Mr HAASE**—Thank you, Chair, for allowing me to start. You are aware that I am short of time. Having had my questions answered, I am probably going to appear very ignorant by leaving but please accept my apologies.

**CHAIR**—We are grateful for your contribution.

**Mr HAASE**—My first question is, Barry, why isn't everyone else at the table referred to as Barry as well? There are three of us here today, and I think that we have set the standard and we should therefore pass the name to everyone. Could you tell me the names of the communities that you have been to in, say, the last six months?

**Mr Smith**—Personally, or the organisation?

**Mr HAASE**—No, you personally.

**Mr Smith**—Mostly I have been to Tennant Creek, which has a number of town camps—

**Mr HAASE**—I know it well.

**Mr Smith**—Alice Springs, which has the town camps, and Wadeye in the Northern Territory. That is about the extent of my personal involvement over the last 12 months.

**Mr HAASE**—So you, like I, would see a great deal of apparent poverty. I say apparent poverty because I believe that it is a management situation, not a case of poverty. Surely you would, therefore, wonder where governments collectively have failed. I hope you would share my amazement that we are talking about the high theory of development of leadership and community building when in fact the first thing we need to achieve in practice is to have people get a good night's sleep, a decent feed and a reasonable level of hygiene in order to understand the basics of communication and money management, and then perhaps the higher issues of understanding what administration is about and what leadership is about.

I wonder if you can explain to me why it is that we in Canberra, for instance, talk about the theory when there is so much practice lacking in communities. How do you think, in practical terms, we could break that inadequacy down? That is the general thrust of my questions. I would



be very happy if we could learn to ride the bike and forget about the jet fighter. Do you know what I am saying?

**Mr Smith**—Yes.

**Mr HAASE**—Because as I see it, if Family and Children's Services was the department responsible for family and services to children, it perhaps could be found greatly lacking, because I see abused women and unhealthy women; I see children who are malnourished; I see children who are unhealthy; I see children who are uneducated; and I see no concern for them to be attending school to get the education they need for future building—all of those things. I believe there is a huge gap between the theory that you report on and the application in practice on the ground.

**Mr Smith**—We will reply to your question by going to a couple of examples. We will use the example of Wadeye and the example of a project which actually applies to Arakun, Coen and Mossman Gorge. In the Wadeye community, over the last 12 months or so, quite a significant change has occurred. Part of that change has come from people realising that they can take responsibility for their own community and their own destiny and partner with others to bring about that change.

A very good example of this is the women in Wadeye who thought that if they were going to stop the violence and get a better deal for their kids they were going to have to take on a leadership role. So one of the things that FaCS did was to provide support to those women in the development of their leadership and confidence in themselves through the Stronger Family and Communities Strategy. Those women have taken the school attendance rate from as low as 30—there are about 600 children who could attend school at Wadeye—to, from the last report that I had, almost 400. The way they did that was by sharing the roles in the school amongst themselves. There are about a dozen of them that share the role of deputy principal of the school. They have taken on the role of developing family plans and achieving family outcomes.

In other words, they have moved away from the concept that they belong to a community and that they are controlled by a community. They are more responsible for themselves in terms of their community of interest—which is the women and their community of family, rather than some other entity. They cannot control the big entity but they can control the smaller communities. That group of women have got to the stage where they now manage the takeaway and have set up their women's centre and sewing centre. All of that activity has taken place after the women had gained the confidence that they can actually take a future forward.

**Mr HAASE**—Thank you, we are progressing well. Can you tell me approximately how much some of these projects have cost? Could you explain the funding process in broad strokes?

**Mr Smith**—Yes. This is quite a good example too. It was not expensive. It cost \$250,000 over two years. Initially, the project fell over because the ambitious program that the women wanted to achieve overwhelmed them. We took quite a unique step for a government department because, when it fell over, instead of blaming them and taking money away from them, we went back into the community and spent time with the women, asked them why it fell over and found out it was a confidence issue and a leadership issue. It was about them having the knowledge and being able to build on that.

**Mr HAASE**—How much money had you done at that stage?

**Mr Smith**—Quite a small amount. We had probably been in there for about six months, at that stage.

**Mr HAASE**—I would like to know about the funding. Did you pay it up front, was it progressive, was it dollar for dollar?

**Mr Smith**—It was progressive—on milestones.

**Mr HAASE**—Did you manage the funding?

**Mr Smith**—Yes, we did—out of the office in Darwin. That was a fairly unique feature. We put the project officer back into the community to spend time there on a regular basis until the people actually knew where they wanted to go with it. We suspended the funding during that particular period of time. When they were ready to go again and when they felt as though they actually had the skills and the confidence, we started the process but renegotiated the contract and the activities. We got it down to something that they thought was a more practical outcome for them and it has paid absolute dividends.

**Mr HAASE**—What was the money going into specifically? Was it going into facilities or wages or vehicles?

**Mr Smith**—It was actually for facilities and a coordinator to support the women in their activities.

**Mr HAASE**—Was the coordinator sourced from outside or selected from the community?

**Mr Smith**—That was one of the issues. The person was actually sourced external to the community. The community at first did not feel as though they had as much to say about the selection of that person as it turned out. So in terms of the second round, that was one of the issues. So in the second life of it, they still wanted a coordinator because we posed the question, ‘Do you want a coordinator?’

**Mr HAASE**—Where did they come from?

**Mr Smith**—The person still came from the outside but the women were actually involved in the full selection process. They got the person out on the place, and that person is actually working as a mentor, a teacher and a capacity builder within the community.

**Mr HAASE**—Was the person known to the community? Was it somebody that they approved of because they had a prior knowledge or were they able to assess the capacity?

**Mr Smith**—The person was known through networks and they were able to assess the capacity.

**Mr HAASE**—Okay, so they had the right ties?

**Mr Smith**—Yes. One thing that has come out of stage 2 of this activity is building what we call a family program because the women said this is where the strength is—that it is in the family units rather than in the broader units, so they are actually taking it down the family line. In this particular stage we are now moving towards having a local person trained as the coordinator, as well as the employment of another six local people as individual family workers—to take responsibility with their families. Why I say that is that it relates to another of our programs, which is the family income management pilot. You may or may not have heard of that.

**Mr HAASE**—No, I do not know it but the name sounds good.

**Mr Smith**—That particular project is operating in Arakun, Coen and Mossman Gorge. The main aim of the project centres around money power, money management, and using that as the root stock for improving communities. The indicator of success is that we have 500 people in those three communities who are signed up to making savings into the family income management coffers.

**Mr HAASE**—You have mentioned all Northern Territory, I think?

**Mr Smith**—That was Cape York.

**Mr HAASE**—Was it?

**Mr Smith**—Yes.

**Mr HAASE**—Why aren't we doing something in Western Australia, or are we?

**Mr Smith**—We actually are doing quite a lot of things in Western Australia. If I could give an example—

**Mr HAASE**—Yes, please.

**Mr Smith**—of how you have to start these processes and then I might get Fiona to talk a little more about some of the work that has done around the Gordon inquiry and some of those practical things as well. Are you familiar with what is called the Jurabalan area?

**Mr HAASE**—Yes, I am.

**Mr Smith**—One of the things before Jurabalan came on the map—before the land claim went through—FaCS had identified that there was a need for the development of capacity in that area and we had been doing some work with Balgo and some of the surrounding smaller communities that basically fit the Jurabalan footprint. That really is focusing on the leadership, governance and what is important to the people—what they see as the first big lever that they need to pull to make a change.

**Mr HAASE**—Can you share with us what that lever was? Do you know enough about that project to identify what the lever was?

**Mr Smith**—Interestingly enough, the lever that is coming out in most places is an emphasis on family and children. One of the things that is coming out of a number of the projects that FaCS is working with at the moment is that family is community—or family as community—and maybe that is the root stock that we would be building on, and that the communities of location really are in fact an aggregation of those communities of families. So the lever tends to be around strengthening the families and their care for kids.

**Mr HAASE**—I am not sure if I am allowed to ask you or the department this, but I am looking for some indication, from those people in the department that would know, what level of sustainability you believe exists for this program. I think it is very logical that members of communities would identify as the key the necessity to sustain families and to build families; you have to do that first. But the families were once strong; outside influences came in and built communities and the families were destroyed. As we are now talking about going back to build the basic element, the family, is there any strong indication that in building families we will not then make the same mistakes all over again? When we try to build the communities with our outside influence, will the families be destroyed again? Has something been done about that? Have you looked sufficiently deeply to establish that you are only rebuilding the families? We cannot take credit for inventing the idea of building families: they were there; they were very healthy and very tightly knit. We destroyed them. How do we know that we are not going to build them and then destroy them again?

**Mr Smith**—I am not sure that I could answer that. I am not sure that anybody here could answer that. I am not sure that any of us could answer that.

**Mr HAASE**—That is what worries me.

**Mr Smith**—Let me tackle the question in some bits. I think it is a bit of an assumption that we have destroyed families everywhere. One of the things that we have actually found—through the FIM project, through the Wadeye project and through another project in Alice Springs which is using family as the delivery medium across a vast region, not a small geographic region—is that families are often quite strong. It is often just that we do not necessarily support the strengths and assets of those families; I am not as convinced as you are that we have actually destroyed families. Indigenous people will actually say that one of the lasting things that they have is their kinship.

**Mr HAASE**—Indeed, in spite of what we have done and in spite of the hurdles we have put in the way. The influences of Western society have been destructive to families. In spite of all of those influences, families remain today and they are very strong but certainly weakened by those outside influences. I do not want this to be a debate about that. I just want some indication that we are confident enough of our strategies today—the whole-of-government approach that we are applying in the likes of Jurabalan—that we can move to the next step without having to make every family represented in every community funded by the Commonwealth with some sort of project money. I am sure you know where I am going on this. Yes, there is an emergent family in almost every community but issues arise when you get that family right. We have seen a great deal of evidence of the rest of the community breaking down because there is resentment about the impositions imposed by the dominant family. Perhaps this is not something that we ought to talk about in nice circles but it happens, and I wonder if FaCS have got that on the radar and can accommodate the necessity to make every family group financially independent and successful.

**Mr Smith**—I will go back to your original question because you have just introduced a new element into it.

**Mr HAASE**—Yes. I am sorry, the chairman has to put up with it all the time.

**Mr Smith**—Going back to the original question about the degree of confidence that you might have in building families, it probably starts with your approach to the building of the families. If you go in with an approach of having a preconceived one size fits all family model and you want to impose that, then you will probably achieve some successes but will probably have some pretty monumental failures. One of the things that we have learnt—and this is being done through the whole-of-government approach—is that we must try to start, as I said in my opening statement, with the assets that are there. We must start with a flexible approach—in other words, where does this family want to go and how can we work with this family to build it? We must go in with a third element, which is that we are there with a shared view of the world; it is not that we are imposing something or that we are actually saying, ‘You adopt this and you will be right.’ That is going to be our only guarantee of success, because it is actually going to build on the people’s own strengths, their own values and their own wishes to go forward. If we try anything else it is not going to work.

**Ms Dempster**—I am by no means an expert on Wadeye but I have been learning a lot as I have listened to my colleagues. I understand a little bit about what we are doing with that family project in Wadeye. There are 20 clans and seven language groups in Wadeye. The way in which they have gone about developing their own governance and reinventing their own traditional governance structures have ensured that they have a council of 40 people. Two representatives of each of the 20 clans sit on that governance council to help make decisions about what would happen to the different people who are in Wadeye town and who come into Wadeye town from the out-stations.

I refer to one of the things that the family project that Barry mentioned a little bit earlier is attempting to do. The women’s group has been built up as a strong group of women from each of those areas. The women who have the right place in the community in terms of traditional authority and who can talk about certain things are beginning to have those discussions with the different family groups. So you are not actually getting the dominant family story happening in a place like Wadeye, because you have recognised there are so many families and how difficult it is in traditional terms. The way we have done some stuff in the past has been to identify one leader, one person, and say, ‘Okay, off you go, Gus, and have a go,’ and for that person’s family it has been very difficult for them to live with their traditional roles about looking after family.

So Wadeye, going back to some more traditional governance with all the families involved in decisions—and the family project Barry mentioned is looking at having one key coordinator but six different family workers to work with the different families—is a real paradigm shift and a step forward for us. We have recognised that in the past, when we have gone in to work with a community and have given authority and support to a single family group, we have left other family groups out and things have not worked so well. For example, the people that are traditional owners of Wadeye town land have had trouble with gangs of young people and have gone to the council to say, ‘A lot of these young people are not from Wadeye. We can’t do our business with them as they are from the out-stations and other towns.’ So the council have agreed that it is okay for the owners of Wadeye land to say, ‘When you make trouble in our

town, we will send you out of town back to the out-stations.' So there is this agreement between the families that they will deal with their business, but it is jointly agreed. I assume that is probably how it was well before missions went out there and that that is how they managed that stuff.

**Mr HAASE**—It is traditional stuff.

**Ms Dempster**—We have done a whole bunch of things differently. I do not think we can be any more confident that that is going to be totally successful. But I think even the beginnings of that recognition that different families have different responsibilities, and working with them differently has got to be a step forward to just one family.

**Mr HAASE**—Thank you for that. That is pretty powerful stuff, and I think that is good material for our committee.

**Mr Smith**—I just want to add—and there is a video available on this—that, when we went out there to do the Wadeye agreement—which was between NT, the Wadeye and the Commonwealth—we actually had a problem on the day. The problem was that we thought we were actually going to sign it with these 20 family kinship groups and land-owning groups. On the morning of the event, they said, 'No, we want every family that is represented in this area to be a signatory to this because we will each take responsibility for our family.' We had 72 people who came forward to represent each of the 72 families and to sign that document in terms of that. That was a very powerful thing because it was making a statement to us that they saw the families as theirs and that they were taking responsibility for the agreement. It is those families that we are working with; we are not working with a single family or a single entity.

**Mr HAASE**—That is good stuff—thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Barry, Fiona and Tony. We were in Wadeye, as you may know, and the effort that went in to negotiating all this stuff obviously represented a very large investment. We did observe some of this stuff, and from what I saw I would not want to presume that there is not a fair way to go, but let us be optimistic.

**Mr TOLLNER**—There was a proposal several years ago suggesting that some of the problems in some of the urban areas in the Northern Territory could be addressed by Centrelink paying benefits to people at the communities where they live. As I recall—you might remember too, Warren—I think it was a group of Aboriginal women from an out-station outside of Alice Springs that came up with the idea, because their husbands were going into Alice Springs and getting on the grog and whatnot. It is, I imagine, an Australia wide problem. Can you explain to me why such a program would not work, or what the practical problems are with that? Why couldn't you demand that somebody receives payment at their place of residence, as opposed to what happens now—that they turn up in Darwin or Alice Springs, they go to the Centrelink office and get a counter cheque?

**Mr Smith**—Again, I know it sounds as though I am probably dodging the question but it is not as simple as that. That is how it is oftentimes characterised: that people would just leave their place, go to another place and get the payment made. There are already rules around people moving to places where they do not have fixed addresses, or moving to areas of lower

employment opportunities—and that relates both to CDP and also to other income support measures. There are already opportunities in place around money and money management. For example, you probably are familiar with the Centrepay system.

**Mr TOLLNER**—Yes.

**Mr Smith**—That is a tool that is available for communities, individuals or family groups, to ensure that money is going to certain places, even if the person is mobile. There are some rules around where you can get it. A fundamental difficulty that we have—which is actually part of the social security legislation—is that individuals have the inalienable right to the payment. At the moment, some of the things that are being looked at fairly closely are the conditions under which you would take that right away.

**Mr TOLLNER**—This is part of the problem. The argument is that, while mum and the kids are at the community starving, dad is in town taking the family's money—which the rest of them have an inalienable right to—and spending it on grog.

**Mr Smith**—Again, that is not accurate, sorry. The partner at the community is paid in their own right and the money for the children is paid to the partner who actually has the care of those children. So if the wife is on the community and she has got the care of those children, she would get that. The partner who goes into town would get the payment that goes to that particular partner. So if that person is spending their money on alcohol and not making a contribution to the household, they are spending their actual income, not the income for the children and the families.

One of the things that the department has been doing some work on in a number of locations is around a payment system called statement of care. I do not know if you are familiar with that. Statement of care basically means that, to ensure the payment goes to the children, there is an agreement—at the family level, and it can be an extended family level—as to who that payment should go to; in other words, whether it should go to the actual mother of a child or to other people who are providing the care. They can make a statement to Centrelink that they want the payments made to different people, to a group of people, split in certain ways or put into certain bank accounts so that the money in fact is following the child.

**Mr TOLLNER**—Who can make those recommendations to Centrelink?

**Mr Smith**—The individual family groups can request that right now.

**Mr TOLLNER**—Can a court?

**Mr Smith**—You probably are referring to an idea recently put forward in the Northern Territory about whether or not a magistrate might be able to make a recommendation that a person who is not making contributions, or is living dangerously or whatever it is, may have it imposed upon them as part of their sentencing that somebody else manages their funds on their behalf. There is legislation around that. That can be done in certain circumstances. Again, quite a lot of those facilities are around but it would have to be done on a voluntary basis. In other words, if I came up before the court and somebody said to me, 'You can spend 30 days in jail or

you can go through alcohol rehabilitation and have your money managed by something,' and I am free to choose to do that, then systems can be put in place for that to occur.

**Mr TOLLNER**—For instance, if a court was to recommend that somebody who was constantly being picked up by the police for public drunkenness went into a rehabilitation facility and that the rehabilitation facility was to look after their money, and the person did not want to do that, how would that work? Would you say, 'Sorry, we cannot assist the court. We are going to continue to pay this person money even though he is creating a lot of self-harm by us paying that money.' What is the policy of Centrelink in that regard?

**Mr Smith**—That would be the policy of FaCS, not Centrelink. The FaCS legislation around that would propose a couple of situations. One situation would be that you would try to use persuasion to get that person to take a different path other than going into jail. But if you are describing somebody whose habitual alcoholic state is such that you believe that they are no longer capable of managing their affairs, that they are a danger to themselves and a danger to society and they are classified as that, then in those circumstances it may be something that is ordered on behalf of the person. It has to be looked at very much on a case by case basis. The question that you are describing is fairly open to interpretation and would have to be looked at.

**Mr TOLLNER**—Thank you.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—In a sense, my question follows on from David's a bit. I know western New South Wales very well and I think it is, by comparison, at least pretty settled. How do you service Western Australia and parts of the Territory? Do you have mobile situations? Do you use agents? In terms of Centrelink and family and community, how do you service it?

**Mr Smith**—Let me go out from an urban environment. In an urban environment, our standard service delivery arrangement is a customer service centre. I am talking about Centrelink; I am not talking about other FaCS services at the moment. That is supported by some outreach staff, who can be financial advisers, youth workers, social workers or some other field operatives who can go out into the broader community. That tends to be more in metropolitan, regional types of centres. When you get out into the remote areas, the focus tends to be more on using teleservice centres. The whole of Australia is covered by teleservice centres, and we have quite a number of Indigenous centres as well now.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—So the person there is trained in your work, or do you just send someone there for a day or a week?

**Mr Smith**—It is a Centrelink system. It is a teleservice centre which is to deliver FaCS income support programs. It is totally owned, staffed and run by FaCS Centrelink. On top of that we have what are called remote visiting teams, which have a schedule of communities that they visit. The most regular visits are probably on a fortnightly basis but the least regular are on about a three-monthly basis. The teams go out and spend up to a week in a location providing a service. That is supplemented by what is referred to as an integrated community agent scheme. In terms of Indigenous communities, we have 147 out there and in the recent budget there was approval for another 50 community agents to be implemented over the next four years. They will probably mainly be implemented in a two-year time frame. That is also supported by specialist staff.



Under Australians Working Together, some of the staff that became available are personal advisers. We have remote area personal advisers. For example, there are seven people located in Alice Springs. They will do three-monthly visits out to locations. This is more about, 'What are your plans? Where are you going with your life?' The most distant thing is people being able to ring toll-free telephone numbers. That is probably the least interactive form.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—Do you have any method of appraising how efficient those services are? How do you judge them? By how much money they put over?

**Mr Smith**—You mean how efficient the community agents are?

**Mr JOHN COBB**—Yes.

**Mr Smith**—There are different measures for different things. The measure they would be using at the teleservice centres is the amount of time it takes to answer customer queries and the number of times a customer might have to come back—in other words, did you actually resolve the issue first time around or did they have to come back several times. That is the measure for the customer service centres.

Keep in mind that the community agent system is about building the capacity of the community—you are recruiting a local person, training a local person and supporting a local person to provide the service in that particular environment. The assessment there is around the uptake of payments and correctness of payments, which means you are looking at whether people who need to be on payments are on payments and whether those on payments are getting the correct payments. That is done through an evaluation process for each of those locations, through the area offices of Centrelink that have got responsibility for those.

That is not to say, picking up on an earlier comment by Mr Wakelin, that we do not have a long way to go on this. There is always development, and the integrated community agent system just went through a further redevelopment in July of last year. The training of the agents was seen to be wanting and therefore it has been improved. Access to IT was not as strong as it could be so IT is being provided, better communication facilities and better support for them. We are always on a learning curve in regard to it.

**Mr SNOWDON**— Firstly, I commend the department on their submission because it is a very good discussion paper for our purposes. I am interested in the whole discussion about community development, which I think is very well written. I will not take up our time with it now but I will make some comments and I may ask some questions. In the document you talk about a range of matters which go towards making an effective community. You have defined what those communities could be and how they might relate to one another, and you talk about social capital and about the need to build and support communities. One of the issues which I think is important is to understand whether there is capacity within organisations such as yours. There is an inherent assumption in this document that you know. Do you, and how do we judge whether the people who are doing the work for you have an understanding of the communities in which they work?

**Mr Smith**— That is a good question and it is one that is recognised in the document. The document itself says that if you do not have the skills and capacity in your own organisation you

can know all the theory but you are not going to get a result. One of the things that FaCS is concentrating on at the moment is improving the skills of its network, both in terms of providing training through a range of workshops around developmental and negotiation skills for our field staff and around concepts such as action research and working with the Australian Institute of Family Studies in gaining those skills. Again there is a fair way to go, but it is not a bad thing for government departments to actually recognise that there has probably been an erosion of the skill base over a period of time and a recognition that we need to rebuild that.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Do I deduce from that that over time the operatives who work in the field will share the common ethos for community development, for example, so that there will be no dispute about the importance of priorities developed centrally after discussion with the client groups and input from communities? One of the issues of course is that individual field staff are individual field staff.

**Mr Smith**—And individual communities are individual communities.

**Mr SNOWDON**—The match to me is very interesting. Clearly, if you build expertise in one area it does not mean you actually can apply that expertise elsewhere. For example, working in the Walpiri communities is one thing but working on Groote Eylandt is something entirely different. How do we manage those sorts of things—dealing with the supply of field staff and staff generally to service communities?

**Mr Smith**—I do not think we are going to get the perfect match. What we are aiming for is to have field staff who have, as you referred to it, the ethos and share the common ethos and a common approach to principles. One of the things that FaCS did internally recently was to make a statement of commitment to Indigenous people. One of the things that our secretary is doing through the organisation is to get that statement commitment to be taken on by everybody, to take very seriously that Indigenous business is everybody's business within the organisation.

Sitting behind that is the adoption of a set of principles regarding capacity building, community development and building social capital. If we can get a commitment in the organisation to subscribing to those skills, to gaining those skills and to Indigenous business being everybody's business I think we are going to be in a much better position than maybe we have been in the past. I will not guarantee a perfect match, because people do move around and communities are very different and can change, as you know from your own experience, in a week. The death of a key person or the moving on of a key family can bring about the total change and you might have to start all over again—and that is both at the worker end and at the community location end as well.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I think we can explore a whole lot of things that come out of the discussion about communities initiating their own action to control benefits—for example, Tangenteyere's system of getting people to bank with them and then controlling their budgets over a fortnight. But I want to ask a question about the community agent scheme. You will recall at Wadeye there was quite a large dispute with the department over payment for the scheme—and I am aware that is the case in a lot of communities, that people are very concerned about not being given sufficient resources to make the thing work—and I want to compare the agent scheme with the provision of the Centrelink office at Maningrida. The difference it made to the income of that community was, I think—correct me if I am wrong—\$50,000 a fortnight.

**Mr Smith**—A magnitude of about \$1 million a year.

**Mr SNOWDON**—A large amount of money. If they were on the community agent scheme before or something similar with visiting field staff but they were not selling the product or they were not able to assess the need, I wonder what the unmet demand is. I respect the fact that community agents are not necessarily going to be the people you might employ in a FaCS office or a Centrelink office; nevertheless, if they are supplied by the community they are going to be who you train. My concern is that they may not be able to get all the clients in. I wonder what the plans are to replicate the Maningrida situation in similar communities around Australia to ensure that the benefits due to people are arrived at.

Can you comment on one other matter which arises out of that—that is, the financial management structures. You say in your submission about banking and financial institutions. One of the significant things that has happened to Maningrida, of course, is the bank and their ability to be able to manage finances. There are very few examples of that around Northern Australia, apart from where the credit union operates, so that large areas of Northern Australia no longer have access to banking or financial institutions. That creates a problem in itself. Dave referred to the issue of payments. One question which now arises, as a direct result of the way in which benefits are being paid—that is, by electronic transfer—is that the control that might have existed in a single community because they had a cheque no longer exists and people have got to get used to EFTPOS. My office in Alice Springs is near an EFTPOS machine. A number of people come in and lose a lot of money because they go into the EFTPOS machine, there is no money in their account, they get a charge, and they repeat that until their money goes in. By the time their money goes in they have been debited quite a few dollars—it is a real issue. Financial management then flows on from the ability to be able to educate people. But regarding the community agent scheme, what is planned to ensure that people get the benefits they are due and then how do you build upon that to ensure that financial management skills are available?

**Mr Smith**—I will answer it in two parts. The reason that the changes were made in July is that what were called the Centrelink community agent scheme and the Aboriginal community agent program were out of sync in terms of remuneration, and the July decision was made to bring all agents onto the same remuneration level. Indigenous community agents are on the same pay as others so that resolved that issue partly. It was also seen that they were not as efficient because they were not getting the training; therefore, training is now being provided. It was also seen that they did not have the right equipment to do the communicating so that has been rectified.

So I am reasonably confident that the product that is out there now, and certainly the product that will go out with these new 50 agents, is a better product than was out there prior to July. Both Maningrida and Palm Island were opportunities to pilot new service delivery models to see if you could get something that sat between a community agent and a customer service centre and they have proved to be very effective. You are probably aware that we are currently rolling out 12 new centres called remote area service centres. They will work on a regional basis so that you are not picking up a single location but a range of locations. In terms of community capacity building and service delivery, you probably know that we have 1,200 discrete Indigenous communities in Australia. About 200 of those have populations of a couple of hundred or more. We have quite a vast number. In the Northern Territory alone, as Warren would be aware, we have over 600. Therefore, what we are looking at in terms of a remote area service centre is

probably more of a centre with a dispersed model. Some people refer to it as hub and spokes or a network model. We hope to evaluate those and to try to build on them. I suspect that is the way that we are heading for the larger centres and that is why places like Wadeye, which is the sixth biggest Indigenous town in the Northern Territory, should in fact be serviced by something more than a community agent and will be serviced by more than a community agent.

**Ms HOARE**—I was pleased to read the detail of your submission and the examples of where the different programs have been applied. I think the number of programs that FaCS has got running indicates that you cannot have the ‘one size fits all’ and they are quite tailored programs. You talked about having the outcome measured of school retention rates in Wadeye. I was wondering if there were any other outcome measures, such as unemployment, domestic violence, substance abuse and where those areas have been going, in particular, under the Wadeye program. If you do have those outcome measurements, how do you apply those to more urban areas which are not discrete communities? I am hoping to meet one of your minister’s advisers tomorrow. I have got a community applying for funding under the stronger communities program—

**Mr Smith**—Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

**Ms HOARE**—which has about five per cent Aboriginal population, but it is in the suburbs of Lake Macquarie. Can we measure those outcomes for Indigenous people as well in more urban areas?

**Mr Smith**—Looking at answering the questions, instead of looking at the Wadeye example, can I use the Family Income Management pilot?

**Ms HOARE**—Yes.

**Mr Smith**—An interim report on that is fairly imminent and the standing committee might be interested in getting a copy of that to look at an example of something which has been built up from the ground and which is working. Interestingly enough, the trial was put in place to improve people’s money management and their saving capacity. That has gone really well. As I said, we have got about 500 people on it. For example, this month, people who had no savings before in any of those places now have \$142,000 sitting in the bank. That is pretty amazing. That is what is sitting there now. But the turnover—what they have saved in the last six months and what they have spent on buying household goods, paying off debt, buying motor vehicles as a family group, motor boats, motors for motor boats to do fishing and for earning—is all great.

But some of the amazing outcomes are things that we did not expect. You do not set up measures for them but if you do qualitative collection and get feedback from the people then you find these things. There is an example at Arakun. Arakun had set up a small community enterprise around furniture making. It was not going anywhere. Who was buying the furniture? Nobody was buying the furniture. Since FIM went there and built it up they have 10 apprentices working in the furniture-making factory and they cannot keep up with the demand for the furniture. It is actually being purchased because 200 of the people who are in the program have reached their first savings target and are able to use the savings to buy whatever they were saving for.

The poor publican in Coen is spewing a bit—I used a technical term there—about the fact that his take in terms of alcohol sales at the pub has gone down. The people have reported that the amount of domestic violence has decreased—you know most people get humbugged and things like that—because people can now say, ‘I can’t get it; it’s in FIM.’ That is a saying now in these places; they actually say, ‘It’s in FIM’—like saying that it is in the bank and they will not give it to you. They are some indicators. Some things that we could set down as indicators are not indicators of change at all. You could go into a place and say that the indicator is an increase in kids going to school or a decrease in violence, but the indicator might be more—I think Mr Haase said this earlier—around the fact that the kids are being fed or clothed. That is coming out of the fact that the parents are participating more in employment.

So you need to look at the whole chain of things. In Wadeye we have three priority working groups at the moment: one is around women and families; one is around youth; and one is around developing a construction industry. Cutting across all of those we have another group which is called ‘local jobs for local people’. All of those groups will work out what they see as an indicator in terms of what goals that they want to achieve. For example, the local jobs for local people program will set a goal like: in three years we want 35 of our people holding down 35 jobs which are now held down by imported white staff. That is how practical you need to get. So do not develop these high-level theoretical indicators; develop the practical indicators that are tied to the goals that the people actually want to achieve. When they see they have achieved those then they can have hope; they can believe, ‘I have achieved that first target; I can do it,’ and then they go on to stronger things.

**Ms HOARE**—I think that probably answers the second part of my question as well: you can get the indicators in the community.

**CHAIR**—I would like to run through some things quickly and check up on a few points—the others have been pretty well covered—then I want to come to domestic violence and sexual abuse. I think you just touched on the Cape York Family Income Management Project. The question that I have is about the family facilitators: are they paid and what sort of formal training do they have? You may have answered it before but I do not remember.

**Mr Smith**—They are paid. In some situations we top up CDEP if that is the way people want to go. Yes, they are trained: in each of the communities we have a coordinator-trainer. The great thing about the FIM Project is that it is very strongly supported by the private sector. Westpac is very much part of it. Westpac have actually been going in with their corporate volunteers who spend a month at a time in the community. They are working with the people on the ground in terms of giving them the skills. We are now recognising that they can only go to a certain point: they are not financial advisers; they are not financial counsellors; they are facilitators.

**CHAIR**—The training is not formal; it is their capacity as you find them?

**Mr Smith**—Yes, but they are going to training courses with those people but at this stage it is not accredited in terms of financial counsellors. That is being looked at because it is probably at stage 2, that some people want to go and gain those skills.

**CHAIR**—You mentioned top-up and it applies to CDEP. Can you give me a quick response in terms of what is reasonable for CDEP in terms of the delivery of these sorts of services? It seems

to me that there has to be a limit—and you have touched on some of those limits—depending on how you view CDEP and whether it is a transition to other kind of work. Can you just comment generally on CDEP: how is it going and how far should it go?

**Mr Smith**—I will probably make an avoidance type of response here. I should probably say something like: it is actually a program which is owned by ATSIC and I believe ATSIC is going to provide evidence in about August. We do have an interest in it because it is strongly connected to our own payment system and people can move on and off—and because we pay the Community Development and Employment Program supplement. I think it is fair to say that it is recognised pretty broadly that CDEP has been very good for a lot of communities in terms of active participation. The fact that it is popular and that people want to continue to get it is an indication that it is working in lots of ways. It does have one drawback and that is that there is a danger that it can become a substitute for real jobs—and people say that. In some places it is a worry that people could see that it is the job to aspire to rather than aspiring to something above CDEP.

**CHAIR**—From a Centrelink or a FaCS perspective, where is the incentive for moving through the system? If you are on CDEP, Newstart or whatever, there seems to be some fairly narrow margins between the incentive to sit and work at CDEP, and to just sit.

**Mr Smith**—Again, I think it comes down to locations and what is available in the locations. It comes down to whether or not people see a personal advantage in terms of moving elsewhere. Again, I go back to the FIM example: if people feel that they can have a job and save money and it is going to result in a better lifestyle and better outcome for them, then they will follow that pathway. If they feel that there is not going to be that pathway—

**CHAIR**—So the top-up is critical?

**Mr Smith**—Top-up can be very important as a way of showing people what a full-time regular job might look like because it takes them on to fuller hours and a fuller pay. So it can be a useful motivational tool; it is an incentive.

**CHAIR**—In many communities there is not that opportunity to move through. Palm Island has the remote service delivery pilot. We are going to Palm Island in about 10 or 11 days' time. How is Palm Island remote service delivery pilot going in terms of its outcomes and as a pilot? I presume it is one of these extended issues in terms of these 50 new programs and some of the other programs that link to that—that it is a pilot and these others have been built on to it.

**Mr Smith**—It is a pilot, but it has probably gone beyond the pilot stage. It has been evaluated and both it and Maningrida have been seen to be effective in terms of improving the service delivery to the area. People will say that it is not perfect but again people will say that having it located there—and having very strong links to the Townsville office through it—has resulted in much better income outcomes and much better correctness of payment outcomes for the people there.

**CHAIR**—Why did you go there? What was the incentive?

**Mr Smith**—Palm Island is pretty special in the sense that it was created out of a number of different language and clans groups—I do not know the number of groups—

**Mr Carmichael**—There were about 50, as I understand it.

**Mr Smith**—and they were gathered from all over North Queensland and placed there. That is not a good recipe for creating community cohesion.

**CHAIR**—It was a challenge.

**Mr Smith**—Palm Island had a lot of problems, and it was a challenge. Also, because it is an island it is very difficult for people to get backwards and forwards—the same as the Torres Strait. We actually have an office located on Thursday Island, and to service that island people do a visiting service using light aircraft, boats, barges and things like that. It is simply to address a special issue around service delivery.

**CHAIR**—Do you have any particular innovative approaches in service delivery and in general management—issues of funding cycles, program design, governance, all the stuff we have been touching on and entering into in the last hour or so—that come to mind that we have not quite touched on in terms of innovation and where you are headed?

**Mr Smith**—There are two things that Warren indicated and which we have reported on in a couple of settings. The first is the work we have done with Tangenteyere around weekly payments and around banking and banking training. Those have shown really good results and there is further discussion going on—

**CHAIR**—Sorry to interrupt, but with the PIN issue—who holds the PIN and that sort of thing—does that innovation develop into who holds the PIN and who does not?

**Mr Smith**—Interestingly enough, because they have banking officers there to train people in terms of banking, initially the loss of cards, replacement of cards and that sort of thing was pretty high. But over the life of the project people became used to using cards and using the ATM, which we had installed by Westpac at Tangenteyere. It was a safe environment, and they could call on a banking support officer for help to use it. People can choose to take the card or to store it at Tangenteyere, and indications are that it is actually working well. People can use the technology, people can remember PINs—

**CHAIR**—But it was important to have that support mechanism?

**Mr Smith**—Yes. The other thing that Warren mentioned was around financial literacy and banking infrastructure. There is another inquiry going on into rural banking and infrastructure. In that inquiry, the department indicated that there is a need for financial literacy and to be connected to banking.

**CHAIR**—You have been before that other inquiry. The US has some system of universal service obligation for banks as well, we understand.

**Mr Smith**—They have, and there are some things that are outside FaCS's control, but there are a couple of things that we have been doing. We have been doing some work with the traditional credit union in the Northern Territory. We have been helping them to develop banking education packages for communities and funding a traditional credit union community development officer to do development within the traditional credit union—to look at expanding the traditional credit union's system. I think you would probably be aware that we have participated with ATSIIC and a number of the banks in a couple of banking workshops to look at what might be done in terms of banking facilities in remote communities.

**CHAIR**—We saw credit unions in Shepparton, and they were going quite well.

**Mr Smith**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Where are we at with domestic violence and sexual abuse? This is something that has been there for a long time. It seems that it is talked about but not dealt with in a way which would encourage confidence that we are making progress with the issue. I suppose for me it is just starting at a fairly elementary level and asking: what do we know? There are two categories here; there is clearly the domestic violence issue and we can link it to everything else—which no doubt you will talk about—and that is linked to sexual abuse and sexual violence. We know of the Western Australian state government report. We have always had a picture, I suppose, but where are we at? Can you just take me through that? We will take a few minutes to prepare the ground.

**Ms Dempster**—I might talk first in terms of the child abuse aspect of things. That is the part I know the most about. You would be aware that there is a constitutional responsibility for the state and territory governments to provide for the welfare of children.

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Ms Dempster**—For a long time that has been the response, in a lot of ways, of Commonwealth governments of both persuasions. To a fairly large extent their response has been, 'That is an area that we are not going to step into too much.' In more recent times, Commonwealth governments have worked out that child abuse has long-term and lasting effects into adulthood and there are impacts on all sorts of people along the way. We have taken a far more concerted view to focus on early intervention and prevention, and that is where we particularly see the Commonwealth's role.

**CHAIR**—Could I clarify, for my simplistic definition, that the Commonwealth is saying that, without dealing with these issues more effectively, a lot of the work that we try and do is negated or is not going to be anywhere near as effective?

**Ms Dempster**—One of the justifications is definitely that we recognise the long-term consequences of this, and down the track the Commonwealth quite often will pick up the tab, so to speak, in terms of income support, contact, homelessness, contact with the criminal justice system, teenage pregnancy and how much higher the rates are for kids who have been in out-of-home care. There is a range of things the Commonwealth has an interest in down the track that we see occurring far more frequently in children who have either been abused or spent time in foster care. The Commonwealth has determined that, because of the long-term effects and



because the responsibility for managing, investigating, notifying and clarifying abuse rests with the states, we would look to take an approach at the earliest end. Tony Carmichael manages some child abuse prevention funds on behalf of the Commonwealth but we do a lot more in terms of supporting families—through parenting programs, through providing special child-care benefit for children who are at risk and through providing them with better access to the child-care system that we run. There is a range of things like that where the Commonwealth has taken its role.

In more recent times, following discussions in the House, the Prime Minister determined that he would place child protection on the agenda for COAG in December last year. In the lead-up to those discussions, prior to the actual meeting of COAG, in dealing with state and territory officials there was the most support for the Commonwealth to work with the states in the area of Indigenous child abuse and less support for its working on child abuse generally.

Following the COAG meeting in December, they determined on a couple of fronts on which to begin some work. In particular, one was in response to the Gordon inquiry, that the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments would work together to implement those recommendations more closely than we ever have in the past in a more multilateral way taking account of all the states and territories. Secondly, the Commonwealth would develop a discussion paper about issues and possible ways forward in Indigenous child abuse prevention, more broadly speaking, and a third element was seen to be—

**CHAIR**—Where are we at with that discussion?

**Ms Dempster**—It will not surprise you that the multilateral approach is progressing far more slowly than the bilateral approach. They are expecting the discussion paper to go to the senior officials meeting, which is normally held a month before COAG and then it would go to COAG at its next meeting.

**CHAIR**—When is that?

**Ms Dempster**—The COAG meetings tend to move around a little bit. My understanding is that it may be in August.

**CHAIR**—Sure. What I am looking to do is to line up when we would hope to report, and maybe we can make some mention of that.

**Ms Dempster**—It is worth keeping in touch with, because it was going to be June and now it may be August but it ended up being held in December last year. Would you like me to talk about the work that we are doing with the Western Australian government?

**CHAIR**—I think so, but I want to go back for a moment. Have we determined that Indigenous child abuse be the priority?

**Ms Dempster**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Can we define what we are talking about when we talk about abuse—are we mainly talking about sexual abuse or are we talking about general violence against children?

**Ms Dempster**—I guess child abuse—

**CHAIR**—I suppose the question in all of that is: what is our data like and what do we know? That is the bigger question; how are we going in that area?

**Ms Dempster**—The data in terms of child protection is pretty scratchy in comparisons between the states and territories. With Indigenous child abuse, the data is collected to determine whether the abuse was primarily physical abuse—whether the child was beaten or there was shaken child syndrome or bruises and broken bones. Sexual abuse is quite clearly either exposure to other people participating in sexual acts or being asked to do things, up to and including penetration, particularly for young girls and boys.

Neglect is also a category of abuse in most states and territories. That is the one slightly different factor in terms of Indigenous kids when compared to the non-Indigenous population: 36 per cent of reported cases of abuse for Indigenous kids are in the category of neglect, whereas the figure is far less for non-Indigenous kids. So the first one is neglect, followed by physical abuse, followed by emotional abuse and then sexual abuse comes in at around 10 per cent. That is not to determine greater value for one or the other in terms of their impact but those are the rates of abuse as reported.

**CHAIR**—I may have missed something, but who is reporting that?

**Ms Dempster**—That data is based on the state and territory government authorities when they are notified about a child being abused. That notification can come from anybody in the community. In most states and territories it is mandatory, except in Western Australia at this stage. If you are teacher, a nurse or a health worker and you suspect abuse, you are required to notify the authorities who are then required to investigate it. Then they will determine after the investigation if it is a substantiated allegation or not. The figures I have given you are around substantiation—so when it has been determined that a child has been abused, that is the source of the abuse and that is gathered through the casework.

**CHAIR**—I am sure there are a whole lot of extenuating circumstances in this abuse—we could talk about substance abuse, poverty, or the whole world around ‘capacity’; there are all those things. Anecdotally, we heard last week some quite remarkable figures about Indigenous sexual activity for minors, very young Aboriginal people—I am not sure if it is abuse. Once again—we said a lot of this information was scratchy—it is interesting that we have only really just started in terms of a Commonwealth and therefore a national approach. Would that be fair to say? The states and the territories had some basic information before, but we are at the beginning of a fairly long journey here from the look of it.

**Ms Dempster**—I would say so, absolutely. Indigenous children are certainly overrepresented in both the child abuse stats and in the out-of-home care stats in terms of children being removed from their families to live with other families. They are six to eight times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous kids, so there is a particular problem. You may discover in your inquiry, as you go beyond that figure into the things that may lead to it, that one of the key things that does seem to come through is the impact of the previous separations—the lack of parenting skills in adults who were not parented because they were sent away to mission or

school or wherever. They have never seen and understood parenting as the direct responsibility for a child and they then have children of their own. The patterns do seem to get replicated.

**CHAIR**—I could bring in the jail system. You would know the figures around jails. Again, it is a state jurisdictional issue but I could also say it impinges very much on what the Commonwealth are trying to do as well.

**Ms Dempster**—Absolutely.

**CHAIR**—We have had a royal commission into deaths in custody. The system is as broad as you want to make the brush.

**Ms Dempster**—For example, even though the Commonwealth does not want responsibility for out-of-home care, we have started to work with the states and territories to develop a national plan for foster care so that we can better understand what is going on and improve the system because we understand the long-term implications. So we have been a driving force in a few areas, and I guess the Prime Minister's approaches to COAG have also indicated that we are beginning to take a bit more of a lead than we have in the past.

**CHAIR**—Of course it raises what no doubt many would call the hoary chestnut of why the state and territories have not been more active and why the Commonwealth is always seeming to be in there taking a leadership role. You could get into all that stuff, which you will hear ad infinitum and ad nauseam. I do not want to go any further on that, other than to ask whether we feel that the states and territories are responding to the Commonwealth. No doubt some would say they are trying very hard; the Western Australians would say the Gordon report is a lead-in to them trying to deal with the issue. Basically, without starting up a state and territory bashing exercise, how are we going in that relationship with our states and territories and why?

**Mr Carmichael**—Over a period of time the Commonwealth has demonstrated leadership in some of these issues. One of them has been around Indigenous foster care. The Commonwealth established 16 foster care agencies; over a number of years the states have picked up on that, and the number is now around 35 Aboriginal and Islander child-care agencies. The success of those agencies in performance measurement terms may not be seen to be high because there have been some difficulties in their capacity to deliver the services they have been contracted to do, and from time to time some of the agencies that we have been funding have got into some management difficulties and sometimes some financial difficulty. However, the program has been able to demonstrate that Indigenous people can take control of their lives, that they can manage their own foster care systems and that those models can be replicated by state governments—as they have been. So I think there is a good demonstration of success there.

We have recently made a decision to review that program and, in light of the work that Ms Dempster is doing around a national early childhood agenda, we want to again re-examine the role of the Commonwealth. Whilst it certainly is the responsibility of states to have statutory responsibility for children, what we are saying is that we still want to play a role. What we may do is refine our role and focus it more on early intervention and prevention.

We have a range of consultative mechanisms around this and Muriel Cadd, an Indigenous person from Victoria who is the president of our secretariat—it is a national secretariat for the

Aboriginal and Islander child-care agencies—has been providing advice to us that she thinks it would be a good thing for the Commonwealth to re-examine its role. In Victoria, which is where she works, the state has taken up its responsibilities substantially. It would be good for the Commonwealth to quarantine its money in the early intervention prevention because often when crises happen, as they do in the state child protection agencies, the money gets reapportioned into the tertiary end and so we are putting bandaids on people who are already broken and we are not doing stuff early enough.

We are going to use some of the good work they have been doing there and do a national evaluation of that program. The methodology we are going to use for that evaluation will be action research because part of it is to teach ourselves—that is the Commonwealth—and our state office staff how to do this better. We will also share what we learn from that program amongst a wider audience. So there are a number of reviews we are doing over the next year around child abuse and we are using that methodology because whereas the Commonwealth may not fund a high quantity of services it does fund a range of very innovative models. What we need to do is share the good learnings from some of those models, and part of that is bringing people together. What has been shown to be very effective with sharing what we learn in some of the Indigenous initiatives that Mr Smith was referring to earlier—particularly in Wadeye where they are also using an action research methodology—is that Indigenous people learn orally about how they can build their confidence to undertake these sorts of programs. We are going to draw on those learnings and on some of the programs—some of which were funded through the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and a lot of that information has been well documented—and extrapolate what we learn from them to some of the other programs that we are currently managing.

**CHAIR**—What we are also saying is that we have got a lot to learn; we are coming from a low base of knowledge and management. That could probably be said of a lot of things, but in terms of professional understanding, or a whole lot of things, we have got a lot to learn on how we do it. That is why you are getting to the pointy end and focusing your resources on best practice innovation.

**Mr Carmichael**—There is some more to learn but one of the points that Mr Smith raised earlier is that there are a lot of good things that are happening. We need to acknowledge that, because some of these problems can look so big that they can overwhelm communities, and they can overwhelm departmental officers at times with so much need out there, so it is good to look at where we have been successful. When we do meta analysis of our programs—large evaluations—it sometimes tends to cover up some of the really good things that are happening and we get to this middle ground.

**CHAIR**—And parliamentary committees, I might add.

**Mr Carmichael**—Because it gets a bit foggy, what is good about documenting is to bring out some of the good stuff we have learnt, get some of the champions out there that are doing really good work, give them a profile and get them to share those learnings with other providers. At one level it is good for the department to learn more and certainly it needs to increase its capacity on how it undertakes these sorts of program initiatives. I have got an initiative here called Indigenous Parenting and Family Welfare Program. I have often been asked to describe what that program does but it is very difficult because it is so diverse.

One of the things is to look at capacity building—which is also the reference for this inquiry—which has to reflect the differentiated needs of not only individual communities but also families within those communities. In this project there are 25 projects funded nationally, each one of which looks very different. It is a response to the *Bringing them home* report, but the issues are broader than that. They are looking at things like domestic violence and child protection and building resilience in their children and in their families, but they have undertaken it all in very different ways. I have got a short summary of each of these projects documented, and I can pass them over to you if you like, just to demonstrate the diversity of the programs. Some of the benefits of these programs include being able to pull out the better learnings and then, as we roll out further programs, we can make sure we feed not only the good learnings into those new program designs but also share the learnings more broadly so that over time they do not always have to be government funded programs. Communities will be able to build their competencies around undertaking these activities on their own behalf and they will not need to come back to government because they can actually initiate these things in their own right.

**Mr Smith**—The other thing that you probably know is that we do not do this work alone at the Commonwealth level. We are working across a whole range of government departments. The early childhood agenda cut across the whole of the Commonwealth's agencies, and ATSIC, which have appeared before you, recently launched their own family violence position, their communique, and they are developing their own agenda. You would probably be aware that in the last budget they received another 1,000 places in CDP, directed specifically to building families and at family and domestic violence. As I say, we are not doing it alone.

**Ms HOARE**—Let us hope we spend our domestic violence money this year.

**CHAIR**—The review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission is making an issue about the involvement of women et cetera. My last question relates to an issue we have not yet covered. We have talked about the young, which is a key and a priority, but we have not covered domestic violence. There has been significant funding over the years put into trying to look at it in a culturally appropriate way—or whatever the phrase might be. Does anyone want to talk about the broader issue of domestic violence? No doubt some of the more successful programs, such as confidence building in parenting and banking, which your building capacity does, indicate that some of those issues do diminish—or I hope so anyway. Do you want to make a couple of comments about domestic violence generally, and stronger families as a part of that? My electorate has mainstream programs trying to develop capacity around parenting and parenting skills. Is there anything you are doing specifically about domestic violence that you want to mention?

**Mr Carmichael**—There are a range of things that we are doing about domestic violence. Dealing with and addressing domestic violence within Indigenous communities requires quite a different approach. Many of the things we have talked about today address domestic violence at a range of levels. Because of levels of dysfunction, particularly in some rural and remote communities, it is about building the capacity of the whole community to start to address these things.

I would draw your attention to a particular one that is funded here in the ACT. There are particular urban issues and of the ACT's Indigenous population about half are not from the local area. One of the big issues about how you might address domestic violence, and other issues

within that community, had to take quite a different approach. We funded an organisation—the Billabong Aboriginal Corporation—which is an Indigenous corporation managed by Indigenous people, but they are not Kooris. There are a lot of Indigenous young people in Canberra who are disenfranchised; they are from Darwin, they are from Cairns, their parents came here and got jobs and there was a lot of violence between those young people and their parents, and particularly their mothers.

The approach that this group took was to re-engage those young Indigenous people with their culture, but not every individual culture because they came from so many different parts of Australia. They got a property in west Belconnen and they started with some very simple things about Indigenous ceremony and that moved into dealing with, more immediately, a lot of anger management issues in those young boys. There was also a lot of crime happening within that group of boys; they were spending a lot of time in youth detention. They worked with some of the local elders, but there was a disenfranchisement because they were not their elders. What they did then was move on to fairly simple things like doing some work on motor vehicles. Instead of stealing motor vehicles, they were starting to repair them and they set up a little repair shop. Now they are starting to generate some income because they actually repair cars for people through their broader family networks. So there is economic activity, and they can build on and increase the capacity of their workshop because they are buying tools now that they are generating some income. Instead of wandering the streets and getting into mischief, they have a focus. So what would seem quite unrelated, which is young boys working on motor cars, is actually having a very beneficial effect on their families because the violence in those families is now reduced as well. It is very organic, very local and very locally responsive to a particular need in Canberra—that there was lot of Indigenous people not indigenous to this region.

**Ms HOARE**—That was the group of boys whose first job was to fix up the car that they had stolen and crashed, and they gave it back to the owners. I have been reading about that.

**Ms Dempster**—My colleagues from ATSIC are to appear separately in August, but they have said that it is okay for us to table for you ATSIC's *Family violence action plan*, which is one of their more recent documents following the announcements and statements by their commissioners. This is the drafted action plan.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. We could go on at some considerable length but I have to draw this hearing to a close. Is there anything that you particularly want to say to before we conclude?

**Ms Dempster**—I would like to say that, in terms of the Indigenous child abuse work in Western Australia, the Commonwealth has got itself significantly involved because it sees that the things that cause child abuse and the things that make a difference to it are not just state responsibilities. We, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, the Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Education, Science and Training, the ABS, ATSIC and the Department of Transport and Regional Services are working together in Canberra to establish a national policy framework for the states and the Commonwealth to work together on child abuse prevention. But also locally in WA, those same agencies are getting together to talk about how they are going to work with the state government, and they are coming up with a very firm agreement about future involvement in planning and consulting, so that we would look at the recruitment of Indigenous staff in those key areas of reporting child abuse. One of the reasons

people do not report it is that there is no-one that they feel comfortable reporting it to, so Employment and Workplace Relations are looking at a bunch of apprenticeship schemes. We are looking at it in a far more holistic manner than we have probably ever done before. It is the beginning of a framework that could be potentially used in other states and territories as well.

**CHAIR**—You have reminded me that this is not about the traditional Commonwealth-state-territories disagreement argy-bargy. It is about actually recognising the responsibilities that we as the Commonwealth have—that we can do things in a different way that actually adds value to what we try to do and that, with a bit more awareness and enlightenment, we can actually do things that are not impossibly difficult to do if we think about them in a different way. Therefore it is not just a matter of dollars; it is quite often a matter of management and of sharing with our state and Territory colleagues.

**Ms Dempster**—There is some really positive stuff in that light happening in WA now.

**CHAIR**—That reminds me that it is not about traditional models; it is about actually accepting that responsibility.

**Ms Dempster**—And doing it differently

**Mr Smith**—My final comment would be to reinforce a little of what Tony was saying. Yes, we have a long way to go on this journey but there are a lot of very good things occurring. If we can actually harvest those and promote those a bit more and get people to cherry pick in a practical sense, we would create a lot more of a wave of hope than the wave of despair that often comes from people focusing on intransigent problems rather than on good solutions. I know that you went to Wadeye some time ago. If you have the opportunity, I wonder whether, closer to the end of your inquiry, you might revisit it. That might be a way for you to say that over a certain period of time you have noticed a change: that you have noticed the different way in which the Commonwealth, the NT government and the community have actually worked together and what that has produced.

**CHAIR**—That is a very good challenge to us. I certainly came away from Wadeye despondent over the challenge in front of us. It had been just a fortnight after a significant incident, which I think was that the coroner had refused to visit it. I think that is a very worthwhile thing to do because I admit to some deep concerns about Wadeye. As I drove down what I would call the main street, I thought I could see a history of previous policies which were not as successful as many would have hoped at the time, and we did not want to be another one of those wrecks.

**Ms Dempster**—Just yesterday there was a discussion about Wadeye. We had someone who had been up there recently talking to a group about what they wanted to do. All the young people just said, 'Where are the jobs? Give us a job. We want a job.' Someone else piped up and said, 'Well, that is amazing. When I was there three years ago, they did not even get it that jobs were good things and that you could earn money from them.' That is an astounding turnover in three years. They felt that suddenly people were getting the idea that getting a job was a good thing and that having money was good as you have got control and you can take charge of your life. So maybe that return visit might show you some changes.

**CHAIR**—I very much hope so. I can also remember that the attendance rates of the school were up a bit, although they were still low overall. Thank you very much for your evidence today.

Resolved:

That this committee authorises publication of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 6.32 p.m.**