



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

## Official Committee Hansard

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Indigenous employment**

WEDNESDAY, 16 MAY 2007

THURSDAY ISLAND

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**  
**Wednesday, 16 May 2007**

**Members:** Mr Wakelin (*Chair*), Dr Lawrence (*Deputy Chair*), Ms Annette Ellis, Mr Garrett, Mr Laming, Mr Slipper, Mr Snowdon, Dr Southcott, Mr Tuckey and Mrs Vale

**Members in attendance:** Ms Annette Ellis, Mrs Vale and Mr Wakelin

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

Positive factors and examples amongst Indigenous communities and individuals, which have improved employment outcomes in both the public and private sectors; and

1. recommend to the government ways this can inform future policy development; and
2. assess what significant factors have contributed to those positive outcomes identified, including what contribution practical reconciliation\* has made.

\*The Committee has defined 'practical reconciliation' in this context to include all government services.

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**Subcommittee met at 12.01 pm****NORRIS, Mr Brian, Indigenous Employment and Training Manager, Department of Employment and Industrial Relations**

**CHAIR (Mr Wakelin)**—Welcome, Mr Norris. Thank you for the historic briefing you have given us on the region already and you might like to give us a bit of background on your work now.

**Mr Norris**—One of the main things I do is to act a bit like a middleman between industry, government and the Indigenous community. I help to try to set up employment and training projects—whatever is basically needed by the community. I go around to all the 22 different communities and try to broker deals basically between different agencies. In a way I act like a project manager. I also do a fair bit of staff management, as there are three employment training support officers who primarily look after the retention of apprentices and trainees and completion of their training. There are two here and one on the NPA as well as admin staff. So there is a fair bit of juggling with them as well. So they are my main roles.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What is the NPA?

**Mr Norris**—The Northern Peninsula Area.

**CHAIR**—I need to clarify that too.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—In other words, the top of the cape.

**CHAIR**—What sorts of distances geographically are we talking about?

**Mr Norris**—From Murray Island to the east to Saibai and Boigu in the north—which is basically on the PNG border—

**CHAIR**—So it is just off the PNG border.

**Mr Norris**—And Badu, which is in the west, and the NPA, which is the five communities north of the Jardine River, so that is my area of operation. The project itself has positions like mine all over the state—for example, there is one in Woorabinda; another one that looks after western Cape York and one that looks after the eastern Cape York area.

**CHAIR**—I think we said there were 7,000 people in the region?

**Mr Norris**—There would be at least 10,000 people throughout the whole area.

**CHAIR**—It is quite significant. Could you give us some examples of the deals you broker, what sorts of arrangements you make—and I guess you try to combine federal and state.

**Mr Norris**—I have a good example of a project that I would like to see more of. It was when the Army came up and built a heap of houses in the NPA. It helped with some base level training for entry into the construction industry. The Army provided the projects and the trainers, the Job

Network provider here came in to assist people on unemployment benefits and our department came in with helping people on CDEP. So together we all did the same thing—the state helped one group and the Commonwealth helped the others. The outcome is that a few of the guys got apprenticeships at the end of it and ongoing employment in the region. I think the construction industry would be one of the biggest growth areas that we could hope for. But there are some other things too. After this meeting I am going to talk to Health about the employment and training strategy for their health workers because a lot of them are ageing—and some have chronic diseases themselves—and we need to get more young people into that sort of industry in this region. As I said before, government administration is the biggest employer up here. I guess I am lucky in the sense that I can pick and choose the projects I work on.

**CHAIR**—What sort of unemployment levels are we looking at up here? I presume the Torres Strait people would make up a percentage of the population—the majority by far.

**Mr Norris**—Yes, at least 80 per cent. You cannot really call CDEP work you know; it is work for the dole as far as I am concerned. So if you include the CDEP people you are looking at around 40 per cent unemployment—that sort of figure. Thursday Island is a bit different in terms of unemployment. There are more job opportunities on Thursday Island. It is more the outer islands that we have to worry about, what their economic opportunities are, business opportunities and so on. I think that is where support more needs to be. But TI has similar problems but not to the same extent as the outer islands, I believe. There are different little projects that I am sure people will come along and tell you about that people are doing in the outer islands, such as trying to make concrete blocks, trying to have quarries and things like that.

**CHAIR**—Do you have a picture of the education standard—literacy, numeracy, basic maths?

**Mr Norris**—Not particularly. I think there might be people better placed in the education field who can answer that. We get the trainees usually at the end stage after they have been through education, and we find that they still need a lot of support with literacy and numeracy. One of our projects is called the Torres Strait apprenticeship project. It is trying to increase the apprentices' confidence level and literacy and numeracy at the same time. A lot of them go down south for block training. They go down a week before their block training when they sit through the whole training block beforehand with another Indigenous person. They use the same work book but it has different sorts of words—how Creole is used and things like that; even though it is not a written language it still can be written—and there are different meanings put in in brackets. So the whole work books are gone through with them before they actually enter into the mainstream class with everyone else and then they go through that block as per usual. After that they go to industry placement in mainstream organisations so they are learning workplace mainstream English as in any workplace. The whole idea of that is to build their confidence, because the one thing we find is that literacy and numeracy has a flow-on effect all the way through to that point. We are trying to increase the apprentices' confidence. One thing we found when we went around to all the islands talking about this was that they said, 'This is great for apprentices to build their confidence and their literacy and numeracy. Can you do this for our tradesmen as well?'—the ones who have already passed and are sitting out in the islands trying to do a job. It seems to me that it is something that has obviously been going on for a long time.

I am a tradesman. I did a trade here and I certainly felt below par when I went down south and started working there. It took a fair few years and a hard slog to try to catch up in many ways.



But I had additional educational advantages of having gone to school down south. I am just trying to explain one of our projects that addresses the literacy and numeracy issue, but the confidence level is a big issue.

**CHAIR**—It would be fair to say that the community struggles to provide a service on location which is going to allow people to be competitive in the general job market. I think that is what the experience is around much of Australia and I would be delighted to think that Thursday Island was different, but it is probably unrealistic to think it is that much different.

**Mr Norris**—It all depends on where people have gone to school. I think it starts from that school level. I am trying to draw just a broad brush over it.

**CHAIR**—I should not be Thursday Island specific—my comments should refer to Torres Strait in general.

**Mr Norris**—Yes, more Torres Strait in general. There are certainly some damn good tradesmen in TI and I know a few from the outer islands too. But I would not say all of them, or the majority.

**CHAIR**—When I was here three or four years ago I think we went to Moa. St Pauls was different, say, to another community. There were different dynamics in each community—they were having a go, but each community was slightly different.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Are the 22 communities you mentioned spread out entirely within this geographic description you have given us—between Saibai Island, Murray Island, Badu Island and NPA?

**Mr Norris**—If we talk about clusters, there are three communities in the east—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—In the east being the Badu Island area? Sorry, that is west.

**Mr Norris**—That would be Murray Island, Darnley and Stephen Island. Then you have the central group—there are four there: Yorke, Warraber, Poruma and Yam islands. Then there are three in the top western—Saibai, Boigu and Dauan—and in the near western there are Mabuaig, Badu and Moa Island, where there are two communities, Kubin and St Pauls. Then there are Horn Island and Thursday Island, and Hammond Island on the other side of TI. And I always include NPA, which has five communities.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—So that is eight communities in this region?

**Mr Norris**—Sorry, NPA is another separate region and there are five communities in the NPA.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—That is fantastic. When we talk about a 40 per cent unemployment rate in the Indigenous communities, the population of Thursday Island is about 7,000; the population of the whole region is about 10,000—

**Mr Norris**—Roughly, yes.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I do not want to be too scientific about this but I just want to get a feeling for the situation. If the unemployment rate is roughly 40 per cent and there are about 7,000 on Thursday Island, there are about 3,000 or so distributed around the rest of the regions. Would the unemployment rate—if we could separate it out for a moment—be 40 per cent consistently or higher when you move into those more remote regions?

**Mr Norris**—It is certainly higher in the outer islands.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What is the chance, taking into account the size and the obvious economy of them, for that much to change? I am not suggesting that we do not try, but the reality is that it would be more difficult in those places where there is very little, if any, economy and industry. Would that be a fair comment?

**Mr Norris**—Realistically we can only chip away at it bit by bit and it also has to be in relation to what the islands offer. Poruma, Coconut Island, is a tiny coral atoll—realistically tourism is a potential industry there and that is about it. But on Moa there are more natural resources because it is nearly as big as Prince of Wales Island, so you can have quarries and block making plants—the same as Badu because it is a bigger place.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Is Moa the sort of place where those sorts of industries are being tried?

**Mr Norris**—At the moment, yes. I think fisheries can play a much bigger part too, such as aquaculture and those sorts of things. I know they are trying that out in some of the central islands at the moment—sponge farming and so on. There is more scope for that up here.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—To come back to the broad 40 per cent overall, do you have a feeling for what the gender breakdown in that figure would be? The girls must be out there trying as well.

**Mr Norris**—Generally you will find most of the ladies work within health, education and the council offices and most of the guys work in the trade areas with council.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—So in the group you are attempting to assist what would be the approximate gender break-up—is it more men than women or about half and half?

**Mr Norris**—I could not tell you that with any authority.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Do you have very many programs that are aimed at women? Women can be carpenters too. I am just trying to get a feel for the numbers.

**Mr Norris**—At the end of the day it is who the employer or the council picks to actually do it. We do not have any bigger incentives for women but we do have broad sort of fully funded traineeship funding for example, and that is one of the target groups. It is just a target group; we do not offer more funding because they are a woman, no. We do not have any programs like that.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—This is not a critique, I am just wondering to what degree—not in the work you are doing but in the situation in which they all find themselves, it would be easy

for some of the females to be sort of left behind a bit in opportunity, given the circumstances in which all of the populations find themselves. I am just wondering whether that is an issue that we need to consider a little bit.

**Mr Norris**—They are quite well represented in TAFE, though, especially the local TAFE here, in terms of ones doing child care and business and stuff like that.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—There is a TAFE on TI, is there?

**Mr Norris**—Yes.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I did not know that. How big is the TAFE?

**Mr Norris**—There is only about two separate blocks of buildings. They currently run carpentry. Not all the carpenters go there, but carpentry blocks, they have got visual arts, they have got welding at the moment and coxswain. They are running a lot of coxswain courses at the moment and boat safety, like boat licensing and computers and business. Yes, just certificate 2 level. Anything higher has to go to Cairns.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I don't know whether you can answer this, but do you have a feeling for what would be the rough percentage of children from this region who are able to go south for further education like you did?

**Mr Norris**—No, I could not tell you. I think that would be a question for TSIREC: Ned David or someone like that would be able to answer that much better. That is what they do.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—My last question is on the schooling opportunities. Obviously on a place like Thursday and on Horn, in this proximity, it may not be an issue necessarily but what about the smaller or the more remote islands? What are the schooling arrangements? Is there a school on Moa or is there a school on Yam?

**Mr Norris**—They have their own primary school level.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Primary level.

**Mr Norris**—To grade 7; I believe just about everyone is at least to grade 7. Hammond Island have got a Catholic school that only goes to grade 4 or 5 and then they have to come across on the ferry, but every other outer island in those groups—this is excluding the NPA—would either have to go down south to Abergowrie or St Augustine's College or something like that or come in here for their high school here. That is it. That is your choice.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Are you aware of what the attendance and retention rating are like within those schools? Do most kids make it to the top level that that is available to them within the school?

**Mr Norris**—I am just going on figures that I saw last year but they were very—there was not many that actually got there to—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—See the distance.

**Mr Norris**—Senior certificate. That got to that level—you know that level where you can go to university.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What about the primary kids who actually get to and complete year 7, for argument's sake.

**Mr Norris**—What do you mean?

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Do they make it to year 7 or do they drop out beforehand? Is attendance an issue at that level?

**Mr Norris**—My understanding is it is quite good up to that level. It is just after that—and we do have certainly a cohort here which I am trying to address with a number of other people, of course, not just by myself, of disengaged students from school. We do have a project at the moment in the NPA which is trying to get those year 10s and 11s and 12s either back into school or at least with vocational certificates. That is utilising tradesmen and stuff like that and practical work based projects. Get Set for Work is the name of the project. But that is the sort of stuff we are trying to do with them.

**Mrs VALE**—What is that called?

**Mr Norris**—Get Set for Work.

**Mrs VALE**—Just following on from some of Annette's questions, you say that the children actually get to year 7 level. Are they at year 7 level with their numeracy and literacy? Do they just actually graduate at year 7? You said you had a problem with the literacy and numeracy, so the young people that do graduate, they really aren't up to that year 7 level where they can—

**Mr Norris**—I could not really answer that with authority, really.

**Mrs VALE**—But if you have to get them more education, if you have to with some of your programs actually help with literacy and numeracy, they obviously aren't really graduating at that grade.

**Mr Norris**—From what I can see where we start seeing the people, it has obviously started way back—

**Mrs VALE**—Yes, they have missed out somewhere along the line.

**Mr Norris**—Yes.

**Mrs VALE**—Do you find girls have that problem too or is it just the boys?

**Mr Norris**—Generally not. I think most of the girls that I see in the traineeships and stuff that they do are in the business area and stuff like that and generally there is not as much problem, generally. Perhaps the ones that do have the problem are child rearing or something like that.

**Mrs VALE**—They are not coming through to your other further courses but the ones you do see are doing okay. We seem to have a similar thing that is happening in mainstream education where the girls at that particular age are usually quite ahead of the boys, and that is something that the government is trying to address. Can I just go back to the beginning. You have got this great geographic distance with your responsibilities: how do you get around? Do you go by helicopter or boat or how do you manage to travel?

**Mr Norris**—I am still fighting with the department now to let me—see, I have been in boats all my life and I come across in a boat every day and I am just fighting with them at the moment to let me go in my own dinghy so I can go to Horn Island or Hammond Island at the moment.

**Mrs VALE**—What, your own tinny?

**Mr Norris**—Yes, which is actually a fairly good tinny.

**CHAIR**—Are they saying it is an OH&S issue or something?

**Mr Norris**—Yes. I think they are a bit toey about *Malu Sara* and stuff like that.

**Mrs VALE**—They are a bit toey about.

**Mr Norris**—That accident with Immigration. But this is smooth waters in here. But anyway, it is only in this area, I am not going to go out that far. Other than that, it is by light aircraft. There are only two islands that do not have an airstrip and you have to get to them by helicopter or you can go to a nearby island and get on a ferry.

**Mrs VALE**—So there are ferries connecting up some of the other islands also?

**CHAIR**—Can you confirm with me that—sorry Mrs Vale, I just have to get this irrelevant piece of information in—but Poruma or Coconut Island have about a quarter or a fifth of the island taken up by the airstrip?

**Mr Norris**—That's right. It is quite a funny sight actually.

**Mrs VALE**—It is pretty important to overcome that tyranny of distance, isn't it. You mentioned that the army was here. Was that on the ACAP program?

**Mr Norris**—Yes, that's right.

**Mrs VALE**—How long were they here? Was that a six-month stint?

**Mr Norris**—Yes, about that. That was going back a few years now.

**Mrs VALE**—And they built houses and—

**Mr Norris**—A whole subdivision.

**Mrs VALE**—Infrastructure.

**Mr Norris**—Yes.

**Mrs VALE**—And people are now living in that subdivision.

**Mr Norris**—Yes.

**Mrs VALE**—You did mention that it was a good program because some of the people were employed. Were they actually employed by ACAP to help the Army engineers?

**Mr Norris**—No, they had their own separate little projects, they weren't actually doing the subdivision itself. There was shelters and barbecue area type things, they had done around the foreshore and also a bit of work down at the regional dump, which is something they needed badly. That is all the work that the ACAP did, or part of it, but that was their main projects that they worked on, yes, for that time. There was about 15 or 16 all up.

**Mrs VALE**—Fifteen or 16 tradespeople or potential—

**Mr Norris**—Potential tradespeople, and they were all doing certificate 2 in construction and they were also getting their workplace health and safety construction blue card which is required in Queensland if you are going to walk onto any job site.

**Mrs VALE**—You need that, right. So it was 15 to 16 people and they were engaged in this occupation for perhaps about six months.

**Mr Norris**—Yes, I think it was more like four and a half months.

**Mrs VALE**—Have any of them been able to go on and use that experience in any way which has been positive for them?

**Mr Norris**—You are only going to get so many jobs and I cannot really tell you where some of them are now obviously, but there was certainly a minority that got jobs straightaway afterwards—say about 15 per cent as a percentage.

**Mrs VALE**—Was that here within the island group or did they have to go onto the mainland to get that kind of work?

**Mr Norris**—No, these are all people that actually lived there on the mainland.

**Mrs VALE**—So the ones that did get jobs, it is local jobs.

**Mr Norris**—Yes.

**Mrs VALE**—So that was worthwhile to that degree.

**Mr Norris**—Yes. I would like to see more of it, as I said. And I think there might be some scope for that, say, with the disengaged school students, that Get Set for Work program. Perhaps we can again do a partnership arrangement with Job Network, I believe they have a similar program and we are in early discussions up here at the moment.

**Mrs VALE**—The biggest problem, isn't it, from my observation with disenchanting students is the fact that they do not feel that their further study has any relevance to their future because they know there are no jobs around. So if there were some way that the jobs could be either created or even if there were job opportunities that link up to something else, it might give them some motivation to continue. If you do not see any relevance in further study, nobody would do it.

**Mr Norris**—Yes, and that is the whole aim of the Get Set for Work program, either get them vocational education or back into school.

**Mrs VALE**—This place is paradise. Has any of the big international hotel chains ever thought about or has there ever been any word of any of them looking at somewhere in this area to establish an international style resort?

**Mr Norris**—I have never heard of it. The only one I have heard of is Pajinka, I think Qantas or someone involved with Qantas were actually involved with Pajinka, which is that right on the very tip. That has since burnt down. That was a number of years ago and a bushfire come through and stuff like that. But that is the only one where I think there were any bigger players involved as of, as far as I know.

**Mrs VALE**—If there was something like that, if the local community were happy to welcome such an establishment, something like that, there would be a lot of spin-offs; it could provide quite a bit of work for local people. The best thing that you have here is the location: it is paradise, it is just beautiful.

**Mr Norris**—I guess they are starting in small scale in some of the cruise liners. The last two to three years there are an amount of cruise liners that are coming through now, but they only stay for a day—it is not enough really.

**Mrs VALE**—They only stay for a day perhaps because there is not enough to keep them here for longer. An international hotel chain could establish themselves on one of the islands and do it in an environmentally sensitive way, and not only would you employ perhaps young people from here to look after the environment for the hotel but the other spin-offs are just immeasurable. Also the retail comes, especially if you have got international liners that are calling here and there is a reason to stay. There is just so much that can happen and even if it was only that one industry it would probably mean so much to the people of this area. I do not know too many international hoteliers, but I will keep my eye out in Canberra; you never know who comes to Parliament House. The other industry that you said you had here was some pearling. Does that employ any local people?

**Mr Norris**—No, not really. I know the one near the mainland, generally that seems to be backpackers and what not. There are a couple, I think Escape River has got maybe two or three

workers from the NPA area. The Japanese one only employs Japanese, they come over from Japan and do their thing.

**Mrs VALE**—I should imagine there would be some regulatory authority that issues licences for that activity. Would there be any purpose, as part of the condition of the grant, in having a certain percentage or a certain amount of local people employed?

**Mr Norris**—It is a good idea, but I think last I saw of the fisheries policy regarding pearl shelling in this region was that any new developments are meant to be totally inclusive of the local people.

**Mrs VALE**—But licences come up for renewal quite regularly, I should imagine. It could be annually, and that is the time to give them some notice: in two years time you are going to be required to employ local people. Not necessarily all of them in total but a considerable section of your staff should be local, and also some training. They have got a vested interest in training people for that job. Any ideas like that that you might get or might come your way, do you have any mechanism for sending it back to your higher authorities, your bosses or the local regional area, whoever is in control of this area? Who issues the licences: the Department of Fisheries?

**Mr Norris**—Yes, Queensland DPI, Department of Primary Industries.

**Mrs VALE**—Is there any way that they could be kick-started to think seriously about that. It is just a mechanism where they have got to give licences, people want them, they are going to make a lot of money, but to be able to reinvest, and the best reinvestment you can put in any area is knowledge for the people and training.

**Mr Norris**—I am chipping away at the moment by just supporting one of the local fellows at the Saibai pearling project. That is just one clan and basically there are three up there, doing diving, collecting it, and we are actually going to be bringing it down here and we are going to get the school involved so that the kids get interested. We will actually do the pearl seeding here and then take them back out, put them on long lines for 18 months and then you come along and harvest the pearls.

**Mrs VALE**—Even that activity has tourist potential, if you have enough people coming here to warrant it.

**Mr Norris**—At the moment it is really like a cottage industry for them. This one local guy, he is lucky he has got other finances and he is just backing it with his own money. He has not got much money from any of these government departments or anything like that.

**Mrs VALE**—He is investing back in his own area. Are the pearls that you grow here unique in any way? You know how the Broome pearls are quite large and quite unique, and then you have got the South Sea type pearls which are different again, and Tahiti has a black pearl and so does Fiji have a black pearl. Are they unique in any way here?

**Mr Norris**—I am not 100 per cent sure. I know they are the golden lip variety here, they are very golden ones. I do not know, to be honest, if they are totally unique. I think they can be grown in other parts of Australia.



**Mrs VALE**—Yes, but it does not matter, as long as you grow them here and can say you do. This could be the Shangri La of the golden pearl; it is always just leveraging off some idea, that is all. I just think that is about all my questions except to say if you wanted us to take a message back to the federal government, even if it was just one or two, is there any special message you would like us to take back?

**Mr Norris**—Off the top of my head—

**Mrs VALE**—Perhaps encouraging an international hotel chain to come and have negotiations with the traditional owners?

**Mr Norris**—I think policies that encourage any big industry to come in and actually have to engage—

**Mrs VALE**—And train.

**Mr Norris**—Yes, and come in to with a lot of lead time to work up projects. That is needed. So I think any policy like that would be great.

**Mrs VALE**—You were saying this island does not actually suffer from cyclones as much—

**Mr Norris**—No.

**Mrs VALE**—That is just such a big thing for an international hotel chain because it means that you could virtually operate your hotel the whole year, you would not be impeded by the cyclonic season, would you.

**Mr Norris**—You get sometimes 20 to 30 knot winds ripping through here.

**Mrs VALE**—Yes, but you can get that anywhere in the tropics, can't you. You would probably even get that on Hamilton Island when it is right.

**Mr Norris**—The south-west winds blow, yes.

**CHAIR**—I have got three or four things. My colleagues have pretty well dealt with it but I just have another summing-up approach. I think we have agreed that the government services are the main deal in terms of mainstream employment and that some building, health, perhaps some tourism are about the key ingredients.

**Mr Norris**—And education.

**CHAIR**—And education. I was interested in the Creole. I hadn't thought of that. I have heard it around other parts of Australia but we need to think about how we actually develop the language skills in the Creole—if I can put it crudely, sort it to be compatible with literacy—to be literate and be able to perhaps hold your own in a trade and just perhaps in conversation as well. Is that fair?

**Mr Norris**—Yes. When I was talking about that apprenticeship project, yes. And I would never be talking about dumbing down the actual structure or the content of the training, you actually just have the Creole and then you would have the English word next to it so that you are not losing that, you are learning both.

**CHAIR**—They are two languages and so it is a language skill in its own right.

**Mr Norris**—That's right. The only problem is that it is not a recognised written language yet, so what do you do?

**CHAIR**—I hear what you say.

**Mrs VALE**—You only need your first book, Brian.

**CHAIR**—My next part, employment success in the region is limited, and Mrs Vale touched on that. I could talk about the mining industry in other parts of Australia or we know that Rio Tinto are over at Weipa. We understand what the opportunities are there but to my knowledge that sort of industry is not something that is within this region; you do not have mining.

**Mr Norris**—No, but historically you have always had people from up here going to Weipa, for example, and also to Western Australia on the railways. I know a fair few boys have gone over there recently.

**CHAIR**—Absolutely. As a boy or as a young man I can very much remember the Thursday Islanders, as we called them then, probably inaccurately, building the railway in the Northern Territory and of course in Western Australia.

**Mr Norris**—Yes, and that still goes on. And that is part of that apprenticeship project I was talking about, to give them confidence level and ability so that they can go anywhere in Australia and work alongside a bunch of any other people and do well. That is what we want, yes.

**CHAIR**—In fact they were employed specifically because they did do it better than anybody else, and I guess it was the climatic conditions as well as their own ability to work. Mrs Vale as touched on this: we all aspire to the whole of government approach, we talk COAG, the grand words, but it is another thing actually applying it on the ground and I guess we are still learning how to do that effectively. I will leave it at that, unless you want to add something. The one thing that I think we need to talk a little bit about is the number of successful Indigenous businesses, and I think you touched on that, but I would be interested just to get a quick snapshot of what is the general picture of businesses and perhaps a sense of entrepreneurial—

**Mr Norris**—I guess the best models you can find are probably on the NPA, probably with Seisia having their resort and caravan park. They have got a good stream of tourists coming up and that is basically booked out years in advance.

**Mrs VALE**—Whereabouts is that one, Brian?

**Mr Norris**—On the mainland, just right on the tip of the mainland there.

**Mrs VALE**—So there is a tourist resort here, is there?

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—No, at the top of Cape York.

**CHAIR**—What was the name of that again?

**Mr Norris**—Seisia holiday park.

**Mrs VALE**—That did get off the ground.

**Mr Norris**—That has been going for quite a few years.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Can you only get to it by road?

**Mr Norris**—No, you fly into the NPA.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—You fly into it?

**Mr Norris**—Yes, or you can come fly here and then catch a ferry across, or you can drive up if you like the rough roads.

**CHAIR**—But fairly active and a viable business.

**Mr Norris**—Yes, and Bamaga is the same. They have got a nice resort there now which is on the mainland as well and they do not run it through councils. I think I have seen too many councils trying to act like enterprises in Indigenous communities and that just does not seem to work. They need to have the separate enterprise corporation, whatever it may be, and that is the sort of model that they are using over there where it is totally separate to council, council is council business. It is making money, that is the whole point.

**Mrs VALE**—I did not realise you actually had resorts in those places; maybe I asked the wrong question. How many people from the islands do those resorts employ?

**Mr Norris**—Bamaga and Seisia are both island communities, they moved there in the 50s or some went voluntarily when Saibai experienced a bit of flooding. The manager is not from there at the moment but just about every other staff, grounds people, people in the restaurant, bar staff, cleaners, are all local.

**Mrs VALE**—Are they trained by that establishment or do they go to a hospitality—does TAFE offer hospitality courses?

**Mr Norris**—Generally speaking it is workplace training. It all depends on the manager who comes in. Some have offered hospitality traineeships to some of them but, yes, their training is via traineeship model. They can go down south for the blocks and do their work books up here.

**Mrs VALE**—What kind of resorts are they? Are they like little individual bures, is that what you say? You know, like huts? Are they five stars, is it a caravan park?

**Mr Norris**—Seisia can be a caravan park, it has also got quite large A-frame sort of chalets on the beach and they have got smaller cabins as well now, or they have got this little donga sort of thing, budget lodge. It is the whole range there. Bamaga is more just a resort—when I say resort, it is just like a motel, I guess but, yes, not like a motel down south I guess, more like a resort looking motel.

**Mrs VALE**—Does the resort, does it have restaurants and swimming pool, so it is about, what, three, four, five star?

**Mr Norris**—Three and a half, something like that. Yes, three star.

**CHAIR**—And Poruma, the luxury high class.

**Mr Norris**—Exclusive, yes, and very lovely.

**CHAIR**—It is beautiful, isn't it?

**Mrs VALE**—So Poruma does have one of those high class—

**Mr Norris**—Yes, but you have only got two sort of big chalet things and that is it. It is not like for 100 people or anything like that.

**CHAIR**—It is a unique little—

**Mrs VALE**—Is it, what, for people to fly in and be there almost by themselves and experience the solitary—

**Mr Norris**—Yes, and you get that corner of the island to yourself. I think Warraber, which is nearby and very similar, a beautiful island too, which is Sue Island, I believe they are building—it should be completed now—a more budget conference type facility and stuff like that. So they are catering for not that level but more the middle sort of level which might work, but we will see how it goes.

**CHAIR**—My last one, and a tough one: the value of education and jobs and how it fits to the culture of the community. It seems a real challenge. I know we have touched on it, but can you just offer us a couple of words on how people perceive the value of education and the value of a job. Mrs Vale and Annette Ellis touched on it, in terms of if you can't connect it is quite hard to motivate.

**Mr Norris**—I am not trying to say that there is a difference between Aboriginal and Islander—

**CHAIR**—No, that is why I was trying to ask as gently as I could about how we deal with it.

**Mr Norris**—I have live in Pormpuraaw, which is Edward River on the west coast, I have lived in Lockhart River, and I lived here off and on all my life. Maybe there is a Christian influence to it too that is very strong up here.

**CHAIR**—Yes, it is.

**Mr Norris**—But there seem to be a lot of families that really do push their kids to achieve, and education is the backbone of that. I think you will find that up here the emphasis on educational value is much stronger, from what I have seen anyway, than on the mainland, and I put that down a bit to that Christianity, I think. Yes, I can't think of any other reason.

**CHAIR**—No, I am of the same view. That was my experience three or four years ago and I particularly remember, not to any island because I have only been to two, but I will say that at Poruma and Moa that that strikes you very strongly.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—When the cruise ships come in, are they big ships?

**Mr Norris**—Some are quite big, yes.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—And if they come ashore, what do they do?

**Mr Norris**—They go to Gab Titui.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—To the art centre?

**Mr Norris**—Yes.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What else do they do?

**Mr Norris**—Sometimes they go on a little tour: if Peddels ferry service is linked up, they have also got a tour of the island, they will go and see the Japanese graves or go up to the old fort. That is about it.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—So they spend the better part of the day here.

**Mr Norris**—Yes.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Do they get fed on the island? Do they take hospitality on the island?

**Mr Norris**—It all depends what day they come in. On a Sunday, you are not going to get fed much unless you go to a pub.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I was just really interested to ask this question because you have mentioned it a couple of times.

**Mr Norris**—I think it needs to be a coordinated effort.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Exactly. Without wishing to rain on it, it sounds like it is good fortune and a port that they can come to and an island that is big enough and well-known enough but there is no exploitation commercially here of the advantage it could bring, as yet.

**Mr Norris**—And it is not coordinated enough. I think one central point or perhaps one person can actually organise it a bit better. Especially in terms of the markets that happen once a month.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—That could be on when the boat comes in.

**Mr Norris**—Yes. I know the Torres shire sends out a flier every couple of months and it has got when the cruise ships are coming in. I am not trying to run anyone down, it is just there is no noticeboard that tells you openly, 'This is when they are coming in,' so the artists, for example, can't really time their work to be all ready when they are here.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—So is the shire very active in that sort of business promotion? Feel free to say it as it is.

**Mr Norris**—I am not sure if it is their role.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Whether or not they are is the interesting point, and it sounds like they are not all that—

**Mr Norris**—They are the only ones doing it, if they are.

**Mrs VALE**—It is a matter of focusing the mind and I think some councils do and some councils don't. I think it all depends on the focus.

**CHAIR**—That will have to do us today. Thank you very much, Brian. That was very informative and thank you for the way you have dealt with it. It gave us a picture that we would never get any other way. So thank you very much and to your department as well.

**Mrs VALE**—There is no tourist authority here that just focuses on that?

**Mr Norris**—No.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.53 pm to 1.34 pm**

**KRIS, Mr Toshie , Chairperson, Torres Strait Regional Authority**

**SAGAUKAZ, Mr Jesse, Member Representing for Bamaga, Education, Training, Employment and Arts, Torres Strait Regional Authority**

**SEE KEE, Mr Wayne, General Manager, Torres Strait Regional Authority**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Toshie, shall we go to you. You might like to make a few opening comments. We are obviously interested in employment. We are looking particularly at positive examples of employment, but we are also obviously having to deal with the impediments and the issues around it. We are within weeks of presenting our final report and we are particularly glad to conclude our visit to your part of the world. You are our final visit. We are glad to be with you. Over to you.

**Mr Kris**—Thank you and welcome to our region. Before I start I would like to give an overview of the Torres Strait Regional Authority and the region, which includes 18 island communities; 17 that sit outside of the inner island, Thursday Island and beyond, with the population ranging from 55 to 1,600. The two mainland communities are Bamaga and Seisia. The region's total population is 8,306 at the last census count, of whom 6,168 are Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people.

The remoteness of our area offers its own challenge. The island communities are at various stages of economic development, which is one of the major focuses that the TSRA current board is looking towards and there are limited market economics throughout our region. That makes employment opportunities very restricted and, as a result, the capacity of the island incomes to fund development throughout our region. Our islands face up to challenges of poor socio-economics and health status and the history of disadvantage and relative poverty.

The TSRA is a Commonwealth statutory authority. It was established on 1 July 1984 under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989 and now known as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005. The aim is to strengthen the economic, social and cultural development of the Torres Strait, which in turn will assist to improve the lifestyle and the wellbeing of Torres Strait islanders and Aboriginal people living in our region. The authority is funded by the Commonwealth government and to achieve one outcome, an outcome that is relevant to the terms of reference of the inquiry. The outcome is to achieve a better quality of life and to develop an economic base for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal persons living in the Torres Strait. Achievements of the TSRA's outcome is linked to our vision and it is to empower our people to determine their own affairs based on our unique island custom of Torres Strait from which we draw our unity and strength.

In the context of the government's approach to reconciliation, there is an important connection between empowering our people through our customary rights and ownership of land and waters and the delivery of services. The six outputs that contribute to these outcomes are: economic development; education and training and employment; native title; housing and environmental health; social and cultural development; and policy coordination and development.

Under this legislation, the TSRA is required to implement the Torres Strait Island Development Plan. The plan is a mechanism for development goals and providing benchmarks for the provisions and services of all agencies which have a responsibility in the Torres Strait. A copy of the development plan has been made available to the committee. The plan is comprehensive, visionary and, in terms of the pursuance of its objectives, oriented towards finding practical pathways to economic self-sufficiency in both traditional and new areas of activities such as tourism. The plan identifies the services needed to promote the development of Torres Strait and the policies necessary to bring this about. Do you want me to go on?

**CHAIR**—It is entirely up to you but I note that you are shortening it. It is entirely up to you, but if you would like to perhaps just pick up the particular employment initiatives, and other witnesses may like to add, and then we will go to questions and an informal discussion and we may be able to refer back to the document. A little bit on employment and you will scan through, and then someone else might like to add a little bit and we will go from there. I was just reaching for the plan to get a bit of a head-up on it. Over to you.

**Mr Kris**—The form that the current board is focusing on is economic development, where we are looking at partnerships in private sectors and commercials and working closely with community councils and building that partnership through TSRA and how we could have better outcomes for our remote communities where employment opportunities are very limited. Whether it is through fisheries, tourism, utilising the community development employment program to the full capacity to bring about that particular entity in the community so that the opportunity for full-time employment is there, we then take people off CDEP. TSRA is undergoing a review of CDEP and having a look at how we roll out that particular program in our area and what benefits there are to communities and how we could utilise that particular program to benefit communities when looking at economic development. We will also join in partnerships with other organisations outside of our region in other sectors to look at building partnership on establishing economic opportunities throughout our region, whether it is through fisheries or tourism or other sectors. In my community itself at St Pauls we work closely with the TSRA to establish a block plant, as an enterprise opportunity for the local communities, not just about creating employment or building better blocks, it is also about lifting the living standard of community members and creating opportunities outside of that particular entity for community members to venture through.

**CHAIR**—I remember it.

**Mr Kris**—In the beginning phase of it we actually utilised CDEP to its full capacity to help bring that economic development around before it becomes an entity and then look at getting community on board to building profit or creating more financial needs for the community through that particular enterprise.

**CHAIR**—Fine. One thing on the budget, \$53 million and I think \$35 million into employment and training, and the 2,000-odd participants: have you got any indication about how many of those participants have gone on to full-time employment—and full-time employment perhaps particularly in sustainable mainstream? Is there much on that? Are there any stats on that?

**Mr Sagaukaz**—I think in this particular review we have gone through for the CDEP, those particular things—can you hear me?

**CHAIR**—Yes, fine.

**Mr Sagaukaz**—I am from the bush. I don't know these things.

**Mrs VALE**—It is working very well.

**Mr Sagaukaz**—With this rollout of this review for the CDEP, these are some of the factors that will be identified to see those particular things. If there has been a shift in creating proper employment as we say proper employment or upskilling our people to go into certain fields and go outside seeking employment, or even the creation of jobs for that employment, those will be some of the things that the review will address. It will also address things such as proper roll-outs as in how do we divvy up those CDEP places to ensure that small businesses are kicked off or a certain proportion are quarantined towards that to ensure that happens. I firmly believe that these particular things will be identified in due process.



**CHAIR**—You are going through the review process at the moment. What sort of time line have you got; how long has it been going?

**Mr See Kee**—What we are looking at doing is having the review process finalised by about the end of the financial year and in the new financial year have a look at some areas where we can trial some new initiatives out of that review. Just in terms of the figures and taking a step backwards, that is one of the things that we have identified so far. There needs to be better data collection of this type of information, that is, people who are in CDEP and how many of them are moving across. What we can tell you, though, is that from the figures that we have, out of the 2,000 participants, 20 per cent of them or about 419 are involved in what is classed as municipal service type jobs. These are the areas where we are starting to hold discussions with the state now as well as with the Commonwealth to identify how we can move these positions or get dollars to transition these positions to full-time jobs, because effectively they are doing full-time jobs but through CDEP.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for that. That is exactly what I was getting at. This is the debate around CDEP, isn't it, the core issue about subsidised jobs but in actual fact a real job.

**Mr See Kee**—Exactly.

**CHAIR**—That is really important. Thank you, that has brought it together nicely for me. That was my initial question. I was going to say to Jesse and to Wayne, you might have been wanting to add something to the chairman's words—was there anything in particular you would like to say from your particular perspective? You added beautifully to the review that is happening and Wayne has certainly touched on and brought out that 20 per cent factor, which is important.

**Mr Kris**—Just on the municipal services, the 17 community councils are now going through a review with the state government. One of the things that the remote communities have always been crying out for is that municipal support from the state government. This is where I see, personally as a chair of my community, the lack of support we get from the state, that they are now becoming dependent on the council to utilise CDEP to provide these services and therefore they are not coming on board and giving us that municipal support that is needed to actually roll out that particular service on a full-time wage or award wage program. At the moment the majority of these councils are utilising the CDEP component to provide these services. We feel strongly that the state has an obligation to roll out those services with those communities and we have not even been given a guarantee from the state.

**CHAIR**—It is an interesting discussion and probably slightly outside of our brief, but it is still a very important part of the journey, because I suppose what we are seeing the federal government do at the moment is ask local government, which implies state government as well, to take on those responsibilities. I suppose that implies rates, it implies the state from the financial assistance grants process, from the state and federal sources of local government money, to set up a budget in the local government sense. That, I presume, is to replace the direct CDEP money—the \$35 million—which is approximate to the CDEP amount. It is that sort of money. It is probably outside of our brief but I think it is important because in there is the sustainable jobs at the award rates and running as a community similar to all other Australian communities. I sense you are at a transition process and when that review comes out you will be in a better position to know; is that fair?

**Mr Kris**—Yes.

**Mr Sagaukaz**—Yes.

**Mr See Kee**—Yes. Just adding to what Mr Wakelin has just mentioned, the other thing with transitioning and getting them to full-time jobs and from a threshold perspective is the superannuation implications of that. So, for example, with the ageing population up here or the getting younger of the population up here, they are critical issues at the moment. You have got a number of people out there who may be accessing CDEP and CDEP providing some sort of employment opportunity for them there, but in terms of putting money aside for the future in terms of retirement or superannuation like everybody else, that is where it becomes a bit of a disadvantage for them at that level.

**CHAIR**—But that is exactly what should be happening, though, isn't it? At the moment what you are saying to me—and I hadn't even contemplated this—is that there is no superannuation, no SGC, guarantee charge I think we call it, created in there. Only perhaps for the managers they would be, but not the participants. Is that right?

**Mr See Kee**—Exactly. So if we can transition them, then they will be going through and getting the correct superannuation entitlements as they would if they were a proper employee, because they are doing the jobs now. I suppose the only thing that I would like to add from a general perspective is just to give you a bit of an idea how a lot of these communities have taken the initiative to organise themselves. What happens here at the TSRA is before dollars go out to communities, all of these communities have to submit a three- to five-year development plan. So what they do in advance is they sit down with their community, go through, look at what development areas they want to move forward in, what sort of initiatives, enterprises that they want to get involved in, and based on those plans that they submit, that is how the TSRA goes through and assesses what funds go out the door each year. So the communities have got a very good idea of where they want to head with a lot of this stuff. What is happening is with CDEP, because of the geographic isolation that a lot of these communities face and being small communities, is that CDEP is enabling them to support enterprise. What we are trying to do is work with some of these communities now with the enterprises to say, 'Okay, we are starting it off. CDEP is assisting to get it off the ground. When it starts to take those first and second steps, let's have a look at how we transition now and build into operating of these enterprises full-time jobs so you can wean the CDEP out of it and then you have got enterprises on the ground.' What we are finding with a lot of these communities, speaking from an administration perspective, is that you have got a transitioning process happening here with these industries and enterprises now, for example, with Seisia, almost self-sustaining, so in a sense you are building a self-sustaining regional economy at a local level to start off with. That is an important part that CDEP is playing in this whole process up here that I am not too sure that many people are aware of.

**CHAIR**—You can see me pricking my ears up because I think I am starting to get a picture here of sustaining communities but using CDEP in a totally different way, as you set up a municipal system which is sustainable and picking up the award wage principle, and the superannuation—those normal, everyday things which most other Australians take for granted. Are you able to anticipate with your review, and this is probably a bad practice because you have not finished your review and I understand that, but what might be some of the options that might

come out of your review in terms of building those industries that you spoke about from a development sense and bringing it to the next stage, if I heard you right.

**Mr Kris**—We have actually done community visits based on the cluster group and talking to councils and communities on where do they see the cluster in 10 to 15 years through economic development, so that when you do look at rolling out a specific economic development for a cluster it does not duplicate each other—you have a process that complements each economic development rather than you duplicate—and how do you provide employment opportunities, whether it is through CDEP or other agencies, that could provide that particular support. That has just come to an end. We are in the process of also reviewing all those visits and then reporting back to the TSRA Board so that we could have an indication where each cluster will be in 10 to 15 years and what we expect to be happening on the ground through economic development.

**CHAIR**—Though it is very dangerous for me to speculate because I don't know it well enough, as I recall the TSRA structure, on your board there is a member from each community. Say you set up the sort of structure which is similar to the rest of Australia type model: municipal service that is one, but perhaps health service is another, the education service is another. I suppose they come under that broad name of municipal. When I think municipal, I think more local government. Are you thinking that as well, or are you thinking health and education on top of that?

**Mr See Kee**—With the municipal type stuff, that includes operating of sewerage plants, garbage, roads, all the sorts of stuff the community is doing. Not trying to pre-empt what is coming out of the review—as you said, it is pretty dangerous territory—one of the things that has been tossed around quite loosely in initial discussion is the idea of splitting CDEP up here and having, for example, a welfare component and then an employment component. On the employment component, there are, for example, 419 municipal type places, so what we need to do is explore legal and policy issues that we might face if we decide that these 419 places, rather than make them a welfare place, they become an employment place. That is, the equivalent of that dollar amount for the 419 places we put on the table and we say, 'State, this is to create a job. You put the additional in to get it up to a full-time job.' That is just one of the thoughts that is being thrown around at the moment. It is not concrete and it may change, but it is some of the thinking that is happening.

**CHAIR**—It is just putting some flesh on the bones. I have two parts of that and then I need to open up to my colleagues because it is quite exciting what you are talking about. I think you are well aware of the changes in CDEP coming as well from July and you might make a comment about that a little later. The way I take it is that health, education, other services, you regard as separate as to what you are calling municipal.

**Mr Kris**—Yes.

**Mr Sagaukaz**—Yes.

**Mr See Kee**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—The other part of it is that, when you start to separate out in the actual allocation of resources now and depending on your review et cetera, and accepting the point about duplication and how you see your future, the issue arises of when they become enterprises and are financed in a way which becomes sustaining enterprises which then contribute to the community in a different way to the way CDEP does. Where are we at in that equation in terms of, for example, IBA, picking up some of the issues in partnership with the enterprises that may come out of the discussion, which of course is the basis of your employment. I am going to invite either Mrs Vale or Annette Ellis to ask questions.

**Mrs VALE**—Thank you very much for coming today, Toshie, Jesse and Wayne. Wayne, you were talking about your changing demography. What is the make-up of your demographics here? We all have an ageing population. Do you have the same thing as what we do on the mainland, and how many children would you have under the age of 20?

**Mr See Kee**—Can I take that on notice and get that for you so I can provide you with the proper stats for the area?

**Mrs VALE**—Yes.

**Mr See Kee**—Just from discussions and anecdotal discussions with other agencies—

**Mrs VALE**—I know you were talking earlier about appropriate data collection, so that might be something you will be looking at at the time.

**Mr See Kee**—Indications are coming back that the population up here is getting younger rather than older. So I suppose some of the issues that we are looking at that we do not have any direct effect over, that falls back on to the TSRA to some extent, are the issues of health.

**Mrs VALE**—So you have a very good fertility rate in paradise; is that what you are telling me?

**Mr See Kee**—It is the water!

**Mrs VALE**—That will actually pose certain challenges for you in the future, won't it?

**Mr See Kee**—Exactly.

**Mrs VALE**—In your development control plan, I have just had a quick look at it, I didn't see specifically devoted to tourism. There is your business development, and I suppose that would actually come under that particular heading. I was only saying to the previous guest here that this place, to me, does seem like paradise. Maybe you have lived in paradise all your life and you are not quite sure what you have got here, but it is very beautiful. I understand too that you are not usually ravaged by cyclones like some other parts of the world that we call paradise. So you have got relatively stable weather conditions. You have also got a very politically stable environment which is always very attractive for any infrastructure investment by overseas corporations. When you consider the dangers, the apprehensions surrounding Bali, this would be a wonderful place to re-establish a new Bali. The beautiful area that you have here would provide significant employment opportunities for your young people especially, in hospitality,

tourism and all the spin-offs that you actually get from that. You would probably want to have some kind of committee just looking at this and you would probably need about two people. Has anyone thought about making any overtures from the authority or through government for any of the big tourist international hotel chains to ask them to come and investigate this area? It would have to be culturally appropriate, of course, but it seems that that would generate so much other economic activity. We have spoken earlier today, Toshie, about education and the difficulties of encouraging young people to stay at school and to actually even learn up to year 7, but if there are no jobs at the end of it, there is nothing more deflating or making education more meaningless than not to have a job at the end of it. That sort of activity would actually create that desire to be better educated to take up those opportunities.

I am just going through some of your attributes off the top of my head. Apart from the fact it is paradise, it is a very safe area unless you have got crocodiles or giant squid out there of which I am unaware. But you do have some interesting local industries. You do have sport fishing here, don't you, and you do have pearling, which is again a unique attraction in itself, especially if a facility could be set up to show tourists how it works. I also understand you actually have visiting cruise ships that come here from time to time which probably could be better coordinated than what they are at the moment, which is not your responsibility but it is just actually getting the people together who could do that. I am even told that you have a market once a month. That would be great if that could be organised at a time when the cruise ships come so your local cottage craft could have the best exposure. I was just wondering if there is anything you think we can do to actually help with that. I am really dobbing the committee in, but we could be able to negotiate some conversations with people that have that kind of wherewithal. This is a very beautiful place and you have so many natural attributes that would lend themselves to that kind appropriate tourism for your area.

**Mr Kris**—As you sighted in your document, we very, very broadly touched on tourism a bit in the development plan. What we have done after the completion of the development plan was build partnership with organisations outside of our region to come up with the Torres Strait tourism strategy plan, which is coming close to its end. We will actually have a document on where we see ourselves in that particular area of tourism. Tourism is already in our area at a very small scale. There are a couple of communities who are benefiting out of that particular sector. As mentioned, and perhaps Jesse and Wayne will talk about it later on, we have actually taken on IBA, which is coming on board, and Tourism Queensland and Tourism Australia to work closely with us to develop that particular plan for our region so that we do have a way forward when we venture into that particular area.

**Mrs VALE**—It seems to be something that a lot other countries in the world are latching on to. Tourism provides 66 per cent of the GDP of Egypt alone. You have different attributes, of course, but attributes in this area which are just exquisite, are quite spectacular. In New Zealand the significant amount of the GDP besides the sheep is actually tourism. It is just a matter of getting the right people together. You are doing a strategy for tourism.

**Mr Kris**—A strategy plan.

**Mrs VALE**—That is great, because that just might engineer other spin-offs that will actually relate to your education and training opportunities, especially in hospitality. Then your young people might be able to have some sort of a reciprocal arrangement with mainland hotels and

they actually really upskill in a very sophisticated manner. The only other thing I want to ask you is whether you actually had one message—or how many you would like—that you would like us to take back to the federal government. Do you have something that you would like us to articulate? Where do you start, eh?

**Mr Kris**—Exactly, where do we start?

**Mr See Kee**—Just on the tourism and just to also give you an idea what has happened since that development plan, what we have done is we have actually created a position in-house that specifically looks at tourism development, driving it, and since then what we have done is we have engaged with Tourism Queensland and Tourism Australia. With Tourism Queensland we have put together a strategy that the chair was speaking about that also latches on to Cape York area; they have a separate plan as well. What has happened out of that is we have been meeting with Queensland Tourism and there is a whole set of recommendations on which we are working with other stakeholders in the region to start to implement. The other thing is from that we have begun negotiations or a partnership with Indigenous Business Australia to establish an economic development plan for the region or a study to give us an idea of what the key industry areas that we need to target are and to give us some idea of framing a proposal we can take to government to say, ‘This is what we see as a strategic area. This is how we can go about doing it. This is how much it is going to cost.’

**Mrs VALE**—That request to government, in a way, if I can say, is a strategy in itself, isn’t it?

**Mr See Kee**—Exactly.

**Mrs VALE**—If you are going to have an opportunity to go to government, you have really got to be focused on what you want. All that data collection and all that information will give you some armoury. I understand.

**Mr See Kee**—IBA have said to us, ‘We would like to come up here and work with TSRA and invest in the region as well, but before that happens we need to have a strategic outlook on how we are going to do it and how we go about getting the necessary funds to kick-start a lot of this stuff.’ That is one of the partnerships we are working in with, with the IBA. I suppose the other thing that is happening up here is that linking into this is the small business side. It is great that we are coming on board as government and facilitating and tourism is starting to happen here, but at the end of the day there has got to be small business driving it in the community, not just on Thursday Island but I suppose on the other islands as well. One of the things that we will be looking at as we start to implement this strategy is making sure that we have got a strong, I suppose, growing business community in the region.

**Mrs VALE**—It is a bit of a chicken and the egg. It really is. You need that kick start somewhere, and if a partner like an international hotel chain could do it for you, great. It might be a government support or initiative; it is just a matter of getting that kick start.

**Mr See Kee**—The other thing we are looking at and I suppose it is critical is having that consultation process with each community, because some will say yes and some may say they are not ready for it.

**Mrs VALE**—It has to be a partnership at all levels.

**Mr See Kee**—Exactly. That is where we are heading with the tourism development at the moment. Torres Shire Council, who is the shire council in here, also comes on board and works with the TSRA and all the other councils. I suppose the main aim and one of the things we have picked up from Queensland Tourism is that we really have to have a think about what the regional product is going to be. What are the experiences that you can get when you come to the Torres Strait and how do we build that?

**Mrs VALE**—Sailing for a start. What is your bird life like? Your animal life here is just amazing. Also the fact that you are already on the loop for those international tourist liners that come here. Are they international or do they come up from the Queensland coast? Are they based in Brisbane or Cairns, or where do they come from?

**Mr See Kee**—There are a number of them. Some of them are coming from Cairns, some are from Brisbane. Since the Bali bombings we have seen an increase every year of ships coming through here and so what we are looking at and we are talking to the shire about now as well as the other communities is how do we capitalise on that, because they are going to continue to come here.

**Mrs VALE**—What are your harbour facilities like? That is another thing: individual yachties coming up and having a safe haven and having good facilities when they get here.

**Mr See Kee**—Exactly.

**Mrs VALE**—So your harbour facilities—I do not know what they are like. We came in on the ferry and I am not sure if that was your harbour, but I am told that here on Thursday Island this was the original harbour for industry or for whatever happened 200 years ago. Is that right?

**Mr See Kee**—You have got the two wharfs; you have got the wharf on Horn Island, the airport is based on Horn Island. So that is what we have got here in terms of infrastructure. I suppose there are some impediments, and this is something we are going to have a really serious think about and talk to government about when we start to develop the regional product and start to market the region. One of the biggest things that we are going to have to compete against, especially with other destinations that may offer similar experience, is actual cost to get here and the actual cost that it takes to operate up here, only because of where we are and how expensive it is to get things like petrol and to freight things up here.

**Mrs VALE**—That is true and you cannot just rely on the boats that are coming. But if boats are coming and they are coming in increasing numbers, you have already got a market coming. You have got the nucleus there, and they are coming anyway because they do want to have alternate places to take their passengers. You are on the right track. Good on you. Thank you very much.

**Mr Sagaukaz**—TSRA is also working together with the ICC, that is the mainland component, as mentioned by our chair among various other organisations that we work with. At this point in time, in the cluster of the northern peninsula area which is on the mainland, we have the Aboriginal component and we have the islander component. The ICC was working with the

TSRA to deliver the economic development strategy and rolling out the tourism strategy, looking at environmental impacts in what sort of tourism we are looking at, and also tapping into the education sector in regards to training and stuff, like the catering services and all that. But the other important factor that TSRA has assisted in is the cultural centre. That can be an outpost but also marketing the cape—we tend to say the tip of Australia, but Torres Strait is different.

**Mrs VALE**—A big waiting room for Torres Strait.

**Mr Sagaukaz**—There is a big tourism and economic drive with the two Commonwealth peak bodies of ICC and the TSRA working in conjunction with the IBA in trying to roll out this whole strategy. IBA is working up on the cape but has actually concentrated in fast-tracking the northern peninsula area sector. So, yes, there has been work done, but carefully considering of course the environmental impacts and what type of tourism we need, because we are getting truck loads and bus loads of tourists coming to the cape. Also in that there are the restrictions that the wild river scheme of the federal government stops us developing certain areas of the tip or of Cape York. So there are various factors that can impact on our strategies and these are all being addressed in due process.

**Mrs VALE**—Thank you.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I have a few quick questions. Ailan Kastom bilong Torres Strait. What does that mean? What are those words?

**Mr Kris**—They are customs or culture, how we practise the culture. Bilong means ours, belongs to us.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I just saw those words and I wanted you to put on record what they stood for. I think it is important. In the paper that you have given us today, you employ 74 people; 63 per cent of whom are Indigenous origin and 62.5 per cent who are women—and I have to say I am impressed with that last figure. What is the sort of work that they do that attracts that high percentage of female employees? Is there a specific reason for that or is it just that they are good at doing everything like fellows?

**Mr See Kee**—Probably doing everything. Not too sure, but the types of work that we have got in the TSRA, as you can imagine, vary because of the scope of portfolios that we are involved in. So we have got a mixture of people who are involved in just straightforward administration. We have got project officers working with NHT going out there facilitating environmental outcomes. We have also got lawyers and legal people on board running our native title office and as well as that we operate the cultural centre. So there is a big mix.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—That leads me to my next question: of the 64 staff members, where are they distributed? Are they right throughout the whole of the 18 communities or are they all on TI?

**Mr See Kee**—All the staff members are on Thursday Island.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Do some of them travel out to the communities?



**Mr Kris**—Providing services.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—We had Brian Norris here earlier on from employment and he talked about 22 communities and you have got 18. This doesn't really matter one way or the other, I just want to get an understanding. Are you both servicing the same area?

**Mr Kris**—Yes.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Good.

**Mr Kris**—We also have three ladies on the board. The numbers have increased since the beginning of TSRA and also, just in local councils alone, the numbers of female that have entered into politics have risen in the last couple of elections.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—So the board are elected positions?

**Mr See Kee**—Yes.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I am really interested in the tertiary education scholarship and the national Indigenous cadetships. I noticed in the stuff you have given us today we have got this pamphlet about this as well. This is not a criticism, this is just an honest question on how you balance this. On the pamphlet you say, correctly so, part of the eligibility wish list is that they have an intention to return to work at the Torres Strait if at all possible. In the paper you have given us today you have obviously had some terrific success with that tertiary scholarship, but it also mentions that a number of the successful students who have accessed that scholarship program do now live on the mainland and take opportunities there which you cannot for one moment deny. What sort of task do you have to try and, on the one hand, promote and assist the access to that tertiary level and, on the other hand, hope that they, in the majority maybe, come back here and invest back into their own community given their education level? It must be a difficult one.

**Mr Sagaukaz**—Maybe that question can be answered by any parent. Who is to know if your child is to come back and help you in the end?

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Absolutely, Jesse. But that is a question, though, isn't it?

**Mr Sagaukaz**—The thing is how are you going to deny the people the right to go and seek where the job opportunities are. We are trying to fight with whatever small employment opportunities we have up here, but the market out there is greater and much prettier at times. So these are the things we are looking at. But if you create a position or some positions in the Torres Strait, well, that might assist. Maybe that is where the Commonwealth's dollars can come.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Also does it not give you the enormous impetuous you obviously have to promote development in this region for a lot of reasons, including that, so that there is in fact an opportunity for them to come back? It comes hand in glove, doesn't it?

**Mr Kris**—Yes, that is why we have introduced the cadetship so when they do come back, we give them the opportunity to be working under our structure so that they get the—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I noticed that; the NIC is in fact offering employment within the TSRA when they come back.

**Mr See Kee**—Just to backtrack a little bit, when the assistance with tertiary education scheme was created by the board a few years ago, that stemmed from a lot of students based in the area needing some assistance to keep them going down there. The original intention was that we do that but it would be focused on professional areas where they would have an opportunity to come back here. What we have found though is that over the last three years or so, because we are supporting them for a year, sometimes they do not apply back again and they stand up on their own two feet and they continue on. We have got three that have gone through so far. So that same question came back to the board and I suppose when you talk about balancing acts, that is where we have got a balancing act now. We have got three places or the equivalent of three dollar places for the scholarships but we have moved towards the national cadetship because I think the board has given direction to us and the administration that we want to try and build a pathway for some people, even if it is two people to start off with. We can support them through their studies but then they come back and do their placements here on holidays, and that gives us at least two or three years while they are doing their undergraduate degree or postgraduate to work out how we can create a position up here. At the end of the day, going to the end part of your question, the availability of jobs up here is going to determine who comes back, and accommodation.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—From my perspective I could only commend you for having constructed and continued with both of those programs, because the reality is that at some point, maybe not necessarily at the end of their study but at some point, why wouldn't they come back? As the area develops, all the more opportunities for them to return at some point into their future will occur anyway. So I just think that they are two fantastic programs that I wanted to talk about on record here and to commend you for it but to also understand the difficulties that trying to run them presents.

The other quick question that I have got is about your business funding scheme. Again, it is a good proactive thing to be doing. There are 35 loans out there at the moment. Would it be reasonable to assume that where you have got them sitting is probably where the most interest or potential lies for economic development here? Commercial fishing, for instance: there is 18 loans out on that, over half of the system, so I would assume that that is where the community sees the most potential, followed by transport and then retail and tourism. Is that basically where you see the opportunities sitting? Is that reflected somehow?

**Mr Kris**—It is quite broad but exactly what you said. What we have taken into consideration, though, also is that we have brought on a secondee from the National Australia Bank who actually works with us to help build a partnership with TSRA and state development into rolling out some of these loans to people in small businesses so that we do create that opportunity for people on the ground.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What would be the approximate length of time for those loans, the average? How long is a loan out there for: forever, or for five years?

**Mr See Kee**—With the commercial fishing loans, most of them run for about three, four, five years.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—And then are most of them successful in going off in continuation?

**Mr See Kee**—Yes, that is correct.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What would be your measure of success with business loans?

**Mr See Kee**—The number of businesses continuing on afterwards.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Yes; what is the percentage?

**Mr See Kee**—That is something we are working on at the moment. What is actually happening here is that we are going through a bit of a reform process with our economic development program as well. Up till now basically we have run two loan programs and a CEIS, which is a grant scheme that assists with enterprise development. What has happened is we have wholly and solely been focusing on loan management. We are at a point now where the board has come back to the administration and said, 'Let's have a look now at not just loan management, let's have a look at business development and what that involves.' So they are the sorts of things that we have got to build a framework on how we progress business development up here. This is where IBA, National Australia Bank, state development are all coming on board to assist us, and one of the things that the board is going to probably contemplate at their June meeting is which direction they want to go in now. Do we want to be the financiers, like we are, or how do we get more of a focus on business development happening, for example, getting the support mechanism after care for when they have started the business and pre-application type development with people who want to get into business. So hopefully in about six months time I will be able to answer your question properly, because we are trying to build those indicators at the moment.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Again I just have to commend the fact that you are doing this and actually developing the program and then saying, 'Okay, now we need to revisit this and just see which direction we should now take it in.' I would assume that training programs for the community out there would probably be reflective of where the emphasis in those industries is as well so that there say continuum there beginning to occur that you can see very strongly.

**Mr See Kee**—This is where also the study I mentioned earlier that we have gone into partnership with IBA to do is going to be critical. That will help to identify what are the industries that have got the most going for them or the most potential up here. When you think about it, that is where we can assist people walking through the door who want to get involved in industry to be a bit more strategic, I suppose, in where they start to build those businesses as opposed to trying to do something that may not be sustainable.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Exactly. And my last question, very quickly, the James Cook University campus here, doing I think you say courses only in nursing and education here, how long have they been in place and how are they succeeding? Do you need to get back to us on that? I am just wondering how well they are going and what the level of interest is in them.

**Mr Sagaukaz**—There has been an increase in the interest, especially on the nursing, but apart from that there also was the problem with the accommodation being a threat, not only for the housing of JCU but also for the students as well. So I think they have gone past that pathway.

There has been, as I said, an increased interest by nursing students out in the outer islands. So, yes, but the hindering factors are the accommodation to cater for those who are interested in taking on—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—In coming on to TI to do it from the outer regions.

**Mr Sagaukaz**—Absolutely.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—But is that improving?

**Mr Sagaukaz**—The interest has improved but unfortunately I can't give you the answer if it is outer islands or it is the Cape with those sort of studies that you can do in the community, not a full-time student.

**Mr See Kee**—Can we take that on notice. What we will do is we will talk to JCU and get some figures for you if that is what you want.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It would be really interesting for us just to see how JCU is viewing it and, if there are impediments in the success of the two, is it just accommodation—learning and living accommodation—or are there other factors. We have already touched on it before: one of the things is to get people trained in areas that you need, that are areas of interest to them as well, and then to have them here usefully. Nothing would be better than education in health in terms of those outer regions. So it would be really nice to know to what extent it is succeeding.

**Mr Sagaukaz**—Besides the JCU, there are also other initiatives that the islander communities are operating on the side also. There is the independent Torres Strait voice which is known as TSIREC, which represents the Torres Strait. They actually talk and negotiate directly with the Department of Education on some of the ways forward. So that is another party that does push the education benchmarking and education performance indicators that are happening within the region. So, besides the tertiary and the post tertiary stats that also need to be developed for the TSRA to actually look at what is happening, that still is being worked on in conjunction with the same body or the voice of the education in the strait.

**CHAIR**—Can I just follow up on the discussion about the business funding scheme and then go to the MIP, the infrastructure program. I see the 20 per cent factor there in terms of Indigenous involvement for Torres Strait—20 per cent minimum Indigenous employment level on the IEP.

**Mr Kris**—You were talking about that one point, if we ever wanted to ask you to bring that one point back. We have so many issues but I think personally that the one point for us would be the funding for the continuation of the MIP program, the major infrastructure program that the chair was talking about then. The partnership that has been built through that particular program between state, Commonwealth and TSRA has seen a huge increase in the living standard of people throughout our region.

In my community alone in St Pauls, we did not have electricity until 1991, that you would actually have the opportunity to turn a switch on or turn a fan on. Through that particular program we have rolled out these services or these infrastructures on the ground such as water

reticulations, and some of the other communities are now starting to get sewerage. We will be writing a letter to the Commonwealth government seeking assistance again to roll out the continuation of the MIP program for the next umpteen years, I suppose. It is a big success story of partnership between state and Commonwealth on how you can deliver programs in remote areas and not duplicate the services. I guess when we look back at the Cape and what is happening in the Cape, it is what happened in the Torres Strait before we had this partnership established or the TSRA was established. The ICC, the Indigenous Coordinating Council, are now trying to build that partnership with the state agencies, but throughout our region it has worked for so long that it is a huge success story for us and there is still a long way for us to continue delivering this program. What we have also done to help progress the MIP or roll out the program was that we developed what we called the HEMTP program, the heavy equipment program. We have identified the fact that little communities around our area were not in a state to have major or huge machinery or plant, in particular communities where they would be collecting more rust than operating. So what we have done is, again through the partnership with state and Island Coordinating Council, ICC (TI), and TSRA, we have developed this program where we put funding together with Queensland transport that you have a group of machinery that we call the HEMTP program and it delivers all these major projects throughout this community and also delivers hands-on training to community members. When we look at the MIP program, the cost of living up here is so high, the HEMTP program actually plays a huge role in cutting some of the costs when we are looking at putting infrastructure down on the ground, so it is just a huge success story for us. If there was one point that I would drive home is if the committee could go back to the government and say, 'We will have a look at the submission that TSRA is submitting and really take a good close look at it and some of the services and the delivery it has also already put out on the ground,' and that there still is a long way for us to go to achieve that better quality of life for our people on the ground.

**Mrs VALE**—Have you put that in a submission yourself to the government, to continue that program? It obviously is one that does appear to be working very well for the people. You have put that in as a request in your—

**Mr See Kee**—It has gone through as a new policy proposal, yes.

**Mrs VALE**—Great. The other question I wanted to ask you is, are you an authority inasmuch as you issue licences for different business activities around, like the pearling industry or the fishing? You do not do that.

**Mr See Kee**—No, we do not have any regulatory type powers. Basically what we do is deliver Indigenous specific programs in a whole range of different areas.

**Mrs VALE**—So there are other authorities that do that sort of thing. I was just wondering about licences being issued for the pearling or for the fishing and whether there should be a requirement to employ so many local people as part of the condition of that licence grant. Would that be worthwhile exploring?

**Mr Kris**—Part of the agreement with the PZJA, the Protection Zone Joint Authority, where Minister Abetz actually is the chair and myself and Tim Mulherin from the state, when we are looking at putting out those non-Indigenous fisher boats in our community, there say special clause that we put there that a master fisherman has to be TIB, traditionally inhabited boat. The

master fisherman has to be on that particular boat before they go into certain areas to look at their catch. We have been working closely, we have tied that up in partnership with ITEC and also CDP communities where CDP participate with those particular licence and have that opportunity to go into that particular industry.

**Mrs VALE**—Thanks, Toshie.

**Mr See Kee**—Just adding to what the chair has mentioned there, with the major infrastructure program, what happens is we have got TSRA on behalf of the Commonwealth as a partner at the table and the department of local government, sports and recreation representing the state. What happens there is with the state government departments they have got what they call an Indigenous employment quota, IEP, Indigenous Employment Policy, where they identify 20 per cent of participation in these programs needs to be Indigenous. So it is a set number that they have imposed on the program that we have to abide by as well. There is a review process within the state at the moment and they are involving TSRA as part of that process but they are having a look at a more practical way, when you set that number, of going about getting it and making the reporting happen so actually meeting the milestones and implementing things.

**Mrs VALE**—And of course there is also a time lag in that sort of imposition. But, having said that, you have got to start somewhere and it really will show dividends in the end.

**CHAIR**—What was that question?

**Mrs VALE**—It was the ability of an authority to actually impose conditions on licences. Wayne actually explained how the Torres Strait island authority is not that kind of licensing authority but others are and they are working in partnership to actually look at that.

**Mr See Kee**—In the major infrastructure program, for example, there is the IEP 20 per cent that the state has, so one of the conditions that the state puts on the program is that with all the projects there needs to be that 20 per cent quota reached. We go along with that because that is meeting the training outcomes that we want.

**Mrs VALE**—That is the employment of 20 per cent of Indigenous people. Is there any training component requirement too from the licence holder?

**Mr See Kee**—Yes, there is.

**Mrs VALE**—There is a training requirement?

**Mr See Kee**—Yes, through the HEMTP and also through the major infrastructure program, yes.

**CHAIR**—Mrs Vale has certainly investigated a lot of the stuff that I wanted to—

**Mrs VALE**—Sorry.

**CHAIR**—No, that is fine, that is what we are here to do. What I wanted to do is just revisit MIP, the major infrastructure program, and just look at those amounts of money, 2004-05, 2007-

08, you have got three and you have got \$93 million there. Fifty-fifty Australian and Queensland governments, so I presume that has been maintained, going out to 2008 and then going to the HEMTP program, which jointly contributed \$1.5 million a year. Do you agree, that is what the heavy equipment management training program, HEMTP, 1.5 million. And you have detailed on page 11 the various projects. There is a great range of projects there and the hours, I think, the amounts of employment that have gone in. So what I have been busy doing is catching up as fast as I can the information that has been presented to us immediately today. So forgive me if we are just a little slow on the uptake. I want to go back to the 20 per cent minimum Indigenous employment level required by IEP, the Indigenous employment policy. That is the Queensland Indigenous employment policy. I need to ask three or four questions. Is that a state-wide policy? It is just not Torres Strait.

**Mr See Kee**—It is not Torres Strait, it is state-wide.

**CHAIR**—We ran into it yesterday at Cairns but in a slightly different form and members will recall that we ran into this 20 per cent; in fact they were achieving 70 per cent on this particular industry. So it is something some of us in the committee are wrestling with: compulsion, a quota system, which this is. I am particularly interested in your views on it. Then I have got the next question. As the Torres Strait authority, you would have some say in terms of your own policy. Have you discussed it very much, Toshie? Perhaps it is not relevant because you have got 80 or 90 per cent of the people that you are dealing with anyway, but you probably employ a lot of outside contractors. So what discussion has occurred about an Indigenous employment policy with this sort of quota? Do you want to just touch on that from your own perspective, not just Queensland but from the Torres Strait perspective.

**Mr Kris**—From our perspective I have certainly seen the percentages go up from 5 to 10 to now 20.

**CHAIR**—Yes, well, that is what has happened.

**Mr Kris**—That is what has happened. We have actually pushed hard to get it out from the single figure digit to at least to 20. I think we basically argued for 25 per cent but then we compromised at 20. There certainly is, I think, a need for an increase in the future, especially if we are going to achieve getting MIP again and then to start rolling that out throughout our communities.

**CHAIR**—Though that was a pretty strong discussion.

**Mr Kris**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—So why was it resisted? What was some of the reasons that people struggled to accept?

**Mr Kris**—Prior to the beginning of TSRA or actually the roll-out of MIP, the whole region was basically having contractors everywhere and it was through the agreement with TSRA. Also there was a lack of skills and the skillsmanship out there. Through the CTP program that TSRA now rolls out and in partnership with DET—I forgot what the acronym is, it used to be—

**CHAIR**—There are so many of them.

**Mr Kris**—Yes, DETA, when we look at upskilling community members that is when we started arguing to say that we now have skilled people on the ground that could actually be accountable in that percentage and then that pushed it up to 20 per cent. So historically it was based on skills, that there were not enough skills in the local communities to be part of that construction team. That was 15 to 20 years ago, whereas now we could actually employ up to 25 per cent of skilled people that we have rolled out through the community and again using those programs through TSRA such as community training program to upskill Indigenous people to meet those specific needs.

**CHAIR**—This seems to be a really important question. We have dabbled a little bit and discussed it a little bit in Western Australia in terms of, for example, access to mining leases and ability to have a go with a mining company. I will go way back where we started, CDEP, your review and what you might get from that review and then what we might call the creation of fair dinkum jobs with all that that means. The real issue was that the response when you were pushing for a higher quota was, ‘You don’t have the skilled people, therefore we can’t do the job effectively.’ The next question is, in terms of those contracts when you let them, was it seen that you were going to be ending up paying more when the contracts were let? Was it seen that there was any penalty there or were you able to be competitive in those contracts in a financial sense?

**Mr See Kee**—You mean to maintain the quota?

**CHAIR**—Yes. Sorry to press you on it. I need to explain myself. Ever since I have been in the parliament, one of my greatest frustrations was seeing all of these contracts going into Indigenous communities all over Australia with just about zero Indigenous involvement—it varied—when I knew that before I was on the scene, back say 30 years ago, there was significant involvement. So I am just curious—well, more than curious, I need to know so that we can recommend to the government what the reality of this sort of program is and what the debates are and why we haven’t done better in the percentages.

**Mr Kris**—I guess in our region you could upskill your people to a certain degree where they are qualified to do a job but the cost of living in our area is so high that anyone who put in a tender for a contract your quota will always be very restricted because of the cost of building up here. Four years ago we could build one four-bedroom house for \$275,000. This year, we would build it for \$475,000. The cost has shifted so much. Although you upskill your people, you still lose the skill because of your cost shift. Freight is our biggest killer. You are buying fuel for \$1.64 at the station at the back. My community is one of the nearest islands to Thursday Island and we are paying \$2.10 a litre. So again, you really can’t even the balance of scales.

**Mr See Kee**—Just with the letting out of contracts and measuring and reporting against that quota, we have only recently become involved in the state discussion and getting our heads around it. That is one of the things we found in the last three years. Up till then we have been concentrating wholly and solely on TSRA core business programs. Now that we have ventured into the area of whole of government partnerships, there is a whole range of policy areas that we need to get our head around to be effective in engaging with the state and Commonwealth departments. I suppose that that is an area that the board has have a pretty robust discussion on, on what sort of percentage do you want and how do you get it and how do you report against it.



From the initial meetings that I have attended with the IEP steering group, some of the things that they have come across as issues are actually getting the reporting done and back: do you make it compulsory or do you have penalties for people if they do not report back?

**CHAIR**—Yes, all those things.

**Mr See Kee**—And we have found with MIP, based on the size of projects, where they are, the timing, there are some projects that are going to be under target and there are some projects that are going to be over. So what we have said—and the state has come back to us as well and they have agreed—is that for the program as a whole we need to make sure that we do not go under that 20 per cent but we aim to go over in a general sense.

**CHAIR**—You spread it.

**Mr See Kee**—You spread it but at a specific project level there are going to be variations. For example, you might have a project that might only require a couple of people and it is quite specialised and you just can't get the skill here.

**CHAIR**—For me it is exceptionally valuable. We are charged with the responsibility of making these recommendations and we really have to keep those practical things in mind so that we get the outcome we are looking for.

**Mr See Kee**—From a purist sense, one of the ways you could address that—and I do not know how you would go about doing this across the board—but one thing that we are seeing up here now, not with the major infrastructure program but in other construction areas, is that some of the other councils now have got a work gang or a construction crew that can actually put in tender for jobs and they are winning them, and so there you have got a higher percentage of participation and meeting these sort of targets. So if you think about it, if you develop Indigenous groups or councils or community entities with the skilled people there and they can actually tender for some of the stuff in the remote areas, that might be the way around it. That is what we are seeing in various sort of stages in the Torres Strait at the moment. There are councils with that ability to tender and win those sort of jobs. That could be one way of doing it as a national level: start small.

**CHAIR**—I need to understand two or three more things. The major infrastructure program is Australia and Queensland. Torres Strait represents the Commonwealth in these negotiations.

**Mr See Kee**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—So obviously your people are promoting it at least as strongly or more strongly than the Queensland government. You are an advocate for and effectively act for the Commonwealth government; you are the Commonwealth government here. You have already put this in place and you would debate this, whether it is 5 per cent or 20 per cent; that sort of debate occurred. Then you go to the fact that you might spread it across the whole lot. This may be beyond where you want to go at the moment, but linking to your municipal services where you might go with your review, clearly that implies significant contract issues. It is probably going too far at the moment, just getting a bit ahead of ourselves, but just looking at the 400-odd people that you mentioned, you would expect all of them, 90 per cent of them, to be Indigenous.

**Mr See Kee**—That is correct.

**CHAIR**—Just about all of them.

**Mr See Kee**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Housing policy, just a quick one on that. The ownership program, I think it was 30 houses for \$3.6 million. You had some interesting points to make about the lease program. Can you talk about private ownership, just how you see that and where that is at? I presume these are all under the private ownership, that type of thing. Can we just talk about that?

**Mr See Kee**—To give you an idea of how the home ownership program works here, at this point in time it is basically restricted to Thursday Island and the inner islands because how it works is just a standard mortgage type arrangement and we take security over the block, so it really cannot operate outside of freehold areas. But the chair might want to talk more about where they want that to head.

**Mr Kris**—That is the whole point. There are 17 communities that sit outside on DOGIT and therefore we need to look at land tenure. What we actually do is just keep a close eye on what is happening in the Northern Territory with those leases that the minister is talking about and see if and how we could apply it in our region when you look at home ownership or create opportunities for community members living outside of Thursday Island on DOGIT lands.

**CHAIR**—Have you got any thoughts on it?

**Mr Kris**—We have a few but it is still up in the air.

**CHAIR**—As I said, I went to Pitjantjatjara and there is no real market and it is native or freehold title. A lot of those are state matters and the leasehold issues and so you have got to work your way through all of that stuff, and without a housing market, how do you create it? We are told that it can be done, in fact yesterday we were working out how it can be done, but we have still got a little way to go, I have a little way to go, in understanding it. My last question is that somewhere back there we mentioned the federal government was stopping development on the cape; there was just some issue there. Do you remember where that issue about—can we just develop that a little bit?

**Mr Sagaukaz**—That was just a state problem. What Peter Beattie tried to do was put a blanket cover over the cape and to stop development by putting that wild river scheme in. Now, on one end we are trying to develop and create employment, look at small business opportunities over farming and all that stuff, but with that policy it actually stops us dead in our tracks. We cannot actually do any farming and stuff like that, those little fish farms and stuff like that, because of the environmental impact that they think might happen. So that is all stopping the progress of the small businesses. We are talking about tourism but tourism cannot be the only industry. There are other avenues, but they have frozen that process for now. On one hand we want to try and move our people forward, on the other hand we are playing an assumption and second-guessing game with what the state is trying to do. So that is the hindrance.

**CHAIR**—No doubt you mentioned it to your federal member. You mentioned it to Mr Entsch, no doubt.

**Mr Sagaukaz**—No, we have not mentioned it to any of the federal members. We are trying to negotiate and make sense out of Beattie instead of listening to—anyway, I will not say that; that is a political statement.

**CHAIR**—No, but I think it was just useful to understand. You make a very good point: on the one hand we say this, on the other one we do that, which is not uncommon in government, as you probably know. But we need to understand why at the very least.

**Mr Kris**—The difference with the cape communities is that you have two islander communities that sit on a DOGIT and the other three where one is the traditional owner for the whole region.

**CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Mrs VALE**—Jesse, you mentioned farming. Is there any farming activity here on the islands? I know you were referring to the mainland, weren't you, and the cape, but is there any farming activity? Do you provide your own fruit and vegetables or eggs or duck eggs or things like that? Toshie, you were saying about the cost of living: does it all come in? Do you bring it all in?

**Mr Kris**—We have a couple of communities who are now trialling hydroponics through the CDEP programs. Part of the bigger picture is that we were looking at how you provide that particular market to the particular region. I guess that is where Jesse is coming from, that to toil that particular land, to provide that service, there is a lot of negotiating with state and there are a lot of hurdles that you have to jump.

**Mrs VALE**—Is that here on the islands too or is it just on the mainland?

**Mr Kris**—On the mainland, yes. Because of the land mass we were looking towards Jesse's community, there is a lot of negotiating. But people are still doing traditional gardening on those islands where you have the vegetables or the root vegetables that actually provide their fresh vegies. Apart from that, everything is shipped in.

**Mrs VALE**—Have any of your CDEP programs ever looked at growing orchids for the tourist market in Cairns.

**Mr Kris**—No, we are all into community gardening at the moment.

**Mrs VALE**—It is just that you have an aircraft that comes here twice a day, two or three times a day.

**Mr Kris**—You would not believe the quarantine zone in our area.

**Mrs VALE**—Quarantine, is it?

**Mr Kris**—Yes. You cannot bring a plant from the outer islands to TI but can you do it vice versa. So if Jesse wants to send a vegetable to the outer islands, it has to go via TI, past quarantine to get outside.

**Mrs VALE**—Why is that?

**Mr Kris**—We have got numerous number of zones plus the treaty. We also have the treaty that applies a quarantine.

**Mrs VALE**—Oh dear. So when you even come up with a good idea you have got all these extra hurdles that you have got to overcome.

**Mr See Kee**—The Torres Strait, if you have a look at the map, they have actually got what they call a protected zone which is joint Australian and Papua New Guinean jurisdiction. So there are parts in that protected zone that PNG looks after. In terms of quarantine, there is what they call the buffer zone and nothing can come out of that area in the way of meat, fruit and vegies, all that sort of stuff. Then you have got an inner zone, which is Thursday Island and this area, and then you have got the mainland buffer zone, which is the cape area.

**Mrs VALE**—So you cannot even export prawns or anything like that, if you had a prawn industry.

**Mr See Kee**—Seafood and all that is fine; it is just all the stuff that comes from the land. For example, if one of the communities out there decided that they were going into maybe commercial level farming of fruit and vegies, they would not be able to bring it into TI, so they are restricted to their community. The other thing that I suppose is a bit of an impediment for farming on those island communities, and I am not too sure about the cape, is things like water supply, because on smaller communities where they are running short of water on a regular basis, if you start going into that type of agriculture there is going to be added strain on their resources for the community to survive.

**Mrs VALE**—So people here on the islands just provide their own vegetables themselves, do they; it is just cottage activity?

**Mr See Kee**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—There is something else I do need to ask you. I was just looking at your development plan and something that is not strictly within our terms of reference but I had heard of it, and it really stands out, is PNG in relation to your health services. To quote your own development plan: 'These institutions are designed to cater for the needs of our own population and they are increasingly overstretched to provide services and programs and goods to PNG citizens.' I think we should put something on the record somewhere here. Would you comment on that, please?

**Mr Kris**—The number of movements south under the treaty has increased from 50,000 to 70,000 in the last calendar year. We have been saying all along to the Australian government that, if there is an opportunity for Torres Strait Islanders to participate in building infrastructure in the western province using the system that we have now for the treaty, we would be obliged to

help the Australian government to deliver that with AusAID. We have a meeting once a year with the PNG government, with the Australian DFAT, to look at issues under the treaty. We have had numerous issues from the treaty from overstayers to current people residing in our community. Also, under the fisheries they take a lot of the turtles and dugong numbers that are also part of the numbers that the Australian authorities perceive that are taken by the Torres Strait Islanders. I think the opportunity is there for us to work closely with PNG under the treaty to put up those infrastructures. It is a matter of getting both government and AusAID to come to the table and agree to that particular issue. In one particular case scenario, we have a block plant on our community that could be used to put infrastructure on the ground in the western province because we are part of that treaty movement. The only issue no doubt will be the quarantine movement because of the sand or the soil that you use to make the blocks from. But if you could clear that up there are a lot of issues in the western province that could be helped by utilising workers from our area. Under the current arrangement you do not need a visa, it is just a signed document allowing for a visitation up to seven days. And that could be done in a way that could stop that influx or decrease that influx of visitors travelling back and forth over the border.

We have got 14 communities now under the treaty that are allowed to move within the section and it is only in the last couple of years that another 16 are claiming to be the original communities under the treaty. What we are saying to both governments is that we can take into consideration that some of those communities outside of those 14 are the original communities, but we do not have the infrastructure on the ground to cater for that. When we look at the health cases we have, at certain times in the year when you walk down to that hospital there are more Papua New Guinea ladies in the maternity ward than there are Torres Strait Islanders.

**Mr See Kee**—Just from a broader policy type perspective, I suppose if you want to put something on record, it is not in the terms of reference, as you say, but that is the other 50 per cent of the puzzle that we have not had a chance to talk about here. Having that border there means that, when you are an agency like the TSRA trying to address Indigenous and remote/disadvantage, it makes it very hard, not only for us but other service delivery agencies for both state and Commonwealth up here, to address Indigenous disadvantage when you have got the strain of a third world country actually utilising your facilities and services at the same time. So it is almost like you are trying to take a step forward but you are carrying—

**CHAIR**—An extra load.

**Mr See Kee**—You are carrying a population twice the size of what we have got in the region here as well. I suppose that is probably why one of the things that we say a fair bit when we go to Canberra and Brisbane is, that is why Torres Strait is so unique, because where else in Australia do you have that sort of population interface and pressure coming from a third world and an independent country? From the TSRA perspective, when I talk to secretaries, that is one of the challenges that we have up here. So TSRA and these councils on the ground play an integral role in holding the region together because you need to have that sort of authority on the ground, especially with these councils, to stabilise and deal with managing that border. We have not talked about it much here, but that is one of the reasons why those local government reforms that are happening could, if we are not careful have a very big detrimental effect on the region and enforcing stability up here and managing that border.

**Mr Kris**—Although it is a Commonwealth treaty, we are actually utilising state infrastructure on the ground to cater for these cases such as the health centres, the helicopters, the cost to travel back—

**CHAIR**—What is the secretaries' or the Commonwealth's response to your representations so far? What do they say?

**Mr See Kee**—As the chair has mentioned, every year there is a treaty cycle or a series of meetings that Australia and Papua New Guinea hold to manage the protected zone and we have made this representation at that level. I have raised it a couple of times and our board has raised it with Dr Harmer when he was up here, just that same issue. It goes across the board for Australian and Queensland government services up here—health, the whole lot. Then you have got the whole other issue of enforcing and patrolling that border and you have got those enforcement agencies that operate independent of what we are doing.

**CHAIR**—There is no doubt in your mind that there is additional burden and therefore it is more difficult to get the service applied to your own people.

**Mr See Kee**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I think what we will do, depending on the committee—we will need your approval, but with your approval we might just put that before our relevant authority as a separate issue to our actual inquiry. Does that meet with your approval?

**Mr Kris**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for your hospitality to us. We are in your building, and I am sure my committee and staff have really appreciated this opportunity at this late hour to put the TSI—it is in our committee name—in the frame. It has been a real pleasure; thank you very much.

**Mr See Kee**—Just before the chair offers some comments, Mrs Vale asked earlier about demographics. I have got some information I can give to you. It gives a breakdown of the various age groups and the population percentage for here. You can take that.

**Mrs VALE**—Thank you.

**Mr Kris**—I would just like to say once again thank you for your time here. There is a lot of stuff that we would like to talk about, but time is against us. We are certainly building a relationship with both the Queensland government and in particular the Commonwealth government and looking at some of the issues on the ground. I cannot say enough about how important it is for us to keep providing that service on the ground within our region. I guess we are going through the practice where you get to a certain stage where having the entity or the major body for the region sitting outside just does not work and our scope is always to have what we have now in place and then just build from all the good stuff or all the programs that we roll out and in particular keeping that partnership with both government agencies. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. I think the thing that really came through for me is this quota issue and how we need to wrestle with that. The great value is that you people are doing it; we are only trying to understand it. Your words are very important to us: you try to do it. We need to understand how the discussion went and you have given us great information today. Thank you very much.

**Mr See Kee**—I suppose the best way for us to explain all this to you is to actually take you there so that you can see it and ask for yourselves.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs Vale**, seconded by **Ms Annette Ellis**):

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

**Subcommittee adjourned at 3.16 pm**