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Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
communities**

WEDNESDAY, 29 APRIL 2009

AMATA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING
COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**

Wednesday, 29 April 2009

Members: Mr Marles (*Chair*), Mr Laming (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Abbott, Ms Campbell, Mr Katter, Ms Rea, Mr Kelvin Thomson, Mr Trevor, Mr Turnour and Mrs Vale

Members in attendance: Mr Marles and Mrs Vale

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The operation of local community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with a particular focus on:

- food supply, quality, cost and competition issues;
- the effectiveness of the Outback Stores model, and other private, public and community store models; and
- the impact of these factors on the health and economic outcomes of communities.

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Subcommittee met at 11.10 am

BURTON, Mr Leonard, Member, Amata Community Council

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DUNNETT, Ms Angelina, Acting Municipal Services Officer, Amata Community

GREEN, Mr Warwick, Manager, Amata Community Store

INKAMALA, Mr Lloyd, Member, Amata Community Council, at times through Ms Angelina Dunnett, Pitjantjatjara interpreter

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STUBBS, Ms Brenda, Member, Amata Community Council

TREGENZA, Mr John, Coordinator, Mai Wiru Stores Policy Unit, Nganampa Health Council

TUKIN, Mr Warren, Private capacity

WILSON, Mr Alan , Member, Amata Community Council, at times through Ms Angelina Dunnett, Pitjantjatjara interpreter

CHAIR (Mr Marles)—Alan, would you like to welcome people to the event?

Mr Wilson—I welcome you all to the meeting and it is okay.

CHAIR—Thank you. Lloyd, would you also like to welcome everyone to today's hearing?

Mr Inkamala—Thank you for coming to see about the prices in the store and everything.

CHAIR—I also welcome everyone today to this hearing of a subcommittee of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and our inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. I would like to add to knowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to the elders—past, present and future. The committee would also like to acknowledge the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in this area. The committee members would also like to thank the Amata community for receiving us and allowing us to have this public hearing in your town today.

These are formal proceedings and this is a formal meeting of the Commonwealth parliament. It is important that everything people say is factual and honest. It can be considered a serious matter to attempt to mislead this committee. We invite you to make comments that will help us in our inquiry with the intention of making improvements to the way the government administers remote community stores.

This hearing is open to the public and a transcript of what is said will be placed on the committee's website. If anyone would like further details about the inquiry or the transcripts then please ask the committee staff here at the meeting. At the conclusion of hearing from witnesses today, we will conduct an open forum and we welcome anyone in the audience to have their say about how the store operates in this community. If you would like to make a contribution, could you approach the committee staff sitting here and let them know your name.

I welcome members of the council. We would like to hear from you about how you see the store operating. Could I call on Alan and then Lloyd to make some comments. Alan, do you think the store is running well at the moment?

Mr Wilson—The store is hard. The prices are just too much. People go in with a lot of money, about \$300 or whatever, and they are too scared to get a lot of food because it will go straight over their budget or what they can afford. It is too hard.

CHAIR—Lloyd, do you have any comments about the store and how it is running?

Mr Inkamala—Since Mai Wiru come in, our store has been run better. There is better quality food, but for some reason it just went up; it skyrocketed.

CHAIR—The prices?

Mr Inkamala—Yes.

CHAIR—So you have noticed the difference since the Mai Wiru policy has been put in place?

Mr Inkamala—When we put the Mai Wiru policy in place, we thought the prices in the store would drop down, but they seem to go up.

CHAIR—So it has not made any difference to the prices?

Mr Inkamala—No.

CHAIR—But has it made a difference to the quality of the food?

Mr Inkamala—Yes, the food quality is better than before.

CHAIR—And is it healthier food?

Mr Inkamala—Yes, it is healthier.

CHAIR—Are you happy with the number of products that you can buy? Are there a range of products in there that meet your needs?

Mr Wilson—We bring a lot of money and we go into the store to buy the clothes and blankets and things like that and a bit of food, but the price is a little bit high. It is going up. People are

frightened, you see. So we would like to have the store and garages bring the prices down a bit. It is fuel, diesel and everything.

CHAIR—Brenda, what were you going to say?

Ms Stubbs—I have lived in Amata for nearly 25 years. I worked in the store for 13 years, but now I am working at the family centre with the mums and the little kids. Our aim is to stop failure, to strive and to help kids be healthy, and to get the mums to start wanting to improve the lifestyle in their houses and stuff like that. But you cannot afford stuff in that shop. You go in there to buy spinach, and there about four leaves folded over—\$6.80. A tub of mushrooms, even a small punnet, is \$7.70. A packet of Black and Gold Kimbies is over \$10. Black and Gold is supposed to be cheap enough for everybody to buy. Most people get CDEP here, but it is only \$220 a week. That buys two paper bags full of stuff. That is not going to last a week.

Mr Wilson—People frightened.

Ms Stubbs—Yes. It is terrible. Almost all the things are marked up over 100 per cent. No-one talked to us about raising the prices. They just came in and said: ‘Your shop is going broke. We need to put the prices up.’

Fuel has just risen. We had a council meeting here, and we asked the last lot of managers—when he came over, we said, ‘How come fuel is so dear?’ He was saying, you know, trucking it in and everything. But, I said, we get a government rebate on that. Where does that go? And he could not answer me. He said, ‘I dunno. It doesn’t come into the shop. It goes to Mai Wiru.’ And I said, well, get Mai Wiru in here. But my understanding is—because I used to do the books in the shop—that we get the cheque here and then we send it in for processing. Now, he should know that. But, when we asked him, he did not know. He said he needed to talk to Mai Wiru. I asked him to get Mai Wiru in, so that we could question them in the office where we have council meetings to find out where this money has gone. He left. He did not even chase it up. There is no transparency there.

CHAIR—The store is owned and run by the council, is that right?

Ms Stubbs—The community. We voted last year to be a separate committee from the council, because, that way, we can have representatives from each area in the community here to speak on behalf of the people.

CHAIR—A separate store committee?

Ms Stubbs—Yes. There is a constitution—I think that is what it is called—supposed to be getting set up. It should be just about finished. But we have been waiting since November for that. Anywhere else, you just work at it and get it up and running as soon as possible. But here everything just seems to drag. I do not know if this is right or not—it might be in the old constitution—but store managers can get their food for nothing. Per week they have got a certain amount. I have seen these managers order in blackberries and all that sort of stuff. We do not know how to cook with blackberries. They get that for free; but we have got to pay for it. There is all that sort of stuff. We are paying too much money. Our kids cannot have decent vegetables or anything. Four stalks of celery is \$6.80—just cut up in a little tray. That is stupid—for being

out here. We get our meat from Prime Cut. Prime Cut—over the years they get a question mark against them, because they do not care. We get packs of meat, and—like, with chops—we will get two good chops on top and then we get fat and bone underneath. But we are paying \$10 or over for this packet of chops. Our right is—if you are going to send out stuff to us, for the money we pay we should be getting top quality. Some of the fruit and veg are good. But, for the prices that we pay, we should be eating all organic!

CHAIR—So, right now, the store is still being run by the council or is there now a store committee in place?

Ms Stubbs—It is in limbo.

CHAIR—In transition?

Ms Stubbs—Yes.

CHAIR—The store is owned by the council—am I right in saying that?

Ms Stubbs—The people in the community. There was a set of managers here but, because there was an argument and they poked their nose in it, they kicked all the Anangu out of the shop and swore at them and everything, and locked the shop and kept the shop shut for four days. That was on a payday. People could not access money and they could not access their keycard. What about little kids and that? Because it was payday, you needed to top up on food. They held the whole community for ransom. They had no right to do that. We talked to the chairman to go and get the key off him, because it is our shop, and he said no. How can you do that when we own the shop?

CHAIR—When did that happen?

Ms Stubbs—Near the end of last year.

Mrs VALE—My name is Danna Vale. I am a member of parliament from New South Wales. My area is between Liverpool and the Sutherland region, near the Royal National Park. The Indigenous people from my area are the Dharawal and Gandangara of the Illawarra—just to explain where I come from.

The nutrition available to mothers and babies is very important to this inquiry. Do any mothers have any say about the kind of product they would like to purchase from the store, such as good quality baby food or transition food for babies who are coming off the breast and going onto solid food? Do the women of this community have any opportunity to say what they would like to see on the shelves of the store for their families?

Ms Stubbs—The other day my daughter went into the shop and saw Warwick's wife ordering some stuff and she asked her about ordering some particular stuff. Most baby foods are for ages four to six months, but in between you need a few little things like yoghurt, jelly and that sort of stuff. She asked her if she could get those things in and she was told: 'No, it's glass. We only order certain things on this IGA list.'

Mrs VALE—Little babies are not catered for at the store?

Ms Stubbs—Not the two- to three-month-olds. We try to encourage them to start their babies on baby rice as soon as they can. I run the family centre. Little kids may be crying for breastmilk all the time, so I try and get them onto food because they are not getting full on breastmilk. We provide one meal a day and that is meat and vegetables and stuff like that. We get baby rice and that if they want it.

Mrs VALE—Is Farex available?

Ms Stubbs—Yes, and baby rice.

Mrs VALE—Baby formula?

Ms Stubbs—Yes, I think there is one brand.

Mrs VALE—What are the prices for those products?

Ms Stubbs—They might buy it from IGA for \$2-something and we will pay up to \$5 for it. For someone who is only on \$220 a week, how can they do it?

Mrs VALE—Can you explain something I do not understand? Do the women get the government money individually themselves or does it go to the head of the household for the whole family?

Ms Stubbs—No. The cheque is made out—

Mrs VALE—Would the mothers individually get it themselves?

Ms Stubbs—Yes.

Mrs VALE—So they have the opportunity to decide on how they are going to spend their money, but it is limited by what is available in the store?

Ms Stubbs—Yes, what gets ordered is what is outlined in that ordering book.

Mrs VALE—There has been no mechanism in the past where young mothers or grandmothers can say what they would like to feed their families? There is no way mothers can have any input into what is available?

Ms Stubbs—They can go and ask.

Mrs VALE—Okay. Are you saying there is no way that their needs are being heard, that nobody is listening to them?

Ms Stubbs—No. No-one has been told there is that choice, but the people who know they can ask do ask. For example, if I want a big container of ice-cream instead of the Black and Gold

small one, I will ask them to order it in for me. A lot of people here do not know that you can do that, but also the shop says it is not on their list.

Mrs VALE—So there is a set list. Who makes up this list?

Ms Stubbs—I do not know. That is why we want a committee.

Mrs VALE—There is no consultation where mothers and members of the community generally can sit down with the store operator and say, ‘We would like, say, yoghurt on the shelves’? You can buy yoghurt in plastic containers; it does not come in glass, actually.

Ms Stubbs—No, I mean special baby yoghurt.

Mrs VALE—I take your point. I want to find out whether there is any consultation process at all. I am hearing that there is none.

Ms Stubbs—There is none. I was shocked over the price rises. I went around and asked a few people, ‘Did anybody tell you they were going to put the prices up and can you afford it?’ and they said, ‘No.’

Mrs VALE—Brenda, what are the key foods that little children are given by their mothers here?

Ms Stubbs—Well, it is cheaper to buy a pie or a sausage roll and give it to them. But they have got tinned food there and they have a variety here for the little babies. They have got baby rice. Then all the care stuff, like the baby wash, the Kimbies and all that are all marked up with everything else in the shop.

Mrs VALE—So baby health and hygiene does not rate?

Ms Stubbs—No, because it is too expensive.

Mrs VALE—What about when it comes to the choice of biscuits and things like that that are available? I noticed in the store that there were a lot of high-sugar content biscuits, like Snax and Jatz. I did not even see any SAOs, though there were some Milk Arrowroot biscuits. There does not appear to be a big choice of healthy biscuits that you can feed children. They do not have to be as high-salt as what I saw over there.

Ms Stubbs—Well, that is just the range they get in.

Mrs VALE—That is just the range? Does the range change?

Ms Stubbs—It hasn’t for a while. If they want to get a pack of Arnotts Family Assorted biscuits, you have to pay \$9 or \$10. I know at my house little kids like to have biscuits.

Mrs VALE—We were told that this store here at Amata does not have Coca-Cola available and that it had been banned. Is Coke on the shelves at the moment?

Ms Stubbs—Yes, Diet Coke and Coke Zero. They are trying to get in healthy stuff for the shop and get out all of that sugary stuff.

CHAIR—Has the decision been made to not stock full-strength Coke?

Ms Stubbs—Yes, I think that went through the council early last year or the year before—two years ago. They have tried to go the healthy living way.

Mrs VALE—Has that improved at all, Brenda, do you think? For nutritional purposes, has that been of assistance that the straight Coke has not been available?

Ms Stubbs—Yes, all of that sort of stuff does help with the kids.

Mrs VALE—There are some communities that have totally banned soft drink altogether. Would the women like to see something like that happen here, or maybe have it limited?

Ms Stubbs—Maybe limited.

Mrs VALE—Limited—special occasions or one per family a week or something like that?

Ms Stubbs—It is our treat for the week. As soon as I leave the lands I go for my straight Coke. You miss it, but at least it is not in front of us and encouraging us to buy.

Mrs VALE—Do you know how many teaspoons of sugar are in it?

Ms Stubbs—Yes. They have it in the clinic on their top shelf to tell you about the whole range of cool drinks and waters.

Mrs VALE—I understand too that red and green cordial is very high in sugar and there is quite a consumption of that here.

Ms Stubbs—Yes.

Mrs VALE—And it does have behavioural impacts, actually.

Ms Stubbs—The main ones are with Black and Gold.

Mrs VALE—It is high in sugar.

Ms Stubbs—You can get big cordials which are 90 per cent juice. But we get no choice.

Mrs VALE—It is not available here. You have been told that things are not on the list. Do you know who makes up the list?

Ms Stubbs—I think it has been just passed down from manager to manager.

Mrs VALE—And the community cannot have any input on what is on that list?

Ms Stubbs—Once we get this committee up, the community is going to have a say.

Mrs VALE—Yes, you bet they will.

Ms Stubbs—We encourage everybody to have a say.

Mrs VALE—Brenda, could encourage mothers particularly to come forward and express their needs? We need to know. There is no point in teaching about health and nutrition unless they can have the option to purchase foods that are nutritional for their families.

Ms Stubbs—Yes.

CHAIR—Could I ask you about fresh fruit and vegetables? Is there good quality fresh fruit and veg?

Ms Stubbs—It varies from week to week—truck days. Sometimes we can get tomatoes and they are all mushy. No-one wants to buy a mushy tomato, especially when you are paying 60c a tomato. Carrots can be all woody. I just do not like the pricing because people cannot pay it. When we used to work in the shop there was a 30 per cent mark-up on fruit and veg and a 50 per cent mark-up on food.

CHAIR—What changed?

Ms Stubbs—The different managers. They decide: ‘We’re going to do this, we’re going to do that,’ and it is not their shop. A lot of them come here and they do not realise it is our shop. We are paying their wages and things like that. They come in and think it is their shop. There needs to be more training for these managers before they come here.

CHAIR—How long has the current manager been there?

Ms Stubbs—About six months.

CHAIR—It sounds like there have been quite a lot of managers recently.

Ms Stubbs—Yes. People are getting really uneasy about the prices. They start asking, ‘What’s going on?’ We questioned the last lot of managers that left about their rebates and all that. He said he was going on holidays. The day before he was ready to leave for holidays, or the day when he was going to leave, he said, ‘I’m not coming back.’

CHAIR—Do you think things have improved with the Mai Wiru policy?

Ms Stubbs—No. We need quality meat. How can Mai Wiru sleep at night when we have to pay these prices and cannot even afford them? The meat we have to eat is horrible. A lot of people just buy it for their dog.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Brenda.

Mrs VALE—I have just one more question. As you know, nutrition is based on the age of food. I have had a look at some of the things in the shop at the moment and I cannot find use-by dates on quite a few products.

Ms Stubbs—That is another thing. With a lot of things on those shelves, most of the time, if you do not look, they are out of date. In the fridge too. Sometimes you have to tell them, ‘This is out of date.’ There is no-one constantly checking that and rotating.

Mrs VALE—That is important for the government to know. Thanks, Brenda.

CHAIR—The next person we will hear from is Leonard.

Mr L Burton—I am a member of the Amata community.

CHAIR—But you are also a member of the council?

Mr L Burton—I was, but I am sick.

CHAIR—Leonard, what would you like to say about the store?

Mr L Burton—A lot of things. There are a lot of problems—not from us; it is a government problem. We have to tell the government people, ‘Look at the place.’ We have to talk about only our store. It is time to talk about the problem—the problem coming out from the government people in Canberra. My problem is the sugar, but I think Brenda is talking about everything. I have to say, this store was run by the community council before and then Mai Wiru and that came in. That is because the government gave us a little bit of money, only for maybe two years. That is Anangu boys, the other one. That was being run by the Amata Community Council—the Anangu store—not by the government. Brenda was talking about everything, but I have to say straight to you mob, because you mob come straight from Canberra and not from state, I think.

CHAIR—That is right.

Mr L Burton—Mai Wiru have been only two or three years, three or four years. But we have been still talking about having our own committee member for the store. That one has been taking a couple of years, a couple of months to set up. I think they bought our committee member from—I do not know, two from community council. That is the start. So that is going to be Anangu boys talking to the store manager for anything that we need in the store. That is starting, but do not talk about way back—a couple of years, 15 years ago. Mai Wiru got healthy because a lot of people are sick—and I am sick too because of a lot of sugar, a lot of fat meat and rotten food from the government. Mai Wiru is a good idea for Anangu people in the land. When they have got the store committee, they have to talk about everything with the store manager and work with the store manager. That is the way we have to start. Young people have to get in there and work. One day, the town complained to the store manager. We have a lot of problems way back. Young people are not working in the store. We have to talk straight to these government people who have come from Canberra. They know prices and they know everything, but we do not know. We have to sit and talk to the manager about what we need in our store.

These people here are recording and they are going to take that recording back to Canberra. That is the story we are putting to these government people. I think they will take it away. They have been on the road already and they are coming around to all the communities. We didn't know, but we are learning to start talking to store managers. Now someone goes in and talks to the store manager—we know we have to have a meeting with the store manager every one, two or three months. That is the way we are going to work through Mai Wiru. We do not want to lose it, like when government run this community before. That was government funding, I know—I was here. I am still here and we are trying to take this store for our own people here.

Talking about the whities—whities want it because whities, we know, and government are always cutting money—salary, CDEP, any sort of work. And that pushes us to this building here—Centrelink. That is no good for young people. They have got to work and earn good money. The government has to put money in. It is important for us.

CHAIR—Could I ask you a question? Is there a store committee working right now?

Mr L Burton—It is starting in a couple of weeks. I do not know when they form a committee. Do you know, Brenda?

Ms Stubbs—When the constitution is done. I asked why are you waiting for a committee when you are not even doing anything. They said that we have got to wait for that constitution. Hopefully it is finished now.

Mr L Burton—The constitution is already done, because we have been waiting for that for a long time. But this is Anangu thinking and talking—it is lovely. A lot of people come from outside and push this thought straightaway. That is what they do. So that is going to be Anangu's voice.

CHAIR—We might keep moving because we do not have a lot of time. Thank you very much, Leonard, for your contribution today. Angie, would you like to make a statement?

Ms Dunnett—I want to talk about the pricing again—it is all about the pricing in the shop. I work hard and I get a decent wage, but I cannot support my family and my children. When I go to the shop I spend all my money on food—and that is my whole pay check within a week. I help the extended family too. I feed them and when I have nothing we share; they feed me and my children. It is getting to winter now and after paying for the food there are winter clothes to pay for. I cannot afford winter clothes because I am just wasting all my money on food. That is all I wanted to say.

CHAIR—Have the prices got worse?

Ms Dunnett—Yes, they have.

CHAIR—Since when?

Ms Dunnett—I left here for a year and a half to go back to Ceduna. I came back and the prices were disgusting. I don't know—it's just too terrible; you can't explain.

CHAIR—This is something which has happened in the last two or three years?

Ms Dunnett—Yes.

CHAIR—Have you noticed a difference with the implementation of the Mai Wiru policy?

Ms Dunnett—A little bit.

CHAIR—In what way?

Ms Dunnett—The pricing and the quality of food is not really good. Maybe you could put some Coke back because the drinks they still sell have a lot of sugar anyway, nearly the same amount or whatever.

CHAIR—Do you think what is in there is healthier since the Mai Wiru policy came in?

Ms Dunnett—Not really. You can get a couple of things that are maybe 97 per cent less fat, but, when you take a really good look at it and see how much saturated fat there is, it is not really—

CHAIR—Where you involved in the decision in relation to the Coke?

Ms Dunnett—No. Even if we haven't got it here, people go to other communities or go to town and come back with a carton of cans of Coke or bottles of Coke. It doesn't matter, they can still get it.

Mrs VALE—I have a question for Angie and Brenda. If—and I say if—the government was of a mind to subsidise community stores in some way but part of the condition of subsidy was that only healthy, quality, nutritional foods were stocked in the stores, how do you think the community would accept that? I am not saying the government will do that; I am just saying: if the government was of a mind to subsidise in some way food coming into community stores but a condition of that was that the stores also stocked good-quality, nutritional food, how would you feel about that?

Ms Dunnett—It will be good. It will help us a lot because the quality of food is not that good. When you get a packet of chops, the top part would be good and then, when you go down to the second layer, it is like it is off.

Mrs VALE—What I mean is that perhaps the government—and I say perhaps; this is a big if—may wish to see foods that have low salt content, and that might mean no potato chips and no very high salt biscuits like Jatz and those sorts of biscuits. It may mean no high-sugar products—for example, diet cordial instead of high-sugar cordial. Do you understand what I am saying?

Ms Dunnett—Yes.

Mrs VALE—I just want to know what the women might think of that. If the government could make good, nutritional food more accessible to mothers but at the same time put a condition that no bad foods were in the store, how would the community see that?

Ms Stubbs—Once we set up the committee and get it up and running, we have a voice in that store. We can discuss all that and we can see what is healthy and what is not healthy. We are working with the store manager. But we need to hurry up and get it started. It will make a difference, because it is the people and the store manager all talking together and discussing the healthiest foods to order in for our kids and for the elderly.

Mrs VALE—Thank you, Brenda.

CHAIR—Angie, do you want to say something about that?

Ms Dunnett—No.

Mr Lyons—My name is Jonathan Lyons. I am on the CDEP committee. I would like to say about Amata store, where is the money coming from? The money is coming from somewhere else. We are looking at the price in Amata store. We have a price from down the road. We are looking at the price from the truck coming in and going. We want to find out how much money is going into freight. I am looking at more CDEP. Some are working and some are working a little bit. Some are only working a little bit and they are getting the same money—\$200. How much money does it cost for the trucks coming in per week.

Mr Green—How much does it cost per week to send the truck in here?

Mr Lyons—Yes.

Mr Green—Anywhere from \$2,500 to \$4,000.

CHAIR—Warwick, we really want to hear from you. What we might do is finish the comments that others have made and then we will ask you questions. Jonathan, we will ask Warwick that question and get him to answer it. Are there other comments you would like to make, Jonathan?

Mr Lyons—I would like to say that we in Amata are not learning properly. We have more children and more people. We are living in the same houses and more people are living with us. We are spending more money on the store and we are taking all the store out to camp. That is why we are losing a lot of money.

CHAIR—Jonathan, can I ask you a question?

Ms Dunnett—He wants me to interpret.

CHAIR—No worries.

Ms Dunnett—He was just saying that we go out to our camps and everything with our own food and then we have to feed the extended family. He is talking about the prices being too high. We are paying for the freight as well as the food. He thinks the freight might be too high.

CHAIR—We will ask Warwick that. Angie, can I ask you and Jonathan a question?

Ms Dunnett—Yes.

CHAIR—Do people do any hunting and to supplement their food?

Ms Dunnett—Yes.

CHAIR—Would you eat bush food every week, every day?

Ms Dunnett—They mainly go on the weekends, but if they are not working they would go nearly every day of the week.

CHAIR—What do you eat?

Ms Dunnett—They eat kangaroo, goanna, emu and wild turkey.

CHAIR—So that is being eaten on a weekly basis?

Ms Dunnett—Just bush food and damper. They make damper mostly every night.

CHAIR—But the damper is made from flour bought from the store?

Ms Dunnett—Yes.

CHAIR—Is the bush food that is hunted eaten straight away or do you keep that during the week?

Ms Dunnett—No, it is eaten straight away.

CHAIR—So it is something that is mainly done on the weekend?

Ms Dunnett—Yes.

Mr Wilson—My name is Alan Wilson. About the store, my people made the cement. My father worked up there. We had no whitefella. Anangu people worked here. For a long time we ran the store in a proper way and there was a lot of money. People had a lot of money from work. Today it has changed from government—no money. We had salary money in Amata when government people been here working in the office here—a long time ago. A lot of good food was there. Prices were not high. Clothes and trousers for the kids, tinned meats and all those things were not high. Today they are talking about Mai Wiru. Mai Wiru is not good enough I think. The government has got to bring more money for the people. People want to buy good food in the store. This is our store; it is not for anybody else. It is our money. They can listen to us and we can listen to him and we can listen to the government. Fifty-fifty. We have got to listen to your mob and this fella here he can listen to me. I from here. Dogs and people. Dogs going inside, people going there. Dogs can eat him. We can only feed the dog, see. We want to bring the prices down a bit.

And with all sweet things, a lot of people are dying. People are dying from sugar. What do you need in your country in the store? Sugar? Sugar is terrible. It is no good. It is rubbish. It is killing people. It is making blind eye. I can't see him today—I got glasses. Good people were here a long time ago. Today sugar has made me weak. I have a walking-stick. Sugar is no good. Sweet things in the store—rubbish. We need proper, healthy food—good food, good meat. You can get the bullock meat. You throw the fat away and cook that thing the proper way. We want fitter food. Everything has got to come down a bit; prices have got to come down: clothes, tinned meats, blankets—all those things. This is not from government, but how can people work here? My father worked in the store and built houses. The whole building is made by Anangu people, by Aboriginal people. When I was young fella here we worked. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—We have one more person who wants to speak and then I think we will talk to Warwick? What do you do, Warren?

Mr Tukin—I am a community member, but I live in Alice Springs. I am on dialysis. I would like to talk about this store and mainly about fuel. People get their fuel money and they want to go hunting but there is nobody working in the store. Why? We have good, young people here walking around doing nothing. They come here to get their pay. This is your store. Look after your store.

CHAIR—Warren, in between there you were talking in your language to the community here. Could you tell us what you said?

Mr Tukin—I was saying that there are no Anangu people working in the store; only white people work in the store. Only one girl works there—this girl here. She is the only one working in the store. We used to have a lot of Anangu people working there.

CHAIR—Why aren't Anangu people working in the store?

Mr Tukin—I do not know why. What happened?

CHAIR—We need to hear from Warwick. Thank you saying what you have said. I am sorry to cut people off, but we only have a short amount of time. I think it is important that we hear from the store manager just to get some of facts and details about the store. I am sure you will be keen to hear that as well. Warwick, what is your role?

Mr Green—At the moment we are in a sort of job-share situation. Previous managers had been here for eight months and left very abruptly, I might say. We were assistant managers at that time. My wife and I assumed the role of managers for four weeks. In recent times, Bob and Connie have been here as managers and assist us at the same time.

CHAIR—So you have been working in the store for eight months?

Mr Green—No, I have been here for only three. I had six weeks here last year in a relieving capacity.

CHAIR—And you have been actually managing the store for the last four weeks?

Mr Green—Probably more like eight.

CHAIR—Has there been a high turnover of store managers here in recent times?

Mr Green—As I understand it—and Bob is probably better versed on this—the people prior to us were here for eight months, but prior to that someone was here for quite some time. Notwithstanding their popularity, there is obviously some animosity in that area.

CHAIR—I would like to ask you some questions about how the store runs. How often is freight brought to the store?

Mr Green—Once a week. It is actually a difficult job because you order on Wednesday and Thursday and, by the time you have put everything away on Thursday, your order is supposed to have been in. It can be difficult in terms of fresh food. We can order stuff and it is not eaten. It is not exclusive to here; it happens everywhere. Some weeks people want bananas and some weeks they do not. It happens in any society. It is a difficult task in terms of having a once-a-week truck.

CHAIR—What is the cost of the freight?

Mr Green—It varies. It is by pallet. For argument's sake, today we had probably nine pallets. Last week we had 14. It can vary between about \$2,800 and almost \$4,000 in freight a week.

CHAIR—Do you know that figure as a percentage of the revenue of the store?

Mr Green—It is about eight per cent.

CHAIR—That is useful. Where are you ordering from?

Mr Green—Alice Springs, and minimal amounts from Darwin. Specialist products come from Darwin and Adelaide, but generally Alice.

CHAIR—Do you order through a single wholesaler or do you order different things from different wholesalers?

Mr Green—We order from a number of wholesalers. We order from wholesalers who provide haberdashery, homewares—utensils, cookware and things like that. We order from the Independent Grocers for all the dry goods. We have other suppliers who supply meat.

CHAIR—Who supplies the meat?

Mr Green—Prime Cut Meats.

CHAIR—Is that out of Alice Springs?

Mr Green—Yes.

CHAIR—Are they getting the meat to Alice Springs from somewhere else?

Mr Green—The meat actually comes from Esperance in Western Australia, would you believe.

CHAIR—There you go. What about fresh fruit and vegetables—where are they from?

Mr Green—I do not know where it starts, but I would imagine it comes from Adelaide.

CHAIR—Which supplier do you use?

Mr Green—Central Fruit and Vegetables.

CHAIR—Do you have lower mark-ups on fresh food?

Mr Green—No.

CHAIR—So there is no policy around trying to keep that price lower than other prices?

Mr Green—No.

CHAIR—How do you experience the Mai Wiru policy operating in the store?

Mr Green—In a word: piecemeal.

CHAIR—Do you talk to Mai Wiru about what—

Mr Green—We have a nutritionist come by quite often to go through what is on the shelves and endeavour to instruct us. We provide daily, as best we can, fresh food. We make sandwiches, rolls and things like that. I digress, but one of the things we would really like to do, but we are hamstrung by the kitchen, is more of that, as was done in the past, but we are unable to. There is labour, and the actual facilities need to be revamped. The biggest thing, I would imagine, is the sugar drinks. There has been an endeavour to cut back on Coke. We only have Diet Coke. We do not have potato chips.

CHAIR—Are you selling full-strength Coke at all at the moment?

Mr Green—None.

CHAIR—What are you doing with chips?

Mr Green—We do not have any potato chips. We endeavour to not have high-salt content biscuits, like Jatz and things like that. There are other things that are probably in the same boat.

CHAIR—To look on the positive side, that is trying to implement the Mai Wiru policy in the store.

Mr Green—Absolutely.

CHAIR—As I understand, there is a Mai Wiru policy document.

Mr Green—Yes.

CHAIR—Are you familiar with the document?

Mr Green—Yes.

CHAIR—So you keep it in the store, you refer to it?

Mr Green—It is beside my bed, would you believe?

CHAIR—That is impressive. We have heard a bit in the open forum about governance. What is the governance structure of the store as you see it?

Mr Green—As I understand and with my limited experience, the store is owned and run by the community. We are responsible to the community via the council. There was a system of meetings happening some time back but there has not been one for a little while because of the changeover in managers and the disruption that causes.

CHAIR—When was the last meeting?

Mr Green—Three months ago.

CHAIR—Was that a meeting of the council or a specific store committee?

Mr Green—It was a meeting of the council which the store manager attended.

CHAIR—It sounds as though there is an attempt to establish a distinct store committee which will look after—

Mr Green—Absolutely, yes.

CHAIR—Has it met yet?

Mr Green—Not to my understanding, no. We encourage it as much as we can. It is the most sensible way. Rather than them individually coming to us and saying, ‘This is what we want,’ which is rather time-consuming and is what happens now, it is much better if a policy is flexible, not something set in stone—‘This is what has to happen.’ Nobody wants to be governed by set rules—‘This is what you must do.’ You need to have some flexibility.

CHAIR—At the moment, if people come to you and want a particular item stocked, you have the freedom and the capacity to do that?

Mr Green—Absolutely. One thing I will say is that we carry a lot of lines and it is an exceedingly difficult task, a non-computerised, manual task, which takes a person 1½ days basically to walk around and do the order. It would be lovely to be computerised and have a stock control system for a lot of reasons—theft, simple management use—as a tool for management. We know exactly what we could do but at this stage we are not in that situation, so we are not able to do that. If we were to have a stock control system, that would make it so much easier to implement the policies that people want.

CHAIR—Concerning profitability, is the store making money? Is it covering its costs?

Mr Green—Yes.

CHAIR—How are profits distributed, if they are made?

Mr Green—I do not know.

CHAIR—Is there a policy about mark-ups, to keep the store in profit?

Mr Green—Yes.

CHAIR—What is that?

Mr Green—It varies from 30 per cent to 50 per cent and in some cases it is 60 per cent.

CHAIR—There has been a lot of comment about prices. Do you have any response to what has been said in relation to prices?

Mr Green—Yes, I do. I will give you an analogy. I live in a seaside town in Western Australia. My store is the most expensive Coles store in Australia—second to Byron Bay—because people can afford to pay it. I would suggest that some of the prices here are probably cheaper and I would suggest that sometimes you would find some things are more expensive. As a general rule, I think people have to look in other places and say, ‘This is what that costs there,’ and have regard to where we are, how things get here and how often, and then to say, ‘It is expensive.’ It may well be expensive but it is not expensive in terms of some other places and the remoteness of this area. We really need a freight subsidy here.

CHAIR—Do you have a sense that prices have increased in recent times?

Mr Green—I cannot say. I think that in Australia things have increased.

Mrs VALE—Thank you for coming. We are very grateful for your evidence. You can understand that the government is concerned about the quality of fresh food and vegetables and the nutritional value of foods that are available for people in remote communities. That is one of the important reasons that we are here today. I understand about the disruption that has happened because of different store managers. I note that you were saying that there have been times where the committee has actually met on occasions to try to talk to the store manager. I notice that the committee is majority men from this area. I heard from Brenda that there is no mechanism whereby the women can have input at all. In your capacity as store manager, would

you be accepting of a delegation, perhaps, of the women of the community meeting on a basis that is conducive to your time frames to import to you what they would like to see on the shelves?

Mr Green—Why not? Absolutely.

Mrs VALE—I think it is a matter of making sure that they are aware that there is such a mechanism available to do that. In the past, in a lot of the community stores that we have seen, there has not been any empowering of the women in the community so that they feel they can.

Mr Green—In deference to people who have commented prior, there would not be one hour of one day go past when someone does not come to me, Bob or Connie, my wife, to ask for something special. It is open, but it is not formalised. If you come to me today and say, 'I want Farax' or something particular, we will endeavour to get it. There are instructions, such as that we are not allowed to bring glass things in. We are not supposed to bring glass in.

Mrs VALE—Where does that instruction come from?

Mr Green—As I understand it, from the council.

Mrs VALE—Brenda spoke of a list and that things are only ordered according to a list. Who organises the list and who says what it is on the list?

Mr Green—You have to understand that I have to be fairly careful about what I say here, but there is a list of items that are available. Every grocer in the world would use a list per se. I will show you the list, but the list is all encompassing. It has every item that the Independent Grocers Association has on its shelves. I do not know that a list is really—

Mrs VALE—It is just that my understanding was that things were not ordered because they were not on the list. That is where I think having some formal mechanism where the women of the community are empowered sufficiently to have that dialogue with the store manager. I am not just talking about here, Warwick. It is stores in all communities.

Mr Green—Absolutely. I will show you the list. We are able to order whatever we want to order, under instructions from Mai Wiru and under instructions from the committee about what it has said can and cannot be brought in.

Mrs VALE—I noticed on the shelves that there were some foodstuffs that did not have a use-by date. I do not think I have seen as many things without a use-by date here. I thought that producers, by law, had to put a use-by date on all foods.

Mr Green—I would like you to show me those.

Mrs VALE—I would be very happy to. Perhaps I have missed it; I am happy to be corrected.

CHAIR—Thank you, Warwick. We really appreciate you giving us evidence today.

Mr Green—No worries.

Mr Tregenza—I have spoken to you before. There are just a couple of things. There has been some sort of half information, I think, that needs to be cleared up. Firstly, the issue of prices is something that has come up again and again. That is really indicative of the frustrations that people feel and goes back to the fact that the stores are non-profit organisations. The prices reflect the wholesale prices across Australia, and there have been price rises everywhere. People here are not aware of what is happening in the greater economy and that those prices actually reflect the operational costs of the organisation and hence underline the reasons why the Mai Wiru unit has been asking the government for subsidies of various kinds. Whilst everyone is frustrated by the prices, we are absolutely aware of that. That is why Mai Wiru came into existence. We have not been supported by a government of any ilk, state or federal, to assist by providing those subsidies. I think that is important to note.

Stuff about rebates was brought up. That is a completely separate issue. There is a misunderstanding by community members about that. If those same community members actually attended meetings, so if they bothered to go, they would find out that information. As for the issue about staff getting free food and all of that sort of stuff, that is about half-truths being uttered in public. What happens is that, under the contractual arrangements to get store managers to come on to the lands, we include as part of the package food from the store because historically, as we are aware, this happens in any case and we would rather have it on the table, so it is all part of people's contractual arrangements when they sign up. Yes, they do get a food allowance but it is all part of their salary package. If we did not have it there, it would happen anyway. So it actually puts it on the table so everyone knows. All of this is transparent.

Mai Wiru has been encouraging this community over the last five years to have a separate store committee. It has taken them five years to get around to it. In the intervening period the store has been under the management and control of this community council. I have been out here numerous times meeting with that community council. We have been encouraging them, when they bring up issues about food quality and about pricing, to talk to their store manager because he is actually their employee. It is in fact this community and its council who have failed to take that action in the past. It is really good that now, after five years of encouragement, they have finally got a committee together. But that committee really consists of the same people who are on the community council. They had the opportunity of control before. They will have the opportunity of control again. Those community people have really got to take it seriously and involve themselves with store managers rather than make criticisms from outside the system.

As for the issues about product substitution and the quality of food in the stores, all of that has come about because of the work of the nutritionist as to the things about sugar. There are whole lots of issues to do with product substitution. In the submission as to subsidies that was put up and modelled by NATSEM, they only modelled subsidies on healthy foods. That particular subsidy was not proposed to be across the board. It was only for a basket of healthy food, as has been suggested by members of the committee, and those healthy foods were what was to be subsidised. But then we also come under pressure from community members and others who then say, 'What about our freedom of choice?' As a way of dealing with those issues, we have a range of healthy foods available and we hope that by an educational process people will exercise choice for that. But if they exercise a choice to have Yo-Yo biscuits, there is nothing much that we can do about it other than to ban everything that a nutritionist said should not be available and then we would cop it from people who would say, 'What about our freedom of choice?' When the whole issue of cool drinks came up, the biggest opposition to getting rid of full-

strength cool drinks came from white staff who said, 'What about our freedom of choice?' So in lots of ways you get caught between a rock and a hard place when you try to implement policies like this.

CHAIR—Thanks, John. We are really running short of time and there is always an opportunity for you to put stuff in writing to us. We do have limited time on the air now and I am very keen to hear from Owen. Warwick, do you want to say something quickly?

Mr Green—Just quickly, and I do not know if it is of any relevance, but a comment was passed about employing Anangu people. Since I have been here I have actively canvassed people about it. I have spoken to the committee on several occasions about it. We currently have one young lady working with us on a full-time basis. We often have people working to do specific tasks. Every Wednesday we have five or six people to help us unload the truck. I want to go down on record as saying I would be only too happy to have as many as Anangu as you would like working there, because to me one of the things that needs to be done is to limit our involvement. Maybe we would still be managers but we would have other people learning how to run the store themselves. That would seem to me to be common sense.

CHAIR—What would you like to say, Owen?

Mr O Burton—I was listening to a lot of story about the store, and I would like to put it on the table what Alan Wilson, a council member, said. The store has been running for quite a while. You can see that for many years it has been exactly the same. Somebody mentioned that the fuel price is up. That has to come down, and all the prices in the store, too. I say that because CDEP used to be in the community. The government changed everything and took away the CDEP. The CDEP is way over there, in Port Augusta. In the remote community, people are talking about going hunting and all that. The price of fuel is really up, and also the prices in the store. CDEP is three days work only. Some people are on Centrelink. As you can see, that store has been here for many years. So I think we need from the government a store that is better than that one. We are looking at a big store. We need more food. We need good food like vegetables and oranges. We need better fruit. We need a new store. Can you can take this one up and let us know, if you like.

CHAIR—Owen, thank you for that contribution. That brings us to the end of today's proceedings. I thank everyone who has participated and made a contribution. All of your evidence goes into the *Hansard* and forms part of the evidence that we will use in deciding what recommendations we will make to the federal parliament. Then we will see whether or not the government will take up our recommendations.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs Vale**):

That, pursuant to the power conferred by paragraph 16 of the committee's resolution of appointment, this subcommittee authorises publication of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Subcommittee adjourned at 12.38 pm