COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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

THURSDAY, 18 JUNE 2009

CANBERRA

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING

COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Thursday, 18 June 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 Debus, Mr Laming, Ms Rea, Mr Turnour 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.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 12.11 pm

SANDERSON, Lieutenant General (Retired) John Murray, Private capacity

ACTING CHAIR (Mr Laming)—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities. These meetings are formal proceedings of the parliament and everything said should be factual and honest. It is considered a serious matter to attempt to mislead the committee. Witnesses are invited to make comments that assist us in our inquiry with the intention of making improvements to the current government administration in relation to community stores. The hearing is open to the public. A transcript of what is said will be placed on the committee's website. Welcome, Lieutenant General Sanderson. I welcome you to give evidence given your unique perspective in the area of community stores. I invite you to make an opening statement. You might want to focus on some areas that you think are most important in the area that would be of interest to us in our inquiry.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Thank you very much for inviting me to appear before the committee. The topic is a very serious one and of great significance to the future of the Indigenous communities throughout the Australian landscape. Let me begin by saying that I am neither a nutrition expert nor indeed a businessman in the sense of having run stores and things like that but I do have a background in the Australian landscape both as governor of Western Australia and as commander of the Army indeed when the Army was quite intensely engaged with the Australian landscape and also formerly in my role as special advisor to the Carpenter government in Western Australia on Indigenous affairs and now as chairman of the Indigenous Implementation Board in Western Australia. I might take some time to explain the purpose of the Indigenous Implementation Board first of all to give you some idea of my recent background and the views that are coming out of that board on a multitude of issues. Nutrition, food and health in Indigenous communities are some of those. As I said, we believe of course that there is a multitude of issues and that they are all related. There is a holistic dimension to these things.

The Indigenous Implementation Board was raised by the Western Australian government at the beginning of 2009. I was approached soon after the last state election in Western Australia to return to Western Australia to implement a number of proposals that I had put forward in my previous role as an adviser to the previous government. In that role I was asked to chair a new board, which is a non-statutory board. The title, Indigenous Implementation Board, is an awkward title but nobody could come up with anything better at the time. The role of the board is to help stand up Indigenous people within the state so that they participate more fully in the processes of governance—I am talking about both government policy formulation and the implementation of that policy in the countryside. But it is also to work with both the political and public service arms of government to change the way government relates to these issues in the state of Western Australia.

I think there are a number of reasons why it was viewed as necessary to change that interface, because there are some fundamental facts about social developments in Western Australia which are very disturbing. One of these, of course, has been the subject of coronial inquiries in Western Australia, and that is the level of suicides amongst young Indigenous people throughout the countryside. That is still a gathering and burgeoning problem. Another is, of course, the level of Indigenous incarceration in the state, which is certainly the worst in Australia. Something close

to 45 per cent of the prison population in Western Australia is Indigenous, and comes from 2.8 per cent of the population—that sort of level. So this reflects a level of Indigenous alienation within Western Australia which is the object of the board that I chair.

At the same time, the government has stood up again an Aboriginal advisory council, which will soon be announced in Western Australia. It will be an Aboriginal voice in the countryside and it will be interesting to see how that is linked into the grassroots of the population. That is a statutory body and it links in with the Director-General's group, which is also a statutory body. It comes out of the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Act 1972, I think. These things have been stood up again, and these are points of contact between the board that I chair and those particular agencies—Aboriginals in the landscape and the government mechanisms.

The board consists of nine people, five of whom are Indigenous and four who are non-Indigenous. These are people with a broad cross-section of experience and not the normal sort of people that you would see engaged in these issues. I chair the board and Professor Fiona Stanley is on the board with me. There is a fellow called Brendan Hammond, who was responsible for the Argyle Diamond Mine when they increased Indigenous employment there to 40 per cent, and who engaged completely with the policy. There is the CEO of the Western Australian Local Government Association and a number of Aboriginal people, including Dr Sue Gordon, who was Chair of the National Indigenous Council—an Aboriginal woman who is a trauma and healing specialist and who was the first Aboriginal doctor in Australia. And there are others—Mark Bin Bakar, who was West Australian of the Year last year and who represents the Stolen Generations nationally.

The board is a broad cross-section, but it does not have statutory authority. It has what I describe as moral authority. It has the capacity to generate a voice on these issues and be heard both within the Indigenous community and within government. The board went through a prolonged process of defining what it is, what its role was and how it would go about that and it came up with a strategy out of that process. The strategy is a very holistic one which is about engaging Indigenous people more fully in the processes of government policy determination and implementation. The underlying premise to this is that Indigenous culture is vital to the future of Western Australia and indeed the nation for that matter. Indigenous people have a unique knowledge of the landscape which is a defining element in building a sustainable future for Western Australia. That is the underlying dimension of the policy. We have not seen any other policies in this country with respect to Indigenous people that start on that premise and are built on that premise. It has been a premise that has been widely accepted and applauded within Indigenous communities as a new beginning if I could put it that way.

Out of that comes a board strategy which is about standing the Indigenous voice up in the landscape. The board has determined that they should do this on a regional basis in that Indigenous governance in the regions is the key to a whole range of other issues. The board's reason for doing this is that the board sees serious issues associated with addressing each of these issues as separate rather than addressing them as a holistic issue. The idea in addressing them as a holistic issue relies on the premise of Indigenous culture that Indigenous people become responsible for their own future and their own destiny. This is quite difficult for a number of non-Indigenous people to grasp.

Most of the policy in the state has been determined on what we would call a silo basis—there is a health policy with respect to Indigenous people, there is an education policy, but there is no holistic policy. The board sees it necessary as generating a holistic approach to this but on the basis of Indigenous participation, Indigenous culture and a strong Indigenous voice standing up in the regions. As a number of Indigenous people have reminded us there have been precedents for this and one of these of course was in ATSIC. ATSIC actually had a regional voice and had regional organisations. In many places there is a view that it was quite a successful regional voice and at least Aboriginal people had a sense that they were represented in the process. I cannot tell you how many times we have been confronted with the statement, 'No more ATSICs' both at the federal and state level. I keep asking people what they mean by that and what it is that causes them to say that. Do they mean no more default leadership or do they mean no more Indigenous representation with a grassroots connection? What has this got to do with community stores? You might well ask.

I have travelled pretty far and wide in Western Australia. We are constantly confronted with health issues in the landscape and issues of deterioration in the way people live in the landscape—the symptoms of poor diet, poor self-esteem and all of those things are fairly obvious. We have had an opportunity to look at some of the differences between those communities that are well and healthy and some of those that are not. By and large, with the ones that are healthy it is down to a strong leadership issue. Where the leadership is strong and based on culture and people are attuned to it then, normally, the communities function very well. People have a sense of a future, a sense of esteem and they stand up and work as a community. Those communities actually have some idea of economic empowerment as well. They work towards businesses, they are more susceptible to negotiating with and gaining employment opportunities from the various economic enterprises that appear in the regions. I guess the thrust of this is that we have a strong vested interest in that sort of leadership in the landscape and that sort of community surrounding the issues of health. What has this got to do with community stores?

In the places that we see where they have strong leadership, the community stores function well. People have a sustained presence in that process. There is a strong leadership oversight of the community store. Normally there is a more sustained executive presence within the operation of the community store. There is a community commitment to what the store does and so on. All of them of course are confronted with the issue of isolation and the issues of infrastructure that go with this.

There is another strategic dimension to this which is a personal view and that is that we have a strong vested interest in keeping people in the landscape. Australia as a continental nation now has close to 90 per cent of its population as urban dwellers. A vast majority of the landscape is practically empty. There was a recent discussion group held on this coming out of the Desert Knowledge group which is called remoteFOCUS, Fred Chaney has been active in this discussion, which suggests that about 85 per cent of the continent comes into the category of remote and semi-remote. About 85 per cent is worse than dysfunctional; it fits into all the World Bank criteria for a failed state. The nation, and I say this as a strategic issue, has a significant interest in addressing this particular problem in keeping people on the landscape.

When we talk about the difficulty of providing food and infrastructure to people in the landscape it is not just Indigenous people who are confronted with this difficulty. It is a difficulty

which exists in most rural communities certainly in Western Australia. What we have is an infrastructure and a strategy which is retracting from the landscape and we are confronted with an issue of how we put people back in landscape and sustain them there in an economically viable way.

The issue of providing food to people in remote and very remote Australia is a significant component of that. The issue is one of providing some sort of economic existence in the landscape such that people are doing things which the nation needs to have done and they are actually contributing to the common wealth of the nation rather than, as many see it, as a negative elements in the landscape—something that costs money and is not justified in terms of commitment to infrastructure. Community stores obviously as a subject are a very important part of that. How do we actually provide food to people in a way that meets all their nutrition requirements and contributes to their capacity to be positive contributors to the landscape and the nation?

I think one of the big issues in all of this is that, the more we actually fail in this respect, the harder it gets to actually conceive of and restore this connection into the countryside. I come back here to the issue of leadership in Indigenous communities. It has occurred to my board that the only way we can get leadership that will serve the strategic purpose within the communities is to establish that leadership on a regional basis, accepting that there are multiple cultures within the regions. Because we administer the country on a regional basis, we think those multiple cultures can be induced to actually having a regional Indigenous voice. This is part of the process of developing a regional vision, a regional strategy, regional partnerships, regional plans, regional budgets, and regional solutions to the problem of sustaining people in the countryside.

In Western Australia, there are no regional governments. If you actually stand up as a regional voice, there is this issue of who to deal with. Regional visions, plans and strategies have to have an Indigenous and non-Indigenous component to them. My board is in the process of trying to convince the government of Western Australia that there is a need for regional governance as well as a regional Indigenous voice in order to work together and create this regional approach.

Economic enhancement, development of the environment, food, nutrition, healthy activities and commitment to culture in the landscape are all part of that regional vision and those regional plans. I have gone, in a very prolonged way, around the subject to suggest to you that the regional stores issue is about this holistic approach. It is not just about regional stores. It is an important component of the holistic approach, but, nevertheless, it is just a component.

This is recognising that we have created a lot of structures in the countryside which are, I suspect, opposed to the sorts of initiatives that I am talking about in this. These are the constructs which cause people to be dependent on a commercial system which is not designed for their needs, is very expensive and, probably worse than that, is opposed to people taking any local initiatives of their own. For example, if local people were to decide that they were going to produce their own food in the countryside, they would find it very difficult to overcome a number of these commercial imperatives that have been set out.

Mrs VALE—Could you give us some examples on that?

Lt Gen. Sanderson—We were conducting a conversation in the Kimberley, as part of standing up with an Indigenous voice in the Kimberley. There were a whole range of issues discussed at this meeting. Health was obviously a very important part of that, as were education, governance, culture, infrastructure and so on.

An Indigenous health worker stood up and said, 'How can you have a healthy community when it costs $15 for half a pumpkin in Balgo?' Immediately it struck me: 'I'm pretty sure that, with proper leadership, we could grow 100,000 pumpkins in Balgo.' We could supply the whole region with pumpkins from Balgo because the soil is very fertile and there is a water supply there.

Mrs VALE—And pumpkins grow like crazy when you plant the seeds.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Absolutely. But there are a whole range of other things. For example, I think citrus is a feasible option in a lot of these remote communities, too. When I raised the issue, the point was made, 'But we used to grow our own food.'

Mrs VALE—That has been our experience, as well.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—The question is: 'Why aren't you still doing it?' The answer seems to be that there is no inducement to do this at the moment because of the way the construct has been set.

Mrs VALE—Or leadership.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Yes, leadership is a key issue in this. This is prevalent everywhere, incidentally.

Mrs VALE—Yes. We know.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—I quote that as an example.

Mrs VALE—We found that, often, wherever there was a successful market garden, there had been one person who had provided the leadership to do that. Once that person either died or moved on, the garden was just lost.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Yes, and quite often the leader was one of the members of the church around which the mission was established.

Mr DEBUS—I have noticed that the approach of our overseas aid program, especially in the poverty alleviation section, more or less embraces the strategic approach that you have spoken about. It specifically focuses on leadership and strengthening institutions at a village or regional level. It is constantly surprising to me that, in our own interior or in remote parts of Australia, we do not appear to do that. You have just reminded us that these remote parts of Australia bear the strongest and melancholy resemblance to poor parts of the developing world.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Yes. I think it is worse than that. I think most of them are not governed at all. I do not think local government provides the answer to this.

Mr DEBUS—Yes.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—When I speak to local government in most of these places—

Ms REA—I was going to ask you about that.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—and ask them whether they are regional or municipal, invariably the reply is, 'We are municipal, but all our problems are regional.' We have a structural problem that prevents regional solutions to these issues.

Mrs VALE—It appears from the observations that the committee has been able to have in visiting remote communities that many of them do not have a long history of living together in the kinds of communities that we find them in today.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Yes.

Mrs VALE—I note that you actually spoke about restoring them to some viability but some of them were never viable.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Sure.

Mrs VALE—Ever. Traditionally, a lot of the families that were there—100 years ago; in some cases only 50 years ago—were still nomadic wanderers in that particular region of Australia. They have come together either on the old mine site, the old homestead or at some gathering of the regional clans that found them all together. Even living together in numbers seemed to bring new family situations or new social stress situations of which they had no history and no tools to deal with.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Yes.

Mrs VALE—You are right about a complete breakdown—it really is a breakdown. I just wonder whether some of these remote communities really are unviable—and not just unviable economically, but unviable socially, because of the violence that is actually generated within the groups.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—I will respond to that if I might. The fact is that we non-Indigenous people have constructed this environment. If you take a place like Balgo, at the edge of the Tanami Desert, there are four or five language groups there, but they are all essentially desert people. So while the language groups are different, the culture is similar.

Mrs VALE—Was it the white government that decided they would all live together or was it just something that they all accumulated?

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Yes. The pastoral operations broke down a lot of the social order. Then people were pushed off the pastoral operations.

Mrs VALE—They stopped that in the 1960s, didn't they?

Lt Gen. Sanderson—The pastoral operations developed from the 19th century. They broke down the structure, which was a pretty fragile structure in the sense that they were very small groups of people. If you take all the young men away and you use them on pastoral properties, then the old people, the young women and children are left in the landscape, and that is not sustainable. There is a holistic dimension to this. Right now, if you go into Indigenous communities, you will find there is a gap in the demographic which is the young adult male, and I am talking about 20- to 40-year olds. When I found that I could not have conversations with that group in the places I was going to, I asked my Aboriginal advisers why not. They said there are three possibilities: they are down the pub, in prison or dead. So we have a big gap in the social demographic here. Incidentally a large number of them are in prison in Western Australia, and this statistic is increasing.

Mr DEBUS—And far away from the communities as well.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Yes, but they do come back and cause wreckage in the communities periodically before they go back to where they came from. This issue of leadership is a big issue.

Mrs VALE—When they do come out, their behaviour is often antisocial to their own Indigenous community, it is not necessarily antisocial to the local white community. They actually report them to the police to get rid of them?

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Which is sad.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—There are a couple of other elements to this. If anybody has seen the movie *Samson and Delilah*—

Mrs VALE—Not yet.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—You should see it if you have the courage to see it because it will grab you in the sense that here we have young Aboriginal people cast into this state drifting across the face of white society that does not put out its hand to reach to them; it rejects them really. I have seen this in several communities, the suicidal—either direct or indirect—through petrol sniffing and substance abuse. The only alternative is prison or that. This is a pretty sad statement about our country. I talked to one of the magistrates in the Kimberley and asked him how many people who come before him actually want to go to prison, and his response was 80 per cent. In many cases it is a matter of life and death. The environment is such that suicide or prison is the alternative. I keep asking people, 'How can we tolerate that as a nation?' A lot of responses to that would be, 'Okay, let's pull them into the regional centres and the urban environments where we can look after them better.' The truth of the matter is that we do not look after them better in the regional centres and the urban environments. When you go to these places, there is a desire to keep them 'out there', away from the regional centres and urban environments because of their destructiveness.

ACTING CHAIR—Before we go any further, I would like to tap into the short time we have available to really look at your observations around the stores themselves. There were four areas: the regulatory environment that you think is impeding decent functioning; the regional

structures; the interface with the private sector, and then, of course, delivery models; and then right down to the little community factors that you might just have seen in an anecdotal way, that may invariably lead to good or suboptimal outcomes. This is a complex vertical issue, isn't it, as it affects community stores, so maybe start from the top with any observations you may have and then drill down to community.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Let me say at the beginning that I have read a number of the submissions that have been put before this committee, and most of them have covered these sorts of issues. I am just adding another dimension to that. My views are fairly confirmatory about the sorts of things that you have had before you so far. The fact of the matter is that in Indigenous communities the stores that are provided are generally very expensive. They are not sustained in the sense that there are serious infrastructure problems associated with getting food to these places, storing food in these places, making sure that the communities have access to it, and that the funds that the community does have are used within the stores. The biggest issue, from my perspective, is that you can put things in stores but you cannot force people to eat them. So the question is: how do you induce people to have a healthy diet?

Ms REA—Although there is a step back in terms of that whole issue around procurement purchasing policy. Ultimately there is a decision made by somebody through some sort of policy as to what actually lands on the shelf and what is actually being sold. Some of the people that we have had present to us have talked about actively being involved in purchasing policies which put more nutritional food or more appropriate food on the shelves. So it gets back, again, to that issue of management, doesn't it, and the governance structure of the stores themselves in conjunction with the governance of the community.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Indeed it does. This is a leadership issue, and it is an issue about having healthy diets and access to proper food as part of a community policy.

Ms REA—I would be interested to know how that fits into the regional structure. Obviously there are issues around economies of scale, bulk buying and all of those things that can reduce the cost of a number of goods, and then there is the outback stores model and others that we have had experience of where you have a more concentrated, centralised procedure which cuts down costs. It would be interesting to see how you saw that, even the management of stores, fitting into your regional government structure—whether you have thought down to that level of detail.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—We have not got down to the detail of exactly how such a mechanism would operate on a regional basis. We think that probably needs to be worked out by Indigenous people. When we are talking about standing up the Indigenous voice, we are talking about standing it up in a way that is able to provide the leadership and actually look at these issues strategically from a regional perspective. So that is part of what I have been talking about. A lot of the communities, of course, are too small to have a strategic approach to this. They have to deal with it as it is served up to them. They actually have internal problems and dysfunction which prevent them from doing that. So the idea of actually having regional solutions to these problems is not there. There is no capacity for it at this stage. There may have been a capacity for it in the past but there certainly is not at the moment.

Mr DEBUS—But they could participate if the program were made for it.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—That is right. Of course they have very little bargaining power in small communities, as well. They are just susceptible to whatever is dealt up to them. It is a combination of things associated with commercial economic policy, health policy, education policy and the other sorts of things that actually go to making communities commit themselves to a healthy future, like self-esteem and the whole idea that you actually have a future that you can commit yourself to. So there are many other aspects that are associated with this: culture, community and the arts, recreation, sport and those sorts of things that induce people. I will quickly resort to my former existence as commander of the army. We were always in the business of putting healthy foods in the messes for soldiers to eat, but you could not guarantee that they would eat them. They would go for the chips and the pies and the hamburgers. But I will tell you: the very best units ate the healthy foods because of the way they thought of themselves and the way they were committed.

Ms REA—It was not just about the physical nutrition; they were making a deliberate choice. That is an interesting point.

Mr DEBUS—I read a biography of Lord Montgomery of Alamein on a wet day recently. There was this extraordinary thing. He was a senior commander in the First World War and he saw people knocked to bits in all sorts of ways and falling in ill health. On of the reasons for his success—and he saw it himself—in the Second World War was that he paid obsessive attention to the health of his troops, including just making sure their feet were all right and that they ate properly. In the end they did actually perform in a far superior fashion.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Yes. I guess the idea is how you think of yourself. But this point about having a view that you actually have a future is a critical determinant of the way you take care of yourself and the way the community takes care of itself.

Mrs VALE—That is very hard when you are dealing with people whose view is retrospective. It is based in the dreamtime. That is really hard. We naturally have a prospective view of our world and our place in it but many of the Indigenous people's view is retrospective, so it is trying to get them to think of the future and then have ambition and have goals. I think you are right. I think you have really hit a very important nail on the head. It is really hard when the culture is naturally retro.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Yes, but I have not met any communities that are not interested in the future of their children. This is essentially about that—what sort of a world are my children going to live in?

Mrs VALE—I think the women are particularly. We have found sometimes it is very difficult to get the women to speak to us. Some of the women on staff have gone around the background, if you like, and encouraged them to come forward. In one particular place where we had a hearing, the men would not let the women speak. I think you are right about the women.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—This is a very important issue. There is a serious gender divide that has been built up within Indigenous communities because of the circumstances. You are right. Women have a strong nurturing component to their view about this, which makes it all the more important to stand up men from a leadership perspective. I know I am going very broad on this—

Mrs VALE—Not at all. It is not just a singular issue, is it.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—and you have a keen interest in tying this down. What I am suggesting is that the community stores issue has to be looked at in the strategic context. It has to be looked at from a leadership perspective. I suspect that it has to be looked at from a place broader than these small sometimes dysfunctional communities that we have created. It has to be stood up in a regional context. One of the requirements in this—and we all know that there are fractures and divisions within Indigenous communities—is a transcendent vision, the idea of where we want to go, what we want to be and how we want our children to be part of this environment.

Mr TURNOUR—I apologise if you have already been over this ground. One of the issues that has come out to this inquiry is that we are going to have to struggle with the issue of the sustainability of stores in small communities and the role of government in terms of whether a store in a traditional non-remote community should stand on the entrepreneurship of the people running the store and the ability for that store to make ends meet in terms of the profitability of that store. We have had certain evidence that some of these stores effectively will not survive without government intervention. The whole issue then comes down to the empowerment of a community that effectively have their main source of food subsidised. What are the fairness issues running across other communities in relation to that? So I would not mind if you could touch on your thoughts around those issues.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—There is a contending view in this countryside about the viability of remote and semiremote communities. There is a trend towards only supporting communities that are conceived of as being sustainable in the longer term—in other words, larger communities. I suppose in the ultimate that sort of view would be one that would say that the best thing is to actually bring them into the cities. It is part of a trend that I spoke about, perhaps before you came in: we are actually vacating the landscape. As part of that process we are not committing ourselves to a presence in the landscape that is economically viable. This is particularly prevalent in Western Australia, where the main driver of the economy is mining. The idea is that you should be able to go and work on a mine site and this will be part of your economic empowerment. It does not work for Indigenous people in the remote landscape but it also has a tendency, just as the pastoral industry did, to draw people out of the landscape.

I accept the point that we are confronted with the fact that there are a number of small communities which do not have the economic viability or the cash flow to actually sustain this presence in the environment without subsidisation. Even a whole range of the welfare payments to communities are about subsidisation anyway, because they do not have an economic viability. So there is a whole range of things which are about subsidisation here. The issue for us is, it seems to me, how to make them economically viable in the landscape. What would actually create a situation where people are happy and healthy in the landscape and have sufficient means of cash flow and so on to actually sustain themselves in the environment?

Mr TURNOUR—I am member for Leichhardt, so I come from Cairns. Noel Pearson has been writing about these issues as well, in terms of the language that we use—sustaining the community or how we make them. In reality, don't people, communities, families or whatnot have to be empowered to do that? Part of my concern in the way that we are operating is that we have gone from missionaries to welfare and now we are going back to government basically running people's lives, effectively, in the way that the mission did before.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—The thrust of that is: wouldn't we all be better off if they came and lived down the road where we could look after them and where they could have access to all these facilities? It is the national trend.

Mr TURNOUR—The argument that I am picking up from you goes to the issue that we need to have people in the landscape, but the people that were in the landscape were more nomadic and living in a different way, so the smaller communities we have created are in many ways artificial in their own self.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Sure. I do not think there is any doubt about that. There is very little chance of us returning to the nomadic presence in the landscape.

Ms REA—I have a very practical question, and you may not be able to answer it. We are about to conduct hearings in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Yo made comments about leadership. Are there particular communities or even individuals that, while we are in Broome, you suggest would be worth talking to about this very issue and how we manage? Are there some people that may not necessarily have approached us as yet but that we might be able to approach to sit down and talk about some of these issues? You do not necessarily, obviously, have to give names here on record, but if you were happy to think of a couple of people that might be worth while us talking to it would be really useful.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—The Kimberley communities have just been involved in a trans-Kimberley conversation about a whole range of issues associated with this.

Ms REA—Great.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—That was facilitated by the Kimberley Institute—Pat Dodson's organisation. But it was a trans-Kimberley conversation. It was not necessarily complete in terms of participation, but it was as complete as any conversation I have seen in the Kimberley. So Pat and his Kimberley Institute would be a good point of contact for you. In that conversation, there was a discussion about health and community stores.

Ms REA—Oh, really? Okay.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—The Kimberley conversation produced both a DVD and a fairly large, substantial document on those conversations, which may be useful for you.

Ms REA—Yes.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—This is also part of a response to our presence and asking the reasons to stand up and be counted.

Ms REA—Yes, and that is why I asked you the question.

Mr DEBUS—I had the great privilege recently in a different role to have a conversation with Pat Dodson and a friend of his who has got the same beard—I forget his name.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Paul Lane.

Mr DEBUS—Yes, Paul Lane. They have identical beards. The conversation was also with Peter Yu. I was left with the impression that I had never met more incisive and effective Aboriginal intellectual leaders anywhere, to tell you the truth. I think it would be terrific if the committee could persuade those people—that is, the Kimberley Institute with Pat Dodson and others, and I think Peter Yu is with the Kimberley Land Council.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—He was some time ago.

Mr DEBUS—And now it is something else?

Lt Gen. Sanderson—He is part of the Kimberley Institute but he operates—

Ms REA—Are they based in Broome?

Lt Gen. Sanderson—Yes, they are based in Broome.

ACTING CHAIR—We can continue an informal discussion after this meeting, but are there any absolute points related to community stores that we would like to put on record as questions before we close? We can continue that discussion after we close formally. John Sanderson, was there a final comment that you wanted to make?

Lt Gen. Sanderson—In a sense, I apologise for the broad front that I have conducted my appearance on.

Ms REA—We like broad fronts.

Lt Gen. Sanderson—I just wanted to make the point that both the board that I chair and I have concluded that there needs to be a much more holistic approach to these issues. We actually need to break through what we have described as the government silos, which tend to compartmentalise these issues, because we do not think you will find solutions in that way.

ACTING CHAIR—On behalf of the committee I thank you very much for coming to Canberra and giving us the submission which we have enjoyed today very much.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Rea**):

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

Committee adjourned at 1.03 pm