



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

(Subcommittee) (Roundtable)

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

THURSDAY, 23 JULY 2009

MILINGIMBI

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

Thursday, 23 July 2009

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

Members in attendance: 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.

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Subcommittee met at 1.27 pm

LAPULUNG, Mr Keith, Director, Arnhem Land Progress Corporation; and Community Representative

NEMARICH, Mr Mick, Human Resources/Operations Manager, Arnhem Land Progress Corporation

RYAN, Mr John, Interpreter

JOBSON, Ms Carol, Manager, Milingimbi Clinic

BUYULMINY, Ms Dorothy, Store Committee Member, Milingimbi Store

McCLEAN, Mr Geoff, Store Manager, Milingimbi Store

MANDI, Mr Ross, Store Committee Member, Milingimbi Store

BAKER, Ms Joanne, Private capacity

BURPUR, Mr Jimmy, Private capacity

GANGULABA, Ms Elizabeth, Private capacity

ACTING CHAIR (Mr Turnour)—Thank you for making us feel welcome here this afternoon. I pay my respects to the traditional owners, the elders past and present. The Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs is travelling across the Northern Territory this week and we have been in the central part of Australia, Cape York and the Torres Straits earlier in the year looking at the operations of remote Indigenous stores. We have looked at the cost of living issues relating to that and the quality of food and the impacts that has on health. We have a particular focus also on some of the different store models that are operating. You have an ALPA store here, there are Outback Stores and there are community stores. We are looking at which stores work better and how we can look from governance point of view at improving those stores. I am the member for Leichhardt. I am from Cairns, I live in Cairns but I also represent Cape York peninsula and the Torres Strait. Warren Snowdon is your member of parliament here. I am his equivalent in Cairns and I represent around 20,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in my electorate of Cairns.

Mrs VALE—I am the federal member for Hughes in Sydney near Botany Bay. The traditional owners of my area are the Dharawal people and the Gandangara people. They are saltwater people. I am with the government having a look at community stores to make sure that all the mothers and grandmothers in our communities have the opportunity to buy good fruit and vegetables and nutritional food for their families. It is a privilege to be here today. We look forward to hearing what you would like to tell us that we can take back to Canberra.

ACTING CHAIR—Can I apologise for the formality of the set-up, in that we have microphones and Hansard here. Today is formal proceeding of the parliament of Australia, so what we say is recorded in *Hansard* and is put up on the website. The way that parliament

operates is transparent so that people can see and hear what has been said or read what has been said. The transcripts are uploaded, which is why we have the microphones and the recording. What you say will be recorded, transcribed and become available for consideration by the committees.

The result of these hearings will be recommendations to the government as to how we can improve the operation of remote community stores. As I said, we have travelled across Australia. We have also had people come and talk to us in Canberra. We are here to hear directly from the community about how their store is operating and to visit the store, which we have done, and have a look and see how we can make improvements for the community.

This afternoon the plan is to meet with the Milingimbi Arnhem Land Progress Association store committee first of all. Thank you very much for making yourselves available. Then we are going to meet with the Milingimbi ALPA store management team. We also want to hear from general members of the community about their experiences with the store and listen to comments they have about how the store is operating.

I will introduce the subcommittee secretariat, Susan, Lois and Rebecca. If anybody in the community would like to make a statement, make a comment or ask questions of the subcommittee, could you please let one of these ladies know and we will get you on the agenda later today.

Thank you again for having us here and making us feel so welcome. It is a lovely place to be, looking out to the ocean. I know many of the people who are here from Canberra are really enjoying the weather.

We will start off by talking to Ross and Dorothy from the store committee.

Ms Buyulminy—I am a member of the ALPA store committee. I have been on the committee for a long time.

ACTING CHAIR—How long have you been on the store committee, Dorothy?

Ms Buyulminy—I cannot recall. ALPA knows.

Mr Mandi—I am the deputy chair of the store committee.

ACTING CHAIR—Can you explain a little bit about how the store committee works—how often you meet and how your involvement and work with the store works?

Mr Mandi—We have a meeting when a request comes in from the community. When they want to go somewhere else to a funeral ceremony we support them.

ACTING CHAIR—So a request from the community comes in—

Mr Mandi—It comes in to us. We approve it and send it to head office.

ACTING CHAIR—Then the store assists in that?

Mr Mandi—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Is that through the benevolent fund from the proceeds of the store?

Mr Mandi—Yes, from the dividend funds.

ACTING CHAIR—Does that come out of the profit from the store?

Mr Mandi—That is right.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you know the size of the fund every year?

Mr Mandi—It depends on the sales.

ACTING CHAIR—Does the store committee have any direct input into the management or the operation of the store?

Mr Mandi—Yes. Locally, in the community, we have support staff. If it is really serious it goes to the board level.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you talk to the store about the range or the quality of fruit and vegies and things along those lines? Does the community take issues directly to the store or are they discussed by the store committee when it meets as well?

Mr Mandi—Not really. We do not talk about the goods. We talk about other things such as when they have problems with staff or problems with the community. That is where we come in and support our staff.

ACTING CHAIR—So you support the community staff and work with the community if there are problems with the white managers or some of those sorts of issues? You help deal with those issues for the store?

Mr Mandi—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—And you also provide advice on the benevolent fund?

Mr Mandi—Yes—debit and funds.

Mrs VALE—Do you buy all of your food from the store? Does everything you eat come from the store, or can you get food in traditional ways?

Mr Mandi—We get food that is ordered through our manager.

Mrs VALE—So there is no other food that you can get?

Mr Mandi—Apart from that, we go out hunting.

Mrs VALE—And do you go fishing and get crabs et cetera?

Mr Mandi—That is right.

Ms Buyulminy—We get food from the shop when the manager orders it. We buy the food and cook it in our house. We also like takeaway food.

Mrs VALE—Do you have a stove in your house to cook with?

Ms Buyulminy—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Do you sometimes cook outside?

Ms Buyulminy—Sometimes.

Mrs VALE—If you want something special from the store, do you ask the manager to get it in for you?

Mr Mandi—If the manager does not get what we need, sometimes we do order it through the manager.

Mrs VALE—So you can always go and have a good talk and get your needs met?

Mr Mandi—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Has the current store manager been there for a long time? Does the store manager stay for a long time, or is there turnover of store managers?

Mr Mandi—There is turnover. They are there for probably two or three years. I am not really sure, but I would say they stay for two years and then they move on.

ACTING CHAIR—Does the quality of the store go up and down depending on who the manager is? From the community's point of view, how important is the manager to the operation of the store?

Mr Mandi—From the community's point of view the manager is all right.

ACTING CHAIR—Is your committee established under ALPA? What is your government structure in terms of the committee and the store?

Mr Mandi—It is under the ALPA board. We only make decisions on local ground. The board of directors make the decisions for the whole lot of us.

ACTING CHAIR—In the last couple of years we have had the intervention and we have had the introduction of the BasicsCard and the like. Have you seen changes in the way people buy things or in the operation of the store during that period of time?

Mr Mandi—Yes, there has been change.

ACTING CHAIR—What sorts of changes?

Mr Mandi—People use the BasicsCard to get goods from the shop. That is the main thing that has changed a lot for this community. We used to have something there for the kids and all that.

ACTING CHAIR—With the BasicsCard are more fruit and vegetables and healthy food being bought from the shop?

Mr Mandi—Yes, and not only food; sometimes they get clothes as well.

ACTING CHAIR—And prior to that?

Mr Mandi—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—So you have seen a significant change in that period of time.

Mr Mandi—Yes.

Mrs VALE—When you buy your food, the first time you get your BasicsCard money in, it comes every fortnight—every two weeks. Is there enough money for your food and vegetables in the second week?

Mr Mandi—Yes, there is. They budget their own money. How they do the shopping is that they budget their money.

Mrs VALE—So there is enough money to buy food—vegetables and fruit—for the two weeks?

Mr Mandi—Yes, it can last them for two weeks.

Mrs VALE—And fresh fruit and vegetables come every week?

Mr Mandi—I am not sure, but I think every second week.

Mrs VALE—Every week or every second week?

Mr Mandi—Sorry; every week. Sorry for that.

Mrs VALE—Weekly, yes. One of the ladies over here is saying weekly. Is there good choice?

Mr Mandi—Yes, there is good choice here.

Mrs VALE—Nice quality?

Mr Mandi—Yes, nice.

Mrs VALE—Great. You like it, yes. Do the children like the fruit?

Mr Mandi—Yes.

Ms Buyulminy—Really quality food.

Mrs VALE—Do you have any traditional community gardens here on your island?

Mr Mandi—No.

Mrs VALE—Have you ever had gardens? Were there ever gardens in the past?

Mr Mandi—Yes, there was a garden in the past, back in mission days.

Ms Buyulminy—When the missionaries were here.

Mrs VALE—And that fed the community?

Mr Mandi—That fed the community.

Mrs VALE—What about chickens? Did you ever have chickens here in the past?

Mr Mandi—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Did you ever have pigs?

Ms Buyulminy—We had poultry.

Mrs VALE—And pig yards?

Ms Buyulminy—In the mission days we used to have poultry, pigs, goats—for the milk—and bullocks here. See that brick house up there?

Mrs VALE—Yes.

Ms Buyulminy—That used to be for the milk cows. We used to get some milk from there to feed the children.

Mrs VALE—Would you like to go back to having some of those traditional resources?

Ms Buyulminy—I do not know whether we could go back, because lots of other things came in.

Mrs VALE—That is true.

Ms Buyulminy—That is why we are not doing anything. We like to plant our gardens.

Mrs VALE—And perhaps grow some fruit?

Ms Buyulminy—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Are there any fruit trees here?

Ms Buyulminy—No—only mango trees.

Mrs VALE—Okay.

Ms Buyulminy—And tamarind.

Mrs VALE—Tamarinds, are there? They are a good source of vitamin C. Thank you, Dorothy.

ACTING CHAIR—Are there any things that you would want to say to us about how we could improve the store or the operations of the store or about some of the things that we should look at in terms of trying to make improvements to stores in general?

Mr Mandi—Could you come again.

ACTING CHAIR—Are there any general things that you have not covered about what things we should be looking at if we are looking at reporting to the government about trying to make improvements to remote stores? What things do you think are important in terms of trying to make improvements to stores like the ones here?

Mr Mandi—To be honest, you might put that question to the board of directors for ALPA and they would be able to answer that question for you.

ACTING CHAIR—We have actually done that; we had them yesterday, and we had the chairman yesterday as well. Dorothy, do you have any comments on that or in general about how we might make improvements to the store in any way?

Mr Mandi—There are two issues there. One is for the community—the community has to be brought in—and the other is for the board of directors of ALPA.

Mrs VALE—But you are reasonably happy with how the store is going?

Mr Mandi—Yes, we are.

Mrs VALE—Chair, I think Keith is sitting over there and would like to make a comment too.

Mr Lapulung—I am Lapulung Dhamarrandji, a director and board member of the Arnhem Land Progress Association and chairman of the Milingimbi store committee. I would like to fill you in on the information I have that needs to be looked at in Canberra and in the states.

Milingimbi ALPA store and the rest of the ALPA stores have been running for over a decade—a long period of time. We have seen changes in supply that have been a great achievement. There is a great source of product that is coming into our store. The store has been running successfully over the past decade up to today. We would like the Milingimbi store to continue offering us that service for our rights and to serve us in our community.

In the meetings we have been talking about this and we are quite happy to use ALPA to be our business model to run a successful business supplying food and other products in Australia. That is my view—that Milingimbi ALPA store and the rest of the other ALPA communities have been successfully running stores over the past years, a long-time. It has a long history. In today's modern movement through the intervention and the initiative of the government, this organisation has been running for a long time. We are quite happy to be in the space of our own kind, to run this business successfully through ALPA. That is my voice. I would like to say something back to the government: give us that right back and give our store back to the community so that we can run a business in partnership with the other stakeholders.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, Keith, for those comments. We met yesterday with Dr Gondarra in Darwin and he gave us some good evidence as well and supported your comments. This inquiry should not be seen as any threat to ALPA stores or other stores. We have travelled extensively in Australia and certainly the ALPA stores are some of the best stores we have seen. What we are trying to do is to come and learn from the different store models that are around so that we can actually look to improve all stores but particularly stores that are not performing very well. Clearly the ALPA model has got some very good things happening. You have expressed that and so has the store committee today.

Mr Lapulung—We would like to build a partnership with a lot of the other balandas that come into our community and to help us, but ALPA has got the vision to run its own organisation, to stand on its own feet and to supply us with good food—products that are made in Australia.

ACTING CHAIR—You should be congratulated and the organisation should be congratulated for the work they have done. We did get some very good evidence yesterday from your chairman about that and the length of time you had been operating. It was very impressive evidence. It is similar to the evidence that you have given today.

Mr Lapulung—Thank you for that.

ACTING CHAIR—Does the store committee have any other comments? If not, we might ask the local store managers to make some comments.

Mr McClean—I am the store manager of the Milingimbi store. I have been with ALPA for about 3½ years. I have been to two ALPA stores and two consultancy stores over that time. The consultancy stores have a different setup to the other stores in the way they are run. The main focus in particular for the ALPA stores is on good food and nutritional value for the community. Being the only store in town, we have to really make sure that we supply everything for the community—electricals as well as toys, clothes, fresh food and meat. We have to cover it all.

We have 30 staff on our books. We do not actually have a lot of CDEPs because we try to offer real jobs for the community. We do a lot of training in the store. We have eight apprentices at the moment and about the same number of people who have done certificate II and III in retail. We focus a lot on staff training and staff involvement in the store. It is not the case that we just run the store ourselves. It is a store effort and a community effort because they support us by coming in and shopping with us.

One of the main points of focus at ALPA has been on the freight charges that we incur through the store. We get a barge once a week. Everything comes on that barge from Darwin. The problem associated with that is that fruit and vegetables will be on the barge for a couple of days. By the time it gets out here they have only a three- to four-day shelf life. Even though the fruit and vegetables are good, they are not of an excellent quality by the time we get them, which is a bit of an issue. We have to put the freight charges on to our costs, which mean that the prices are a little bit higher for the community. That is something that we are looking at. We do not charge freight on fruit and vegetables because we try to encourage people to buy fruit and vegetables and meat at a better price. We try to encourage them to drink orange juice and water and to get away from Coke, within the policy of good foods. That is about all I have to say.

ACTING CHAIR—Can you give us a breakdown of the freight charges as a percentage of the retail prices here. How much do you think it adds on as a percentage of the total cost?

Mr McClean—Our last barge charge was about \$28,000. That has to take into account everything that we sell. We have different charges on different things that brought out. If you order a big washing machine, that is going to take up a lot of space on the barge and so there is a dearer cost than what there would be for just a box of groceries. But the breakdown overall would be about 20 per cent.

ACTING CHAIR—You do not put a freight cost on the fruit and vegetables. Do you have a target for the amount of fruit and vegetables you are looking to sell?

Mr McClean—About five to eight per cent of our sales.

ACTING CHAIR—Are you meeting that?

Mr McClean—Not at the moment. It is sitting on about 4½ per cent. We have a new cook in the store. He is going really well with promoting healthy lines through the takeaway at night. He is cooking a lot more vegetables and things like that. That will impact on our sales as well, because we can now buy onions, carrots, cauliflower and things like that in bulk to mix through the meals that we serve.

ACTING CHAIR—What incentives are you giving to promote those healthy choices to meet that target?

Mr McClean—Just having the food on display and not filling it up with chips and other snack foods. We are trying to promote a healthy menu across the line, such fresh salads and fresh hot meals, especially at night. When the community come in, there is something available as an actual meal, not as a snack type of meal.

ACTING CHAIR—Obviously, you have talked about presentation and the like. Do you have a nutritionist? How do you go about continuing to promote healthy foods? If you are at 4½ per cent now and you have a target of five to eight per cent, what sorts of strategies do you have in place to try and lift that up?

Mr McClean—We have a good foods person. Once a week, she goes through the store with a checklist to make sure that we are covering all the policies set by ALPA to do with good foods. She then sends a nutritionist for two hours, who monitors what we are doing in the store. He is in contact with Simon George, our supplier of fruit and vegetables. They can see whether it tapers on or off depending on season. In the dry, you sell more potatoes and hard goods. You sell salads and whatnot in the other seasons. He monitors that. He gets on the phone and says, 'We're a bit down on sales,' or 'We're going really good with the sales.' He monitors what we are doing.

ACTING CHAIR—So that monitoring happens centrally and then they give you advice. Is that right?

Mr McClean—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Are any of your nutritional or good, wholesome foods marked differently in any way so that the community can identify them and so mothers can see that these are more nutritious foods than other foods?

Mr McClean—Originally, we had—

Mrs VALE—Do you have colour coding or anything like that?

Mr McClean—colour coding. They have stepped away from that now. I do not know why that stopped.

Mr Nemarich—I am the human operations manager for ALPA. I oversee four of the ALPA stores directly, this not being one of them. You may have heard of the FOODcard. It was a voluntary budgeting device. The women of Gapuwiyak recommended it. It took us a couple of years to develop. That was meant to be a voluntary budgeting tool linked through to a point-of-sale system so that only healthy nutritious foods and essential day-to-day items could be purchased with that. With the intervention and income management and because of the excessive administration burden that that original system imposed upon stores, we linked the Centrelink payments to our FOODcard. Originally, the FOODcard had green tickets for the stuff that could be bought on the FOODcard. That was a de facto labelling system for all healthy foods, because that is what we deemed as good. Unfortunately, with income management we were forced by Centrelink to open up the restrictions on the FOODcard, because they were too restrictive compared to the restrictions for the income managed funds. The green ticket items are still better options. We still do not allow coke or chips. But items such as clothing, which we would never have allowed, and sugared biscuits, for example, are now allowed. The FOODcard would only have allowed the purchase of Saladas. Now we have to allow people to purchase Monte Carlos as well.

Mrs VALE—Do you still have the green ticketing system within your stores even so?

Mr Nemarich—Yes.

Mrs VALE—It sounds like it would be a very good guide for mothers.

Mr Nemarich—It was. The green tickets are now far more prevalent in the store. They probably make up 80 per cent of the store's range instead of the original 40 to 45 per cent.

ACTING CHAIR—What was the response from the community? What proportion of the community were using FOODcards before the intervention? What proportion are using them now? Do you know?

Mr Nemarich—I will use this store as an example. I am comparing June of this year and June of last year. The BasicsCard came in around November—there was a roll out. FOODcard sales have decreased by 53 per cent and EFT transactions have increased by 30 per cent. It is a bit hard without full analysis of the data to make a solid statement on that, but we would imagine around a 50 per cent decrease in the use of the FOODcard, which was targeted specifically towards healthy food. It has now gone on to more general items because of the BasicsCard's introduction.

Mrs VALE—Laying aside the BasicsCard and the FOODcard, is there any way, without increasing any more of your workload because of administration and what you have to do in the store, of simply making some kind of marker? The green ticket item was really a good way of marketing it, but that was tied to the FOODcard. Is there any way of even giving a green tick on good nutritional foods? Is it possible to do that, just to give an indication? It is just a matter of making sure that the community has an informed choice about what they are purchasing. You might understand what I am saying.

Mr Nemarich—Yes, definitely. We are looking at new ways of doing that. We have not worked out a way to make it effective and eliminate additional administrative burdens on the store. Ideally we will link that healthy food information to the ticket. So, regardless of what sort of ticket it is, it will have either a tick or a cross or some version of that. The format of the ticket and the format of what sort of symbol to be used is the challenge for us now.

Mrs VALE—Is it something that ALPA is actually thinking about?

Mr Nemarich—We are thinking about it, but it is in the early stages. We already had our system, but we had to recant it quickly and now we are looking at the next version of that.

Mrs VALE—It would be a good system. ALPA should really be congratulated. It is indicative. The answers lie with the community and the fact that the FOODcard came from the Indigenous women. What was the name of the community that it came from?

Mr Nemarich—Gapuwiyak.

Mrs VALE—To think that it actually came from the Indigenous women of that community and the federal government has actually taken on the same idea and the same concept in the BasicsCard.

Mr Nemarich—A general statement about ALPA—for blokes like Geoff and me—is that it is not our company. It is a Yolngu business and the board set Yolngu priorities to determine our direction. We are just bit players in this. We offer our retail expertise that we have gained from working with Woolworths, Coles or IGA, but guys like Keith on the board and the store committee guide where we go and the staff maintain that.

Mrs VALE—So you develop some system on your ticketing card to identify nutritional and wholesome foods. You would take that concept to the board and get their approval?

Mr Nemarich—A nutritionist at every board meeting, every quarter, presents to the board, and possibly the most verbose discussion that the board has with us at that level is about health and nutrition in the stores and of the people.

ACTING CHAIR—Obviously we talked about the nutritionist and some of the things you are doing in the stores with the FOODcard and the like. Are you working with the health clinic? Is there interaction with the health clinic or is there any proactive outreach in relation to that?

Ms Jobson—Not enough at this stage. I have been associated with this ALPA store since 1989. It was my first contact with this community. I have watched it go from a very small building and a very small operation to what it is now. I worked with Alastair Campbell before, when Alastair was the store manager in the nineties. The store has gone from strength to strength. That is what I wanted to talk about. A new manager has come and there has been little opportunity to get together in the last year. One of the problems that I have with the store—having said all of the good things because I think it is a fantastic store—and we talked about this yesterday, is the bread. It is not a store issue; it is a demand issue. White bread is sold in the store when such a large proportion of this community is diabetic. It has a very high glycaemic index. It has iron in it, but it does not work, and it has fibre in it. It is a poor dietary choice for anyone but an even poorer choice for our diabetics. I do not think anything is gained by saying it is the store's problem. It is a problem for all of us. What we probably need to do is some dual marketing and health things at the store—show other healthy choices that are available and start to break down that white flour, white bread choice.

Some of the women in the community approached us before you came and asked for brown rice because they understand that, so they started to do brown fried rice at the takeaway. That has worked really well. A lot of our diabetics' HbA1cs have come down because they are making better choices. There is not enough, but that is starting to happen. People are becoming more educated and more aware. Television does that as well.

In the early days we had the shelves marked for all of our diabetics. Viv Hobson, who is the dietician in the East Arnhem region and is now in Darwin, came out, and we put big spots on all the foods that were okay for diabetics. We started off with red because it caught people's attention and then we went to green. That was an indicator that those were the foods that diabetics could eat. This store actually led that. It is unfortunate that it is not happening now, but that is something that we could work at together. And there is a dietician as well. When the dietician comes out he always comes to talk. I think ALPA has done a fantastic job, in that it is community owned and it supports the community with a whole range of funding for different things that are not funded through other areas. It has been a fantastic effort, but there are many more things that we could do together.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you for that. You have obviously been here a long time.

Ms Jobson—No, I have not been here all that time. I have been here and gone.

ACTING CHAIR—Obviously, you can have good health workers work with good individuals on the ground and make things happen in communities. Are you working for the NT government?

Ms Jobson—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Is there anything happening systemically from the NT government's point of view in engaging with—

Ms Jobson—Yes, there is the whole chronic disease program—not specifically engaging with ALPA but engaging with communities. More funding is coming through the intervention for those purposes.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you think it would be worth while, when we are obviously engaging the federal government with ALPA through this inquiry and through a security strategy that is being developed as well, for the NT government to look more formally at engaging with ALPA or Outback Stores or whoever?

Ms Jobson—Wherever we can we should be forming partnerships and looking at all the stakeholders being involved in that progression. I have been talking about this a lot in this community to get groups of people together for regular meetings. We should have partnerships, they should be formalised and they should be formalised from the ground right through to the top and supported.

ACTING CHAIR—Is that formalisation something you would work on directly with the store or with the store committee? How do you think that could work?

Ms Jobson—I think it should be through a local health board. The true pathway to working through that is that this community has its own health board and that all people in the community store, the school, the council and the health centre be involved—not as members of the board; it should be a Yolngu board—in working through that vehicle to bring about health changes in this community. It needs to be formalised where the power lies in the community, not with more bureaucracy. We have been bureaucratised beyond belief. It is not getting better; it is getting worse. What we need is for that power to go back to the individuals in this community, to the Mala leaders and the people that the Mala leaders determine should be working with their family groups. It should be done culturally appropriately, and we should then work through a formal health committee or community store or whatever you want to call it. Without that in place, it becomes a whole lot of other balandas sitting around and having a talkfest and then going out and telling Yolngu people what to do, and that is not what I want to see happen.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for that. It is good. Geoff, we talked about freight charges. One of the other things is costs in terms of maintenance and all of those sorts of things. How does that impact on the pricing in the store and the real cost of running a store out in this part of the world?

Mr McClean—We have workmen in town—plumbers, carpenters, things like that.

ACTING CHAIR—Are they all local people?

Mr McClean—Yes, they are local people. They have work to do in the community fixing houses, roads and different things. If we have a freezer breakdown, we have to either fly someone out from Darwin. A charter is about \$4,500 or \$5,000. If they do not have the parts on them they have to get them sent here and come back at another time. So you have the downtime that your freezers are out. All that is ongoing costs. Darwin is a busy place and trying to get any type of workmen at the best of times is always hard, let alone coming out into a community, flying out, doing the job and then flying back. It is quite an expensive exercise. All those costs are added on to charges through the store. We have an IT specialist at ALPA. If anything breaks down, there is no-one really in town that can fix any our programs, so he has to fly out, fix it and fly back. That is another ongoing cost. All these things, being in a remote community, have to be factored into what we are doing in the store. The crux of it is that it is the price point at the end of the day—what we are charging the community.

ACTING CHAIR—Is this a profitable store? Does it make money?

Mr McClean—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—In terms of the money that goes across to feed back into the community, the decisions about how that money is spent is done through the store committee or the board of ALPA? Is that correct?

Mr McClean—Yes, we do not have any say in where the money goes. The directors, if they see fit, buy something for the community, something for the store. It has to be run through them. At the end of the day, as Mick was saying, we are here to manage the staff and the directors direct us as to what needs to be done in the store and outside in the community.

Mr Nemarich—As a very rough guideline in the stores that we operate, about 80 per cent to 85 per cent of the money goes back into the maintenance and development of the store to make it larger and increase the infrastructure. Five per cent in the ALPA stores—not the consulting stores—like Milingimbi goes back to the staff in the way of bonuses and 10 per cent is set aside by way of dividend funds for the community.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very, very much for that. Unless you have some other comments, we might open it up to the broader community for some comments.

Ms Gangulaba—Elizabeth Gangulaba is my name. I prefer Gangulaba. I am the partnerships manager at the school. My main job is to create partnerships with the parents and agencies in Milingimbi to help enhance and improve the attendance of the students of Milingimbi community.

ALPA has a law. I would like ALPA to strengthen that law. That law is not having children in the shop during school hours. I have also noticed there are two game machines. I am from this community. I shop at this shop. I want the best for my community. My point is most of the stuff in there is in English, and English is not our language; it is a second, third, fourth or fifth

language. What would help is to give that power to people through language so that we can work together to educate our children so that they will not be illiterate; they will read that this food is good for my body organs or this food is not good—this is going to hurt my organs. I will have sickness if I eat this food all the time. It needs to be presented in a way that will help them understand, like the colour coding. I remember the colour coding when I was still a health worker. Language is the main barrier to every aspect of life. We need that in our language or any pictorial, visual image that will help to show the people that this is not good for our body and this is the right food. Even just a couple of ticks—like the Heart Foundation tick. In conjunction with ALPA, promote educational materials like DVDs or posters that can be displayed around ALPA.

My main concern from the school's perspective is for everyone to strengthen these laws, or by-laws or whatever initiative we come up with and start applying laws that will help our children to attend school, meaning if it is school hours you do not go to the shop; you go to the school. I know there is a reason why the children during recess and lunch come to the shop: food is provided at the school and no drinks, so they come looking for drinks. One of the initiatives that could be in partnership with the shop is that the shop could provide the kids with a bottle of water. It is good for the kidneys. Start educating our students to choose water over a Coke bottle.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for your contribution. I have a couple of questions. You work with families and whatnot. Do people typically go and buy their food when the barge comes in, or do people shop through the week?

Ms Gangulaba—They do both.

Mrs VALE—Does the fresh fruit and vegetables last until the next barge comes in? Are there any days when all the fruit and vegetables go and then you do not have any?

Ms Gangulaba—It depends. Some people have fridges and some people do not. It depends on what the families have available that will keep the fruit and vegetables fresh.

ACTING CHAIR—What percentage of the community has fridges?

Ms Gangulaba—Most of the community. But, like Geoff said, if I wanted to buy myself a refrigerator it would cost me more. The more remote you are, and the heavier the refrigerator you purchase, the more it will cost you. Sometimes people do not bother because they just cannot afford it.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you for that. Are there any other people who would like to make some comments?

Mr Lapulung—We do not see any problems with food supply in the community at the moment. ALPA is providing a good service—apart from fruit and veggies. And we cope, we live with that. With the food that is supplied to our community, we all like living in this community. They supply the best food source.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, Keith. Are there any others who would like to make a comment?

Mr Ryan—Usually there are too many people in the house and the vegetables go in just one day. Sometimes you can save them in the fridge and they will last until next payday. Sometimes they last a long time and sometimes they do not. It is because of the housing problem. There are too many people in the house. But you cannot leave your family sitting down with an empty stomach. You have to feed everybody in the house. The next door neighbours or the people down the road will help our family with tucker. Everybody in the community helps each other. That is why we all buy our tucker here. We do bush hunting as well.

ACTING CHAIR—Do people eat bush foods through the week, or just on weekends?

Mr Ryan—No, we eat it every day.

ACTING CHAIR—What sort of things do you catch?

Mr Ryan—Fish, oysters, mangrove worms, turtles and sometimes dugongs.

ACTING CHAIR—And that supplements the food from the store?

Mr Ryan—Yes, that is where the vegetables come into it.

Ms Baker—I am one of the Aboriginal health workers. I have just graduated. I have a very deep commitment in the area of chronic disease management. That is what I am training to learn more about. The issue I see in this community is about healthy foods for the sick, especially as Carol was saying for people with diabetes and other sicknesses. Would there be a possibility in ALPA to have specials on good foods—especially for vegetables, fruits and other good foods that go with that?

ACTING CHAIR—ALPA have advised the subcommittee, and they are here to respond, that they do not charge freight on fruit and vegetables, so they are already providing the fruit and vegetables at a subsidised rate through the direction of the board. That is subsidised by increasing the costs on other products in the store that are not as healthy. So they are effectively doing that at the moment. That is what they have advised us and I can see them nodding their heads.

Ms Baker—In the shop prices are a bit too high and people like pensioners and other people can only afford as much as they receive. The other thing that I was looking at was to have more fruits and vegetables in stock than the other foods.

ACTING CHAIR—Do people have enough money to get from one pay to the next in terms of healthy eating?

Ms Baker—Some people only earn about \$400. That \$400 goes straightaway leaving them with about \$10. Some foods do not last until the next fortnight. That is why we still go out hunting and get all the other stuff.

ACTING CHAIR—So people rely on traditional foods then when the money runs out?

Ms Baker—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Is it normal for money to run out and then to rely on traditional food every fortnight?

Ms Baker—Yes, because of the cost of what is in our shop.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you for that.

Ms Gangulaba—Something came up while Joanne was talking. I want to make something clear for you so that you do not assume some things. In Yolngu there is a kinship system. One of the aspects of that kinship system is that everything that we have is not about lending, it is about giving and sharing.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you for that. On that, can you explain a bit more about how that—

Ms Gangulaba—I am a full-time employee. I have an affordable wage. This is my cousin. In your culture, she is my cousin; in my culture, she is my sister, not a cousin. She has a little boy, my nephew. Because she cannot afford two weeks of healthy food and vegetables to provide for my nephews, that means I have to give some of my money to help her. I am not lending it; I am giving it; I am sharing it. That is the reason why a lot of the people who are on welfare run out quick.

ACTING CHAIR—Then the broader community share in terms of meeting the needs of the whole community.

Ms Gangulaba—Yes. We share to meet each other's needs. It is in our system.

Ms Jobson—Their income is among the lowest of anywhere, so they exist on the poverty line.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for that. I thank everybody for having us in your community. I know that it is a bit of a rush and it is bit funny having microphones and everything, but it enables the parliament to record what has been said. We will then review. It will also be published for public reading on the internet. We will be reporting in October. We will be going on to Maningrida and staying there tonight. We have travelled throughout remote Indigenous Australia, including the Torres Strait, Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory and Cape York, and been into communities. We have had a chance to look at a lot of different stores and talk to a range of different people. We have learnt some new things today and we appreciate that. ALPA are clearly doing a good job in terms of some of the stores that we have seen, so congratulations to those people. I will take one more comment before we go.

Mr Burpur—I have one point. You are recording this?

ACTING CHAIR—It is recording, yes.

Mr Burpur—Could we turn that off?

ACTING CHAIR—We can hear you. I can hear you very clearly.

Mr Burpur—My point to all you government people, ALPA people and Northern Land Council people—whoever you are; everybody—is that next time come once, please. We are sick and tired of people coming all the time. We have to keep our heads fresh. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. I take that on board. I represent a lot of Aboriginal people in Cape York, and they get very frustrated with people coming and going. It is very difficult from our point of view in that we are representatives of the Parliament of Australia and we have a limited amount of time. We wanted to get around to a range of different communities. We are a bit different than the regular government people who come here, in that we are elected representatives. I am equivalent to Warren Snowdon, who is your representative as a member of parliament. I am with the Labor Party; Danna is with the Liberal Party. We are a bipartisan subcommittee that is looking at this particular issue. But I take on board the issues that you are raising in terms of the number of people who come and go and the need for us to put people in communities and keep people in communities to work over an extended period of time. That is the sort of feedback that I give the government as well. The number of people flying in and out can get quite confusing for the community. Thank you.

Mr Lapulung—As one of the ALPA directors and also chairman of the Millingimbi ALPA store committee, I think it is good to share this and it is good that we have come together to express our concerns. One thing I would like to try and implement that you can take back to the federal government in Canberra and the whole superior level of the government is that we are facing a crunch time here with this intervention, but we are open to building a bridge in a level of understanding through the service. You people, the government, need to promise us to build a strong layer and implement a structure where we can live together in peaceful harmony and do things that will suit the needs of Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people in Australia. That is the final initiative that I am introducing through the movement of this meeting. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much. I think that is a good place to leave it. Thank you again for having us. I again thank you for the welcome and formally close the meeting. We appreciate the time you have given us today. Thank you to everybody who has made a presentation and to the ALPA staff for making us feel so welcome, and to the store committee as well. Thank you very much.

Mrs VALE—Thank you very much, everyone.

Subcommittee adjourned at 2.36 pm