



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, 23 JULY 2009

MANINGRIDA

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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 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 4.32 pm**HUTCHINGS, Mr Mark, Manager Barlmark Supermarket, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation**

Ms Williams—Good afternoon everyone. Today we have the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. I would like to welcome them here at Maningrida as a traditional landowner. I would also like to apologise that not a lot of people are here because we have business ceremonies and other things happening around Maningrida. Today we will talk about two shops that are based here in Maningrida and some issues that should be brought up on both sides. I hope everyone is all ready to have a go. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR (Mr Turnour)—Thank you, Helen. On behalf of the committee I thank you for your welcome and pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land that we are gathered on and also the elders, past and present. I am the member for Leichhardt, so I come from Cairns and I represent an area including Cape York Peninsula and the Torres Strait.

Mrs VALE—Hello everyone. I am the federal member for Hughes, which is in southern Sydney and takes in the Sutherland shire and east Liverpool, and Botany Bay, which you might recognise, is one our closest waterways. The people of my area are the Ngunawal people and the Gandangara people. They are salt water people. We are here to hear what you have to tell us about your store, how it fulfils your needs and how it provides the nutrition and wholesome food for the children. Thank you very much. It is a privilege to be here.

ACTING CHAIR—We need to apologise to Helen and to everybody else for running late. This is a formal proceeding of the parliament of Australia and, as part of that, we have some protocols that we have to follow according to the parliament. That is why we have Hansard setting up to record the hearings today. So I will formally open hearings and invite our first witness to give evidence. But again thank you very much for taking the time. We do understand if members of the community are not here today because of the show and other ceremonial issues.

We have been travelling extensively not only in the cape, the Torres Straits and Queensland but also in Central Australia, Western Australia and the APY Lands, and now we are in Arnhem Land, so we have gone across the length and breadth of Australia visiting remote communities and looking at remote stores. The objective of this inquiry is to look at remote community stores. The particular issues are health and wellbeing and the outcomes that Aboriginal people are getting out of stores, and the impacts and the policy decisions that government makes in trying to ensure that stores are meeting the needs of communities, and so we are here today to hear directly from members of the community and also to have a look at some stores which, I understand, are open until eight o'clock tonight. Again, thank you very much for having us.

I understand Mr Hutchings is the first witness today. He is off to Darwin on a five-hour drive, so we are providing him with the opportunity to go first. Mr Hutchings, I know you have a submission. Could you give us an overview of your store operations and maybe a little bit of the history of your store as well.

Mr Hutchings—I have a brief document that I prepared.

ACTING CHAIR—That would be good.

Mr Hutchings—It backs on to the submission that Ian Monroe made and also talks about a few issues. I will quickly read it.

As would be widely known, both supermarkets passed assessment for income management with ease. Barlmarrk supermarket employs 15 CDEP staff members. There is a supervisor also employed under a CDEP salaried position. Recently, two CDEP staff members completed Certificate II in Retail Operations. From on-the-job training they have been able to assist with administration and the counting of tills. There are also six balandas, or white people, employed and some are in supervisory and management positions.

The changes from old CDEP to new CDEP will result in lower levels of employment and less money in the community that was previously paid in top-up. As discussed in our submission, the barge service is a monopoly and is currently not subject to any competition. Our supermarket and our organisation, specifically BAC, run our own freight service that operates via road. This service costs approximately 40 per cent less than the barge service and at full capacity would be up to a 50 per cent saving. It offers a shortened turnaround time of two days as opposed to four days with the barge. This helps with perishables and fresh items that have short use-by and best-before dates.

The competition in Maningrida is healthy and reduces some of the need for customers to order groceries and food items from Darwin. The business has continued to grow and improve the quality and consistency of fresh fruit and vegetables, meats, dairy products, fresh juices and other healthy items. Implementing change towards eating healthier foods requires more than just the foods being available within remote supermarkets; it also requires some form of education process to take place. When the warehouse or Balmarrrk supermarket was first opened, I believe in 1998, it had a turnover in the first year of some \$1.6 million. This turnover has grown in the last financial year to be somewhere around the \$8 million mark. The level of turnover that we now have allows the store to negotiate good pricing on groceries and also allows us to participate in some form of investment buying of stock. Also, when deals are available we can take advantage of them.

Also mentioned in the submission was the bush delivery service that is provided by BAC. BAC operates a bush delivery service that was previously operated by MPA. This service offers outstation customers food and other goods at the same price as in town and there are no fees associated with this service. From our perspective, competition in communities is a good thing. It drives down prices and improves the availability of fresh and healthy food. Competition provided through private enterprise may lack a focus on employing Aboriginal staff and training them.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for that opening statement. You said in your statement that you employ 15 people under CDEP at the moment. Is that correct?

Mr Hutchings—Yes. There are 15 participants employed at the supermarket under CDEP.

ACTING CHAIR—And you saying that, without CDEP, you will probably have to reduce the number of employees. Do you have any idea what that reduction will be? How many do you employ overall in the shop?

Mr Hutchings—About 21.

ACTING CHAIR—And 15 of them are on CDEP?

Mr Hutchings—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—With the reforms to CDEP, what do you think the total employment in the shop will be going forward?

Mr Hutchings—Somewhere around half of the staff that we currently have.

ACTING CHAIR—So more around 10 to 15 total rather than the 21?

Mr Hutchings—Yes. We see the changes to CDEP, where it changes to a form of work for the dole, will result in a lack of incentive for Indigenous employees wishing to come to work. There seems to be in the changes a lack of incentive for them to work because they will not be able to earn the top-up that they currently earn. So if they stay at home they are going to earn the same amount of money they would earn if they went to work. So there will be a lack of interest for them to come to work.

ACTING CHAIR—And you will replace the part-time role of a CDEP with more of a full-time worker that you will pay more of an award wage without the top-up under the new system?

Mr Hutchings—We will shift as many people who are competent and qualified towards salaried positions. But it is not something that will happen immediately. It will take further training and further skills will need to be attained. CDEP allows our participants and our staff members to still participate in funeral and ceremonial businesses. We can modify a salaried position but it would take a lot of modification to make it suitable for the Indigenous employee to carry on all their business plus participate in some form of full-time employment.

ACTING CHAIR—Are all of your Indigenous employees CDEP participants, or are there some salaried participants already?

Mr Hutchings—There is one salaried participant as well.

ACTING CHAIR—But all the others are CDEP participants?

Mr Hutchings—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Due to the ceremonial and cultural requirements, if you replace your CDEP people with full-time employees, if you could do that financially, could there be a negative impact in having full-time employees who have to participate in a ceremony or a cultural requirement?

Mr Hutchings—The current situation under CDEP is that they can attend some form of full-time work and then, when they have to attend cultural business, ceremonies, funerals and other things, they are able to. CDEP currently takes into account the time they need to attend cultural ceremonies and funerals.

Mrs VALE—Can you see a role within your particular circumstance to retain the CDEP?

Mr Hutchings—Certainly, for the community and for the business.

ACTING CHAIR—I thought I would pick that up because we have seen and spoken to a variety of stores—some that use CDEP and some who do not—and it is useful to get some input from you, as you are obviously using CDEP. One of the major focuses of the inquiry is the health of communities. Can you go through some of the policies and some of the things that you may do as a store to try to promote healthy eating and healthy living through your store? Do you have any particular policies in that area?

Mr Hutchings—There is not a formalised document, but we work with other agencies—the health clinic, nutritionists and other people who visit the community—and over the last couple of years we have tried other products and ranges of diet and fresher products and other bits and pieces.

ACTING CHAIR—Can you give me some examples specifically?

Mr Hutchings—Diet jams and diet cordials; lowering the margin on fruit and vegetables and applying that margin to other areas; and reducing the margin on meat and then putting that on a salty snack, a soft drink, cigarettes or another product.

ACTING CHAIR—So you are cross-subsidising healthy products by raising prices on other products. Do you have a set formula you use for that? How do you determine what level of subsidy to make?

Mr Hutchings—It is set by departmental margins that we manage and monitor.

ACTING CHAIR—I think you have been here a couple of years. Were you here prior to and post the intervention?

Mr Hutchings—Yes, I was here previous to and after the intervention.

ACTING CHAIR—Are you monitoring the quantities and different types of food that get sold through your store? Have you seen changes in the types and quantities of the types of food that have been sold since the intervention.

Mr Hutchings—Certainly. We have seen some form of change, but there also has been change because of the healthy competition and the good display of fresh fruit, vegetables and meat that are available in both stores. The customers have always had that available to them. The forced quarantining of 50 per cent of their income has helped divert funds for the supermarket. There has been some increase in purchases, but it may have been through a variety of goods like clothing and toys. The only quarantine item that we have is tobacco. There has been an increase

in turnover across the whole range of items. We cannot specifically clarify that fruit and veg has increased because of BasicsCard and quarantine funds.

ACTING CHAIR—So there has been an overall increase in turnover but you do not break that down and look at increases to see if there has been an increase in the sales of fresh fruit and vegies or the like post the intervention and the introduction of the BasicsCard.

Mr Hutchings—It is hard to break it down, because there has been continual growth from 1998, when the businesses opened, to now. Before they were quarantined, we could not tell how much of the funds we were getting. After quarantining, we know what we receive from food card sales; but, from the BasicsCard sales, now that we accept EFTPOS it is hard to break it down and see what percentage of that now are quarantine funds.

ACTING CHAIR—In general, do you have an understanding of the percentage of your turnover that is fruit and veg compared to dry foods or other items in the store?

Mr Hutchings—At the store level we could break down the percentages of what is sold under each department. We have not seen an increase in fruit and veg that we could attribute to income management. We have seen an increase in fruit and veg, but the increases we have seen have just followed on the trend of the increased turnover in the business that we could not attribute to being income managed funds.

ACTING CHAIR—You are talking about different departments. We have not been in the store. Can you give us a run-down of the organisational structure within the store? You said you have different departments.

Mr Hutchings—In the supermarket there are six managers and 15 staff. It trades seven days a week. There are a good range of fruit and veg, a good range of meat, and a good range of dry goods, clothing, variety goods and other bits and pieces available. It operates as a business completely separate from other businesses that BAC operates.

ACTING CHAIR—You said you were talking about working with other groups regarding health. Have you worked with or had involvement with the clinic, other health professionals or nutritionists?

Mr Hutchings—There has been some work in the past 12 months with a green tick program that was started and was up and running. It identified with a placard in front of the product what was a healthy, nutritious product. It is just something that has not been maintained by the original people who came out here and started running it.

ACTING CHAIR—Who set that up?

Mr Hutchings—I am not sure.

ACTING CHAIR—But there is no specific labelling for healthy food or anything in the store at this point in time?

Mr Hutchings—Not at this stage.

Mrs VALE—Would the store consider doing that, even if it is just identifying high-value, nutritional foods with a green dot or something, so that there is some that helps mothers, when they go to the store to make their choices, to make an informed choice?

Mr Hutchings—Sure; we are happy to work with other organisations and the NT Health, the clinic and other agencies that come out here, to promote healthier living standards and better purchasing of healthier foods but it does not lie with either of the two supermarkets to take an education process, which is beyond us.

Mrs VALE—Yes; that is true. I accept that, Mark. It was just about making sure that there is was something easily identifiable that would mark a food product as being high in nutrition, wholesome, and having good food value for your children. I know that probably goes, initially, to your extra work on management and everything—administration—but it is the sort of thing that once it is in a store it will not be so hard to maintain when new lines come on board. Can I ask you: how frequently do you get deliveries of fresh fruit and vegetables?

Mr Hutchings—While the barge is operating we get two deliveries of fruit and vegetables.

Mrs VALE—Two deliveries a week?

Mr Hutchings—Two deliveries a week.

Mrs VALE—And when the fresh fruit and vegetables arrive do they last very long on your shelves? Is there still some available when the next delivery comes?

Mr Hutchings—It is intermittent, depending on what money is around and what end of the pay-fortnight cycle we are at—whether it is a CDEP salary pay week or a salary pay week. It depends. The schoolteachers may be on holidays and it also depends on what functions or bonus money might be around in the community. If you look at when the two big stimulus packages were around we could not keep fruit and veg of particular lines in the fridge. And it is seasonal, depending on what lines are available—such as cherries and other bits and pieces that the locals out here love to buy.

Mrs VALE—You mentioned in your submission the possibility of trying to secure local food sources for local traditional foods. Has there been any progress on that at all?

Mr Hutchings—Nothing at this stage. Collecting and having traditional foods available in the supermarket is something that we have looked at and talked about but that is as far as it has got at this stage.

Mrs VALE—Would you know if there has been any tradition in Maningrida of having domestic gardens or community gardens? You might not know.

Mr Hutchings—I know of one that there has been in the past—it was down towards Bottom Camp—but I do not know of its success. I know there have been other ones at outstations that they have tried to get up and running but I do not know of anything that has happened during my time.

ACTING CHAIR—You said that when the stimulus payments came you could not keep up with the fruit and veg. Is that right?

Mr Hutchings—That is true. When the stimulus package came in we could not keep up with much at all in the supermarket. It was absolute chaos across all our departments of variety, meat, toys, bikes, clothing, dried goods, fruit and veg, soft drinks, confectionary. The whole lot was getting towards being empty on the shelves in a lot of areas of our business.

ACTING CHAIR—In terms of your experience with their pays—and we should probably talk to some of the reference group for a community perspective—do you see people come into the shop after the barge arrives? You get two a week here so maybe it is not an issue. Do you get a big shop after the pay day? Is that how the system works?

Mr Hutchings—Pretty much, that is how it operates. A lot of people spend the money as soon as they get it. As soon as they receive their pays they are into the shops buying their grocery needs.

ACTING CHAIR—And you provide packs for one meal. Do you break the food down into pack form or do you sell it in bulk?

Mr Hutchings—The way that it is sold in the supermarket is the way that it is successfully sold and the way that the Indigenous customers have wanted to purchase it. If they have any additional need to change a pack quantity or to buy something in a smaller size, we will try to work with that but generally the mixed fruit and other bits and pieces are sold as they like to buy them.

ACTING CHAIR—Is that packed here or is that packed in Darwin?

Mr Hutchings—Probably 95 per cent of our fruit and veg are packed here.

ACTING CHAIR—Using local Indigenous people?

Mr Hutchings—We have a balanda supervisor and then probably four to five Indigenous men who pack most of the fruit and veg.

ACTING CHAIR—And they are CDEP employees?

Mr Hutchings—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—With the change in CDEP would you continue to do that or would you look to get it brought in?

Mr Hutchings—We would try as much as we could to package our own fruit and veg locally.

ACTING CHAIR—And obviously that is employment, which is good, in the local community. I know you are keen to go off to Darwin, but I just want to ask you a couple of questions about licensing. Your store is now a licensed store. What has been your experience with the licensing process?

Mr Hutchings—As I stated earlier, there was nothing we had to really change to accept quarantine and income managed funds. The only thing I would say about the licensing of community stores is that it would be good if there were an even playing field so that there were no corporate licenses and so on and all stores were assessed under the same guidelines rather than having a different set of rules for the other models that are out there as opposed to the organisational ones that are run locally here in the community.

ACTING CHAIR—So is that the issue where an outback store or an ALPA can get a corporate licence whereas you, as an individual store, effectively get a different system?

Mr Hutchings—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Who is licensed in your store? Is the CEO licensed? And if they move on do you have to re-licence?

Mr Hutchings—There are several people within the organisation who are licensed—those who have access to the financials and those who work within the actual business. There is the CEO and the financial controller, and there is another person who we would have licensed as well.

ACTING CHAIR—So what does that mean, practically, if one or other of those people move on, from an administrative point of view?

Mr Hutchings—It takes time to complete the police checks and other bits of paperwork that we have to complete to have them listed as an income management person who can look after those funds.

ACTING CHAIR—So if you were to make a recommendation about what we could do in terms of making licensing work more effectively for a store like your own, what would you think would be fair?

Mr Hutchings—When we apply to be reissued with a licence we are asked for three years of financial documents, yet a lot of this information has already been provided. I do not think there is a need to continually go over the same lists and produce the same information.

ACTING CHAIR—So if somebody were to leave they would have asked you to give them three years, and then if they were to leave six months later you would have to give them the same three years or 3½ years or whatever it is? The forms are the same.

Mr Hutchings—No, that was not where I was coming from. I was saying that, as we get the different people, as they change, it is an easy process, but it would be good if—as we do that process and as FaHCSIA come out to check out our store and review our pricing and other bits and pieces—the documents that they required were simplified and if they did not need us to provide to them the same information that we have already provided. Our time could be better spent in other areas of our business.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you for that. You have raised some issues that others have raised as well. Have you got anything else you would like to comment on?

Mr Hutchings—No, there is no further comment that I would like to make.

Mrs VALE—Does your store actively assist in nutritional programs for the school, Mark?

Mr Hutchings—We support the school at the moment by supplying, through Red Cross, fruits and vegetables. We have negotiated favourable terms, by which we supply that fruit and veg at prices as close to our cost as we possibly can, to try and get that healthy food—apples and oranges, Milo and other bits and pieces—into the schools.

Mrs VALE—Thank you very much.

ACTING CHAIR—I think you said that profits from the store go back into the community organisation and can then be redistributed, depending on what the board wants to do with them—is that the way that the system works?

Mr Hutchings—The document that Ian Monroe tabled said that the profits from the business are used as seed capital—to fund start-up costs for other businesses—and also to fund other, non-profitable businesses within the organisation.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mark. Drive very safely to Darwin.

Mr Hutchings—Thank you.

[4.59 pm]

HERREEN, Mr Dene, Indigenous Engagement Officer, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; Member, Maningrida Community Reference Group

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any additional comments to make about the capacity in which you are appearing?

Mr Herreen—My position of Indigenous Engagement Officer came about as a result of the review into the NTER. I am working alongside the government business manager. I am in what could be described as a very difficult position, to say the least, in that I am an acting deputy chair of the first organisation that was represented here and I am a long-term board member of the third one that is coming up. I am also the secretary. So it puts me in a really difficult situation in having to represent both independently and be optimistic about the futures of both. I will leave it at that at the moment.

ACTING CHAIR—We are just here to learn, so we are interested in any advice you can give the government. The reality is that stores are private enterprises. The good ones are well connected to the community, particularly in remote Indigenous communities. If there is any advice you would like to give us about how government policy may operate or what government could do to make policy work more effectively. That would be helpful. Have you got any thoughts in relation to that?

Mr Herreen—As far as the effectiveness of both shops goes, they are both doing good business all the way through. He mentioned income management can do whether fresh fruit and vegetables were bought more often than previously. I do not know whether that is how much the case. A lot more shopping happens but there is an educational level attached to understanding how to use the fresh fruit and vegetables and to cooking decent meals. Income management has meant that people buy more food, but there is a lot more tinned meat that goes out. BasicsCards I am used to buy quite a lot of that. The Maningrida Association has been a community based organisation for a long period of time, so it has a bit of stability about it which has helped it succeed in the way it has. Bawinanga, represented here by Mark Hutchings, who, for one reason or another, has not got any support, does not really have much of the history with regard to knowing what Maningrida is all about. He does a decent job of running the shop. The community are quite happy with the way that both shops are working. One of the things that continually comes up about both stores is the pricing issues. I do not think the community are aware of the costs involved in expressing the freight out here. We do a considerable amount of shopping in town, where there are similar styles of supermarkets and shops stores. We do comparisons and find that there is not much of a difference really when you take out the component of sending it out here by express freight by barge. If the barge has a monopoly on it obviously it is going to boost the prices in accordance with that. The stores are a good thing. There are a lot more fruit and vegetables out, which is good for us personally. We like cooking and growing fresh fruit and vegetables.

ACTING CHAIR—You were talking earlier on about the issues with the introduction of the BasicsCard and the need for education. Do you think there is a great need for more information and education about the preparation and use of different types of food? Is that needed? Is government putting effort into that?

Mr Herreen—That is what I was directing my comments to. There are notices up saying, ‘These are fresh tomatoes. This are fresh vegetables and this is the way you cook them.’ But, until people actually know how to prepare it and cook it properly and beneficially, I do not like to say it but it is a wasted item on the shelf.

ACTING CHAIR—Is there anybody running those sorts of education programs in Maningrida?

Mr Herreen—Not as far as I am aware on a big scale, but there are smaller programs within the nutrition program to the schools. They have a Good Food Kitchen which is based around decent food. There is the Hasty Tasty, which the Maningrida Progress Association runs, which has got fresh salads, fruit and vegetables, fruit salads and so on. There is a definite push in place for organisations to have this understanding of the difference between fatty foods and nutritious foods.

Mrs VALE—Thank you for coming to give evidence today. We have been to many communities across Australia and you are right about just having the food available being one thing, but how mothers are taught to prepare it is another thing. Indeed we have found great differences in facilities in the kitchens in the households. In some communities the majority of households have refrigerators but we have found other communities where a vast amount of households do not have refrigerators or even appropriate storage where they can actually keep their food safe. Do you have any knowledge of the facilities within households in Maningrida? Is it possible, say, for a young mother to store food at home and to keep food that might deteriorate in a refrigerator? Does she have a working stove? We have found great differences across the many communities that we have visited.

Mr Herreen—We are always having conflicts in the kitchen. I love to cook just as much as my wife does. If one of us starts to cook, the other will try to give advice on what spices to put in and so on. We only recently got our stove put in. Most of the houses in the last round of NAHS, the National Aboriginal Health Strategy, just had stove tops put in. They were cost efficient and ovens have a tendency to be stood on to see what is cooking on top of the stoves. That means our style of cooking will now change to be a bit wider than just having to cook on top of a stove.

The houses were designed with bits cut out of the back to put fireplaces in on the concrete verandas. There were sections cut out of them to put fireplaces there because there was an expectation that people would cook outside. That was not the case because a fireplace was very often moved away from the designated area. Fridges are a problem. I think we have an average of 17.9 people to a house here. Fridges are constantly getting opened and shut, so doors are getting weaker and weaker and the seals on them are getting broken.

Mrs VALE—Do most houses have a fridge here?

Mr Herreen—As far as I am aware, people are more inclined to have freezers. The stores themselves would probably know better than I do, but I see more deep freezers.

Mrs VALE—Most households actually have freezers do they?

Mr Herreen—I do not know if it is most houses.

Mrs VALE—Do you have one at your house?

Mr Herreen—No, not a freezer, we have a fridge and a mini fridge but a deep freezer would definitely be of benefit. We do a lot of fishing and a lot of hunting, so if we had a deep freezer we could put that stuff straight in there instead of in the top of the fridge. There are benefits to both sides of it. To have both of them would be a luxury in a lot of respects.

ACTING CHAIR—When you say most people do a lot of fishing, do people regularly or on a daily basis generally supplement what they buy from the shop with bush food?

Mr Herreen—Definitely, from what I have seen. If somebody goes hunting, the household next door will generally get something given to them. People go hunting in other people's countries and, if they are culturally respectful, they will bring it back for them. With funerals and ceremonial situations, people will go out hunting and that supplements what is bought at the shops. It is also more cost efficient.

ACTING CHAIR—Being paid every fortnight, do people tend to run out of money between pays and do they then rely on bush food or food sharing to survive between pays with CDEP?

Mr Herreen—Not from what I see. The hunters will go hunting. They will save for their fuel cards for their motor boats, their motorcars, their shotgun pellets or whatever depending on the season. There are people who do have problems obviously in being able to budget in that BasicsCard situation but there are always other members of the extended family who assist in some way.

ACTING CHAIR—Are diabetes and heart disease significant problems in the community?

Mr Herreen—I am aware there have been a lot of problems in the past.

ACTING CHAIR—We have got some people from the health section, so we will probably hear from them during the general forum. Are those issues of healthy eating, healthy buying and how the supply of food in the store could improve talked about within the community?

Mr Herreen—Changing how stores are set up seems to be coming more to the fore. We try and move things around a bit. The committee is trying to move unhealthy food out of the way so you have got the better products at the front and so on. There are definitely pushes towards having better food served and bought.

ACTING CHAIR—Are people in the community supportive of that?

Mr Herreen—Pretty much so, yes. Again, it gets back to their knowledge of how to use and prepare the particular things.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much, Dene, for your contribution today. It is greatly appreciated.

Mr Herreen—No problem at all. Thank you very much.

[5.12 pm]

TAN, Mr Jimmy, Financial Officer, Maningrida Progress Association

WILLIAMS, Ms Helen, Chairperson, Maningrida Progress Association

YOUNG, Mr Bill, General Manager, Maningrida Progress Association

ACTING CHAIR—I welcome representatives from the Maningrida Progress Association.

Ms Williams—I am chairperson of the Maningrida Progress Association. I have been working there since I was 17 years old. Since then I have been doing things in the store on and off. I then went to work with the women's centre for a while. That was 20 years ago. I was a board member but I still went back and forth working in those times. The Maningrida Progress Association store is one of the oldest shops in Maningrida. It started as the Trading Post. I have seen it grow and progress, but in the past there were ups and downs. Some things were good; some things were bad. At this moment we have decided to have community groups from different local language groups. From each community we decided to have two from each clan group. We formed into 12 executive members so we can make decisions for our members as to what sort of needs we have. We then put it together and ask the CEO or other staff to come along and talk about these things with us. So my role as the chairperson is to make sure everything runs smoothly. I work closely with the CEO. I will pass on to our shop manager, Bill Young.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, Helen.

Mr Young—I am a dinosaur. I will quickly refer to what Helen was talking about with the ups and downs. That was an incident which occurred in 1996 when there was a hostile takeover and something like \$800,000 went missing from the store. That has never happened. We have had a history of 50 years of making a profit every year which we are very proud of because it is not government funded. Our net profit is normally around eight per cent which is what we aim for. It is a non-profit organisation. We were incorporated in 1968 and, as I said, there has only been one hiccup in that time. We operate a number of different businesses, aviation charter, bakery, service station, the hostel accommodation in town, a building division and a takeaway. We are very proud of the fact that we are a non-government agency that has been around for a long time, if not the oldest organisation in the Top End, possibly in the Northern Territory.

I would like further on to address what Mark was saying about fruit and veg a bit later on, but the actual our monthly sales figure for fruit and vegetables from our main supplier is \$13,000. That is out of a \$600,000 per month turnover. There is the concentration on wanting food and vegetables to be cheap and available but there are a lot of other ways of getting them. People get tinned fruit, tinned food, tinned tomatoes and frozen food. We have just spent \$1½ million on increasing our freezer and chiller capacity for that reason and we are about to put dump bins in and things that were actually here 30 years ago.

There was a market garden out at Cadell which was run by the late former minister Bob Collins and that was a proprietary limited garden. It was a garden at the front of the store which

took up about 10 acres. It burnt down and never got built again. We had a fishing industry in Maningrida which exported fish. We would like to see that happen again but not the exporting of fish. Because of Maningrida's location, freight is the biggest issue. Sending fish into Darwin, it has to go on the barge and you pay the same freight going backwards and forwards. That is 82c a kilo for chiller food. Our main issue with this review is to look at getting some subsidies on freight.

Dean mentioned hunting. I think Professor Altman said that 80-odd per cent of people in communities in the last three months have actually been out hunting. When people hunt they get a beast or something like that and that is why they want freezers. It does represent a big volume of the food that is consumed in communities. But to get out there people need to get out in boats and trucks and we pay 21c a litre to get fuel out here on the barge. We are paying the same price as Darwin retail and then we add 21c on before we have the freight factor of getting it from the barge to the store. It might only be half a kilometre but we still have the infrastructure. We still have to have the \$300,000 worth of forklifts and trucks and all the infrastructure the same as a company that may be freighting from Adelaide to Darwin. It is the same cost. It might be a lesser fuel cost but it is still the same impost on the community. Freight costs are not just the barge. It is a major issue. For a kilo of tomatoes you have to put 85c on top for the freight and it is a big impost. As I say the actual wholesale value of fruit and veg is \$13,000. It may well be \$20,000 when you look at some of the other items that you get from other suppliers. It is a small percentage and it is an education thing about getting people to eat more.

ACTING CHAIR—Did you want to say something, Mr Tan?

Mr Tan—We have very strong internal control to make sure that all the incomes from all of the outlets are accounted for. I produce a timely report every month to the management to give them the knowledge of how the different divisions are performing. We have KPMG, one of the biggest auditors in the world, to do our audit to make sure that the accounts are properly kept. We get an unqualified report from our auditor every year. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, and congratulations on that as well. Just to go back and get the governance clear: Helen, you were describing the committee that you have with the different clan group representations and basically the operations of the store are run by the CEO, Mr Young. Is that correct?

Ms Williams—Yes. I know how a board works, because I have done my cert III in business governance. The board is there to make decisions on how we can help if there are any problems, and then you can progress that with the people who are dealing with you. That way you can see who is not well and who is not sick, and you can say, 'Let's get this done.' I am not talking only about MPA but it is also wider—like BAC and other little shops around here. We have got a reference group that gets together. It is a big group and then we are able to take it back within our board meetings within our own organisation that we represent. I will go back to MPA. Like Bill said, MPA is a non-profit organisation but our customers are like our funding body. They spend their money, but the money also goes back to the people, because every death that we have is \$1,000 that we have put towards the family that still goes back for the ancestor ceremony food. That is how MPA operates. That is how money goes back to the community, to the people.

ACTING CHAIR—Bill said that the margin around that is eight per cent. Is that right?

Ms Williams—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—So money goes back for funerals. What other sorts of things does the profit go into? Or does it go back into the enterprise, the depreciation and other things?

Ms Williams—I have a list here.

ACTING CHAIR—Did you have a submission you wanted to table?

Mr Young—I have a late submission, but Jimmy has listed a few examples. As Helen mentioned, there are the funerals; the swimming pool, \$125,000; most people will not be aware of it, but the football oval was \$350,000 and no government money was spent on that. That was done 15 years ago, and that would be a million dollars today. Over \$200,000 was spent to install television satellite and the radio, which was defunct for a while but fortunately we resurrected it. We bought all the fire trucks for the emergency services over the years. There were concerts, the church renovation—and again that needs to be refurbished. Competition is good but we have not got the capacity, with two stores in the community, to continue to do these sorts of things. That is unfortunate. We still contribute to the community in many other ways. All the wheelie bins in Maningrida were supplied initially by the MPA. The basketball courts at the school were built by the MPA. This building was built by the MPA in 1970. Two Aboriginal men and a white builder built this by hand. For one of the first times, all the agencies actually got together to refurbish it in the hope that one day we can get a new town hall. But we have not got that capacity anymore to be able to put the money into one project like that.

I could go on. There were the preschool toilets, the clinic, the JET centre and the provision of a car for the night patrol. These are the sorts of things that we have done in the past. It is the committee that Helen mentioned earlier that will make these decisions. I might come up with an idea—or an agency, or the sport and rec chap might say, ‘Look, we want to send a footballer off.’ That is the sort of thing we will contribute to—but in consultation with all the TOs, not just the traditional owners in Maningrida, as Helen said. We have a lot of outstation people who live in Maningrida. In fact, 90 per cent of the population are from outstations. That would be correct. Is that right, Dean? I am sorry, Willie. I should have thanked the traditional owners. Willie Neimugini is a senior traditional owner, an ex MPA employee for a long time. It is a big melting pot, and it is getting bigger and it is going to get bigger if the outstation movement does not get any further funding from the NT government—which has been mooted. As the hub system comes into place, there will be greater pressure on the stores. One of the reasons we spent the \$1½ million dollars on the refurbishment was because we knew that was going to happen. Even though there has been a big push to get people into Maningrida, it will be even greater in the future. So it is important that we look at getting food as cheaply as possible. We are looking at 15 per cent—is that right, Jimmy, with freight, with the MPA and the barge?

Mr Tan—Yes.

Mr Young—That is a lot of money. That is one-seventh of the cost of goods.

ACTING CHAIR—Fifteen per cent of your—

Mr Young—On average. That is not barge freight. Everyone focuses on the barge but there is the added factor of getting the freight from the barge.

ACTING CHAIR—Fifteen per cent on top of—

Mr Young—You have got staff unloading. A considerable amount of food comes in on these barges. It is not boxes; it is pallets and containers—truckloads—and that is between the two organisations.

ACTING CHAIR—Can you just give us a bit of an overview of the employment in your store? We have heard that you use CDEP employees. How many Indigenous people work in your store and how many people in total work in your store?

Mr Young—We do not run the CDEP. We have found that we are on an uneven playing field because we do not have the benefits of CDEP. We do use CDEP, and I think that we have only got about three participants at the moment. There are about a dozen Aboriginal employees and about eight balanda in the store at the moment. But over the year we might employ over 110 local people. As you mentioned earlier, people do move and come in with ceremony. There may be a death in the family and there are all sorts of pressures. We have actually had up to 370 employees in the store in one year. So we are used to over-employing. We have operated for 40-odd years without the CDEP and we still believe that it is viable to put people into full-time jobs.

ACTING CHAIR—With such a large number of people going through the store, do you have a core group of people that you put through training? What sorts of training programs or policies do you have?

Mr Young—The Arnhem Land Progress Association have a retail training division. I have known Henry Harper for 20-odd years and we do on-site training. But you do not need outside agencies when you have got good staff, and good Aboriginal staff as well. It can be in-house, and that is the best way to do it. In fact every day at work is training. Every day on the till, counting the money at the end of the day, particularly with the new system in place with the food card, we rely more and more on local people. There are a lot more administration costs with the new system.

ACTING CHAIR—I think you said \$13,000 out of \$600,000 was your fruit and veggie turnover, if my memory serves me correctly—

Mr Young—Overall our turnover is \$600,000 and our purchases of fruit and veg—green lettuce et cetera—is \$13,000.

ACTING CHAIR—A month.

Mr Young—And \$130,000 of those sales is cigarettes.

ACTING CHAIR—Is that a month or a year?

Mr Young—It is a month. In most communities it averages about 23 to 25 per cent. We do all the right things. The cigarettes are covered up. There is certainly no advertising. There are signs everywhere with 18-plus and all the rest, and it is an issue.

ACTING CHAIR—That is right. You would have noticed that in the recent budget there was a large chunk of money put in there to tackle cigarette smoking. If there is anybody out there that is smoking or Indigenous people—we have not got a lot today—from these studies have been done, one of the major reasons why people are dying young is because they are smoking. That is the big issue in closing the gap. Sorry, there are statistics: smoking kills people early.

Mrs VALE—It does appear that the two stores here in Maningrida very ably supply fresh fruit and vegetables of good quality and with frequency. And as was said, having access to nutritional food—fresh fruit and vegetables, but also other good food—is one thing but knowing how to prepare it and use it is another. The government is also very watchful and careful about young children and especially the young ones up to the age of five and the kinds of nutritional benefits that they can get. We have found that across the different communities there have been very many different standards in the kinds of facilities that each household has when it comes to allowing mothers to prepare food for their families. In your household do you have a refrigerator or a freezer?

Ms Williams—We only have a refrigerator but no freezer.

Mrs VALE—So you can keep food cool, you can refrigerate it. Do you have proper storage to keep other food if you need to? Do you have cupboards?

Ms Williams—Not really. We do not have a proper cupboard—just mesh wire shelves where we can store tinned food and packets of flour, tea, noodles or whatever. We only have those mesh wire shelves.

Mrs VALE—What about a stove? Do you have a working stove or a stove top?

Ms Williams—Now we have a stove. We used to have a hot plate, but now we have a stove.

Mrs VALE—Do you cook often with the stove? Do you cook in a big pot? Do you do stews?

Ms Williams—Yes. With a big family, I have to cook in a big pot. Now we have a stove and an oven, so we can use the oven to bake damper. Also we have a fireplace, so we can use either the fire or the stove. If we want to save electricity, we can use the fire.

Mrs VALE—You can use traditional fire.

Ms Williams—Traditional fire. Like Dene said earlier on, some people like to go fishing or hunting for buffalo, kangaroo or whatever. As we said, we can always go to the shop and buy a packet of rice or flour or whatever that will go with it. I do not know whether some people have got a freezer or not, but it is a good thing having a freezer because, that way, when the wet season comes you will be able to stock up on your seasonal foods.

Mrs VALE—It would give you some resources to keep your food a bit longer.

Ms Williams—Yes. I can go shopping here or at BAC. I love my sweet potato, you know. I say, ‘I’ll go to BAC and look for sweet potato.’ That is the purple one. We are sort of stuck in the middle, but I can go shopping at both, you see.

These days I can see kids running around with healthy skin because of the swimming pool.

Mrs VALE—Has the swimming pool made a big difference to the health of the children?

Ms Williams—Yes.

Mrs VALE—How long has the swimming pool been open?

Mr Young—Two years. Would that be right?

Mrs VALE—Only two years. And it has made a big difference to the health of the children?

Ms Williams—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Why would that be? It keeps them clean, does it—keeps their eyes clean?

Ms Williams—Yes—their eyes and their skin. I do not know—it keeps them entertained, I suppose. We have got a saltwater place where they used to go and swim, but there were box jellyfish, crocodiles and all that. Plus they can have swimming competitions here. We used to send our kids away to other schools, like Jabiru, where they had a swimming pool, but now we can have our own competitions here.

Mrs VALE—Who runs the pool?

Ms Williams—The shire.

Mrs VALE—Did the shire put the pool in or was that something that came out of—

Mr Young—All the agencies, all the organisations, contributed equally.

Mrs VALE—So it was a real community venture for the children.

Mr Young—It was the first.

Mrs VALE—It is good to note that the pool has made a big difference to the health of the children. Helen, do you know how many households would actually have working ovens and working stoves in them, or do most mothers prefer to cook outside?

Ms Williams—Last week I heard that the shire is putting in 150 stoves and getting rid of all the hot plates. Hot plates are not safe for kids.

Mrs VALE—That is true.

Ms Williams—So there will be 150. That started last week.

Mrs VALE—And they have gone into the households here in Maningrida?

Ms Williams—Yes. Some of the houses probably already had stoves and ovens.

Mrs VALE—When people want to buy a refrigerator, how do they do it? How did you buy your refrigerator? Did you buy it through the store?

Ms Williams—Here or at BAC.

ACTING CHAIR—Just going back to a few of the issues to do with the nutrition program, has the store been involved with or supported any programs in the past? You might have heard some of the earlier evidence about education or training programs for cooking, or engagement with the school. Has the store been involved with any of that, via the progress association?

Ms Williams—I will go back to my history. When I was working at the women's centre, which was 25 years ago, I would always mention housekeeping and a nutrition program. At one stage we had the clinic mob and the community people. It was run through BAC, when I was working for BAC. It used to be a women's centre but it is a screen-printing shop now. Women, children and old people used to gather there. I used to look after them as a coordinator. At one stage I told them, 'Come on. It's about time we did this housekeeping thing around the house. That way we can look after the house and maintain it properly and look after the kids.' Right now I do not know what is happening, but I would like to see this housekeeping thing going.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you know when the women's centre closed down?

Ms Williams—In 1996. That is when all the resource centres were closed down.

Mrs VALE—So the women's centre is closed?

Ms Williams—Yes. It used to be called the women's resource centre. They were all over Australia, but they were closed down in 1996 when the CDEP took over.

Mrs VALE—Do you have a women's centre here in Maningrida?

Ms Williams—We have a women's centre here but it is retail. We have one big building that is a retail shop, a child safety office and a screen-printing office. It is all in one building but all divided up. They are also using it as a laundromat. Washing machines and dryers are there for the public to use.

Mrs VALE—Helen, just so that I understand, at one time was there a program on housekeeping to show women how to clean the house?

Ms Williams—Yes. When I was working there we had meetings about housekeeping, but it never came up as a big deal. People were talking about it but never took it seriously. It was maybe only me talking about housekeeping all the time. I want a big push to see it happen here.

ACTING CHAIR—We heard some evidence about this yesterday, with the cutbacks to ATSIIC post-1996. The women's centre funding was one of the significant cuts that happened with the initial cutbacks to ATSIIC during those years. That is obviously something we can take on board. You are not the only person to raise that with us. I want to go to some of the administrative issues. You heard some of the questions about licensing that I asked earlier on. What has been the experience of the progress association's stores with regard to licensing?

Mr Young—We were resigned to it. We did not like the idea. We thought the card was foolish and we told Centrelink so. In fact, they came out here. We had a lot of changes made as a result of our stores' preparation. We were resigned to it. We prepared for it. We had the software in place. We worked closely with the Arnhem Land Progress Association. I argued with the ministers about the fact, and with the general himself at the intervention, that the card should be more like a BasicsCard but be usable in any store in Darwin. We have the bizarre situation where Aboriginal people in the community have to make a decision—and, as you can see, these people have allegiances with all—whether they should shop at Bawinanga or MPA.

ACTING CHAIR—So you cannot use the card in either or?

Mr Young—You can with the BasicsCard but you could not with the FOODcard. It could have been a nasty situation. As it turned out it was fifty-fifty and everyone is happy but if the Centrelink card had been done properly the first time—I know it is being reviewed again, hopefully, by July of next year—it would have been a card that was universal. It should have been a Centrelink card, not a food card. It should have been a card so that if Dene and Helen want to go to Darwin and buy a refrigerator they could do so, with the card.

Mrs VALE—Sorry; you are confusing me a little bit. You say this was a food card. Was it like the ALPA FOODcard or the BasicsCard?

Mr Young—No, the IMF card—the initial card.

Mrs VALE—The Basicscard?

Mr Young—No. The initial card was for food only, basically. You could not just—

Mrs VALE—I see. That is different, is it, to the ALPA FOODcard?

Mr Young—Then they introduced the BasicsCard, which makes it difficult. We are now finding that it is two to one—the BasicsCard versus the income management fund. They should have done it the first time—put the details on a card that can go in a machine and all the family members who can shop on that are put up on the screen. It cost us over \$150,000 to install the right software in the store for that particular card. Then the system changed again and now we are probably looking at another system change. As I said, we have got all the IT in place. We are fortunate that we have the capabilities of people like Jimmy and my store manager, who is not here at the moment. We have noticed that there has been an increase in sales of 20 per cent—that is far and beyond what the normal increase would be—of all sales in the store. Now, whether that 20 per cent increase is as a result of people choosing to shop with us and not the other organisation, I do not know.

Mrs VALE—Yes.

Mr Young—It does not appear to be as a result of people being forced to go out and buy fruit and veg. That is not a result. A lot of people like the card because they can shop all fortnight without going in with the cash and have family members take it.

Mrs VALE—So you are relatively happier with the particular version of this BasicsCard—and that is the card you have in store now—are you?

Mr Young—I think it is fairer for the Aboriginal people. Do you agree with that, Jimmy?

Mr Tan—Yes.

Mr Young—They have the option of going somewhere else. That is why it was introduced.

Mrs VALE—So they can choose either store to use the BasicsCard.

Mr Tan—Even if they go to Darwin they can still shop in those stores registered with BasicsCard facilities, whereas the FOODcard they can only use in one store.

Mrs VALE—One store; yes, I understand that. So you do not have the FOODcard any more, now. You just have the BasicsCard.

Mr Tan—No, we still have FOODcard.

Mrs VALE—You still have the FOODcard?

Mr Tan—Yes.

Mrs VALE—But the FOODcard is restricted to food, whereas the BasicsCard is a little bit broader than that. It covers other essentials.

Mr Young—It is ease of use. You can use it in other agencies. You can go between stores. If, for instance, we did not have sweet potato, Helen could go down to the other place and buy sweet potato, instead of having to ring Centrelink up and ask permission to go down and buy a kilo of sweet potato—if she did not have discretionary funds. But, again, instead of Centrelink introducing the BasicsCard they got a Volkswagen instead of a Rolls Royce, because they could have had a better card with all the information on it that the IMF card had. That would have protected the user, because at the moment an unscrupulous shop—in Darwin more so, but it does happen in communities, although we do not sell alcohol or anything else that is off the list—can use the BasicsCard without declaring what it was for. He just has to ring up flour, tea or sugar and sell a bottle of rum. So there are flaws in that, as well.

Mrs VALE—It sounds as if there are some loopholes in the BasicsCard.

ACTING CHAIR—In general, in terms of the licensing process, do you have any comments about the administrative processes—not just for the card but about the way that FAHCSIA is operating? Is there anything you would like to see changed or improved in relation to stores?

Mr Young—When it came to the time for licensing they had been to 30-odd different communities and the comment made by the people doing the work was that the store in Maningrida—the MPA store—was the best they had seen in 30 communities, which we were very pleased to hear. The money which is spent on increasing the amount of fruit and vegetables and size of the freezer—getting an extra 300 square metres—was planned well before the intervention. It was not a post-intervention reaction; it was planned in 2005 but was slowed down by Cyclone Monica. So it is not something that has come on. The store was constantly improving itself to cater for the community. We take feedback. We have 12 Aboriginal people who meet regularly, and they get feedback from their families. So we know if there is a product there that they do not want.

And in terms of the nutrition things, there have been better programs. There was a homemaking class at the school. That no longer exists. There were stoves everywhere for young women who wanted to learn some lifestyle skills, or for men who wanted to learn how to cook. That no longer exists as far as I know. We had good healthy heart programs. The nutritionist used to visit us regularly.

We were a party to the community basket deal which Warren Snowdon set up many, many years ago. That was a yearly review of the community store, and we always came up trumps. We had better prices than a regional store in Darwin—not better than Coles or Woolworths, but it would be ridiculous to think we could have—and the nutritionist would come and put up posters or promotional things, do things out in front of the store. That happened at both Bawinanga and the MPA but not so much in the last few years. The clinic cannot do it. The clinic is flat out just doing its job. There should be more focus from a government agency to come out and get some programs running. There was an antismoking campaign about a year and a half ago. There should be more work done at the school, possibly through a women's centre.

ACTING CHAIR—Would you welcome agencies or a non-government organisation that wanted to come out and work with your store?

Mr Young—Absolutely. But there are a lot of products out there that are self endorsed, if you know what I mean. *Choice* might argue the point, but there are a lot of products that are on the shelf now which self-evidently indicate that they are good for you.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you sell any local, home-grown or other produce in your store? Is there an opportunity to do that? Is it something you are looking at? What are some of the barriers to doing that?

Mr Young—We were doing it 30 years ago. I cannot believe that it is not happening today. We had freezers full of fish. I would go down and pick the fish up in my own truck and fillet them until midnight and have fresh fish in the takeaway and in the store. It was a dollar for a piece of barramundi that you would probably pay \$10 for at a wholesaler in Darwin.

ACTING CHAIR—Why is it that you are not doing it anymore?

Mr Young—There is red tape. There are licensing fees. There used to be an Aboriginal fishing license which only cost us about \$20 per annum. It has now gone. We sold our barra licence—they currently go for about \$150,000 or something—which we had for \$10, and then the

government changed the rules and there was no Aboriginal fishing licence. We had Aboriginal men fishing regularly and supplying. There is a market for it and for bananas, pineapples. Other communities have done it and it is really time. There was also no demand for it. There is a lot more demand now for fresh fruit and veg than there was when I first came in. The whole street that whitefellas lived in was growing pineapples, bananas and pawpaw, and there were no fences in the entire street.

Mrs VALE—Were they growing them in their own house household gardens?

Mr Young—I had a garden. I do not garden but I had a hundred pineapples and hands of bananas.

Mrs VALE—And they were just there for the community to help themselves when they wanted to?

Mr Young—That is what happened. No-one stole them or anything else.

Mrs VALE—It was there to share.

Mr Young—Absolutely. And there were Yirrkala's dried bananas. We imported bananas from Galiwinku and the Elcho Islands; and Yirrkala was doing it.

Mrs VALE—Bill, would you have any idea when this stopped? Could you put a time frame on when the community stopped it?

Mr Young—Probably in the mid-eighties. Bob Collins left in the late seventies, I think it was. In the mid-eighties there was pretty well nothing.

Mrs VALE—So this was a Bob Collins inspired initiative?

Mr Young—No. He was employed by the association, by the MPA, and he lived out at a place called Ganarpa—which is Cadell—and they grew all sorts of pineapples and flowers. They used to grow orchids. It was amazing. But unfortunately, a few pigs got released and the ground was rooted up and you could not even drive over the same area. The pigs were introduced by a Tongan family who lived in Maningrida. The pigs would have eventually been there. But, again, market gardens and everything else are not an Aboriginal initiative and we do not want to see that. We do not want to see a bunch of balanda gardeners out there. We want to get some young Aboriginal people to want to go and work a garden.

Mrs VALE—Exactly.

Mr Young—And the market is there. I know that Barlmarrk would take it on. We could even set up a local fruit and veg shop.

Mrs VALE—A couple of communities that we spoke to actually had poultry farms and gardens. A young Aboriginal woman who was working in the local store spoke to me and said her first job was working in the gardens at the poultry farm. We never got to see the poultry

farm, unfortunately, but she said, 'I'm a gardener' and she was very proud that she was a gardener.

Mr Young—In the gardens that I saw in Yirrkala, the chickens were free-range and they ran through the bananas and fertilised them.

Mrs VALE—And this was all here?

Mr Young—It was in Yirrkala in 1985. Yirrkala is Nhulunbuy. They had a big market for their produce, apart from the Aboriginal community. But we are talking about nearly 3,000 people in Maningrida. I am sure that there is possibly the potential with the new development and everything else and with the money that is coming in with the intervention that something will come up. I think The Good Food Shop sells local mud crab. There is a demand. I no longer have a boat and I have to buy fish—cardboard fish out of the freezer.

Mrs VALE—It is amazing that you can actually articulate that change in 20 years.

Mr Young—The amount of fish that we bring in just for the takeaway is phenomenal.

Mrs VALE—That is interesting. The issue of CDEP comes up from time to time, especially when looking at capacity building within the community and how some of the stores have relied on CDEP for staff. You were here during Cyclone Monica, were you not?

Mr Young—Yes, indeed.

Mrs VALE—I was on a committee that came here after Cyclone Monica that was looking at Indigenous employment. We spoke to several members of the community who said that the men who were on CDEP were the ones who had the equipment—the chainsaws, the big trucks and the tractors—and, because there was no help here in Maningrida after Cyclone Monica, it was the local people who had the skills because of CDEP and they helped the community. Do you recall that?

Mr Young—It was not just CDEP; there were a lot of Aboriginal people like emergency services and a lot of local people. But if you were to read the media, it was as if the Aboriginal people sat there and watched outsiders do the work. That is not true. Two guys came out from emergency services. All the work that was done in Maningrida was done by local people. That cyclone actually brought balandas and Aboriginal people together. I was so proud of the community. It was devastated. It was a big strong wind.

Mrs VALE—Part of the evidence that we took on that particular community was about the work that was done by the local people here at Maningrida to clear the debris from Cyclone Monica. They said, I think, that they would have been waiting two months for help to come from Darwin and they just had to do it themselves. They said the training that they got through CDEP on the big, heavy equipment, manning chainsaws and being able to man the big trucks and the bulldozers helped them deal with that themselves, and they were very proud of that.

Mr Young—There were council members as well. There was a council in those days. It was pre shire. We had a building team as well that did a lot of the work. It was a combined effort. It

was CDEP, the community, the school teachers et cetera. It was a huge effort, and it was done within a few days. The plant operators were Aboriginal. With SIHIP, the housing thing, we are saying that there are a lot of Aboriginal men and women who can get jobs on those sites—people who have had plenty of experience—but the job opportunities are not here at the moment, because the contractors who come out do not employ Indigenous people. This new program is aimed at Indigenous employment. We can identify these people. Anyone who has been here for longer than four or five years can identify young men and women who have some skills and are waiting to get jobs when the new houses start. But, unfortunately, there have been delays, which have been in the media, as we are all aware of. The promise is there but it is not really—

ACTING CHAIR—I am conscious of time and we are starting to digress into areas that are not around the inquiry. I hear what you are saying about employment and those sorts of things, but I am also aware of the time and the reality is that this committee is focused particularly on stores and—

Mrs VALE—I am sorry about that. It is just that one of the recommendations on that previous committee was that any government contracts actually stipulate local Indigenous components in their employment. So we had better go back and see if we can get that one out.

ACTING CHAIR—I do not disagree with that. Are there any other things that you would like to say to the committee for the record? Did you have a submission that you wanted to table or to present to us?

Mr Young—It is just further information—financial reports and everything else—to let you know that we comply with all the guidelines and what have you?

ACTING CHAIR—Are you happy to have them tabled here?

Mr Young—I would like them to be. Part of that is in fact the audit report. I did mention earlier, as Jimmy also mentioned, that there is no silver bullet, but we do believe that stores in all Aboriginal communities should be properly audited to a standard that is the level of ours. Unqualified audits should be done. I think the community does not realise how lucky they are that they have two agencies currently audited correctly. I get people who are trying to get employment with us, and when we check their backgrounds, I swear that it is pretty woeful. A lot of the Central Australian communities and Top End communities have to suffer these carpetbaggers.

ACTING CHAIR—Hopefully one of the things that licensing is doing is trying to pick up on some of the problems that have existed in the past. I understand that is part of the reason that drove that.

Mr Young—But those audits also include internal audits done all year round. So daily takings are not, 'Five days mine and 15 yours' and that type of thing.

ACTING CHAIR—Is there anything in the submission that you have tabled that is commercial-in-confidence?

Mr Young—Nothing.

ACTING CHAIR—The proceedings are made public unless you notify us, and the submission will be made public unless you notify us.

Mr Young—That is fine. Everything is publishable.

Mrs VALE—Is there anything else that you would like to tell us?

Mr Tan—I would like to add one thing. Most people complain that food or grocery items in the community are very expensive. I would like to emphasise that the prices of what we are buying from our wholesalers in town are mostly higher than what Coles and Woolworths are selling in town. On top of that we have to add on the freight cost. So by the time it reaches our store, you are looking at about 10 to 15 per cent higher than the prices in Coles or Woolworths. And our cost price from the wholesalers is higher than what Coles and Woolworths are selling for. Coles and Woolworths have the bulk-buying power and we do not have that sort of bulk quantity purchase from our wholesaler.

ACTING CHAIR—Are you buying through Metcash?

Mr Tan—Through IGC and SPAR from Queensland.

ACTING CHAIR—Have you looked at working with the BAC store and bulk-buying with them on some things? I suppose you are basically in competition, so that does not necessarily work either.

Mr Tan—I think we are buying from the same supplier as well, the biggest supplier in Darwin.

Mr Young—We do deals. It is not a cartel as such. If we get a special deal nobody is better off. We do buy in bulk. As Jimmy said, you go and buy a packet of tea at Coles, and we buy a pallet of tea for the same price. The guy who works in our shop has had 15 years as a wholesale buyer. It is not like we are just buying from the nearest convenience store. He actually shops around. We try to get the best prices possible. I have been to board meetings with these suppliers and said, ‘This is ludicrous.’ We know they are not loss leaders. I think they have also got their freight factors built in, because they have to get it from their warehouse to the barge landing. I think that is the reason why there is an increase in the cost before it gets on the barge.

ACTING CHAIR—The amount of market power that Coles and Woolies or large buyers have in terms of their ability to demand lower prices is also part of that, I would imagine. Helen, would you like to add anything?

Ms Williams—I just want to go back to the housekeeping thing. With housekeeping you would be able to cook good food and have a healthy household. It links up with the nutrition program where mothers or fathers can cook good food for their children at home. So the housekeeping and the nutrition programs go together. I would like to see a big push with that, because I have been talking about it for many years.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for presenting today. We do appreciate your time and the evidence that you have given, along with your submission. We are looking forward to having a look at your store.

[5.59 pm]

McKENZIE, Ms Noeletta, Youth Coordinator, Youth Issues/Services

MURPHY, Mr Kingsley, Youth Worker

THUMM, Ms Michelle, Community Wellbeing Coordinator, Malabam Health Board

KIELY, Mr Len, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

KOVACK, Ms Sue-Ellen, Remote Area Nurse, Chronic Disease, Maningrida Health Clinic

SMYTH, Ms Sandi, Remote Area Nurse, Child Health, Maningrida Health Clinic

ACTING CHAIR—What would you like to tell the committee?

Ms Kovack—There is a very large community there and I want everyone to know that there is a handful of us that are working on the health of this community. There are about 3,000 people and there is a handful of nurses who want to see a lot of these issues go forward. Right now we are working on a one-to-one basis; one person has an education session with one client or patient. From my public health background I do not think this works. I think it has to be done at a population level, which means we really need to go after the education in larger groups. One-on-one is just not enough; not for a part-time position, for this many people. I do agree that if there were subsidies for the food people would buy it—I sit and listen to people every day, all day—and it is expensive to buy fruit and vegetables. I know there are alternatives like frozen and canned food but, as Mark from BAC was saying, when all that money was out there—and I saw it as well—carts and carts of fresh food were going out of the shops. So if it was available I know that more would be purchased.

ACTING CHAIR—In terms of the program that you are working with one-on-one, is that a federal or a Northern Territory government project?

Ms Kovack—That is the clinic. There are eight nurses in the clinic at the moment. We each have a program that we look after. I have about 600-plus people with a chronic disease—we are talking about diabetes, kidney health and chronic lung disease. There are many, many issues and many, many sick people here.

I will tell you a quick little story: I took about 15 ladies, who are diabetics, to the beach and we had a little education session on diabetes and eating well. They listened and we spent a couple of hours together. They said, ‘Thank you very much, Sue-Ellen, but how do you want us to feed 12 people with this much money?’ It made me feel quite small, when I am spouting on about having to have fresh fruit and vegetables and whole-wheat bread. In a couple of words they asked, ‘How can we do it?’ This was just after the quarantining of the money had started and people did not know how to make that go very far. If you buy a bag of fresh fruit, which could be \$50 or \$60, when you have large families it is not going to go very far.

The other issue is that a lot of people do not cook from recipes. We are starting a program where we want to have cooking classes to show people how to cook rice and how to put recipes together. It is called the *Flower Drum* cookbook. We need the human resources. We need people to come out and help us start these programs because the nurses in the clinic are flat out from Monday to Friday nine to five seeing acute sick people. We work on call a couple of times a week and we do not have any resources so if we could have—

Mrs VALE—Obviously, like Helen said, there was a program at some time which had stoves available. I imagined it was in the women's centre, I do not know, but it looks like when that program was cut it was never ever reinstated and it should have been.

Ms Kovack—The smoking and nutrition program was funded for only six months. We got so far with the smoking, we got so far with the nutrition and then everything fell apart.

Mrs VALE—Six months is not enough. I see what you mean. You were saying that the women you spoke to said that they had many people in their families. How big are the families here? How big are the households? Are you talking about more than two adults being in that household, in that family?

Ms Kovack—Yes. They have their grandmothers, aunties, sisters and children.

Mrs VALE—Wouldn't the adults also be receiving some support? Wouldn't there be a combined income coming into a household that would be greater than one's welfare cheque?

Ms Kovack—Greater than one person putting in. I do not get into cutting that down. I do not understand how people put that together. I just felt a little condescending. I felt really bad after that.

Mrs VALE—It is awfully hard—like you were saying—if you do not know how to prepare meals anyway.

Ms Kovack—That is one thing I would like to get onto, and we are getting onto it. We have not had a nutritionist for many months. We finally have one coming out in the next couple of weeks, I believe. We have cookbooks ready; we have got the *Flower Drum*. We are going to start doing things but we need the human resources to get things started.

ACTING CHAIR—In terms of your current role, what percentage of your time would you spend on acute health care—dealing with emergencies or problems—as opposed to primary health care when you are doing proactive education and those sorts of activities?

Ms Kovack—My profile is that I have 600 people on the chronic disease list, and all those people need check-ups every three to six months. During the chronic disease check-up, I will bring up the issues of smoking or nutrition, but it is such a small amount of time. You can imagine the number of people you need to see.

ACTING CHAIR—That is your program and that is the way you have to run through it. I do understand what you are doing. Part of my background was in the training area, and I do understand the motivation to get out of working in groups as compared to working with people

individually. Often you need to provide people with individual support but often you can get people sharing ideas and information that can motivate each other to make changes as well.

Ms Kovack—Yes. We started action with smoking; we are getting little groups together and people are supporting each other to quit smoking. With nutrition, we are trying to do the same thing but it is labour intensive for what we have to work with. We are trying to start it up.

ACTING CHAIR—I think we will make some recommendations. We have got an inquiry into stores and the like; providing fruit and vegies or healthy food is one thing, but the other thing is being able to use it—and having the equipment and the facilities to be able to use it is important as well. Sandy, did you want to say some things as well?

Ms Smyth—Because I am relatively new to remote health and to the community, probably the most helpful comment that I would make is one that seems to be supportive of others, which is that there is a need for education to work alongside the provision of the healthy foods, the stocking and availability and reasonable cost of all of those things. Subsidising that is obviously something that would have a very positive impact because with limited resources you are going to always choose that which is going to feed more people. The spirit is very willing to be involved with education. It is the ability, with limited resources human wise, to be able to implement that, so a lot of our work at the clinic is probably done on the run and opportunistic rather than by a planned and systematic approach because of the limited human resources. There is a collaborative approach within the community with the retail providers and the other places like the women's centre and the creche. There are new positions being created at the moment which will help us to be—

Mrs VALE—Multipurpose?

Ms Smyth—Yes, to network together, which I would really look forward to. In terms of child health, I know that in the past there have been feed-in programs which have been connected to things like playgroups and creches, which again would be one of those programs in the past that perhaps have the inconsistency of people—again, human resources—being available to run those programs, so that they have not continued. But it is something that we are looking at at the moment to improve the consistency of food for children. So, yes, in short it is the collaborative educational approach, working alongside the availability of foods that are going to be consistently and reasonably priced and available to the community, that will perhaps make a difference.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for that. Have you got any other comments?

Ms Kovack—There is one more thing. A man from Darwin called me a couple of days ago. He had been around the communities in the Northern Territory looking at the shops and the fast food outlets, and he said, 'Look, I just want you to know that the Good Food Kitchen here in Maningrida is a benchmark for the Northern Territory; they are doing a very good job of providing very nutritious and safe food for the community.' So I just wanted to pass that on.

ACTING CHAIR—You have that on the record; it will be there in perpetuity. We have heard that and we are looking forward to going to have a look at it. I think they might be feeding us tonight; is that correct?

Mrs VALE—Sue-Ellen, how long have you been working within the community?

Ms Kovack—Four years.

Mrs VALE—It is part time? Did you say you are part time or full time?

Ms Kovack—The program is part time. I work weekends and evenings. I look after the pharmacy. There are 3,000 people. A lot of communities this big have hospitals, doctors and that kind of thing. It is a lot of work. If I could do it full time five days a week, it would still need quite a few of us to get on top of the situation.

Mrs VALE—It still would not be enough. I noticed—I think Bill told us—that, compared to the \$13,000 a week worth of fruit and vegetables that they sold, there was a turnover on cigarettes of \$130,000, which is just unbelievable—but we do believe it. Have you had any success in trying to get people to quit smoking at all? I understand that you are part time and that you have many other balls that you are juggling, but I was just wondering if you have had any success and, if so, what your secret was.

Ms Kovack—We are making small baby steps. We do not have any evidence as yet, but each of us, when we see someone as a nurse in the clinic, will do a brief intervention about a patient's smoking status. We find that just that five minutes talking about it or handing out a leaflet will put a little grain in the back of their mind. If we continue to do this, studies have shown that it is the best way to have people eventually come around and maybe come and ask you for patches. I have no evidence to give you, but I can see that people do come to me out of the blue and say, 'I'm ready for those patches.' Smoking will be something that I talk about six, seven or eight times a day with patients. Yet again, we need a program and people to run it. It has to be full time.

Mrs VALE—Can you say to the committee that you can genuinely recommend a 'quit smoking' program as beneficial in this community?

Ms Kovack—Absolutely. I think our numbers are 72 per cent or something like that; do not quote me. I think the rest of the country is 21 per cent. Look at the rates of diabetes, kidney health and cardiovascular. If you add smoking to diabetes, it is time bomb stuff.

Mrs VALE—Yes, it is.

Ms Smyth—Smoking in the community also has a direct impact on child health through the impact of passive smoking, so obviously that has an across-the-board implication.

Mrs VALE—Sue-Ellen, would you say that there is an urgent need for a 'quit smoking' funded program here in Maningrida?

Ms Kovack—Very urgent, yes.

ACTING CHAIR—I think we could say that that is the case across all Aboriginal communities. I think it has been recognised by the government; we are putting a lot of money in this year's budget. That probably has not been rolled out as well, but clearly if we get serious

about closing the gap—and I think I made this statement early on—all of the evidence shows that smoking is the No. 1 reason for the gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people.

Mrs VALE—Absolutely.

ACTING CHAIR—Before we let you go, since the BasicsCard and since the licensing of stores have you seen any changes in the stores from a health perspective or any change within the community?

Ms Kovack—In the last two years?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Kovack—I think there has been a small change in eating habits. I think people are interested in coming to learn about cooking and about their health in general. I have no concrete evidence of anything; it is just a feeling that I have.

Mrs VALE—Are people using the ‘nutrition’ word more often?

Ms Kovack—Yes, absolutely, but then again I am working one to one. With 600 people, you need people in a room; you need groups of people. You need population shifts, not one-on-one shifts. Small steps are good, but we need an across-the-board approach.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much, Sue-Ellen and Sandi, for your presentation today. Michelle, Noeletta and Kingsley, do you have any comment to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Ms Thumm—I have been in this position only about six weeks. I have worked on various other Aboriginal communities, but this is a very new position for me and for the board as well.

Ms McKenzie—I have been in my position for three years.

Mr Murphy—I am also doing training—cert III—in youth work.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. What would you all like to say to the committee today?

Ms Thumm—I would basically like to say what Malabam is doing for the community about the nutritionist. There was a nutritionist here about 18 months ago. She was only here for six months and then there was no more funding for her. While she was here, she also did a Smoke-busters program, which was extremely successful. Because there was no more funding, it stopped. That is right, isn't it?

Ms McKenzie—That is correct.

Ms Thumm—Noeletta is more up to date than I am.

Ms McKenzie—The Green Tick program came out of Malabam Health Board as well. The issue seems to be lack of funding and short-term funding for programs that are successful in the communities.

Ms Thumm—At the moment, I am waiting for the public health nutritionist to come out next month. We are looking at revamping the Green Tick program within the stores and talking about that. We will also talk about the Flower Drum cooking and getting that revamped again, which will be more than likely out in the open rather than in a closed-in area.

Mrs VALE—That is one-pot style cooking?

Ms Thumm—Yes, one-pot style cooking. We are looking at that. But the problem with the nutritionist coming out is that it is two days a month and that is all.

ACTING CHAIR—So you get a fly-in fly-out nutritionist for two days a month.

Ms Thumm—Yes, and that will be all. I will be working with her to try and get other programs up and running and then I will get local people on board so that they are educated to take those programs out to the community. They will be local men and women, more so local women.

ACTING CHAIR—Is your position funded through the community organisation or is it government funded?

Ms Thumm—No, it is through Malabam Health Board.

ACTING CHAIR—Have they received a grant? How is it funded?

Ms Thumm—I have a contract for two years.

ACTING CHAIR—Where does the funding come from?

Ms Thumm—From OATSIH. I will also be looking at revamping the Maningrida Smoke-busters quit smoking program. There is a public health nurse, Alanna, again she is only coming out two days a month, and we are going to be working together to put Smoke-busters on the agenda again for the community.

ACTING CHAIR—I just want to clarify. You are getting funded through OATSIH which is federal government funding. Where does the funding come from for the nutritionists?

Ms Thumm—It comes from the Northern Territory department of health.

ACTING CHAIR—Are they working with the clinic?

Ms Thumm—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—They are funded through the clinic.

Ms Thumm—So Alanna will be going to the clinic but she will also be liaising with me.

ACTING CHAIR—One of the frustrations I see in Indigenous communities is the number of programs, the silo basis of some of the programs and the lack of integration when we are all working in a smallish community where everybody knows everybody else and things need to be better integrated. Have you got any comments on that in terms of the way that the federal and NT governments are delivering health services? Is that a problem?

Ms Thumm—It is not a problem working with them but what I am planning to do is to draw up a spreadsheet of what is available within the community so that programs do not overlap and people know exactly what is going on.

ACTING CHAIR—I hear what you are saying. I see this in my electorate in Queensland where health professionals have to meet with each other to work out who is doing what when they go into a community and the reality is that it is a small community. Government people should not have to meet with each other to work out how not to step on each other's toes in a community, we should actually just be working on how to integrate effectively with the community. I am getting off the track little bit from the inquiry, but it is interesting to hear that there are similar issues arising here. Would anybody else like to make a comment on that?

Ms McKenzie—The biggest issue in Maningrida is lack of communication between service providers. Everyone is saying, 'Let's do cooking.' I have been running a program for the last six months on a Saturday grog day, a nutrition program, where mind you—sorry, shop owners—I had to go outside of Maningrida to get funding to run the nutrition program for young people in this hall every alcohol day. We are feeding up to 70 kids and it is just me and my youth team that are running it. We are making \$8 million profit, but I have to go outside of Maningrida to get a measly \$4,000 to buy food to feed these kids. The kids are being taught to cook. It was the same when I asked both shops for a donation of a fridge and a freezer to put into the town hall so that we could make ice cups of kids, I was told, 'No because we are a not-for-profit organisation.'

Mrs VALE—Do not both the community stores here return profits back to the community?

Ms McKenzie—Apparently so. I just ran a festival that catered for 3½ thousand people. Again, I went outside of Maningrida to secure funding.

Mrs VALE—From a government department?

Ms McKenzie—From FaHCSIA. They milk youth diversionary money down into the Red Cross and again—no sponsorship. I got \$500 from the AC outdoor shop and then nothing from MPA.

Mrs VALE—Have you put a request in to the committee who run the shop?

Ms McKenzie—I sent sponsorship packages out to all the organisations that can provide to the festival, yes.

Mrs VALE—We really cannot make a comment about internal management of that, sorry, but at least you are getting your funding from FaHCSIA. Obviously, they can see the value of the programs you are running.

Ms McKenzie—Well, as of 30 June we do not have any recurrent funding so—yes.

ACTING CHAIR—What sorts of programs are you running? You say you are doing—

Ms McKenzie—We get alcohol into the community every second Saturday.

ACTING CHAIR—So you get alcohol into the community—

Ms McKenzie—Yes, it is called a wet barge grog day.

ACTING CHAIR—Okay.

Ms McKenzie—We open the hall for the kids so they have a safe place to come.

ACTING CHAIR—You open the hall for the kids to have a safe place to come?

Ms McKenzie—Yes. It is run most barge days. Some barge days it does not happen due to staff or human resources.

ACTING CHAIR—And you do not get funding from the community organisations who support that? You have to get—

Ms McKenzie—No. That has been funded from outside Maningrida.

ACTING CHAIR—And you have taken that up with the community reference group and with the different organisations in town?

Ms McKenzie—I have spoken to a few people on the community reference group about different issues with the youth services, yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Have you spoken to the government manager here?

Ms McKenzie—Yes. I have lots of conversations with Michael Rotumah.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes. Kingsley, did you have any comments that you wanted to add?

Mr Murphy—No.

ACTING CHAIR—I appreciate your frankness, Noeletta—often you scratch the surface and there can be different issues within communities. Obviously, you are running a program and you are clearly frustrated by that. Similarly, Michelle, for the comments you have made in terms of what we can possibly recommend to ensure that government is effectively coordinating the effort

that it is making in communities to support that effort. Have you got any other comments that you would like to add?

Ms Thumm—I did a very, very basic grocery comparison for BAC, MPA, Coles and Woolworths, which I would like to table.

ACTING CHAIR—We would love you to table that and we will have a look at it. Would you like to make some general comments about your brief analysis of it?

Ms Thumm—Initially, when you total everything up, BAC comes out as being very expensive and Coles and Woolworths are fine. But when you look at delivery charges to the barge and freight charges, BAC and MPA come up cheaper than Coles and Woolworths.

ACTING CHAIR—So when you add the cost of freight on—

Ms Thumm—Freight, and the delivery charge. To get your groceries from the Coles store to the actual barge is \$27.50. To get just one box—the minimum—from Darwin to Maningrida is \$42.00. Basically, it backs up what BAC and MPA say, that their prices are what they are because of the freight cost. A subsidised freight cost, or some more competition to get another freight service in or whatever would be really good to reduce that cost.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for that, Michelle. We will have you table that. Thank you very much for your comments today and your contribution to this hearing. Is there anybody else that we would like to hear from?

Mr Kiely—I would like to pick up on a couple of points. Starting from the observations about BAC and MPA and the comparison to Coles and the price of groceries in communities, I would like the committee to consider the zone rebate and how that has not moved over the years—zone A and zone B and what that means. Years and years ago that was really worth something. It helped defray some of the costs of living in remote areas—costs for electricity and food. That has not moved. While we see different moves in the tax scales in all sorts of areas, we have not seen that zone rebate moved. That would be something that we would hope would act as an incentive for all people in remote communities to come out here. The government has a fiscal equalisation model. I think it is really unfair that, while we see moves on income tax and moves on all sorts of good and services occurring in larger communities and capital city based communities, we do not see that in the most remote and most disadvantaged areas of Australia.

ACTING CHAIR—Len, are most Indigenous people in this community paying tax?

Mr Kiely—You see our CDEP participants on top-up pay tax; of course; everyone on wages pay tax. There is a pretty big tax base here.

ACTING CHAIR—Wouldn't it be that most people on welfare or a transfer payment would not be paying tax, so a change in a tax rebate would not necessarily provide any additional money to those on the lowest incomes in this community?

Mr Kiely—The whole thrust of government is that we get people onto real wages—I think that is the term. To presuppose that everyone around here is always going to be a welfare basket

case is not right. We are moving towards a larger income base. We hope that there will come a day when those on higher income brackets are local people. There is a large welfare base here, but maybe the application of a zone allowance should be taken into the welfare stream. Perhaps those in zone A should get a special consideration of some sort. Maybe not doing it effectively through tax breaks will help those on the welfare, fixed income stream. You raise a good point. There are a large number of recipients on welfare who would not be getting the advantage of a zone A, zone B tax break, and that too should be taken into consideration.

ACTING CHAIR—Thanks, Len. Would you like to make any other comments?

Mr Kiely—BAC has been in the fortunate position of being on the panel for the Indigenous Employment Program. We manage the new CDEP schemes. I think Mark from Barlmark Supermarket and others have mentioned how we feel about the changes that the new CDEP will make for the individual. There are some good programs, such as the Indigenous Employment Program. Picking up on Bill's comment on market gardens, we have been considering trying these out as new Indigenous enterprises. Depending on soil type, we may be able to get some sort of market gardening going—not one which has one row of cabbages and one row of cauliflowers. I think we have got to learn from the Humpty Doo experience. People from the north who have come down and settled in the Top End are growing Asian type vegetables, which are more suited to the climate. We might even be able to find a way of harvesting traditional bush foods.

There is a lot of work being done by John Altman and others on Indigenous enterprise and in working through traditional food sources. While we could not extend ourselves to an external market such as Darwin or beyond, certainly if we could find one or two crops that will grow on one homeland and one or two crops that will grow on the other, with the surplus we might be able to start up some sort of Saturday market in town. He said that we would not only be meeting the traditional needs of the community but we might also be looking at fixing up some of the economic needs as well. Those are the main points that I wanted to throw into the mix for you.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, Len. Mark did a pretty good job of outlining some of the other issues early on. Is there anybody else who would like to make any comments to the committee? If not, I thank people for coming along this afternoon. I do again apologise for the lateness of our arrival, and I do know that this has been a difficult day, running into show day in Darwin. Last week we had Cairns show day last week and many people travelled down from Indigenous communities in Cape York to come to show day, and it is a big part of the annual event.

Just to let you know what happens from here, we have been travelling across Australia to remote communities to hear directly from people. Some of the things that you have said today have been similar to what we have heard in other places, but it helps to inform us. We have gone to communities with corporate stores in the NT and Queensland, we have gone to communities with individual stores. The good thing about this community that is a bit different is that you have got two stores. We have gone to small communities and large communities, so we have been getting around talking to a range of different people about the situation in remote Indigenous stores.

The transcripts of all of those conversations are up on the Parliament House website and, if people are interested, they can have a look and a read of not only the conversations that we have had today and the submissions that have been put in today, but also all the submissions that are being contributed to the inquiry. We are going back to parliament in a few weeks, and we will be having another hearing with FaHCSIA. Following on from that, we will be starting to deliberate and come up with a series of recommendations. We are planning to bring down our report and table it in the federal parliament in October. We are a committee made up of the Labor Party, the Liberal Party and also Independent member Mr Katter. So we are a cross-party committee. We will be looking to try to bring down a bipartisan report. Many of the issues that have been raised go across communities. I think that we can make some recommendations that will be useful to the government.

In the end, it will be a decision of the minister, who will make a recommendation to the parliament, and Minister Macklin will have to respond to the report. We are hoping that the hearings that we have had and the input that we have had will provide some input into the development of the food security policy that is being developed by the Rudd government at the moment. I certainly hope so. The information that you have provided today and the submissions that you provided will help inform us and guide us in our recommendations. We hear the calls for freight subsidies and in terms of the difficulties particularly in small communities around the sustainability of stores. So there are a range of different challenges that we face in terms of making recommendations.

Again I thank you for your contribution today. If you are interested in this committee then you can follow the results of it on the internet or you can get in touch with the secretariat through the government business manager here, with whom we have been working in terms of pulling the program together today. Danna and I really appreciate the efforts that you have made to come today. I thank the traditional owners and Helen for the welcome and again we pay our respects to the elders. Thank you to *Hansard* for the work that they have done today. We look forward to overnighing in your community. I always like to overnigh in communities—there is too much flying in and flying out—and trying some of your good seafood that I understand we are going to experience tonight. Thank you very much, and also thank you to the secretariat that has organised today.

Committee adjourned at 6.39 pm