



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

## Official Committee Hansard

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

(Subcommittee)

**Reference: Indigenous employment**

TUESDAY, 11 APRIL 2006

MELBOURNE

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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

**Tuesday, 11 April 2006**

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

**Members in attendance:** Ms Annette Ellis and Mr Wakelin

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

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

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**Subcommittee met at 9.09 am**

**ANDREADIS, Mr Jim, Private capacity**

**BRIGGS, Mr Paul Anthony, President, Rumbalara Football and Netball Club Inc**

**CORBOY, Mr John Francis, Private capacity**

**CUTCLIFFE, Mr Anthony Charles, Director, The Eureka Project Pty Ltd**

**CHAIR (Mr Wakelin)**—Welcome. This is a hearing of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, which is inquiring into Indigenous employment. The committee is investigating positive outcomes and best practice around Australia to recommend to government some practical steps to improve the issues around employment outcomes. I particularly welcome our guests from the Shepparton area today. As you would be aware these are proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the parliament itself. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr Corboy**—I am a fruit grower and a community leader in Shepparton. I am involved in quite a few things as well as Ladders to Success, which is an Indigenous employment organisation.

**Mr Andreadis**—I am a retailer and an employer. I am also on the Ladders to Success committee and some other community groups.

**Mr Briggs**—I am one of a group of Aboriginal leaders who have been looking at the issue of employment, unemployment and community development in Shepparton.

**CHAIR**—I do not know how long it has been since I saw you, Paul; maybe 3½ or four years.

**Mr Briggs**—Yes, something like that.

**CHAIR**—It is great to see you.

**Mr Cutcliffe**—Our organisation is a partner with Paul and his activities in Shepparton.

**CHAIR**—I invite someone to summarise and make a short opening statement, and then we will go into a general discussion.

**Mr Briggs**—I will lead off and then I will ask John to say a few words. I want to re-emphasise the underpinning issues around unemployment. Unemployment in a place like Shepparton is a symptom of the issues facing Indigenous people as much as the health, education and justice issues. It requires a whole of community and a whole of government approach to address the crisis in Indigenous family lives. Indigenous unemployment is not just about statistics; it is not about politics, bureaucracy or programs. However, I think we have been categorised into that mind-set by bureaucracy and programs over a long period of time.

It is a generational issue and the data has not changed over numerous years and over successive governments. It requires a change in culture and practices and that sometimes requires innovation and courage on all parts to create the change that is necessary if we want to enjoy a better outcome. It is about people and about families. It is about dispossession, poverty and isolation— isolation in the broader sense of social and economic isolation of Aboriginal people on the fringes of society. That underpins the work that we have been doing in Shepparton to break down those barriers and create a better communication between the Aboriginal people and the community in which we live. I think that has taken us something like 10-15 years of solid work to start to create the dialogue that is now happening between Aboriginal leaders and the non-Aboriginal leadership of Shepparton to take this issue on. By addressing the issues of unemployment, we are also addressing the issues of health and education and the social and economic standing of Indigenous people.

It is not about the culture primarily, about black and white, but about the power imbalances—in particular, the domination or the paternalism of the politics and the bureaucracy over a long period of time and the position of Indigenous peoples within that. In addressing Indigenous employment we have to look strategically and not isolate or silo the issue of employment into its own category without being conscious of the social and economic issues underpinning the Aboriginal community and the relationship that exists between people in the community in which we live.

This also is underpinned by the value of Aboriginal identity in a place like Victoria and the culture in mainstream society of generational symptoms of data that describe Indigenous peoples as either disadvantaged or a deficit. This also underpins the self-esteem of young people and their willingness and ability to engage with the broader community and to engage in work or educational opportunities that present themselves in the Goulburn Valley. That is why I say it is an opportunity for us. We have worked really hard. I think we are well positioned now that we have people aligned in the private sector, in business, across government with the COAG process and across industry and civic leaders in Shepparton to want to make a change and see this as an issue facing the community rather than isolating it as an Aboriginal issue of Aboriginal unemployment. I think that has been one of the wins that we identify when we talk about the capacity now of the Goulburn Valley to be innovative and to put down a model that could well be influential, not just for our own wellbeing in the Goulburn Valley but for other communities in south-eastern Australia and nationally.

That underpins the way in which we have approached the issues in Shepparton and, in particular, unemployment. We do have some discrepancies about data collection. We have real issues about the way ABS counts. We think there is something like a 60 per cent undercount in describing Indigenous populations in Shepparton and the use of that data is prevalent across all areas—not just unemployment but across health, education and justice—in the descriptives defining Indigenous people. We have found it very difficult to do policy work and to be strategic in the way in which we do future directions envisioning. We have to move into a place where there is a greater sense of sharing of data information and a greater ownership of data and the descriptives around 'Indigenous' by communities. We need to be a lot stronger, I suppose, in the way in which we present forward strategies and the role of governments, whether they be Commonwealth, state or local, to support community-led initiatives. I will leave it at that and I will ask John to pick up on the descriptives about what we have been doing in terms of employment in Shepparton.



**Mr Corboy**—From our opening remarks, you will see that we are a fairly diverse group of people who are sitting in front of you today. There are a couple of commonalities. One is that none of us has a financial interest in employment or government programs as such. The second thing is that we have an enormous interest in our community. Shepparton is very fortunate in that sense and, through Paul and several others, thank God, we have a very prominent and active Indigenous leadership in our community. When I say that we are all dedicated to our community, the statistics tell us—and we are never sure about statistics but we will take them as being accurate—that one in 10 people in the Goulburn Valley is an Aboriginal. As such, our community can never reach its optimum potential if 10 per cent of our population is at a disadvantage.

Personally, I am not enormously into reconciliation; I am enormously into affirmative action. I think, beyond any doubt, there is an undeniable case that the Aboriginal members of our community do need to have the playing field levelled.

Jim's involvement and my involvement came into this at a meeting in Shepparton where business leaders were asked to come, and where it was said that we have 80 per cent unemployment in the Indigenous community within our area. Jim and I looked at each other and said, 'That does not seem to make any sense. We have a very vibrant community here. There are plenty of jobs et cetera.' But when you thought about it, if you walk into any business in Shepparton and you saw an Indigenous person involved in that business—be it banking, retail or whatever—it would be a surprise. There are two key things that encourage people to be part of community: one is sport. It is something that seems to have a clear line, and I think Paul through Rumbalara is doing an excellent job on that. The second one is employment. If you are employed you are part of a community.

Over a period of time, we went to our peers first off and said, 'Would you employ an Indigenous person?' The unqualified answer from them was, 'Yes, we will.' But there were some conditions and the first was that they wanted that Indigenous person to be trained. The second thing was that they understood that, in the dynamics of dealing with it, there could be some issues that they were not familiar, so they wanted support—in other words, some mentoring. The third thing they said was, 'We really don't want subsidies. We want this to be a business deal. We are on about employing people and getting something at the end of it.' In a very short time there were 100 jobs on the table. It is not as if the work is not there; it has to be on employer's terms.

Jim and I are probably unique in one sense, in that we have had a fair interface with the government and DEWR in relation to policy. It is a real education as a business person sitting out on the outside, because you look at it and you say, 'We are running this system on the basis that the gauge of success is getting somebody in work for 13 weeks.' You get remunerated for that. You are never sure on the stats, which is a fundamental as a business person. You say, 'Let me see the trends. Let's see what is working and what's not.' Then when you go to look for the stats, you will find that you cannot get them and what you get you have to treat with enormous suspicion.

At Ladders, in 2½ years we have placed 80 people in permanent employment and 125 people in total. But I do know that a lot of other agencies double claim—in other words, if they were registered with another agency and came to us and we got them a job, there would be two hitters

on the line. Equally, I know that if you are working for the dole, you are classified as being employed. Hang on! The government is paying for that. That is not meaningful work. If you work 15 hours a week, you are classified as having a job. I would defy anybody to support their family on 15 hours a week. The stats are very rubbery, so you cannot get a real handle on the situation.

The other thing—and Paul alluded to it—is that when you look at it from the outside, you will see that there is not a level of equality in this. We were very encouraged with the meeting Paul had with the Prime Minister when Paul asked the Prime Minister what his vision was for Indigenous communities. He replied along the lines that he would like to see communities find solutions for their own problems. The reality is, though, if you do not play within a very tight set of parameters, you cannot provide solutions for your own problems. So there is not equality. I know DEWR is very sensitive when you take a counter position to them, and I am not taking it to be offensive. I am just saying that this is the reality of life. There is no equality in relation to employment. You either play by DEWR's rules or you won't play at all. That is the reality of how we have to deal. I am not necessarily saying this is good or bad. But we are all taxpayers, so I want to get the best value for my dollar.

The issue we have is a social issue. It is being dealt with in a cold, hard, commercial manner and that is not achievable. As a business person, if you said to me, 'Your goal is to get as many people in work for 13 weeks as you can', I will find a way of doing it. It is not hard, especially if you give me subsidies to do it. But in a lot of cases, you can be creating more damage than you can good. I will give you an example, and it is one we come across very early. It involves a 15-year-old Indigenous male. There is a history of violence and drug abuse in the family. Two older brothers are serving long-term prison sentences for serious crimes. The father is a reformed alcoholic and is violent. The kid could write his name and could not read. And he had a real chip on his shoulder in the community. If you put that kid in work for 13 weeks and you just mentor him there for that period, and when it is finished you have not done him any good at all. That is an 18 months- to two-year program. When you talk about 18 months to two years—and I do not know, but you guys might be able to tell me—that amount of time does not seem to be politically acceptable because you are not getting the runs on the board quick enough. That is not going to solve the problem that we have out there at the moment.

We have gone to the government with what we believe is an innovative scheme. It starts on the basis that you had better stop the bleeding first up—which is what a business person would do. The bleeding is where the kids are not coming out of school with an education. They are leaving school at the very early stages. I was talking to a young Indigenous kid at school and said, 'You're ticking along good. In another couple of years you'll be finished your tertiary education. That must be exciting.' He said, 'No, I'm leaving next year.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'What's the use? Johnny got through last year and he's down at CDEP.' Those issues have to be addressed, and it has to be a long-term solution. The key to this, whichever way you cut and dice it, is the employer. If that rapport is not made with the employer and you are not making him feel part of it, you have only two out of the three critical equations, and without the third it does not work.

I hear that we are placing more Indigenous people in work in the Goulburn Valley than ever before. I question those statistics. But if we take it that they are right, then we have hardly scratched the surface. The one program that did work was where employers were part of it:

leading it with the Indigenous leaders in our community and working in a practical way. I know it is a very complex issue. It is not an issue of lack of money. As a business person, if you said to me, 'You can have this amount of money and we want these sorts of results,' I would not consider it a major challenge. It is not about a lack of money. We go back to the Prime Minister's statement—and I do not know whether it is rhetoric from a government viewpoint or not: does the government want communities to have ownership of their own problems and be very active participants in it? Or is it a matter of 'You can play, as long as it is by my rules, even if it does not make any commercial sense to you'? The response from business people is, 'We can go and make money.' None of us get paid for this. There is no vested interest for us. I think there is an enormous chasm there that needs to be bridged. I am not saying it is the government's fault, DEWR's fault or the employer's fault. I think there needs to be one good dose of commonsense in here. As somebody said, the only good thing about commonsense is that it is not that common, and that applies to this situation.

I know I have bounced around a bit, but I wanted to provide a flavour of where we are coming from. As I say, we do not have a vested interest in it. We do not make money out of doing what we are doing, but we cannot afford not to make the investment we are making. The community I live in has been enormously rewarding to me as an individual. I have a commitment to it. We have a very good community in Shepparton. For example, we needed a children's ward. All of a sudden, the cannery winds up for a day, it gets free fruit, Visy gives them the cans et cetera and they raise a million dollars to get a children's ward.

**CHAIR**—How did that happen?

**Mr Corboy**—If you went back several years, there was a need for a children's ward at our hospital. All of the community got together, with fruit growers giving free fruit, the cannery giving free facilities and all the suppliers giving all the inputs, and within three weeks there was enough money for the children's ward. It is not a community that is uninterested in the wider sectors. On the Aboriginal issue, most people in the general community say, 'There's plenty of money being thrown at this and there's a lot of rhetoric. Do I really have to do anything?' On the face of things plenty is being done, but that is not the case if you scratch under the surface. As our community is becoming aware of that, they are becoming much more active in their involvement.

**CHAIR**—We have about 20 minutes to chew over these things. It almost seems trite. You people come from Shepparton and that takes about two hours, and I am reminded that Paul came from Gosford. Australia is too big sometimes. I do not quite know where to start but perhaps I can try to draw out three or four threads. Could you just draw on the spirit of COAG, a great umbrella group, the Council of Australian Governments. It has been running about three years. This is this commonsense, whole-of-government, get-on-with-it type of thing—that is what I thought it was. We are getting a pretty mixed response around the country about what it actually did, what it can do and what it cannot do. Can we talk a little about that and your experience of it. Did it contribute? Perhaps you might link the Prime Minister to that—when the Prime Minister came down to see you or was in the area.

**Mr Briggs**—No, I went to Canberra. I was involved in the Long Walk with Michael Long. We ended up having a talk about issues facing Indigenous people.

**CHAIR**—Can we get a picture of how you saw that working, because I seem to recall a very good drawing together of everything. The measurement is as good as I have seen and the focus on employment—the three rings bringing it all together. Can you draw that out a little.

**Mr Corboy**—I will quickly give an overview from an outside perspective. COAG obviously is a very commonsense thing if you make it work. The issue with COAG is that DEWR was the lead agency in pulling it all together. It was through your inquiry that we found out that DEWR is no longer the lead agency and that they have passed it on to somebody else and none of us knows. To me, that describes how successful COAG has been. I do not think it needs a lot of discussion.

**CHAIR**—No. Thanks for that; say no more. In the submission you mentioned that you had had some discussion with Kevin Andrews, the minister, and that he had some idea of it. How long ago was that? Where did that go? That is back a fair while.

**Mr Corboy**—No, it was about a month ago. We have been trying to get to see Kevin Andrews since March last year. I think it was a productive meeting for all parties there. It started off in a strange way. It was very obvious to us that the minister was not what we consider to be properly briefed. We spent a bit of time getting some ground rules right. He could not quite understand. He was of the view that we were coming to asking him for money. We had made it very clear in all of our correspondence that we could not consider continuing Ladders. It would have been fiscally irresponsible because we had run out of work-ready people. We were not there to get any money. We clarified a few issues and, to be very fair to the minister, the minister is fairly quick off the mark. He got the issues. He understood the benefits thereof. He encouraged us to get together with the department and see what could be worked through. We have a meeting next month in relation to that. Where it will end up, we are not quite sure.

The big issue is that to some degree the system is so rigid that, unless you can fit into a program, you cannot play. We are offering something much more widespread. From a business viewpoint, we look at it and say, 'Of course: that's life.' You have to adapt and you have to change things and everything else, but it becomes very intimidating when you go into the system with something that is different, whether or not the system can cope. We made it very clear to the minister that we wanted to contribute, but only if we could make a difference. If we felt we were getting into something that was a nice, warm, motherhood feeling thing but ended up being a facade, we did not want to play. It would be just a waste of time and an insult to the minister's intelligence and our own.

**Mr Cutcliffe**—From my experience of meeting with Kevin Andrews, I have never had any doubt that he is an honourable person and very committed to getting genuine outcomes for Aboriginal people. I have never wavered in that belief. From my observations and experience with DEWR, I do not have the view that the department shares that conscientiousness in displaying those characteristics, either in the way it has led the COAG trial at Shepparton or the way it has responded to the initiatives involving Indigenous employment activities in Shepparton.

From my extensive study of the COAG process and from the good feedback which the Indigenous leaders gave me in Shepparton, the common characteristic of Indigenous employment initiatives led by DEWR and its leadership of the COAG process is that it

consistently excludes Aboriginal people from determining what success would look like. DEWR is very good at coming up with various compilations of data, but invariably they are data sets which appear to be linked to careers within the department and which the department can demonstrably achieve without necessarily having regard to the effect that those achievements might have, beneficial or otherwise, on the community. The reason that the Aboriginal community and its non-Indigenous partners in Shepparton came up with the measuring success scorecard that you mentioned earlier is that hitherto, in three years of COAG, no-one had seriously asked Indigenous people what success would look like. It was determined externally what success would look like.

In the same instance, we talk about the recent meeting we had with Kevin Andrews, and bureaucrats there would swear black and blue that the Indigenous unemployment level in Shepparton is only 20 per cent. We know it is not 20 per cent but, again, data talks and it talks about the issue with the vagaries that John Corboy just described. We can talk about people who might have had three short stints in a year. That counts as perhaps three jobs, depending which way you look at the statistics—15 hours; that is a job. But, in the language that we all talk, a job is a job which enables a person to maintain themselves and their family. No matter which way DEWR records its statistics, nothing can change the fact that a job is a job.

Again, we have found in the COAG process that all the indicators which were adopted by DEWR, and to a large extent by the state government, were about process—about the number of meetings that were held—but not the outcomes that those meetings produced. It is my view that the Council of Australian Governments was intended to get a lot of cooperation between the two governments to better involve the Aboriginal community, and it is my experience and observation that they operated more like a cartel and simply further excluded the Aboriginal community.

**CHAIR**—On these figures of 80 per cent/20 per cent, and one in 10 Indigenous people—and I think somewhere it mentioned a \$200 million potential improvement in economic activity, whatever: is it as simple as saying, ‘Let’s do a reality check; let’s say what it is.’ From our humble origins as a parliamentary committee talking to government, are you telling us to describe it as it is?

**Mr Corboy**—I have a very personal belief that this issue should be above politics. Everybody is very frightened to find out exactly what it is, because he who is sitting in the chair at the time gets blamed. That is why, with employment, it very much reminds me of a business that has problems and is trying to build up its balance sheet—obsolete stock comes in as good stock. With this issue, unless there is a reality check and you ask yourself where you are now, then how the hell can you ever go forward? Whether the political spook can be taken out of it and there can be an all-parties approach to it, I don’t know; but it is certainly needed. This committee in particular is an all-party committee, so you have an influence in that sense. You are also going to come across enormous vested interests. DEWR is a big business. It has a budget way exceeding a lot of very significant companies in Australia. So don’t think you are going to get change in a real hurry, unless you want to put a receiver manager in.

**CHAIR**—Apart from telling it as it is—which seems like a reasonable contribution—if there was one thing you could tell us in describing the DEWR programs that would meet the community’s needs, what would it be? This goes to this whole issue of community ownership

and you people from the business sector saying, 'We don't want to be involved in this; we're just wasting our time. We're just going to play games, go round and round the mulberry bush.' If you could describe one thing where the program might move things forward, could you give us a clue on that. What would break the deadlock in a DEWR program? You may like to bring in Job Network, you may like to strengthen this whole independent committee scorecard approach. Or maybe there are three things. I need to pass to Annette, because there are endless questions here.

**Mr Corboy**—There are two things that come very readily to mind. One is to let us know exactly where things are now. I would be more than happy to give a process that would allow confidence for that to happen. It is not a matter of giving me the figures and I will believe them. Give us the figures in this form and then we know that they are right. The second thing is to take an all-of-problem approach to this issue. I know that employment is a DEWR issue, but this issue goes beyond just employment.

**CHAIR**—Can I make the point to you, and remind all of us perhaps, that it is not just employment; it is the positive examples of employment. We heard the negatives, and we know we have to address those. It seems to me that you have given us a formula, which gives us an opportunity. It is our job to sift through that and try to present it to government in a way that we think might work. So it is about employment but it is also about that positive approach that you people have taken that I want to present before you today. You have taken a very positive, proactive approach. Everywhere you go you seem to be running into these roadblocks.

**Mr Corboy**—To some degree it is like most things when you hit an impasse—sometimes you have to have a clean slate; everybody has to forget about what has happened in the past and let's have nobody indicted but let's agree there are some fundamental issues in this. The fundamental issues in this are how we ensure that the children, as they come out of school or whatever, see work as a viable and achievable thing. Communities, employers and government are key components in that. How do we deal with the issue of long-term problems and allowing and accepting that the long-term solution takes long-term funding? It is not a quick fix.

**CHAIR**—Not 13 weeks.

**Mr Corboy**—No, and you need to identify that. We have suggested, for example, that, for a lot of the people who are in the system at the moment, it is at least 18 months. That could entail just a week's work, at some level: complete a week and you have had a success. There might be a whole multitude of those issues, and skilling up as you get there, so that when you put them in for 13 weeks the employer is not disappointed, and the individual is not destroyed because it has not worked.

Look at the young Aboriginal mothers who are having families at a reasonably young age—they are very dedicated to their families. By the time the kids have left school there is too big a gap; they need to be able to have part-time work that works in with schooling and to have career paths and to add skills, so that when their kids leave school, the mothers can go back into a job. That cannot happen at the moment. It is not just the system; that is the play.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—First of all, Paul, I was trying to work out where I knew your face from. It was from the Michael Long Walk, I think, because I was amongst the crowd that came out and welcomed them and walked in.

**Mr Briggs**—That is right. I remember you.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It was a terrific day. John, can I take you back to a couple of comments you made earlier about the double dipping with the Job Network? Could you explain in a bit more detail how you saw that happening?

**Mr Corboy**—As I say, there was a whole raft of ways. I would just go back a step and say: ‘Give us the statistics under the terms we ask you to and we’ll know they’re right.’ We need to exclude these double-dipping issues. If an Indigenous person is registered with an employment provider, and another employment provider finds them a job—in particular, with Ladders to Success, where we were not necessarily part of the system and being paid—that employment provider gets the tick.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—When the other one is the one finding them work?

**Mr Corboy**—Yes, but they both place—this is the irony of it. We place them in a job, so, when you are reporting how many Ladders has done, you say this; and when you are reporting how many Centrelink or whatever have done, you say that. The same people can be in the two things; you get a double hit out of it. If you look at CDEP, Work for the Dole, et cetera, a lot of those issues are classified as jobs.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I wanted to ask you that because we have heard the same sort of instance elsewhere. The other thing I would like to address is the lack of job readiness. Do any of you want to make a comment on what we need to be doing? A lot of it is in your submission but I need to hear it for the *Hansard*. Could you give your view on why that is happening, what elements are missing, and what we need to do about that?

**Mr Andreadis**—With a service like Ladders to Success there was a fair bit of emphasis put on providing the before-and-after support, rather than just on getting these outcomes where you are measured by how many placements you are creating. If the person loses the position in or inside 13 weeks and you place them again, that looks like two jobs, or several. So you can end up with a person with no job at all but it looks like you have created four jobs. If you are encouraging somebody to provide training, job readiness and mentoring and they are trying to keep the retention rates up, I think you can avert a certain amount of that, whereas the system is encouraging some of the Job Network or CDEP providers to ‘churn’ these people or, alternatively, to keep them on their books so they are getting funding for all those people. It just seems to work against what we would all like to see happening.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—So it needs to be opened up and made far more flexible. Paul, you were going to say something.

**Mr Briggs**—I just wanted to make a comment about community ownership, which is vital to this. Collectively, in Shepparton, when the lights go out we are all still there, and when we wake up we deal with the issues. We have to support community ownership and community-led initiatives. There is public accountability happening. That is where we are taking the measuring of success. We want to create accountability so that these data sets that are being presented time and time again, over countless governments and generations, are not with us in the next generation, because we are the ones that wear the brunt of that.

I will say that the issues between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people are still stark, and the relationships are still poles apart. Aspiring young Aboriginal kids in Shepparton do not feel respected or valued, and those are generational issues. They do not feel valued or respected in the educational sector, out on the streets or in the employment sector. They are very much fringe dwellers when it comes to social and economic participation. The skill sets in the community are generational skill sets that have been there for quite some time. We are struggling to get kids through primary school with enough skills to enable them to cope in the secondary environment.

This is a long-term issue, and the pivotal thing is that the community must be prepared to work together to create the answers. We are looking to bodies like DEWR, the state government and others to support the initiatives that we are coming up with, because nothing else has worked in the past.

Another thing I want to say about where I have been for the last 10 years is that the Rumbalara Football and Netball Club has been one of the key vehicles which has brought young people out onto the public stage and has allowed them to be in a public environment, to put their identity in a public place, and to share and show their culture. Apart from that, the infrastructure of the Aboriginal community has been set up around social, welfare and disadvantage, and it is hived off onto the fringes where nobody really wants to talk about it.

I think it is sad that this is one of the only institutions that is allowing young Aboriginal kids to socialise in a public way. That is not happening in any other sector. It is encouraging kids to aspire to be in a public place, and whether it is to be able to share their identity in educational institutions or in the workplace, it is a very small kernel of belief in their own identity.

I think that issues around respect and value have been missing. One of the things that we have begun to address under this COAG process is cultural enhancement and cultural celebration within the community. How does a place like Shepparton express the identity of the people who live within it, and how does Aboriginal culture show itself in a public sense, other than through kids standing outside a courthouse on a Monday morning, or on the streets, or in other types of disadvantage? A healthy engagement of Indigenous people in the city of Shepparton underpins healthy outcomes in employment. We need young Aboriginal kids on the shop floor and in the tea rooms sharing the experience in a healthy way, so it is not just about having a job and then gritting your teeth, bearing down and putting up with all the crap that goes on around racist attitudes, so that you can sustain a job.

There is a lot of work that has to be done on building confidence, because generational confidence has been dented. We need to build confidence in the long term and support civic leaders, industry leaders, Aboriginal leaders and others to work on a solution in Shepparton that gives us the opportunity to create change. It has not been pinned down by national policy direction that is too rigid to cope with a local idea.

**CHAIR**—Your situation is repeated all over Australia. These are national issues. The template for Shepparton would apply over much of Australia; it is just that the responses from government are not giving that local ownership.



**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—And we do have to do something about breaking down the jurisdictional divide between the different layers of government, definitely.

**Mr Briggs**—We would like to think that there is a potential to redefine the resource and asset allocation, whether that be CDEP or otherwise, into a local solution for the best use of those assets.

**CHAIR**—Can I quote someone to you, Paul: we were judged rightly as a community where people walk into a business and are not surprised to see an Indigenous person working there. That was John Corboy.

**Mr Corboy**—Thank you, I do have my flashes obviously.

**Mr Cutcliffe**—If I might make a brief observation.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Yes, absolutely.

**Mr Cutcliffe**—What I think is really ironic about the employment experience in Shepparton is that you have Jim Andreadis and John Corboy, who are two of the most successful business leaders in Shepparton. They run multimillion-dollar businesses and are regarded as business leaders and community leaders. You have Paul and a whole variety of other Indigenous leaders in Shepparton who would put any community leadership to shame with their sport, healthy living, employment and education initiatives. Together, this group has formed a model for partnership and employment which is not only profoundly successful but also has big economic implications for the future. That is a model that is profoundly successful yet in our experience it is the best DEWR can do to suffer it rather than celebrate it. There lies one of the big problems. The issue is not so much layers of jurisdiction but a preparedness by departments to accept that a methodology which looks and acts differently to their own is in fact legitimate. Until you break that divide—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—That is a very telling comment, Barry.

**CHAIR**—I wanted to ask you, Tony, as someone very much involved with this document, for a brief insight into where you came from in, I think, 2004, as I understand it. Could we get a brief insight into your background and how you drew it together and worked with these people.

**Mr Cutcliffe**—I have known Paul Briggs now for about six years. With a lot of people you know for six years it is one year six times over, but Paul squeezes about 50 years of experience into a six-year life of association. What has always galvanised me to work with Paul, the same as Jim and John and everyone else, is that he leaves his ego at the door. He takes the view that you can achieve absolutely anything providing you do not care who gets the credit. That is why he has been so successful: because everybody owns the success that has been delivered by the Indigenous people and their partners in Shepparton. Getting involved in the Shepparton community is like a light over the door because you not only get involved with the Aboriginal community and can help make a difference but also non-Indigenous people being involved in the community become better people and actually see a better side of each other as well. The effect of that is quite phenomenal.

**CHAIR**—Paul, something that you said years ago was similar to what you have just said. The penny dropped with me when Paul said: ‘You have to remember that the football or netball club is the most likely social activity and interface with the community that the majority of many of these people are going to have. That is why you harness that in a way to go on to other things.’ That still haunts me a bit; it is still there. It is a very powerful comment about what we are really dealing with. Enough from me. Annette, do you have any more questions.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—No. I think this discussion is fantastic. I do not need to ask questions, because these guys are so forthcoming.

**CHAIR**—The submission stands on its own. We better ask our standard question about ICCs—the Indigenous coordination centres.

**Mr Briggs**—I think you will get silence. Not many of us know too much about it.

**Mr Corboy**—Sounds like confetti to me.

**CHAIR**—Tony, what really fascinated me when I first had a look at measuring success, about eight or nine months ago, was this methodology. You drilled into the community. You said: ‘These are the issues. How do we do it and then bring it together?’ You have touched on that. Can we talk a little bit more about that methodology? We understand the economics. We understand that these people here act beyond their own businesses. They might be offended by the word, but they are a philanthropic strength in the community. Can we talk about your methodology in terms of how you got to where you got to? You have probably done it, but I want to have another crack at it.

**Mr Cutcliffe**—The methodology was delivered out of exploration that Paul conducted with his community. At the start of the COAG process Paul had been quite determined to try and establish a baseline, but he could not get support to do it. If the programs were going to be successful, how would you measure that success? The other issue we found in evaluating the COAG process was that there was no data set that you could rely on. You could ask for a simple set of data and you would come back with all sorts of configurations. You could ask how many people were in a room and you would find out how many had black hair, how many had yellow shoes and how many were wearing glasses but you would never know how many people were in the room. There was that type of approach. The idea was to take that measurement out of the domain of bureaucrats and the political process and hand it back to the Indigenous community. Christine Nixon was very kind in helping us develop the Comstat methodology, which is very much about, ‘Let’s measure what matters rather than a whole lot of peripheral data that just confuses people.’

What is really important about that scorecard is, No. 1, we have now assembled a group of about 20 eminent Australians to measure it. They are broadly representative, with backgrounds in politics and all the rest of it. So it is an external, independent measurement process. It is about stuff that will actually make a difference in the community. More importantly, it draws together into what we are calling the equity stack—that is, measuring not just obvious outcomes in the way a community looks but the level of equity and control evident in the relationships between Indigenous people.

So it will have an indicator of whether, when Aboriginal people entered into a particular jobs agreement or another community development agreement with governments, they did it because they had a choice, because they felt they were an equal partner in it or because they were told, 'You either sign this or you get nothing.' Measuring the balance of power, the balance of risk and the balance of commitment in all those relationships is a really important cultural indicator. If I entered into a contract with you tomorrow and you did not give me a cooling-off period, and then I found out it was a really bad contract you had made me sign, the court would void it. They would say it was an unconscionable contract. But Indigenous people do not get a cooling-off period. They have to sign one contract and then start getting ready to sign the next one. That is where the measuring scorecard is important. It is independent. It is about things that Aboriginal people say will be a success. It is about results rather than process.

**CHAIR**—Paul, you might be able to help me with this question. When the committee went a few years back to the school at Shepparton there was some work being done there. We touched on education retention rates. It was 25 per cent, way below what we have got to get to, which is 65 per cent regional and 75 per cent for the Victorian state average. Can you give us a quick update about that issue with the school? Is there much going on there? Have you made a bit of progress?

**Mr Briggs**—No progress. Retention has probably got worse since then. For young males it is around 14 per cent and overall it is still around 24 or 25 per cent. Again, the underpinning issues are the same issues we have talked about here: ownership, sense of pride and identity, kids aspiring, parents aspiring with kids, feeling a part of the social and economic matrix of your community, using institutions as a pathway. That is not occurring, so that shift has not happened. That is why accountability and community ownership are so vital to us getting those changes across education, to young people seeing a pathway and aspiring to a pathway to be a part of their local economy and to the local economy not being about disadvantage and jobs that pertain to disadvantage. So it is shifting where young people see themselves working—not just working in the Aboriginal community controlled environment.

**CHAIR**—Is there something within the education system that we as politicians could be insisting on? Is there something that comes to mind?

**Mr Briggs**—The only thing from my perspective is the issue about how you respect and value the amenity of a young person that walks through the gate of an institution. It is not about pushing kids through the gate and locking it before they can get out. There is an issue around cultural literacy in the community, so people know about Aboriginal history, they know about Australian history as it applies to Aboriginal people. It is about respect and value in terms of the way in which the institution works with kids. Also, a 25 per cent school retention rate for young males, which is dropping, becomes a public issue. It should not be suppressed or kept hidden. People have to work with it. There should not be a cyclical approach to a crisis.

**CHAIR**—We should expose it and say, 'We've got an issue here.'

**Mr Briggs**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I seem to remember some work with the Koori Court at Shepparton. I know it is a bit off the subject but it is still in the mix. Is that still going along?

**Mr Briggs**—The Koori Court is relatively new. It is a pilot and I am not sure whether it is two or three years old. The recidivism rate within that has been excellent. The kids that have been coming before the Koori Court are not appearing again; they are not re-offending. It models community ownership. Young people are appearing not just before prosecutors and magistrates with their external powers but before an Aboriginal elder, eyeballing them in the process. So the ownership is on the community, the elder and the young person. It is a good model and no doubt it will be refined as it evolves. Again, it symbolises what we have been talking about, which is community ownership and getting people to be accountable in a community way as well as an individual way.

**Mr Andreadis**—Once upon a time somebody no doubt had to think outside the square to allow that to happen, because that concept must have been confronting at the time.

**CHAIR**—You could say, ‘If our legal processes, which are sometimes seen as being fairly rigid, allow that, why can’t everyone else do it to a degree?’

**Mr Andreadis**—Perhaps the bureaucracy could look at that example and get something from it.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—On the question of retention in education, you said that there were mutual obligations. You said a moment ago that we do not push them through the gate and lock it; we have another relationship. Do you see mutual obligation in there?

**Mr Briggs**—I think all parents aspire for their kids to achieve the best, to go through the processes, to get their VCE and to think about the notion of tertiary education and careers. There is not one parent that would not want that to happen. It is about the barriers that seem to be placed in front of parents over the generational issues of racism, their non-affiliation and non-engagement with society, employment and schools. I think the mutual obligation will apply if the balance of power also goes upwards. If the environment is constructed in a way that makes it a safe place for young Aboriginal people to be and protects them, we can work on the mutual obligation. Mutual obligation is not about punishment, it is not punitive—that if you do not do the right thing you will lose your dole, your pension or whatever. It is more constructive, it is more proactive and it is about building social and economic capacity.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—So if all those other bits are in place it can be balanced.

**Mr Briggs**—That is my belief.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Yes. I am asking your opinion. So it applies whether we are talking about retention rates in school, the achievement of CDEP or a whole range of other things—the whole breadth of the social question.

**Mr Briggs**—I think mutual obligation applies when we as Aboriginal leaders sit with John and Jim and other leaders in our communities and say, ‘Let’s work on this together because we do have a common interest.’

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It is a good example of mutual obligation of a different kind.

**CHAIR**—That is a wonderful place to conclude. To the Shepparton groups, Eureka Project, Ladders to Success and Rumbalara, I dips me lid and I thank you for the time you have given us this morning.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Thank you for your statements and the time to discuss them; it has been terrific.

[10.12 am]

**DODGSON, Ms Debra, National Manager, Workforce Diversity, Australia Post**

**McDONALD, Mr Rod, Group Manager, Human Resources, Australia Post**

**WALKER, Mr Brian, Diversity Consultant, MND Victoria/Tasmania, Australia Post**

**CHAIR**—I welcome representatives from Australia Post. We do not require you to give evidence under oath, but I remind all of us that these are legal proceedings of the parliament. I understand, Mr McDonald, that you would like to make a brief opening statement.

**Mr McDonald**—Yes. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee to talk about the commitment of Australia Post to its Indigenous employment and business strategy. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, the Kulin nation. I have with me, as we have indicated, Debra Dodgson, the national manager for workforce diversity for Australia Post, and Brian Walker, who is the diversity consultant responsible for Indigenous employment in Victoria and Tasmania.

Australia Post provides postal and ancillary services to the Australian community. We are a big organisation, with 35,000 full- and part-time staff. We operate 4,474 post offices. We serve 1.1 million customers every business day and we deliver mail to 9.87 million Australian addresses, as at today. It increases every day, of course. We have three main business streams: the first stream is letters, which is the reliable sorting and delivery to add-on services such as bulk mail, direct marketing and mailroom services; the second is our retail and agency services, which has been a growth area over the last decade, and we provide agency services there for government and other businesses as well as salary type products; and the third, which is changing and growing, is parcels and logistics, which includes domestic and international parcels and domestic and international courier services and logistics.

Seventy-six per cent of our profit last year came from competitive services open to full competition. We are geographically diverse, and I think that is important in terms of the strategy for Indigenous employment. Our workforce comes from over 130 countries and speaks over 70 languages. It is in this environment that our Indigenous employment and business strategy operates. In brief, the strategy is that we have targeted strategies for the employment of Indigenous Australians and have done since 1988. We believe the success of that strategy has been reflected in the fact that the number of Indigenous Australians employed by Australia Post has increased by 400 per cent since the first year of the strategy in 1988.

Our current Indigenous employment strategy—I think copies of it were provided to the committee; if not we can hand them over—provides a target, which is currently a two per cent representation in our workforce by June 2008. Currently, we have 625 Indigenous Australians, which represents about 1.8 per cent of our workforce. We consider that the ongoing success in the employment of Indigenous Australians is due to a strong commitment and a planned and sustained approach. That commitment needs to, and does, come from the top of our organisation. Both our managing director and the board support the Indigenous employment and business

strategy, and in a real sense they receive regular reports on progress. Targets for the employment of Indigenous Australians are transmitted through the business to the divisions, business and facilities—that is, individual work centres. The achievements against those set targets are reflected in performance management agreements for a number of managers.

The next point which I think is critical to helping the strategy be successful is that there is a resource in each state responsible for the recruitment of Indigenous Australians. It plays a coordinating role. Those Indigenous employment consultants are themselves Indigenous and provide a key focal point for the strategy, particularly in a national organisation. They consult with the business, having regard to business needs, and they assist with the placement of Indigenous Australians into positions on the basis of merit. We see maintaining a relationship with Indigenous Australians as key to the success of the strategy. Detailed induction provides new Indigenous employees with information in relation to their rights and responsibilities. We maintain that relationship through the early stages of employment with regular follow-up contact with the Indigenous employment consultants, by mentoring new employees, by having regular network meetings and with newsletters.

In addition to our employment programs, we have business relationships with Indigenous individuals and communities generally. As at November 2005, 143 of our licensed post offices, community mail agencies and community postal agencies and 26 of our mail and parcels contracts were operated by Indigenous individuals or communities. In summary, we are proud of what we have been able to achieve through a commitment to the employment of Indigenous Australians. We are keen to maintain that commitment and success. We have had dedicated strategies since 1988. Key to the provision of that commitment is the support through a network of Indigenous employment consultants. Our strategy is all about providing real, ongoing jobs and real opportunities for Indigenous Australians. We would be happy to answer any of the questions that you might have.

**CHAIR**—Congratulations, Australia Post, and thank you. I suppose the key issue is this. When you set the targets from a corporate perspective, how does that help you? How do you do it? I can see an obvious one—that is, two per cent of the population and two per cent of the employment. But what process do you go through and how does that assist you in getting fairly close to your target, as you are at the moment?

**Mr McDonald**—I suppose there are two major factors. I will let Debra and Brian add to this. One is taking into account what our level of employment has been to date. There is a variation, obviously, between states, which reflects that and also reflects factors such as the population of Indigenous Australians in those particular states. On the second part of your question, we think it is important to set some targets that people aim to get to and, hopefully, exceed. It is a matter of ensuring managers do not rest on their laurels but are continually looking at ways to build the employment base. Do you want to talk about the process, Brian or Debra?

**Mr Walker**—I set the targets for the Victorian and Tasmanian business units. I look at what their current situation is in terms of what opportunities will come up in the next year. I like to place people into real jobs and not just a three-month contract or whatever and then say, ‘Thank you very much.’ I like to make sure that we can achieve those targets but also push the business to make sure that they are really focused on exceeding the targets where possible. There is a lot of discussion with the various business units as to how they can achieve those targets. It is about

making them realistic but also giving them opportunities to tell me where they are at and for me to tell them where they can improve to reach or exceed those targets. There is a lot of discussion involved around that.

**CHAIR**—In terms of the, I think, 35,000 employees and the 600-odd or 700 Indigenous employees, what is the spread like across the whole structure from senior management through to postal delivery?

**Ms Dodgson**—In terms of the spread, 20 per cent of the Australia Post population generally are in above base grade positions. For our Indigenous employees that figure is 17 per cent. It is pretty close. Indigenous employees are physically located in all streams of business and across the entire country. So we have Indigenous employees in every state and territory and in most designations across the business as well.

**CHAIR**—I am interested in the consultants' conference in the effort that goes into what, I would think, brings together the best of the corporate knowledge that you can then put back through this very large organisation that you are responsible to and for. Could we talk about that?

**Ms Dodgson**—In my position I am responsible for ensuring we have a diversity conference and an Indigenous employment conference annually. We had one in early March. All the Indigenous consultants come together at that conference and we talk about where we are going, how we are going to get there and what sort of issues we need to have addressed. One of the outcomes of the conference this year that we are going to be working on is to provide a uniform promotional pack for recruitment. All the consultants contributed to what will be in that pack as to whether we have banners, badges and those types of things. We focused on what is actually going to engage likely Indigenous recruits with the organisation.

**Mr Walker**—From my perspective, these are a fantastic opportunity to get together with the other people who are sharing the same experiences in the same organisation. We can talk about what sort of things work, what our challenges are and how we can get around things. If someone is having problems, we can put our heads together and see what the best way around those problems is. We can also talk about various initiatives in the different states.

One of the great initiatives we heard of in March was in Queensland. They have an Indigenous employment advocacy program, in which employees are brought in for training for a couple of days a week. They get to learn a lot about the jobs that we employment consultants do, the jobs at Post and all the information I try to get out into the communities. That way, we have various employment consultants around the state in the communities, and people can get the word out that way. Among Indigenous communities, word of mouth is often the best way of getting the information out there. That is something I had not thought of that I am going to implement in Victoria and Tasmania. It is a great opportunity to learn and help each other.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What sort of traineeships do you offer—if any? Do the Indigenous people you employ come in fully and absolutely trained-up or do you bring them in and take them on as apprentices, trainees or whatever to enhance their employment situation from what it is when they first walk through the door?



**Ms Dodgson**—It varies from state to state, having regard to the business needs in the particular state. As a general rule—in fact, as an absolute rule—we fund our own recruitment. We do not take government funding for recruitment at all. We have relationships in a number of states with a number of agencies which provide us with pre-employment programs. In New South Wales we have a relationship with the Sydney Institute of TAFE to provide a pre-employment program that gives Indigenous candidates a level 1 certificate in warehousing and distribution. But it varies from state to state. To give you an idea of how it works in practice, I might ask Brian how he does it in Victoria.

**Mr Walker**—In Victoria we do not have any traineeships at the moment. As I have my own funding, I generally give people an opportunity where sometimes they may not have got that opportunity. At Post we have great training available for all our people. I like to bring people in and teach them how to work in an organisation like ours because a lot of people have not had that sort of experiences. I like to give them an opportunity for three months and give them the skills.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What percentage of those people you bring in for three months go on to full-time employment?

**Mr Walker**—Off the top of my head, I would say it was around 70 per cent. In the last year it is probably around 80 per cent. I try to make sure there is a permanent job at the end of any training program I run. There is nothing worse than seeing people come in with their resume and they have done three months here, three months there—it goes on for ever.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It is pretty demoralising.

**Mr Walker**—They are doing all these training programs and courses and not really getting anywhere. If I give them an opportunity to settle into one position, they generally—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What about the non-Indigenous staff? As an employer, is there an issue for you in assisting with relationships—cultural understanding and cross-race issues in the workplace—and, if they are recognised, how do you handle them?

**Mr McDonald**—We have run cross-cultural awareness programs in the past. I have to say I have not detected there being any issues at the moment. In fact, I think relationships are very good and there is an acceptance of working together. Brian is probably closer to the situation.

**Mr Walker**—There are a lot of issues that pop up. Generally, our managers are pretty well-placed to deal with those issues.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Does Australia Post actively pursue cultural awareness of the non-Indigenous workforce, not just in Victoria and Tasmania?

**Mr Walker**—Yes, we do.

**Mr McDonald**—Sorry, I was talking generally, but asking Brian to give an example. Yes, we do across all states.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It seems to be vitally important, because many employers say that it is part of the issue in attempting to employ more Indigenous Australians. It is about how their relationships are built with the non-Indigenous working community.

**Mr McDonald**—I think the fact that we have done it for a number of years and it gets reflected not only in cross-cultural awareness training but through NAIDOC, a commemoration which has non-Indigenous people there as well, all helps. Also, there is the promotion we do through our regular staff journal and the highlighting of all of those factors. Obviously there will be issues that you have to deal with on a day to day level, but the relationships seem to me to be very good.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—My last question at this stage is a hard one to ask. What is the advantage for Australia Post in employing Indigenous Australians?

**Mr McDonald**—We are very careful to reflect in our policy that the advantage to us is that we are a big organisation and we service a big community and customer base. That customer base is made up of a whole range of people from different backgrounds. They are from ethnic and Indigenous backgrounds. It is important that we have a workforce that reflects that customer base. We have promoted that there is a real business advantage in such a workforce and I think it has proven to be the case in practice. Our policy has the thrust of providing a competitive advantage to the organisation, as well as providing employment to individuals through a merit based selection process so that the best person gets the job, irrespective of their background.

**CHAIR**—My last question is this: as part of corporate Australia we are seeing more and more of the corporate sector becoming involved in this issue. You have a solid track record in the way you do it and we congratulate you on that. But in terms of the corporate sector generally and yourselves as part of the corporate sector, can you comment on where you see the future? We have a lot of undone business here; we have a long way to go in terms of getting to where I think most Australians would want to be. Can you comment on how you connect with the rest of corporate Australia and how you see the future on this issue?

**Mr McDonald**—I think there are two elements. Brian might comment on the second element, which is the interaction at more the community level. At the business level, I think it is important for us as a big corporate player to promote the virtues of the things that are being done. We sponsor Indigenous employment awards, and have done so for about five years, through the Diversity@work process. That reflects good achievements in terms of Indigenous employment. It is that promotion and talking at conferences and seminars about what is being done and what the rationale for it is. We were at the Australian Human Resource Institute conference, which involved a range of organisations, where you share best practice. First and foremost, you have to have the runs on the board and be seen to be doing that. It is important for you to go out there and be prominent and talk about why you are doing it and the benefits.

I suppose it is a bit separate from what you are asking me, but our reporting on Indigenous employment activities ultimately goes into a report that is tabled in parliament. More particularly, we report to the board of Australia Post every three months. We talk about what we are doing in terms of our performance on Indigenous employment. Our board is made up of eight or nine board directors who are also directors of other companies. I think it is about being a good corporate citizen and promoting—

**CHAIR**—I am sorry to interrupt, but you have really captured exactly what I was aiming for. Is there anything you want to add at the operational level?

**Ms Dodgson**—From the point of view of the strategy, one of the things that we are waiting to see fall out—and I am speaking pretty candidly—is that we have pretty much had the field to ourselves. There are a whole bunch of other people out there who are saying, ‘We’re going to employ Indigenous people too.’ I am watching with interest to see what happens with that. I suspect there will probably be some poaching. Frankly, I do not care about that.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—That happens in the non-Indigenous workforce as well.

**Ms Dodgson**—That is absolutely right.

**CHAIR**—It reflects well on your ethic and—

**Ms Dodgson**—Precisely, our training. One of the things that I included in the strategy was to look at exploring opportunities to increase Indigenous relationships with Indigenous individuals and communities from a business perspective. As with everything, long lead times require a lot of work, but that is another way of contributing overall to advances in the Indigenous community by getting that business relationship up and running as well. In future I think that is a place where there is a field that we can play in. We will see how we go with that.

**CHAIR**—I am very appreciative of your time this morning. I came to Melbourne many years ago and have been backwards and forwards in this role. I remember going to the larger exchanges and saying, ‘That was something I did not know’—that is, Australia Post always continues to surprise. You really are a credit to our country. Thank you for your attendance.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.36 am to 10.56 am**

**CULL, Ms Emma, National Policy and Research Officer, National Tertiary Education Union**

**McCULLOCH, Mr Grahame, General Secretary, National Tertiary Education Union**

**WRIGHT, Mr Joel, Indigenous Officer, National Tertiary Education Union**

**CHAIR**—I welcome the representatives from the National Tertiary Education Union. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I need to advise you that these are legal proceedings of the parliament. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

**Mr McCulloch**—The National Tertiary Education Union is a medium size national trade union. We have about 27,000 members across the country. The types of work that we represent are all categories of employment in universities from the highest paid and most senior professor right down to gardeners, cleaners and security staff. We have a strong industrial focus but, unlike some other parts of the trade union movement, we also have a very strong focus on professional issues and on issues of social justice. In that connection we have made a lot of strides in recent times to build and develop a strong Indigenous membership. We have more than 300 members who are Indigenous Australians. We also have a national committee, an Indigenous tertiary education policy committee, and a national forum or conference of our Indigenous members, which we hold once a year. We have in a sense reached an understanding with our Indigenous members. We have a commitment to Indigenous employment throughout all sectors of the economy but including in our own organisation. In addition to Joel, we also employ a further Indigenous resources officer. I would like Joel to introduce the main substance of our submission. At the end of his remarks, I have a couple of supplementary comments to make.

**Mr Wright**—Thank you very much, Grahame. I would like to begin by stating that we do bring some additional evidence or material that we would like to table as a part of this inquiry. I have provided copies of that which I could table for the committee's information. This additional information is based on issues that relate to the continuing implementation of the NTEU's Indigenous employment strategy that has been implemented at universities Australia wide as described in quite substantive detail within our initial submission that was given to the inquiry in May 2005.

That initial submission speaks of the success we have been able to achieve in increasing Indigenous employment, in the period from 2001 to 2004, to a level of approximately 24 per cent across the sector. In recognition of the effects of the success of this particular strategy, the then Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, adopted some additional policy guidelines that supported the implementation of the strategy within institutions nationally. These guidelines relate to what is now called the Indigenous Support Program. They relate to the core operational funding for Indigenous student support centres at each institution across the country. One of the new guidelines that the minister implemented was that universities, in their applications for the core operational grant, were now required to demonstrate that they had in place an Indigenous employment strategy and that there were Indigenous people involved in the decision-making processes of the particular institution.

One of the issues that we bring to the committee's attention today relates to some occurrences as a result of the Higher Education Workplace Reforms Requirements and of the interpretations of DEST and DEWR relative to the existence of Indigenous employment strategies within universities. The evidence that we have tabled here today demonstrates that there is some inconsistency in relation to those particular departments' understanding of the Indigenous employment strategy within universities and of the universities' responsibility to have such a strategy involved in their application for Indigenous Support Program funding.

What we are basically saying to you today is that, whilst we have ministerial support of the Indigenous employment strategy through the adoption of these additional guidelines for institutional core operational funding, we are actually receiving advice from the Department of Education, Science and Training and, in some instances, DEWR that suggests institutions, pursuant to being compliant with HEWRS, should remove references to their Indigenous employment strategies from their enterprise agreements. We believe this is a significant contradiction of the policy position that was established by the previous minister in adopting the additional guidelines for ISP. I understand that it is a complex issue, and I have provided the committee with documents, which I have just referred to, containing information additional to our submission. In the information that I have provided are the actual guidelines to the Higher Education Support Act and the extra conditions of eligibility for ISP funding. In addition, I have provided a copy of DEST advice to a higher education provider here in Victoria. They are documents 4 and 5 within the copies of the documents that I have provided to you.

**CHAIR**—We have them, thank you.

**Mr Wright**—You will note that the table in document 5 refers to precisely the advice that was given. I refer you to the second dot point. It clearly advises that the clause should be removed. On the basis of the material and documentation that we have here, we are seeking that the departments and minister clarify the implications of HEWRS for the status of the Indigenous employment strategy pursuant to the operation of the ISP guidelines and to giving continued support to the strategy overall.

**Mr McCulloch**—I would like to add briefly to that summary. I would like to put the issue in this way. There are competing priorities in the government's overall objectives here. From our point of view, while we are opposed to the government's overall industrial relations policies, it is not on that basis specifically that we ask you look at this matter. If I can try to do justice to the government's thinking or, more particularly, to the bureaucracy's thinking on this: their view about our enterprise agreements not having Indigenous employment strategies set out within them derives from their view that there should be flexibility for management to seek to change its allocation of resources at any given time, and they do not want industrial instruments to interfere with that.

We say to the committee that, apart from our general objection to that—which we do not go to—it is not the kind of principle that should necessarily be applied on some kind of uniform basis, without recognition of the particular circumstances of particular policy objectives. We made a conscious decision as a union, but in partnership with local Indigenous communities and employers. If you go through every single enterprise agreement that exists in the university system you will find that each and every one of them has a written, developed Indigenous employment strategy, and in most instances they have targets specified in them.

Our employers have deliberately chosen to be legally bound through those enterprise agreements to those targets and objectives, because their relationships with the local Indigenous communities and with Indigenous people say to them that it is important that they do bind themselves. What the government's bureaucracy seems to be saying is, 'Because our industrial relations policy says that employers should have maximum flexibility,' that apparently prevents them from voluntarily choosing to bind themselves.'

**CHAIR**—Even though they have chosen to do that.

**Mr McCulloch**—That is right. Together with our partners we made a conscious decision five years ago to make this a key priority for all major players in the sector. The numbers speak for themselves. There has been a big 24 per cent increase over that four- or five-year period. While we do not claim the credit for that, there cannot be any doubt that these binding requirements in the enterprise agreements was one of the major drivers of that.

The other point we would make is that, while we may choose to have a different emphasis from the government's policy on, say, mutual obligation, in universities in both urban and regional areas we are creating real, highly skilled, well-paid jobs for Indigenous people that help them to sustain development, economic activity and cultural identity within their communities, and we would have thought that is precisely the kind of approach the government would want to see, rather than what it might describe as a 'passive welfare' approach to the problem.

What we are really asking the committee to consider, when it has had time to more fully absorb the materials we have presented, is to at least make some recommendation that points the department and the minister in the direction of, 'Perhaps you need to have a look at some of these unintended consequences for other policy objectives.'

One other matter that we were particularly involved in, Joel in particular and other elected Indigenous representatives in the NTEU, was working with Brendan Nelson to establish the Indigenous Higher Education Council, which is a very important initiative. We certainly know that the council itself has discussed this contradiction, so it is a mainstream issue for the government to contend with, and we think it should be looked at practically rather than ideologically. So we are hoping that we do not have to continue to remove from our agreements the requirements to develop these strategies, because they are building a future for the local Indigenous communities as well as for the institutions.

**Mr Wright**—I would like to add that the additional material we have provided also includes a copy of the latest press release produced by the NTEU entitled 'No education, no work, and now no CDEP', which was released on 4 April 2006. The main contention of our concern in relation to the changes introduced to CDEP by Minister Kevin Andrews in the last month relates specifically to the provision that requires new participants in CDEP, aged 20 years or under, to be paid a youth rate, in order to improve incentives for young people to complete their education. Indigenous youth in this age group who are parents or legal guardians will receive the adult CDEP rate.

As the press release states, our concern is in relation to the fact these new participants in CDEP have not been given any incentive to actually continue education by having some offsetting of potential loss of income by an increased rate in, for example, Abstudy. What we see

in relation to this approach is no consideration of strengthening the pathways to education for new prospective Indigenous participants in CDEP. As a consequence, this is really putting the onus of educating and skilling those Indigenous youth on local Indigenous community organisations, which clearly do not have the training infrastructure or expertise to provide high-quality educational and training services. We are concerned that certainly this will create an underworking class of Indigenous Australians, particularly within remote and regional areas. We would like to recommend that the committee consider adopting a recommendation to strengthen educational pathways within the guidelines that have been recently announced for CDEP.

The other item that we bring to the committee's attention is in relation to Indigenous higher education employment statistics. That item is No. 7 within the additional material provided. This is a critical issue in terms of being able to effectively monitor the success of federal Commonwealth Indigenous employment related program activities as well as the progress achieved by universities with their employment strategies across Australia. There is an indication within this paper that the current level of statistics provided relative to Indigenous staff within higher education are extremely limited and are represented in two series of data only. If you were to look at the paper, you will see that it proposes an enhanced range of data series to be provided by DEST and puts forward numerous arguments relative to the nature of those data series on being able to monitor particular trends and aspects of Indigenous employment within the sector. Certainly we would be seeking the committee's support of the recommendation that DEST consider the development and presentation of a more comprehensive set of data series relative to particular trends affecting Indigenous employment within higher education.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. In terms of CDEP, breaking the link between funding and welfare and the better coordination of whole-of-government approach to program delivery have been challenges for both Labor and Liberal governments over the years. Can we talk a little about how that could be restated and how you would see that working? This is the oldest work for dole program in Australia.

**Mr Wright**—With regard to the history of CDEP and how it was established, it had a two-pronged focus. One was to provide an opportunity for those employed on the dole to contribute to work in maintaining essential public services—for example, at local remote area regional communities. The other aspect of the CDEP was community infrastructure development. There was a policy rationale that was accepted by the Commonwealth government and governments of all persuasions since CDEP's introduction that not only did you need to provide resources to support activities and to maintain some of those essential services through employment activities but you also needed to provide resources to those communities to develop basic critical infrastructure, which would in turn sustain employment bases and maybe even promote an expansion of employment bases.

Places like health services, cultural education centres et cetera represent some of the most obvious examples of that infrastructure development. That, unfortunately, has not occurred since the introduction of CDEP to the degree that it was required. As a result, the program has really been relegated to a welfare type program when in essence the intention of CDEP—as proposed by Indigenous people, I might add—at its implementation was that it not be a welfare program, that it negate the effects of depression as a result of welfare dependency and provide those participants with some opportunity to contribute to the development of the community.

Whilst there may have been a wages program developed through revenues that were allocated for unemployment benefits to support these activities, obviously it was going to be extremely limited relative to the level of infrastructure development that communities were able to provide, whether it be funded through the core CDEP as it was auspiced through ATSIC at the time or whether it be through private enterprise contributions to community infrastructure.

**CHAIR**—My question was endeavouring to see the future a little bit, to get a little glimpse of how you would see the general separation of the welfare and the move away from the old saying ‘sit-down money’.

**Mr Wright**—On that backdrop, I would certainly look at establishing relationships with universities and at conducting research within local communities relative to the economic, political and social aspirations of the community. That is one example relative to our industry, if you like.

**CHAIR**—I think that gives me an example.

**Mr McCulloch**—If I could add to that, reinforcing that last point: we in the university sector cannot pretend, applying a university view across this problem, to be able to contend with the full range of historical, economic and social factors that underpin disadvantage in remote communities, for example. With that qualification, though, I think there is a lot of duplication of thinking and effort that the whole-of-government approach that Joel’s submission talks about needs to go to.

Using us as an example, it seems to me pretty obvious that there are two key elements of what universities do that can directly contribute to that whole-of-government approach. The first one is the self-evident point that universities are one of the primary sources of the highly skilled graduate professional labour for Indigenous people that is a necessary but not sufficient condition for those communities not to have merely bureaucratic support and expertise from non-Indigenous people but to have those skills themselves, whether you are talking about human services, mining and construction, natural resources, fisheries and forestry, farm management—a whole series of things.

So there is that aspect, but then in some instances those institutions themselves, particularly in combination with local TAFE colleges—every region has a university or TAFE college presence, even remote regions—also provide direct employment opportunities for Indigenous people with very big employers in those regions. We have members scattered in remote locations directly delivering education services. We also have large numbers of members—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—in places like the Kalgoorlie College, Charles Darwin University and its satellites or the satellites of the University of Notre Dame in Broome. All of them have direct connections with both the university system and those Indigenous communities. A small example to reinforce our primary point is that, even within our own portfolio, the left hand and the right hand do not always know what each is doing about, for example, these Indigenous employment strategies. We have an open mind, but we say the major players should be allowed to shape their own future within the government’s overall guidelines rather than having this attempt to directly steer everything from the centre—which does not work.



**CHAIR**—That is a good comment—and we heard it this morning from previous witnesses. I have a question about improving Indigenous employment outcomes across the university sector. You are in a pretty good position to understand how the various universities are performing, so you might be able to make some general comments about why, for whatever reason, some are clearly doing it a little better than others. Our inquiry is focused on the positive outcomes. We have had a lot of negatives around Indigenous issues for a long time. The committee is of the view that it would really like to focus on the positive things—which we know are there. You might be able to help us by talking about a couple of things which, for whatever reason, some universities are doing a little better than others—no names, no pack drill. We just want to hear some of the reasons, and that is up to you.

**Mr Wright**—One of the critical elements in demonstrating support for Indigenous employment is having employed within your organisation senior Indigenous people who have a strong mandate or capacity in the decision-making process, particularly in relation to the development or implementation of Indigenous program activity relative to the organisation. I say ‘organisation’, and it relates not only to university or institutional situations but also to private companies and private enterprise organisational structures. A greater involvement of Indigenous people at those levels within an organisational structure tends to promote a level of awareness and understanding among senior management or senior non-Indigenous people in the organisational structure to the point where they take on a leadership role in accepting a whole range of principles that have been identified as to why there are not more Indigenous people within the organisation. That is one of the key elements. Those organisations whose leadership embrace the principles of the strategy and demonstrate it to staff seem to produce some of the more outstanding results.

**Mr McCulloch**—The number of Indigenous professors in the sector has increased substantially in recent years. One of the disappointing things, from our point of view, is the requirement not to articulate the employment strategy in the agreements—and Joel made the point about senior leadership, not only professors. Part of our strategy is that, provided we have adequately qualified people, we need Indigenous faces in leadership positions like deputy vice chancellor and pro vice chancellor. Some of the Indigenous employment strategies had sequenced programs and steps to move in that direction so that a necessary precondition for a deputy vice chancellor or pro vice chancellor type of position is professorial status. That is one aspect.

The other aspect, which is also linked to what Joel has said, is that the strategies themselves make sure that the targets distribute employment reasonably evenly between high- and medium-skilled jobs so that you do not create this sense that the only solution for an Indigenous person in employment terms in a university is to slot into a junior or so-called substandard role. In fairness, like many of these things in many different sectors of society, not just Indigenous people, your success and failure rates vary according to different circumstances. The good things is the retention rates of Indigenous staff in institutions are rising. We do not want to see this progress choked off.

**CHAIR**—That is important.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It is good to have you here. In your submission, one of the things that you are suggesting the committee consider is:

The Federal Government increase the number of programs and level of funding allocated to improve Indigenous participation in and achievement at all levels of education and training, and to provide additional resources to increase the number and to improve the quality of employment outcomes through Indigenous education and training programs.

Could you discuss with us what you have in mind? From reading that, I take it that we are talking about all levels of education for the preparation of a work career. Is that what you are getting at: not just university but the whole gamut?

**Mr Wright**—I suppose the overall description of what we are talking about in terms of this educational program is to recognise a whole range of exit, entry and re-entry points for Indigenous people relative to achieving a higher standard of education for the purpose of increasing their employment potential and capital and, therefore, quality of lifestyle. It needs to target, certainly at the most basic level of education when an Indigenous person enters into the education system at its first experiences, and look at the dynamics associated with factors inhibiting the retention rates within that particular sector. It is the same with the secondary schools sector et cetera. We then need to have a coordinated approach which recognises a whole range of trends. For example, particularly within the secondary school area, the low levels of Indigenous students achieving year 11 and 12 are well recognised. Yet research into this trend has demonstrated that, in actual fact, the drop outs are probably more prolific around year nine and year eight and that our strategies targeting year 11 and 12 have obviously been missing the mark.

It also speaks to a whole range of incidences in relation to the number of Indigenous students who enrol in higher education enabling courses who are mature age, who have dropped out of secondary school and who do not have the educational standards to get in and need to go through bridging courses et cetera to be able to access education. In a lot of cases, they have family and economic responsibilities, such as debts on their house and that sort of stuff. The whole-of-government approach needs to recognise a whole range of what will be termed loosely as traditional entry and exit points for Indigenous people within the education and employment system. Given the way policies have been developed, that approach does not seem to be recognising those sorts of trends, if you like.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I want you to have the opportunity to talk on that, because it does not matter who we speak to or whether we are talking about the point that Grahame was making a moment ago about to what degree people can reach a career within universities, none of that will happen if we do not have this basic education thing fixed. Everywhere we go people are talking about it. What is it that is wrong? We ask this question all the time. What is it that it is making it so difficult? It depends to some degree on which part of Australia you happen to be sitting in. You could be in densely urban Australia, or you could be in a regional remote area, but the same issues are prevalent—that is, encouraging, assisting and guiding the younger end of the market as much as we can through retention of education. It is a huge issue. Do you not agree? Nothing matters if we do not start to attack this.

**Mr Wright**—Yes. One of the primary issues is the lack of big business involvement in supporting these sorts of initiatives and providing some infrastructure to facilitate some program development delivery within those targeted areas. That goes to some of that core issues in terms of Indigenous socioeconomic development within the more isolated rural and regional areas in particular and certainly in remote areas. We have stated quite categorically in our submissions

that, unless there is some substantive community infrastructure development in those more remote areas and in some of those regional areas, we are certainly going to see some increases in the indices indicating poor participation of Indigenous people in education increase. That will have a long-term flow on effect in employment levels.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—You just continue the same.

**Mr Wright**—It will continue the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—The best way for people to see what their potential is to have an example in front of them of someone who has achieved. The best example is someone they know with a job and the benefits they see from that. Within the tertiary end of the world where you operate the most, is there a role for those people who have achieved in stepping out of that and presenting themselves to that broader community somehow, or is that already happening? I do not want to use the word ‘mentor’ because that is an overworked word. To what degree are they able to spread themselves amongst the community?

**Mr Wright**—Those people who have achieved those levels of success—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Wherever we might be talking about, at whatever level.

**Mr Wright**—My understanding, particularly in this area—and I have frequently travelled nationally, so I have a national understanding as well—is that those people are in great demand.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—That is what I thought you might say.

**Mr Wright**—There are so many things that those people would love to become involved in, but it is just physically impossible for them because of their existing commitments. Certainly, some of those commitments are not flexible enough for reprioritisation. There are contractual or legal obligations relative to particular program activities they are involved in. This is a big problem in terms of being able to employ the expertise that has been gained back into communities even though those people who have achieved basically spend most of their time in this sort of activity. Increasing the level of this expertise that is available to communities is going to impact on a number of areas. One of the recommendations that we put forward to the previous Department of Education, Science and Training minister was for the provision of staffing scholarships, if you like, to allow for some time release scenarios for senior staff in substantive positions within the institution to go and further their successes and then to allow for more subordinate staff to have an opportunity to come into those more senior roles in a work experience scenario.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—How was that sort of idea received?

**Mr Wright**—The ministry provides a total of five scholarships on an annual basis. We would certainly like to see an increase in the number of those scholarships that are provided. Somewhere of the order of 20 is what we discussed at our national Indigenous forum, simply because they do provide a tangible pathway to career and professional development not only for the recipients of the scholarship but for all those people who are required to backfill the positions.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I do not wish to be gratuitous about this, but I am really impressed by the fact that the NTEU is not a union that is just sitting there with a strategy of working for your current members and so on but you have this really broad view about how to better improve the educational opportunities for our Indigenous people. I commend you on the work that you have done in relation to that, because it is terribly important. You obviously have a terrific level of expertise amongst you, and it is refreshing to see that you are putting the effort that you are into the suggestions right down from the lower level of education right through the spectrum. I think it needs to be said that that is excellent work.

**Mr McCulloch**—Thank you very much.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It is providing valuable information for us, I have to say.

**Mr McCulloch**—Could I add one thing on that basis, in response to that?

**CHAIR**—I agree with Annette's comments. It is very good. Thank you.

**Mr McCulloch**—I would like to thank you for the opportunity of making the presentation. I want to underline something about the nature of the commitment we make. We are a trade union and we are in the education sector of the trade union movement, and you can imagine we have a general range of policy views that quite often would be at odds with the government's world view. But, notwithstanding that, we would urge the committee to have as much as possible a bipartisan perspective on particularly the questions we have raised in our sector.

To put it very crudely: there is not necessarily any skin off the government's broader ideological commitment to a deregulated labour market. The government sees us as a strong union that might stand in the way of that deregulated labour market to some degree in our sector. We acknowledge that. But we would not want that and we would urge the committee to seriously consider our request that some statement be made such that, 'You've got the wrong end of the stick,' so to speak, 'about these higher education workplace relations requirements not enabling the union, staff, Indigenous communities and the universities to do this on their own terms.' It is not just us. I want to emphasise that there are a lot of local Indigenous communities that are embedded in these employment strategies. There is an implementation committee, which is not just the stakeholders in the university but also Indigenous stakeholders in the relevant region or catchment—however it is described. We appreciate your comments. Thank you.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—You have a member of the government and a member of the opposition here, so we are a very balanced committee today.

**Mr McCulloch**—Sure.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for that. I think it is very well argued and put forward in a way which endeavours to pick out the positives from what can be a partisan debate. I thank you for that.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Absolutely. It has been terrific.

**CHAIR**—Do you have anything else?

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I do not have anything else. There is a lot of information here that is going to be very useful.

**CHAIR**—We thank you very much for your contribution this morning.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Thank you very much. Good to meet you.

**Mr McCulloch**—Thank you very much for your time.

[11.38 am]

**CROKER, Ms Roberta, Indigenous Programs Specialist, Rio Tinto Ltd**

**HARVEY, Bruce Erle, Chief Advisor, Aboriginal and Community Relations, Rio Tinto Ltd**

**CHAIR**—I welcome representatives of Rio Tinto. We do not require evidence to be given under oath, but these are considered to be legal proceedings of the parliament. No doubt you have a brief introductory statement to make.

**Mr Harvey**—Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the inquiry. Some of this you will already know, and cut me off if I am getting on too long because I am sure answers to your questions are more important to you. I am sure you know who Rio Tinto is. We operate worldwide in 20 different countries with 84 operations; 61 per cent of our assets are in Australia and New Zealand. We produce a wide range of mineral commodities—iron ore, coal, copper, diamonds, borax, alumina, nickel, zinc, gold et cetera. The names you might be more familiar with in your jurisdictions are Pilbara Iron, Hamersley Iron, Argyle, Dampier Salt, Comalco, ERA, Rio Tinto Coal Australia, Coal and Allied, Northparkes and various others. We also have an exploration division that operates worldwide from a Perth base.

**CHAIR**—We confess we have only been to Comalco at this point, I think.

**Mr Harvey**—I know you have been to Weipa.

**Ms Croker**—And Pilbara.

**CHAIR**—Okay. I stand corrected. We have been to a couple. Over to you.

**Mr Harvey**—As a global corporation we have a values statement, which we call The Way We Work, which guides how we operate around the world. Cascading off that are a number of specific social policies, one of which is the Rio Tinto Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy. That policy clearly states our commitment to work with local Indigenous employment. I would say that worldwide our policy is to recognise and work with local and land-connected peoples wherever we operate.

We actually do that, as a point of some differentiation from a lot of other companies, through formal land access and mine development agreements. We now have some eight major mine development agreements in Australia and more than 65 exploration access agreements. I bring that up because, as I said, it is a point of differentiation, but also our employment efforts are formalised and contracted under those common-law contracts, many of which, in Australia, go beyond and, under the native title regime, are registered as Indigenous land use agreements. We actually feel it is important to dignify and formalise our relationship with local communities through those negotiated arrangements.

We have increased our overall Aboriginal employment in Australia in the last six or seven years to some 700 Indigenous employees at last count. They are the people we can count. There

are additional Indigenous employees on our sites that work for various contractors short- and medium-term. We cannot keep track of them, so there are probably several hundred more at any one time on our sites.

The advice that we provide to you is particularly pegged off our work in northern Australia, where Indigenous population growth rates are very strong and where many of our long-life businesses are. Much of our learning comes from those sites. For instance, Argyle Diamond Mine now has 25 per cent of its workforce—more than 200—Aboriginal people. Fifty per cent of the population in the east Kimberley is Aboriginal; and where we can, we benchmark our employment for local demography. Under the recently negotiated Argyle participation agreement, signed last year, ADM is on target for 50 per cent of its local employment workforce being Indigenous by 2008. By that year, we will also be 80 per cent locally employing, so that will be a substantial proportion of the total workforce. In excess of 40 per cent will be local Aboriginal people—defined as those living between Halls Creek and Wyndham.

Comalco Weipa, under the Western Cape Communities Co-existence Agreement, has agreed to 35 per cent of its workforce being local Aboriginal people by 2010. It is currently on 20 per cent—not quite on trajectory but making every effort. Pilbara Iron currently has 180 Indigenous employees. It has slipped in proportional terms because of the huge ramp-up in the Pilbara at the moment. Where it was eight per cent of the total workforce, it is now three per cent, but the numbers themselves have not dropped. They have committed to an additional 100 Aboriginal people in 2006-07. Ironically, the difficulty is that every able-bodied Aboriginal person in the Pilbara who wants a job has got a job. It is a wonderful statistic in one sense, but in another there are many people are not work-ready. We are working our best to get them there. The coal group similarly has committed to an additional 60 Aboriginal people on its payroll in the next three years. That is in the Bowen Basin in the Hunter Valley. Those are our leading lights; but, overall, seven per cent of our entire Australian salaried workforce in the group are Indigenous employees.

We have moved into a couple of areas more recently to work collaboratively with government. One is the MOU between the Minerals Council of Australia and the Commonwealth government to pilot regional development and employment in seven pilot regions: Western Cape, east Kimberley, two in the Pilbara, Tanami, Boddington, Peel and a number of others. These are in collaboration with other companies, such as BHP Billiton and Newmont, and contractors such as Roche and Henry Walker Elton and Ngarda Civil and Mining.

The reason is that we need to work collaboratively to achieve the outcomes that we want, otherwise a relatively small number of companies are going to be providing a free good, and those companies that are not putting the training effort in can just use chequebook recruitment and take some of our better Aboriginal employees. That would be wonderful in one sense, but it would mean that we would become an extension of the national training arm and other people would be getting the benefit and we would not. So that is one of the issues.

**CHAIR**—It is very much so. We would like to talk to you about that. We have talked about that amongst ourselves.

**Mr Harvey**—Roberta is the manager of our Indigenous employment program for Rio Tinto overall. She can get into some of the details of, for instance, our cadetship program and things

like that. We are doing our best to recruit across the full profile of the mine workforce, including young professionals. We now have a young underground mining engineer, an Aboriginal woman, working at Argyle, and there are other examples of some real achievement over the last five or six years. There is a lag, obviously, but we are now starting to kick-start people into the mainstream workforce.

**Ms Croker**—That is a result of our corporate leader arrangements with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. We have had 30 cadets go through since late 1999. We had 10 graduate before the end of last year. Five have taken on graduate recruitment placements within Rio Tinto—as Bruce was just saying, the underground engineer and in various other engineering roles across the business unit.

**CHAIR**—We can talk in light of self-interest or we can talk about being a corporate leader of the magnificent kind. A whole lot of things come to mind. We have been to Weipa; we were very impressed and pleased to be able to be part of that discussion. I have been observing this for some years now. Your people have always been very helpful to us. I appreciate, and certainly Annette does, the way you have dealt with us. I am endeavouring to understand a little more about the corporate sector, particularly as Rio Tinto's role is so strong. Here, by necessity, we need to be slightly critical. We have touched on education. You make recommendations about health. Can we talk a little holistically—in a way that you want to present it, of course—about these issues and about how you see it and where our system of government can do better, from your own experience. You offer positive leadership and you have a unique position. Can we talk about education and a couple of things that we could think about as to how we might pick that up.

**Mr Harvey**—Obviously we went into this business 10 years ago from a perspective of enlightened 'self-interest'—you used that term. The business case at that stage was a relatively, I would think, unconstructive one. It was a matter of land access and mine development approval, and if we do not work positively with people we will not get those approvals. We have now moved beyond that. The business case that we are working on now—as opposed to 10 years ago, which was one of the recognition of standing of Aboriginal people—is a business case that you might describe as working together.

Our demography tells us that rapidly improving Indigenous population growth rates in Northern Australia where most of our mines are mean that by 2020 every second Australian above the tropic will be of Aboriginal descent. That is a wonderful statistic. That is the future of Northern Australia. As I say to many of our people, 'Who do you think is going to be working on the mines?' We need to start now. That is really the business case. It is the workforce of the future. It is not strategic philanthropy or CSR; it is pure, hard, long-term business thinking about our own future.

When we started on this we said that we need to employ people, and we found that not many people were work ready for all the reasons that you know: literacy, numeracy, lack of stamina, lack of health, lack of many of the things that we take for granted. These things are often described as cultural, but they are not; they are learned. I am talking about things like regularity, punctuality, sobriety, ability to work in a team, stamina and ability to work long hours. These are learned behaviours. We learn them in our societies and our homes. We of course all grow up in



the types of communities where it is taken for granted that you will go to school and you will stay there all day and you will present for all the activities.

We find that people in many Aboriginal communities have their lives governed by the passage of the sun. It is a wonderful way to live, but the workforce on a mine has to be able to present itself and work safely and on a regular basis with shifts and all the like. Before you know it, you find yourself realising that the school system is not generating the right kind of people to consider working on the mine. Then you go back a little further and you find that the primary school system is not generating the kind of people who can make it into secondary school with any chance of picking up requisite numeracy and literacy skills. Then before you know it, you are into preschool—the time of family-habit forming. And before you know it, you are way back at antenatal care because that is really where it has to start. We have found ourselves, through the Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation, supporting antenatal programs.

That brief description indicates that there has to be a holistic look involving an all-of-community approach. A community must have the ability to support what might be the one in 10 of its members who will end up in what is a very demanding occupation working on a mine. That means childcare centres. That means the ability to look after the elderly, because if you are at work someone has to. I think that is the realm of government: coming in and doing what we would consider normal essential services. In less remote communities, it has to be there.

In regard to the specifics of education at the pre-employment and vocational stage, we would have to be fairly critical of the TAFE system. The TAFE system has shown itself unable to be flexible enough to deliver courses as and when we need them—meaning, in remote locations—at the time of year when we need them, and in the north that means the wet season when people have time available and they are caught in the community anyway, and to a standard that automatically articulates into a job. There is no point in giving someone a qualification that does not lead to a job on the mine. There is nothing worse than giving someone a qualification, as we have experienced, and when they take it to another institution it does not get them in the door. It brings great shame upon people and it is actually counterproductive. We find that at our sites we are being asked to directly fund TAFE courses in literacy and numeracy. It seems bizarre that the private sector should be asked to stump up to pay for, as a paid service to a government institution, the things that they should be doing anyway.

**CHAIR**—We think our taxes are already paying for that.

**Mr Harvey**—In our submission we cite some instances of that kind of thing, and we could cite others.

**CHAIR**—It would be so easy—and this is not a criticism—for us to end up with just the negatives of this process. So, because we have been in negative territory for a long time on this job, we are trying to find the positives in terms of Indigenous issues. We cannot have it both ways—we cannot have a bob each way—because we have got to acknowledge the negatives to get closer to the positives. In terms of TAFE or the education sector generally, I would be interested in two or three things that come to your mind—and I am sure there are a multitude of things—which might help our friends in the education sector—and I will come to the health sector in a minute and then I will pass the questioning to Annette—to focus on what many, if not

most, Australians would say was a sensible outcome. Are there a couple of things that they might be able to be more cognisant of?

**Mr Harvey**—I would generalise it as their paying attention to what we have called the school to work transition period. Kids do not go to school for the sake of going to school. They are going there to come out the other end and be available to have a job. For instance, that means we should be running—and paying a lot more attention to—no-dole programs in schools. I know that at the moment kids in their final year, year 10, are told how to fill out dole forms. I do not think that is particularly helpful. There are foundations and institutions that run specific no-dole programs. They say, ‘There are three options when you finish this year. The first is you can go on to higher education, the second is you can go out and get a traineeship or an apprenticeship to work on a mine, and the third is you can drop out and be on the dole—but the third is not an option so we will chop that one out and then look at the other two.’ That kind of positive presentation of options needs to happen.

**CHAIR**—The Indigenous Land Corporation made really clear comments about this to us in Adelaide.

**Mr Harvey**—Many remote area schools in regions where there are mines have that mindset. In the deep desert where there are no mines or other commercial enterprises—and I do not think it is even an option there, incidentally—you could almost excuse it. But where there is a mine sitting there saying, ‘To any student who passes year 10 we will offer the opportunity of a traineeship or an apprenticeship at the mine,’ there is no excuse not to be fairly tough on those kids who are inclined to drag the chain. In fact, teachers have told us that making statements like that is the best thing that anyone has ever done, because that means they can push back at kids who are inclined to be unmotivated and say, ‘There is a job there for you if you get through this year.’ Teachers could start planning for that three years ahead of time and ask students, in personal mentoring, ‘What do you need to do in year 7 to prepare yourself to get through year 8 and then to get through year 9 and then to get through year 10?’ They should interview those kids twice a year, with their parents present, to see how they are tracking against those expectations. It is a little nudge here and a little bit of encouragement there. That is what we find some of our site based mentors are doing. At Argyle the site based mentors are in the ratio of one to 10. Their duties include spending time in the high-school system and interviewing kids with their parents.

**CHAIR**—So you would regard that as a key factor in your outcomes?

**Mr Harvey**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I have a last point to make before we go to Annette. I want to ask about the health issue. We could make the same argument as to health about why we pay our taxes, I suppose, but not to quite the same extent as with education. Can we talk about health and the opportunities that may exist there?

**Mr Harvey**—Yes. I am not a health nor education professional, but I would imagine there is a lot of scope for including health matters in the curriculums of primary schools, particularly for young women. It is young mothers, much more so than blokes, who feed their children and look after their health. Do you have anything to add, Roberta?

**Ms Croker**—I think mental health needs to be addressed as well. We have counsellors that go to remote sites but we need a firmer arrangement for them to stay in the locations so they can offer proper mental health counselling.

**Mr Harvey**—We are supporting an initiative this year with the Australian Psychological Society which has recognised a deficit in Aboriginal mental health services. To our knowledge there is only one working Aboriginal psychologist in the country, who graduated several years ago on a Rio Tinto scholarship. We are working with the APS because they came to us and said ‘Is this a need?’ We said, ‘Most certainly, it’s a very large need.’ We provide confidential counselling to all of our workforce when they need it and those counsellors are coming to us and saying, ‘We are unqualified and inexperienced to help Aboriginal people. We do not know the dilemmas, the cultural background and the behavioural issues in Aboriginal communities and there are no Aboriginal counsellors.’ Over the next two years the APS is looking at developing short course modules for practising psychologists and developing modular courses for undergraduate psychologists. We are involved with them this year in raising a significant amount of money for an endowment so we can have in perpetuity five scholarships a year for Aboriginal graduates in psychology.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. We might consider the current federal government’s approach on the same mental health issue and how that might connect.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Thank you both for being here. You talk a lot, appropriately, about employment within the mines. Am I right in supposing that wherever there are mines, there are also communities outside the mine as well? I do not wish to give the impression that it is your company’s responsibility to look after the community outside as well but there seems to me to be a bit of a connection. How do you see the role you have been playing in developing employment opportunities within mines relating to the community outside and around it? They may not be employed by you, family members may be or the community outside the mine may support the community in there anyway. What is your comment in relation to that?

**Mr Harvey**—It is a very interesting question and it is the subject of a thesis in itself. I will try to keep my answer short. You are precisely right. There is a huge amount of money that is available and flowing into a community now from Aboriginal people earning good money on a mine and there is the multiplier effect that can bring about. Until relatively recently, our mines have been exclusively staffed by essentially expatriate white Australians. Some of them are fly in and fly out, some of them stay for 26 years but, at the end of the day, they do not retire and die and get buried there, they go back to somewhere else. So they are not actually contributing to regional development. They are not investing their assets locally. They are obviously investing their operating day-to-day moneys but not long term. If we go to Argyle, for example under the Argyle participation agreement, there is a considerable amount of money that will go into the benefits receiving trusts over the next 20 years which are governed under secure governance conditions and caveats. That amounts to several million dollars a year. But 200 Aboriginal people earning, on average, \$70,000 a year adds up to a considerably greater amount of money. Most of them are local and most of them with good money in their pockets would want to spend it locally. Inevitably, that means that they want to have a hairdresser. In fact, I saw an application several months ago for a young woman who wants to start a hairdressing and beauty salon in Warmun. If you know Warmun, your first inclination is to roll your eyes but what a wonderful thing.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Where is it?

**Mr Harvey**—It is in the east Kimberley between Halls Creek and Kununurra and it is one of those desperate communities but when a young woman wants to start a hairdressing and beauty salon in a place like that I think that is absolutely fantastic. Why shouldn't a thousand people living in a community like that have a hairdresser. The people who work on the mine will want their hair cut and why shouldn't they employ someone locally to cut their hair. We think a lot about the multiplier effect and how it will contribute to the regional economy. That is one stream of thought. Another one is making the transition from never having had a job and your parents never having had a job into a job in the mine is a huge jump. It is a very demanding job with the shift structures and the levels of skills.

The first job on that ladder of opportunity, which someone mentioned, is frequently pumping gas at the local gas station or washing cars as a 15- or 16-year-old. After a year or two of that they say, 'Could I drive the courier truck?' After a year or two of that aspiring young people will say, 'I would like to drive a bigger truck.' There will be enough of them who by the time they are 22 or 23 have learnt all those essential life skills I described before through jobs in the general community and can then apply for high-paid, highly demanding jobs on the mine. That is the way we recruit miners in every other community, and that is our preference, to be honest, for recruiting people in Aboriginal communities.

But because there is no base of the pyramid currently in existence we have to recruit from scratch. It makes our job much harder. That is why we have moved in the last two years in partnership with DEWR and the Minerals Council into these pilot programs for an all-of-community, all-of-economy, all-of-government approach to developing a comprehensive economy around our mines that will lead to an articulated pathway for those people who want to progress. Many people will not.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—That leads to my next question. What is the clash or relationship between your company and government authorities providing education in the creation of those jobs around the mine? It seems to me that that is where the interesting question is, given what a lot of people say to us. It would be easy for us to sit back and say: 'It is up to the mining company to do that. They've got the mine there.' But there is also a responsibility, is there not, to the other side of the argument as well?

**Mr Harvey**—Absolutely.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What is that relationship like, in your view?

**Mr Harvey**—I do not think that people have looked at small business as an avenue for Aboriginal employment to the extent that they should. The Corporate Leaders Program says it itself. You have to be corporate and you have to be a leader to be included, but why shouldn't the small business man who runs the roadhouse get the same kind of governmental support that we do to put on a first-time Aboriginal employee?

**CHAIR**—I think we just had a recommendation.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Yes, I think we might have just had a recommendation. That is absolutely correct. The other question is: what is your relationship to the engagement of Indigenous business that may be around, be it in a remote mining instance or elsewhere? Generally speaking, if there is an Indigenous business beginning or sitting there, do you have a readiness to engage?

**Mr Harvey**—Yes, we do. Where there is an existing participation agreement premiums will frequently be allowed for contracting Aboriginal businesses. What is an Aboriginal business? Does that mean it has majority Aboriginal equity, it has an Aboriginal CEO or it is greater than 50 per cent Aboriginal? You can get into that argument. Nevertheless, the best avenue for getting the most Aboriginal people into a job is through an Aboriginal contracting business. We see that in the Pilbara with Ngarda Civil and Mining and in Cape York with Nanum Tawap and Cape York Earthmoving.

The style of work and the ability to move people in and out and substitute them for each other in a contract earthmoving business has greater flexibility than the corporation. We are going to end up indirectly employing many more Aboriginal people through those non-critical path contracts. I say non-critical path because in the first instance the best contracts to let to people who have a start-up business and do not have the sort of slick just-in-time management systems that major corporations have developed are the peripheral contracts, where it does not matter if they are not finished at the end of this month or the end of next month. They need to be finished at the end of the quarter, but there is not another body of work waiting desperately to start when that one is finished.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What is the difference in the numbers of male and female Indigenous employees? I think your submission said the ratio was five males to one female. Do you want to comment on that?

**Ms Croker**—Because we are a mining operation there tends to be a lot more men in the industry. Eighty per cent of our workers are male and 20 per cent are female.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Is that the only impediment?

**Ms Croker**—No.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What would be the others?

**Ms Croker**—There is a high interest on the part of Aboriginal women in working in the mining industry. It is a matter of ensuring that those people come through and take up places.

**Mr Harvey**—Child care is a big need. If we look at our numbers, the ratio of Aboriginal women to Aboriginal men on our sites is higher than non-Aboriginal men to women. In other words, proportionally there are more Aboriginal women than non-Aboriginal women in our workforce. For many of the reasons that we have come to expect from young women, they go out and get things done. I don't know where the blokes go; I can't remember where I was when I was 18! For many of them, unfortunately, their domestic circumstances are such that they may be single mothers. So at the moment they are leaving their children with mum or grandma. The greater provision of child-care services in Aboriginal communities would help greatly in the

recruitment of young women, who are the role models. There is no question that it is the young women coming through who are the role models.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Does the company have any view about whether it has a role in workplace child care in those situations?

**Mr Harvey**—I am unfamiliar with that; I have not given it any thought. I don't know what we are doing. We are certainly putting a lot of effort into developing pre-school programs off-site in places like Napranum. It is not a direct company responsibility but indirectly we contribute to better child-care and pre-school programs around our communities.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—If there is anything further that you want to add later, I am sure we would welcome it.

**CHAIR**—Yes, I would endorse that. A parliamentary committee inquiry on child care is about to be completed. I think it will be pretty interesting, so we would be very interested in that aspect of it. I have two or three quick questions. The first goes back to our earlier theme about how we encourage government agencies to fully participate in a way that will give us the best outcome. I need to ask about the Indigenous coordination centres. I need to ask about general departmental participation—DEWR and others. Can you give us any guidance about how that might be progressed?

**Mr Harvey**—We would say at this stage, because we set this up, that the seven pilot sites that we are currently operating on the MOU will give us some real data in the next two or three years. I can leave you some information on that. The critical difference is that the communities themselves are taking charge of the agenda. Instead of government expenditure programs being checked off by somebody wearing long socks and with a laptop flying in and ticking things off, the agendas and the assurance process are being run by regional partnership committees made up of, in the case of Weipa, people from Comalco, local business people, Aboriginal people, Aboriginal council members and chamber of commerce members—in other words, it is not an Aboriginal problem any more; it is a matter of a community working together to develop opportunity. It is not quarantined and isolated out there as something that the civil servants flying in and the Aboriginal people are going to resolve for themselves. The broader community has bought into it. Where I can see it heading is that they will take overall accountability for the proper disbursement of those funds and the performance delivery. All they want is access to the resources.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—They are pretty well placed to do that, aren't they?

**Mr Harvey**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—It is a work in progress, and the old saying that we have had enough pilot programs to fly Qantas for the next 10 years is perhaps moving on a little.

**Mr Harvey**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—My final question relates to the balance between benefactor and facilitator. I am sure it is an old question but I would like a 2006 response, if you could give that to us. I think

you have already answered in terms of the community taking ownership, but you might have a view in the broader context.

**Mr Harvey**—We are most definitely a stakeholder in this process, as much as anybody else. We do not own it. We are not going to run it. We have signed formal contracts based on principles of mutual obligation—we will deliver if others deliver. We are just one player among many others. It is not a frontier any more. We are not operating mines in the back of nowhere. It is a closed system where the general manager gets to make every decision and to hear from everybody who wants something. We are stepping back and we are telling people to step forward. We will be a facilitator in that process—it is a pretty important role though.

**CHAIR**—Absolutely, thank you. May our democracy flourish!

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Has the young woman opened her hair salon yet?

**Mr Harvey**—I do not know. I would doubt it but I hope very much that someone has taken the application seriously and is working on it. In fact, as I leave here, I shall pursue that because it is one of those things that we would be inclined to dismissed as a crazy idea.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Far from it.

**Mr Harvey**—In closing, I draw your attention to one other matter—that is, we have engendered in the last two years at the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining at the University of Queensland a specific program which is designed to inform policymakers and the minerals industry on key trends relating to Indigenous employment, to develop a tool kit, to be publicly available to assist other mining companies achieve improved employment outcomes, to generally facilitate good practice across industry and to develop a tool which hopefully will include a web based component. I understand DEWR are developing a web based tool kit and we will feed into that. In other words, this is an issue of national importance. It is not something that Rio Tinto or any other mining company should treat as a matter of proprietary advantage. Anything we learn we are going to make publicly available and we will go further and turn it into publicly accessibly tool kits and the like so that others can join us in getting the pool of work-ready Aboriginal people up to some sort of self-sustaining level. At the moment it is not self-sustaining. I think there are probably 2,500 to 3,000 Aboriginal people Australia wide working in the mining industry. For the sake of picking a number, let us have 10,000 and then we can probably take the foot off the accelerator a bit and let it self-organise.

**CHAIR**—It starts to self-create.

**Mr Harvey**—Yes. So the more companies—not just mining companies. Retailers and banks are operating in remote areas. We would love to recruit from the checkout system with the supermarket at Weipa. Some of the young men and women who are working on the checkout would make fantastic administration clerks at the mine. Why shouldn't they get that opportunity when they are sick of pushing grocery bags across the desk?

**CHAIR**—Thank you and thank you for your submission.

[12.20 pm]

**BULLER, Mr Craig, Regional Manager, Engagement and Culture, National Australia Bank**

**COLL, Mr Michael, Chief Executive Officer, Mandala Career Brokers, National Australia Bank**

**O'BRIEN, Mr Dan, Head, Government Relations, Australia, National Australia Bank**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. The committee does not require evidence to be given under oath, but I advise you that these are legal proceedings of the parliament. Does anyone wish to make an opening statement?

**Mr Buller**—Yes. Firstly, we thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this inquiry. I am glad that Dan and Michael are here with us. Michael's organisation, Mandala Career Brokers, is focused on the promotion, recruitment, retention and career development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia in different industries, so they are of important assistance to the National Australia Bank. As the committee may know, the National Australia Bank is in the process of transforming its culture. There has been a lot said about the culture of the National Australia Bank, and as an organisation we want to become a lot more open and inclusive.

The launch of the Indigenous Pathways Project by the National Australia Bank in April 2005 was an important part of the cultural journey that we are on. Through that Indigenous recruitment effort we hope to achieve improved employment prospects for Indigenous Australians, enhanced employee diversity across NAB and enhanced corporate and social responsibility by NAB. We would like to increase our access to the source of employees in areas where there is geographic or demographic alignment and enhance the cultural development of our organisation.

We are a proud member of corporate leaders for Indigenous employment. Over the past three years we have trialled a number of Indigenous employment retention programs. The first two programs were not as successful as we would have liked, due to a lack of experience and support for our Indigenous recruits. Because of a change in our approach we have now attained reasonable levels of success, especially in partnership with Michael's organisation, Mandala Career Brokers.

NAB has learned from this program and the process that Indigenous employees do not want to be singled out or treated differently from other employees. Our Indigenous employment programs have to be part of the recruitment process within our business units, not driven by any separate area within the company. We have learned that we need assistance from external experts, such as Mandala Career Brokers, who have existing relationships with, or are able to build relationships with, Indigenous communities and that genuine support for the recruit and the employing team is vital for success.

Our current strategy is to start with a small number of recruits and focus on the training and development of the recruits and to give support to both the recruit and their people leader so that



we can increase our retention. So our process is aimed at long-term and sustained employment. To this end our focus is on the recruits achieving the Certificate III in Business while being paid the same award rates as their fellow workers.

Over the last 12 months we have recruited six candidates through the Structured Training and Employment Program, and by adhering to the approach I have just outlined we have been able to retain four of those recruits. It was a conscious decision on our behalf that the approach to Indigenous employment for 2005 would be realistic. For the candidates' sake it is vital that we get the recruitment and retention strategies right before we expand our recruitment program. We feel now that the last 12 months have given us a clear indication that our approach and our partnership with Mandala Career Brokers are working well. The quality of the recruits and their retention is clear evidence that our strategies are beginning to work. We are now looking to expand our program into New South Wales, and we will be targeting 35 Indigenous recruits in 2006-07.

Indigenous employment through STEP is one part of our involvement with Indigenous communities. The NAB Indigenous MBA scholarship within the Melbourne Business School is another component, and is a component of our scholarship program. We are aiming to increase opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in business and management. The MBA scholarship is targeted at assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a track record of leadership in entrepreneurial community, business, artistic or sporting activities to fulfil their personal professional potential. One graduate from the Melbourne Business School has already been assisted by this scholarship, and we are currently assessing applications in order to award a second scholarship, to be taken up some time this year.

We also have a three-year undergraduate economics and commerce program, which provides funding of tuition and living expenses for a selected Indigenous Australian to undertake full-time studies in an economics and commerce degree at Melbourne university. The program encourages Indigenous Australians to undertake studies in what is, historically, a non-traditional study area. The Centre for Indigenous Education at the University of Melbourne identifies suitable Indigenous candidates based on academic merit, and then in conjunction with the faculty of economics and commerce selects a student. Our undergraduate housing bursaries provide housing assistance for two University of Melbourne Indigenous undergraduate students per year as identified by the University of Melbourne Centre for Indigenous Education. An independent recruitment agent was contracted by the Melbourne Business School to actively assist in working with Indigenous communities, associations, local councils and lobby groups to identify Indigenous scholarship candidates.

NAB also supports a number of other Indigenous programs such as building Indigenous business capacity in the Torres Strait Islands. We have initiated a partnership with the Queensland government and the Torres Strait Regional Authority to work with the regional authority community business hub to assist the development of local business initiatives. Starting in 2005-06, four high-potential NAB employees a year will embark on a four-week placement in the Torres Strait. Our aim is to provide business expertise to the people of Torres Strait as well as offer a great opportunity for our talented people, who we see progressing into senior management ranks by giving them a better insight into the challenges faced by Indigenous communities.

NAB is also a key sponsor of the Yachad accelerated learning program, which commenced in 2004. The program looks at leveraging Israeli expertise to help improve the learning capacity of Indigenous students in three communities. Preliminary results would suggest that the program is making changes, not only in the children but more broadly in the broader communities.

NAB formally liaises with Australian opinion leaders through an external stakeholders' forum. The forum meets quarterly and is hosted by Ahmed Fahour, the CEO of NAB Australia. The purpose of the forum is to help NAB better understand the needs and concerns of Australian communities, including those specific Indigenous needs. In 2005, Reconciliation Australia undertook a program with young Australians asking them to interpret the concept of reconciliation through photographs. Twelve schools were involved, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and NAB was the proud sponsor of the photographic exhibition that resulted from that program. As you can see, Indigenous employment is one part of our overall approach of improving the prospects for Indigenous Australians, and at the same time contributing to the cultural transformation of our organisation.

**CHAIR**—Thanks, Craig. I think that has laid it out well. I must confess that I started my working life as a bank clerk, but that is by the way. My expertise is not in banking. You are suggesting to me that your bank's expertise is not in Indigenous employment. Therefore, you seek external support to help you with retention strategies to get successful outcomes. Can we talk about how you go about that? You mentioned the organisation. What skills are you looking for?

**Mr Buller**—Are you saying that when we look across a group of external experts, what skills do we look for in those experts?

**CHAIR**—That is right. You are bankers. You do a great job of banking. But you have embarked upon this ambitious target, along with much of corporate Australia.

**Mr Buller**—If you look at it from the base level, as an organisation we do a reasonable amount of recruiting. We employ a lot of people, but the majority of those people who we recruit do not come from a disadvantaged or a long-term unemployed position. When we first ventured into this, I suppose, we quite naively thought that we do a lot of recruiting; therefore, this cannot be all that difficult. We segregated that area from the rest of the organisation and said, 'This group is going to focus on Indigenous employment.' We tried to create relationships with communities and get internal Indigenous mentors. We went down that track. We tried those things. We found that those people were quite isolated in a large organisation. We found that when we brought in groups of Indigenous employees under STEP people knew that they did not come in the normal channels; they came in through a different channel. So those people felt as if they were being identified as different and special before they even arrived in the organisation.

Quite frankly, we found that program was not working. We were bringing people in and they were leaving us just as fast. That was not what we wanted. We felt that was destroying the people rather than actually giving them real employment. That is where we thought, 'To get to that point we will need some external help.' Then we looked for people who had been working in that environment, who had community links, who could give us access to quality candidates, who could assess the candidates before us and who could then work with those candidates if they had any problems and give them mentoring support or bring it back to the community for

community support. Michael was quite successful. He had discussions and then trialled it. He said, 'Let's get together and run a pilot.' You just said that there are more pilots than we need, but that is how you do it. You say, 'Let's get in. Let's see how it works. If it doesn't work then we can both amicably leave one another and say, "Well, that was a learning experience but it didn't work." But if it does work, let's pick up the program.' That is exactly what we have done with Michael and his organisation.

**CHAIR**—I applaud you. I am mindful of something that happened when we were in Sydney earlier in the year. It is on the public record, but I will not mention names or anything. In the discussion we had an Aboriginal employment group who were specialising, and we had bankers sitting with them. We had representatives from head office and regional, and we had the local banker. You could see the difference in approach and expertise. The fellow who understood at the grassroots what he was on about brought the light of day to a discussion with senior and respected bankers who were there with him from his own organisation. I applaud you for that. I thank you for what you said. I thought you said an important thing: you found that Indigenous people do not want to be treated differently. That has been my own experience. As much as anyone they want to be treated according to their own merits as Australians. For the retention strategy it is early days for you. You are setting slightly more ambitious targets as you go. I am no expert, but you had a go, and you were expecting greater success, basically.

**Mr Buller**—We are expecting much greater success. There is that motto about if at first you do not succeed. Unfortunately, quite often in the corporate world if you do not at first succeed then it gets thrown out. People say, 'Well, that didn't work,' and it does not come back again. We are determined to get this to work and to find a model that makes it work. The retention strategy is the bit that makes it work. Michael and I were talking in the cab on our way here. In 2004 we brought in 30 people through the STEP, and three of them remained. That is not the outcome that we want, so we have got to start to rethink it. We look at that as a failure. It is about giving real employment to these people, not just burning them, which is the expression I would use—bringing them in and churning them out.

**CHAIR**—Your organisation is urban and regional—and international, but stay within Australia if you like. Are there any obvious differences that strike you?

**Mr Buller**—We have not yet focused on regional. That is our next step. We know that will be different. We have focused on urban because that is where we have the jobs. We have looked at our large employment bases around call centres and at entry level type roles and administration. That is where we have looked to fill people. Now we need to start to say, 'If we can get that working in the suburban areas, we need to look very carefully at how we go about employing people in regional areas.' Off the top of my head, I think the big issues there, again, will be support issues. It is not just support of the employee; it is support of the employing team as well, so that they understand the process and that we need to approach it slightly differently without making the candidate feel as if they have been treated differently.

**CHAIR**—It is a fine balance. I will make the observation that this morning we had here people from regional Australia. They had a list of the corporate people—no names, no pack drill—whose companies had zero Indigenous employment all the way through. Estimates have been made that there are potentially another \$200 million to be had out of that economy if you

could get better outcomes in Indigenous employment, as a whole lot of really significant things could occur way past the bottom line stuff.

**Mr Buller**—There are also large social issues within rural communities that can be resolved through meaningful employment.

**CHAIR**—There is some really exciting stuff out there, so we are encouraged by that. My last question concerns the corporate approach. You would have heard much of the Rio Tinto presentation. You are aware of Rio Tinto's openness, which links in with your own organisation's approach. There does seem to be here a real role concerning sharing this experience, because this is a very significant national issue for government and everybody. Would you offer a comment about the sharing of the corporate role and responsibility.

**Mr Buller**—To me, sharing involves a number of different areas. As a corporate organisation, we see that we have a strong social responsibility. Part of this is about sharing that responsibility as a large organisation. We employ 25,000-plus people in Australia, so we are a major employer, and we should share the responsibility. As part of that and as part of sharing across corporates, we would be open to talking to any other corporate about the approach we are taking, because we do not see this as being a competitive situation. It is not as if we are giving away anything that is going to give someone a competitive advantage. In that respect, there is the case of an approach through this inquiry—someone from the inquiry called us; I do not know if it was Cheryl—to see whether we would be interested in giving our details to ANZ people so they could come and speak to us about what we were doing. We are more than happy to share information with those in like industries. But we also see it as being a huge part of the responsibility that we as a corporate have to the community of Australia.

**Mr O'Brien**—The partnership that we have entered into with the Queensland government on Torres Strait is unashamedly copied from Westpac's Cape York relationship. That was the result of their sharing their experiences with us. That is a really important opportunity for us and our people. It works for the government, state and federal, and it is obviously working very well for the Torres Strait community. We are up to our third seconded. Westpac have been doing that for three or four years in Cape York. Again, it is banks lending their business expertise, rather than offering direct employment, to help Indigenous businesses develop. I think that is a great way for the corporates to get involved and deal with and tackle the problems that Indigenous communities face.

**CHAIR**—All strength to you and good luck with that.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I think the witnesses have almost answered the question I was going to ask. My question was really about why you are doing it. What is the advantage for the NAB in getting involved in Indigenous employment?

**Mr Buller**—You can look at it as having a range of different advantages. From the big picture point of view, we look at it this way: from a workforce as diverse as we can possibly have we get better outcomes. So from perspective of diversity, which I am responsible for on a regional basis, we look at issues around teams that do not have enough women in them. In fact, we ask them, 'As an effective work environment are you getting the best outcomes?' because the decisions that are made in a mixed group are much better than the decisions that are made by a male group

or a female group. You expand that further, so the broader the mix within your community the better it becomes. It is also important that the mix of people we employ reflects the mix of the community that we serve. There are specific issues there. You can look at it as being a social responsibility. It adds up to a lot of things as far as we are concerned.

If you wanted to give it a hard commercial sense, you could turn it around and say that there is a huge economy that we would like to tap into. It is fine to say that, but we have not done a business case on that at all. We have looked at it purely from the point of view of it being a people and community responsibility. As a large employer in Australia, it is our responsibility to actually get involved in these programs and do what we can to actually employ as many Indigenous people as possible. That is especially so when I look at STEP. To me it is more about employing people who come from a disadvantaged and long-term unemployed background rather than saying it is specifically Indigenous, even though it is. It is more about the disadvantage because there would be a number of people who work with the National Australia Bank and come from an Indigenous background that we do not even know about.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Obviously you have branches and outlets around the nation. You have already said, for obvious reasons, that your initial entry for your work at the moment is in the more urban areas. You have also acknowledged that the harder part is probably the next bit. Maybe this is a bit premature because you are obviously working through your processes of how to get a lot of this into place. The greatest example—and I have said this to other people coming before our committee—for the communities is to see other people within them working. When do you think we will see that black face behind the teller cage?

**Mr Buller**—I do not think we are all that far away from that.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—That is not a critical comment, it is about reality.

**Mr Buller**—No, I do not take it as critical. The next step for us is that the more internal promotion we do of what we are doing then people within rural areas will start to come up through our internal communications and the early adopters will say, 'Pick me, I want to do this,' or 'We've got opportunities here that we'd like to take up.' They are where we get to start because there is enthusiasm there. If we go into areas and try to impose it on teams then we will get resistance because they will say, 'It's those guys from the puzzle palace coming down and trying to tell us what to do.' That mindset is basically human nature. So we need to go out and find our early adopters and they will be the ones who will help us to start.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—That question is not deriding the other roles people have in their employment. I do not mean that for a minute.

**Mr Buller**—I do not take it that way.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I say this often, and my colleagues can get a bit bored with me saying this, but the reality is that we need to see the examples front up so that other people can learn from them. I do not remember ever seeing in my travels that face in the retail store in Darwin or that face that I am looking for in tourism outlets in the northern end of Australia, just as an example. I think they are the harder but probably the more important ones in a way because there is symbolism attached to them as well. That does not mean that they do not get it

for that reason but an enormous flag-flying exercise occurs when you achieve those sorts of outcomes. I am sure you agree.

**Mr Buller**—I could not agree more.

**Mr Coll**—I want to add some clarification in terms of where we are targeting for 2006-07. As Craig said, we are moving from basically the Melbourne CBD, out to regional Victoria and out to New South Wales which also includes Sydney. One of the areas we are looking at is Rhodes in Western Sydney and that is in the call centre. We are specifically looking at trying to develop programs for call centre intake. The other part of our vision for 2006-07 is places in regional Victoria and regional New South Wales in retail banking. The process that we have been using and developing within the bank is that, rather than having a traditional equity and diversity or equal opportunity unit, which is usually a policy unit within an organisation that does not have any operational responsibility or any HR expertise, trying to drive a program, we are actually building relationships with each of the businesses and their recruitment people. So the next stage is building the relationship with retail banking and their recruitment people, looking at where we can get matches between branches in regional areas where there is a significant Indigenous population, for example Dubbo, Shepparton or Mildura for argument's sake, and getting places in this program. Plus we are consolidating where we were last year. So in lending services in some of the central areas both in Victoria and New South Wales, in Melbourne and Sydney, we are actually going to increase the number of recruits based on the success of the program in 2005.

It is a building block approach and it is about bringing people on board without, as Craig said, that imposition from a policy sense at the central level. Mandala has been involved since TAP, the Training for Aboriginals Program, so we go back a bit of a way. We saw that model of let's have the equal opportunity unit deliver it. The equal opportunity unit did not get the support from the HR services. The HR services did not get the support from operational management and then the Indigenous person who was recruited basically on rather strange measures—why they would recruit that Indigenous person to coordinate the whole thing—was left high and dry.

We have evaluated a number of those programs over the years and we have learnt that that is just the wrong way to go. As Craig said earlier, of the 30 people who came in in 2004—and Mandala came in near the end of that—we have three people left over. We were talking in the cab. That means that 27 people had a start in an organisation and it did not work for them. What does that do to those people's attitude to the bank and attitude to that sort of program? We want to build long-term, positive relationships with Indigenous communities and build a reputation as an organisation that wants Indigenous people employed, that wants Indigenous people to build careers and that wants Indigenous people to relate with the bank right across the board. It takes time to build those things.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Absolutely. All power to you. The motives are all there and they are all correct. The critical comparison I would make against some information and some evidence that we got earlier on today is this. At least as a private sector organisation you are able to set your own timetable to some degree, and I would encourage you to do that. The converse arrangement is that some of the government programs—and we have heard this this morning—are so constrained by a short program time that they can sometimes be problematic. At least you have that ability and obviously that interest, from what you are just saying, to work along those

lines and do it slowly but progressively, making sure that success is part of the outcome rather than repeating your experience of earlier on. I commend you for that.

**Mr Buller**—The key to it is that we ensure that those processes are embedded in the usual process that happened within our business units. Looking at the size of our business and the size of our business units, if you sectioned off as a separate company the people in our business bank or our retail bank, you would see that they would still form very large organisations within this country. They have their own processes that they own end to end, and if we try and impose anything upon that it does not work. If we work with them, they are more than happy to work with us.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Barry, there is a comment I would make on that. The financial market is in a unique position. As you employ these people and they learn, they are going to have a valuable skill to transfer to their communities—probably more in remote and regional areas than in CBDs—of knowledge the financial way of the world that culturally is sometimes challenging for some of these family units. There is a very definite advantage that the banking institutions have in the employment role. That is an offshoot that would have to be valuable in some of those communities and family groups, I would suggest.

**Mr Buller**—Quite definitely. I see that there is a much bigger role that we as an organisation could play in devoting time once we start to get the ball rolling here.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Just quickly: do the ABA, the Bankers Association, have any role in this? Are they involved at all?

**Mr O'Brien**—They are from a corporate social responsibility perspective. They are involved with trying to increase financial literacy, and they are working with Reconciliation Australia in a banking forum. I am on that as well. That is looking at two issues: financial literacy and access to banking services.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I was interested, as I thought maybe they had a role. That is good. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thanks very much, Annette. I do not have anything further. Do you have anything to complete?

**Mr Buller**—I do not have anything. I thank you for the opportunity.

**Mr O'Brien**—I would like to hand over the memorandum of understanding that we have entered into with the Queensland government. You can have a fairly clear idea of what that is about.

**CHAIR**—We can accept that. We are pleased to receive that.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Thanks for your time. Good to meet you.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.48 pm to 1.55 pm**

**LAZENBY, Ms Colleen, Manager, Community Safety and Well Being, City of Melbourne**

**MURRAY, Ms Bev, Senior Indigenous Policy Officer, City of Melbourne**

**SMITH, Mr Mikael Simpson, Coordinator, Aboriginal and Multicultural Policy and Programs, City of Port Phillip Council**

**CHARLES, Mr Shane, Coordinator, Indigenous Learning Pathways Project, Swinburne Technical and Further Education College**

**WANDIN, Mr Perry, Chairperson, Toor-Rong Aboriginal Corporation Community Development Employment Program**

**KILLMIER, Ms Helen, Manager, Community Development, Whitehorse City Council**

**CHAIR**—I welcome representatives from the city councils of Melbourne, Whitehorse and Port Phillip. The committee does not require you to give evidence under oath but I need to advise you that these are legal proceedings of the parliament. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear today? Would each individual council like to make a brief opening statement or speak to your submission?

**Ms Lazenby**—I am happy to do that. I have brought some additional information. Since the time of our submission we have done more.

**CHAIR**—If you have a couple of minutes of oversight and additional information that would be good, and likewise with the other councils.

**Ms Lazenby**—Since our submission dated 29 April 2005 we have had an opportunity to do a number of other things in the Indigenous Unit at Melbourne City Council. I have summarised those in a dot point document. In addition to an employment strategy, which is close to being finalised for endorsement by our council, we have just recently launched the development of the Indigenous Social and Economic Framework as well as the Indigenous Culture and Heritage Framework. I have summarised those in a document and have provided a copy to Miss Scarlett.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much.

**Ms Killmier**—You also have in front of you a pack of information from the City of Whitehorse which contains some information about the Toor-Rong Aboriginal Corporation. In a similar way, the City of Whitehorse have done little bit more since our submission. We have included some additional information, some photographs and a bit of a timeline about what we have done.

In essence, we are working on our second Indigenous garden. Our first garden was part of our original submission and there were a number of partnerships involved with it. It is seen by us as an extension of our policy, our statement of commitment, along with a number of other councils that sit alongside us. The garden has provided an opportunity for employment and linkages with



both organisations: Toor-Rong CDEP and Swinburne. Shane and Perry are with me today to talk a little bit further about their involvement in the garden.

We are also in the process of redeveloping our reconciliation policy and action plan, have just put on some Indigenous trainees with the organisation and are looking to develop further the policy in terms of employment strategy. Employment is the next step, and we are looking to action that as a result of the work we are doing in the gardens.

**Mr Charles**—In the Swinburne pathways program, we have been able to deliver some modules from out of the pathways curriculum on project based types of activities. Working with the City of Whitehorse, we have had a CALP—community advocate and learning partner—which was probably instrumental in bringing together a group of interested people in terms of how they could help the project and where we were heading. We were able to get a broad range of industry representatives, as well as community representatives, together to look at where we were heading with what we wanted to do. That started proceedings off. Hence, we have brought Perry with the Toor-Rong CDEP onboard to work very closely with us.

**Mr Wandin**—At Toor-Rong we have three different satellites. Our main office is in Healesville, our second is in Dandenong, and we are looking at starting one in Frankston. Working with Shane through Swinburne, we have an opportunity for the boys to do onsite training, which has been helping with City of Whitehorse. We have done stage 1 and are onto stage 2, and hopefully in future we will be doing more works with them as we go on. The new structure the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations are putting out for '06-07 is possibly a bit of a problem for us because our time frame for the students to be trained up for employment through Swinburne has been cut to 12 months. Shane can probably talk a bit more about that, but they are not going to be job ready. We—both me from Toor-Rong and Shane from Swinburne itself—are very concerned about that. But otherwise the program has worked very well for the boys and the training is excellent. We have five or six who are job ready right now, but we still have another 14 that have to be trained up to go into the employment side. That is a bit of a problem with DEWR and their new structure.

**CHAIR**—Did they start at a similar time?

**Mr Wandin**—Yes, they all started together.

**CHAIR**—I would like to come back to that, but we will move to Port Phillip. Mikael, we are just inviting people to give a two- or three-minute statement about what you are doing and how it is going. Could you give us a general view of how you see the issues?

**Mr Smith**—The documents we have provided to the inquiry relate back to about 1994, when the City of Port Phillip started employing Aboriginal people. We have tried a large group of trainees which, on paper, looks unsuccessful—there was about 34 per cent retention. However, many of the people who participated in that program went on to find other employment, and I would see that as an outcome. So it was more of a pathway or conduit to other employment opportunities.

We started another Indigenous employment initiative with trainees, which had a very different structure from new, full-time equivalent employee positions. It was about finding roles that were

vacant and filling those with trainees to train up to get the job at the end, instead of having no pathway to a full-time position. It is always difficult with Aboriginal employment initiatives to find candidates suited to the positions. That program finished either last year or the year before. I found that it was difficult for business units to support Indigenous trainees and to also provide the level of commitment required to nurture and grow a person into a job-ready candidate from relatively no employment experience or qualifications.

Now we are looking at not having trainees again in the near future—and maybe not ever—because of the level of support that is required within business units and the training that has to come with the staff that are in those units. The managers, coordinators and team leaders have to be able to support people who do not understand local government, do not understand bureaucracy and do not have a high level of experience in the workforce. So we are looking to maybe undertake a cadetship program and a graduate program in the future. That is in development.

**CHAIR**—Thanks very much. I am presuming that each local government area is at different stages with a slightly different focus et cetera to reflect some differences within your own local communities, but perhaps it would be good for my purposes to ask at least a couple of half-intelligent questions. Give me a picture of how you see the current employment in your respective areas. Is it medium, high or low? I think of urban Indigenous employment as relatively strong, but I may be wrong. I am sure there would be variations across the three local government areas. Could we go to each local government area and get a description in a minute or two of your area, of how you see the employment situation currently? If you can think of them, even outside local government experience, could we hear about a couple of positive things that might have happened in recent times? Could we just get a description of your own area and Indigenous employment issues and of how you see it? Can we try that? Who wants to kick off?

**Mr Smith**—I see the biggest growth area in Aboriginal employment in small business and in people undertaking roles where they are not held back by the constraints of governments and big corporate organisations and are free to manufacture, produce and do whatever they want to. I think there can be a level of support provided by the Commonwealth and state governments and even local governments to assist in that process. If you look at the TAFE sector's graduate outcomes or participation in Victoria, it has been in arts and craft. People are being trained up in that area because they wish to undertake that level of education, but there is no big pay packet at the end of any artistic endeavour unless you are a really good artist. However, I think that there can be opportunities in local government to facilitate some outcomes through corporate gifts, art collections and all sorts of things.

**CHAIR**—Do you regard your area as having relatively high Indigenous unemployment?

**Mr Smith**—In the ABS stats for 2001, I think it was 234 Aboriginal people, which is 0.2 of one per cent Indigenous people in the community. I do not know what the stats point to for employment, but I would say that more than 50 per cent of the people in the community are employed. There is no CDEP close to the City of Port Phillip. The closest one is in Thornbury and the next closest one is at Healesville, with satellites—I do not know whether the satellites are still operating—at Dandenong and Hastings, which is too far for people to travel. There are lots of kitchens. There is lots of hospitality. There are art galleries. There are lots of opportunities to seek employment at a level that people might be job ready for. However, there are a lot of

professional Aboriginal people in the City of Port Phillip. You are talking about an area from Elwood to St Kilda, Middle Park, Albert Park and Port Melbourne, which is a growing—I suppose a gentrifying—area.

**CHAIR**—The City of Melbourne?

**Ms Lazenby**—I think it is a bit disproportionate or anomalous, in that if you were to count by head the number of Aboriginal people employed within the city of Melbourne it would be higher because a lot of organisations are located within Melbourne, whether they are a state department or an organisation like Koorie Heritage Trust which happens to have its offices within the confines of the city. So it is a little bit of an anomalous situation. I will ask Bev to say a little more in addition to that, but I will say that we all know who the really good people are and where they are working, and we are always trying to poach them for our organisations.

**CHAIR**—I am sorry to interrupt, but the city of Melbourne would include a number of corporates too, wouldn't it, in terms of your CBD type employer?

**Ms Lazenby**—Indeed.

**CHAIR**—Would you regard the unemployment rate as medium, higher or what?

**Ms Lazenby**—I guess I would let Bev answer that.

**CHAIR**—Yes, sorry; go on.

**Ms Murray**—There is not a big Aboriginal community that resides in the city of Melbourne. So, even though there would probably be a high employment rate, there are no residents, as I said. There are very few Aboriginal residents in the city of Melbourne area. One of the good things that have happened, though, is the Aboriginal restaurant that has opened up. It is a pilot that has opened up in Fed Square. They have employed, I think, about 10 to 15 CDEP trainees.

**CHAIR**—Can you go specifically to—I think you said—the 1,000 employees in the City of Melbourne? Did I see those figures somewhere?

**Ms Lazenby**—I am happy to.

**CHAIR**—What is the picture of Indigenous employment within your own organisation?

**Ms Lazenby**—Those who nominate as Indigenous?

**CHAIR**—Fair enough, yes.

**Ms Lazenby**—Five.

**CHAIR**—I think that gives me a picture.

**Ms Lazenby**—Soon to be six.

**CHAIR**—Can I ask Whitehorse?

**Ms Killmier**—The City of Whitehorse generally features high employment overall. It is that sort of middle-eastern or eastern corridor suburb. As a result of that, the local learning and employment network that we are involved with tells us that, although employment generally is relatively high, there are a lot of young people that fall through the gaps as a result of Whitehorse and its surrounding areas having some of the highest retention rates for school leavers in the state. Whilst that is terrific and paints a rosy picture for those who are going on to further education, employment and training, for those who are not, when they slip through the gaps, they often slip a long way down and are not picked up. That is why programs such as MIPs and On Track and a whole lot of other programs like that are really important to our young people.

Like Port Phillip, the City of Whitehorse has approximately 0.03 per cent of the population reported as Indigenous. However, there is a natural corridor that is emerging throughout the eastern region through Whitehorse, Maroondah and Healesville. In Maroondah, you may know that there is now a neighbourhood house that has been set up called the Gathering Place, which perhaps Shane and Perry can talk a little bit more about. That is attracting a little bit of a buzz, I guess, for young Indigenous people and providing an opportunity for neighbourhood house activities but lots of other things as well.

I would say that there is not a lot of Indigenous unemployment in Whitehorse. I cannot say that there is, but I can say that, when somebody falls through the gaps, there is a potential for them to fall quite a long way. The safety nets need to be well and truly in place.

**CHAIR**—Can we talk about the CDEP? Can you describe it and the participants? You mentioned the issue of the 12 months to be work ready.

**Mr Wandin**—We have been given a task. We put our hand up to do 40 from the last financial year, and we are up to about 22 so far, I think, so we have another three months to get in 18 or so. We have had a lot of time of not being able to train up the people who we want to put in as job ready. But we have people on our system who are ready to go but their training and skills are not up to scratch. That is our biggest problem. A lot of people in the community nominate whether or not they are Indigenous, so it is up to them. There is a bit of a problem in that area. Some say 'yes', some say 'no'. If there is anything that will help the community to be job ready, such as being trained through Swinburne—a lot of people see that this program does work, and Shane and I and a few other people sat around a table to make it work. We are working on a program at the moment that hopefully will be the first one in the state to be a role model. As for employment, I think it is low—I really do. Our big problem with DEWR is our time frame at the moment.

**CHAIR**—I am interested in this issue of identification as Indigenous. It has been an issue for this country for a long time. I would have thought it was an individual right to make that choice. It does raise this issue of the desire to be treated the same as everybody else. I am not mentioning it of my own volition—the issue of identifying as Indigenous was raised earlier. In terms of identifying the issues that we are trying to identify, about the most I could take from our conversation in that area is that the statistics are unclear. Do you have a view on how many and who, Shane?

**Mr Charles**—Before I was the coordinator at Pathways I was at Centrelink. There is some generational thinking from the community's perspective in terms of CDEP. That is something that they could fall back on because the job networks are failing Indigenous people. We have been able to pick up from the street a lot of the youth who had been on the street for 18 months or more and put them in the pathways program. This is a flexible curriculum that is specifically designed for Indigenous people and it is working at the moment, where we have been able to bring in the City of Whitehorse. We are talking with Maroondah council at the moment about other projects. A lot of my students do not want traineeships or apprenticeships. They think that you can just walk into a job that pays real money.

We are about giving them the experience of industry and what is out there and showing them: 'Okay, if you don't like that, that is fine.' We give them a taste—it might be 40 hours—of building and construction. As an example, we did possum boxes and we linked the building and construction to the cultural modules of the program. By doing that and delivering on projects out in the field, we are having a lot more results and a lot more students wanting to engage in the program that we are doing next. It is easy to say: 'Well, at the end of 12 months they are going to leave CDEP.' But a lot of them are not job ready, so what is going to happen? Is it going to be a revolving door? I do not have the capacity to take on another 50 students. At the moment we are working in partnership with RMIT for the hours that they have that they are not delivering so that we can deliver the programs that we want to deliver. In terms of employment, yes, the kids who have come through my door are not interested in traineeships or apprenticeships—

**CHAIR**—Who was that?

**Mr Charles**—The students who have come from off the street into my program. We have a jobs board, and I will say, 'There are new jobs on there,' but they will say, 'I'm not interested because I'm here for three years.' We are running certificates I, II and III over a three-year period. They are wanting to engage more in that project type stuff and get a range of skills rather than just focusing in the one area. We have been able to do that through the whole project, and in the future we will be doing it in exactly the same way. But how do we create employment for these kids?

Mentoring is probably one of the biggest winners in the program that I have. As I said, I have two mentors in each group. It is that pastoral care that is important. As far as I am concerned, duty of care has gone out of education. We have to help them deal with what is happening in their lives before they get in the classroom and before they get off to work. There is no process for that, but we have been able to implement the mentor program, which is slowly starting to work. I do not care about AQTF requirements first up. It is the pastoral care that we focus on. We have to help them. Some of these kids come from dysfunctional families, and they have nobody other than the people they see when they come to the program. It is providing that support and linking them into the services, but we do not link them in and leave them alone. We go with them and hold their hand. These are the things that we have to do. Kids keep coming in the door, and that is fine. In the three-year period, cert. I is about getting them TAFE ready; by the time they hit cert. II they should be TAFE ready; and by the time they hit cert. III they should be job ready. That is the model that we are working on at the moment.

**Mr Smith**—That describes what I was trying to highlight before. When people come into local government on a one-year traineeship, it takes them that one year just to sort out what local

government is. By that time, it is the end of the traineeship. If they are not ready to do the full-time job, it is very difficult for local government to take them on. You have absolutely hit the nail on the head there, and it is one of the issues about traineeships. We employed I think it was 20 trainees and 15 or 16 of them left. We also have five Aboriginal people working at the City of Port Phillip, and we employ upwards of 60 or 70 Indigenous contractors a year.

**Ms Killmier**—I would just like to add one thing, picking up on a point that Mikael talked about before, and that is, at the same time, there has to be training inside the council. Managers, supervisors, team leaders and other staff also need to be trained in working with the trainees when they come in. That is also critical, and one of the things we are doing at the moment is working through those issues. We have yet to see how successful we have been. For us this is a newish area. We have not been able to get this happening before; it is happening now. We want to try to make sure that it is right the whole way along, and we also want to learn from others experience.

**Mr Smith**—I have found that it is 25 per cent of my role, plus 25 per cent of the team leader's or coordinator's role, to support an Aboriginal trainee. So that is another 0.5 role, on top of what I already do. I do not mind the pressure that is put on me as an Aboriginal officer; I have quite broad shoulders. But for somebody who does not, you jeopardise other Aboriginal employees within the organisation, by taking on part of that program as a support role.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Ms Lazenby, in your submission you mentioned that selected positions within the City of Melbourne were 'earmarked', for want of a better term, for Indigenous employment and that you got an exemption from the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria to allow you to do that. What sorts of positions were they and why did you make that decision to do that?

**Ms Lazenby**—We have a designated Indigenous unit, and Bev is the head of that unit. There are two permanent positions. When we advertised, we got an exemption so that we could indicate that the position was for an Indigenous person. There is another position that we have, which is in a very large Indigenous arts funding program. That is run by an Indigenous woman. There are three other positions—an events position, a security position and a parking and traffic position. Certainly the two positions in the Indigenous unit were the most recent ones advertised. Those others have been filled for quite a while. That experience relates to those two positions.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Can I ask each of you in turn why your council thinks it is important? What is it that is driving your council to have an Indigenous employment program?

**Ms Lazenby**—At Melbourne City Council we have a broad set of commitments. There is a commitment related to reconciliation. That is a clear one. We also have social, economic, employment, culture and heritage commitments to Aboriginal Australians. So the employment commitment is just part of all of those. It is a key part, where we can actually put our money where our mouth is and commit to Indigenous positions and hiring Indigenous Australians.

**Ms Murray**—I think it is also about bringing in the expertise, knowledge and skills of an Indigenous person.

**Ms Killmier**—From the City of Whitehorse perspective there has been very strong commitment from one or two of our councillors. That commitment, I guess, has been there for some time. For perhaps a while they were lone voices. Now there is a really different level of commitment. There has been a real culture change within the organisation at both the councillor staff level and probably the community level. It has been said to us that there is not a big Indigenous community in Whitehorse so why put a lot of resources into it. Council does have commitments to Indigenous people. We do have policies that we have developed and we see the relationship-building factor as being particularly important. We have been working on that very closely and carefully. We intend to continue to do that. Employment is for us the step that we are trying to get to. There are a lot of things that we are doing along the way to put that in place.

The other thing I would mention from our perspective is that we have a very strong community organisation in Whitehorse called the Whitehorse Friends for Reconciliation. It has actually also been a key community driver in putting the issues on the agenda and keeping them there. I think that has been an opportunity for council to look to this group, support it and also look to it for linkages. It has been a big part. It is the one that is in the second guard and that has gone out and engaged all of the schools and done all of the pavers. It has done a big job. It has been a key driver, I would say, as well.

**Mr Smith**—Can I just add on the answer of the City of Melbourne that we have a memorandum of understanding which is about to sunset. We have a statement of commitment which was developed in 1998. These are all very old documents. We have signatories that were ATSIC, which does not exist anymore. We have those documents, but, because of the political environment, they are in jeopardy of becoming old and redundant. The signatories to them are organisations that no longer exist. The leadership there, the commitment and the people that the community can say are representative of the community are not around any more—or they are still around, but they are just not in high-level leadership roles. The policy commitment is there, but it is fast becoming outdated. I think there is a jeopardy in terms of the leverage that those documents can create for employment and other business development opportunities because of the abolition of ATSIC and other groups that represented a united voice of Aboriginal people.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Perry, you touched on an issue in relation to the timing with the DEWR program, I think you said. Forgive me for asking, but can you just nut that out for us fairly precisely again? Also, can I ask each of the other councils if they have a view on their situation in relation to the federal programs that are being offered and the success or otherwise of them?

**Mr Wandin**—We just got the new structure, and we are a bit worried about the 12-month time frame. That is the biggest problem because we are really looking at the people who will not be job ready to be trained to go out to full employment. That is our biggest issue and the biggest problem. Shane can probably help me here. We have the youth; we are all virtually the same program on the youth side. Do you want to explain more about that, Shane?

**Mr Charles**—Within the changes, people will be coming onto the CDEP for a 12-month period and then they have to get off. With the projects and the stuff that we have been doing, as I said, we run a three-year program. We have signed up the CDEP guys, and probably eight to 10 of those are more than ready to go out and get work, but the younger ones who are coming through have huge literacy and numeracy issues that we have to try and help them with. They are

nowhere near TAFE ready, let alone job ready. So we are going to have a gap where, for a 12-month period, everything is fine, they are engaged, and then all of a sudden they are off CDEP and going to be out on a limb where they are not job ready and still have literacy and numeracy issues: 'What am I going to do now?' For programs in the Indigenous community, you probably double it and triple it. We have a three-year plan, and by the end of that three-year plan they will be job ready.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Coming to Ms Lazenby, the question is: to what degree does that help or harm the aspirations of the people who have been engaged for a certain time and then cut off? It can be a very demoralising situation for them. Do you want to say something?

**Ms Lazenby**—I want to refer to what we talked about before, and that is the political environment. Local government is inherently a political environment, and at the moment Melbourne enjoys great support from our city council, particularly our lord mayor, so much so that—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Is he the man who was cheered all of the time at the Commonwealth Games?

**Ms Lazenby**—Indeed.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Did you pick that up, Barry?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Ms Lazenby**—Through the Indigenous unit, Bev Murray and I have been able to support the employment of two people at external organisations. We do not do our own outreach support services, but we did support the employment of what is called the Indigenous Public Space Officer at an outreach agency called Living Room. There is a focus particularly around one of the cathedrals in the CBD. Homeless, substance-abusing and otherwise quite vulnerable Indigenous people gather around there. We identified a need for some service delivery that we were not able to provide, but we were able to support a staff member at an external organisation. In addition, we have a funding and service agreement with Reconciliation Victoria. We provide an annual subsidy for them to hire additional staff because we ask them to cooperate quite a bit with us, for events and whatever. The lord mayor is particularly committed to RecVic and we support part of an officer there annually.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Do you have anything to add, Ms Murray?

**Ms Murray**—In terms of the federal government programs, council has not accessed those sorts of programs—not CDEP—and is probably not likely to.

**Mr Smith**—I think it is important that council provide information to their communities by way of internet sites and officers who are on board. We link into some of the IBA programs. Business development provide that information through to community members. There is also the cadetship program through DEWR. As I said before, there is too much work that has to go into a traineeship for \$5,500. That is not an incentive. I do not think that you need to have an incentive; I think you need to have commitment from the local government and then you have to



employ or train people within the organisation to support them. I would not even suggest having the \$5,000 for the traineeship; I would say give them \$10,000 to train their staff, because that is where you will get outcomes, because they will have support.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Do you mean staff within your existing workforce?

**Mr Smith**—That is right. You could employ half a person to take on board skilling up the organisation. You are asking an organisation to be culturally appropriate. Cross-cultural awareness training is 250 bucks a pop and then you have to take the time off work. If you get a consultant in, it is three times that. Cross-cultural awareness will cover history and some of the communication levels of support, but when you have an 18-year old Aboriginal person who has never worked before, who has low-level numeracy and literacy skills and who has a task to do, you have to sit with them and teach them how to do it, because they go to TAFE one day a week. I think it is fraught with failure from the start.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—How would you fix that? What would you do in your establishment to fix that? Do you get the council to employ this person or do you think that the federal government should support her? How do you get the person into the workforce?

**Mr Smith**—Local governments are becoming more professionally focused. They outsource all of their contracts for cleaning, gardening, for the parks and gardens and those types of areas where especially a lot of young Aboriginal men would fit in very easily. We have worked with Spotless to employ two Aboriginal trainees. They have completed their traineeships and are now working for Spotless doing foreshore regeneration. We have worked with the Alfred Hospital, which had never employed an Aboriginal person before. To create employment opportunities you just need to support new Aboriginal staff. We have worked with numerous organisations. I think it is easier to employ in the local government area rather than in the council. If there is a designated Aboriginal person they can then provide a link through to programs such as the DEWR ones and Jobs for Young People, which is a state initiative. There is an array of ways to do it but I think that there needs to be better collaboration or communication between state, local and federal governments.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It would be good, wouldn't it?

**Mr Smith**—I will not say the word.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Say it. What is it?

**Mr Smith**—COAG. Not that type of setup but maybe that type of agreement—an understanding that you work together. If you had the 5,500 from DEWR and the 9,000 from JYP, you have a full-time position allocated from local government to then employ somebody in a contract role. Maybe that would work. Then you would have three groups that can provide ongoing support and then you have TAFE, the group training company and RTO as additional support.

**CHAIR**—You made an interesting point earlier when you were talking about the opportunities with small business—the way Spotless and local government employ. Does it offer that bit more flexibility? Is it a more immediate, one-on-one type situation? How does that

work? Spotless is hardly small business but it certainly falls within that contracting of business approach. What I am really saying is that for local government to employ people and take on these roles is a big demand. They have their budgets—whether it is federal, state or local. It is a big effort. But Spotless comes along on a contract basis and—bang!—they do it. How do you see it in terms of a contractor or local government doing it?

**Mr Smith**—It depends what the role is. I think that a lot of trainees are in business—business traineeships, IT traineeships, nursing traineeships. You have success in nursing because you get women. I think one thing is overlooked here, and it is culture. It is a culture of men and boys and women and girls entering the workforce. Men generally are like a football team: they get together and support each other. When you have a contractor like Spotless which can provide manual labour and a blokey environment outdoors, you will have success. I do not know anything about nursing, but you have a group of women with their uniforms on—that type of environment is conducive to good outcomes because the culture bit is there.

**Ms Lazenby**—I have a couple of unrelated things I wish to say. We have heard that mentorships really enhance the success of a traineeship program and that it is important to train employees so that they understand the issues—cultural, numeracy and literacy issues or whatever. It is also important for an organisation to commit to freeing up that mentor from their normal workload so that they can take on the extra 25 per cent it might take to commit to the mentorship. I think we need to consider that as well. Another issue is that in our contract specifications documents, Melbourne city council is at the minute looking at sustainability triple-bottom-line issues. We have just commenced writing a social sustainability portion to the standard specifications that asks: what are the social commitments that companies might have—Spotless might be a good example in this case—that would allow them to score higher, when we are scoring them, to work contracts? That is under development now and will be finished in draft by the end of this month.

**CHAIR**—That is a very good point. This is slightly different, but we had Rio Tinto appear earlier and the National Australia Bank followed them. We spoke about their social commitment, if you like, and their enlightened self-interest and moved on from that in terms of where their minds are. In the case of Rio Tinto, much of their workforce in the future has to come from Indigenous people. Therefore the investment they make is directly related to their own future.

**Ms Lazenby**—It has real bottom-line implications for them.

**CHAIR**—That is right. And NAB acknowledged that their expertise in employing Indigenous people—and this is on the public record—was inadequate. They just did not know how to do it well. The cultural issue is a real challenge. I have a couple of quick questions. A lot of this is how long is a piece of string stuff. What do you think are the key ingredients in terms of job ready? Is it in educational—literacy and numeracy—issues? Can you give us a snapshot of what you think are some of the major issues you face in creating the job-ready situation?

**Mr Wandin**—It is literacy and numeracy for sure. That is the number one priority. Self-esteem is another issue. We find that having mentors is the best solution. We have team leaders and mentors with Shane's program, and that is what we are looking at. We are looking at what each individual person wants. We do not say: 'Here's a program. This is what you're going to do.' We sit with our participants and, with Swinburne, we work out what program they want.

They pick what they want so they get their skills and are trained up. We had three programs we had worked out. I think we are up to number seven. They can pick a group of three preferences—one to three. Then we sort it out and put the boys on the best employment track for how they want to go. So we approach the individual person and ask them which way they would like to go. They come back to us and we have got the program, which we have sat down and done with Swinburne. It has been going for about—

**Mr Charles**—Eighteen months.

**Mr Wandin**—But we are running out of time. The time frame is our biggest problem.

**CHAIR**—Do you have any contact with Indigenous Coordination Centres? Is there any linkage?

**Ms Lazenby**—No.

**Mr Smith**—I have linkages in other ways with ICCs but not in employment.

**CHAIR**—Do you have any concluding statement that you might like to leave us with? We are getting towards the end of our inquiry. We have been to every state and we are looking for, on balance, those positive examples, and that is the bias in our inquiry, if you like—the positive examples of what has worked, why it has worked and how it is working. But it does not mean that we can discount what we need to improve in. So would anyone like to wrap up with any quick guidance for us as we go away in the next three or four months and write our report?

**Ms Lazenby**—Nothing additional.

**CHAIR**—All that remains for me to do is to thank you very much for being with us today and giving up your time. We very much appreciate it.

[2.46 pm]

**DEEMING, Mr Paul, Chief Executive Officer, Corrugation Road**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. As you would have heard me say earlier, we do not require people to swear an oath for their evidence, but we remind you that these proceedings are legal proceedings of the parliament. I invite you to make a brief opening statement.

**Mr Deeming**—In my organisation I am involved in the media, in the production of television programs and publications, primarily in the Indigenous area. There was an invitation originally from the former health minister Michael Wooldridge, who asked us to come up with some concepts to communicate with young people in the category of high risk of self-harm. We developed a couple of programs in the health sector that I like to think gained good results, good outcomes. I have dealt with Canberra for the last 10 to 12 years, banging on doors and talking to different departments—you know where I am coming from on that—and of late I have been getting a bit tired of the tokenism: ‘Let’s add on an Indigenous component, a little bit on the end.’ I also produce a publication for IBA, which is a concept I took to IBA as a result of all the negative—

**CHAIR**—That is Indigenous Business Australia?

**Mr Deeming**—Yes. There is a free copy for you there. It was this little publication that led to me coming to have a whinge and a plea with you today. That was the hardest thing I have ever undertaken in my working life, and it should not have been. This program was launched at the Stock Exchange by Philip Ruddock and Joseph Elu. I wanted to showcase all the positives that Indigenous people contribute to this country. As I said, I get a bit tired of all the negatives and the stereotypes. We are all about good stories, positive stories, and developing wellbeing and self-esteem and pride in the communities. Unfortunately I followed Pauline Hanson and *60 Minutes* onto Palm Island, but there were good stories there—they were not all bad—and we published those stories.

I have another program here in my bag, called *Beyond their limits*, which is all about young people in communities who are disadvantaged financially or geographically who are getting on with life. They are getting a good education and they are contributing. They are good citizens and part of their communities. They share these stories with other Indigenous people. You do not have to be an AFL footballer. You could be the checkout chick at the Fitzroy Crossing supermarket, who is employed and very proud to be employed. Unfortunately some community members are not totally in agreement with her earning money and, when that money gets back to the community, it tends to just disappear. Having to put that publication together led me to believe there was a huge need to promote tourism opportunities for Indigenous people and their communities.

I reckon I am the luckiest ex-Pom on the planet, having done what I have done and having travelled around Australia, producing 50 episodes of television in 50 communities and being able to experience some of the opportunities in Nhulunbuy and Gove in far north Arnhem Land. Actually, I went crabbing in the mangroves and saw sharks and crocodiles and got the life frightened out of me. It was just an amazing experience. An Aboriginal fellow who was the first Indigenous policeman in that part of the world took us out in his nine-foot flat-bottom boat.

Believe you me, when you are out there with a couple of big crocs around you, you are not feeling too secure!

I got Matt to put a package together for me and allow me to auction it off. I will bore you with the details so that can you see where I am coming from. I auctioned it off for a charity that my wife and I are involved with called Brainwave, who work with the Royal Children's Hospital. One of Victoria's wealthiest men, Michael Buxton—and I know Michael will not mind that I mention this—bought it. He paid \$13,500 dollars for it. For his 13½ thousand dollars he got two nights in the Walkabout—I do not know if you have ever stayed there—and two nights on the beach. He told Matt: 'You are sitting on a gold mine. I've got mates who would pay double what I've paid to experience my four nights.' That led me to think, 'Okay, I want to get into this area.'

I have approached Tourism Australia and all the state and territory bodies to put together a television program. A good friend of mine, who is an Aboriginal fella, and I have set up an Aboriginal company called Mark Olive Pty Ltd. Mark is Australia's only five-star Aboriginal chef. Mark goes out into communities and identifies tourism opportunities. But, more importantly, he finds out what foods Aboriginal people have been cooking with for thousands of years. In this country today, we do not use them. We use Thai, Japanese, French and Italian products—everything but our own products. What we have been able to do is to get some support from the tourism sector. I have been with Fran Bailey, and she has given us the big tick of approval and asked, 'What do you want from me?' I said, 'Money, to make the whole thing happen.'

As you would know, there is a reservoir of programs in departments available for training. We have actually put all the training in place with the growers. We are going to reinvent the wheel and get all these products that Mark uses to cook with grown in communities. We tracked down an organisation in Reedy Creek which, in conjunction with 12 Aboriginal communities, grows enough product to sustain the demand at the moment, which unfortunately at the moment is not a lot. We have stepped in. We have put together a TV program—six episodes are being recorded as we speak. The guys are up at Gagudju at the moment, floods and all. We have to get them in via helicopter this morning. They are now filming in that particular area. We are identifying the tourism opportunity. Mark will go and find the food and the herbs that these people are cooking with.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—And the TV program?

**Mr Deeming**—*Message Stick*.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—With cooking?

**Mr Deeming**—No. He has been on a program called *Message Stick* and he has been down at Federation Square cooking for Taylor Wines on a boat during the Commonwealth Games. He has had an absolutely ball. Tourism Australia uses Mark as one of the faces of Indigenous Australia around the world. I will tell you about my biggest problem—or rather our biggest problem, as I am only a shareholder. I approached five of my colleagues to actually put some collateral up to make this thing happen. Tourism Australia supported us. The Northern Territory, Far North Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria supported us. Other states were not in a position to fund a program. What we have done is to break it down to a program per state. We

have six, and Far North Queensland have taken two of those because of South Australia pulling out. But we have been able to produce these shows. We have actually had a chat with Woolworths-Safeway. They want to put our products into all their stores. That is 700 stores Australia wide. We have had an email out of the Netherlands, where Unilever want to be our agent. I cannot even talk about it—it would never get warm in the volume they are talking about.

It is very exciting but it is very frustrating for us because, without the TV program, consumers will not know about it. When I went in search of information for this, I was getting little brochures, half-torn posters and contact details of tour operators who were no longer in existence—they had gone broke. To me, they have gone broke because no-one knows about the product. People cannot say, 'I want to go to Yirrkala,' or 'I want to go to Palm Island.' If you have a good look around Palm Island, there are some fabulous spots. If you want to want to go to Fregon in South Australia, yes, there are petrol-sniffing problems but there is magnificent scenery off the beaten track where we whitefellas unfortunately never get to.

**CHAIR**—We have both been to Fregon, as you might remember, Annette.

**Mr Deeming**—Did you go the back way? Probably not! I had to go in search of Nicky Winmar, because Nicky's a mate of mine. We took Nicky down to Fregon.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I cannot remember.

**CHAIR**—We did not go the back way.

**Mr Deeming**—This is where the Aboriginal fellas took us on their way to Uluru, which is the quickest way to the airport, because Nicky had missed his plane and we had to get back up there and pick him up. That is a project we did with drug- and alcohol-free week. To see that was just mind boggling. We do not see that in the general community. We have cleared the Lifestyle Channel. We have done a four-year deal with them. We go to air in June. We did the six episodes, which are irrevocable—they are going to happen. The next 39 probably will not, unless I can get government support. As I said, I could not spend the money that the departments are offering us for training. We will take it, and we will spend it where we can. But we have the training formula—I believe we have the best program already there—and we do not need anybody to reinvent our wheel. I will leave you the documents on how it works. We have created another 150 jobs for Aboriginal people with this project, plus there are 12 communities already involved. The states and territories have introduced us to a further eight communities who would like to be part of the program in growing the produce for us. We are going to send our people up there. They will investigate what will grow and what will not grow in those areas and then that will be the product they will grow. We will bring them down to Reedy Creek and we will train them. We will give them the product, and they will grow it—farm it and harvest it. We will buy it off them for two years, guaranteed. It is a win-win situation for them, but it all depends on us being able to get a marketing and promotional dollar out of Canberra in the structure that we are currently in. The best advice Canberra can give me is to go to the banks, which is fantastic! I can go to the banks with my commercial hat on and pay interest on the money—

**CHAIR**—What does IBA say?

**Mr Deeming**—I spoke to Ron Moroney from IBA a while ago. Before IBA jumped into the new IBA, when IBA had more control over what they were doing, they were very keen. They are no longer the IBA of old, but I have spoken again with Ron. I do know that there is interest in the food produce side of what we are doing. At this stage we have not even attempted to do anything with tourism. I met with Aden Ridgeway, who is the new chair of the committee for Indigenous tourism, and Athol Guy, who is a great spokesman and advocate for Indigenous tourism. They are absolutely out of their trees. They think this is a fantastic product.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for that. I have a number of thoughts. Can you take us through two or three things. I forget our statistics, but I think that it is 80 per cent of our approximately six million visitors to Australia, or at least an overwhelming majority, say that they would like an authentic Indigenous experience, but we understand—we are not experts—from what we are advised that a fraction of that number actually receive it. We have to keep asking ourselves: what is the reality of this? It is for hard heads to work out whether what we are hearing is somewhere near the mark. What is your view on our six million visitors or so? How many of those people do you think are looking for that experience?

**Mr Deeming**—I could not answer that.

**CHAIR**—No, but do you think it is significant?

**Mr Deeming**—Not really. People do not know enough about it. It is not promoted in their homeland. People do not jump on the plane to experience Uluru—well, they do but to experience Uluru as Uluru, not to experience an isolated community.

**CHAIR**—You do not think that those international visitors who come here are that aware of our Indigenous people, Indigenous communities and Indigenous issues.

**Mr Deeming**—It depends what country they come from. In Germany, Italy, the US and the UK there is an big following. We would also like to develop many countries like India, China and some of those markets. We are a bedroom of Asia. They should be coming. It is easy for them to get here. This program of ours will be on in 120 countries world wide. I notice Tourism Australia spent \$100 million on ‘Where the bloody hell are you?’

**CHAIR**—Just let me develop my thought processes a little more. We are going to run out of time. What you are putting to me is that the rest of the world does not really know that much about Australia, particularly about Indigenous issues, Indigenous people and what they as tourists might see. There is a role there. I will let that sit there. In regard to the opportunities for Indigenous people in the tourism industry, it would seem to many of us that that is one of the more obvious areas that we should be looking at. You clearly agree with that. In terms of the IBA response to your proposal, I am still unclear on what they actually said.

**Mr Deeming**—We went to them before they pressed the button on all of this because, as I said, I have close contacts with IBA. The situation was: ‘We are not really getting into products and programs like you are talking, Paul. Go away and develop a business plan. Get your TV happening and then come back and talk with us.’ At this stage, we have gone away—

**CHAIR**—Let me just take the next step. What Indigenous partnership do you have? What is your linkage within the Indigenous community and with Indigenous partners? Are there any Indigenous people within your group?

**Mr Deeming**—Absolutely. With Mark Olive Pty Ltd, Mark is a traditional man from Wollongong; and the program is *Outback Cafe*. Mark is a Wollongong man, a traditional man. He is chairman of the group and we have one other director.

**CHAIR**—Any other Indigenous linkage?

**Mr Deeming**—Not at this stage. The only linkage that we are trying to gain, Barry, is with communities and individuals to grow and set up their small businesses as part of this network. The opportunities are just endless—even the growing of food for us at the same time that one of the biggest problems we have in Indigenous communities is nutrition. They could be growing food produce for themselves if they knew how to sustain that in their community.

**CHAIR**—With your partners and your business plan—which you would have, given the discussions around it—in terms of the government response to ‘see your bank,’ there is some merit in that, isn’t there, in terms of—

**Mr Deeming**—Absolutely. That is my next step. I can do one of two things, Barry. This is virtually my last roll of the dice—I will be perfectly honest with you. At the moment there is a lot of money going back into communities. We ourselves have put in \$300,000 of our own money. We have now been told, ‘Go to a bank, take out a loan and they will help you do that.’ That is fine and we can do that. But the contribution back to communities will decrease significantly. At the moment, there is a lot of money going back to the communities and a lot of opportunities for jobs. If we go to the bank we then have to put our commercial cap on and if there is a bit of land and dirt out there that I can grow product on I am going to grow it. So it is open slather.

At the moment we are pushing and, as I said, this is the last roll of the dice. I have my shareholders, if you like, who are mates of mine, giving me this last opportunity to try and get through to government to get them to understand that all the training in the world is to no avail if people do not know about the product. And I am talking about the industry that we are in: hospitality. There are two things we have to offer in this country: tourism and hospitality.

**CHAIR**—I just need to confirm that, as you probably understand, it is not our role as a committee to get involved with specific programs and make specific recommendations. We can get into some general discussion about it. I do not remember our role ever being specifically recommending specific projects to government. We are very loath to do that. We will make comments about particular projects, perhaps, in a general sense, but we try to do it in a balanced way. Our recommendations are those which government or parliaments can use over the longer term.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What is the name of the film and television place in Alice Springs?

**Mr Deeming**—CAAMA. There is CAAMA and there is Imparja TV. Imparja TV takes our programs. CAAMA produce stuff with us. We hire them—



**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I was going to ask you whether CAAMA was involved.

**Mr Deeming**—Yes. As I said, I have been doing this for 10 years now—TV programs, men’s health, women’s health and gaining trust in communities. We have just filmed a secret men’s meeting in Tennant Creek. No-one has ever been offered to do that before, and that is because the communities trust us. People in the community need to know the good things that are happening. There was a great story in Redfern in the community centre; nobody knows about it.

**CHAIR**—It just occurs to me that there is a community just down from Fregon called Mimili. They are into the production of Indigenous food and Indigenous plants. When the community is already doing it and someone else comes along and wants to offer a comparative program, I guess they would say, ‘I’m sorry; we’re already into it.’ I can see that that is one issue there. I think I am going further than I need to go, because these are individual type projects. I hear the enthusiasm but what I am trying to do is make the linkage in a general sense that the industry itself could be involved.

**Mr Deeming**—As I say, my issue is with—

**CHAIR**—Sorry to interrupt, but one other area is the Cape York partnerships, and some of the large corporate people are interested in these sorts of projects. I know there is a furniture business and other such businesses that they look at carefully apart from IBA. I am just thinking about the actual structures that are already in place, endeavouring, I suggest, not only to celebrate the Indigenous way but also to create financial models which actually make the communities more sustainable.

**Mr Deeming**—Bruce Harvey from Rio Tinto was here earlier on. He is someone I know and he wants to talk to us about this project. People are coming at us left, right and centre. But unfortunately when I am talking to the departments it is like knocking on this table, because they only have a program for training. I could walk in and get half a million dollars just like that for training. They say, ‘You can train all the people; we’ll do this and we’ll do that, and we’ll come out and visit,’ and I say, ‘Thank you, but it’s done.’

**CHAIR**—Perhaps my question should be: why should a department be supporting your program?

**Mr Deeming**—Because we are supporting Indigenous communities. What I have in front of me here is to do with one of 15. Over the next four years, we will deliver \$100 million with us striking a blow in Indigenous communities. That is a phenomenal effort. It would have 150 people immediately employed tomorrow if this were to go ahead. They will go and employ 150 people.

**CHAIR**—Surely if IBA is working satisfactorily that should be able to—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Exactly.

**Mr Deeming**—I will go back and talk to Ron. Our business plan has really and truly gone from here to right across the other side of the room.

**CHAIR**—I am not in a position, Paul, to speak for IBA.

**Mr Deeming**—I know that, but I took this opportunity because I will talk to anybody I can. It is private enterprise who have thrown all these dollars into whatever. While government is the biggest business in this country, there is no percentage of that business to market. The department of health should be the department of ill-health, because I have never seen a message out there about health; it is all about problems. What I am saying is this: this is something that will create employment and small business in as many communities as we can actually engage to grow the product.

**CHAIR**—I am not in a position to say yes or no, but I celebrate the idea. I am absolutely worth nothing to you as far as putting it into effect. What I want to emphasise is that I really hope that, as a test of our structures, IBA, the bankers and the various partnerships—through corporate philanthropy or whatever you think it might be, and hopefully there is something like that there—tap into that. Indeed there could be a straight appeal for private venture capital. But that's enough from me, I think.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I do not have anything to add, except to wish you well. I hope it comes to fruition for you.

**Mr Deeming**—As I said, it is all there. And here are a couple more things that I have for you. With your permission, can I put you on our mailing list?

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Absolutely.

**Mr Deeming**—We have a web site and an email facility. The lifestyle channel, as I said, are going to invite 195,000 of their subscribers to buy the products as well.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I have seen it.

**Mr Deeming**—It has been on the ABC, on *Message Stick*.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I was intrigued, I have to say.

**Mr Deeming**—Some of the communities have really grabbed this by the horns and have asked: 'Can Mark go into the communities? We'll buy a mobile kitchen and we'll take him into the communities if he will cook and show people in the communities how to do it.'

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Can I ask one more question—this is just me being mischievous. Here is Mark's recipe for wattleseed creamed meringue with quandong dessert sauce. Where would I buy the quandongs?

**Mr Deeming**—That is my point.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Exactly. Where would I buy the ground roasted wattle? That is the point.

**Mr Deeming**—Woolworths said to us: ‘We’ll put all your product in here. What media are you going to back it up with?’ When I could not tell them, they said: ‘Well, you’re not ready for us. Come back in 12 months.’

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Good luck. I really hope it works.

**Mr Deeming**—Yes. It is \$100 million. As I said, if we could give Unilever a crack in Europe—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Absolutely.

**Mr Deeming**—I appreciate your time.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It is really good to meet you.

**Mr Deeming**—This came about because I got a press release from you months and months ago and I thought I might find a sympathetic ear here.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Never let a chance go by.

**Mr Deeming**—Absolutely.

**CHAIR**—You have a sympathetic ear, but whether it is able to take you to the next step is another question.

**Mr Deeming**—I spoke with Mal Brough’s office a couple of weeks ago, with Russell Patterson. I went in there—I know Russell—and I explained the situation to him. The first thing he said to me was, ‘Let me know how you go with Woolworths.’

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Where does Mark Olive live? Where does he hang out?

**Mr Deeming**—He lives in Melbourne now. We were going to launch this project at Parliament House in Canberra on 24 February, but unfortunately the Grand Hyatt owned the catering rights then and would not let Mark come in and cook with his foods.

**CHAIR**—Is that right?

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—That is funny—we are mind reading, because I was just thinking that very thing now. I do not know about that, because the Tasmanian salmon growers have been in.

**CHAIR**—That is something we might think about seriously.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—We might think about that—

**CHAIR**—I think we had better think about that.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—and get in touch with you if there is anything we can suggest.

**Mr Deeming**—Thank you. I appreciate the time.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Paul.

**Mr Deeming**—If you do not mind, I can send you out emails on where we are going.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—No, we would not mind at all.

**CHAIR**—No. All the very best to you.

[3.12 pm]

**APPO, Mr Adrian John, Executive Officer, Ganbina Koori Economic Employment and Training Agency**

**ATKINSON, Mr Neville, Chair, Ganbina Koori Economic Employment and Training Agency**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Thank you for coming along today. I need to tell you that we are not taking evidence under oath, but I will just remind you that these are legal proceedings of the parliament. Does anyone want to make a brief opening statement to summarise?

**Mr Appo**—Ganbina is an Indigenous organisation. It was established in 1997 to look at how the Indigenous community in Shepparton—that is in north-east Victoria—would operate with changes that were coming to Commonwealth legislation and, more specifically, with the closure of the CES. We were basically seeing how the Indigenous community in Shepparton was going to fare in employment—or unemployment. In that time, as an organisation we have developed several programs, one of them being Ladders to Success. Another one that we just put in place very recently is called Jobs 4U2. It is written numerically because it is working with kids in year 7 through to year 10, so it is a text message sort of thing.

Basically what we have looked at doing is moving the community away from the perception that there is very little employment opportunity, especially in Shepparton. More significantly, we are translating the view that employment only exists in the community sector and, more specifically, in the Indigenous health sector. We have translated the perception that employment exists in the wider private industry sector. We have done that through the relationships that we have built with several of the significant industry leaders and also with some of the major companies that operate in our region, like SPC Ardmona and, more recently, Coles Myer through their brands of Kmart, Target and Coles, obviously.

Within that sort of success, we have been operating those programs for about three years, and we have moved Indigenous employment from what was originally about 300. That was Indigenous people in all sorts of employment in all sorts of categories, whether it was casual, part time or full time. Over the last three years, we have placed something like 125—it might be a little bit more now—into private sector employment. So we have increased the overall employment for Indigenous people in Shepparton, but more specifically we have increased their participation in the private industry sector. We have seen that not only as a method of increasing employment overall, because we realise that the Aboriginal industry—the social welfare industry—is not going to be able to support Indigenous people into employment. It is the wider private sector that is actually going to be able to do that. We have looked at that and been able to translate that, but we have also been able, through that, to bridge the gap between the wider community and the Aboriginal community.

**CHAIR**—I seek clarification about Ladders to Success. You would be aware that first thing this morning we had as guests people from the general area of the Goulburn Valley.

**Mr Appo**—You would probably have spoken specifically to John Corboy, Jim Andreadis and Paul Briggs.

**CHAIR**—That is right. Do you fit together anywhere?

**Mr Appo**—Very much so. In fact, Ladders to Success is a Ganbina initiative. As part of that initiative and looking at the broader context of Indigenous employment, we saw as an organisation representing the community that Indigenous employment is not just a responsibility of state or federal government or the Indigenous community; it is a responsibility of the total community. Given that the Indigenous community in Shepparton is 10 per cent of the wider community, we needed some of those broader community leaders to be working with us in solving this and embracing this as a community issue, not just an Indigenous issue. Through that, those leaders, like John and Jimmy, brought together a number of their networks which then fitted in with the networks that we were already working with.

**CHAIR**—Are you and John Corboy part of the Ladders to Success board?

**Mr Appo**—Ladders to Success is a program. John chairs what I suppose you would call a management committee, which Jim and Paul as community representatives and I as the Ganbina representative sit on.

**CHAIR**—I see. I needed to clarify that.

**Mr Appo**—It is Ganbina that actually operated and delivered the program.

**CHAIR**—There are a lot of areas. You people have been at this for many years. The Ladders project fell short of its goal of 100 Indigenous employment outcomes over the three-year contract. Why was there that shortfall? What was the issue? Can you take us through that?

**Mr Appo**—I am not quite understanding the question.

**CHAIR**—Can you take us through the contract? Maybe that will do it.

**Mr Appo**—The contract as such is basically a consortium of business and industry. The City of Greater Shepparton—the local government representatives—and Ganbina on the Indigenous side went to both state and federal government and said, ‘This is the type of program that we would see as being successful in achieving real outcomes for the community.’ We said that we did not want to get involved in the process of starting a person somewhere where they would work for one or two days or a week and get excited by that and tick it off as a significant outcome, because we did not see that it was a significant outcome. We said that the reality of a significant outcome is putting people into the private sector for longer periods of time. That longer period of time was in excess of six months. More normally, they were still there after 12 months.

The program achieved success with 80 individuals, which was 80 per cent of the contract, because it was to work with 150 individuals as a maximum over the three years and to place 100 of those into full-time employment. The stringency of the numbers that we had to work with to achieve those 100 placements was what government came back to us with. So it meant that we had a very high level to achieve. If you work it out, we had to put 60-odd per cent of the people who we were working with into long-term employment. We achieved that with 80 of the individuals.

**CHAIR**—How did it all shake out? What was your overall feeling about where it ended up and the final outcome?

**Mr Appo**—Overall, 80 individuals got a long-term employment outcome, and a lot of those are still working with the same individual. Although some others, as with many others, moved on to other employment, so they are working with other employers. That was a great success in the first instance.

**CHAIR**—You met the contractual arrangements, from my understanding.

**Mr Appo**—To that requirement. We did not make the 100. So if you want to make that—

**CHAIR**—You were about 20 short, weren't you?

**Mr Appo**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—That is what I am trying to say. I am just trying to get the picture.

**Mr Appo**—We had also discussed with government at the time that this would be a development phase for others coming through. We then looked at the fact that there was a huge number in the general unemployment pool, working with organisations like CDEP/IEC. Also, the Job Network was developing them and providing services to them. Our view was that these individuals would get to a level where you could work with them to link them to mainstream employment, because the mainstream employers were basically saying, 'We'll be a part of the process, but we're not here on gratitude.' We found that as it came towards the end of that process there was just not the level of near-to-ready job seekers out there. I think we ended up signing 135 on our books all up. We did not even take on the full 150, because we said that the remaining 15 just were not there.

**CHAIR**—Jobs 4U2 seems quite exciting and interesting. Two government departments and, no doubt, the schools are involved. Can you describe that. How does that go?

**Mr Appo**—There are no government departments involved within Jobs 4U2. It is all external funding. There is some from the private sector, some from business and industry and some from the—

**CHAIR**—I am sorry. I meant that they have since used the model.

**Mr Appo**—Yes, that is right. With Jobs 4U2 we looked at the issue of where this pool of job-ready job seekers coming through in the Indigenous community was and why the levels of literacy and numeracy were so vastly inferior to what was required for base level employment. We decided to look at the reasons and rationale behind that. We found a whole number of reasons, but one of the major ones was that kids were leaving school in year 7 or 8 because at the end of the day they saw that they were going to be unemployed. Basically, if they could leave school at year 7 or 8 and go onto unemployment benefits or onto CDEP, that is where they were going to be. Their decision was reinforced by the fact that they did not see lots of people in employment.

We thought that, if we could actually run a program that exposed these kids at levels 7, 8, 9 and 10 to the opportunities, they could actually see the tangible links between education and the employment opportunities locally available. Also, if we started exposing them to and linking them with employers—that is, actually meeting employers—so they could recognise that this is where they could be involved in employment as part of their educational process, that would then encourage young kids to stay in school. We started the program at the beginning of last year. We had 42 students. Against the normal trend of 36 per cent retention rate of Indigenous kids, all 42 of those kids actually stayed in school. I think nearly all of those kids have returned to education this year.

**CHAIR**—Let us talk about that. That is pretty impressive. What do you think a couple of the keys to that outcome were?

**Mr Appo**—Part of it is having industry involvement and not just saying to the kids, ‘You can do this and you can do that.’ We were able to utilise the networks that we actually had with business and industry and take the kids to the business and industry. They got to talk to and ask questions of line managers, store owners and business owners. For them it demystified the whole process. For them, the Aboriginal community sits in this one sector of the community and then business and industry is right over in another place and it is very distant. So we demystified it with that.

We have also done things like trying to work with the kids to define career path options and talking to them about what sorts of processes and levels of education they would require to get into the sorts of industry sectors that they are actually dealing with. Obviously, the big one at the moment is to show them that you do not have to go to Melbourne for the jobs. You do not have to wait for that job to turn up in a government department or in the local coop or whatever. There are jobs right here and now that you can actually be involved in.

**CHAIR**—Can I talk to you briefly about the Shepparton area. There is one other community there called Mooroopna. Can I get a general picture of Indigenous employment and then perhaps hear a couple of positive things that are happening? In terms of the bigger companies—the main ones that are recognised all over Australia, because Shepparton is the reasonably sized city as far as regional cities go—can you give me a picture about employment in those corporates, for want of a better word, and then the general picture of Indigenous employment through the whole base of industry and the public sector throughout Shepparton? Can you give me a picture of that? What do you know and what can you tell us?

**Mr Appo**—What I can tell you is that Indigenous employment in Shepparton, especially in the private sector, is still very much at the early stages. That is basically because it was only three years ago that Ganbina took a focus into this area. I think we are one of the few organisations, and our programs are some of the few programs, that are actually taking the emphasis away from just putting people into jobs. It is about career paths and linking to that private sector area.

It is also, I suppose, because of the relationships of Ganbina and the programs that we are running. We have strong tangible relationships with business and industry. That includes a lot of that corporate sector that you are referring to. What we have been able to do is leverage off a lot of goodwill and also the intent of these organisations to be involved with Indigenous



employment. That intent is not just social responsibility. In many cases for these industries it is about their own livelihoods. Shepparton has a general unemployment rate of less than five per cent. So, for a lot of these companies, not having skilled labour means that they have plant equipment that is sitting vacant and they cannot utilise it.

**CHAIR**—They cannot get people?

**Mr Appo**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—Skilled people?

**Mr Appo**—Certainly, we have been able to come to them and say: ‘Look, the Indigenous community here has an unemployment rate of about 80 per cent. Whilst we do not have the immediate skills to translate those’—

**CHAIR**—Do you think it is 80 per cent?

**Mr Appo**—I do not ‘think’ it is; we actually know it is.

**CHAIR**—You know that we heard this morning about the government statistics.

**Mr Appo**—One of the things we found was exactly the same thing: how do you actually address an issue if you do not know what it is? So we went along the traditional lines of asking various levels of government and different areas and no-one had the figures or wanted to look into those figures. So we commissioned our own reports with Melbourne university. We have done two along those lines that actually identify that, yes, the Indigenous unemployment rate in Shepparton is around 80 per cent. That is dependant upon whether you include CDEP as being unemployed or employed.

**CHAIR**—A document in front of me now talks about major employers in what I think they call ‘A snapshot of the Eureka walkabout survey’. I do not see any Indigenous employees in any of the major companies in that area.

**Mr Appo**—Certainly. And that is a case of actually engaging those—

**CHAIR**—Where are the Indigenous jobs? Where are they found in Shepparton?

**Mr Appo**—You cannot exclude some of the large corporations. There is SPC—

**CHAIR**—I was wondering about the SPC; that is quite famous.

**Mr Appo**—It is SPC Ardmona, which is now owned by Coke, there is Campbell Soup—

**CHAIR**—Can you give us a picture of what percentage might be at SPC, for example?

**Mr Appo**—It is very hard to judge, because a lot of the corporations do not actually take it on board. They do not actually employ by Indigenous numbers. About three years ago we found that there were only about 30 Indigenous people working in the private sector.

**CHAIR**—That is a good figure.

**Mr Appo**—That is three years ago. Given the fact that the latest program placed 80, now there are probably 100.

**CHAIR**—Which you helped place?

**Mr Appo**—Yes, that is right. But we are also working with—and the Eureka Project that you referred to identified the organisations—Coles-Myer, ANZ Bank—

**CHAIR**—It is in there.

**Mr Appo**—and Big W. They are all currently sitting around the table and looking at how they can be involved in being responsible for recruiting Indigenous people.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Forgive me for my absence and if you have already covered this area. One of the recurring themes in our discussions, wherever we go, is the level of job readiness and the reasons for people not being job ready: education levels, literacy, numeracy and a whole range of things. I think I am aware that in the Ladders program, for argument's sake, there were a number of people who showed an interest in it but were not able to participate for those sorts of reasons. What happens to those people in your opinion? And in not just Ladders but any program where they show the initiative but they are not able to participate, for whatever reason. Where do they go? Is there or should there be a need for some re-direction?

**Mr Appo**—I think it is a very hard question to answer in a simplistic form. In many of the cases, what we found was that we were dealing with a number of individuals who were contracted to other services but were quite unaware of the services that they were able to access through those organisations. When we made the decision that we could not continue to operate the Ladders program and utilise the funding available in the business sense, we continued to operate with the clients that we had on board. Let us say that there were something like 15 or 20 clients. We have continued to work with and support them and have placed some of those clients into employment. That is also a responsibility that we have as an Indigenous organisation whereas, if someone else has a contract and they lose that contract, they shut the door and there is no responsibility because they are not actually answerable to the community as such.

Your question is about what needs to be done to service the individuals, and the answer is the word itself: they should be serviced. The number of young people we have come across who are just unaware that they can access a service from a provider is quite astronomical. There have been a number of cases where we have worked with individuals and placed them in employment, and the first contact we have from any sort of service provider is to ask us where we have placed them so they can put in a claim, and that sort of thing.

When we look at the depth of that issue, the first thing is to have the individual serviced properly. The other side of it is to look outside the mere funding constraints where individuals

are serviced in one sort of service element. There needs to be a broader awareness of what requirements individuals have. Take, for example, when a kid leaves education. Certainly there is funding into the education sector, and the schools work with the kids in education. We have developed and also changed the Ladders program to pick up some of these kids, in terms of its new format. I reiterate that we do not receive any government funding of any sort. The next level of support for these young people is when they become unemployed or on the dole and are termed as 'You are on the rocky road.'

One of the major stratagems Ganbina has tried to address is: why aren't we doing more to stop these kids from entering that environment where they start picking up the baggage of damaged goods? The major limitation is that education funds education and employment funds unemployment.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—And what about in the middle?

**Mr Appo**—Yes. It is a little bit like: we will work with the individual, but we have to wait until they crash and burn. It is about this sort of thing. Why aren't we able to bridge those elements so that we are able to manipulate and use those positive jumping off points for individuals?

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Is that where you see this Jobs 4U2 type program coming in?

**Mr Appo**—The Jobs 4U2 is about linking young people up in terms of employment opportunities. Part of it also is, when they get to year 10, linking them and starting to engage them in part-time employment. This where the Coles Myers, the Big Ws, the Maccas and those sorts of places come in, as part of that. We have got a second stage Ladders program which looks at how we support those kids as they finish years 11 and 12 and also those who are under 25 and are doing some training. We are looking at how, when they have finished their training, we can link them up to the employers that we are dealing with, so that they do not become disillusioned by the system and by their own success. When they finish year 12, kids are on a buzz. If they finish a course, they are on a high: 'Look what I've done. The world should open up for me.' If they do not have those relationships and those links, it is very difficult. Unfortunately, employment is still not what you know but who you know.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—And then you have got the issue of the years 9 and 10, who do not actually get that far.

**Mr Appo**—And that is why Jobs 4U2 is trying to engage those kids as early as seven and eight. It is saying, to some extent, 'You can dream, but realise that these dreams are only possible if you are able to do this.' We try to work with those young kids at that level but also engage their family as part of the resource and support—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Have you heard of the Beacon Foundation?

**Mr Appo**—Yes, I have. I know Scott Harris quite well.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I only bring it up because they recently launched—in fact, the Governor-General launched it—a Beacon program, in my electorate in Canberra, with a

consortium of five high schools joining together. They have never done it quite that big before. I have to say that I was fairly impressed with what they are attempting to do. For me it was a really good illustration of the absolute necessity of the private sector.

**Mr Appo**—That is the ‘no dole’ ethos—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Yes. All of these things we talk about will not work to the extent they can unless you have that private sector, or, in Canberra’s case, the public sector as well—government agencies, But you have to have that employer connection. That is what you are trying to establish.

**Mr Appo**—That is very much what we have found. You can tell anyone anything but if you cannot deliver on what you are trying to sell them it becomes a hollow promise. The traditional method of Indigenous training and Indigenous employment has all been about saying, ‘Do this training or do this and you’ll get a job,’ and all that has actually succeeded in is winning a tick for the provider or the funding body. It has not ended up providing anything tangible for the individual. We have started to see what we term as disenchanting job seekers, who are not even looking for work because they have been through this process so many times. At the other end, if you say, ‘If you can do this, this and this, here’s the employer that can give you the job,’ suddenly there are real, tangible links for the individual. It helps a young person or an individual move away from the fact that they might not have anyone within their family or their peer network that is working. Suddenly they know they can be the one that can break out because here is this real, positive, tangible way.

**CHAIR**—Jobs 4U2 are jointly funded by Telstra, AMP, Social Ventures Australia, VicHealth and Coles Myer. So there is that level of support there. I think you gave us a really optimistic picture of some of that. There were some positive things occurring and some outcomes within Shepparton, Mooroopna et cetera. Is that fair?

**Mr Appo**—Yes, I would say there is certainly a huge amount of optimism there. Jobs 4U2 have 42 kids, along with their families, who have seen the benefit of staying in education, and staying for some purpose, not just for the sake of being there. That is probably supported by the fact that they have seen over the last three years an extra 100 or so individuals who have gone into the private sector. So this whole reality that you can get a job with Big W, the local plumber, SPC Ardmona—

**CHAIR**—You would still say that there is a long way to go to get to that Victorian 75 per cent retention rate. But it is a small or moderate step in the right direction. How would we put it?

**Mr Atkinson**—I grew up in the area around Shepparton-Mooroopna. I am 43 years of age. Over that period of time I have been through the CES days and the numerous programs that have occurred along the way. It has not been until now that I have been able to say that we are really starting to make an impact. It has been because of that relationship we are starting to establish with the local businesses. I suppose it is because of the common ground and the common interest that Jobs 4U2 is a success. We are not looking for welfare; we want to make some real inroads and make the impacts that need to be made to bring down this high unemployment figure. It is good and it is a breath of fresh air to be able to make those links with local businesses like John Corboy’s and everyone else’s.

**CHAIR**—Has it been in the last 12 or 18 months or so that you have felt—

**Mr Atkinson**—It has been for a number of years.

**Mr Appo**—I think it has built steadily over the last three years. How big is that step?

**CHAIR**—That was my question. It is very hard for me to say, but I remember going into one of your high schools about three or four years ago and listening to some of the aspirations. It is at least encouraging for me to hear that there has been some progress.

**Mr Appo**—That is probably what the reality is: there has been progress, but there is still a long way to go at both ends of the spectrum. One is that we need to continue to work in the unemployed area, but also, if we are doing work there but not addressing the amount of young people who are still continuing to leave school early and leave training halfway through, if we are not even meeting that same need, we are still not making any inroads.

**Mr Atkinson**—No, we would not be making any impact.

**Mr Appo**—We need to be addressing both areas at the same time. In relation to a lot of the positive momentum when we get it up, if we can keep building that momentum, the quicker we will close that gap. It will be an exponential sort of close rather than relating to time lines. There are things though that can make it a lot easier for us to do that.

**CHAIR**—I will leave you with this thought. It is nice to think that there has been some progress. As is on the public record, when Rio Tinto were with us they said that they had I think roughly 3½ thousand or hypothetically 3½ thousand—we won't get into specifics—Indigenous people employed in the mining industry. They said that was not sustainable in itself. They are thinking in terms of 10,000 people, once it starts to, and I think the words they used were, 'sustain itself'. So it starts from small beginnings. We all need that bit of encouragement to go to the next step.

**Mr Appo**—Success for our community—and I think Neville would bear this out—is that we do not think we will be successful until we have Indigenous employment representative of wider employment, and that means not just people employed across a whole number of industries but representatives at the various levels within those industries as well. I think that is achievable.

**CHAIR**—We have to believe that, and I think there are some signs that we can do it but it is a way to go. Gentlemen, would you like to add anything before I wind up this session?

**Mr Appo**—If there is anything that needs to be added, it is to emphasise the fact that we need to be looking at where the grey areas are, where we are missing those tangible links. That is one of the things I was talking about to you, Annette. There is support for kids in education, but we do not pick them up until they are unemployed. We need to be looking at those sorts of things. Similarly, we need to be looking at communities. Even though Shepparton is a large community, it is still a community. There is a limited amount of resources that we can draw upon. A scattergun approach to deal with Indigenous employment—and by that I mean funding a number of agencies to go and do a whole lot of different things, where there is a lot of crossover and similar things—creates a huge amount of confusion both for the individuals within the

community and for the employer groups we are dealing with. If we are serious about changing the situation, we need to be more concentrated and defined in how we work forward. The last thing we can afford is for individuals being confused and dropping out of the process. Similarly, we cannot afford to have 15 people all knocking on the door of business and industry saying, 'Take my person, take my person,' so they withdraw from the process. That is the very reality that we are tripping over.

**CHAIR**—Is that a Job Network type thing?

**Mr Appo**—It is a whole range. You have the Job Networks, the likes of us and other small programs that are put up for six or 12 months. For example, someone says that it is a good idea, so we will put up our hand and run something like that, or someone thinks that might be a good thing to be involved in, so we will fund something into that area. It can become a quagmire of service provision rather than—

**Mr Atkinson**—It is a missed target.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—But we also need to recognise the good stuff that you are doing, and that is a point too.

**CHAIR**—Gentlemen, we need to draw this session to a close. Thank you for your time today.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Thank you very much. It has been lovely to meet you.

**Mr Atkinson**—Thank you.

[3.51 pm]

**BROWN, Ms Leah Nicole, Private capacity**

**SCUTT, Dr Jocelyne Annette, Barrister and Human Rights Lawyer**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. We do not ask for evidence under oath, but we remind you that these are legal proceedings of the parliament. Who would like to lead?

**Dr Scutt**—Perhaps Leah could.

**CHAIR**—In what capacity are you appearing before the committee today?

**Ms Brown**—I am appearing in my capacity as a recipient of a national Indigenous cadetship.

**Dr Scutt**—The submission I put in relates to my position as Anti-Discrimination Commissioner for Tasmania and the cadetship that Leah Brown has with the commission, which she commenced when I was the commissioner.

**CHAIR**—Would one or both of you like to give us a brief statement or add to your submission?

**Dr Scutt**—If I could, I would like to make some remarks that are not specific to the submission I made but lead from it, because I was very interested in the submissions that were being made by the people who gave evidence earlier. They were talking about people without education. A lot of people without education were gaining education in order to get jobs. I think it is important to recognise that those who do have education are very often prevented from having jobs because of discrimination. I would like to give you a couple of examples. It seems to me that often there is an attitude that if we are talking about Indigenous people's employment we are talking about how gracious we are going to be or how generous in giving Indigenous people jobs and not acknowledging and recognising the skills that Indigenous people have and that they very often have skills over and above the European education that they have.

I have done work in the Northern Territory in this regard, both in education and employment, and also I have run cases on discrimination. I would like to refer to one of them—Dr Wayne Atkinson. Dr Atkinson, who had an article in the *Age* yesterday, was my client. He had not secured a job in Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and believed he had been discriminated against. He had BA (Honours) and is an elder of the Yorta Yorta and therefore had Indigenous cultural heritage experience and knowledge. His BA (Honours) was in the field of Indigenous cultural experience and knowledge and so on, and he was enrolled in a master's degree and then subsequently a doctorate, which he now has. The person who got the job over and above him was a non-Indigenous person from another country who had an MA, which was really just the equivalent of a BA (Honours), and whose experience did not entail any Australian Indigenous cultural heritage and knowledge equivalent to Dr Atkinson's—and it was for an Australian Indigenous cultural heritage position within the department. It seemed to me and my colleague, the solicitor who was representing Dr Atkinson, that no value had been placed on the Indigenous cultural heritage that Dr Atkinson had. If you are an elder in your Indigenous group, there is a huge expertise that goes with that.

To come to the Northern Territory. I was involved in education there. I ran a case in Tennant Creek where the Indigenous people were absolutely determined that their children should get a European education. But they also knew that within the education system that was presented to them it was very difficult for the Indigenous children, because there was no valuing of their own cultural heritage. They want a two-way education—and I know you will have come across that—particularly in the Northern Territory and Queensland. Their position was that you could not learn within a heritage or a culture that was different from your own if you did not have a firm grounding in your own cultural heritage.

The other aspect of this, however, is this. At school when we did science we would dissect a rabbit, look at a rat's brain and so forth. If you are doing Indigenous biology, you are out there in the bush looking at goannas in their habitat. It seemed to me that from a science point of view you would learn a lot more science doing that than doing what we were doing in the laboratory. Yet, if one talks about this in lots of educational settings, there is a pooh-poohing of the notion of bush tucker. They say: 'That's bush tucker. It's got nothing to do with science.' As I said, it is a real grounding in science, it is one that is valuable and it is one that is not given any acknowledgment.

Finally, I would say in my work as a lawyer I have come across so many good women particularly—and there are fellows out there too—who have done law: Irene Watson in South Australia, Marie Andrews here in Victoria, Toni and Terri Janke in New South Wales and Larissa Behrendt, who is now a professor at the University of Technology, Sydney. One thing Irene Watson said is really important. She said she wanted to practise her law from the perspective of her Indigenous heritage, and that desire has to be given an affirmation. I am led finally to the words of Mary Gaudron, who as you know was the first woman judge on the High Court, after many years of no women at all. She said that, when she first went to law school, she and her cohort believed that they should just do law in the same way as the blokes did it and that that was what you did. She had over time come to recognise that it was important to affirm that the way women might do law may have some difference.

That is an affirmation also of what Irene Watson said: if you have a different cultural or social background and understanding, that needs to be incorporated into our culture and be recognised and acknowledged as having a value. There should be that approach rather than the approach of, as I said at the outset, thinking, 'We'd better give Indigenous people a few jobs.' Leah Brown brought to the Anti-Discrimination Commission her own experience and understanding, and that was value added for us. We were giving, I guess, to Leah by having the cadetship for her but we were certainly gaining by having Leah at the commission. We could not have survived without Leah coming at the end of every university year to pick up claims.

**CHAIR**—I think that is very wise, but I need to be really clear. You are not saying that the education is not valuable for people looking for a job but that it is very important that the existing education within that person is acknowledged and respected. In other words, you are saying that the two can work together.

**Dr Scutt**—Absolutely.

**CHAIR**—You have to acknowledge that former and first part, which is the basic of that person's being. Is that fair?



**Dr Scutt**—That is exactly what I would say.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for making that point. It is something that I needed to get into this thick skull of mine as well.

**Dr Scutt**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Should I invite Leah to say a couple of words? Leah, can you give us a few minutes of how you see it? You might include the Indigenous cadet scheme and some other issues. But do that in your own way and in your own time. Can we just have a listen?

**Ms Brown**—Yes, that is fine. I guess I should begin by saying that I concur with the submission Dr Scutt has put forth. Perhaps it would be best if I went through what I saw as the benefits for me, the Aboriginal community here and the Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, if that is pleasing to the committee.

I have spent the last five years of my summer holidays with the Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner under the initiative and guidance of Dr Jocelyne Scutt and also the project policy officer, Ms Carol Jackson, from the Office of Aboriginal Affairs. As I have indicated before, there have been a number of benefits to me, to the community and to the office. I believe they are all testament to the fact that the NICP schemes should continue and should, in fact, be expanded to ensure Indigenous success in the workplace in future.

For me, the benefits of my five-year term are simply things that could not have been achieved without the cadetship. The main benefit would have to be the practical work experience I have gained. Most students who study law gain cadetships in the summer through the assistance of family and friends who have been involved in the legal profession. Unfortunately, coming from an Aboriginal family with a low socioeconomic background, I have not had any involvement in the legal profession and so did not have those opportunities. The cadetship, however, made up for this and I would submit that the experience I gained was over and above that of many of my fellow students. I have had real, hands-on experience working with the Anti-Discrimination Act, dealing with comprehensive caseloads and assisting in the conciliation of complaints.

I also now have more of an opportunity to gain full-time employment at the completion of my studies, because of the sheer value of the practical work experience I have had. For example, I have been offered part-time employment with the Department of Tourism, Parks, Heritage and the Arts for the state government, working on new heritage legislation.

Another benefit for me from the cadetship is that it has allowed me to concentrate on my studies and other Aboriginal culture activities. At present I dedicate a great deal of time to studying and also with any spare time I have I participate in community and family activities. Unfortunately, as I am sure you are aware, that costs of university have increased and it costs a great deal going here, there and everywhere to do things for the community. Without the assistance of the cadetship, I would certainly have to have found part-time work, and I believe it would have compromised my study.

As to the benefits for the community, I guess they now have someone they can speak to at the Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner in what can be a very traumatic time. I guess they also now have another role model. Ultimately, there are very few Tasmanian Aboriginal lawyers, as I am sure you can understand. I believe I am the only Aboriginal person studying law and have been for quite some time.

In addition to these benefits, I spoke to a number of colleagues at my work and asked what they thought were the benefits of having me in the workplace. They indicated that there was a great deal of two-way education, as Dr Scutt indicated in her submission. They also said that it helped to eliminate a number of negative stereotypes presented in the community at large and that it came to show them that Indigenous people could have a valued place in the workplace.

In conclusion, it has been very positive for me. The doors are certainly open for opportunities when before they were pretty much shut. It would be my submission to the committee that more Commonwealth government funding be spent on actively recruiting Indigenous people at the matriculation level who would be interested in studying at university or TAFE and supporting them so that they have the same wonderful opportunities that I have. That is what I have to say.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, Leah, for a wonderful presentation. Annette Ellis is going to ask some questions.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Hello Leah. I am the federal member for Canberra. First of all, I want to congratulate you on your submission. Did I hear you say that you were the only young Indigenous person studying law in Tasmania?

**Ms Brown**—Yes.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Are you still in your studies now? Where are you up to?

**Ms Brown**—I am in my final year.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—And you are still doing the cadet process through the commission?

**Ms Brown**—Yes.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Does that stay with you until you have finished your degree?

**Ms Brown**—Yes, it will. In fact, following my completion of my degree at the end of this year, I do have to do six months of the legal practice course before I can be admitted. It is my understanding that the cadetship will also cover me during that period as well.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Is this the only cadetship of its kind that has occurred in Tasmania?

**Dr Scutt**—It was the first one.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Have there been any subsequent ones?

**Dr Scutt**—Not to my knowledge.

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**Ms Brown**—I think Jocelyn is correct. I know that I am the only law one. I do know that they have had other cadetships but in other areas, not in the justice department.

**Dr Scutt**—Leah was the first one in the Public Service in Tasmania. I should here pay tribute to Carol Jackson, whom Leah recognised also. She is within the Office of Aboriginal/Indigenous Affairs. She worked really hard to get the scheme going. She got a lot of support for this cadetship in the commission.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—In all of our discussions in this inquiry when we have talked about education, the primary issue has been that we are constantly facing the issue of lack of appropriate education to get people from the Indigenous community into employment at that entry level. You are actually both saying that there is another end of the scale, where you are getting well qualified people. We had the National Tertiary Education Union here this morning. They were speaking very positively about the increase in the number of people getting employed through the university sector, for argument's sake, but they were also talking about the need to have those higher level positions coming through as well. I have to say that I find it surprising and disappointing that at one end we need people to get a better education, primarily, and at the other we have people qualifying who are running into brick walls in getting those opportunities.

**Dr Scutt**—That is right. Dr Wayne Atkinson, whom I spoke about originally—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Yes, I was going to ask you what happened to his case. Is it complete?

**Dr Scutt**—It is complete. I have to confess that we did not win. It was one of the very few cases I have not won. We would have appealed if there had been money to appeal, because, in my own view, the tribunal missed a number of significant points. He was going for a clerk class 4 position.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Good heavens!

**Dr Scutt**—Yes, it is a very modest position. Fortunately, I see from the article yesterday in the *Age* that he is now teaching at the University of Melbourne. So they have actually acknowledged his expertise, knowledge and so on.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Absolutely. So he is teaching at Melbourne university but he could not get a clerk class 4 position?

**Dr Scutt**—Yes. What was interesting too was that that was the first case that was ever run at that level. When you do discrimination, you see that the cases that get through are cases where Indigenous people have been prevented from getting access to services. For example, they cannot get into a restaurant or pub and so on. Our system seems to tolerate the notion that Indigenous people should be able to fight to get into a pub or a restaurant. But the notion that Indigenous people should have the right to fight to get higher-level positions is really foreign to the antidiscrimination system.

**CHAIR**—It is really interesting.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Yes, exactly.

**Dr Scutt**—I think it is really instructive.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Leah, just in finishing off my discussion with you, can I thank you and say that, as far as I am concerned and I am sure as far as Barry is concerned, we will be interested to consider a bit more in our deliberations, I am sure, the future of the Indigenous cadet scheme. That is just within the considerations of this committee. It has been valuable to talk to you and have your experience come before us. Thank you.

**Ms Brown**—That is okay.

**CHAIR**—I can only support what Annette has said. I really appreciate your time today. Stay with us—I have a couple of formalities to go through, and I just want to ask Dr Scutt an additional question. Leah, you could answer this as well. Is there anything you would like to see added to or slightly improved in the cadet scheme? Are we seeing people not quite getting the opportunity?

**Dr Scutt**—I think the funding is probably restricted. You see, the commission had very little funding, and we were really fortunate to get Leah because we only had to pay half of whatever the component was. The other half was paid by ATSIC—that is my understanding. It is really important that in order to enable these schemes to continue and go forward, there has to be funding from both sources. It is important from the Indigenous person's point of view, too, to know that their position has the Indigenous component of funding as well as the non-Indigenous component from the straight public sector.

The other point I would like to make is that we sometimes say, 'Isn't it wonderful that we've got all these Indigenous people going through university and getting their qualifications,' but then—as the point has been made here—they have to get a job at the proper level. There has to be some acknowledgment that there needs to be support. It is no good just putting an Indigenous person somewhere and then leaving them. I say that from the point of view of not just the Indigenous person but the organisation they are going to work with. As Leah said, at the commission we learnt pretty smartly that there are a lot of assumptions made about Indigenous people that are very negative. Leah put an end to every single one of them. Leah diligently turned up every morning well before the appointed time and was diligently working away at her desk. She would engage in discussion with us but then she would get back to work. As I have said, we would not have survived without her, because we had an overwhelming load of claims, because we had only just been established. Every time it was time for Leah to come in, we would all be saying, 'Isn't it wonderful Leah's coming? She can now take on this load of claims.' And she took on a true component of claims that she worked on in the same way as all of us did, and she contributed in a really solid way. So we benefited hugely from having her there. It would be a very great pity if this scheme did not get the funding that it got through ATSIC plus additional funding.

**CHAIR**—Leah, did you want to add anything to that?

**Ms Brown**—I would agree with what Dr Scutt just said, but I would also emphasise what I said before: it is very important at the matriculation level that someone is there to guide students

and say, 'This is available to you,' so that they do consider going to university. It would certainly make the choices a lot easier, I believe.

**Dr Scutt**—I could not help but note that in the estimates committee Senator Evans raised the issue of employment within the Office of Aboriginal Affairs that has replaced ATSIC. His concerns were that the numbers of Indigenous people have gone down in that office. If that is correct, there does need to be something done to ensure that that attrition halts, because the only way that we are going to get Indigenous people working in other areas in the Public Service is to give them a fair go in the office that is supposed to represent Aboriginal people. If they are not hanging on to employment in their office then I think we are going to have trouble having them hang on to employment in other areas. They have the greatest amount of expertise in Indigenous knowledge, understanding and so on. We should be making sure that our whole Public Service benefits and, as was raised, the private sector too—but particularly within the areas where they have experts like Dr Wayne Atkinson.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It was interesting earlier today when we had three councils here. The City of Melbourne actually explained to us that they had sought exemption from the Victorian discrimination office when they were advertising particular positions in their workforce. When I asked why, they said it was because they particularly wanted Indigenous people to go into particular jobs. I think there were three positions that were referred to, and they went to the trouble to do it to ensure that they could get that expertise in the jobs that they were filling for all the right reasons in terms of their employment strategy. So it was interesting to see that they had gone to that trouble. But they had to get the exemption to do so because of the way they advertised.

**Dr Scutt**—That is right. I think that means you have to address your mind to what you really want. That is a healthy thing to have to think about. What are the components of this job that are absolutely essential and specific to it? You would need to do it from the other point of view, too. When Indigenous people are not getting jobs, it is necessary to look at the job description and ask whether the job description in an unstated way is actually excluding Indigenous people, because that is what was happening with Wayne Atkinson.

**CHAIR**—Ladies, it has been a real pleasure this afternoon. Thank you Dr Jocelyne Scutt and Leah Brown.

**Ms Brown**—That is fine.

**CHAIR**—And thank you, Annette Ellis, Hansard and the secretariat staff. All the best.

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

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

**Subcommittee adjourned at 4.16 pm**