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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Indigenous employment

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS
Monday, 29 May 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, Mr Garrett, Mr Laming, Dr Lawrence, Mrs Vale, 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.

WITNESSES

HOSKING, Ms Ngaire, Group Manager, Evaluation, Australian Public Service Commission 1

**PAGE, Ms Clare, Group Manager, Better Practice Group, Australian Public Service
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TACY, Ms Lynne, Deputy Commissioner, Australian Public Service Commission..... 1

Committee met at 11.20 am**HOSKING, Ms Ngaire, Group Manager, Evaluation, Australian Public Service Commission****PAGE, Ms Clare, Group Manager, Better Practice Group, Australian Public Service Commission****TACY, Ms Lynne, Deputy Commissioner, Australian Public Service Commission**

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into Indigenous employment. As you know, we are seeking positive outcomes and best practice around Australia to recommend to the government practical steps to improve the outcomes for Indigenous people. I particularly welcome representatives of the Australian Public Service Commission, and. I invite you to address the committee.

Ms Tacy—Thank you for the opportunity of appearing this morning. I pass on the apologies of Lynelle Briggs, who is on leave at the moment and who, otherwise, would have been here herself. We are very pleased to be here. Indigenous employment is a real priority for us in the commission. Our responsibility is promoting best practice and monitoring trends in the Commonwealth sector. We have provided the committee with a written submission, so I will not go through the material in that. I would rather provide an update on things that have been happening since.

To clarify our role in this area, as a central agency, our role is really to promote the APS values and better practice employment approaches in the APS and particularly in this area with work practices around respect and diversity—practices that are inclusive, supported, flexible and free from discrimination. As part of that role, in conjunction with a number of agencies, we have developed a five-part strategy called the APS Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees which is described in our written submission. A key catalyst for us to do that was the fall in the numbers of Indigenous employees in the APS. That has really come through strongly in our regular *State of the service report*.

The strategy, as you will see from our submission, is really a framework for individual agencies, both individually and collectively, to get their houses in order in this area. We in the commission are not responsible for large-scale education or employment programs—that responsibility rests with agencies—but we focus on very targeted interventions and promotion and facilitation of better practice. The key initiatives making up the strategy are spelt out in the submission. There are three elements around pathways to employment, supporting employees and supporting employers, that are really designed to help people become more aware of jobs in the APS, to make us be seen in the Indigenous community as a really valid career choice and then to assist people to compete for those jobs on merit. We are also trying to provide a more flexible and supportive work environment for all employees.

Just a few things that have happened since the written submission: we have undertaken a survey of all Indigenous employees in the APS to get a better handle on their views of APS employment. The report was launched last week by Minister Andrews, in his capacity as

Minister assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service. We have provided copies of the survey report to the committee. That report reveals some very positive features in the APS in relation to Indigenous employment. For example, job satisfaction rates were quite high—in fact, higher than those for APS employees overall. There was a strong focus on good working relationships, the chance to make a difference to Indigenous Australians and flexible working arrangements. We found that they welcome the opportunities we provide for skills development.

We find in the results also a very high level of pride of respondents working in the APS. They report good things about the majority of their colleagues working sensitively and effectively and about their supervisors in terms of managing people. We find that most respondents are also quite satisfied with the support they get in meeting their cultural and community obligations. So they are all quite positive aspects and positive in relation to learning and development.

We are trying to replicate more broadly those good practice developments coming out of the survey, but the survey also identifies a number of challenges, and we are focusing on those now as some key areas for improvement. For example, a worrying thing in the survey is reports of bullying, harassment and discrimination in the workplace—still from a minority of employees, but when you compare this with the results we get from our *State of the service report* for all employees, the rates are a bit higher for Indigenous Australians.

There are some issues with people saying that they might be looking at leaving the service, around some specific issues to do with job satisfaction, feeling undervalued, poor management or a lack of workplace support—again in the minority but something that we need to look at. There is a strong feeling too that agencies could be doing more to support the employment, development and promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

As part of the strategy to address those sorts of issues, we launched two booklets last week. One is *Getting a job* and the other is *Not just a job*. These are aimed at assisting us in our attraction strategy—to make us seem a good choice for employment, as I said before. We have provided advice—very simplified advice—on how to get a job in the APS and also a series of case studies, in *Not just a job*, of Indigenous people in the APS across a whole range of different work environments.

CHAIR—Can I just intrude there. Perhaps you could just sum up with a couple of points. There will be an opportunity later, if there is anything we overlook in our questions. That might give us a chance to get into it.

Ms Tacy—There were only two other points I was going to make. One was just to note that we have introduced a new program of career development workshops, called ‘Career trek’, which we are running at the moment, and also we have set up an Indigenous capability fund for medium and small agencies to be able to access and run more programs of their own. Finally, I wanted to mention the emphasis that we put in our submission about partnerships. We work with a whole range of groups in this area. I will hand back to you now.

CHAIR—Thank you. I could have just waited patiently, couldn’t I? What percentage of Indigenous Australians do we have in the Public Service now?

Ms Tacy—At July 2002 the figure was 2.2 per cent.

CHAIR—What number is that approximately?

Ms Tacy—1,770.

Ms Hosking—It is about 2,800. I think you are thinking of the response rate to the survey.

Ms Tacy—Yes.

CHAIR—What is the emerging trend?

Ms Tacy—It is a decline. It has been a decline. Ngaire can provide more details. The high point, I think, was in 1997-98, with a representation rate of 2.7 per cent. It has fluctuated a little bit since then, but overall it is a decline.

CHAIR—In your submission you talk about high separation rates—and I think you touched on it earlier too. Can we talk a little bit about that and just repeat a couple of the points? Perhaps your survey indicated a couple of reasons why the high separation rates are there. What is the ratio?

Ms Hosking—It has fluctuated a little bit, but over the last 10 years there definitely has been a trend to an increasing separation rate. It has gone from Aboriginal people making up about 2.3 per cent of all separations in 1995-96 to 4.3 per cent in 2004-05. We did use the survey to explore that issue. Obviously, it is not the perfect way to do it because we are not talking to people who have actually left—we are talking to existing APS employees. We approached it in two ways. We asked people whether they intended to leave the APS in the next three years and we explored the reasons for that if they answered yes. We also looked at people who had previously left the APS and had come back. We asked them about why they had actually left the APS.

In the first category we found that Aboriginal people were less likely than non-Indigenous people to say they intended to stay in the APS for the next three years. Most of the difference, though, was actually in the 'not sure' group. It did seem there was quite a potential to influence that group. They had not yet made a definite decision. The people who had made a definite decision were quite similar to non-Indigenous rates.

As to the types of issues they were mentioning, the most commonly reported reason was to seek new job opportunities, which is quite a positive one. The other reasons, though, were more related to issues of job satisfaction and management, and dissatisfaction with some of those areas. While job satisfaction rates overall were very high, for the group that actually intended to leave they were actually relatively low. It was very similar for the people who had left the APS and had come back. The only difference in the factors that they said had prompted them leaving in the first place was that they put more emphasis on family issues. It sounded like they had left, for example, to raise children or look after elderly parents and so forth and then come back.

Mr LAMING—I have just two points. You said they had moved from the mid-twos to the mid-fours as far as percentage of total separations. That figure, of course, is dependent on the total number of separations, the denominator of which can change. It also really hides movement within a very small group. Where you are talking about a very small group like the Indigenous

proportion of the total, you really should be reporting the number of separations per 100 Indigenous employees. It would be far more—

Ms Hosking—Perhaps I can clarify that. We do report it in two different ways in the report. The one that I mentioned to you is actually the proportion of all separations. By comparing the percentage in all separations to the percentage in all employees, you get a better feeling of whether it is underrepresented or overrepresented. There is another way of looking at it, which is the percentage of all Indigenous people that have left in the year. We then compare that to the percentage of all APS employees generally in the year. In that one we also find higher rates of separation amongst the Indigenous employees. Over the last year around eight per cent for the APS broadly had separated in the year. For Indigenous people it was around 15 per cent. That 15 per cent was a little misleading because it included 48 people who had separated from the APS but only because of a machinery of government change which placed them still in Commonwealth employment outside. When we factored that in, it was around 13.5 per cent.

Dr LAWRENCE—Obviously, that trend has been around for a while—the decline in numbers or the proportion. It probably results from a change of policy, but we will not go into that. Clearly your objective now is to try to increase the numbers. Are you looking at models anywhere else around the world where performance is rather better with Indigenous employment—for instance, New Zealand and Canada?

Ms Page—As part of putting our strategy together, we did look at other jurisdictions within Australia and also New Zealand, especially around pathways to employment. They have a tighter legislative base in terms of their ability to be able to employ Indigenous New Zealand people. But we certainly looked at them and continue to look at what is happening in other places in terms of informing the sort of material we are developing.

Dr LAWRENCE—One of the things that strikes me in all of this is that, in order to get Indigenous people, particularly in rural and regional areas where, on the face of it, the starting point of skills and knowledge may be deficient on the merit base, really the Public Service needs to be proactive in seeking out people, training them and getting them involved. How successfully are government departments and agencies doing that at the moment, do you think?

Ms Page—At the moment we are piloting a school-to-work program. We started that last year in Brisbane and we are looking to roll it out nationally. We are also rolling out a traineeship program, which we piloted last year in Canberra, to bring school leavers into the APS. We know there is increasingly an emphasis on a graduate workforce and graduate qualifications, so we are trying to explore pathways to employment for people at the APS1-2 level. We are talking to agencies about considering regional and rural locations when they are looking at partnering with us and taking trainees. Also, we do a lot of work with ICC partner agencies. We are about to start a body of work with them on workforce planning to try and develop a cross-agency workforce planning strategy. One of the key elements of any workforce planning strategy is around the recruitment of Indigenous staff at locations where we have ICCs throughout Australia as well.

Dr LAWRENCE—I know the numbers are small, but do you have any data that compares success in recruitment to the Public Service from the major cities and regional centres with that from remote and rural Australia—particularly, for instance, in the Northern Territory, north-west

Australia and Queensland, where the percentage of Indigenous people in those communities is different?

Ms Hosking—I am not sure whether this will directly answer your question, but one of the things we looked at in our census report was location. It did not really look at recruitment, but it was the first time we looked in detail at where Indigenous employees in the APS were located. Not surprisingly, we found that many more Indigenous employees than non-Indigenous employees were located outside the capitals and the ACT. We found that 57 per cent of Indigenous employees were located in capital cities, nine per cent were in metropolitan areas—the big cities outside the capital cities—22 per cent were in rural areas and 13 per cent were in remote areas.

Dr LAWRENCE—You do not a breakdown by level or skills?

Ms Hosking—Not by location. It is something we could look at doing in a cross-tab, but we have not compiled that.

Dr LAWRENCE—Any visit to a community, large or small, in Northern Australia—and I am sure Warren will back me up on this—will very quickly reveal that most of the skilled staff working in the Public Service are not Aboriginal people, whether it be in medical services, income support, employment or whatever. So there is clearly a lot of work to be done there. Do you detect much enthusiasm on the part of those big agencies to recruit and train? It takes persistence; you cannot just walk in there and snap your fingers.

Ms Tacy—I would say there is quite a strong degree of enthusiasm for that task. The figure of 2.2 per cent that we gave was as at July 2005. While we do not have the current representation rate, we know that the numbers have increased. We have already had a significant increase since then through some of the programs that we and the agencies are running.

Ms Page—We coordinate some whole-of-government entry level programs. A lot of agencies with a significant regional presence, such as DAFF and AQIS, are strong partners in those recruitment exercises. They are actively looking for ways to bring in people from regional, remote and rural locations with a view to training them.

Dr LAWRENCE—Have you developed any attitude to, or understanding of, what is likely to happen with the abolition of CDEP? I note that you talk about moving off CDEP and into real jobs, so presumably you think they are not real jobs.

Ms Tacy—We have not focused on it much because CDEP is not a big part of employment in the APS.

Dr LAWRENCE—Sorry, it was DEWR that said that.

Ms Tacy—That is all right. I was thinking, ‘Where did we say that?’ Our focus is on employment under the Public Service Act. I would not call them ‘real jobs’.

Mr SNOWDON—Do you have a breakdown of employment by agency?

Ms Hosking—We do not go through all 84 agencies in the *State of the service report*, but we include the representation of Indigenous employees in agencies with more than 1,000 ongoing staff and we also mention a few of the smaller agencies which have higher proportions of Indigenous staff. In this graph, we find that the Department of Education, Science and Training has by far the highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff with over 10 per cent, followed by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, which has just over 6.5 per cent. Then it goes through all the large agencies. The ones that have more representation than the APS average include Family and Community Services—this was in 2004-05, before the current machinery of government changes—DIMIA and Centrelink. After that they are going to the average and then to below the average.

Ms Tacy—I should note that the commission itself is an above-average employer.

Mr SNOWDON—That is very good to see.

Ms Tacy—In the *State of the service report* results, the statistical bulletin—

Ms Hosking—That is right. We can certainly get you data for the other agencies.

Mr SNOWDON—Is it possible to do a correlation between those agencies and their regional representation? The next question is very specific: what proportion of employees at the Indigenous coordination centres are Indigenous?

Ms Hosking—I do not have that data. Do you, Clare?

Ms Page—No, but we could—

Mr SNOWDON—It would be helpful for us. Where I live and work, we see Indigenous people in various jobs but they are not often in central agency jobs. It would be interesting to see what tasks they fulfil in each agency. I know that Centrelink, for example, have set up some remote service centres where they have had difficulty recruiting local staff because of the levels of education attainment in those communities and work experience. I am conscious of that, but it would be very helpful to us if we could see a map of where people are working—in which agencies and what jobs they are doing.

Ms Hosking—The main issue for us is the overall statistics that do not come from the survey come from our Australian Public Service employment database and I do not think regional status would be one of the variables on that database. We might be able to do that by broader location, such as state.

Ms Tacy—However, we could provide figures by agency and, while not statistically based, we know which agencies have a remote and regional representation and it would give you a better picture.

Mr SNOWDON—For example, the Northern Territory Indigenous population is about 30 per cent. In my electorate, Lingiari, the Indigenous population is closer to 40 per cent but they do not represent 40 per cent of the public sector workers and they do not represent 30 per cent of the public sector workers in the Northern Territory. These are the sorts of things we would certainly

like to look at. Indeed, in the Kimberley it would be the same sort of thing, and in North Queensland. We would like to get a picture of how—

Ms Page—So total APS employment, not just within ICCs?

Mr SNOWDON—No total, but I ask about the ICCs because of their particular role. It would be a useful exercise to find out how many Indigenous people are working in the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination. We had an Indigenous person here to talk to us about private sector partnerships with the public sector. Do you have public sector programs to move Indigenous people to the private sector to give them work experience and vice versa?

Ms Page—No, not specifically. We have developed, as part of this strategy, is mobility scholarship programs, one of which is trying to give Indigenous staff experience in central agencies. Prime Minister and Cabinet are coordinating that part of the strategy. The other one is for more junior staff at APS1 to APS6 level. We are trying to provide them opportunities to move out of Indigenous policy development, program delivery, and to move into the mainstream. We already run one in Western Australia.

Mr SNOWDON—That is very positive. What about statutory authorities? I am thinking now of four statutory authorities that are not often recognised as statutory authorities—the four Indigenous land councils in the Northern Territory.

Ms Page—We certainly do not have anything at the moment existing in relation to partnerships or exchanges.

Mr SNOWDON—You do not have any figures on organisations funded by the Commonwealth, coming under Commonwealth regulation presumably.

Ms Tacy—No. Our figures relate to the Public Service Act.

Mr GARRETT—I have a couple of additional questions. Am I right in assuming that you are operating off 2002 figures when you describe the trend?

Ms Hosking—No, that was a slip of the tongue. It is going up to 2005. We have the survey data, which is also useful, but the latest data on employment goes up to 30 June 2005.

Ms Tacy—My apologies.

Mr GARRETT—I want to come back to the cross-workforce training strategy.

Ms Page—The cross-workforce planning strategy.

Mr GARRETT—Could you provide a bit more detail about what is anticipated.

Ms Page—It is a project which is in our strategy for the next 12 months. We are getting ICC partner agencies together—all agencies that have staff in ICCs—and we are going to talk to them about a whole-of-government approach to workforce planning. We will look at issues to do with being able to do some joint recruitment exercises. Obviously, they are all targeting a small pool,

especially in remote and regional locations. We are trying to come up with some tools and strategies for those agencies to work together to ensure that they get maximum benefit for the potential Indigenous employment pool at particular locations. Our first meeting with that group is tomorrow. I cannot give you a lot of detail about what it is going to look like because obviously we need to get the input from the ICC stakeholder agencies on what they think the specific needs are. We anticipate that it will be some sort of tool that ICCs can use in relation to issues in workforce planning, mature recruitment and retention, succession planning and those sorts of things.

Mr GARRETT—On that, there is no doubt that some ICCs have a shortage of people who have sufficient connections with the community to go out and do the work. The ICC, generally, is juggling a whole range of different departmental connection points and communication points and then somehow has to find the means of going back out and engaging with the Indigenous community. I would have thought that one of the most important things that could be identified is that crucial problem, so perhaps that is something to bear in mind. It seems to me that there is tremendous potential to take people at that point to provide that assistance. Your ICC person, generally speaking, is finding it extremely difficult to manage both the bureaucratic management of their job and the workload. Perhaps that could be considered.

Ms Page—We do some work more generally with ICCs on capacity building. We have done a series of workshops in every ICC about—

Mr GARRETT—Are you finding that they are struggling with the tasks that they have at this point in time?

Ms Page—The workshops that we did 12 months ago were preliminary work in whole of government, to say, ‘This is what it means.’ Certainly, people were receptive to having some clarity about what work in whole of government meant, but that was very early in the arrangements. We are now putting together another package to try to address some issues in community engagement as well.

Mr SNOWDON—Tell us what it means.

Ms Page—Working collaboratively?

Mr SNOWDON—What does ‘work in whole of government’ mean? It would be useful for us to know that!

Mr GARRETT—Can I follow up on that, because I am not sure that you answered my direct question. I am not pushing you on it, but I am asking whether or not you have had feedback or you will seek feedback from ICCs as to whether they have the capacity to manage the tasks that they have under the new arrangements. That is my first question.

Ms Tacy—We do that as part of the consultations—for example with the meeting starting tomorrow. Part of working with the workforce planning approach is to focus on the capability requirements and whether there are shortages and then to work through whether a cross-service approach needs to be taken to that, compared to a specific agency approach.

Mr GARRETT—I am wondering about that. This is the pointy end, to use a cliché, isn't it?

Ms Tacy—It is.

Mr GARRETT—This is where things may or may not be resolved in not only making the ICC process happen more effectively but additionally trying to identify why, apocryphally and from experience and evidence, they are struggling and whether or not this is a place to put people who can assist them in the tasks that they now have.

Ms Tacy—It is obviously something that OIPC would be working with and also, through the workforce planning strategy, trying to tease out some of those issues.

Mr GARRETT—Do the COAG trials that we have under way fit into this cross-planning strategy?

Ms Tacy—They do not.

Mr GARRETT—Not at all?

Ms Tacy—No.

Mr GARRETT—So they are operating as stand-alone trials?

Ms Tacy—Yes. We have not had involvement in the COAG trials. The commissioner is on the secretaries group about Indigenous employment. But, from a functional point of view, we have not had involvement in those trials.

Mr GARRETT—Have you given any thought to any other kinds of initiatives that might seek to arrest the trend line—in other words, earlier intervention into the schools system to recruit? You may have provided some evidence to us on this basis and I have missed it.

Ms Page—You can mix and match how you access and use our school-to-work model. It starts at year 10. It gives agencies the option to sponsor or to provide a scholarship to an Indigenous student at years 10, 11 or 12, with a guarantee of ongoing employment at the end. That is probably as early as our intervention goes. We also run the cadetship program, which is trying to encourage Indigenous students to complete their studies under the sponsorship of an agency—and, again, with a position at the end of that. We do not go any earlier in a student's educational life cycle in the school-to-work model than year 10.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—It is good to be here with you this morning. I want go back to comments you made earlier in your discussion with us this morning regarding the reasons why Indigenous people leave. When you give those figures for the rate of folk leaving, to what degree is it possible to get a real understanding of the reasons? I understand, Ms Hosking, that you said that someone talks to people if they indicate through the surveys that they are planning to leave or that they have left and come back, but to what degree are we really able to get a true understanding of who is leaving and why? You are not going to see the majority of them again, and it seems vital to me that we understand as well as possible the connections they have with their workforce colleagues and their workplace, the decision they made to leave and where they

end up when they go—whether they go to other work. What hope is there for us to get a better understanding of that disconnection?

Ms Hosking—Other than what we have done, the main approach to that would be through exit surveys. Given the nature of the APS, it is much easier for agencies themselves to do exit surveys, and a number of them do.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What do they do with that information? Do you become privy to that?

Ms Hosking—As far as I am aware, we have not been given exit survey information from individual agencies, but they would be using that in their own planning processes and so forth.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Would it be useful for you to have that, as a central point of understanding?

Ms Hosking—We have a small ongoing allocation to do further Indigenous research. At this stage, we are just completing this survey. The other piece of work we are doing on the research side is an evaluation of some employment practices in some individual agencies. I guess it is one of the things we would be likely to consider in a number of different possibilities in the ongoing research program.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So some agencies do it and some may not. Do you know whether DEWR collects that centrally?

Ms Hosking—No, I do not.

Ms Tacy—I do not know that.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Maybe we should ask DEWR's agent.

Ms Hosking—I do know that, in general, the anecdotal feeling about exit surveys is that it is quite problematic getting people to fill them out. Some agencies that have tried them have found that they have had really low response rates to exit surveys. That is why we tried to take a roundabout way through this survey.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I guess I am looking at it fairly simply—that is, a dialogue occurs between the employer and the employee when they leave, and one would think that we would take any opportunity we could in that dialogue to get this sort of information so that we can try to understand. At the other end of that discussion, I want to ask: what sort of cultural training or other training are you aware of that takes place within the agencies in preparation for the employment of Indigenous people?

Ms Page—I probably cannot tell you specifically what happens in individual agencies. Under our strategy, we are coordinating some whole-of-government tools to assist agencies to make their workplaces more culturally inclusive. One of those is about how to recruit Indigenous staff—and it follows on from the two booklets—and how to make sure that your recruitment practices are culturally appropriate. We are also developing a tool for managers on how to

manage Indigenous staff. We are currently talking to our Indigenous SES leaders with a view to developing a package for cultural understanding training. I think that there is enough evidence around the traps that the old-fashioned cultural awareness training has good use and meets a particular need but that we need to do some more targeted cultural understanding training. We are using some of our current Indigenous SES cohort to help us develop what they consider to be a good package of training around cultural understanding and having a culturally inclusive workplace.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Another question I have is in relation to management positions—and forgive me as I have not read your report yet. What percentage of Indigenous people employed in the public sector are in what we would call senior management positions?

Ms Hosking—I can probably answer that for you. I will quickly turn to the right page.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I am sorry because I have not read it yet.

Ms Hosking—It will give you exactly the right data. We might want to consider two different levels here. One is the senior executive service. The numbers in the senior executive service have had a little bit of fluctuation over the last 10 years but as at 2005 there were 20 Indigenous people employed in the senior executive service.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Is that throughout the whole of the Commonwealth Public Service?

Ms Hosking—That is right. That was one per cent of the people in that classification. At the executive level, the middle management level of EL1s and EL2s, there were 293. Whilst still being underrepresented compared to their proportion in the APS as a whole, there has actually been quite a growth in the employment of Indigenous people at the EL level over the 10 years. For example, in 1996 there were only 142 Indigenous people employed at the EL level but by 2005, despite the decline, there were actually 293 people employed at the EL level.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Are they spread very widely or are they aggregated in a small number of departments?

Ms Hosking—I do not have the data on which departments they come from. I think you would find that they are overconcentrated in Canberra compared to the regions, which is partly a reflection of the APS classification profile more broadly in any case. We could have a look at that data if you were interested in it.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—The chair might correct me if I get this wrong, but we had evidence in Melbourne from tertiary education union people who used very strong words about the difficulty that qualified Indigenous people had in getting, in the first place, and retaining positions of note within academia. I am applying the same theory to this and wondering what the numbers are and whether the situation does not necessarily reflect any more the availability of the numbers of Indigenous people with qualifications. There may be other aspects to it. That is what I am really thinking about.

Ms Hosking—There has certainly been that growth at the EL level and also at the APS5 and APS6 levels, which would be the feeder groups into the EL level. That has been the positive story over the last 10 years.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Thank you for that.

Ms Hosking—I had an earlier question about the numbers of agencies that had cultural awareness training. I now have those figures if you are still interested in them.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Sorry to interrupt you, but I need to explain this. The interesting thing here is where the training is done, where the success in numbers is, if there is a correlation and if there are lessons to be learnt by other agencies as a result of that. That is the sort of information I need. Statistics are useful but really understanding what they stand for is the other aspect of statistics. If there are agencies that are doing it well and training well and having good policy in relation to the training and employment of Indigenous people and you can see the numbers reflecting that, surely there must be a way of translating that knowledge to other agencies.

Ms Hosking—From what you have said, probably the best result is in the Department of Education, Science and Training, which has by far the highest proportion of Indigenous people. Also, when you ask not just Indigenous people but all employees whether Indigenous people are supported there, they have much higher results than a lot of other agencies. They certainly have the best result in the APS. I have the numbers, if you are interested in them, but I cannot correlate them.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is okay.

Ms Hosking—The are 84 agencies altogether—around 80, anyway—of which 14 provide culturally specific training programs and 16 provide Indigenous cultural awareness training for all employees. A further nine are developing programs, 33 say they are not in place and 24 say they are not applicable.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is interesting.

Mrs VALE—I have something further to what Annette was saying. I do not know whether this specific question has been asked, but your submission talks about the development of best practice guidelines for employers. Do you have a role in supervising that best practice, or is it too early to ask you that? Do you have a supervisory role at all? I know Annette asked about exit surveys, but do you supervise the progress of people through employment, or is that getting too much down into the fine detail for the commission?

Ms Tacy—It is the latter. We do not have that sort of detailed supervisory role or employer role. Our role is more about promoting better practice, some targeted interventions in the traineeship graduate program area, provision of guidelines and monitoring the statistics so that, for example, we might be able to identify better practice or not so good practice, where there might be issues, and take those up with the agencies concerned.

Mrs VALE—Would you consider doing that exit survey at all?

Ms Tacy—I do not think we are in a position to do that. We could look at collecting information from agencies, but I do not think it is something that would be appropriate for us to do.

Mrs VALE—Do you have any successful examples of best practice—employers that have proved to successfully employ and retain Indigenous people?

Ms Tacy—There is the example that Ngaire mentioned. DEST has quite a comprehensive strategy to Indigenous employment under, I think, its Yarrangi policy. I think DEWR also has had some success and, for example, has recently complemented its work with appointing somebody as a career development mentor for Indigenous employees. As was mentioned before, one of the next stages is to do a more detailed evaluation and try and extract some of those better practice lessons to put into the best practice guidelines.

Mrs VALE—So it is a dynamic policy?

Ms Tacy—Yes, absolutely.

Mrs VALE—Thanks.

CHAIR—Thank you; I think we are all done. Do you have anything to add?

Ms Tacy—No, that is all from us. We will provide that additional—

CHAIR—Thank you.

Ms Tacy—If there is any other information, just let us know.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Garrett**):

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

Committee adjourned at 12.03 pm