



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Indigenous employment**

FRIDAY, 21 JULY 2006

BROOME

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

**Friday, 21 July 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:** Mr Slipper, Mrs Vale 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.

**WITNESSES**

<b>BATTY, Mr Dennis, Manager, Djaringo Registered Training Organisation, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHRISTOPHERS, Mr Ray, Manager, Municipal Services and Environmental Health Services, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>COOK, Ms Jessica, Trainee, Indigenous Employment Centre, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ECCLES, Ms Emma, Coordinator, Broome Youth and Accommodation Services, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>EDGAR, Mrs Kathleen Janice, Aboriginal Education Training and Employment Officer, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>MAHONY, Mr Bob, Administrator, Community Development Employment Project; and Manager, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ROE, Ms Marcia, Employment Consultant, Indigenous Employment Centre, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>SIBOSADO, Mr Martin, Director, Djaringo Registered Training Organisation; and Chairperson, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation.....</b>	<b>1</b>



**Committee met at 9.11 am**

**BATTY, Mr Dennis, Manager, Djaringo Registered Training Organisation, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation**

**CHRISTOPHERS, Mr Ray, Manager, Municipal Services and Environmental Health Services, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation**

**COOK, Ms Jessica, Trainee, Indigenous Employment Centre, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation**

**ECCLES, Ms Emma, Coordinator, Broome Youth and Accommodation Services, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation**

**EDGAR, Mrs Kathleen Janice, Aboriginal Education Training and Employment Officer, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation**

**MAHONY, Mr Bob, Administrator, Community Development Employment Project; and Manager, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation**

**ROE, Ms Marcia, Employment Consultant, Indigenous Employment Centre, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation**

**SIBOSADO, Mr Martin, Director, Djaringo Registered Training Organisation; and Chairperson, Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation**

*Evidence from Mr Mahony was taken via teleconference—*

**CHAIR (Mr Wakelin)**—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. I feel that it is inappropriate to welcome you here, because you are, I hope, welcoming us. But we are certainly glad to be with you. As you would understand, the committee is an extension of the parliament, and we ask you to recall that in our deliberations. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr Mahony**—I am in Coolum at the moment. I am the manager of the admin section, which encompasses the Indigenous Employment Centre, the homeless youth program and the CDEP participant part of it. I suppose a lot of my role is reverse marketing for the IEC.

**CHAIR**—I invite you to make a short opening statement, and then we can go into a fairly informal discussion about the good things you are doing here.

**Mr Sibosado**—I have held an executive role in the corporation basically since its inception. I welcome the committee. In a previous life I worked for this committee in 1991 during a three-month secondment from ATSIC in Canberra. The inquiry is a good opportunity for us to talk about what we are doing. I will give you a brief history of Nirrumbuk as an organisation. Some 11 years ago we started off as a CDEP project. We achieved that by working with a community outside of Beagle Bay about 160 kilometres north of Broome on the Dampier Peninsula. Over a

few years CDEP gradually moved into town. Prior to that, CDEP was a program for remote communities.

So we moved into town. In our heyday as a CDEP we had something like 800 participants. That is the foundation of Nirrumbuk. To understand where we have been, we started off from scratch. We were about 500 metres down the road in a rented premises. As I said, we started off as a CDEP. The type of thing we did there included building shelters, putting down bores and basically resourcing people to move back to their homeland communities. After a few years of operating the CDEP project like that, there was a split in that community. Some members of the community felt that the CDEP had got too big and there were particular directions in which that community wanted to go. Out of that came four other CDEPs at the time.

Nirrumbuk always had a focus on employment and training. Rather than talking about it, we decided to just go and do it. Today is the result of 11 years of work. We set a plan about six years ago. We reviewed that last year. We have reached the working life of that particular plan. The satisfying thing for the board and the staff was that we were able to go through our objectives of a one-stop employment and training shop for Indigenous people in this region and tick off the achievement of those goals that we had set for ourselves some six years ago.

What we do today and what we have done over the last five or six years is actively focus on vocational training and putting in place employment services, like the Nirrumbuk IEC. We have a registered training organisation. That is registered through the state education system. We deliver VET training. We are fully accredited and AQTF qualified. Three years ago we established the Job Network provider in this region, Kullarri Employment Services.

**Mr SLIPPER**—Is that just for Indigenous people?

**Mr Sibosado**—No, that is a generalist Job Network contract. Job Futures runs a national contract. We are members of Job Futures. They subcontract the delivery of the Job Network services to our organisation.

**Mr SLIPPER**—What proportion of the people you assist are Indigenous?

**Mr Sibosado**—Probably 90 per cent in this region. Why is—

**CHAIR**—I invite you to continue and complete the session, because we need to bring the other people in. Perhaps we will go to questions afterwards. I ask Mr Slipper to restrain himself for a couple of seconds.

**Mr SLIPPER**—I stand admonished.

**CHAIR**—Okay. Sorry, Martin.

**Mr Sibosado**—Just to paint the picture—the other people will fill in the detail—as I say, three years ago Nirrumbuk established Kullarri Employment Services. It is now a stand-alone not-for-profit company. It has a separate board and separate premises, staff and operations. I am happy to report that as of 1 July we won the employment service area contract for the West Kimberley. The Job Network operation is not Nirrumbuk's anymore—I should qualify that—but we did



establish it three years ago. The boundary of the Job Network operation as of 1 July is halfway between Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing to the east. We go as far as Tom Price down into the Pilbara. We have our main operating offices in Karratha, Port Hedland, Newman, Broome, Derby and Fitzroy Crossing.

That is, I guess, a quick snapshot of what Nirrumbuk does in terms of its employment and training services. I will invite Ray Christophers to also speak about it. The other side, other than the VET, is that we also provide our experience and expertise to the whole region, not just to Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation. The reason I will ask Ray to speak is that he is also the current chair of the Kullarri Regional CDEP, which we have participated in. At this stage, it has 1,500 participants. But I will leave that to Ray.

**CHAIR**—At this point, I invite everybody around the table to tell us if you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear.

**Mr Batty**—I am the training manager for Djaringo. As Marty said, we train as far east as the Northern Territory border and as far south as Tom Price.

**Ms Eccles**—I am the coordinator of the Broome youth accommodation service. We work with youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness between the ages of 16 and 21.

**Mr Christophers**—I am the director for the training company and the Job Network. I also manage the health service and municipal service. I am also the chairperson of the Kullarri regional centre.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for your guided tour, even though we lost each other.

**Ms Roe**—I work for the Indigenous Employment Centre and I am an employment consultant.

**Ms Cook**—I work for the Indigenous Employment Centre and I am a trainee.

**Mrs Edgar**—I mainly work with Dennis in the training section liaising between school students and the organisation.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. I think the suggestion is that we will move first to you, Ray, on your role in the corporation and how it is going.

**Mr Christophers**—I am one of the founding committee members. Like Marty said, our mission always was to create employment for Aboriginal people within our region. We did originally start off with a membership base as a granting organisation in the old ATSIC days. Our main mission was to try and create employment. Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation actually comes from the outer parts of Broome, not necessarily Broome township. Our membership base comes from the 11 outstations we have based out in the peninsula. Our main focus was to try and create employment in town so that our people would have that opportunity to come from the bush to town. All this structure that we set up here has been aimed towards that. Now we are at the end of our 10 years, we feel we need to progress this with the changes to the CDEP to try and pick up our young kids and keep in mind our community development.

**CHAIR**—Martin, we might talk about the focus on vocational education at a time when the job market is strong. What is your take on it? You might like to describe in a pretty informal way the move from ATSIC into this newer era, and the changes to the CDEP. There have been pretty significant changes occurring out there over the last three years at least. We have been with some people, for example, who could see five years ago that ATSIC would go through some change—whatever that change would be—and were preparing for it. Those who seemed to pick that up and run with it are perhaps in a stronger position today than those who held on to the old way a bit longer. You people seem to have seen the opportunities and have run with them, so could we talk about vocational education and the transition from ATSIC to what we have now, and pick up a couple of those issues?

**Mr Sibosado**—One of the biggest things in terms of that transition is that ATSIC at that time was not really involved with VET in a meaningful or practical way; we dealt with the education system. Basically, most of our dealings are with the WA education system, so in terms of those changes we have not seen much. But, for me, CDEP is where there is a dilemma. I am a vocal critic—in a good way, though—of the changes to CDEP and the impacts on communities. Our main focus is on getting jobs for our people, but in front of that employment is the training for those jobs. But we also recognise those remote areas where there is no job market; 600 kilometres to the west or south of us is where the employment market is. There is mining and there is industry. One of the things the Kimberley does not have—and it is certainly not in this Broome region—is mines. We do not have any major resource projects happening.

The main industry in this particular area where we focus is tourism, which is a seasonal thing. It is difficult to get big numbers, so one of the strategies we have used to get those outcomes is to get our young people to accept the idea that for them to get a job and a career with some sustainability they have to leave Broome itself. The facts are that the opportunities are not here. I cite my own case: I finished high school here. There were not enough jobs to go around. I had a choice to make; I wanted a career, so I left Broome. I did not return until 10 years ago, other than on holidays and stuff like that. But I did not return to live here. The message I give to our young people is that, unfortunately for them, there are lots of people like us in our community, who have been away and got our skills elsewhere. We have got our education levels and we have come home to put down our roots. There is not much movement in the chain because we are not old enough to be thinking about retirement yet, so there is a bottleneck in terms of the jobs.

That is one of the things we do. We are focusing on encouraging people—especially our young people—to accept the fact that the likelihood of their winning a job or a career in Broome is fairly remote. There are jobs here, but they are very limited. These are some of the things we focus on with our VET: getting that work ethic and also being able to work around them. Again, it is because of our membership. A lot of the elders of the community are on our board, so we are able to deal with things by specifically engaging with our Indigenous culture and applying it to the task of living independently in every way—economically and making a good life for ourselves.

**Mr SLIPPER**—The problem you have in Broome, where people have to leave for careers, is not confined to Broome. A lot of country towns would have the same problem.

**CHAIR**—I came from a small community—much smaller than Broome—and had four children in regional South Australia. They are in four Australian capitals. They moved out.

Having the distances and needing to do that is a feature, and sometimes a disappointing feature. There is only one other question I want to ask at this stage. There are a hundred questions, but we have limited time. You mentioned that the main linkages are with your state government. Of course, there is the DEWR connection as well. There is the importance of the state, in terms of how it supports, encourages and sets up the right structure. Can we talk about that a bit? I do not really understand it that well. How do DEWR and the state sit alongside one another and work together, or do they not work together? Can you talk about that a bit?

**Mr Sibosado**—When I talk about the state, I mean that we mainly access the state. It is basically more for support. They have pushed us along and assisted us in the process of starting an RTO—a registered training organisation. We were fortunate—I can say that—in that we were thinking along those lines at the time we started the registration process, in trying to get the RTO started. The national VET—vocational education and training—system was deregulated to user choice. That allowed us to grow the new rules and we were able to become familiar with the industry.

**CHAIR**—Rather than the TAFE monopoly, if I can put it that way.

**Mr Sibosado**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—You moved in and some opportunity came from that.

**Mr Sibosado**—We had that opportunity. In terms of Commonwealth and state, Bob, who is in the fund, is probably a better person to speak about this because those are the types of things that Bob does, in terms of making associations in the East and in dealing with DEWR and the Commonwealth.

**CHAIR**—We will invite Bob to speak now. Bob, do you have a couple of comments about that?

**Mr Mahony**—Yes. We had a fairly good relationship with ATSIC at the time. Regarding the IEC, it was actually to do with Peter Reith and Di Hawgood, when they came to Broome. That is where the IECs came from. They came on a trip, saw what we were doing and basically asked how it could be done better. That is where the idea of people actually working with people to get them jobs—a bit like a job network—came from. Peter Reith can put his hat on about that. It was actually Mal Brough and Tony Abbott who made it successful. We used to meet with them every three months. There were about four of us from around the country who used to meet with Mal every three months, just on the IEC, and that is where the changes came through. I probably liked it better three years ago.

I am a former public servant of nearly 20 years. There were ideas of some changes. It is a hard thing for public servants. I was one once too, so I know how they think, I suppose. There is too much red tape that hamstring a lot of it. A lot more could be done. There are genuine people who really want to get the employment and training stuff going, but sometimes I feel that I am hamstrung. I obviously have some good mates from my years in the Public Service. With the red tape they get a bit bureaucratic, which we all know can happen. It is probably not as open as it used to be. When they wanted to make changes to the CDEP, the same four crew offered the services to DEWR. I think Marty alluded to the impact on the remotes. We probably thought it

could have been done in a way that was more of a compromise—doing it over a couple of years. We know the difficulties because we work with them. There are some fantastic people around who have some great ideas, but I do not know that they get far enough. That is my big thing. I deal with and talk to the types of public service levels in Canberra and Perth. We are not there to rip off the system. That is the feeling I get these days, if you know what I mean.

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mr Mahony**—It seems to be turned onto us a bit. It is almost like they feel we are ripping it off, but I actually feel that we are trying to achieve something. That is what the vision is at Nirrumbuk, and that is what we are trying to take elsewhere.

**CHAIR**—Yes. They find it pretty hard to even think a bit entrepreneurially and creatively.

**Mr Mahony**—I went to a meeting and met a few of them there. I have had talks with Brendan Darcy, who is with the office of Minister Andrews, but we could not get past him. Ray and I actually went to visit him two years ago in Melbourne and we got as far as Brendan. It is a matter of trying to explain to people. When those in Nirrumbuk first asked me to start the place up, I had an idea as a public servant, but it is 180 degrees of what could be achieved. The visions and committees that we have are fantastic. It is like Marty said: the elders have set the targets and we are there to just try to make sure that it occurs.

Unless you work in it, there is a problem. I could not go and work with you guys without knowing a little bit, if you know what I mean. If you get to work with a system, you know what it can achieve. We offered that to them again. I know that there was one from Tasmania, another mob from Port Augusta and another one from Brisbane. We offered to sit with them when they were looking at all these changes, but they did not want to have anything to do with it. It probably could have been done a little bit better, but it is the red tape and the bureaucrats. We have to keep working around it. That is probably the most difficult thing at the moment: that we really do not know what direction things are going. This five-year stuff at Nirrumbuk started because we used to do a fair bit of travelling and meeting people and getting involved. The vision started from discussions and hearing whispers around the country, I suppose. That is why it has been able to do what it has.

**CHAIR**—Thanks for that.

**Mrs VALE**—Thank you, Bob, for your contribution. I am not sure if you are the right person to ask—perhaps this should go to Marty. My understanding is that you started with the CDEP. Do you still have the CDEP operating? Is that still the basis of your organisation?

**Mr Mahony**—It is one major part of it. We use the CDEP for the training and employment side of things, obviously. We are part of ‘the crikey one’, which is part of that 1,500. From memory, we have 91 participants. The majority of them are part of the Indigenous Employment Centre. We have used the CDEP at Nirrumbuk that way for the last four or five years. We use the CDEP to give them skills. We use it with the employers to put people in work experience and that sort of thing. Even though we are not the grantee or the contractor, we are still a CDEP activity under the new one.

**Mrs VALE**—We have had some criticism of the CDEP from some people who have given evidence to this committee during this visit to the north. One in particular said that it needed to be scrapped. It seems to me that it varies according to the different communities and how the different people in those communities see the opportunities of CDEP. Could I have your thoughts on that? Would you see any value in the CDEP being more flexible than it is? Just to give you an example, one criticism was that it was wrong that it was the same as the dole and that there should be some flexibility to pay more for higher skills, especially skills that are more relevant to the community. There was another point of view that came from a different witness, who said that it should be scrapped altogether. To me it seems that you have been very clever and very adept at using the CDEP for the great advancement of the young trainees. I would value your opinion on that.

**Mr Mahony**—My background was in social security, so I have seen both sides of it. That probably makes it easier: my public service background. I had 18 years with social security. CDEP is a fantastic program. It is the most flexible program going. I do not think it is as flexible now as it was two years ago—there you go. There is a lot of stuff that needs to change. It has probably taken over a lot of the roles in the remote areas which Marty was talking about. There are a lot of programs that have been scrapped over the years which CDEP has taken up. Remote communities and towns are totally different, and the government has accounted for that in the current program structure.

The only problem I see with the CDEP is that it seems to all be going towards town or city based outcomes. As Marty said, we know that there are no jobs. I was around when CDEP first came in in 1985 or something. We had a lot of remote people for whom the dole was totally inappropriate. There were no jobs out there. The CDEP has allowed a lot of people to come on. It has allowed people to go back to their homelands, so it has had a social impact as well.

With some of the changes that are happening now, I can see major problems in towns like Broome. If the communities are not allowed to use the dollars to run their communities, which is the community development aspect that seems to have been forgotten about, then I can see major problems for the towns. What has happened in Halls Creek is going to happen to towns throughout the north—I can see that. A lot of people use it to run their generators and all that sort of stuff. They are living out there with the CDEP.

I have actually used the program as it is intended to be used. It is pretty hard for me to judge what someone likes or does not like. I like the program because of its flexibility. I think that was the beauty of it. We have done it with the idea of training and employment and town and community development outside, so I think we have probably used it to its nth degree. Mind you, some public servants do not like it, but it is just the way that we have been able to read it with the terms and conditions of the contract.

**Mrs VALE**—Yes, it but it seems to me you have been able to leverage CDEP to actually give you the objectives that you want with the employment track record that you have got for young trainees.

**Mr Mahony**—It has been a fantastic program. I love it. As I said, I have worked both sides of the counter. There is one bloke who has been unemployed, as far as I know, for nearly 25 years and who is now working in the mining industry. I have a big fear with this 12-month thing. For

example, we have worked with people for 10 and 12 years—since we started Nirrumbuk—and they are just getting jobs now. Some people we have worked with for three and four years. I do not know how that is going to affect any new ones coming on, because there are a lot of other social issues, like literacy and numeracy, that take more than 12 months to work with for the type of programs we want to run.

**CHAIR**—Just to intervene quickly, how do you answer the many critics in relation to unemployment benefits and the incentive to be on CDEP and to work towards getting long-term employment? How do you answer those critics in terms of the message—as you say, you have been on both sides of the counter—that welfare is part of the destination, not the destination in itself?

**Mr Mahony**—I see that the whole program is running that way anyway. I can only say what we do on the CDEP: we expect them to do training; we expect them to turn up. The whole aim of our organisation is to get people off CDEP into employment. It has been that way for a number of years. It is no different to unemployment or Newstart, whatever you call it these days. It is a method to get a job in the end. You still have to register with Job Network, you still have to do training, you still want to get off the dole, and we are hoping most people want to get off CDEP. So the two programs are aligned. Whether they should be getting a higher rate or not, I do not know. You do not have to be on CDEP. If they do not like it, they can be on the dole.

**CHAIR**—Yes. Sorry to interrupt, Mrs Vale.

**Mrs VALE**—That is all right. It was important to hear what Bob had to say on that. We have had varying opinions on it, Bob. I am sure that you are aware that, in some communities, the CDEP has not been used appropriately but has been used to enrich some perhaps—

**Mr Mahony**—Administrators.

**CHAIR**—Spot on.

**Mrs VALE**—Yes. As you know, the newspapers always print the bad stories, never the good ones, hence the reason for this committee. We wanted to understand some of the success stories. Your corporation is one of them. It is a real flag bearer.

**Mr Mahony**—I think Marty would say that that is probably one of our issues—we all seem to be getting tarred with the same brush.

**Mrs VALE**—Absolutely.

**Mr Mahony**—It is probably why we do not do a lot of publicity. It is like the kids who won the awards and who just came back from Melbourne. They met with Minister Stone, I think, the other day. One of our kids in Broome won the Victorian award and was on *A Current Affair*. It is those types of things that we do not really put out to the public, because we get shot down.

**Mr Sibosado**—That is more in terms of our own community, plus we find that, if you stick your head out too far—I think generally in Australia they call it the tall poppy—we just get scrutinised and attacked.

**Mr SLIPPER**—That was the point I was going to make. Bob, while I fully understand what you say is correct with respect to your spheres of activity, the media would have the same approach to many other spheres of human activity in Australia, including in the non-Indigenous area. I think it is one of the unfortunate traits of the Australian media, and you just happen to be one of the many areas suffering from this approach. I want to pick up on something Mrs Vale said. We also had evidence that, where there was a CDEP program, the dole ought not to be available as a lifestyle choice. I would be interested in any views that the witnesses currently before the committee might have with respect to that matter.

**Mr Mahony**—I suppose what is happening now is that, with Centrelink, the remote area exemption has been lifted anyway. So I would say that is almost happening. Previous to that, you could either be on the dole or CDEP remote. I do not think you could do that in town, to be honest. I think that is an option. In the remote areas with the lifting of the remote area exemption for seeking employment, I think that is already occurring. I do not think there would be too many people on Newstart out in the remote areas once the new rules kick in. I think that has already been done.

**Mr SLIPPER**—Okay. I was also shocked to hear that in one community there was a stigma attached to people who chose to work on CDEP. They were looked down on by those people who were on the dole, and by the general Indigenous community. I have to say I found that quite a shocking situation. Do you have a view on that?

**Mr Mahony**—I could not see why. I am probably not different from you; I would not know why. I could not comment on that. It is unusual.

**Mr SLIPPER**—This is my last question. I have listened very carefully to our witnesses as they have explained what they do. A number of different organisations were mentioned, and I was just wondering whether, after we are finished, you might be able to put together a mosaic or a bit of a mud map on the organisations: how they are interlinked and what each does. It seems to me that you have a lot of organisations doing worthwhile work but I just cannot get my mind around how they all fit together. Maybe in some cases they do not fit together at all and they are entirely separate but there must be some common membership, including some common board membership and some cooperation. I do not expect you to do it now but maybe after the hearing you could send to the secretariat a map showing what organisations in the Indigenous area you are collectively involved with and how they interlink.

**Mr Mahony**—Are you talking about the Nirrumbuk structure?

**Mr SLIPPER**—I am talking about that, but as we went around the table there were various witnesses who seemed to be doing things in relation to other associated areas, as well.

**Mr Mahony**—Yes, okay.

**Mr Sibosado**—I can answer that. It is because of a lot of the contractual obligations of being a service deliverer. That is the reason. For instance, as I said earlier, we initially started as a CDEP. The ATSIC policy at the time was that you could not expose the CDEP to unlimited risk. We are a private RTO; we are not government-funded. We are just a private company that is a registered RTO. For Nirrumbuk to go into training and get the accreditation to deliver the

training our CDEP rules said we were not to expose our CDEP activity to unlimited risk by going into private business. Therefore we had to establish a proprietary limited company that is owned by Nirrumbuk. Similarly, the IEC is Nirrumbuk; that is fine.

With respect to the Kullarri Employment Services, Djaringo owned it but in December it was a 'related entity'—that was the term they used, and forgive me, I am not a lawyer—for taxation purposes. Therefore we had to relinquish the ownership of that body. That is why I said it is a stand-alone operation. It is, in our view, a part of this family but there are legalities in relation to DEWR service contracts. The reason that occurred is that we hold an IEC contract with DEWR and we also hold a Job Network contract. These are the inconsistencies.

**CHAIR**—That is a pretty good explanation. I think that is a very good view of the structure.

**Mrs VALE**—You are not doing too badly for a non-lawyer, Martin, can I tell you! Could I just mention one of the things you said, Martin. It is a problem with regional Australia that small country towns have a limited number of resources so therefore the young people have to go off. As you said, to get a career and to have a career path you had to leave Broome. Does your training—maybe this is a question for Dennis—look at things like tourism jobs and perhaps pastoral trades?

**Mr Batty**—Yes, we have both Indigenous tourism and mainstream tourism in our scope, and rural operations, which include an entire pastoral scope. We do not use that in town but we do use it out on stations, and work fairly closely with the Department of Agriculture here in WA in planning that.

**Mrs VALE**—I have heard criticisms that the schools no longer offer pastoral trades which they once did. Do you think it would be helpful if the education department actually looked at even some basic tourism skills and some pastoral trade skills—as I understand they once did?

**Mr Batty**—Through the Aboriginal School Based Traineeship Program we have with both the schools in town we do tourism. So students study Indigenous cultural tourism in years 11 and 12. Pastoral skills are a bit of a different issue. We can offer some of the pastoral skills but, because of what the Department of Education and Training call insurance problems, we cannot offer the entire thing. We wanted to actually take these kids out onto stations whereas DET would not allow us to do that. That would be an ideal training avenue, but we are hamstrung with that as we are with a couple of other things like construction where, again, because DET say they have insurance problems—

**Mr SLIPPER**—Is that a state based department?

**Mr Batty**—Yes.

**Mrs VALE**—What are the insurance problems that they have? Do they not want young people near horses or doing welding?

**Mr Batty**—Yes. Their claim is that, because ASBTs are paid through them, technically they are legally liable and that their insurance will not cover the school based trainees for trades that their insurer deems as dangerous. I fail to see how working in construction or on a cattle station



is particularly more dangerous for someone who happens to be at school at 16 than for someone who is not at school at 16, but that is their excuse.

**Mrs VALE**—It is very short-sighted, isn't it?

**Mr Batty**—You said it.

**Mrs VALE**—I am appalled at that short-sightedness, and I am willing to go on the record about that. We really want to encourage young Indigenous people. Aboriginal stockmen are part of our Australian mythology. They are world famous. To think that we have a white bureaucracy that is actually preventing young people getting experience during their learning years seems very short-sighted to say the least.

**Mr Batty**—Marty, Bob and I have been belting our heads against a brick wall for a number of years now trying to get this changed, but the brick wall is still there.

**Mrs VALE**—I find it unbelievable. The whole focus of government really should be to try to encourage Indigenous young people.

**CHAIR**—I could understand the OH&S issues if rough riding were part of the deal, but it is not, is it? We ran into a young fellow yesterday who has already had three busted bones out at Roebuck Plains.

**Mrs VALE**—There is a way of overcoming this. If they can actually train young people in these kind of skills at tech level then there has to be a way of getting them trained too at school level in years 11 and 12 or years 9 and 10. Those skills are far more relevant than algebra and chemistry.

**Mr Batty**—When we were ready to go with all this, particularly with the pastoral stuff, we had both of the high schools here in town right behind us. The prison were going to bring a group in as well. It is enormously important for some of the guys who are in prison who will be moving back into the community to have those trades so that they can get some skills. Basically the department said no, we could not do it. Having said that, the other side of the coin is that we are doing a lot of this stuff with the COAG site out at Tjurabalan. Where we are working at the COAG site, which basically is led by the Commonwealth, we do not have those problems. They are 100 per cent behind us and we are getting some really good outcomes for people out there.

**Mrs VALE**—I would like to hear more about that. It sounds positive. Emma, do you have something to add?

**Ms Eccles**—I have to say that, while these young local kids might be able to get their training here, at the moment accommodation is at crisis point in Broome. Some of these kids might be living in a house where there are 10 or 15 people. They are not getting a good night's sleep and still have to get up to go to work or school the next day. There is a five- to seven-year wait for state housing. If you want a private rental, you will have to pay \$600 to \$800 a week. It has really reached crisis point this year. The government is going to have to do something because, as Marty said before, we are going to end up as another Halls Creek.

**Mr Batty**—I can give you an example of that. We have one young girl who as an Aboriginal school based trainee was doing tourism and was in her traineeship at the tourist bureau here. She was expected to get 13 younger siblings—brothers, sisters and also cousins—ready for school before she did anything else, because they were all living in the one house. She was turning up late for her traineeship every day or not turning up at all because there were problems. So those housing issues spill over into every other aspect of life.

**Mrs VALE**—An opportunity cost for the person.

**Mr Batty**—Exactly.

**CHAIR**—Is there any investment in Broome in accommodation for this specific age cohort, as we call it—16 to 21, or whatever it might be?

**Ms Eccles**—Basically, accommodation for my service comes through Homeswest. I get my accommodation for my service—it is externally supported—from the Department of Housing and Works, which is the state. But I have not had any accommodation offered to me by them for over six months, and they are saying that the situation is not looking good. So I am getting funded for a service that I cannot provide. I cannot house these youth because there are no houses. They have priority people on their priority list who are waiting a year to get into a Homeswest property.

**CHAIR**—I appreciate that. I have not got an answer for you, but you have laid on the line what is happening.

**Mrs VALE**—Emma, what about some of the Indigenous land corporations that do have an interest, say, in a particular skill set, like pastoral trades? Would there be any contact with them, so they could help fund or provide accommodation for young students here in town?

**Ms Eccles**—Where is the land? Find some land. Where is the funding to build?

**Mrs VALE**—Who releases the land here? Is it DOLA?

**Mr Sibosado**—Land has been tied up with native title, which has had the compounding effect of driving up the price of real estate, because we are on a peninsula. Availability of land, even though there is lots of bush out there, is limited. I have been on the shire, and I don't mind going on record as saying that the shire predominantly is dominated by real estate agents who, in my view, basically obstruct it for economic reasons. And good on them; they are business people, and the opportunity came their way. But the native title issue has been going on for 10 years. The average person—our young people, me, the people on the CDEPs; the majority of the population—cannot afford real estate. It's the same all over. The real estate market around the country is booming. We will never be able to afford to buy a house in our own place.

**Mrs VALE**—If it is native title, and it is Indigenous land to start with, isn't there any way that the board could release enough land to accommodate—it wouldn't be a lot of land—Indigenous students?

**Ms Eccles**—At the end of the day, who is going to fund the building?

**Mrs VALE**—This is what I am saying. You get it from those people who have a vested interest in having those skills available, like the Indigenous land corporation, say, that owns Roebuck Plains. There must be other Indigenous land corporations that own other pastoral leases or pastoral companies that would have an interest, I should imagine.

**Ms Eccles**—But then again, if they are out of town, it is transport, if they are doing their training and stuff in town—

**Mrs VALE**—No, I am talking about the investment to get these young people trained so it is a pool of talent from which they can draw. Roebuck Plains is running a very successful business, but it depends on having Indigenous stockmen skilled up to run it. They are training them there.

**Mr Batty**—About five or six years ago we initiated a program with the ILC to build a pastoral training centre out at Roebuck Plains station. That would also have included accommodation.

**Mrs VALE**—I believe that is coming on line, Dennis.

**Mr Batty**—The problem has been, and it still is, the issues between the ILC and the local native title group about ownership. That is what is holding all of that up. But we are going into those same issues all over the place.

**CHAIR**—In the local paper, the *Broome Advertiser*, the mayor's piece at the end of June talked about this issue. It has been around for a long time. Kununurra has been through it. It is the same kind of deal all the time. The bottom line of what I have heard you say is that it has priced young people particularly, out of the marketplace. It is a Clayton's offer. You are getting money that you cannot use. There is no way you can do it.

**Mrs VALE**—I don't understand, if it is owned by the Indigenous land councils or the corporation, and yet these are Indigenous young people who are suffering. It doesn't make sense to me.

**CHAIR**—That is the beauty of coming here—we actually get a reality check. You have the boom economy and all this wonderful stuff but then—bang! You run into this stuff. All you are trying to do is get some skills for people such as literacy and numeracy—you are trying to get them basic education and then to go to the next stage.

**Mrs VALE**—Also I think we understand that there are tensions too, within different communities, Martin, which perhaps from the icy halls of Canberra we do not really appreciate. I have one question for the delightful young Jessica. Martin, you articulated very clearly that you had a prospective view, you had an ambition, a goal, a dream and a career path that you knew that you had to pursue. Jessica, I want to know about your dreams. What would you like to be doing in five years? Is it too big a dream to share with everybody? What would you like to see for Jessica in five years time? Do you have a thought on that?

**Ms Cook**—Yes.

**Mrs VALE**—Okay. You are being trained as a receptionist?

**Ms Cook**—Employment consultant.

**Mrs VALE**—Would you like to be in a position to continue to be an employment consultant in about five years time, do you think?

**Ms Cook**—Yes.

**Mrs VALE**—That is what your aim is to be?

**Ms Cook**—Yes.

**Mrs VALE**—To be 2IC to Marcia?

**Ms Cook**—Yes.

**Mrs VALE**—Okay. Thanks, Jessica. Are you enjoying what you are doing?

**Ms Cook**—Yes, I am.

**Mrs VALE**—What kind of skills have you had to learn to be an employment consultant? Do you work the computer?

**Ms Cook**—Yes.

**Mrs VALE**—Wow—well, you are better than I am for a start. And you have had to learn basic reception skills and people skills?

**Ms Cook**—Yes.

**Mr Christophers**—She also went to Canberra and she did quite well at her class, at the traineeship.

**Mrs VALE**—So you have already left Broome, Jessica, to study?

**Mr Christophers**—No, when we took on the ILC.

**Mrs VALE**—Okay. Fantastic. Did you enjoy that?

**Ms Cook**—Yes, that was good.

**Mr Mahony**—Jessica took over the training course. She was basically showing people how to do everything. She was excellent in Canberra.

**Mrs VALE**—Fantastic! That is what we wanted to know, Jessica, because one of the things that I have learned is that a lot of the Indigenous women are very shy and they often—in the old saying in my culture—hide their light under a bushel. It is lovely to meet you and congratulations. I wish you every success in your chosen field.

**Ms Cook**—Thanks.

**Mrs VALE**—Thanks, Bob.

**CHAIR**—Kathy, what are some of the basic issues and challenges for the people you are working with? What is a weekly or monthly challenge for you? Give us a picture of some of the good, some of the bad and some of the difficulties.

**Mrs Edgar**—To do with the young students, again—we try to get them early. They have a lot of problems when they come in here with their attitudes but we try and help. It is probably due to their home situations and things.

**Mrs VALE**—You actually act like a life skills coach, do you?

**Mrs Edgar**—Yes, I treat the parents and the students.

**Mrs VALE**—This is another thing that we have found: the need for like a life skills coach, if I can put it in those terms.

**CHAIR**—Marcia probably is in that sort of role too. In years 8, 9, 10 and 11 what is the participation like and where are we up to? Broome is a centre which would be a catchment for a lot of outlying areas, I would imagine. We are hearing for example you have a Norforce head office or a regional office here. You have an offshoot in Kununurra. What is the retention rate like in the high school?

**Mr Batty**—Are you talking about generally, in terms of education—in terms of students purely coming through us?

**CHAIR**—Yes. You would have to see it through your own perspective, but you would have a picture and you would have a community perspective as well that you might be able to share with us. Some of it is anecdotal, I am sure.

**Mr Batty**—We were on ASPA with St Mary's High School. The percentage of Indigenous students and generally students staying on in year 10 with the new changes, we have seen that increase over the years. Both secondary schools have a fantastic record in terms of their services in education towards their students. Last year, factually, Broome senior high school—not that I go in for these things—won the highest TER score in the state. That speaks volumes, I believe. And we do have almost a frequent or ongoing relationship and discussions with the high schools because we run the VET in Schools program here from the two high schools, so we have that dialogue.

The services they provide toward educational outcomes are starting to be reflected in the retention rate of students. The schools have just started a football academy—that is part of Clontarf in Perth; it is an annex of the program—which has brought in a whole bunch of people. The schools are now starting to respond to young people. I understand the policy for young people to stay in school for a while. Over the last five years, we have seen a marked increase in the retention rate of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students going through to complete year 12.

**CHAIR**—Generally, there are plenty of positives but it is still a tough job. Emma, I suppose the cost of real estate and all of that—correct me if I am wrong—is impacting predominantly on those who would come into town but who live outside the 150 to 180 kilometre radius. That is the one issue that really impacts: they cannot access Broome.

**Ms Eccles**—With the changes to CDEP, people on the outstations are going to be expected to come into town. Where are they going to stay? Where are they going to find a job? If you do not have permanent accommodation, it is very hard to get up and go to work or school every day.

**CHAIR**—Would you be prepared to put something in writing for us?

**Ms Eccles**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—It is important that we understand that. We need to have something—just a few paragraphs. You are all busy people and we do not want to load you up, but I think it would be pretty useful to understand the practical issues. No doubt you have told people the same story but we would like to register it in our committee report, if you are comfortable with that.

**Mrs VALE**—Emma, what kind of mechanisms do you have for getting back to government about some of the very real drivers and constraints you have on programs? Can you say, ‘Hey, fellows, we can’t actually meet these deadlines or goals that you have set for us because there are specific circumstances within this area?’ Do you have any mechanisms for doing that?

**Ms Eccles**—I could be out of line here, but I did have a meeting last year with the district manager for DCD, the Department of Community Development.

**CHAIR**—That is the state department.

**Ms Eccles**—Yes. The managers for Homeswest were going to look into it. I then sent email after email—no follow-up. Basically, they do not want to know. My next step will be to go to our local member of parliament and say, ‘We’re being funded from a service which we’re supposed to be working in partnership with, and we just get no support whatsoever.’ This refers to the district manager for the whole Kimberley region. She was supposed to follow it up, and nothing has been done.

**Mrs VALE**—The result of that is that, after a 12-month period, there might be some young people whose CDEP might be taken away from them, yet the government—the bureaucrats, if you like—are putting unreal barriers or obstacles in their path.

**Ms Eccles**—Definitely. Some of these kids and even some older people will not be job ready in 12 months. At the end of the day, it is going to take more than that.

**Mrs VALE**—There is a long lead time.

**Ms Eccles**—As Marty said before, sometimes we work with people for four or five years; but, if one of them get a job, it is a great outcome for everybody. A lot of the expectations are totally unrealistic. Sometimes you think to yourself: they make all these rules in Canberra; they should come and live in our area and see the obstacles that are in people’s way.

**Mrs VALE**—To try and get some appreciation of that is why we are here. I just wish that we could make sure that everyone in every government department with initiatives to be delivered to Indigenous communities could also have the time to come and be here. Chair, how do you think we could follow that up for Emma? She is having to deal with a real bottleneck.

**CHAIR**—Is that in terms of the email issue?

**Mrs VALE**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—We are talking about state departments.

**Ms Eccles**—They are both state departments.

**CHAIR**—We have to understand the coordination between the states and the federal government that is part of our Federation, but the influence we have is quite limited. We can have limited influence on our own, but we have just about no influence on the states. All we can do is explain the issue. That is why it is important if you could put something in writing.

**Ms Eccles**—We could put something in writing.

**CHAIR**—If you can get a few paragraphs down for us, that would be good. I need to ask about the ICC, the Indigenous Coordinating Centre. I need a view. I need someone to explain it.

**Mr Mahony**—Just on that whole thing that Emma is saying, that is one of the things that we identified through the IEC. Like Marty said, we are sending kids away. What we did with the Melbourne kids is set them up in a house in Melbourne. We had a lady go across and stay with them for three months—not to babysit them but to make sure that they were right. Those three kids are now top apprentices in the industry. The other thing that we were talking about is the Pilbara. It is no different for Broome, Port Hedland or Kununurra, like you said. But there needs to be some place where kids who are going to work can go and stay, even if it is only for 12 months or whatever the case might be. Most mining companies are fly-in fly-out, but not all of them. This accommodation thing impacts on the whole north-west.

The idea that we are talking about, which Marty can probably say a bit more on later, is whether we can buy a house in Port Hedland or in Newman and set it up as accommodation for kids. We do not have those kinds of dollars. What no-one has said is that we are doing this whole training thing on a shoestring. We are using every available dollar for training and employment. That has not been said. It is not as though we are a rich organisation. But buying a house in Port Hedland would be so that we can get the kids from Broome to go down there and work with the mining companies. That is the employment side of it, which is obviously going to relieve the impact in Broome and bring more money back into the Broome economy—this goes on and on with the social side of things. That is a big issue—not just in Broome but everywhere—in regards to Indigenous employment.

Generally, all the people we are working with are CDEP participants and there is no way they will ever be able to buy a house, so how are they going to get accommodation so that they can go to a job et cetera? We need to have a system in place where we can set up halfway houses or something for a period of time. Once they get a job, they can buy their own houses, but it is a

catch-22 situation at the moment: they cannot get to the job because they have nowhere to live. I can see that as being a big issue across all the remote areas, I suppose.

**CHAIR**—That raises an interesting issue. We were fascinated—absolutely absorbed—by what is happening with Argyle Diamonds. You probably know some of their percentages and aspirations—that sort of stuff.

**Mr Mahony**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—They have a quite remarkable kind of commitment here. The mining industry generally is endeavouring to participate in this process. You might have a comment on the role of the corporates and how that is going. The ILC is one example that we talked about earlier. I regard it as a corporate entity, even though it is a government corporate entity. Could we talk a little bit about the mining companies and the sort of ethic that seems to be emerging? You know the figures. Argyle are talking about 50 per cent local or regional, not fly-in fly-out, and 25 per cent Indigenous now—and growing that out. All strength to them. That is a remarkable aspiration. Do you have a view about that? Your mention of Port Hedland reminded me of it, actually.

**Mr Sibosado**—If I can talk about the mining, as I said, we have come through 10 years of our planning. In our view, we have built the base from which to launch in that 10 years. As Bob says, we are not fabulously resourced, and I do not want to gloss over that fact. We clearly understood that we would have to prove ourselves and deliver outcomes. We have done that on a shoestring. For example, the Department of Education, Science and Training, which is a Commonwealth department, in no way supports our registered training organisation. It is the only place that we can go to get funding. We have an issue around profit and not-for-profit, which I am addressing. I am trying to get the company articles changed so that we are not-for-profit.

The point is, none of those major agencies support this place, even though that is their role and responsibility. The majority of the effort here has been out of CDEP. When I say ‘the department’, the state department kicks in, for instance, a percentage of Kathy’s wage. We won the IEC contract in a tender situation, and we won Job Network in a tender situation. Yes, we are trying to generate our own money. One of the things we are proud of is that we have done all these things and we have these outcomes. We are proud of the fact that we have made progress using whatever resources we have available to us. We have that.

However, in terms of mining—and I will get to your question, Chair—as Dennis was saying, one of the things COAG found working in Tjurabalan, especially out in Balgo, because it is so remote, is that it was not able to access training companies. What the bureaucracy does not understand is that this is not a metropolitan area. In Perth I can probably find 30 registered training organisations, 10 technical colleges, 15 TAFEs and any number of private RTOs. Up here, it is us and TAFE. TAFE have been here for 20 years. They get the lion’s share of the state training and education without having to justify their outcomes. That is what I am saying: there is a disconnect in the federal government’s VET restructure of user choice—the trainee or the participant having a choice as to where to go.

Last year, because of the bureaucracy, the state education department said, ‘All our high school students are going to TAFE.’ So we lost those ones. We picked up the ones that were not



funded and, subsequently, this year is really the last year I have put the acid on the education department and said: 'Our results speak for themselves—the number of apprenticeships we've got locally out of the skill based training. It is not just a training program. We have an employment outcome.' That is why we do VET training—we have an employment outcome at the end, and that is the goal for us. It is not about training for training's sake. Again, we subsidised that VET in Schools something like 60 per cent.

**CHAIR**—How? I think I know how, but put it on the record.

**Mr Sibosado**—I will give you a practical example. Our trainer costs us \$50,000. That is cheap. He has a social obligation. He could go to TAFE and get better money, but he works in the workshop here for \$50,000. We have to buy materials, welding rods, steel and building materials. So one full-time trainer is tied up with training these high school students. We take in the admin that we run, again with the VET in Schools. That is another trainer. So there is \$100,000, plus the outgoings of running the centre and whatever consumable training materials they need. What do we get in terms of the contract? Ten thousand dollars. That is why I am saying that we have done these things; we have realised we have to get the outcomes to get our mob into—

**CHAIR**—Bringing it out of somewhere else to cover that obligation.

**Mr Sibosado**—Out of CDEP, our business or our profits. As Bob was saying, everything is churned back into achieving our goals, but we are not getting the support. The crazy thing about this is that last year I applied specifically under DEST's Indigenous employment program, which is a Commonwealth program. I applied for SRA money for our RTO. Dennis, how many people do we have in training?

**Mr Batty**—About 500.

**Mr Sibosado**—We have 500 people enrolled in training. In terms of student contact hours, from my last look at the figures—and forgive me, I have to keep referring to Dennis—we had something like 15,000 student contact hours at the Kimberley College of TAFE. It has an annual budget of \$26 million and any number of classrooms. It is a wonderful facility down the road. However, in terms of our people, for some reason it has not been able to achieve the outcomes or get into our communities and produce employment and training.

**CHAIR**—That is a very common concern across Australia, and particularly in this part of the world—isolated from Perth et cetera.

**Mr Sibosado**—Yes, but it is getting worse in the state. We were just told the other day that, in terms of signing SRAs or any employment and training—we do not have a say in that process—the Department of Education and Training will only sign an SRA and direct its trainees to the TAFE to maintain their market share. But this concept of user choice and outcome—

**CHAIR**—A shared responsibility agreement.

**Mr Sibosado**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—That is interesting—they will only sign to TAFE.

**Mr Batty**—Only if the contract specifies that the students will go through TAFE. So the Director General of education in this state is specifying: ‘I will only sign off on this SRA if you place in the SRA something that says these students or this training will be done by TAFE.’

**CHAIR**—And they will have a look at that.

**Mr Sibosado**—Your question was about mining, and I did go off on a tangent—

**CHAIR**—It was a very valuable tangent.

**Mrs VALE**—I did not appreciate that, Chair. Did you understand that system?

**CHAIR**—As I understand it, the Director General of TAFE will only sign off—

**Mr Sibosado**—The Director General of the Department of Education and Training—

**CHAIR**—Yes, of the overarching state department. The Director General will only sign off on the shared responsibility agreement, which is the federal financing process of agreements with communities for any given good project—which is the new model post ATSIC—if it can be out of TAFE resources or connected to TAFE. To me, that is quite bizarre.

**Mr SLIPPER**—What is the justification for that?

**Mr Sibosado**—I think I can answer that. At a state forum last year I actually challenged that. The state is out of kilter with the Commonwealth in terms of vocational education and training policies and directives. As I say, the restructure was what allowed this organisation to enter into the training field. So we are quite aware of what the policies are around user choice, competition, normal business competition policies. They do not apply to the state government.

**CHAIR**—Each agency?

**Mr Sibosado**—The Department of Education and Training. I asked the question specifically in a forum of the training accounts manager or the person who contracts management in the department. They took those skill based Indigenous trainees off us last year. Simply because they were funded through DEST, they attracted money. We ended up with the non-indigenous students, who did not attract any funding. That is what I was saying about our subsidy. Around that issue, I said: ‘Listen, you are out of kilter. I am a private RTO. We are registered under your training accreditation council. Why is it that the lion’s share of the money goes across to TAFE?’ I will keep beating my drum. I know I have been beating my drum with that particular department for a number of years. She turned around and said: ‘TAFE is a state educational institution. We have invested, in terms of the state government, significant resources and taxpayers’ dollars into those systems. Therefore that is the reason why we will continue to operate in that manner.’ I said, ‘What about the trainee and the individual and the user choice and the competition and what about the outcome?’

**Mrs VALE**—Absolutely. What about the outcomes?

**Mr Sibosado**—It is not just about funding schools any more. It is about outcomes.

**Mrs VALE**—It is about outcomes.

**Mr Sibosado**—I said, ‘That is the bit you do not seem to understand.’

**Mr SLIPPER**—What did she say?

**Mr Sibosado**—‘Well, that is just the way it is.’

**CHAIR**—Fait accompli. That is very revealing.

**Mr Sibosado**—Chair, I would like to get to mining—I keep sidetracking.

**CHAIR**—Can we stick with this, because we have uncovered a sad little gem here.

**Mr Batty**—Can I add something to that. This is an incredibly cynical exercise, but last year, for instance, DEST allocated \$110 million to this state for Indigenous training organisations, therefore the state government designated all of its TAFEs as Indigenous training organisations and gave all the money to them. So none of that money got to where DEST wanted it to go. There is really an issue for the Commonwealth there, where it has to look at organisations like DEST and DEST has to stand up a lot stronger to states like WA and say, ‘No, you have to put this money where it is intended.’ Either that, or it has to bypass the states altogether and fund Indigenous training organisations out of a separate bucket.

**Mr SLIPPER**—We would like to; basically the government would like to cut the states out, and we are doing it in areas like road recovery and others. Part of the problem is that the Australian government does not have the infrastructure on the ground to manage it.

**CHAIR**—Only in this case it does.

**Mrs VALE**—Yes, in this case it does, but—

**Mr SLIPPER**—But in many other areas we do not.

**CHAIR**—In this case it does; that is the point.

**Mrs VALE**—There are probably other organisations that we have come across—

**CHAIR**—We will get to mining in a minute.

**Mr SLIPPER**—What I—

**CHAIR**—Can we do this, Mr Slipper? I just want to try and nail this that one step further. I do not suppose you made any rough estimate of what it might mean in dollar terms to your organisation?

**Mr Sibosado**—In dollar terms, basically all we get out of it is a percentage of Kathy's wage, which funds the Aboriginal education and training employment officer. Then, because we are an RTO, we register on a public RTO list for public funding. There are numbers quarantined, and as we register trainees then we are able to access the public funding list from the VET sector of the department. It is a contract situation.

**CHAIR**—Sorry to interrupt, but Mr Batty might have a figure in mind. I do not expect all the i's dotted and t's crossed, but with that sort of policy what might you expect if you allowed a more open allocation of that resource?

**Mr Batty**—Realistically, out of that budget last year—that \$110 million—we could probably have expected \$6 million. Given the way it was funded and structured from DEST as to how the money was to be spent, realistically we would have expected between \$2 million and \$6 million.

**CHAIR**—Is that for your organisation—for the Indigenous private—

**Mr Batty**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Is that a rough number?

**Mr Batty**—I mean around about \$6 million for us alone, which would have made a huge difference—remembering that we operate across the entire Kimberley and down through most of the Pilbara.

**CHAIR**—Exactly. Can I just make the observation—you might want to make a comment, but we are running out of time, as we always do, which is good, because we have had plenty to talk about—that we are consistently running into this frustration with TAFE everywhere we go. As Mr Slipper has identified, we do not have the immediate governance of this organisation because of our federation, for a range of reasons that we all boringly know too well.

**Mr SLIPPER**—One of the reasons for setting up the Australian technical colleges was to bypass the states.

**Mr Batty**—Then again, that did not bypass the state. The one in the Pilbara was handed to Purnululu, which is controlled by the local TAFE. Therefore you have not bypassed the state at all. It looks very clever in that they have set it up as a separate entity—

**Mr Sibosado**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—The state has to approve the registration anyway. We tried, but we have still got it. You identify it very fairly with TAFE—they have got this and they have got that, and all the rest of it—but the people do not easily relate to the outcome model, which is Australia-wide. I do not pretend to understand why altogether, but we are getting some of the reasons.

**Mr Batty**—It is a whitefella model—

**CHAIR**—But it is not even suiting the whitefella, in many ways.

**Mr Mahony**—Can I just answer that, please?

**Mrs VALE**—Bob has a comment, I think.

**CHAIR**—And I think that we have probably just about squeezed the lemon dry, as far as TAFE goes, but is there any simple—

**Mr Batty**—No.

**Mrs VALE**—I think—

**CHAIR**—Can we talk about, just in two, three or five words, what TAFE—yes, Mrs Vale—means?

**Mrs VALE**—Bob has a comment.

**Mr Mahony**—Marty was mentioning something in there that he probably forgot about. We actually did have an application into DEST, and it was knocked back. That was through DEST and not through the department of training, wasn't it?

**Mr Sibosado**—Yes, I mentioned that, but the point I am making on that particular issue is that after being knocked back purely on our company registration of 'for profit' versus 'not for profit'—

**Mr Mahony**—Yes.

**Mr Sibosado**—That is the guideline; that is fine, but clearly we met every other criterion in the application with flying colours, in terms of numbers enrolled and process. We got rejected on our SRA, which would give us the means to employ our trainers and pay them a bit more—

**CHAIR**—Which is a different bucket.

**Mr Sibosado**—Out of the Indigenous employment policy. The ironic thing about this—and this is where bureaucracy has gone mad—is that they were able to fund us to sponsor the Broome Homework Centre. It was the same department but a different program that funded this organisation to sponsor the Broome Homework Centre, so we are a contractor or grantee in DEST. Yet when we apply for the VET funding to assist our training process—it is the policy; I do not disagree with the people who made the decision that they only fund not-for-profit organisations—my argument is, and I do not want to run it: 'I have grounds to go to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal because, on the one hand, you have said we are not eligible; on the other hand, you have turned around and given us a grant even though it is to sponsor a homework centre. I fail to understand your logic, but I do not want to fight about it.'

**CHAIR**—I understand. You could argue against yourself, but we need to deal with mining and I invited Ray to come in, way back. We need to answer this question on mining. Can we come to the mining bit and get a brief summary of where you think it fits? Does anyone want to have a go at the mining industry, how it is going and what it might mean?

**Mr Batty**—I would like to quickly talk about a few things and I think Marty has found the same thing and he will probably add to this afterwards. We have been working on the COAG side with Tanami Gold and Coyote Gold, and it is fine. They have both signed contracts with the local traditional owners that say, ‘We will give you 50 per cent employment,’ but that is as far as they go. There is no support for them to get the people trained up, into the mine or work ready. So they are signing a contract that says, ‘We will employ 50 per cent Indigenous people,’ but when the people come to front the mine, they say, ‘You don’t have the skills; we can’t employ you.’ They will not put any money towards these communities getting people trained up and job ready. It is all very well on paper for these mines to say, ‘Yes, we’re going to do this—

**CHAIR**—It is an interesting point because what we are getting a bit of is: you are a larger corporation—and we know who Argyle Diamonds is; it is one of the biggest, if not the biggest. Therefore it acts as if the government may be different to others. I do not know whether that is right, but that has been put to us—and I see by the roundtable that that may be right.

**Mr SLIPPER**—I would like to see the secretariat query the department in relation to the designation of all of the TAFEs in Western Australia as Indigenous training authorities. I would be very interested in what the bureaucratic answer is to that and I imagine it is competent for this committee to query the department for an answer.

**Mrs VALE**—Absolutely, on the basis that all other Indigenous training organisations are based on outcomes. I would have thought that if that is the criteria for others, it has got to be a criteria for TAFE.

**CHAIR**—I have lawyers on both sides of me.

**Mrs VALE**—And, Martin, can I tender: you’re not a bad bush lawyer.

**Mr SLIPPER**—I think we should call the department back and get an answer to that. I do not think we could adequately give a report in relation to this without at least knowing what their version is.

**Mrs VALE**—Absolutely.

**Mr Sibosado**—I think I will talk about the mining business. In terms of the 10-year strategy, we built the base. Where are we going in the next five years? As I said earlier with the Job Network, that gives us a project to sheet in terms of getting the mines. We know 600 kilometres down in the Pilbara there is any number of jobs. We have got a lot of unemployed people. We do not have the employment market or the industry in this region to be able to take those people up, give them meaningful employment and a career path. Therefore as we were talking loosely about before—housing in the Pilbara—why do we do these things? When we sent people to Melbourne, we sent three people, not one, to support each other. We generally do that everywhere we go. We have sent people to Gove, Sodexo in particular, to work. We have sent young people up to Argyle Diamonds. We have sent a young guy to Queensland who now works on a rig out of Singapore. We are starting to get that traction with our young people being prepared to move.

We like to say, 'Take away the impediments to someone moving somewhere for employment'—for example: where are they going to live and how are they going to pay their rent? We are saying that if we provide some housing infrastructure as part of our support process and get them down there, we have done it. We have people through the IEC down in the Pilbara who are now working. As Bob was saying earlier, we had a guy who had not worked for 20-odd years—there were three or four years of investment in training—who has relocated his whole family. He has a job in the Pilbara and he is as happy as Larry; suddenly he has some choices.

But, in terms of mining, as I said to the Job Network—with whom we still maintain close affiliations, because we are in that training and employment network—'Go down to Tom Price.' Through Dennis we already had another process happening, where an organisation out of Kalgoorlie—Rayburn, Meekatharra, basically some state coverage—is coming up here on a tour and a workshop. Eventually we want to spread. While some people have a bogey with native title in terms of employment and training, it is a fact, certainly in Western Australia, that a lot of the traditional owner groups have struck in their land use agreements with the mining companies agreements around employment and training.

What has been the difficulty? Having the vehicle—and I am talking from the Indigenous or traditional owner perspective—to take up what is in those agreements. For instance, most of the agreements with mining companies are around employment and training opportunities. But, as was said, the smaller ones, yes. But the Argyles, the Pilbara Irons, the Rio Tintos—the big ones—are able to talk with government directly. They are big organisations—I do not have to tell you that in this country—and they have different relationships from those of the small miners. In a nutshell, we are planning to engage with the native title or traditional owner groups who have those agreements. We are well placed as an organisation with an RTO, a job network, to say to the traditional owner groups, 'You let us be the broker in the middle, between you and the mining company; we have the vehicles to give practical effect to the mining agreements.' Too many of those agreements have been struck. But, because the Indigenous community does not have the know-how or the resources to implement them, we see a niche for ourselves in the future in being able to get in the middle of the agreement and say, 'We've got an RTO; we can come here, just as we are doing up in Tjurabalan.' The big educational institutes will not tackle those things, because they are too remote, too far, and the logistics of delivering the training is too hard. So, yes, we are planning to tackle that mining in a bigger way. That is our next phase of development; that is certainly on our drawing board.

**CHAIR**—Way back there somewhere there were some issues.

**Mr Christophers**—Going back to housing and what you have heard, I just wanted to add that we are a positive organisation and we have these problems, but we will work through them. I know it happens all around the country. There is a housing problem with youth. So that you do not get the wrong idea, let me say that this is our opportunity to say what is not right, but it does not mean that we will not do what we have to do; we will still go on to do that. It is just that with some of the programs we feel that we may not get exactly the outcome as quickly as the government might like to, but we will get it. That is the same as Marty is saying. We will go it alone and that is what we have done. As a committee member and a director, I will say that Nirrumbuk will still do that regardless.

**CHAIR**—That is a very good comment, because it is a reminder to all of us, particularly to me, who are very keen on the positive messages within Indigenous employment all over Australia to remember that, even with the difficulties and the challenges.

**Mr Christophers**—We cannot miss an opportunity to say what we have to say.

**CHAIR**—At the same time, we cannot be blind to the blockages we all feel in our different ways as to how we might do it better. We must remember that the goal is positive and that there are many positive examples.

**Mr Christophers**—It is fair to say that.

**CHAIR**—I am going to refer back to a slight negative. I apologise for this, but I do need to ask, because we have had some comments—and people may or may not want to comment—about the ICC, the Indigenous Coordination Centre. Would anyone be prepared to just give us a picture? It is as simple as saying whether you have much contact with the ICC.

**Mr SLIPPER**—Martin's face is a picture!

**Mr Sibosado**—I will declare my interest. I was a regional councillor for six years and I have also been a Broome shire councillor, so I have served the general community and the Indigenous community. I mean no disrespect to the person who is there; he is a nice fellow and everything, but I have never in my 20 years in Indigenous affairs encountered such a disconnect in all my life. There is no dialogue going on between governments. The fact is that Indigenous people, not through our own fault, are dependent on government. Government funds are our primary source. That is the challenge for us—to develop some measure of economic independence. But the government, our chief bread provider, is not talking to us in terms of the ICC, coordination, partnerships and taking account of local decision making. I am well versed with COAG and what governments, state, Commonwealth and local, agreed. In terms of all that stuff, it is an unmitigated disaster, and that is to put it mildly.

**Mrs VALE**—Don't hold back, Martin!

**CHAIR**—I am very grateful to you, because—

**Mr SLIPPER**—Do you have anything bad to say!

**Mr Sibosado**—In the seventies I worked for the Aboriginal Development Commission, the predecessor to ATSIC. My father was one of the first elected national Aboriginal councillors. So I think I am qualified to speak about Indigenous affairs. In the seventies, the same types of things happened that are happening today with the ICC. Local decision making? No. Today it is exactly the same as when I worked in the bureaucracy. First a decision is made in Perth by the state manager. He has the limit of delegation. Then it goes off to Canberra because he does not have the next level. We have reverted back 30 years. We have no say. With housing, for example, which we were just discussing, not a black face determines the allocation of houses.

I know ATSIC at the board level deserved what they got. At the regional level they certainly did not, because we were making an impact, we were represented and we were elected by our



people in a democratic process. We had any number of policies around good governance and sustainable development. I challenge anyone to look at that. Housing and works have taken over the state. You put the cookie monster in the cookie jar, and they are just gleaning money off. It is going back to Perth and there is no local decision making.

I can give you examples. I am glad I am in this situation in a way. In ATSIC regional councils we had a million-dollar budget to provide housing. So we went and built, and if you go out to the bush you will see them, shed type impoverished dwellings. Because of the demand, we had to make that money stretch and accommodate people as far as we could. They are not houses by any stretch of the imagination. Some of them are as large as your car shed. But housing and works took over—and, Ray, you will acknowledge what I am saying—and today the norm is a \$600,000 house for a man, his wife and two kids. It is just ridiculous. Those houses would not be out of place here in millionaires' row in Broome. But the state, not thinking about the overall population and need, is going around building houses at \$600,000—mansions, in other words—infrastructure and all those things; you name it. They are totally uncoordinated and uninformed. We have gone back to poor workmanship. Contractors from Perth get up here and think, 'Okay, I can knock a few bucks off here; I am out bush, out of sight,' go broke and leave the project. That has happened a few times since ATSIC's demise.

On the ICC, in a word, the sooner we get to the spirit of what was agreed to in COAG—and I know what the government had in mind—of partnerships with locals taking into account local circumstances and not a one size fits all, the better. The challenge—and you can take this with a pinch of salt—is to reform the way the wheels of government work in the bureaucracy. They have just reverted back to the 1970s and, while they have been at it, have given us all a good beating.

I am not saying this because I was with ATSIC; I adapt to change fairly well—that is what I credit myself on. I am not set in mud. Whether or not ATSIC had to go was the government's decision—they set it up and they funded it. If that is the government's decision, I acknowledge that. The government is elected to run the country. No-one argues with those things, but don't knock things down and leave us in a vacuum. That is the challenge for the ICC—and I say that to that man. Why do I say all this? Again, Ray and people here will know. For five years the regional council invested something like \$300,000 of taxpayers' money in 300-odd meetings with communities and put together a regional plan. We were informed 12 months prior to ATSIC closing. So we went down this path of putting in place a regional structure, seeking a regional partnership agreement.

**CHAIR**—No go?

**Mr Sibosado**—Everything was written and documented, we had people's support. The bureaucracy could not get it together between the ICC and the state and join it up to get a whole of government approach. There was nothing. Suddenly we have lost the interest of the community. They just say, 'It is another scheme. The government will come again.' 'Yes, but we need to keep pursuing this RPA—regional partnership agreement—under the new approach.'

**Mr SLIPPER**—Have you raised these matters with your local member, Barry Haase?

**Mr Sibosado**—I have. Me and Barry, it is fair to say, do not see eye to eye. We have differences of opinion. Barry actually opened this place. His plaque is on the wall.

**CHAIR**—I think it is still a useful thing to say. ICC has been contentious and disappointing, to put it mildly, in many parts of Australia. I think we need to be honest about that. You have put that very clearly to us this morning. I need to wind this up, but I do need to give you all an opportunity for a final word. I want to go to the chairperson and to Ray. Is there anything else that is burning that needs to bounce out?

**Mr Sibosado**—If I can have one final brief word, it would be around coordination and delivery of Indigenous services on that very issue I just spoke on—the ICC. Do not allow leadership to dissipate. That is what I am saying. This corporation—and there are other corporations in this region—are leaders that do not necessarily abide with this welfare dependency and are actively working on practical outcomes. What we are doing demonstrates that. But while we cannot have dialogue how do we address the Indigenous situation in our particular region? Quite frankly, while it sounds callous, what happens in Kununurra or Redfern does not really concern me. I feel sorry for them as fellow Australians and fellow Aboriginal people, but it is not something that I am practically going to do something about. If something happens in my community I am practically going to get up and do something.

**CHAIR**—Which reflects, probably, the way most of us feel about our regional community. We need to be able to connect like that.

**Mr Sibosado**—Yes. My point being, we need to coordinate services. What works here, we know. We are prepared to take that leadership role—I think our performance speaks for itself—to work with government on the issues that effect our people. But there is a lack of coordination. I understand that it is new. Personally from a management perspective, it may take three or four years for all those government agencies to get coordinated.

**CHAIR**—You are being very fair.

**Mr Sibosado**—You have to be, at the end of the day. Clearly, the types of things that this organisation is doing address the issues on the ground. I said to you earlier, on top of what we do, we also have things like Ray's organisation. We are allowed to go out and deal with the rest of the community, with the CDEP. The things that I talked about regarding the Western Australian Aboriginal justice agreement included incarceration, all the criminal activities that are going on and the social things that Minister Brough is talking about at the moment. We are prepared to address those issues. The whole of government is not working for us in the partnerships. Therefore you do not harness issues. We are not talking to each other. That is all I am saying about that.

**Mrs VALE**—Could I ask a very quick question, just to raise something you said. Is the man in charge of the ICC—the manager or whatever—appointed from Canberra?

**Mr Sibosado**—Yes, but he actually came from Cape York. Personally, I have great hope because he comes from Noel Pearson's area of Cape York. He is up to speed with everything. We should be able to get along fine.

**Mrs VALE**—Is he an Indigenous person?

**Mr Sibosado**—No, he is not Indigenous.

**Mrs VALE**—Do you think it would be helpful, in the structure of the ICCs, if an Indigenous person were elected by the local Indigenous people to be on the ICC committee?

**Mr Sibosado**—Not really, because the real issues are around whole of government, mainstreaming and service agencies. The agencies are not talking to each other or coordinating their delivery of services.

**CHAIR**—Are there any final wrap-up comments?

**Mr Christophers**—I just want to add to what Bob said and go back to the CDEP. I believe it is a good program. I am the chair. In the ATSIC days, we in the CDEP were also involved in the bureaucratic things that happened in Canberra. On the ground, we would have liked to have seen the CDEP being delivered differently. DEWR has now become involved and we do not see anything wrong with a lot of the changes that DEWR has put in, especially regarding our youth employment and that sort of stuff. I would like to say that, if we were given the opportunity, we would have done close to what you have done now. I know you have had something to do with CDEP. I do not believe that CDEP is a bad program. Like any program, you do have some failures, but, in all, I have seen some good employment opportunities come out of CDEP. I have seen people being able to go the extra step. In a small town like Broome, you would not get those opportunities in administration. CDEP did provide a lot of that. If we go to the mining sector, CDEP vehicles were driven to go to the mine. That is a lot of stuff that you do not see on the ground with CDEP. I will finish there. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for that. Bob, would you like to say something?

**Mr Mahony**—I want to reiterate what Ray and Marty said. I suppose the hardest thing for me is that we now do not have the linkages to the ministers. They are the hardest ones to get to. The experience with Mal and Tony was that, once we actually put across a case and did not just say that it was wrong but gave solutions, that changed the program and made it extremely successful around the country. But you cannot get past the advisors and whatever else. The hardest thing for me these days is that I really do not know who to talk to. It is not as though I could ring David Moore and say, 'David, this is a problem.' As I said, we got as far as Brendan and that was it. Do you know what I mean? That is the difficult thing for me these days. I suppose 'Who is Bob Mahony?' is the easiest way of putting it. It is just that there was a dialogue going on at the senior level which I think changed a lot. I know that Marty has met with ministers, their chiefs of staff and that type of thing. That is the thing that I have seen go in the last couple of years. We actually try and offer solutions, as I said. We do not disagree with the way things are going; it is perhaps just the way that it has been implemented. We have not had any input into any of these changes, which disappoints me after the last six years of work.

**Mr SLIPPER**—You do of course have access to your local member, even if you do not agree with him.

**Mr Mahony**—I can talk to Barry, mate. He is all right. It is more the understanding—getting people who understand where things are going. You have people laying out programs who really do not know the program, like Marty said about it going back to Canberra. What would Canberra know what is happening in the Beagle Bay community north of Broome? With the ICC not having all those linkages and all the various departments coming together at the COAG site, it is just not working. So what Marty is saying, what Ray is saying and what I am saying all links in with the fact that there is no communication between the parties. That is why things have fallen down.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for that, and thanks for your perseverance there in Coolum. Can I thank everybody for a pretty candid and forthright discussion. Emma is going to give perhaps a few paras, and others should feel free to sum up on anything that they feel they might like to add to today. I thank all of you. We are appreciative.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Slipper**, seconded by **Mrs Vale**):

That the evidence taken in these proceedings today be authorised for publication.

**Committee adjourned at 10.56 am**