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SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Petrol sniffing in remote Aboriginal communities

TUESDAY, 16 MAY 2006

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SENATE
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 16 May 2006

Members: Senator Moore (*Chair*), Senator Humphries (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Adams, Allison, Carol Brown and Polley

Substitute members: Senator Crossin for Senator Carol Brown and Senator Bartlett for Senator Allison

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Barnett, Bartlett, Bernardi, Bishop, Bob Brown, George Campbell, Carr, Chapman, Colbeck, Coonan, Crossin, Eggleston, Evans, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Fielding, Forshaw, Hurley, Joyce, Lightfoot, Ludwig, Lundy, Mason, McGauran, Milne, Murray, Nettle, O'Brien, Parry, Payne, Siewert, Stephens, Stott Despoja, Watson, Webber and Wong

Senators in attendance: Senators Adams, Bartlett, Crossin, Humphries, Moore, Siewert and Webber

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

- a. the effectiveness of existing laws and policing with respect to petrol sniffing in affected Indigenous communities;
- b. the effectiveness of diversionary initiatives and community level activities; and
- c. lessons that can be learned from the success some communities have had in reducing petrol sniffing including the impact of non-sniffable Opal petrol.

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CHAIR (Senator Moore)—The Senate Community Affairs References Committee is continuing its inquiry into petrol sniffing in remote Indigenous communities. On behalf of the committee I would like to acknowledge, as always, the traditional owners of this land and thank them for welcoming us here today. I welcome Mrs Tur, our first witness. Mrs Tur, for your information, our committee is: Senator Judith Adams from Western Australia, Senator Gary Humphries from the ACT, Senator Rachel Siewert from Western Australia, Senator Trish Crossin from the Northern Territory and Senator Andrew Bartlett from Queensland. Do you wish to say anything about the capacity in which you appear?

Mrs Tur—I am here because I was asked to present oral information about petrol sniffing.

CHAIR—Thank you. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. The committee prefers evidence to be taken in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if you think there is something that needs that facility, so just ask us if you do. I know that you have brought along a presentation; if you would like to share that with us, and then we can move into questions.

Mrs Tur—Yes, I would like to. Thank you very much. Ngayulu Ngurur ngarala kulira munu Wangkanyi Ananguku ara. I am standing in the middle to listen and talk about the plight of my people's situation. Ngayulu Kaurnatjutaku mantagangka ngaranya. I acknowledge that I am standing on Kurna land.

My name is Mona Ngitji Ngitji Kennedy Tur. I was born 100 kilometres north of Oodnadatta on Hamilton cattle station in remote South Australia. I am an Antikirinya/Yankunytjatjara and Irish woman—my mother is Anangu and my father was Irish. I also share family lineage to the Pitjantjatjara community through my grandmother. Even though I do not have a university doctorate, I have been recognised by my communities as an expert in my language and culture, and that is good enough for me. I have been an interpreter in the Pitjantjatjara and Antikirinya/Yankunytjatjara languages for over 30 years. I was given permission by the Pitjantjatjara elders to teach and interpret, as this is not my mother tongue. I have interpreted in courts, hospitals and prisons, and for native title claims for Anangu people. I have been a registered interpreter with the Interpreting and Translating Centre, previously known as the Ethnic Affairs Commission, since 1983. I am a cultural broker, lecturer and tutor of conversational Pitjantjatjara; a tutor of conversational Antikirinya/Yankunytjatjara; a teacher of Aboriginal cultural awareness to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples; a poet; and a custodian and teacher of traditional knowledge.

In the assimilation period in the 1950s, when I was 14 years old, I was sent away to Adelaide to work as a domestic servant in prestigious white homes. I was in reality taken away from my precious mother and the rest of my family, but this was the policy of the day so I just had to accept it. I was lucky when I ended up working long term for a rural family where the wife of the landowner and mother of three boys allowed me to regularly return to my camp home to see my mother and my family. I remained close to my family so far away because the foster parent took me under her wing and treated me like a daughter. Even though as a child I had to go so far

away from my family, I today feel blessed because I was able to hold onto my language and culture, eventually sharing these gifts with others.

I became involved in the petrol sniffing program through the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement in 1974 as an interpreter. On holiday at Indulkana community in 1972, visiting my mother and family members, I became aware of how petrol sniffing was affecting Anangu lives. The effects were devastating. These included a sense of loss, cultural and generational breakdown, deaths, dysfunction and hopelessness. The effects of petrol sniffing were exposed by the media in Adelaide, who highlighted the problems of petrol sniffing on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands. All of a sudden government departments, the child-care agency and welfare were on full alert.

As a response there were programs set up through the Anangu Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara lands—like camel mustering, horse mustering and other intervention activities—to try to prevent petrol sniffing, but sadly these programs eventually stopped. I interpreted for many young Anangu affected by the petrol sniffing who were sent to Adelaide to be checked by medical staff. As an interpreter witnessing these young Anangu I felt saddened, as many had brain damage, disease and loss of culture, as they were made outcasts in their own community due to petrol sniffing. I saw program after program start and then abruptly stop because there was no more funding left, there were no more staff and the community eventually lost interest in trying to keep programs going. They were getting stressed and sick themselves. No-one was there to help. The Anangu felt it was out of their cultural control. They could not use their ngankaris—that is, the traditional healers—as petrol sniffing was seen as a white man's illness. The petrol sniffers were called 'kata kuya tjuta', the crazy ones, by their own community members. However, Anangu understand today that this behaviour by the petrol sniffers is because of the petrol fumes inhaled by them making them sick.

I attended a women's meeting on the APY lands in November 2001 and at Spear Creek, Port Augusta, in December 2001. At these meetings the Anangu women emphasised strongly and clearly their concerns about the lack of help for the petrol sniffers in their communities, and they outlined some recommendations to deal with petrol sniffing. The women wished for the following: (1), that a rehab complex be set up in Port Augusta for petrol sniffers. The women felt that being at Port Augusta would limit the petrol sniffers from leaving the centre until they were fully recovered, because they were so far away from their communities. (2), Anangu wanted to choose the staff, which included community members, organising and participating in the interviews. (3), they sought quality staff with appropriate skills and the ability to work alongside Anangu and train Anangu. (4), they wanted there to be transparency as to how and where government money was being used for Anangu.

(5), the rehabilitation centre was to be aimed at young Anangu up to the age of 18 years. (6), as per traditional law, men and women were to live in separate quarters. (7), that a training program be established in the rehab complex so that when Anangu recovered they were able to return to their communities with good living and working skills, to try to help them stay away from the petrol and the habits that might bring them back to petrol sniffing. (8), the women asked for a place for parents to come and stay while they visited their children at the rehab complex in Port Augusta. Having their families close would help support people going through rehabilitation. It would also allow families to own and be responsible for their family members

through the rehabilitation process so that recovering and healing was holistic and available to all family members. Petrol sniffing affects the whole family, not just the person who is sniffing.

I am unsure whether the recommendations were acted upon at that time and whether the women's voices were heard, but it is evident that in 2006 our communities are no better off. In fact, some communities say that petrol sniffing has become even more devastating and dire than when I began the collective fight against it 30 years ago. To me, it seems that the government—state and Commonwealth—have given up the fight against petrol sniffing in our remote South Australian communities. That is sending a message to our communities that the government just do not care and that we, the Anangu, are alone in our fight against this poison.

I have seen so much destruction in my communities because of petrol sniffing. This was particularly evident when I travelled as a court interpreter with magistrates Hiskey, Vass, Swain and Grantley Harris on the court circuit for six years and also as a correctional services officer at Marla Bore for two years. Despite so many programs coming and going as quick as a flash, the issues that existed in the 1970s still exist today. So I am asking the government: do they really support self-determination of the Anangu community or do they wish for the situation on the lands to remain the same? After all these programs, interventions and prevention initiatives, how will this inquiry help Anangu petrol sniffers? Are we going to be controlled forever by short-term strategies, pilot programs, one-off funding, changing governments and all the political games being played? Will the inquiry listen to the recommendations by the women at Spear Creek?

We are the most over-researched people in Australia and yet we live in poverty and devastation in what we call this 'lucky country' of ours. The leaders of this country should be ashamed because, to the international community, Australia is seen as a First World country. The Indigenous people of Australia live under Third World conditions. Should we ask organisations like Oxfam to look closer to home and start collecting money for our own Anangu? The Anangu lands have some of the richest minerals in the world and still the Anangu people have limited health services, education and employment opportunities. Why are we missing out?

One answer to help address petrol sniffing is for all of us, black and white, to work in partnership, in reconciliation. We are experts of our own communities. You need to see us as experts. The government need to utilise our knowledge. Start listening to us because we have many answers and solutions. We have survived for 60,000 years and, in particular, for 217 years of genocide and cultural damage. I am sick and tired of the government turning to non-Indigenous cultural experts when we are waiting to be asked the questions so that we can finally give some answers. Sit down with Anangu on the Anangu lands, for the Anangu people.

From this inquiry I would like to see a consultation meeting being held in the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara lands so that Anangu can share their thoughts and approaches about petrol sniffing. If changes are to occur about petrol sniffing then the community needs to be involved with the decisions made. Our community understands the negative effects petrol sniffing has on our family members. It requires strategies that are culturally safe and respectful of Anangu ways.

I believe change can be effective only if a holistic approach is taken—that is, that the government, with the APY community, consider all social indicators, such as health, housing,

education, employment and economic status, which impact on why Anangu might take up petrol sniffing. We do not want to lose our children and family to this poison. We need to understand the long-term impacts of petrol sniffing on generations of Anangu families. Anangu have a strong culture and we want to continue to keep our culture strong. The government need to take this seriously.

If the situation were different and it was non-Indigenous children and individuals petrol sniffing in urban communities, would it have taken over 30 years for serious attention about petrol sniffing to be paid? I imagine the answer and response would be different. Anangu live in a colonised world. Despite this we are strong and want the best for our children and future generations. Please listen to us, open your ears to our concerns and together we can change this situation for the better. Before I end I would like to read you a poem that I wrote as a person who was so much in the limelight in 1973. It is what happens to Indigenous people when they are put in this place by government departments. This is my own story that I am going to finish with. It is called *Lost Vision*:

You who bore me, in dust of earth
Once a vision your heartache poverty did I see.
Then by chance, whiteman's school was for me.
In mind to brighten your future was my vow.
Obscured now, your bleeding heart your face.
Personal ambitions to fame has quenched its flame.
Alone I sit in my ivory tower, plenty money, whiteman's
praise and power.
Removed from your anguish and pain not my concern,
the grog, petrol sniffing, metho taken over Aboriginal
mob.
Going our laws, corroborees, once proud Elders sob.
Our role has become a lost job.
Now recognizing my false, self indulgent situation.
I cry beloved people, my flesh, my blood.
Bring back your revision.

Save what's left of proud dejected race.

Elders, your power, wisdom, must set lasting pace.

Knowledge gained with European confrontation

brought me nothing but self degradation.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mrs Tur. We will now go to questions.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Thank you, Mrs Tur, for that evidence. You mentioned that lots of programs had been begun in your homelands and stopped for no apparent reason. Are you aware of any evidence that any governments could point to about the programs not having been effective or not having had support from Aboriginal communities or any other reason that might be given for them not being continued?

Mrs Tur—As I said, I do not live up there, but I do go backwards and forwards amongst the community. I am in the middle because I am an interpreter and they see me as a middle person. I really cannot put my hand on exactly what is going on. I really feel personally that there is not enough consultation with the Anangu on what they would like. I think what is happening is that other people are putting on what they would like to happen for their children and for their children's children and not directly asking them.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You said that petrol sniffing was seen as a white man's illness. Do you think that means that it is white man's responsibility to fix the problem?

Mrs Tur—As a mother of two children, we can say drugs and all the other things are other people's business. I also feel that the Anangu do really have to take responsibility as parents and try to control their children. If my child is on drugs, I cannot go across to the next-door neighbour and say that it is their fault. I have to try to help that young person. I feel there should be an education program for parents to attend to say, 'Yes, it may be a white man's problem, but in reality it also comes down to families being responsible for their children.'

Senator CROSSIN—Thank you, Mrs Tur, for making the effort to come today. It is appreciated. You mentioned when you first started off that some of the children were actually brought down to Adelaide for treatment. Can you tell me a little bit more about what sort of treatment they would have got or why they came to Adelaide?

Mrs Tur—As you know, I work in a confidential area as an interpreter. I can just say that I was asked by the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement to come in as an interpreter to interpret for the child-care agency. I was told that petrol sniffing would be having a lot of effect on the children in terms of brain damage. That is the reason why. I had to interpret to the child and the parent on what was going on. I cannot go any deeper than that other than to say it was a devastating thing, because petrol sniffing mucks up your brain and the whole of your body.

Senator CROSSIN—Without going into any personal cases, though, was it because those children needed psychiatric assistance or medical assistance to the degree that it had to be given here in Adelaide rather than in their communities?

Mrs Tur—They could not do it up in the bush or in Alice Springs, because there are no facilities. The media exposed it just like that. So the government and everybody started jumping around. They had to start somewhere. The only place that you could come to help these children was a place like Adelaide. We have doctors who are qualified in all these things. Through those medical examinations, they found out really what it was that was harming our children. That is why they had to be sent down here. Otherwise, you would not have really known what was happening. Everybody suddenly realised that we had this big problem of petrol sniffing. From then onwards, when the children were sent down here for medical purposes, people started to think, ‘Yes, this is worse than we really thought, because it has been proved by medical staff that it is dangerous for our children.’

Senator CROSSIN—There has now been some discussion about having a rehabilitation centre on the APY lands or in Alice Springs. I think there is probably, though, a move to put it on the APY lands. Do you think that has come out of the women’s meeting that you had?

Mrs Tur—I do not know. As I said, once I did the interpreting, whatever I interpreted was left in the government department that I was interpreting for. I did not have any feedback. Maybe this is one of the things that has come out of this meeting. I do not know.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to pick up on the question that Senator Humphries asked. We have had a lot of evidence to say that you cannot just put it back on communities because they need other resources and things like that. You also talked about the need for consultation. How do we get it right in terms of making sure that communities have control, but that the broader community is not saying, ‘You take full responsibility for doing it. It’s your fault’? How do you get that balance?

Mrs Tur—As I said before, I noticed that today there is going to be a lot of lawyers and people who have been missionaries on the AP lands. Normally, from my personal perspective, all the information is taken from the non-Indigenous experts. I do not think there has ever been a time when people in authority have actually gone and sat down face to face with the Anangu and talked with them rather than bringing in and listening to many non-Indigenous experts, who seem to be listened to rather than the Aboriginal people themselves who have the problem. This is one big issue that I see as an Indigenous person sitting outside my own community. I am looking in from the outside.

Every time there is a catastrophe on the AP lands, who are approached? It is non-Indigenous experts who may have control of the situation and think that the Aboriginal person does not have the know-how to do these things. That is possibly what it is. That is what I see happen instead of getting the Anangu, sitting down properly and getting first-hand information rather than second-hand or third-hand information from non-Aboriginal experts, although I do have great respect for these people who are my colleagues and students who I have taught in the Pitjantjatjara language.

Senator BARTLETT—We are predominantly looking at petrol sniffing throughout this inquiry. If we were able, whether through non-sniffable petrol or other sorts of things, to address that, how much do you think that would fix the problem, particularly for younger people? Is there also the likelihood of other substance problems, like amphetamines, marijuana or alcohol?

Mrs Tur—In my day and age, you never heard about drugs. You had a different mode of conduct in my day, in your day and in our grandfathers' and grandmothers' days. Today we live in a changing society. Today we live watching Foxtel, the unrealities of stuff that comes out of Hollywood and things like that. It is not just our Indigenous people who are suffering. It is all children. I had two young daughters who went to St Dominic's, where they studied. It does not matter which hierarchy you come from, kids will try drugs. I think it is an issue for both non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, as I said. What I feel that the Anangu really need is education. You have parenting education. If a person does not look after their child or something like that, welfare or the courts say, 'You have to come and do a course,' or something like that. Instead of just looking at the children's programs when you are working with Anangu people, you really need to look at it holistically because our culture is holistic. I feel that you have to look at it from that point of view. I hope I am answering your question.

Senator BARTLETT—Yes. At a few of the other hearings I have been to, I have got the personal impression that in those communities that are still quite strong, where the family networks are still strong and the extended family is strong, there is a lot more ability to do what you suggested. If someone gets into petrol or drugs or something and the parents are not coping, others can step in and try and help the child or get them out of danger. How much is the strength of the local communities and the family networks crucial to being able to not so much stop the kids experimenting—because that is what they do—but to help them before they get addicted or before it gets chronic?

Mrs Tur—I think it is very important. As you know, the kinship system in the old days worked. People looked after themselves. Just recently, there are some communities where I believe that they are looking at the petrol sniffing in a holistic, family kinship situation, where the whole community is involved and the elders have been given the authority to be a part of the whole petrol sniffing program. There is a chance if the whole community gets behind it and the whole family structure is given support from these communities. I believe there is one such community at this moment. I cannot speak too much about what is actually happening there because I live away in Adelaide and I just meet my family. My house is like a crossroads, where people come if they need any help and they tell me these things. I feel that the whole kinship system has to be looked at, training given and the elders given more power to take control.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you, Mrs Tur, I really enjoyed your presentation. I am going to pose a hypothetical question. With your experience and knowledge, if you were given the mandate to perhaps set up a pilot to try to cure or improve the situation with petrol sniffing in the lands, how would you go about it? We really need a solution that is somehow going to fit in with your people.

Mrs Tur—The solution is really not with people like me but actually going to talk with the community face to face. I think that is where you will find the solution. I read out what the women from Spear Creek said. They are amazing solutions coming from traditional women who want those things to go ahead to save their children. I cannot speak really for my people. I am really surprised that the mothers and fathers who have actually lost their children through petrol sniffing are not here. Where are they today?

Senator ADAMS—Say the government asked you to go out there and try to set up a program that was really going to work. Could you put yourself in that position?

Mrs Tur—I could put myself in that position. I would sit down on the manta, on the land, with the Anangu and say, ‘How can we do it together?’ I would not send in people from outside to make all the decisions. That is the only way that I would do it. I would go back and sit with the people and say: ‘We’ve got this problem here. How are we going to look at it as a family, as a walytjapiti? How are we going to look at it? Once we had talked, I would then reach out to the people. I really feel that it should come from the people—like those women who want this complex for their people. I do not think they have been given the opportunity to even interview the people who they want there. It is chosen by other people who know nothing about Anangu and the culture. That is all I can say.

Senator ADAMS—You spoke about perhaps having a rehabilitation centre at Port Augusta.

Mrs Tur—That was very strong at the meeting that we held in 2001 at Spear Creek. Even though these women talked about that, they said they would like to go back and talk with their men. If the men were happy about that, then they would like this program to be started away from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands for the simple reason that it is very easy for kids to run away in their own community. As I said to you in my speech here today, they felt that they should be sent away to a place—I am not sure of the name; if somebody could help me with that—where Aboriginal people are sent when alcohol is a problem.

Senator ADAMS—Was it Mount Theo?

Mrs Tur—No, somewhere around Port Augusta. I have forgotten the name now. They said the complex should be put there and that it should have all the facilities for young men and young women, including numeracy and literacy programs and the teaching of life skills like home economics and how to look after themselves. They should be educated there. In the meantime, Aboriginal people should be trained to work with their own people rather than always getting non-Indigenous people.

Dozens of kids come through from the AP lands to the education program in Adelaide. Some of them are very good and they might go to years 10, 11 or 12. When they graduate, they may have wonderful computer skills and have learnt other skills, but what happens to them when go back to the AP lands? There is nothing for them. I have spoken to teachers and to people on the lands. There is a TAFE program up there. When these children finish their education and go back to the AP lands, there are no jobs for them. There is nothing for them to do, so what do they do? With all their educational capabilities and everything else that they were sent away to train for, when they go back there are no jobs for our children.

And the living standards! I go up there. It does not matter. You hear glossy reports about beautiful things that are happening, and there are some good things happening in the land, but families in the community do not have a fridge, a washing machine or a good home. Every non-Indigenous person—and I know myself, because I was a government worker at Marla; I had a house all ready for me and I had everything that opened and shut. I had a washing machine. I had all the facilities to look after my family. But what have the mothers got on the homelands? You have to be able to look after your child. You have to be able to have food. You have to be able to look after that child. I do not know what happened in the years prior to my mother and other Aboriginal women who were forced to work on cattle stations, but at least we were taken

care of. Even if we were in the bush, we had a bath, we had clean clothes and all that type of thing.

When non-Indigenous young women and Indigenous young women were training, they had what was called home economics. I really believe that they should have something like that to teach people life skills. It is wonderful for people to learn to play football, go bike riding and do all these other things. Recently I heard that there is ‘no school, no pool’. What does that teach people? What is that teaching our people? It is wonderful to have all those things like football and all that type of thing for the young people together, but we want—if I was not an old woman, I would want to learn life skills so that I could pass them on. My mother passed on her life skills to me, and when I was in the mission they passed on their life skills to me, and I pass them on to my children and my grandchildren. There has been some kind of breakdown there.

Senator ADAMS—I have another quick question. Are the younger people respecting the elders the way they should?

Mrs Tur—No. It is in both the non-Indigenous world and our world. Respect for elders is waning. You never called your grandparents by their first name when you were non-Indigenous, and we do not do that in our culture. In both our cultures—none of us can get away from it because it is all over the world—young people are not respecting their elders. And I think this is one unfortunate part of the growing generations of young people. In my time, I was brought up to respect and do everything that the culture taught me. I was taught that from my mother, and she was taught that before from her mother. But there has been a breakdown, as I said before, with all these other things that are coming in. Unfortunately, this is a changing world. There is not the respect that I had for my elders happening today with our people. It is waning, which is very sad.

Senator ADAMS—How can we turn that around?

Mrs Tur—I think the people themselves have to try to understand how you can bring back respect. How can you really do that? How can you bring respect back? You have to really work at it somehow. I do not have the answer to it, but I think listening to your old people—for me, anyway, as a young Anangu woman growing up in the camp till I was 10 years of age, I learnt a lot of things there. The respect was there, and I will always have respect. But, as I said, I cannot answer for other people; I can only answer for myself. I have to try to teach my granddaughter somehow to be respectful to her elders.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mrs Tur. We have to finalise our report in about a month, so if you think of something you want to send to the committee after you go, please be in contact with us. Sometimes you find there is something that you really want to share after you have gone, so please get in contact with us.

Mrs Tur—Okay.

CHAIR—We appreciate your evidence and your statement.

Mrs Tur—Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity. I am only here by chance because Michelle Madigan, a Catholic sister with whom I have worked in the past, was unable to take part, so she asked me to come. I am just here by chance. Thank you for giving me the opportunity.

CHAIR—We are pleased that you came.

[9.50 am]

CHARLES, Mr Christopher, Chairman, Aboriginal Issues Committee, Law Society of South Australia

COLLETT, Mr Andrew Clive, Member, Aboriginal Issues Committee, Law Society of South Australia

ESZENYI, Ms Dymphna Julianne ('Deej'), President, Law Society of South Australia

CHAIR—Welcome. Have any of you given evidence to Senate inquiries before?

Ms Eszenyi—Yes.

CHAIR—It is very useful to have that on record. You have information on parliamentary privilege, the protection of witnesses and the process of in camera evidence—which you may have if you wish—so we will not go into that. The committee thanks you for your submission, which was No. 41. If any of you would like to make an opening presentation, please go ahead, and then we will go into questions.

Ms Eszenyi—Thank you for the opportunity of speaking to our submission. Both Chris Charles and Andrew Collett have worked with Aboriginal clients and communities for many years. Both have worked with clients on and from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands. I have also worked, and work, with clients, primarily victims of crime, who live on those lands. One of the first observations that we make about the people of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands is the obvious one: they live in South Australia, in Western Australia and in the Northern Territory, and they move from place to place across those two states and the Territory. We are therefore very conscious that the task of providing services to the people on those lands is not and should not be the task of any one of the two states or territory. Can I break here and ask you, senators, if you have had the opportunity of seeing a graphic depiction of the lands. Do you have a map?

CHAIR—Yes, we do.

Ms Eszenyi—The map shows very clearly what we are talking about. This particular group of people is not a group that lives in any one state or territory. Many of the services which the people of these lands need are services which are in the capital cities, provided by the state and territory governments. Police, criminal law, education, sporting and recreational services are largely state based. The Commonwealth stands back from direct involvement. But this particular group of people on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands are Australians first, before they are in any real sense South Australians, Western Australians or Northern Territorians. So the interest of the Commonwealth parliament in these people is critically important. We believe that the Commonwealth is in a position to take direct and positive steps to address the problem of petrol sniffing on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands.

Our first submission relates to the technical area of mortality and morbidity coding for people who have lived on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands. Petrol sniffers who die in situ—that is, on the

lands—will be recorded in the state or territory where they were sniffing, or where they die. The connection between their petrol sniffing and their death will be likely to be noted. But petrol sniffers who become ill and are transported to hospital, say at Alice Springs or Adelaide, may have their death or impairment coded in such a way as masks the impact of petrol sniffing. Coding training is expensive. It is an adjunct to the delivery of health services. That is something in which the Commonwealth is the pre-eminent player. Support and funding for uniform mortality and morbidity coding for these people is a project which we urge the Commonwealth to undertake.

We do also urge the Commonwealth to consider setting up a comprehensive longitudinal neuropsychological testing program to establish the extent and progress of brain injury caused to these people by their petrol sniffing. Without such a program, how can we as Australians know and quantify the damage that is being done and the extent to which the damage is continuing or the extent to which it will be arrested?

The role of the Commonwealth in the area of sanctions and sentencing practices is not so straightforward. The variations between the two states and the Northern Territory are set out in our submission. We think the development of uniform legislation would be of assistance in addressing the petrol sniffing problems on Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands. We think that the Commonwealth could provide real assistance in providing outstations and secure care and sobering-up facilities. There are no such places on the AP lands at the moment. There is nowhere where sniffers can be taken and detained to sober up. There is nowhere where chronic sniffers with mental impairment can be cared for and occupied and treated or where persons convicted of offences can be supervised and rehabilitated. Support for the establishment and funding of such facilities is already being undertaken by the South Australian government, which has initiatives which will come online in some years time, but such facilities would also be a worthwhile project for the Commonwealth. That funding must in our submission be ongoing and generous. It will be necessary in order to deliver an effective service and to attract high-quality personnel who are able to plan an employment future on one of these programs on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands. There need to be enough such workers to provide support and backup to each other.

In the same way, we see that the Commonwealth should consider taking a leading role in funding strategies to reduce recruitment into petrol sniffing. We support, and have set out at page eight of our submission, the recommendations made by our state coroner in the 2002 inquests. We stress that the strategies will require real people to spend real time working with Anangu Pitjantjatjara on their land to provide to them some of the social services that suburban Australians expect and receive as a matter of course. It will not be enough to provide enhanced telecommunications and video linked professional services.

I would like to ask Andrew Collett to address you now with some observations from his experience on the Maralinga lands, with one community—the Oak Valley community—which is at present free of petrol sniffing and to point out to you some of the lessons which might be learned by the experience of the Oak Valley people.

Mr Collett—I would just like to tell you about the Oak Valley community in South Australia, which is on the Maralinga lands, located south of the Pitjantjatjara lands and close to the transcontinental railway line. I have had the good fortune to have been involved with that

community ever since the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia since 1984. I have had the great fortune of being involved in assisting the community with matters such as the clean-up and compensation from the contamination of the lands. In the course of that, the Maralinga people went back onto their lands under the Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act 1984 and have re-established their community. Other Aboriginal people who were pushed west by the atomic tests to the Cundelee mission in Western Australia returned to a community just east of the Western Australian border at a place called Tjuntjuntjara, and they are also Western Desert people who were moved by the tests. They are just inside the Western Australian border, and they are the sister community to Maralinga.

Both of these communities were able to re-establish themselves after the royal commission and as a result of compensation and assistance provided by the government. Both of those communities commenced as petrol and alcohol free, and they have remained that way, so in a sense they are the good news stories of the Western Desert in South Australia and nearby. Not only are they still petrol free but they are alcohol free and they have little or no violence. So it is worth looking at what makes these communities different. Why have they succeeded in not succumbing to substance abuse?

I think firstly the enthusiasm of their rebirth has assisted, but it is not just that. The Pitjantjatjara lands had that after the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act—that was just before the Maralinga act—and these communities have now been going for 15 to 20 years, so the enthusiasm has worn off but the spirit has carried on.

Their isolation helps. They are two of the most isolated communities in the country. Were one keen to buy alcohol to take it to Oak Valley on the Maralinga lands, it would involve a seven-hour drive afterwards, and no doubt many people who have bought alcohol have consumed it or it has been broken by the time it has got there. So the isolation has helped in a way. But they are not the only communities that are isolated.

Both communities have strong authority structures. Western Desert law and culture is still extremely strong, not just in Maralinga and Oak Valley but in all of the Pitjantjatjara communities. I was fortunate enough to be involved in the De Rose Hill native title claim, and that community, which is immediately to the east of the Pitjantjatjara lands, had no difficulty in showing that it was part of a system of law and custom that survives and is strong and where everyone is still initiated, as a matter of course, into the community. So there is no question that traditional law and custom is strong. Dysfunctionality in communities has other explanations. But, in Maralinga and Tjuntjuntjara, other forms of community authority are strong. The community structures are strong and they have remained strong.

I think part of the key to it is the other influences that have occurred to prevent petrol sniffing and keep it at bay. The most significant example of that relates to Oak Valley, where, when the community commenced, it appointed an administrator, Dr Archie Barton, who had been a substance-abuse worker with the WOMA Society in South Australia beforehand. When he came to Maralinga he was a member of that community. He was a part-Aboriginal man. He was not initiated. So, in a sense, he stood apart slightly. And he had a very clear view about substance-abuse and about alcohol and petrol, and the view was that it should not be tolerated.

From the start, he took it into his own hands to confiscate alcohol and petrol, to smash bottles of alcohol, to tip out petrol cans, and to ensure that sniffers were sent back from where they came. He continued that practice for the first 20 years of the Maralinga lands, and it was signally successful. It created a culture of intolerance of alcohol and petrol which the rest of the developing communities took up.

I was really interested to read, in one of the submissions that has come to you, the submission of Dr Maggie Brady of 8 December 2005, where she points out that one of the problems with the Western Desert is that, by reason of the nature of traditional society, adults rarely interfere in the activities of children or teenagers, and there really needs to be a back-up from authority figures or other agencies that can legitimise the desire to stop petrol-sniffing. As it turned out at Oak Valley, Dr Barton did that. Off his own bat he did what local parents could not do, and he soon got their endorsement. It is perhaps unusual but it is a salutary model of individual activities that can assist.

The same thing in a sense happened at Tjuntjuntjara. It was related to the Oak Valley community. When it started there was no alcohol, and there were strong community structures and strong advisers who did the same thing—who made it clear that alcohol would not be tolerated—and the community got behind that.

I think the final factor is that in both of these communities which are stable there is a strong level of family support. So people are not abandoned, as they are in places like Yalata when families leave to go to Ceduna to drink or gamble or whatever. This does not happen in these communities; the family remains and it supports the children. Allied with that, in both cases, there are strong and vibrant schools which occupy the children. So successful has the Oak Valley community been that they are now developing an outstation for sniffers, to take the sniffers from Yalata and look after them and acculturate them in Western Desert culture and discipline.

It seems to me that there are some lessons for this inquiry and for the community that come out of these apparent exceptions. Firstly, it can be done. Petrol sniffing can be kept at bay. Secondly, I think there is a lesson about capacity building. It seems to be the buzz word these days—governments must build capacity within the communities to handle their problems, and that is obviously true. But one aspect of that is that, at the same time, the capacity has to be there amongst the advisers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, within the community to assist those members of the community. Probably that element of capacity building is just as important as building the community. Finally, there is perhaps the example these communities point to of the desirability of conducting some research—and research which is more formal and erudite than what I have put to you—as to why some communities succeed and others don't, because it is an important lesson.

Ms Eszenyi—Those are our opening remarks. We would be happy to address any questions that you have might have for us.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Could I clarify the point you are making about collection of data on mortality and morbidity? Are you saying that there are different protocols being used in the three jurisdictions that cover the Pitjantjatjara lands or are you saying there are different practices with mortality and morbidity where people are taken to capital cities for treatment for petrol sniffing?

Ms Eszenyi—That is right. We are saying that when people die on the lands it is pretty clear to local health workers, who know the people, what the factors are that contributed to their death. So, if those workers are trained in coding—and that is not, by all means, as I understand it, a common occurrence—then there is a chance that the impact of the petrol sniffing on the person's health status will be recorded. If the person has been sniffing petrol and as a result of that develops, say, a chest condition or has an untreated alternative or other medical condition and ends up dying of that in hospital at Alice Springs or at Adelaide, the family background, the substance use history, may well not be understood to be a factor. So there needs to be an awareness among medical staff in particular who see people from these lands that there are codes which can be used to illustrate and elucidate the causes of their deaths. It is a specialist area. We are, of course, lawyers, not epidemiologists. But we understand that the epidemiologists are well au fait with this. We understand that coding training is available—I think Queensland does it. It is expensive. It is about \$8,000 to train a person in mortality and morbidity coding. You might have such a worker on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands, but once that person leaves you are up for the training costs a second time. We think it would be a really worthwhile Commonwealth project for the Commonwealth to take on the task of making sure that all health workers who are going to be coding illness and death for the people of those lands are trained in the one system so that there is a uniform collection of data.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So there is no need to change Commonwealth morbidity statistics under Medicare, say, to accommodate this? It is a matter of training the people who are working with Aboriginal people who might suffer from these conditions—

Ms Eszenyi—I am not familiar with the codes, but there might be a subcode for substance abuse and that might already be divided into various substances—alcohol, amphetamines, tobacco, petrol. That might already be available in our national coding standards. But it is the training—teaching people how to use those codes for the benefit of the community—which we think deserves attention.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Mr Collett, you talked about a Dr Barton from Maralinga who initiated this practice of destroying alcohol.

Mr Collett—Yes.

Senator HUMPHRIES—That practice goes back some years, I assume. Was that a practice that he initiated at the promoting or with the support of elders in those lands or was it something that he began when he came there? Can you tell us about how that came about?

Mr Collett—It was done with the support of elders when the community went back on to the lands. They had been at Yalata off their lands and in a situation where, as a result of being off their lands and unable to exercise their traditional authority, their authority had started to break down and there had been a lot of drinking. The community was determined to make a new start when they went back onto their lands, and so he was given very clear directions about a number of matters around how the community should establish itself. That included that the community should be alcohol and petrol free, so he had a very clear mandate. He also had the advantage of having been a substance abuse worker beforehand and had the confidence to be able to do it.

Senator HUMPHRIES—We have heard other evidence in other places that the problem of petrol sniffing and other substance abuse seems to be stronger in communities which are blended—where there are different cultural or tribal groups living together in particular communities. You have also mentioned that in the case of the Maralinga, where the community structures are strong and customary law is strong, it was easier for them to have a concerted campaign to prevent the intrusion of these substances. The \$64,000 question is: how do you do that in communities where either that customary arrangement has broken down or you have different cultural and tribal influences in the one place? Is there any way of being able to restore those values in places like that?

Mr Charles—You are going to receiving evidence this afternoon from the Reverend Bill Edwards. Bill Edwards was the superintendent of Ernabella Mission from the late 1950s. In terms of an historical perspective on sniffing on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands, he is probably in a unique position to give you evidence on that point. So rather than us trying to rehash what he would say, you should wait and listen to him. That is probably the best answer to that. It is a very complex set of questions, and there are lots of assumptions behind it.

Mr Collett—I will add one thing to that. Every community, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, is a product of its own history. My involvement with native title cases across South Australia indicates the obvious thing that most communities are at different stages in terms of their level of adherence to old traditional law and custom. Some have it strongly; for others, it has been wiped away a lot more. In all communities, there is still an appeal to the past. There are aspects of law and custom that can be invoked and referred to. That is one of the things that have to be worked at strongly with these communities. All communities say, ‘We respect our elders and we want to go back to as many as we can of our old forms of discipline and decision making.’ Ways have to be found, even in those mixed communities, to assist that to happen.

Senator CROSSIN—I am interested to explore a little bit more about the uniform collection techniques. From my recollection, we have heard that in a number of places it is very hard to get a handle on how many people have died as a result of petrol sniffing. No-one can tell us with any degree of accuracy the number of deaths related to petrol sniffing. Will the program you are talking about do more than just develop a code to record deaths from petrol sniffing? Will it actually break it down a bit further so that if you die of pneumonia there will be another subcode that says that that was a result of petrol sniffing?

Ms Eszenyi—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you know from your experience how that works with AIDS related cases? People with AIDS can die of those secondary illnesses. What is the difference between that and—

Ms Eszenyi—If you read death certificates, as I do from time to time, it is common—

Senator CROSSIN—I do not do that on a regular basis, I have to say.

Ms Eszenyi—In any work that you do with the coroner’s office, and inquests and so on, or in medical negligence matters where people die, that is where we laypeople get to see the epidemiological coding. What you will see is a cause of death, which may be respiratory failure,

and then there will be, underneath that, some subcodes to give a better picture of how the respiratory failure came about. It might be in the context of chronic pulmonary disease with emphysema and smoking. There will be a head cause and then three minor contributory codes. I do not know, because I am not an epidemiologist, whether or not there is a subcode for petrol sniffing or other substance abuses. I think that there is, but because it is such a technical area, it is unfortunately an area where people who are filling in those certificates and hospital records need to be trained so that they get the statistics right.

The keeping of statistics is one of the Commonwealth's real strengths, and the development of a careful stat-keeping program for these outlying people is something that the Commonwealth could do as a nice, discrete project, which will have the potential of showing very positive results. If you can start with your base stats and then show the effects of various programs on those communities over time, then we may have something very positive coming out of the Commonwealth's intervention.

Senator CROSSIN—I also want to ask about the tri-state developments. There has been a tri-state policing initiative that has been instigated and developed. You may or may not be aware that in the Northern Territory there is now legislation that allows a third party to confiscate the petrol legally. But again, it is very patchy. In some areas, there is a tri-state initiative and everyone seems to be working together, but then in other areas I see states and territories still trying to experiment and do different things. Do you believe there is a better way to coordinate and communicate between the Attorney-General and the state governments?

Mr Charles—This is a very important point and it is conceptually difficult, when you have states and territories that have been working on their own for a long time, to recognise that they are dealing with a tri-state region. There needs to be a culture shift to allow that to happen. You then get the conceptual legal problem of defining the area within which particular laws of each of the three states will work together. That is a legally difficult thing to work out, because you then have to work out what the boundaries will be between the Central Australian application of three lots of laws of the various states and territories. Legally, that is a tricky thing to work out because you are practically inventing another state. The extreme form of it would be creating 'Centralia', because that would be a particular set of laws that would apply there by application of the three individual states. That is going to take time to work out.

It is also going to mean that there will probably be, and with good reason, rationalisation of the operation of Aboriginal legal services, which is of relevance to me because I work for an Aboriginal legal service. For police, for magistrates, for judiciary, there would seem to be lots of rational reasons as to why this ought to be progressed. One of the points that we make strongly in our submission to you is that one of the reasons why it has been very difficult to get successful programs across the APY lands is that the APY lands are so large and so diverse and so attached to Northern Territory and Western Australian communities. You might have a set of programs which would work in the east, and it might discourage the sniffers successfully, but you will find they will turn up in the west. The sniffers will just move.

The conclusion—and this point was strongly made by our state coroner in 2002 and 2005—was that the programs and actions that governments take need to be uniform throughout the lands. You cannot have one project that works well in one place which is not duplicated elsewhere because, as I say, the sniffers will move, possibly to get away from the successful

program. Apart from that, one part of the lands deserves government assistance as much as any other part. There is no reason why one should be favoured over another. They all deserve and desperately need treatment and assistance, in circumstances where the people themselves are living in very severe poverty.

That goes back to the questions that my president has raised about Commonwealth responsibility. What has been the absolute effect of the changes in CDEP, in Centrelink, upon communities where people are already living in dire poverty, where there is not food security? One of the important aspects of the Council of Australian Governments trials has been support of what was called the Mai Wiru stores policy, which may indeed require that staples which are required to keep children alive be subsidised because of the inadequate incomes that apply to people who are living in very expensive, very remote communities.

We make the point that a citizen's entitlement at Kalka or Pipalyatjara must be looked at in a different way from how it would be looked at in suburban Adelaide, because of the tyranny of distance and because of the extraordinary expense that applies to giving people what they need. I recall being at Watanuma store once and being asked to pay \$4 for a small tin of sardines. That is a graphic example of the extraordinarily high cost of food staples. If you have people living on very low incomes, from CDEP or Centrelink, that sort of money does not go very far when those are the prices of staples.

Senator CROSSIN—I can relate to that. Once I paid \$9.60 at Docker River for four oranges—in fact, it was not too long ago, during my travels in that area. In order to progress those matters, in terms of legal conformity across the region, and looking at what has worked—for example, looking at whether the Northern Territory legislation actually works—whose responsibility is it to drive a coordinated approach? Would you see that as the Commonwealth's responsibility? Do they have a role here in assisting in pushing this communication and cooperation further?

Mr Charles—The Commonwealth could do great things. We must always have great optimism about what the Commonwealth could and should do. There is great room for optimism there. In our submission we point to the differences in legislation about sanctions between Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia. I think our submission was written before the new Northern Territory legislation came into force. But one of the things that concerns us is that, although the state government of South Australia talks about the operation of the Public Intoxication Act enabling sniffers to have their cans taken away from them to stop them physically sniffing, to save them from brain damage, basically, there does not appear to be much that the South Australian government is going to be able to do about that. That is why my president made the point that perhaps the Commonwealth needs to be supporting the state in respect of sobering-up centres.

I have brought a copy of the South Australian Public Intoxication Act with me, which senators might want to see. It is quite complex legislation. The point we make is that it allows for people to have the can taken away; it allows for people to be detained until the effects of sniffing on their minds have been reduced so that they can be diverted to another program or given some assistance. It appears to us that the present South Australian proposals do not include actually doing anything about the Public Intoxication Act in the APY lands because I do not think they have the resources to do it.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you mean implement it?

Mr Charles—Yes, I mean implement it. Yes, they have proclaimed petrol as being a substance to which the act applies. But the proposals for police stations, for instance, at Ernabella and Amata include two police cells in each. There will not be enough to help deal with the sniffers.

Referring to the act itself, consideration needs to be given to setting up sobering-up centres, as proclaimed under that legislation, so that sniffers can have the petrol taken away. They can be put through the revolving door of sobering up, be sent out again and have the petrol taken away from them again until they get used to the idea that they will not be allowed to sniff petrol. That is the logical operation of that legislation. But I do not think that the state has the resources to do it under present arrangements. In our submission we point to the fact that the Western Australians seem to have worked that out. That was the evidence of Mr McLean the JP. The Western Australians have worked the other way to deal with it.

There is new legislation in the Territory, but South Australia is still applying criminal sanctions, whereby the process of a police officer finding a sniffer anywhere on the APY lands will involve taking the can away, treading on the can or doing whatever is necessary, reporting or arresting and giving immediate bail. So the person will go out of police custody still affected by petrol. There is not that break of a process of sobering up and straightening out which would enable people to perhaps get a more rational view of the world. That is the point we make about policing policy, which we think is fundamentally important and where there is room for improvement. There is room for more resources to come to the state of South Australia to provide what is needed.

Senator CROSSIN—When the Commonwealth talks about the central desert region and the work it is doing to address petrol sniffing in the Northern Territory, it is actually talking only about Nganampa, Mutitjulu and Docker River—that is, the three main communities along that highway. The Commonwealth is addressing the issue by using the Aboriginal Benefits Account, the ABA, which is money derived from mining royalties from the Northern Territory land rights act.

That leads me to ask you a question about your comments earlier about the coroner's report. He suggested that unless you are going to have a program that rolls out around the region it will be ineffective. Is the Commonwealth neglecting Western Australia and South Australia because it does not have a similar ABA that it can draw on? Is it paying attention to the Northern Territory communities only because it has access to Indigenous money there? How do you push this notion that you just cannot deal with some communities in isolation when you have such a massive area? Indigenous boundaries are different. They ignore our non-Indigenous state and territory boundaries. This, to them, is a state in its own right. How can the Law Society progress a view that programs have to be rolled out right across the region and money needs to be provided equitably across the region?

Mr Collett—That is why our president made the first submission. The Commonwealth is in a unique position to do that. The Commonwealth can provide moneys across the states and provide some leadership. There are enormous disparities between Aboriginal communities in terms of income and wealth. The Maralinga community, for example, has some fall-back

funding from its compensation. You have talked about the ABA funds in the Territory. That and the Maralinga community are probably some of the very few communities in the Western Desert that have access to that type of money. The rest have not and are in a much more parlous position. The Commonwealth is in a unique position to take the leadership on that.

Ms Eszenyi—The Commonwealth, in effect, can also consider the slogan that these first Australians are Australians first. They are not people of South Australia first; they are Australians first. The Commonwealth, as the government of Australia, can assume the right to provide funds to the states and territories where necessary to implement programs for these people.

Senator SIEWERT—I would like to pick up very quickly on the base stats issue. That is going to be significant for all Aboriginal health issues, isn't it? It is significant for health issues in general but it applies in particular to Indigenous health.

Ms Eszenyi—And we are recommending not only mortality stats, where, when people die, you keep a good record of how and why. We are also recommending morbidity stats including—and this has never been done on a mass scale—neuropsychology testing, which could be conducted with the children, in the first instance, through the schools. We need to know the extent to which the children on those lands are losing their basic ability to think and function physically and mentally as a result of petrol sniffing.

Mr Collett—Could I underline the practical importance of that scheme. It will never be known to what extent Aboriginal people in the Maralinga lands and the Pitjantjatjara lands suffered health effects as a result of the British nuclear tests, the atomic bombs. The reason is that there was no baseline health information available either before the tests—in relation to all those communities—or for 25 years afterwards. So the epidemiologists that Deej talked about could come in, but they did not know what to look for. There was no baseline information, and that remains the case.

Senator SIEWERT—I would like to move on to the tri-state approach on these issues. We have heard a bit of evidence—not a lot, mind you—around the tri-state process. What is your opinion of the effectiveness of the current approach that the tri-state committee is taking?

Mr Charles—It is in its early stages. It is new. It is not something that people are used to thinking about. There are considerable conceptual and legal difficulties in working out how to do it and where to draw the boundary lines, basically. But yes, it is a vital thing to be done. It is a logical and necessary thing to be done. It needs goodwill, and it needs the Commonwealth to take a leading role, because it is a federal system and the Commonwealth is the leading part of a federal system.

Ms Eszenyi—It also needs lobbying and project management. There are a number of projects going at the moment and a number that have happened over the years to try to bring the laws of the states, territories and Commonwealth into line. How many years did it take to develop the Corporations Law? How many years did it take to develop the uniform Defamation Act? What will happen with the uniform Evidence Act, which is currently under consideration? What will happen with the model law with respect to legal practice? The Commonwealth knows, from its experience, that any of these uniform laws take a vast amount of time, and the ones that are

successful are generally pushed by very powerful lobby groups—such as the media with the uniform Defamation Act.

These people on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands have no such lobbying status, and the Commonwealth needs to take a leading role in helping the two states and the Territory to develop a legislative program which will address some of the legislative issues.

Senator SIEWERT—The comment you made before about creating another state, ‘Centralia’: if the laws were uniform across the two states and the Territory, those laws could apply across the state, couldn’t they? Do you think there should be a separate process for those central lands?

Ms Eszenyi—That is one of the areas where the two states, the Territory and the Commonwealth need to sit down and work through, in a very careful way—and with resources; you would need to have some pretty good constitutional lawyers sitting with you—how it would affect the rest of the people in our states and territory if we changed the laws to have a uniform law in these areas. Will there be unintended and unwanted effects? It is an expensive legal reform project, and the Commonwealth could sponsor it.

Mr Charles—The point we make is that we are not advocating Centralia, we are just pointing to the idea of Centralia, as it were, as being one of the conceptual legal difficulties that you are going to have in working this through, because you have actually got to work out where the legal boundaries will be. That is the point.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. I was not trying to verbal you by saying you are. I was trying to ask whether we should, for example, be recommending that more resources be put into trying to operationalise this process of uniformity, because it is going to be needed across each of the states and the Territory.

Ms Eszenyi—A recommendation for a law reform project funded by the Commonwealth to address these particular issues would be welcomed.

Mr Charles—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Still on the tri-state approach, you made some pretty strong comments about the failure to implement the recommendations of the 2002 coronial inquest, and I am taking it that your comments refer specifically to the South Australian approach. Are you aware that the tri-state committee is actually tackling the coronial recommendations?

Mr Charles—Perhaps I can answer this. Obviously, the coroner of South Australia was made aware of the tri-state process as part of a Commonwealth government submission to the 2002 inquest, and Commonwealth officials gave evidence to the 2002 inquest. The sad part of it was that no Commonwealth officials at all came to the 2004 inquest. There was no Commonwealth submission; there was no documentation at all from the Commonwealth in 2004-05. That was unfortunate, I think, because it indicated that there was perhaps not the same degree of interest in the second set of inquests as in the first. That caused concern to those of us who were involved and acting for the families. The families were concerned that the Commonwealth was not there the second time around.

Senator SIEWERT—While I find that information very useful, I was looking at it from the other point of view, and that is: is the tri-state committee also accepting responsibility for trying to implement the recommendations as they apply to its areas of jurisdiction?

Mr Charles—The tri-state committee was dealing with specific issues, particularly the idea of the Central Australian cross-jurisdictional point. That is a very important Commonwealth initiative, and obviously, as Deej just said, it needs to be supported. It was also doing things like the roll-out of the Comgas Scheme, and now it is dealing with the new submissions in relation to Opal petrol.

We have had a look at what the NPY Women's Council has said about the further roll-out of Opal and we have looked at the Access Economics report. Again, we support that as being an important matter for a Commonwealth initiative, as something very useful that the Commonwealth could do to support what the coroners have said—and, again, I think in our submission we refer to what the state coroner said in 2005 about the need for Opal to be rolled out generally across the tri-state region. It is a classic tri-state issue which the Commonwealth should be involved in.

It might be useful to make some further points about that. Part of the evidence that came before the inquest in 2002 was to do with what had actually been the effect of the initial roll-out of Avgas in the nineties. The effect that was noted then was that there had initially been a slow-down in the rate of petrol sniffing, because the Nganampa Health Council have been keeping records of petrol sniffing for at least 10 years, if not longer than that. They keep detailed records of the amount of sniffing on the APY lands. They found that the rate went down in the nineties when Avgas was introduced. But it crept up again, despite Avgas. Then you can talk to things like the need for strong laws to prevent trafficking in petrol. Again, that is a point that we make where we support the NPY Women's Council's calls for the state laws on trafficking to be implemented quickly and not be held up in the legislative council, which is what is happening in South Australia; it is quite bizarre. The point we make there is that the wide roll-out of Opal is necessary if you are going to prevent trafficking. You would probably need to go down as far as Coober Pedy in practical terms for South Australia, because there is lots of movement between the APY lands and Coober Pedy. You would need to make it uniform in Coober Pedy.

One of the issues that the NPY Women's Council raised with us recently was: supposing you actually did make Opal universal across the lands, then you could get to the stage of making the possession of unleaded petrol on the lands an offence, because you would not need to think in other terms if you had a universal roll-out of Opal. That might actually mean that you could make a more effective regime in terms of the law preventing trafficking. It is an interesting point which the Senate might want to think about pursuing in more detail. It is one of the interesting and useful consequences of a wider roll-out of Opal.

Senator BARTLETT—I want to get a further opinion on the approach of the South Australian government. I appreciate what you have said about the need to have a consistent approach across the two states and the Territory. You mentioned the slowness of the response to the initial coroner's report. We have had a lot of suggestions in other submissions that, whenever there is controversy about this, there is a flurry of movement and statements are made and all that; but, if you look back 12 months or longer, you will see that the concrete outcomes are fairly thin on the ground. Is that still the case? Has there been a shift? Is there now a serious endeavour

and quick action to get resources on the ground? It does seem to be as much about getting people, facilities and resources on the ground as it is about coordinating enforcement and that sort of thing.

Ms Eszenyi—The state government has started to plan for and to roll out programs and resources, but the state government's ability to devote its resources to this region is limited, and it could do with assistance. We understand that the state government has supported and will continue to support youth development and education projects. As Chris has said, two new police stations are being built at Umuwa and Amata, but there will be ongoing support required for the officers at those police stations. It is not easy to attract officers to serve in those areas. Again, there may be some supportive role for the Commonwealth in those sorts of developments.

Senator BARTLETT—When you say that the state government has limited capacity or ability, you are talking about money?

Ms Eszenyi—In South Australia there are great calls on the resources of the police—that is just one example. As you may be aware, at the present time there is a need to recruit a further 400 police officers, and the government is having difficulty attracting that number of new recruits. Against that general background over the whole state, it is even more difficult to attract officers to work on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands. They are a long way from the services which ordinary suburban and country South Australians are used to, and they will undoubtedly require extra resources such as the building of houses. You cannot just build a police station. You are not going to get police officers to serve there unless there is somewhere for them to live. Governments cannot simply put up a police station and expect that police will come. The housing for those police officers needs to be supplied as does the education for their children.

Senator BARTLETT—When you suggest 'assistance', are you seeing the role at the federal level as more than just one of subsidising a roll-out of Opal; it could also have a role in resourcing personnel or some sort of thing to help in that regard?

Ms Eszenyi—As I say, the essential issue for the Commonwealth is to make a decision that these people are Australians first and for it to take a supervising and coordinating role to make sure that state governments are put in a position where they can supply state services. If that means that the Commonwealth, one way or another and from whichever bundle of money or from whichever resource, funds to assist in putting those services on those lands, then well and good.

Mr Charles—I would like to expand on that. An important point about the coronial findings was that they were very detailed. They set out primary, secondary and tertiary forms of intervention around what you do with people who are starting to sniff, with people who are moderately impaired and with people who are grossly impaired. You are dealing, for instance, with a need for a severe disability service throughout the whole of the lands. The 2002 inquest findings refer to the Tregenza report, which went to the state government. It outlined the need for wholesale disability services across the whole of the lands. From what I have seen of the state government submission, they are not able to do anything like fully implement the Tregenza report. There are certainly significant disability services going into Amata and Ernabella to deal with grossly affected sniffers, but they are not the only places with grossly affected sniffers.

Also, the state government have not dealt with the question of whether there should be, for instance, an options coordination agency for brain injury across the whole of the lands, which was one of the recommendations by Tregenza in 2002 in a major report on disabilities.

Another example is the physical difficulty of getting a guardianship board, which applies in South Australia, to deal with people with mental handicaps and acquired brain injury. What is the relevance of a guardianship board that lives and works in Adelaide to people whose immediate needs are up north? You might have a guardian appointed, but people's actions can hardly be dealt with from Adelaide.

Senator BARTLETT—Do you mean an appointed guardian who lives in Adelaide?

Ms Eszenyi—Yes. The guardian, who is the guardian of last resort in South Australia, is the Public Advocate. The Public Advocate, on a personal level, would be very willing to go out and serve clients on the Pitjantjatjara lands, but the law which enables him to be guardian stops at the South Australian border. If a person with an acquired brain injury travels to the Northern Territory or to Western Australia, as you would expect him or her to do, then the question of who can make decisions about that person's living arrangements becomes very confused indeed.

Mr Charles—Similarly, if there has to be mental health detention, do you bring the person under detention to Adelaide or do you take them to Alice Springs Hospital? Again you have the jurisdictional problems of the operation of the South Australian Mental Health Act in the Northern Territory. It is a classic example of the tri-state legal problems. Further, I want to point to other areas of implementation, of which the coroner said in 2002, 'I have to repeat the same recommendations in 2004.' It is unprecedented for a coroner to have to say that—'I make the same recommendations three years later because not enough has been done.' It is a grave cause for concern to the Senate, in my submission.

Senator BARTLETT—I do not want get into a Commonwealth versus state argument—nothing irritates me more, frankly; I could give a litany against both levels if I were in the mood. So I am not asking if it should be a Commonwealth or state responsibility, but in a technical sense the coroner's recommendations were directed to the state government.

Mr Charles—In most respects, yes, they were. For instance, on the youth workers that we referred to, we are concerned about whether or not the provision of youth workers on the lands has been universally acceptable or universally successful. We have reason to doubt that it has been because of the way in which it was set up. We point to the fact that the Docker River project—again, a project in the Northern Territory—appears to have been successful because it was properly resourced and had a community council that was able to manage it properly. We suggest that this Senate committee refer to what happened and get information about Docker River as a successful youth worker project. Again, we refer to our submission, which discusses why youth worker projects have failed in the past and why they do not always work out well. Those are important matters for the Senate to consider.

An example other than disabilities is the need for more universal neuropsychological testing, which is a point that my president made. If you have a cohort of sniffers which is in the hundreds—at least 200 people on the APY lands are known to be sniffers—then logically you would expect that you would need to do more than send a psychologist up once or twice in two

or three years to test 10 or 20 people to work out the degree of impairment. You actually need a universal process of testing the degree of impairment so that you can work out programs to look at what degree of impairment an individual suffers and what will be useful for them. To state the obvious, there is not much point in fining a person for possession of petrol if they are incapable of pleading to the charge. That is an extreme example but it is an example that refers to the present regime of sanctions.

Senator BARTLETT—I have a final question and it is without getting into a state versus federal thing and it is leaving aside where the money could come from. I have taken this from some of your comments. Are we talking about another consequence of some of the skill shortage issues that we are dealing with, whether they concern youth workers, psychologists or police officers? Is it the case that we cannot get enough of them, leaving aside all the issues of infrastructure, housing and those things, which are matters of funding? Does that shortage mean that obviously they are more likely to go where the population centres are?

Mr Charles—There is an even more fundamental point which I think needs to be made strongly. There have been—and this has been reported by the state coroner—between 2002 and 2005 a variety of consultation mechanisms between the state and federal governments and the Anangu. First of all, there were tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3, which were replaced. Then you went to a different form of consultation. Then you had the TKP set-up. We understand that an even newer one has been set up since TKP. It is about whether or not the purpose of consultation was for Commonwealth or state agendas to be put before the Anangu and whether or not that was to allow the Anangu to speak to the Commonwealth about what their perceptions of need were. That may come back to a simple point about whether you have enough interpreters and whether you have public officials travelling to the lands who have cross-cultural training. Why has there been this continual process of changing consultation mechanisms in the last four or five years? Why didn't you provide the interpreters? Why didn't you provide cross-cultural training to the public officials in the first place? These are points which I think are important.

Mr Collett—I will add to what Mr Charles has said in response to your observation, Senator Bartlett, about the need to get more staff on the ground. This is not an issue that just relates to petrol sniffing and it is not an issue that just relates to the Western Desert. It relates to police officers, teachers, sexual abuse workers and everybody else from Far North Queensland to the Western Desert and to, no doubt, southern Western Australia. Perhaps there has to be a more integrated and more thorough incentive system to get appropriately skilled workers into these communities.

Senator ADAMS—Continuing on the recommendations and, as I have made a note about the proposed rehabilitation clinic for petrol sniffers, my question is: where are we at with that? That was originally supposed to be one of the most important recommendations. That centre was actually meant to give these people a place to go where they could be examined, helped and rehabilitated.

CHAIR—Is that a question for these witnesses? I would think not, Senator.

Mr Charles—That is a matter for the federal and state governments.

Senator ADAMS—All right, I will deal with that later. I have been thinking about the communities that are dry. I come from Western Australia, and we are actually going to Balgo and then on to Halls Creek. They have a problem in Halls Creek with the Dinner Camp, with a lot of petrol sniffers there from Balgo. As Balgo is a dry community, they have been forced out. Is there any evidence of that happening here in the lands? We have been to Alice Springs, where we were given evidence of some of the people from the lands where Opal fuel was not available migrating to Alice Springs as the Opal has been rolled out. You mentioned before chronic sniffers moving on. Do you have any evidence of that?

Mr Collett—Chris might have some views on that. From the point of view of the Maralinga and Tjuntjuntjara, the only sniffers they say they have are people who have come from other places. They are moved on as there is a capacity to move them on. I was thinking, as Chris was talking, that these two communities I mention are not dry in the sense that there is legislation that covers them. The arm of the law does not reach as far as these communities. They are dry because of practical community measures.

The only other observation I would make is that, from work Chris and I have done at Yalata, we know that people move on. We have worked with efforts to restrict alcohol sales from the nearby roadhouse. The community at Yalata has been strong about that over the last 10 years and has been able to achieve licence restrictions at the nearby roadhouse and, as a result, at the surrounding towns. But you do get the effect of drinkers moving beyond however far you are able to go with those restrictions. It does happen.

Senator ADAMS—Just from the evidence that we have seen, it seems that probably it is a good thing that these people are moving on and ending up in larger communities where there are services available to help them. I just wonder if this migration will go further and further. As communities are controlled, organised and doing the right thing, I wonder if those with the drug and alcohol problems and those who are trafficking petrol will move to communities such as we have got at Halls Creek now with a new hospital and, luckily, workers who can deal with the problems, or most of them.

Mr Charles—These are very complex and difficult problems and they relate not just to petrol but also to alcohol abuse. That really goes back to the point as to why it was that the state coroner spoke of the need for uniformly effective actions across the lands operating at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels to work on all areas at once. If you do not do that then you are going to have these people moving around to get to a place where they can sniff more easily. You have to have uniformity of approach and a uniformity of will from the governing bodies of the Pitjantjatjara to enable effective measures to be maintained.

Mr Collett—Can I just make a terse response to one of the problems in relation to that, which Chris and I observed in the effort to restrict alcohol at Yalata. One of the effects of adults moving on from Yalata to Ceduna to drink was that they left their children behind, and that was a real problem for the community and for those children.

Ms Eszenyi—Another peculiarly South Australian problem is that if the people with the substance abuse problems are to move to a centre where there are services then that essentially means that they will have to come to Adelaide. Many of the services which are recommended by the coroner are not available anywhere else. There is for, example, no psychiatrist resident north

or west of Gawler. There is no visiting psychiatrist north or west of Port Augusta at the moment. The whole of the north and west of South Australia is very sparsely supplied with any services of a health nature.

Mr Charles—In fairness to the state, they have actually provided psychiatric services to the APY lands recently and, ironically, one of the deaths that was investigated in 2004 involved a person who was under psychiatric care.

Ms Eszenyi—That was a visiting—

Mr Charles—Yes, it was a visiting psychiatrist.

Ms Eszenyi—And they have visiting nurses.

Mr Charles—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—Many of the same points were made in this same room about the resources in that area during the committee's inquiry into mental health.

CHAIR—Thank you. If there is anything you would like to add later to what you have told the committee, please do so. We are due to report at the end of next month.

Mr Charles—One matter I regret I had completely forgotten is that the Law Society of South Australia was responsible in 2005 for putting out a book on the effects of petrol sniffing. We were wondering whether the committee would like a copy.

CHAIR—We would like that very much. Mr Charles, where did that publication come from and how did it come together?

Mr Charles—The Law Society held a seminar in 2000 in which we brought in anthropologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, police officers, mission superintendents, judges and senior lawyers. We recorded their speeches, transcribed them and turned the transcript into a book. We have added to the end of it the findings of the 2002 inquest into petrol sniffing.

CHAIR—The 2005 findings were exactly the same.

Mr Charles—Unfortunately, we have not put them into the book, but we have referred to them. We hope the committee will find the book useful.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 10.59 am to 11.17 am

BYRT, Mr Patrick Thomas, Board Member, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation South Australia

COLSON, Mr Dennis Richard, Chairman, Turkey Bore Community

GILES, Mr Glenn David, Coordinator, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation South Australia

HARTLEY, Mr John Benjamin Karrangal, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation South Australia and TAPY Inc.

CHAIR—We welcome the representatives from ANTaR. Do you have any comment to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Hartley—I am a descendant of the rainforest people of Far North Queensland. I have been asked by Mr Gary Lewis of the Pukatja Community Council to attend here today and to speak to a proposed submission that the Senate may be interested in receiving.

CHAIR—Have we seen that submission, Mr Hartley?

Mr Hartley—No.

CHAIR—Would you like to hand it over?

Mr Hartley—It is a 20-page submission.

CHAIR—Mr Colson?

Mr Colson—I live on the APY lands. I am also the chairman of the Turkey Bore community.

Mr Byrt—I am a barrister. I am appearing here as a board member of ANTaR SA.

CHAIR—Have any of you appeared before Senate committees before?

Mr Byrt—Yes, I have.

CHAIR—Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, but if you have any particular reason to go in camera, please let us know and we will discuss that. The committee has before it a submission from ANTaR South Australia. Mr Hartley wishes to provide a supplementary submission. I invite any of you to make an opening statement and then we will go to questions.

Mr Giles—Thank you very much. I will, if I can, briefly reiterate some of the key points that we made in our submission and introduce the people we have here today as part of our group. Our submission was only a brief submission, particularly making the point that the communities

that are confronted by these issues of petrol sniffing need to be worked with to identify what the problems are and what the solutions can be. More generally, we think that governments have not done anywhere near enough, that they need to focus on addressing the underlying causes of these social problems and that holistic approaches need to be developed with the communities involved. Governments have to step away from blaming the communities themselves for the problems that are arising and recognise that governments—really, for 200 years in this country—have not done enough with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to meet their needs and, more importantly, to recognise their rights.

As part of our approach to working with Aboriginal people, today we have managed to get down from the APY lands in South Australia one person, Mr Dennis Colson, who has just introduced himself. He is the chairperson from Turkey Bore homeland community. He has been working with petrol sniffers in his own community for some years in a very intensive way, and he has much to tell you about. We also have Mr John Hartley, who is originally from the rainforest country of Far North Queensland but is now a long-time resident of Adelaide. He has over the past three years had the opportunity to find out about what other indigenous peoples around the world are doing in confronting some of these issues. He can inform the committee about some of the lessons that we in Australia might learn. We also have here another member of our ANTaR SA board, Patrick Byrt. I will hand over now to Mr Colson, for him to give you a brief overview of what he would like to tell you about. Would you like to hear from each of us and ask questions of Dennis or would you like to hear briefly from Mr Hartley also?

CHAIR—I think it is easier for people to make an opening statement and just put their position on the table. Then we will go into general questions. Those can be answered by anyone, by individuals or whatever. We will make it as informal but informative as possible.

Mr Colson—I will start off by giving you a rundown of my background. My family is from out in the APY lands. My father was born out there. I grew up in Alice Springs and did all my schooling there. We moved down to Port Augusta and then one day we said, ‘Let’s go back home, back to the lands.’ This is going back to the late seventies and the eighties. We established our own community, Turkey Bore-Balfours community. We started off with nothing. We had 100 people there at the time, our immediate families. We are today down to about 40 or 50 members because of death and people moving to town. My personal background is that I am a qualified Aboriginal health worker. I have been for about 25 years. I am also a qualified environmental health worker, and I have been for about 10 years. I have counselling skills. I have done all the training in those areas.

About three years ago, I was working as a youth coordinator in the APY lands, trying to set up different programs there for the needs of the youth, but I was called back to my community because they needed me there. From the time I moved back to my community, the Turkey Bore community, we have always been tackling petrol sniffing. We had about 14 petrol sniffers in our community alone when I first moved back there. We are back down to about six or seven at the moment, because of the hard work that we have put in there. My wife and I—just the two of us—are doing this. Her background is that she has been in the education department for over 21 years. She has worked with the youth right through. With us two doing the work back home in the community, we are trying to keep our kids alive today. At the moment, while we are sitting here, I think there are young petrol sniffers out there who are trying to hang themselves—now, while we talk.

On Friday night before I came down, we had an incident out in the community. A young male, a petrol sniffer, went back home. His wife was in bed. He had an argument outside his house. He walked back home, chucked petrol on his wife and set her alight. That was on Friday. She is in Adelaide Hospital at the moment. These are the things that we go through out in the lands.

Just in the community of Turkey Bore alone, I lost my young brother, but we tried very hard to keep him alive. He tried to hang himself about five times. We really worked hard to try and save his life. We got him into Alice Springs. He was in Alice Springs. He was arrested for warrants. They put him in the jail in Alice Springs. He tried to commit suicide by hanging himself there. When he came out, they gave him back to the care of the mother. There was no support, no documents saying that he had to get rehabilitation—all those sorts of things. There was nothing. We could not find anything. We rang the jail in Alice Springs to see whether there were any orders that he had to be on, and they referred us to the South Australian correctional people. We rang them, and we had no response. They did not receive any paperwork about him.

He got home. He ended up trying to hang himself again. They sent him back to Alice Springs to get assessed. He went into the hospital, got assessed, and they gave him a sleeping tablet. Nganampa Health turned around and put him in a hotel. He trashed that hotel because of the windows. He smashed all the windows because he could see images where people were talking about him. He smashed that. Who ended up with the bill? It came back to Turkey Bore. We had to pay that out of our community. We got him back home again, to sit with him.

While we were there in Alice Springs, the mother had ended up for four days with him, walking around all night and all day. What happened was that Nganampa Health just dropped him there and did not support him. The mother was the only one that cared for him while he was in Alice Springs. She followed him around every night. All day, he would not sleep. She rang up on a Sunday. We got into Alice Springs. I sat down and cried when I saw my mother. Her eyes were bulging. She had no sleep, no nothing. She had no support in Alice Springs. It took us five attempts to get him to the hospital, to get him admitted into hospital. The hospital kept turning him away. Every time they saw him, it was, 'Oh, he's only a spoilt brat.' We had arguments with the mental health mob and the disabilities people, and we still never got any results out of it.

He ran away from the hospital. It was over 40 degrees in Alice Springs at the time. He sat on the lawn, two steps away from the mental health office. He sat there for half a day, in the middle of the heat. I just kept sitting there. We did not know where to go or who to turn to. We rang the police. The police said they could do nothing because he had not done anything wrong. We just sat there. We had to feed him water and more water, just to keep him from dehydrating. My wife and I walked into the mental health office: 'Can you help us? Is there any way you can help us? Just walk outside, take a step outside and watch how that young fellow is behaving.' 'No, we can't do that.'

We walked away from there. We had nowhere to turn. The only one we ended up getting help from was the youth coordinator from the Nunga women's council. He came across and supported us there. We finally got my brother in a vehicle—this was about the third attempt. We took him back to the hospital. They refused him again. So we ended up asking the police, because he ran away and sat in the middle of the road, trying to commit suicide. Cars were going past him. He had done that twice, once at the airport too. I meant to say about that.

It is very hard to get support from any organisation in Alice Springs—we could not get it. We ended up taking him back to the hotel and spending another half a day in the sun—he would not come into the room. At night-time, the lights of the swimming pool were on, and that is where he ended up going: to the light. He just walked round and round that swimming pool. We rang the police again: ‘Can you come and help us? Can you take him back to the hospital?’ The police turned around and said the same thing: ‘No, we can’t do that because he hasn’t done anything wrong.’

Senator BARTLETT—Just to let you and the committee know, there is a document in attachment D to the submission by Kate Reynolds that I think is a report you did.

Mr Colson—Yes, that is what I am quoting from.

Senator BARTLETT—I just would draw your and the committee members’ attention to the fact—

Mr Colson—I am just trying to cut that a bit short.

Senator BARTLETT—that we have that as an attachment to her submission and committee members have got that, in the interests of time and also so that people know—

Mr Colson—I have some copies here. But I will just let you know how hard it is for an educated person like myself in the community to get help for petrol sniffers. You look at the Anangu people and their educational side. How could they do it if it is hard for myself and my wife? But if you have a report on that, you have read it all, have you?

CHAIR—As a committee, we have that.

Mr Colson—I will not keep going into it—

CHAIR—Unless there was something you particularly want to focus on, Mr Colson, because it is referring to your—

Mr Colson—No, I will go back to the ‘effectiveness of existing laws and policies’ in your terms of reference. We have written up something on it. Community members on the APY lands believe that the use of law and policing with respect to petrol sniffing in affected communities should be implemented with great care and consideration. Some community councils have created by-laws that make petrol sniffing an offence and therefore allow for removal of sniffers from their community and placing them in another community. They are not really looking at the problem that is there in their community; they are just isolating the petrol sniffers and pulling them out of the community. Then they sit back and say, ‘We’re doing a wonderful job—we’ve got no petrol sniffers here’! But they have just picked them up there and dropped them into another community, and that is their problem. They are not looking at the right problem of how to combat it. It is very frustrating that we get more and more people coming into Pukatja community. Turkey Bore is only eight kilometres away from Pukatja community. I am finding it hard in my community—and all of a sudden the petrol sniffers are moving into the Pukatja community where there are hardly any programs running.

I will go on to the second term of reference: 'the effectiveness of diversionary initiatives and community level activities'. We have written down what we have done in our community. Some of the programs that our community has undertaken include taking young men out with elders hunting and teaching them cultural ways, like how to address the cooking of the kangaroo and all of those sorts of things that we are constantly doing. Young ladies are going out with the elders, going out and digging for maku and honey ants and digging for sticks and twigs to make artefacts. They are teaching them the traditional ways. These are things that we are doing in our community. Employment and training is another one. We have sent four young ladies down here to do disability training in Adelaide itself. They are going through that stage of getting their tickets, and they just have to complete first aid now. That is another area that we have looked into. I have run educational and hygiene programs and talked about costs and effects of petrol sniffing, drugs and alcohol.

I pick up the young petrol sniffers and take them to cultural ceremonies. I have recently purchased a bus through the petrol sniffing program, so we are grateful for that. When the culture is on, I go around the two communities, pick up all the petrol sniffers and take them to the ceremonies. That is working well. They were happy about that. We have given them the responsibility, by saying: 'This is your bus. This community bought this bus for you petrol sniffers.' If I do not attend, I get another driver. We give the petrol sniffers in our community the responsibility to look after the bus. They take it, they bring it back and they clean it out—they do all those sorts of things. Things are improving in our community with the petrol sniffers. They start to realise that they cannot bring grog back into the community, they cannot bring drugs back into the community and they cannot sniff in our community. If they want to sniff, they can go and do it somewhere else. They go into the Pukatja community because there is a majority that they join up with.

Family support is a very important thing that we do in our community. Every time a petrol sniffer goes off, the old people come running and knock on my door. As soon as I open the door they come running inside. They are frightened of the petrol sniffers because there is no support for them. We are getting nothing out there in the communities. The only support that we are getting through the Northern Territory is through DASA, but they can only do so much. They have not got the funding to do petrol sniffing programs.

CHAIR—What is DASA?

Mr Colson—The Drug and Alcohol Services Australia, for sobering up. It has a detox centre in Alice Springs—they pick up all the drunks and take them to dry out. The third one I want to go on about is learning from success. I already went through the lessons. It has taken three years to get where we are today. But the problem that we are finding now with the Opal fuel that is coming in is that they are finding ways of getting by that. They are using polyurethane cups. They fill those up with unleaded Opal fuel. After a while it brings out the vapour. They sniff that again. Also, they have started doing Windex, the window cleaner, again. They are finding ways of getting around that Opal.

Senator HUMPHRIES—They add the Windex to the Opal petrol.

Mr Colson—Yes, they mix it with the Opal petrol, and that brings out the fumes in it. Also, there is a big problem with the black market in the sale of petrol. They are charging \$50 to \$70

for 1.25 litres. Then they go into other things, like paint. They are putting paint into a bladder from a water container cask—the silver ones you get out of a box. They are sniffing sprays. These are things that are really happening out there.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Aerosols?

Mr Colson—Impulses and all that. They are doing all those sorts of things. There is not really a program set up out there at the moment. I have sat down and thought about these things. Why is the government still jumping on the backs of other programs—old programs that have been out there for so long—when they are not working? The government is jumping on the backs of older programs that have been in the AP lands, and they are not working. They have not been working. So we need to take a step back. Let us start going back to the petrol sniffers. Let us go back to them and ask them what they want, why they are doing it. Let us get ideas about education and work training. Out in the lands there is just one community alone. There are a lot of resources out there. You have got TAFE. You have got land management doing fencing and eradicating the donkeys. They are getting them off the lands, because they are damaging the homelands. There could be a program set up there, with petrol sniffers working with them. It could be a trial. We could do this as a pilot in one community. Let us start again.

We attend meetings about petrol sniffing. It is not the petrol sniffers who are there talking; it is the parents and the grandparents. Let us go back to the petrol sniffers, because at the meeting in the background you can hear petrol sniffers growling because we are talking about them all the time. Let us take it back to them and get ideas. Let them write it down on butcher's paper. Then we could get all the service providers together and look at those things—what they want to do, what sort of training we can provide.

Let's talk to APY Land Council. Let's talk to APY Services—the roads and all those that look after homelands. There is a lot of work out in the homelands we could do. We could take the young petrol sniffers out there. While they are working, a couple of them can go out and get kangaroos for them. At lunchtime they could cook it up and they could sit down and have a good meal of bush tucker. What is wrong with doing those sorts of things?

The other organisations get funding from government. Why can't we utilise that funding? They can do top-up for the young kids, because they are doing it better themselves. I am working as an environmental health officer at the moment. I went ahead and set up a program for petrol sniffers. I found some funding to do top-up. You have a look at that community today. It is different. They are proud of it. They are cleaning up their yards. People are asking me: 'Can you give me some rakes and all those sorts of things so I can do my yard?' I say: 'Yes, I'll give you the rakes. I'll give you the trailer. You load it up. I can take it away.'

So things are working out there in the Pukatja community and Turkey Bore because we are caring for our people. We are not coming in and going away. We need people that are living on the land that can do the job, not the government. They come in, they tell us what to do and then they go off. It is not their problem. At five o'clock they do not worry about it. We live in it. We eat it. I am getting very uptight about it.

What I would like to see is the government doing something. If they are true to their word, let them get off their butt and start doing something here for us out in the community. The

government talk about their detox centre that was supposed to be up and running in May 2006. They are still at the stage of finding out where they are going to put it. There is nil consultation. That is three years running. Nothing is happening. With youth programs out there, our youth shed is sitting stale. It has not been going for four to five months. What is happening with the youth program? They were in Alice Springs when it was school holiday time two weeks ago—the holidays that just went. They were in Alice Springs training and the kids were out there running around. They were playing football.

Our eight-year-old kids are starting to sniff. Let's get on top of it now. There are no education programs—nothing. There are no posters around the school. There is nothing at the shops. What is happening out there? I do not know. The departments are getting money for these things. They should be made accountable, because at the moment there is nothing at all happening out there for us.

Just recently—on Friday, before I packed up to come down here—one of the petrol sniffers set fire to his own wife. He was arguing with petrol sniffers outside, came back home, chucked the petrol on and lit his own wife up. That was only Friday night. On Saturday or Sunday night there was a big problem in Fregon, I think. Once I got down here I found out about it. One of the vehicles was burnt. So things are happening out there. That is close by my community—Fregon, Pukatja and Turkey Bore. So I do not know where to turn.

How many more inquiries are we going to have? We have already had two and nothing has been done. This is the third. Where is this going to go? Are we going to go anywhere with this? I do not know. This is all I have to say. I am getting a bit hot under the collar about it because I sit at home with my wife and I think, 'Why should I go through this?' I could pack my family up and come and live down this way and get a job back in the 'real world', as they say. We need those services up there, but these are the things that are keeping me going. They are my family. I am getting sick and tired of people saying to me, 'You're losing a generation tonight.' Why don't we get off our butts and start saving our lives, saving this next generation? That is all I have to say.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Colson. I am sure there will be questions for you, but we will move on. Mr Hartley, you were going to speak next.

Mr Hartley—By way of introduction, I am a Kuku Yalanji descendant from the rainforest country of Far North Queensland. My clan is Goobidi. My name is Karrangal. I have been a resident of South Australia for the past 15 years, and I would like to acknowledge the Kurna people, whose country I speak in today.

In a nutshell, my more recent background has been in addressing family violence within Aboriginal communities. To that end, I have delivered a number of presentations within Aboriginal communities throughout Australia and I have participated overseas—namely, throughout Canada, where I was fortunate to spend a total of six months participating in and exploring indigenous first nations healing programs. Many of the programs were developed in partnership with mainstream service providers but were managed and delivered by the first nations peoples themselves and with their elders playing a central and pivotal role in all aspects of the recovery process.

I also want to acknowledge the Anangu people here today and also to make clear I do not speak on behalf of Anangu. I speak in a more general manner about the problems within Aboriginal communities more broadly. I am here today at the request of Mr Gary Lewis, who, unfortunately, could not be here personally today. He sends his apologies. I believe some arrangements may be made for Mr Lewis to speak with the Senate committee at a later date. For those of you who do not know, Mr Lewis is the elected chairperson of the Pukatja Community Council. He is also the elected executive member of the APY Lands Council. He is also a former chairperson of the APY executive.

Mr Lewis has asked that I read a submission. It is not a submission specifically for this Senate committee hearing. It is a submission that has been put together by Anangu and the senior council of elders under the auspices of Tjukurpa Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Law and Culture Inc. of which a senior council of elders is a part. It was formed to address the dysfunctions currently occurring within Anangu communities. The submission is entitled 'Support, prevention, treatment and diversion: A community response to petrol sniffing. Tjukurpa Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara senior council of elders proposed submission application. Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Healing Centre for Social and Cultural Well-being'.

Essentially, we want to point out that Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities are not sitting on their hands waiting for handouts from governments. Aboriginal people have taken responsibility and are waiting to form realistic partnerships with various government bodies, which for some reason keep walking away from their obligations to form realistic partnerships with Aboriginal peoples and, in this case, in particular with Anangu peoples. Mr Lewis has asked that I read some of this application because I think you may be interested to hear where some aspects are going to. I have already established that the Tjukurpa Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Law and Culture Inc. host the senior council of elders, so I will just refer to them as the senior council of elders from now on.

The senior council of elders acknowledges that social fragmentation and dysfunction is not simply an Aboriginal problem. Petrol sniffing and alcohol and other drug abuse and misuse affect all people from all walks of life and is a community problem and needs to be addressed in a safe, caring and holistic manner. Senior council of elders is a community based working group of senior traditional owners whose objective is to oversee and provide input, direction and support to all Anangu peoples wanting to achieve a healthy lifestyle. Substance misuse, particularly alcohol and petrol sniffing is a major contributing factor in the breakdown of individual, family and community relationships and wellbeing throughout Australia. Family violence, ill health and increasing morbidity, child neglect, imprisonment, sexual abuse, acts of violence and premature deaths can all result from substance misuse. Senior council of elders has come together to address these problems by providing a culturally accountable service that will assist Anangu peoples to regain control over their lives and re-establish themselves within their communities. I think that sits on the point that Mr Colson was raising about programs being centred within each community rather than people flying in and flying out.

The senior council of elders working together in partnership will support each other to effectively address the health, safety, wellbeing and security of all Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara peoples now and for coming generations, achieving this through the maintenance of strong cultural beliefs and practices, uniting strong accountable leadership

through the senior council of elders and the implementation of high-quality service delivery models. A shared vision of the senior council of elders will support each other in accessing and providing quality and culturally accountable services to improve the health, education, justice, social and culture wellbeing of Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara peoples by drawing upon Anangu culture and the collective wisdom and knowledge of the senior council of elders.

What I would like to briefly speak about is that the resources within Aboriginal communities—and I am sure within the Anangu communities—are there. They are the people. They are the people who are in the communities, such as Mr Colson and the women, who are working tirelessly each day for nothing. They open their doors to people, they feed people and they keep the family structures going against great odds and with great difficulty. They are the leaders of our communities; it is not the politicians. They are the people who are showing and role modelling healthy behaviours and what it takes to address these issues.

I would also like to point out that the people themselves, the people who are suffering from addictions, be they alcohol and/or other drugs, are also a resource within themselves. If the people can have the resources to appropriately address the issues within their communities then these people's lives can be turned around and they can be put back into the communities to start to teach other people about the hardships and the lessons that they have learnt through their own misadventures with alcohol and/or other drugs.

So the greatest resources that we have are already within the Aboriginal communities. You do not need to invent them; they are there. The Aboriginal people within the communities know, through their own experiences, hardships and treading water daily, what it is that needs to be addressed and how to address it. Our submission is a little part to show the Senate committee that, in this case, the Anangu are not sitting on their hands. They are ready.

They are waiting for government departments and bodies, whoever, to go and sit down in their country, to listen to the people and to start to enter into fair dinkum, realistic partnerships, so that infrastructure can be built within the lands, training can be built so that the Anangu, Aboriginal and other people in Aboriginal communities, can have their own doctors, psychologists, nurses, health care workers and mental health care workers. This is not beyond possibility. My experiences throughout Canada show that this can be done and the effects are, in the main, positive. But the ownership of these programs must be by the Aboriginal people themselves.

The delivery of the programs and the cultural content of the programs that must be inserted with them must strike a balance between mainstream service programs and the cultural elements within Aboriginal communities to make it effective. It can be done. First nation people elsewhere have shown that it can be done and it can be effective. The Anangu, the people whom I have been speaking with, particularly Mr Lewis, want to enter into partnerships. They are waiting. They have the ideas. They have the vision. They have long-term vision about where their communities need to go and what they need to do to address the dysfunctions within their communities.

The key partners in such a venture would obviously be the Anangu senior traditional owners. The most effective program, the most effective thing, that first nation people have found elsewhere in the world is role modelling. If you have healthy role models, that is the most effective way of talking and relating to the young people coming up. That is why the senior

elders and traditional owners have a very central and pivotal role in any program that may be developed in partnership with the Anangu people.

The senior traditional owners, the Anangu community councils and Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders, such as government—state and Commonwealth—local councils and agencies, mainstream Aboriginal health organisations, community organisations, church organisations, trade unions, the legal and criminal justice fraternity, Aboriginal medical services and mainstream medical services all need to be brought in. It needs to be a multi-pronged approach

Once you start to draw in these people, once the services are provided on the land by the people, once you start to train up the people within the communities to address health issues, mental health issues, you also start to create hope and employment within their own community.

Briefly I would like to leave the committee with six points from my own personal experiences, from travelling here and overseas and also from within my own community. We also come up against the same problems as the Anangu: suicides—people as young as 10 and through to 30—alcoholism, drug sniffing and family violence. I am sure you will hear these stories echoed throughout the country. It is happening everywhere within Aboriginal communities.

I want to make it clear that it is time to listen to Aboriginal people—not just listen; really listen. The time to act is now. The inclusion of cultural processes in program delivery must be seen as central and pivotal for any positive outcomes to occur. The development, management and delivery of services by Anangu persons or Aboriginal persons must be brought to the fore, enacted and celebrated. There must be development of long-term and community partnerships. When I talk about long-term partnerships I mean 25 to 30 years. I am not talking about funding that spans three years. Speaking from my own community experiences, what often happens is that you get funding for two or three years. It takes half that time to get the community together, to get people discussing things and to work out a vision and direction. The next year and half is spent trying to implement that policy and then you turn around and the funding is cut, it is gone. Governments need to start realistically looking at commitments in the 25- to 30-year span. Then you can start looking at generational change, and that is what it is going to take. It is not going to take two or three years; it needs generational change for things to really start to occur.

There needs to be ongoing training for community members in all areas of health and wellbeing. That includes cultural training within respective Aboriginal communities. Mr Colson spoke about elders taking young people out for culture camps, teaching them how to hunt and fish and to share that food as well as about respect and things like that. These things need to be included in these programs. I want to make it clear that the Anangu people that I have spoken to are responsible. They have a plan, they have a vision. What they need now, as a matter of urgency, is for governments to go up and sit down with them in their country and to enter into genuine and realistic partnerships.

They are very much aware of the problems that are happening in front of them. Mr Colson is one of the people at the coalface—as am I, in my own community. We are witnesses everyday. It would not be uncommon in my own community at times throughout the years to go to a funeral every day of the week, without exaggeration. The time for empty talk has stopped. It is time to

sit down on the ground with Aboriginal people and to listen. They know what is happening, and that is where the resources are. I will end on that point.

CHAIR—Mr Hartley, is there anything you want to submit in terms of Mr Lewis's paper?

Mr Hartley—The submission is not an actual submission to the Senate committee. It is a submission for funding from the Anangu. But I would be happy at a later date—on the proviso of Mr Lewis and other Anangu wanting to have part of that submission submitted—to forward that to you.

CHAIR—Mr Byrt, do you wish to make a statement?

Mr Byrt—No, I do not wish to make a statement. First, I acknowledge that we are meeting on Kurna land. I do that on behalf of ANTaR. The Kurna people are the traditional owners of the place at which we are meeting. I am primarily here as a support and, as Mr Hartley has said, to listen. I could contribute one thing. As a principle: the abuse of a thing does not make the right use wrong. Mr Colson explained that we need to take a step back. I think that is what needs to happen.

My involvement in this issue commenced some 25-odd years ago when Judge Jack Lewis of the District Court in South Australia, who was then the Chairman of the SA Customary Law Committee, raised with me the complete impossibility for that committee to deal with the issues that were confronting them because of petrol sniffing in the APY lands. He discussed with me the merit in kicking over the traces of constitutional legal history in South Australia, and that raised in me the positive interest to do what Mr Colson has indicated and take a step back.

I am here as a member of ANTaR because I became deeply involved in that process. The merit of it is well established because, in doing that, I have independently discovered what Anangu and other Aboriginal people have told me. Listening to Indigenous people is the way forward. I would not wish for more than to contribute that and to say that there are deep principles that are perhaps being rushed and overlooked. What I said about the abuse of a thing not making the right use wrong is critical. It was a befuddlement to Judge Lewis, as he explained it to me, that during that period his view—and the view that he put to me was not the view that was held definitely by Anangu people—was that they were saying, 'It's not our problem. You brought it here; you solve it.' There seems to be a 25-year history of confusion about it. We hear from Mr Colson and others how inquiries continue and reports are made, but the feeling being expressed is that the Aboriginal people are not being listened to.

The principle that the right use of petrol is possible is made more poignant when Mr Colson explains to us that perhaps the efficacy of the entire Opal solution now has a serious dent in it. If it is as simple as obtaining a polyurethane cup or a window cleaner, where has the step back and the listening to Aboriginal people been in a comprehensive process? I certainly acknowledge that Aboriginal people have been listened to in relation to Opal but perhaps not at the level of comprehension that Mr Colson is indicating. Had that been done, maybe this would have come to the fore much earlier.

As Mr Colson said, the key people who are affected by this, the petrol sniffers, do have something to contribute, no matter the intractability of the problems. We know from our own

understanding of the general area of mental health that the early half of the 19th century and colonial models of disposing medicine have passed and that the consultative approach, the therapy approach—in Anangu language it is ‘kulila’, to listen—is now a worldwide medical understanding. My contribution remains at that. I would listen. I am prepared to answer questions or help.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Mr Colson, I was fascinated to hear what you had to say about the alternative sources of intoxicating things to sniff. I do not think we heard about these in other places. Do you know if this is a problem just in the communities that you come from or have you heard of things like that going on elsewhere?

Mr Colson—I have not heard of it anywhere else; only in our community. I did not pick it up from any other place.

Mr Giles—I do not have them in front of me, but I have seen other reports that have referred to sniffers using Opal and still being able to get a high from Opal. I can try to locate those reports and forward them to the committee for your information, but I do not have them at hand.

Senator HUMPHRIES—If you would, that would be great. We have certainly heard about people sniffing paints, glue and so forth, but I had not previously heard about these particular uses of those things. It leads me to try to pose a possible answer to the question that you asked, Mr Colson, about why there have been so many inquiries and yet there has been no effective action in response to problems like petrol sniffing. One possible answer—and I would like your response to this—is that the reason that governments have not been able to put together effective responses to petrol sniffing over a number of years is that they realise, either implicitly or explicitly, that this problem of petrol sniffing is only a symptom of a much deeper raft of problems affecting Aboriginal Australia and that the whole background of dispossession, disadvantage, alienation and all those issues that you have touched on today are in fact manifesting themselves in things like petrol sniffing. To solve them, you need to go much deeper and spend a lot more than you would merely have to do in addressing petrol sniffing. Do you think there is any truth in that? If so, where do we go with that?

Mr Colson—The government and the service providers need to take a step back. Let us start by getting a workshop going somewhere—a trial in one of the communities—so that we can sit down with the petrol sniffers. They have not been heard from before. They have been bypassed all the time. They have missed out when people have tried to help them. There are ways in which we can go about it. By going back to the petrol sniffers themselves, we can get it all written down on pieces of butcher’s paper and get all the service providers together to look at those things. There are a lot of resources out in the AP lands that we can tap into. There is a lot of employment in the different areas, such as in aged care. We can put young ladies in there and teach them how to do washing, bed making, sweeping out the houses, cooking and all those sorts of things. That is just one area.

AP services are the ones that are taking all the money away from homelands. They are running the programs and they are supposed to be cleaning up houses, cleaning the yards, fixing fencing and water. Why can’t a couple of the young petrol sniffers be employed by them? As I said, take them out of the way, get them away from the community. Take them back to the homelands. Let them do work on fencing and that type of thing, and get another lot to go out and get kangaroo

and bring them back. Get pride back into themselves, self-determination and all those things that are lacking at the moment. Everybody is just bypassing them and forgetting about them.

The service providers and the government are running around there. If you get a bunch of marbles and chuck them on a table, what happens to them? They scatter. This is exactly how the government and the service providers are running around out there. They are putting their little programs in their pockets and not working together. They should put their heads together and work as one. They should establish an office in Umuwa or somewhere, where every service provider can meet to talk and run programs. We have to do a trial in one of the communities and see how that goes, as well as still doing those other programs.

But the most important thing that should be done is the establishment of that rehabilitation centre. It needs to be up and running now, because these other service providers are running around doing this and that. They are not looking after the real needs of the petrol sniffers at the moment. They can come later. Those services can go to the families. While the petrol sniffers are being rehabilitated, they can be in the homes, working with the mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, setting things up for them so that when they come back home, they come back to a happy family. With respect to *Anglicare et cetera*, it is fine to have them there, but they are not looking at the real problem. It is only a bandaid solution at the moment. All the service providers can do a lot, if we have the rehabilitation centre up and running now. We need it.

Mr Hartley—Senator, the question that you asked was whether the historical events in this country are a factor in the current everyday lives of Aboriginal people. The short answer is yes, very much so. The simplistic answer is that what is happening now is a manifestation of the effects colonisation and invasion have had on Aboriginal people in this country. The brutality that has been inflicted upon Aboriginal people over the centuries continues today—perhaps not so overtly, but in government policies—and this grinding-down effect starts to express itself through dysfunctional behaviours. We are at a stage now where in Aboriginal communities you have what they call lateral violence, where the violence is inflicted on each other within our own communities. This is a consequence of colonisation and invasion. So yes: history does play a big part in addressing and putting into some context what role and what effect the process of invasion and colonisation has had on Aboriginal people in this country.

You have to ask yourself: through this process, what is it that has been taken away? And when you know what it is that has been taken away—or forced and wrenched away—from Aboriginal people, you may get closer to the answer of what it is that needs to be put back. That comes back to what we are talking about: the role of culture in these programs and the role of the elders that needs to be there. In short, yes: it does have an effect. People may say that petrol sniffing, alcohol and other drugs are symptomatic of far greater or deeper underlying issues of brutality and violence being inflicted on Aboriginal people for over 200 years.

Senator CROSSIN—Mr Colson, in your opening remarks you talked about giving responsibilities to kids who sniff petrol, to keep them occupied. Have you noticed a marked difference after you have given kids trust and responsibility? Do they respond to that in a positive way?

Mr Colson—I will give you an example from my work as a health worker. I have got five young petrol sniffers working with me in the community, and I work alongside them. At the start

I worked with them, but now I have taken a step back. They do their own timesheets; I leave them on the table for them. They come in every morning and sign on, and most times they sign off. They do that every day. The community itself is looking wonderful. They are picking up rubbish from yards around the community, they are fixing fencing and all those sorts of things. I have given it back to them. I have got two sniffers who are not sniffing anymore. They are the leading hands. I have given them that role: to look after the workers. We are getting more and more young petrol sniffers coming up asking for work. This is what they are doing out there. They want to work, and I have given them that responsibility and that top-up.

This is a program that I set up myself. No-one has ever come to me and said, ‘Can we help you?’ I was talking about this when my young brother passed away, which is six or eight months ago, and still I have got no response from the government departments. They have not come up to me to say, ‘Do you want help? Is there a way that we can improve the service?’ There has been nothing. Not one person has come to me and asked if I want them to help.

Senator CROSSIN—Can I get back to the job you are doing with the petrol sniffers, then. Is the funding for particular programs too rigid, and does there need to be a greater amount of flexibility in order to let communities take funding that is available and accommodate that funding to their needs? Have you found there are too many restrictions on the ways you have to use the funds that are given?

Mr Colson—Yes, I think they need to just hand it over. Our community has been allocated \$20,000; it is supposed to be for the next three or four years. But we have got to go and beg. We have got to put in a submission to run a program. That should just have been put in place. The money should be going directly to the community so it can run the program. They should not put any restrictions on us. At the end of the day we have got to sit down and write a report and present that back to the funding department anyway, and we put down everything there. But they are saying we cannot do this and we cannot do that, which is wrong. I think they should just say: ‘Here’s the funding; you run with it. If you have any problems, come and see us.’

Mr Hartley—More to the point is that there needs to be an acknowledgment that the Aboriginal world view is just as valuable and valid as the mainstream world view. It can be as simple as that.

Senator SIEWERT—I would like to talk about the rehab centre. I think you said that it has been three years since it was first proposed. What is the hold-up?

Mr Colson—Consultation—they are still trying to find out where it is going to be. I do not know what is happening.

Mr Giles—There would appear to be a lack of real commitment from the state government to really do it.

Senator SIEWERT—Would it be fair to say that you have been consulted to death on some things and not consulted on others?

Mr Giles—With respect to state government, it is interesting that the relevant minister has decided not to be in Adelaide at the time of this hearing; he is in the APY lands as we speak—interesting timing, it would seem.

Mr Byrt—If I may add something generally about difficulties in South Australia, we all know about Sorry Day. One of the points I was implying, if not stating, is that responsibility is a two-way street. There is current hysteria about Aboriginal culture and violence and a need to take responsibility, but there is no public utterance that I have heard that says, ‘We need to take responsibility for our fellow Australian citizens.’ In fact, there are outrageous claims that the problem is Aboriginal self-determination, yet we are hearing evidence here to the contrary. It is because we are responsible that we understand about Sorry Day. To the stolen generations Sorry Day is, perhaps, what Anzac Day is to ordinary Australians, yet the state government here, through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, has seen fit to hold a consultative process about the future of the state on Sorry Day. When asked for an explanation—‘How could this possibly have happened?’—the answer was, ‘No Aboriginal person told us that Sorry Day was on.’ That is idiomatic, in a way, of what responsibility is.

Over the last 25 years I have certainly heard that it is time for Australia to take responsibility to the level it needs in a two-way street for what it needs to do for Australian citizens and to do so in partnership—as I understand Mr Hartley to be speaking for the Pukatja community—and make a way forward. That is a very big ask. Some of us understand the cruel and barbarous nature of violence in the criminal area, but we do not hear when comments are made about how Aboriginal people are enmeshed in that. But this is lateral violence implicated clearly in colonisation, where responsibility is needed by everyone. We do not hear why the people are living in the conditions in which they live. Certainly Mr Colson has made it clear to us that there are human resources and physical resources that have arisen both from the community and from government funding in a proper way that are available to be used and to address, in a pilot stage, this program straightaway. But there seems to be a lack of initiative in the major society to put out the hand and bring forward the partnership which people like Mr Colson and Mr Hartley have been talking about and which is out there in communities. Of course, I think the first step is to listen. Unless the major society wants to listen and recognise the value of Aboriginal culture, these public debates and the tides of the favourite solution of the moment will continue.

Senator WEBBER—I am from Western Australia, where the issues are just as significant, and I had the joys of growing up in the Territory. I am aware, therefore, that this is an issue we have struggled with for a long time. I was interested, Mr Colson, in your statement when you said that we needed a longer commitment. That is a proposition that was recently put to me very strongly by Fred Chaney. We need a 20- or 30-year commitment to funding and policy directions in the area of helping Indigenous communities.

I want to go back to one of the underlying causes that people do not really want to talk about because it is very difficult. It has been put to us in Western Australia that one of the reasons we have challenges with issues like this is not just the struggles that the communities have with things like family violence but also the struggles that they have with child sexual abuse. In Western Australia in the north-west, particularly in the Kimberley, we have children as young as three with sexually transmitted diseases. I was wondering whether it would be your view that often things like petrol sniffing are masking a horrendous and confronting problem for these

people. Do we have to go that far back in terms of the hurt and the pain to try and come up with some realistic solutions?

Mr Hartley—Do you mean to go back and unearth the issues within the individual?

Senator WEBBER—Within the individual and within the community.

Mr Hartley—Programs that I have experienced and have participated in have all been directed towards that. It is necessary to get down to their personal issues. The first thing that we have to do is become sober, because how do you clearly address issues when you are still ravaged by alcohol and/or other drugs? The first step we need to take is to become sober. Why? So we can think clearly about how to address issues within the community. It is once you have started to become sober that the other more personal issues such as sexual abuse start to arise and bubble up.

What do you have in place that will then address that issue and assist that person in dealing with that? From my perspective, when we speak about holistic programs, that is essentially what we are talking about. We are talking about the emotional, physical and spiritual hurts that have been covered up by that person. In a lot of cases, the abuse of alcohol or other drugs or other dysfunctional behaviour such as violence is a manifestation of that. I know that through personal experience. I experienced sexual abuse as a young man in an Aboriginal community—by Aboriginal people, not white people. It took me a number of years of dysfunction to work my way through that. So I am speaking not just from a general point of view but also from a personal point of view. Those things need to be addressed.

In Far North Queensland, we also have children at a young age with sexually transmitted diseases. It is not isolated within the Aboriginal community. It is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a community problem. This happens in the non-Aboriginal communities as well. It is just that Aboriginal people live in small communities and the media seems to blow up things within Aboriginal communities—not that they are not deserving of being blown up. To address the issues, fundamentally you must first be sober or off the drug.

Senator WEBBER—You were talking earlier about role modelling. Because of decisions of past governments, one of the issues that has arisen time and time again with a lot of our Indigenous communities—my experience is more in Western Australia—is the difficulty we have around adequate parental role modelling. We have generations of people who were brought up in dormitories or removed from their families. They do not know what it is like to have parents. They did not have that parental role modelling, so they therefore do not necessarily know how to behave as parents.

Mr Hartley—Again, in addressing the issues holistically, when we talk about programs, we are looking at anger management programs, parental programs, drug and alcohol programs, counselling programs—a whole gamut of issues—and having them in place within communities so that communities can address them. If you have the resources in the community trained up to address these issues within the community, so much the better. That can be done. First nations communities that I have visited overseas have these programs within their communities, and the responsibility for running the programs is with the people themselves. It has to be acknowledged that the responsibility and role modelling lies with the people, to role model healthy behaviours.

It is getting back to the question the senator mentioned earlier. But you cannot look at that in isolation from the historical impact that invasion, colonisation and occupation has had on Aboriginal people. All of that has to be put together and put into context.

In my experience, sometimes when we are acting out we do not know why we are acting out; we are just angry. It was only when I started to look at historical events and the intergenerational effect upon Aboriginal people of violence and brutality that I started to see this intergenerational link in the acting out of violence. It is all right for some people to say that it is a black-arm view or that it is in the past, it has happened, it has gone. Personally, every one of us here knows that that is not true. Trauma does not just disappear without it being addressed. You can block it up with alcohol and drugs but it needs to be addressed. All those things you are talking about, Senator, need to be inclusive. That is why I say the partnership needs to be with mainstream but, as you say, validity needs to be given to the Aboriginal world view and culture—validity that Aboriginal people also know what is good for their community and already have processes and means to address imbalance within their communities. That needs to be given validity when you are looking at funding. I think you mentioned funding, Senator Crossin. In my community, the elders take the young people out for a camp, say, to an island, give them a spear and go fishing. They do not understand why they should fund that or what the young people are learning from that. So validity must be given to those aspects of Aboriginal culture that are positive and healthy.

Senator ADAMS—Mr Colson, I was very impressed with your evidence today. As you are very close to the petrol sniffers, it is unfortunate that, with all the hearings that we have done, we have not actually had someone who is petrol sniffing appear before us. That is a pity. You have said that the fact that they cannot work or that they do not have work available is one of the reasons. Can you give us an indication of what is really the problem—why they are sniffing—from the point of view of your own people that you are working with?

Mr Colson—I will go back to Wiltja. They are educating our children to go through school, to get up to year 12. When they leave year 12 and go home to their community, there is nothing there. When they go back home to the lands there are no jobs set up for them. What else are they going to do? They will turn around and join the crowd, sniffing. A lot of the young kids coming back are well educated. There is nothing else offered out there for them. There is no employment. Who is going to go back—they have done year 12—and get on CDEP? It is only a \$200 a week wage to do two days work. With their education, they should be able to go into an office, learn about office procedures, typing, computer skills—all those sorts of things. They are not getting that at all up in the lands.

The kids go back home. They do year 12 and get their leaving school ticket. We have to encourage them to go on further. We have to get these young kids into employment. They are our future generation and our future leaders. We have to give them that opportunity. They have not had the opportunity to go in and work in an office and learn all the skills. We are always employing people from off the land. We are not getting people from on the land. This is where the breakdown is. Our education level out there is very low. When the kids come to Wiltja at the high school here, their level of schooling when they leave the lands is grade 5. They are grade 5 when they come to high school here. The education system in town is different from out there. They work very hard with the kids here to get them up to the right level in their education, but when they go home we lose the lot.

We have to try to turn that around and say, 'Let's look at all our service providers.' The work is already out there. The APY Land Council could be employing young kids to work in the office, typing and that sort of thing. AP Services, which does roadworks and that, could be employing young kids to be grader operators, truck drivers and all those sorts of things. Instead, we are wasting big money on employing people from outside. They come in, get the big dollars and they are gone. They pay off their mortgages and their land and all those sorts of things. They do not care about us. We are living there. We are there and the white people are not. They come in, do the work that they want to do and make their home life beautiful. We are stuck with it. We, the people out there, are the ones who have to put up with everything.

Senator ADAMS—As far as making an approach to the land council and other employing bodies goes, do you have a community council that can go forward and say, 'Look, we've got the people here. These are educated children. They've come back to us. We want them employed'? Are you working that way so that you can come back and say, 'We've got the people. Please help us to employ them'?

Mr Colson—The council can do that. They can go there and approach them, but it has to come from the funding body and all the service providers that are going in there—the government organisations. This should be set up as a way of trying to get things moving on the lands. They can go to the APY Land Council executive and talk to them about those things. You have TAFE and all those sorts of people there. They should be doing more for us out there but they are not. We are learning a little bit, just enough to keep them above the level. It is very hard. I keep talking about it.

Senator ADAMS—There must be a two-way street. Somewhere, your community is going to have to become a little stronger and say, 'Enough is enough. We want this to happen. You have to help us.' I would think that as a health worker you are probably in a position where you can perhaps push those strong people in your community to say, 'We've had enough. We want these children employed. Let's get on with it.'

Mr Colson—That has been talked about all along. The people are saying, 'Let's start looking after our young kids,' but it seems to fall on deaf ears. We are going round and round in circles out there.

Mr Byrt—The pivotal issue is that Aboriginal policy is not being set in partnership with Aboriginal people. The frustration that I hear from Mr Colson—I do not know whether others do—is that, yes, we can ask our organisations, we can do the hard work and bring those questions forward, but it is the funding bodies and the government departments, which Mr Colson is iterating, who need to change their heart. The core of that is policy. We know in ANTaR, from the experience over the last 18 months, that the policy for the APY lands, which vitally affects the very issues that you are raising, Senator, was set in Victoria Square, not in partnership with Anangu.

CHAIR—Does anyone wish to make any further comments?

Mr Hartley—Only to finish off, Senator. With respect, as I said to begin with today, the time to listen—to really listen—to Aboriginal people is now. It is crucial that that be done. I want to add also that the funding strings are tied to certain people running Aboriginal communities.

Funding is not put in so that there is a roll-on or flow-on effect of Aboriginal people taking charge of their own communities. It is not as though Aboriginal people, with respect, Senator, have not for years and years sat up and said, 'Listen to us; this is what we want.' Aboriginal people have been doing that—for centuries, in fact—but people are not listening. That is all I wanted to say. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you. Gentlemen, thank you for your evidence. You realise that the committee will be reporting on 20 June, so there is still time if there is further evidence you wish to bring forward. I have spoken with Mr Lewis today, and we will be talking with him at a supplementary time. I am not sure when yet, but we will arrange that.

[12.41 pm]

EDWARDS, Reverend William Howell (Bill), Private capacity

CHAIR—Welcome. I appreciate your patience. Inevitably, in these inquiries, we go beyond time, and it is very tough on people who are waiting. Is there anything you would like to say on the capacity in which you appear today?

Rev. Edwards—I am here as an individual, but, as I will state, I have had considerable experience in the Anangu lands.

CHAIR—I know the information on parliamentary privilege and protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. You understand the process of seeking evidence in camera, if you think that is important, but we prefer to have evidence heard in public. We have your submission before us. I invite you to make an opening statement, and then we will go into questions.

Rev. Edwards—I made a written submission with an attachment, and the attachment was this paper, ‘Facing the real problems: substance abuse in Aboriginal communities’, which I wrote in 2001. I have prepared a statement to present today; it is about 2½ pages long and it will summarise some of the things and add a little bit more new detail. My submission to this inquiry is based on the following experiences. I was superintendent of Ernabella Mission in the far north-west of South Australia from 1958 to 1972, and resided at Fregon in 1973 and Amata from 1976 to 1980. I resided at these communities as minister of the Pitjantjatjara parish of the Presbyterian Church and, from 1997, the Uniting Church. During this period, I interpreted in Pitjantjatjara land rights negotiations.

In 1972-73, as superintendent of Mowanjum Mission in the north-west of Western Australia, I oversaw the handover of Mowanjum Mission to the local incorporated community. From 1981 until retirement in 1994, I lectured in Aboriginal studies at the South Australian CAE and the University of South Australia. I remain an academic adjunct at the university. I interpret in courts in association with Mrs Tur, whom you have heard from today, and in hospitals for the Interpreting and Translating Centre in Adelaide. Over the last two or three years, I have received about 120 calls a year to interpret. At times, I am dealing with people affected by substance abuse, including petrol sniffing. In this role, I have contact with people who have been affected by petrol sniffing.

I continue to visit the Pitjantjatjara region annually for various reasons. At present, my wife and I have a guest in our home who is a Pitjantjatjara person, so we have quite a deal of continuing contact. I acknowledge that, as I do not now live in the region, my contribution to this issue is limited, but because of my almost 50 years of contact with the Anangu people I can provide some historical and cultural perspectives. I lectured in Pitjantjatjara language and mainly in traditional Aboriginal culture.

During my time at Ernabella, despite limited funding—I ran Ernabella in 1959 on a budget of \$4,600, and I have heard today that they are spending \$16 million on powerlines in the

Pitjantjatjara lands in coming months—many of the people were employed in a variety of tasks such as shepherding, shearing, cattle mustering, well sinking, fencing, building, brick making, gardening, maintenance, handcrafts, baking and butchering. Young men were often employed on nearby cattle stations and school attendance was almost 100 per cent. There was no consumption of alcohol, use of drugs or petrol sniffing, apart from two isolated cases of alcohol use in the latter period that I was there. The beginning of petrol sniffing by a very few youths—about three or four—was in the 1970s. Now, with little meaningful employment for men in this region, the use and abuse of alcohol, drugs and petrol is causing immense and tragic problems.

During our time at Amata in the late 1970s, we observed the growing emergence of these problems. Petrol sniffing was first observed in the region in 1968, when people returned from ceremonies at Warburton Mission in Western Australia and a few young men had brought the practice back with them. In the early 1970s a few youths engaged in the practice at Ernabella. They ceased the practice soon after becoming initiated, and a couple of these young men later became—and are—responsible leaders in their communities.

CHAIR—We have your submission and it seems that you are reading from that submission. It may be easier for us to get into a discussion with you. I am sure that senators have read your submission. Was there anything in particular you wanted to highlight? As we have read your submission it seems silly for you to read it out.

Rev. Edwards—I want to note two or three points. I attached to my written submission an unpublished paper I wrote in 2001 in response to an article by Paul Toohey in the *Weekend Australian* magazine. This paper provides more detailed historical and cultural background. In the paper I noted that the demands of supplying administrative, health, education, aged care and infrastructure services has led to an escalation in the non-Pitjantjatjara population in the region. Some have taken up roles and jobs formerly performed by Pitjantjatjara people. In the sixties, many of the men and most of the women were working. We had a very small staff. When I went there we had a staff of seven to cover all aspects of the work. That grew to about 12 by the early seventies. That meant each of us had a group of people working around us, and they did most of the work. Now there are so many outsiders in the region that the young people involved in petrol sniffing have no models of work habits and possible hope in their communities.

One of my concerns is that local community members have been increasingly marginalised in their own country. I am concerned that, for example, if a rehabilitation centre is built in the area, the problem could be exacerbated if it is built and staffed by outsiders rather than having local men engaged in the building and staffing. I have referred to an occasion in the late 1970s when I interpreted at a meeting at Amata at which community members requested government representatives from Canberra to have nearby liquor outlets closed. People were told that the outlets were needed for tourists and that they should use traditional methods of social control to stop the problem. When a man responded that he would do this by spearing and killing the next person to bring alcohol into the community, the government officials warned that such actions would lead to police intervention.

That is an anomaly—a paradox—that has never been fixed. We talk about allowing them to use their traditional controls, yet they were controls that were developed in a hunter-gatherer society and often do not apply to the situation. While it appears obvious that an effective solution to the problem of petrol sniffing depends on a concerted approach by the Pitjantjatjara people

themselves, traditional methods of social control offer no appropriate models. These structures were part of an overarching worldview expressed in the Dreaming stories. While this mythological complex provides examples which dealt with issues and disputes about access to sites, distribution of food and social relationships, it had no reference to alcohol, petrol and introduced drugs. A consistent response of the people has been, ‘Whitefellas introduced these things; let them fix the problem.’

Thirdly, in contrast to Western societies, where, in general, young children are disciplined and taught appropriate behaviours before being allowed more freedom during adolescence, in Aboriginal societies children had great freedom. Strict discipline was imposed as they entered adulthood. Thus parents find it difficult to exercise such discipline at a time when children are first engaging in petrol sniffing as they come under social pressure if they are seen to be hard on their children. I don’t know whether others have raised this point, but I think it is an important point of throwing it back on the people. There are problems in their own values and social background that make it difficult.

While diversionary programs may produce some temporary results, there will be no lasting solution to the problem until these basic problems are addressed and the people themselves can be persuaded to take responsibility and engage in a united attack on the problem. They must be supported by strong police and community action to stop the illegal supply of alcohol, drugs and petrol, something which will be new.

I close these remarks by quoting from an opinion piece which I recently unsuccessfully submitted to a newspaper to express frustration at the lack of effective government action in relation to this problem:

Before the recent election the Rann government’s submission to the Senate inquiry advised that the government will build ‘a rehabilitation facility to treat chronic petrol sniffers in South Australia’s remote Aboriginal communities before the end of the year’—the *Australian*, 10 February, 2006. Responding to critics of the government’s perceived lack of action, the newly appointed minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Jay Weatherill, declared that ‘slow progress is being made’ on the ABC, 3 April.

Hopefully, this progress will not be as slow as in the past. The recent announcement has a remarkable resonance with one made by Dr John Cornwall as Labor Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in 1986, when he recognised that the problem had reached crisis proportions and needed urgent attention. Dr Cornwall announced that a medical team would leave for the region within 10 days to assess and start treatment of an estimated 200 young Aborigines. In addition to the mobile unit, a new rehabilitation facility not yet costed would be built in the Pitjantjatjara lands in the next 12 months—the *Advertiser*, 1 December 1986.

According to the coroner’s report, approximately 35 deaths can be attributed to the effects of petrol sniffing during these intervening 20 years. Will a report in 2026 announce the forthcoming building of a rehabilitation facility, or will it be too late?

Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Reverend Edwards. Within the next 12 months.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Thanks, Reverend Edwards, for those comments and for your submission. I want to ask a question which I posed to the Law Society earlier this morning. They said that you would be the best person to answer it. So I hope that you can help me with this. They talked about societies in South Australia which had been successful in dealing with these problems, particularly the societies on the Maralinga lands. They pointed out that customary law and traditional arrangements were still very strong among those people and that authority structures were still very powerful. They were able, for example, to exclude alcohol from those lands—very substantially, anyway. I asked about what happens when different clans come together in particular settlements and they are blended peoples—they are not a single people—or where those traditional societies have broken down a bit. What do you do to restore the framework where you can actually get some control again over these situations? Do you have any experience that would answer that question?

Rev. Edwards—I don't think I can offer anything profound about that. We have been tackling this problem since the early 1970s, when we handed over from missions or government settlements to the Aboriginal people. We have set up incorporated councils, but, as we know, they have been struggling for a number of reasons.

I see one of the problems, as I have said, as being that in the Pitjantjatjara lands the population has increased and a lot of that population now is not what I would describe as the core Pitjantjatjara or Yankunytjatjara population. Other people have moved in and all kinds of relationships have been established. I think this has weakened the power of what we sometimes refer to as 'the elders'. Some of these people would show little deference to the elders. So I think there is a real problem in trying to re-establish that authority.

It is still going. One anthropologist in Queensland used a model of 'domains', and even in my time at Ernabella it was obvious there was an Aboriginal domain and there was a whitefella domain. That Aboriginal domain is still there, but it is very difficult to relate it to the other domain, which is the domain into which a lot of government—the finance—comes, and so forth. How to interrelate these is very difficult. So I really have nothing very profound to offer on that.

Senator CROSSIN—Has CDEP outlived its usefulness?

Rev. Edwards—Like many things, I think it probably varies from place to place. I have been fairly critical of CDEP in recent years because I cannot see that it is providing a sense of purpose or hope for the people involved in it. Compared with those days when people were actually involved in carting the sand and laying the bricks, the work often is just picking up rubbish or doing something else that is not terribly fulfilling.

Yes, I think it needs reviewing. I have written on this. I think it should be made a condition of any financing of projects—large building projects—that a proportion of that money is to be utilised for the employment and training of Aboriginal labour, and I do not think that is happening. When I was at Amata three years ago, interpreting for a state committee, they were building 17 houses for Aboriginal people and, as far as we could see, not one Anangu person was employed. I would think it is vital that, if such money is expended, a large proportion is used for the training and employment of the people.

Senator CROSSIN—Is that the way you think funding agreements or contracts ought to go—that if, for example, schools or houses or infrastructure are going to be built there should be an absolute requirement that local Indigenous people be involved and trained on the job while these projects occur?

Rev. Edwards—In 1971 we handed over what had been a mission school to the South Australian government. The officer of the education department came and said they would be taking over. We were happy with that; we saw the need to do it. They said they would be building a new school. We had just recently built a store and a preschool, as part of the mission projects. I said, ‘If you’re going to do that, can you let us tender for the building of it?’ because we had quite a team of builders at Ernabella. He just said that that would not be possible because of the time limits and the standards that had to be met. Although I was a minister, I may have replied rather rudely, ‘What is the use of your so-and-so school?’ I think that, again, is the crux of what has happened over the last 30 years. Unless that lesson was learnt then, it is going to be very difficult to redress it. I hope I have answered your question.

Senator CROSSIN—Yes, that was fine. Thank you.

Senator SIEWERT—In the last paragraph of your submission—and you also articulated this before—you said:

While diversionary programs may produce some temporary results, there will be no lasting solutions to the problems until these basic problems are addressed ...

You have been talking about the lack of employment in the lands. What are the other issues? We have heard a lot about some of the issues that people believe are the underlying ones. Could you just say a bit more about what you see as the underpinning issues?

Rev. Edwards—I sometimes refer to it when I am writing as if it is a whole series of tsunami waves that are overtaking the people with social pressures. It started perhaps with alcohol; then it was marijuana; then it was petrol sniffing; now it is the pokies. I was talking to somebody two days ago here in Adelaide about two people—young women—who came to Adelaide with responsible jobs and both of them now appear to have become very much addicted to poker machines. It is an immense problem for Pitjantjatjara communities, as they move to Alice Springs, Port Augusta or Adelaide.

There is a series of those problems. I guess they are the symptoms of underlying problems. I think it is the problem of conflicting sets of values and aspirations—and, again, I have written about this—that is, the fact that we work towards a future orientation and the traditional Aboriginal society have a past orientation, to the Dreaming, which provided their pattern for life. These things are very much in the psyche of the people through their enculturation. Our system is built very much on individual endeavour; theirs is built very much on the family kinship structure and the sharing.

Somebody was talking earlier about educational aspirations. We know the problem here. Sometimes people may make the effort to get to year 12, but it is a problem for them to progress because the family will see themselves as losing that person and they want to keep that person. It provides tremendous conflicts for them. I think it partly goes back to this difference in values.

Their values were built up over thousands of years in a hunter-gatherer society, and it is difficult to adjust those to a capitalist economy and the demands of our society. That would be a very simple answer at this stage.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you have any suggestions for how those issues could be addressed?

Rev. Edwards—I feel at times we need to do more getting together and talking with the people, all the people who are involved in these issues, and trying to get down to some of these deeper issues. I think there is too much talk at a superficial level, perhaps about self-management, self-determination, using traditional methods and so forth. I think at times we need a wider educational program that embraces the older people, the middle-aged people and the younger people who are coming up. We need to put to them the possibilities and ask: ‘How can we address them? Is it through our present way of education? Do we need to change that?’

When taxation was introduced—I think it was in about 1970 that people first had to pay taxation—the people thought taxation was a wonderful thing, because all they knew about it was that once a year they got a cheque. There was no understanding of all that goes into the economy. I tried a little bit to explain that, but I do not think at times we get around to educating people about the fundamental structures of the society and about how they may conflict with their traditional societies. It would be an immense program.

We need to do more of that with all of them but with some of the key leaders. There is a problem with some of the Aboriginal societies. It was, in a sense, such an egalitarian society, with people having limited authority within their own group. But that did not extend outside. That has been a problem at the communities. People feel loath to stand up and take a lead. If they do that, they are then told they are a whitefella—which is a term of abuse—because they are taking a whitefella role. I think we need to have more education of some of these leaders and to discuss some of these issues with them.

Senator BARTLETT—Thank you for your contribution. You made a comment in your introductory remarks about the fascinating parallel between comments made in 1986 and comments made just recently about a centre being built urgently. I want to go to this aspect of promises being made and recommendations being made in reports. We have had comments about coroners’ reports from 2002 and 2004. Apart from the general widespread comment about governments and politicians and their innate nature to promise and not deliver, can you give any indication of why you think we seem to be failing even at that basic level? It is hard enough to think of solutions, as you say, looking at the deeper underlying issues, but we cannot even get it together to do what would seem to be rather more fundamental things.

Rev. Edwards—It would help at times if we could focus on some particular program and work on that, as Mr Colson may have mentioned previously. Perhaps Mount Theo is our one success story that has worked. If people come up and discuss these problems, then we need to say, ‘Let’s tackle it at this level with a concerted program, have it well monitored and see how that works.’ One of the problems I find in reading many of the things that are announced in the press about what will be done is that it is revisiting the past. They are things that were tried and failed in my time up there and they are suggested again as the solutions. We need to come up with a program in consultation with them—it may be at Eagle Bore or Turkey Bore—and work

comprehensively and coordinately with that. I do not know whether that answers your question; I was finding it hard to get the gist.

Senator BARTLETT—Why is it that it has taken 20 years and we still have not built a rehab centre or something as basic as that? How come the promises keep being made and we cannot even deliver that?

Rev. Edwards—I guess sometimes it has to do with changes of governments when what one government said another will not fulfil. Again, there are problems taking such projects to the people themselves. You will get disagreements amongst the people, and that may be a reason why sometimes these things have not progressed. But I see it partly as a lack of political will to see the thing through. As I say, there are problems with building a rehabilitation centre. I am not saying we should just build one; I would only have it built if there were a good deal of Aboriginal sweat, blood and tears put into it. There is no point in building it if it is all built and then staffed by outside labour. One reason why the non-Anangu population has increased in the region is that people are just sitting back and seeing a parade of strangers coming through to work in aged care, health services and education services. It should only be built if the people agree it should be built—in the lands or in Alice Springs; wherever it should be—and if it has participation of Aboriginal people in all aspects of its construction and maintenance.

Senator ADAMS—I enjoyed reading your submission. I would like to talk about where the cultures are going. An example of that is at Kintore. In your submission you talk about the death of a 26-year-old man and the community leaders deciding to use traditional punishment on sniffers. You say:

Petrol sniffing ceased, school attendance increased and the community became more peaceful.

How are we going to manage this? I think we have come to a crossroads where sometimes cultural punishment is used and other times it is the white man's law, just to differentiate. Last night there was exposure on the *Lateline* program. As has been said before, we have had a lot of evidence coming through about sexual abuse but, when you look at the traditional side, the younger women are being sent away to school. They are not there; they are the promised women. We have all these sorts of conflicts and all of a sudden it is coming to a head, so I would like your opinion. The traditional treatment obviously still works, because the younger people are petrified. They have probably had the stories handed down to them of what happens when you do the wrong thing. Now, all of a sudden, petrol sniffers are getting that treatment, but legally where is it going to go? What law is going to be followed?

Rev. Edwards—As I suggested, one of the things that has kept this problem continuing for so long is the fact that people basically see it as a whitefellas' problem—we introduced the substances; they have no stories about petrol in the Dreaming and no social controls related to it. We keep throwing it back to them and they keep throwing it back to us. This is why I am suggesting it probably needs a lot of deep discussion with the people. As for the use of the traditional controls, sometimes the question is raised about introducing traditional Aboriginal law and giving it equal status in the Australian legal system. I have some problems about that. I think the way it is managed now, on an ad hoc basis, is the only way to do it, otherwise you are signing an open cheque and you do not know what you are in for.

I would agree that, if we can encourage people to administer this, this is well and good. As I have raised, one of the problems with this is that the traditional laws did not relate so much to very young children. You were brought into strict discipline from adolescence. One of the problems now is with smaller children becoming involved—in fact even babies being affected, through foetal syndromes. There is a nexus there which in some way must be broken. I mentioned, I think, in my submission that education of the people traditionally is very much from older siblings teaching younger siblings, which is a great way of education in a traditional hunter-gatherer society. But now, if the older siblings are petrol sniffing or drinking or abusing children, the young ones pick these practices up. There needs to be some breaking of that nexus. I do not know what more I can offer in answer to this. Certainly support elders where they are taking a stand. Of course, we have to watch it does not go to the point of brutality and the kinds of things exposed last night.

Senator ADAMS—You said before that, if someone is seen to be taking the lead, they are then being considered to be doing things the white man's way so therefore it is not right. I feel this inquiry has uncovered so many examples of what really is happening that we have to now take a stand and try and come back and say, 'This is the evidence we've heard; where is it going to go?' You have such great experience from the time when the Aboriginal people were on the stations. I can remember back to that myself—how organised they were, how they worked, what they did. Everyone seemed to be very happy. The children had their school with the station governess and they all worked together. Then all of a sudden equal rights and wages came in and drinking rights came in and we have just seen that whole society deteriorate. Can you see a way forward now, from that background going right to where we are now?

Rev. Edwards—It has certainly got to a very serious situation. We all know that. A whole generation are, in a sense, at sea. They do not have those work habits that the previous generation had. They have lost a bit of contact with the past. I remember an old woman passing our house at Amata in the 1970s and she looked tired and my wife said, 'Come and have a cup of tea.' She said: 'I had my daughters in my house and they were bringing too many people home and making rubbish, so I told them to go and stay in the camp. They came back and said, "But, Ngunytju, Mother, we don't know how to build a wiltja; we don't know how to build.'" In a sense, that is the problem. People have lost some of those skills of the past and they have not fully attained skills sufficient to adapt into the modern society.

It needs a lot of deep discussion with the people to say, 'This is where you're heading.' Where they are heading now is rather a disastrous possible outcome. We need to put this to them and say: 'Now, how can we turn it around? How can you take responsibility for this? How can the government help you in this?' It would need discussion of these very deep issues. I was talking on the phone yesterday to Amata community, which, when I visited last September, was probably one of the worst communities in the area. I believe in the past few weeks, Amata has picked up. There was a very large Christian convention there at Easter—that may have had something to do with it. I have heard that from people up there, but also the community has a municipal service officer and they are obviously designing some programs, so it may be worth inquiring as to what is happening at Amata. A lot needs to be done at those local levels to really face the people with these issues of what the future is likely to hold if things continue and to say: 'We want this to turn round. We want a future for your children. How can we start to implement that possibility?'

Senator WEBBER—I want to return to the comment you made before about how, when we build infrastructure in these communities, a parade of strangers turns up to do that. It seems to me, from my experience in Western Australia, that that is not where the parade of strangers stops. The parade of strangers, if it is government funded, keeps turning up and telling people how they are to use that infrastructure—particularly if you look at things like accreditation for aged care and what have you—without any of the cultural sensitivity that needs to go with that. I would be interested in your views on that but also on your views of the way governments traditionally fund programs, which tends to be over a three-year cycle. When you look at cultural differences and the distances and isolation of these communities, three years is nothing. You do not get effective change in three years. Therefore, perhaps governments at all levels need to look at a longer term commitment and perhaps a bit of patience to see some results.

Rev. Edwards—Yes. I guess in the old days it was easier, when I just had a small annual budget. It was before the referendum and there was no Commonwealth money. Now there is so much money that it is a problem to have that effectively used. I remember, even in those early years, I had what I called the Edwards law: the effectiveness of Aboriginal programs is in inverse proportion to the amount of government money spent on them. Do not tell Mr Costello that, please. What I am getting at there is that I found most of that money was spent on infrastructure to keep whitefellas happy with their airconditioners and so forth, and that is what I saw in the early government action in the lands. There needs to be flexibility, as I mentioned with the building. If a building has to be built under certain specifications by 30 June, then the possibility of having much Aboriginal labour is very limited. There has to be flexibility in those allocations of funds.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Edwards, and thank you for your patience. Would you like to table that supplementary paper that you brought in today?

Rev. Edwards—I will give you a copy.

CHAIR—Is it the wish of the committee that the document be accepted as evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered. If you would like to add anything to the committee later on, please be in contact with us, because we have about a month before we finish. We do appreciate your time and your patience.

Proceedings suspended from 1.19 pm to 2.16 pm

REYNOLDS, Ms Kathryn Joy (Kate), Private capacity

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have anything to say regarding the capacity in which you appear?

Ms Reynolds—I am here today as a citizen of South Australia but at the time I made my submission to you I was a member of the Legislative Council in the South Australian parliament, representing the Democrats.

CHAIR—Thank you. You would be aware of information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. As you know, the committee prefers to hear evidence in public but if there is anything you wish to take in camera please let us know and we will work through that. We have your submission, which you sent through to us quite early in the process. I now invite you to make an opening statement and then we will go to questions.

Ms Reynolds—Thank you for asking me to appear before the committee. Before we proceed I would like to acknowledge that we meet on the land of the Kurna people, and I would like to acknowledge their relationship with land and their culture and customs, and I pay my respects to that. In this opening statement I do not intend to touch on all the issues raised in my submission because it is very lengthy but I am certainly happy to answer questions. If I cannot provide an answer right now I am happy to provide an answer in writing to the committee. I understand that you need that quite soon because you are hoping to wrap up fairly soon.

I would like to refer you back to the comments in my covering letter to the submission where I talked about the cyclic nature of inquiries and petrol sniffing issues. I will not repeat all of that except to say I sincerely hope that this committee, which I suspect arose out of a similar media response experience, is able to really make a difference and get some interventions in place at both federal and state government levels where communities can really be confident that action is going to be taken that will make a difference and will last.

I said in my covering letter that I would also make some comments on policing in South Australia's remote Aboriginal communities. I had hoped to get that in writing to you previously; I have not been able to but I would like to speak about that today. I am very concerned that this cyclic nature of inquiry lets governments off the hook by only requiring them to appear to be doing something for as long as the inquiry lasts or until public interest in the issue wanes. I reiterate that I really hope this inquiry will be different.

Before continuing to talk about policing in remote communities, I need to make it clear that I am not an expert on petrol sniffing, on its physiological and psychological effects, or on the pros and cons of avgas versus Opal fuel. I have some understanding of those things but only at a generalist level. I do have a more detailed understanding of government responses to petrol sniffing in South Australia, particularly over the last five years.

I apologise in advance if I repeat things that Mona Tur, Bill Edwards or others have already highlighted. Mona and Bill are terrific resources in terms of knowing what has been tried in and promised to South Australia's remote Aboriginal communities over the last 50 years. There is

very little that I know that they have not known for decades. I am sorry I could not be here to hear their evidence.

The government of South Australia's submission to this inquiry bears the signature of the Hon. Jay Weatherill, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation. In his submission, Minister Weatherill writes:

... the South Australian Government has elected to respond to substance abuse and the factors underlying it in a thorough and coordinated way. This approach is fundamentally different—

and I will return to those words later—

to the way previous governments attempted to address petrol sniffing in remote Aboriginal communities across this state.

'Fundamentally different' is an awfully big claim. I believe it is a claim that does not stand up to scrutiny. On 1 December 1986, this article appeared on the front page of the *Adelaide Advertiser* under the headline 'Govt acts on petrol-sniffing "emergency"'. The article reports an announcement by the South Australian government that it would immediately establish mobile treatment facilities for petrol sniffers on the APY lands, ahead of the construction—'within 12 months'—of a permanent rehabilitation facility. I repeat: 'within 12 months'.

Jump forward 20 years and you have Minister Weatherill in his submission to your inquiry writing of the government's intention to establish a 'mobile outreach service' to petrol sniffers ahead of the construction of a permanent rehabilitation facility. And this, the current government would have us believe, is 'fundamentally different' from what has gone on before.

I have another artefact from 20 years ago, an extract from *Hansard* dated 14 August 1986. Here the South Australian Minister of Health tells parliament:

A significant start has been made to coordinate the efforts to combat petrol sniffing through a combined Federal, State and Aboriginal community committee under the Director-General of the Department for Community Welfare, Ms Sue Vardon.

We then go to what I will call exhibit 2, a copy of which I can provide to the committee if you want one. This is a copy of the petrol sniffing policy paper that South Australia's interdepartmental committee prepared in 1986—20 years ago. It includes the observation:

... State/Commonwealth Government bodies and other non-government bodies—

need to—

make a sound commitment to formulate a coordinated, cohesive approach in conjunction with Aboriginal communities to address the broader social problem which appears to be perpetuating youths participating in this form of solvent abuse.

I probably do not need to remind you that very similar statements appear in Minister Weatherill's submission. Attached to the 1986 policy paper is a proposal for an Aboriginal youth worker training scheme to recruit and train eight Aboriginal youth workers to positions in four communities on the APY lands. Jump forward 18 years and the South Australian government, as part of its 'fundamentally different' approach, told the state coroner of its intention to fund seven

youth workers across the APY lands through a program that, incidentally, would be situated in a department now headed by Sue Vardon.

Going to exhibit 3, this article appeared in the *Adelaide Advertiser* in May 1991. It is headlined 'Govt to spend \$29.5m on police cells'. This article reports that the government will be spending this \$29.5 million upgrading cells at police stations throughout the state, including—and these are specifically named in the article—cells at Amata, Ernabella, Fregon and Indulkana, all communities on the APY lands. The article reported that the work would be completed by June 1992.

Jump forward 12 years and we have the Hon. Bob Collins, who was, as you will remember, a special adviser to the current Labor government, recommending that funds be provided to immediately upgrade cells at Amata and Ernabella. As I wrote in my submission to this inquiry, more than 12 months after Bob Collins made that recommendation and more than 14 years after this article appeared, I inspected the cell at Amata. It still had not been upgraded; it still did not comply with the recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, even though funding to bring it up to standard was allocated 15 years ago.

The spin is that things are now fundamentally different. The reality is that there is some funding and some commitment, as there was in the past, to progress long recognised priorities which never got off the ground last time an inquiry was held, or only got off the ground for as long as petrol sniffing made the headlines.

I agree with the comments Professor Peter D'Abbs made to this committee a fortnight ago when he said:

... it would probably be very easy for petrol-sniffing to slip off the agenda again ...

and when he spoke of the need to sustain the current 'level of governmental interest' in petrol sniffing. Professor D'Abbs, along with Dr Maggie Brady, appeared to float the idea that this committee could make an important recommendation concerning the provision of funding for ongoing research into petrol sniffing. That research would ensure petrol sniffing stays on our collective radar and ensures that reliable data and analysis is available so that governments and others can make informed decisions. They spoke about only needing funding for one or two researchers. I support their call, but I strongly believe that it will be important for that research to monitor government promises, programs and funding commitments. If the right research is funded for a period of at least five years it might be possible to apply enough pressure to turn that spin into substance.

I would also like to give my support to the Law Society of South Australia's call for this inquiry to recommend that the evaluation of the APY lands COAG trial be made public. Anyone wanting to understand what has and has not happened on the APY lands over the last five years has to come to grips with the COAG trial and its tribulations. I suspect this committee is well aware that across Australia a very substantial amount of money for the COAG trials never reaches the ground but has, instead, funded government bureaucrat positions.

I do not know whether this committee is aware that when the South Australian government appointed Bob Collins to be what it called its 'man on the lands', Mr Collins, acting on a written

briefing from the Secretary of the federal Department of Health and Ageing, claimed that COAG funding would be withdrawn from the APY lands unless the state government immediately made significant changes to the APY Land Rights Act. Without conducting any formal consultations with the lands' traditional owners, the state government made the changes. That was the beginning of an 18-month concerted push by the state and the Commonwealth to wind back Anangu rights to self-determination, done under the guise of needing to improve the delivery of programs and services.

I note on the schedule of witnesses that Mr Chris Larkin and Mr Peter Kay will be appearing later today as representatives of the South Australian government. I am confident that they will make a significant contribution to your inquiry and inform you about what is happening through the state Department for Families and Communities and, to some extent, through the state's Department of Health.

Having said that, they are, in my view, a very calculated choice. They will be able to tell you much about some things and very little about others. I doubt that they will be able to tell you much about policing in remote Aboriginal communities. That will be outside their area of expertise. I doubt they will be able to tell you much about the two main COAG trial projects—that is, the establishment of rural transaction centres and the community stores policy—because I suspect that is also outside their area of expertise. I doubt they will be able to tell you much about TKP, the peak body that the Commonwealth and state with Anangu organisations established a year ago to coordinate the delivery of all services and programs to the APY lands. As far as I am aware, neither Mr Larkin nor Mr Kay are members of TKP, although in my view, they most definitely should be.

On 27 June last year I called on the Premier to appoint a representative from their department—the Department for Families and Communities—to TKP. That recommendation was ignored by the Premier, who preferred to appoint three representatives from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. So, although Ms Jane Halton, the Secretary of the federal Department of Health and Ageing, is one of the three Commonwealth representatives on TKP, Ms Sue Vardon, the CEO of the Department for Families and Communities—that is, the department that is rolling out at least six major new programs and services across the APY lands—is not. Ms Sue Vardon, with more than two decades of experience in relation to the APY lands, does not get to attend TKP meetings, nor does anyone from her department.

I note that Ms Jocelyn Mazel is not appearing before you today. Ms Mazel is a member of TKP and has oversight of the state's Department for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation, a division of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. She chairs the APY Lands Task Force and was the government's lead witness to the last coronal inquiry into four deaths on the APY lands. You will recall that in my submission I quote extensively from Ms Mazel's evidence to the coroner. A cynic—and good heavens that anybody should suggest that I might be a cynic—might suggest that, perhaps like the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation in South Australia, she is out of town up on the APY lands today, perhaps for a photo opportunity beside the new Mimili swimming pool. A cynic would suggest that this might be a positive news story aimed at distracting attention from the substance of today's hearings.

I also note that the large delegation of witnesses from the Western Australian government gave substantial evidence to this committee and that that delegation was vastly different in number

from the delegation you have appearing before you from the state government here. Certainly it was interesting to read the Western Australian contingent's comments about policing in remote communities in their state and how it compared with what is happening on the APY lands here. Not only did the Western Australian contingent point out that many of the drugs entering their communities are coming in from South Australia and not only did they point out that the Western Australia Police has better relationships with remote Aboriginal communities than the South Australia Police but the Western Australia Police witness told this committee that the South Australian government's decision to station its officers at a small, isolated homeland community instead of at the major community of Pipalyatjara 'defeats the purpose of the tri-state initiative'. That point is very significant and I hope that the committee pays attention to that evidence. The South Australian government's submission to this inquiry states that:

Since March 2004 there has been a presence on the APY Lands of seven fully sworn police officers.

It goes on to state that in the longer term this number will increase to eight. The important thing for this committee to realise is that in the longer term not one of those officers will be based in a major community on the APY lands. Over 400 people live at Amata, but their local police officers will be based in a small homeland community about 100 kilometres away. Over 500 people live at Ernabella, but their local police officers will reside about 30 kilometres away at Umuwa, which is, I think it is fair to say, an administrative centre dominated by white fellas. The same story can be told for every major Aboriginal community on the APY lands. Police will drive around these communities each day. They will open their police stations at designated hours, but as the sun sets and as the petrol sniffers come out, there will be no police close to hand.

For years Anangu and their supporters have been begging for sworn police officers to be based on their lands. I draw your attention again to some of the attachments in my submission from people on the lands. For years and years South Australia ignored those requests. Now, finally, after what the government has deemed to be an unacceptable number of deaths—but probably, more importantly, substantial critical media attention—they have agreed to base eight officers there but only if they do not live anywhere near a major Aboriginal community. The nursing staff, the teachers and the local community's administrative staff all live in the local communities, but not the police—at least not in South Australia. As you know, it is a very different story in Western Australia.

The refusal by South Australia Police to locate officers in communities on the APY lands will in my view have some very long-term consequences. Without a doubt, it will have a serious impact on the success of local night patrols—and I draw your attention to some of the questions I have asked in the parliament, which I have provided as an attachment to my submission. When I visited Amata 12 months ago, a night patrol was up and running. I was told that its success was in no small part due to two police officers living in the community. The officers were not involved in the night patrols and were not often called upon at night, but the night patrol workers and local community members told me that they took on their task with much greater confidence because they knew that, if things did get difficult, the police officers could be called in as backup. Once the permanent police housing is finished, those officers will not live in Amata any more; they will live 100 kilometres away. The other consequence of moving the officers out of the communities is that the ability of police to know what is going on and to be on top of things will be greatly diminished.

I have for the committee a copy of a table presented to the state coroner in November 2004 by a witness for South Australia Police. It is a summary of the suicide database that South Australia Police commenced in March 2004. You would recall from my submission that March 2004 was a significant period in terms of negative publicity about conditions on the lands. In the nine-month period up to the time of the coronial inquiry there were 64 suicide attempts on the APY lands, 30 of them at Amata. Despite what these figures suggest, Amata is not the suicide capital of the APY lands. It just happens to be the only community in which police were residing during that nine-month period. No doubt, when the permanent housing for the sworn police officers is completed and the officers temporarily based at Amata relocate to an isolated homeland community, the number of attempted suicides, according to this record system, will fall. Rest assured that, when that happens, the South Australian government will claim that things on the APY lands have significantly improved and are now fundamentally different.

I would like to return to the comment about cycles. I draw your attention to the second paragraph on page 2 of my covering letter, in which I said the cycles of attention paid to petrol sniffing only become problematic when a series of inquiries are conducted in quick succession. I will repeat one small part of what I wrote:

In this regard, the South Australian experience in 2002 is particularly instructive. It clearly demonstrates how pressure can be successfully applied to an unresponsive government but also, sadly, how once that pressure is removed everything grinds to a halt.

Bearing that in mind, I urge this Senate committee to seek to identify ways in which the cycle of inquiries might be broken. More immediately, I urge you to build on what has been learnt and attempted in South Australia over the last four years. I went on to say in my covering letter that I was disappointed the committee had not visited South Australia, so I am very pleased that you are here today taking evidence. Before I close, I would like to draw your attention to the final remarks in my submission. On the last page, page 21, I have made three recommendations. With regard to the cycle of inquiries, I recommended that your recommendations should include specific comment on the need to closely, regularly and independently monitor whatever actions the committee recommends—and certainly for no fewer than five years. In company with Coroner Chivell, I urge this Senate committee to affirm the ongoing importance of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and to apply significant pressure to both state and federal governments to identify whether or not those recommendations have been implemented.

Lastly, I draw your attention to the third recommendation, which relates to the 2003 social justice report by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. I thank you for your attention. I know that was a long opening statement, but I did want to cover a number of significant points.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ms Reynolds. Yes, it was a long opening statement, but the issues are on the table.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You make quite a compelling case for there being neglect of this issue and, as your press clippings indicate, not just by the present government but by a succession of governments. Can I put a view to you not so much by way of an excuse but as a possible explanation as to why governments of different persuasions in this state and in other

states of Australia, and possibly nationally as well, have found it so difficult to deal with this issue. This point of view postulates that petrol sniffing is simply a manifestation of a much more serious malaise affecting Aboriginal Australia. It is a symptom of disempowerment, dispossession and disadvantage that afflicts that community. Governments have discovered but never explicitly acknowledged that it is extremely difficult to deal with just petrol sniffing and not all those other issues. But you cannot deal just with petrol sniffing. Do you think that view is valid? If it is, what do we actually do to deal with this particular issue in the terms of reference before this committee?

Ms Reynolds—I certainly think that that view is valid. In fact, I would refer you to the findings of Coroner Chivell, who said:

Clearly, socio-economic factors play a part in the general aetiology of petrol sniffing. Poverty, hunger, illness, low education levels, almost total unemployment, boredom and general feelings of hopelessness form the environment in which such self-destructive behaviour takes place.

He said that in his report in September 2002, and that is certainly echoed in previous findings from both coroners' inquiries and many, many other inquiries into conditions in remote Aboriginal communities. None of us, I think, would question that. What we have to do, though, is remain focused on the fact that governments promise a whole lot of interventions, strategies and assistance and then as soon as the heat is off stop bothering. So all of those very significant issues remain. If the only thing that governments want to respond to is negative publicity, then how do you deal with poverty, illness, low education levels and almost total unemployment? You cannot deal with petrol sniffing in isolation.

It seems to me that in the 2½ years that I had the portfolio as Aboriginal affairs spokesperson for the South Australia Democrats this current state government and former state governments were not truly committed to addressing the issues in remote Aboriginal communities. You need a whole package of interventions and you need solid and permanent follow-through. I sent you that letter from Makinti from Ernabella because this woman has had to resort to writing begging letters to the state government, saying, 'Can you please send us some help. We need somebody who can sit and work alongside me for six months so that I can learn the skills that I need in order to properly manage government money and so that we can actually get some changes here on the ground.' The state government ignored her. They still have not provided the sort of assistance that these communities are begging for. How do we think we can address the real issues of petrol sniffing when we cannot provide the sort of assistance to on-the-ground administrative staff in remote communities that workers in metropolitan, urban and predominantly white Australia take for granted?

Senator HUMPHRIES—You say that we should affirm the ongoing importance of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, but you also say that you have had difficulty getting information from the state government about how well they have been implemented, if at all. Not having looked at those recommendations for some time, can we take it as fact that those recommendations are still relevant and are substantially unimplemented?

Ms Reynolds—Absolutely. It is my understanding that they are well and truly relevant. I am just flicking through attachment A, the sample of questions that were asked in the Legislative

Council. There were certainly some questions that were asked about progress with implementation. Which ones they were are not jumping out at me at the moment and I am a bit reluctant to rely on my memory. I can certainly follow this up and get back to you, but my understanding is that those questions that were asked had not yet been answered, and one of the reasons that they had not been answered is that the recommendations were by and large not implemented, although significant amounts of money had, over the years, been allocated for their implementation. So if we assume that all of the recommendations are still relevant then perhaps this committee might ask why the money has not been spent and, if that is the case, what happened to that money? There are numerous other examples of funds that have been allocated and not spent. A number of those are outlined in my submission.

CHAIR—You have given us all of the questions that you have put on notice in the Legislative Council. Have you provided the answers that were provided to you?

Ms Reynolds—Many of them remain unanswered, but I am happy to get you a collection of the answers.

CHAIR—The questions are all there, and they are all closely linked to the terms of reference, but we are unsure as to whether they were left unanswered or whether the answers were not fulsome or whatever. It would be useful if we could get those linked up.

Ms Reynolds—I am happy to provide the answers that have been made available to me.

Senator BARTLETT—Thank you for that. As to the specific recommendation that you have made about close, regular, independent monitoring of not just our recommendations but even some of the other recommendations—coroners' recommendations and the like—do you have any views about how that might be done effectively at a federal level? The possible parallels that jump into my head are some of the things that are happening at the moment in the immigration area, where the now Immigration Ombudsman is reporting on a whole range of cases and on whether or not the government is meeting its commitment to three-month time lines for reviews. Would that be the sort of thing that you think could work, whether at a state or a national level?

Ms Reynolds—I think it would very helpful to have a model of scrutiny that very much focused on stated targets and time lines. I draw your attention again to the comments in my submission about the progress reports that were put on the state government's website. I think pages 10 and 11—it might be 11 and 12—refer to those. It was almost impossible to know what progress was achieved because the so-called progress reports were published on the web and then removed when the next one was put up, so you could not chart anything. You certainly might want to ask the state government if they could provide you with a list of each of those progress reports in the form that they were published on the website at the time. If, for any reason, they are unwilling or unable to do that, I am certainly able to provide a copy of each of those to the committee. But that is the very nature of the problem. What governments are seeking to do is to conceal their lack of progress.

If there are so many complex issues then there has to be a whole new model developed to very clearly scrutinise what has or has not been done. Some mechanism needs to be developed to hold each and every one of those people to account, whether it is state or federal governments or Aboriginal community organisations. Having said that, I would be very loath to see any more

blame shifted to Aboriginal organisations on the ground. I think that they have had so much blame dumped on them for things well and truly out of their control; it would be most unreasonable to do that in the future. I would hope that this committee might make some recommendations about the need for assistance to be provided to Aboriginal organisations to— from their end—try and hold governments accountable for the promises that are made to them.

Senator BARTLETT—Following on from that, I was looking at your submission and the comments made by Makinti, who was an executive member of the land council, about some of the issues at the time regarding the controversies around the administration of the lands. It is something I am vaguely aware of without knowing the details. How much truth is there in allegations that the lack of functionality of the administration amongst the Indigenous people on the lands is a barrier to making things work and making government programs effective? How much of it is just a convenient blame tool used so that the government can say, ‘We’re trying to do all this but they can’t get their act together’?

Ms Reynolds—I think probably about 99 per cent of it is a convenient scapegoating technique used by governments over many years. The time lines I provide in my submission show that, when certain announcements were made by the current government, it was very much about just reacting to negative media pressure at the time, and yet these people had been calling and asking—begging—for assistance over and over. Here you have small, mostly volunteer organisations in very remote communities attempting to administer what look on the surface to be very large sums of money, bearing in mind that much of it never got to their bank accounts in the first place. These are people who were working with very little training, very little support and very little access to professional expertise.

I could probably refer you to some evidence that was received by the Aboriginal Lands Parliamentary Standing Committee, of which I was a member when I was in the state parliament. This evidence showed very clearly that governments were blaming the APY council for not having spent money on programs and services when, in fact, that money had never even reached their bank account. How can they possibly respond with services on the ground when they cannot get access to workers, let alone the fact that they cannot even get the dollars in the bank account to try and attract people? In my view, scapegoating is an art form by governments that has been perfected in relation to Aboriginal communities. Again, if there was some wonderful thing that this committee could do to break that cycle of blame, I think that would be very helpful. It is a big ask, I know, but those issues around governance and management in these communities are extraordinarily large and largely ignored.

Senator BARTLETT—In your submission you have given a few quite good examples where you have tracked announcements and shown what does and does not happen. It flows on from what you said about funding—this issue of potential double-counting of money or things being announced and not funded and then re-announced. You give an example of \$590,000 allocated to improve water quality in communities being packaged as part of a response to petrol sniffing and then you track it and find that it was not at all clear what happened with that money. Is that the sort of thing that you would also need an independent body to assess?

Ms Reynolds—I think that would be very helpful. In fact, on that \$590,000, which was allocated by the APY task force as one of the 26 proposals in a bucket of money back in 2004-05, I do not know if that has been spent. But those of you who had access to the Adelaide

Advertiser and perhaps local radio yesterday would have noticed that Minister Weatherall announced that \$500,000 was being spent on the lands to improve water services. I cannot tell you if that \$500,000 is in addition to the \$590,000 that was allocated in 2004-05. Perhaps you might like to ask the government to supply an answer to that question, but I suspect it is in fact a prime example of re-announcements and the pea and thimble tricks that governments of every persuasion have become expert at when it comes to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people.

Senator BARTLETT—I was going to say that I thought only state Labor governments did that; I am sure the federal Liberals never do anything of the sort! I can safely say there has never been a Democrat government that has done that!

CHAIR—Do you have any further questions, Senator?

Senator BARTLETT—How much is unique about the petrol-sniffing issue as opposed to other abused substances, such as alcohol and marijuana? I shall not mention ecstasy. Is it a risk for us to focus too much on petrol and not look at some of the other issues? Are we displacing the problem? You put in Opal and they just bring in amphetamines or whatever.

Ms Reynolds—I think that is a very useful observation. Petrol sniffing is just one way people block out the misery of their lives and the hopelessness that Coroner Chivell talked about. Certainly on one of the trips that I went on—the entire Parliamentary Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs went on it—there was a particular incident in a community where a man went off his trolley, if I could colloquially put it, as a result of glue sniffing. The violence and the dysfunctionality in communities as a result of abuse of substances other than petrol is very significant but, as we know, images of young people and, increasingly, older people stumbling around communities with petrol cans tied around their heads make for great pictures in newspapers and great television coverage and give much fodder to shock jock radio.

I don't know how many of you will enjoy a glass of wine and a cigarette—I am sure nothing else—after your day's work today, but the degree to which alcohol and marijuana and other drugs, both legal and illegal, are abused in these communities is enormous. So I think putting too much attention or focus on petrol sniffing would be missing an opportunity to address the broader issues in those communities.

Senator SIEWERT—I found your submission most useful and illuminating. Why are the police not in the community?

Ms Reynolds—Anecdotally, I have been told that some police just do not want to be there because they do not want to be disturbed at night or they do not want to have to be on call 24/7. Other police officers say, 'No, that is not a problem for us.' It seems to be very much a person by person approach. It would be incredibly hard work being a police officer in any of these communities. Equally, it is incredibly hard work being a nurse or a teacher. They are on call, they are on duty, they are at work 24/7. I personally do not understand why SAPOL wants to take a different approach for its police officers.

I know that they have had extraordinary difficulty getting police to agree to go to the lands. But I think you would find, if you unpacked all of that, that it is as much around industrial issues as anything. The police officers in the past have not had particularly attractive packages, given

that it is a pretty tough working environment and not somewhere that you would like to necessarily take a family. Housing is, by and large, dreadful. Access to other opportunities for families is almost non-existent. So I have certainly expressed the opinion that we need to pay police officers, teachers and nurses basically whatever it takes to get the best quality people into those communities. If that means paying them double and doubling other conditions to get police who are willing to live in those communities and provide the sort of protection and support that communities want—people are not just calling for this protection for women and children; they want it for the entire community—then we need to do it. It is an investment that will pay such dividends. I do not understand why governments are so reluctant—

Senator SIEWERT—There are two follow-up questions out of that one specifically. Do you know if the tri-state committee has been dealing with this uniformity of police conditions and locating them in communities? You mentioned Western Australia. Are you aware of that being raised as an issue?

Ms Reynolds—I do not know whether the industrial conditions have been raised as a tri-state issue. If they have not already then I would suggest that that might be something that the committee could look at. It seems an obvious question to ask: why is it that in Western Australia police are willing to live in the communities and in South Australia they are not? Is it around wages and conditions, or is it around the level of support? Or is it something around the selection processes of those officers who go to communities?

Senator SIEWERT—My understanding from when we were in Western Australia is that the Western Australian police force has made a significant effort in building houses, for example—those sorts of things.

Senator ADAMS—A huge effort, yes.

Ms Reynolds—Again, as I said in my submission and my statement, there are houses being built on the lands, and I am sure the state government will tell you more about that if you wish. But, again, the decision to not locate the police in the communities is one that I think should be very carefully investigated. Once those houses are there, outside the communities, there are not going to be any new houses built for a long time.

Senator SIEWERT—You have also raised the issue of upgrading the cells et cetera. What was the reason given for that not having happened?

Ms Reynolds—I cannot answer that; you would need to ask the state government. I asked the question in the parliament, in other places, but we have not been given an explanation.

Senator SIEWERT—For that or for the rehabilitation facilities?

Ms Reynolds—On the rehabilitation facility, I think the government is on the record. I cannot remember how much of that I have quoted in my submission, but there were all sorts of explanations offered about consultation and this, that and the other. Of course there needed to be a consultation with communities, but I have heard just recently that the government has put some ultimatums to communities about where some of these facilities might be located, and perhaps that will in fact be outside the state. Again, some people might call me a cynic, but my

explanation would be that this just was not right up there on the top of the government's agenda, so it was not getting the attention and the expertise that it needed.

CHAIR—Thank you. I hope that we have noted the cross-party defence of the Western Australian housing situation on that point from all three senators from Western Australia!

Senator WEBBER—I am one of the three from Western Australia. I therefore might pick up where that comment about the Western Australian police force left off. It is pleasing to know that people do notice when the WA police force makes an effort to do things. I would, however, say that we do have a lot of Indigenous communities in crisis, and one of the reasons that the Western Australian police force had to address that was that they could not get nurses or doctors to stay in those communities, because they did not feel safe. But not all Western Australian police officers feel comfortable in those communities either. I would also say—and I do not want to comment on the particular location where people live—that, when you come from the west, someone being located 100 kilometres away is not really that far. Without wanting to comment on the geography, just in terms of the scale I am sure that our police have to deal with that a lot.

You talked a lot about the cyclical nature of what we are doing with petrol sniffing. One of the most depressing things I have read was that social justice report, because it basically said that all of the issues we are trying to deal with, particularly to do with health, are cyclical. So petrol sniffing cannot stand out there on its own. It is something that we have all been trying to grapple with for years. We are spending more money than we have ever spent on it, but our communities are in a greater crisis than they have ever been in. So there is no one quick-fix solution. In fact, there are a number of former politicians in Western Australia who have put to me that what we need is a cross-party commitment on a policy direction for 20 years and the resources to go with that, if we are going to be serious about addressing those problems.

Ms Reynolds—I think that is a very reasonable suggestion. One of the other things that particularly concern me—and I have said this in the third paragraph of my covering letter—is not just the cyclic nature of inquiries and announcements by governments about what they intend to do to respond to recommendations of various inquiries but the fact that communities have their hopes built up again, and then the actions just fade away. And then, when the next thing happens, whether it is a death or some other issue that focuses attention on a community, the pain and grief that these communities experience is trawled through again.

I have been on the lands on numerous occasions. I have sat on the grounds with Aboriginal women as they talked about that pain and grief. That is one of the things that caused me to be so active and passionate on these issues. It breaks your heart when individuals, families and entire communities are vilified in the media and by parliaments for matters that are often well and truly out of their control. If there could be some kind of cross-party, cross-government commitment for something like 20 years that involved truly providing the sort of support that communities needed, that would be good.

And it is not about just saying, 'We're going to put some youth workers up on the lands.' I visited one of the communities just after this state government announced that it had placed youth workers in the communities and I said to these people, 'Can I meet your youth worker?' They looked a bit confused, but eventually they worked out what I meant and they introduced me to a young Aboriginal man who at that time—and I assume still, but I do not know that for a

fact—was on CDEP. He had had it noted on his CDEP form that he was now the youth worker—he was the person that the Premier was referring to in the parliament as a new youth worker.

I asked him what training he had, and he said, ‘None.’ I asked him what equipment he had. He walked me to the edge of the community to this rundown shed—and I can provide a photograph of the outside and the inside of it if you would like—and he opened the doors, which was not easy because they were not in very good condition, and showed me an empty, dirty, unlined shed. I said, ‘Have you got any equipment for this?’ He said, ‘No.’ ‘Have you got a billiard table, a bike, a sound system or anything?’—the kinds of things that we take for granted in youth centres in white urban Adelaide and region Australia—and he said, ‘No.’ I said, ‘Do you know if anything is coming?’ ‘No.’

How you can lock changes to that situation into cross-party commitments and long-term arrangements, I am not really sure. But attention has to be given to that level of detail. The sentiment is excellent and I am absolutely behind it but we have to be able to get really tough about exposing the hypocrisy and the nonsense of some of the claims that are made.

Senator WEBBER—Going hand in hand with that, though, is the need to get tough about coming up with models that work, rather than having solutions built around personalities in communities. A lot of the time—and Senator Adams would know this more than me—in the north-west of Western Australia a community works really well when they have a good CEO and a good youth worker or what have you. When they burn out and leave, the community moves back into crisis because we do not look at models of good service delivery and give that long-term commitment and work out what needs to happen.

Ms Reynolds—I absolutely agree with that statement. It is one of the reasons that I found those letters from Makinti to the Premier so absolutely distressing, because they were looking for support to ensure that they could get and keep the sorts of skills that they needed in their community, and they were constantly denied that support. I have heard those stories over and over whenever I have visited Aboriginal communities not just on the APY lands but on lands in other parts of South Australia as well. It is incredibly difficult to get and keep good people who can then train and support and mentor Aboriginal people from those communities.

Senator ADAMS—Just to follow on from that: we have heard evidence today on exactly that; how do Aboriginal communities, if they have a stronger person there as a leader, talk to the government and become able to understand and work with the policy? Getting back to the culture: the person is looked at as if they are following the white man’s line and not following their own law.

More and more evidence that we have heard as we have travelled around the country has shown that we have to tackle this divide of one minute running with white man’s law and the next minute running with Aboriginal cultural law. It is becoming terribly confusing. What was shown on last night’s *Lateline* program is obviously going to become an issue and be blown up. You were talking about all these different cycles, but we have had that evidence in a number of areas. The situation is that a lot of the younger women are being sent away to school and they are becoming quite streetwise and quite smart. They know that, if they go back to their community, their lives are in danger—probably even more than young men—and they are not going to be able to follow a path that they want to. Therefore, will they go back? Mornington

Island was probably a very good example of that. There was just this missing generation of young women. The hospital had a number of jobs. No-one wanted to do them. They were quite happy to just get their dole payments and go off to the tavern and do what they wanted to do. And then, with the petrol sniffing, there was an example in the evidence from Kintore where someone had committed suicide and the elders had decided, 'Right, we're going back to tribal punishment now.' Any petrol sniffer is lined up and they get tribal punishment. So the petrol sniffing stopped.

So there are also these conflicts. I just wonder if we have reached a time now where we have the evidence and the support to make a change—even looking at a 20-year bipartisan way to try and get through with a policy that is going to work and is going to be supportive. I worked at Warburton and at Cundeelee as a nurse years and years ago. We have had some really top people out there, and our police that do go out there are dedicated to the cause, but they have terrific support and backup from their senior people in the department. So the difference, I think, is the fact that they know they have the support. Hopefully, we can attract some sort of tax exemption or something for the people who go out there. I am very strong on that because, more and more, even our medical staff are not prepared to do the hard yards. They enjoy what they are doing but they want a life. And that is the difference with the 24 hours, seven days a week attitude of my generation that went out there to work; we were prepared to stay there and do it. There was usually a time when you were going to be able to come back, but that was your commitment to that area for that time. But things have changed and we really have to get with the changes in our workforce as they are prepared to work.

Ms Reynolds—I think you are absolutely right, and that churn of supportive and skilled leadership in communities, whether it is from Aboriginal people themselves or it is Aboriginal people working alongside and supported by non-Aboriginal people who have expertise in particular areas, is a real issue. Any Aboriginal community can tell you; they say, 'We just feel like we're getting somewhere, when the person goes.'

We could be here all night talking about some of these bigger picture topics, and I know you have other witnesses, but there are issues we are still not addressing—for instance, around housing. For decades and decades, Aboriginal communities in this state and, I am sure, others have been saying to the government, 'The reason we can't get a qualified youth worker up here who can train up some of our young people and our other community people to run programs for young people is that we haven't got a house to put them in.' Twenty years after alerting the state government to the fact that there is no house, bearing in mind that in South Australia the state government controls the building of all houses on the lands, what possible excuse is there for the fact that there is still no house for a youth worker to go into? When youth workers come up they think they are going into a different circumstance, and after three or four weeks—or, if you are lucky, three or four months—they say they cannot tolerate it anymore; they just cannot cope. That is why I keep returning to that lack of commitment, that lack of embedded support and skill in communities. There are no more excuses that can be made for the inaction, spin and deceit about what it is really like in these communities and for how little action governments have really taken over the years.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ms Reynolds. You have raised a number of points on top of those in your submission, and I am sure that the state government will be interested in having those questions put to them. I think I have covered a bit of paper on that point. If there is anything you

wish to add, please get in touch with the committee. I think we now have copies of all the documents you have given us today; they have been circulated. Thank you for your time.

Ms Reynolds—Thank you, and I wish you well.

[3.18 pm]

RAWSON, Mr Peter Harold, Public Officer, Mentor, Adelaide Healing Energy Centre

WEBB, Ms Lorraine, Owner, Manager, Adelaide Healing Energy Centre

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Rawson—I am appearing on my own behalf but am associated with the Adelaide Healing Energy Centre. I have spent over 30 years in the government sector, most recently with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

CHAIR—We have before us your submissions. Thank you both for their early lodgment. I invite you to make opening statements before we go to questions.

Ms Webb—I am an Aboriginal woman. I set up the Adelaide Healing Energy Centre in 1999. Since that time the centre has grown. It offers natural therapies from 12 different therapists, along with classes and courses in personal development, healing and life skills. We have achieved many of our goals in healing within our community. The centre is a leader in the field of alternative health and it offers therapies such as spiritual healing, massage, polarity therapy, Reiki, counselling, chiropractic, herbal medicine, acupuncture, iridology, inner child work and children's healings. We also run weekly classes in meditation and yoga and regular workshops in inner child work, positive parenting, life skills and much more. We have 14 therapy rooms, two workshop spaces and a large shopping area. The basis of all the work we do is looking at the dysfunctions within families that create fear, lack and loss—basically, a lack of love in one's life.

My role has been one of setting up the centre and training the trainers, passing on my knowledge and skills. I am a trained healer in spiritual healing and Reiki. I am also a workplace trainer. I have been teaching healing techniques, such as mind-body-spirit connection for the past 10 years. I have created a number of courses and currently have 12 trained healers and facilitators working in inner child workshops in most states.

I have written a book, a copy of which I have given to each of you, called *Practical Guide to Healing the Inner Child*. This book supports my work on healing the past and how to do it—which is most important. It looks at the patterns and programs that people are operating from, based on their past experiences, and looks at the stories that have been passed down from family member to family member.

We both have read and understand the terms of reference for this inquiry, and I wish to provide the statements contained in my letter of 28 October 2005 to the committee. On reading the *Hansard* transcripts of the Alice Springs hearing, we have noted that the word 'healing' does not appear at all. Our contribution to this inquiry is based around healing. We believe that the major key to the petrol sniffing issue is healing of the mind, body and spirit of the individual. The question we ask is, 'Why are the young using substances?' Petrol sniffing is a symptom of a greater core issue that we believe to be an emotional and spiritual issue for the community as a

whole. We feel it is a whole-of-family issue of great emotional pain that is passed on through families as emotional genetics. The emotional pain of the entire family and community with regard to grief, loss, anger, resentment, helplessness, powerlessness and hopelessness is passed on to the very young from family member to family member and becomes all too encompassing for one individual to carry.

When pain such as this becomes overwhelming, each member will reach for relief in any way possible. For some it will be grog, for others drugs, and for others still it will be petrol sniffing. It is interesting to note that the euphoric feeling within the mind blocks the daily issues and pain that become unbearable. For just a short time, sniffing takes away the facts that they know to be real, such as their own lack of identity, their own emotional pain, the fact that they do not have the opportunities of the average white student, and the fact that they cannot see a future for themselves beyond the inner pain. They cannot see any opportunities in the future. We need to paint a picture of hope for the young Indigenous person.

We feel that what is required is a breaking of the cycle—which I am sure everyone is aware of. We need to introduce emotional healing to heal the wounds of the past once and for all. All Indigenous people are inherently spiritual. We have found, by working with Aboriginals from various groups, that they are particularly receptive to this type of therapy. They are able to make enormous shifts in a short space of time, in particular because as a race they are hungry for the sacred, which is often missing in their life—the sacred being their own connection to their own spirit. This needs to be for all of the family, not just the sniffer, so that there is real encouragement, progress and healing for the whole family.

We need to inspire and give hope and, most of all, love—starting with teaching love of oneself. We need to teach personal power instead of reinforcing powerlessness. We suggest that this can be done by coming into each community with a team of healers and trainers, through proper consultation processes that are in line with individual communities and by proper negotiation processes. We have access to many trained healers that are able to do this work under direction. We would offer one-on-one healing with whole-of-family healing plans addressing the individual needs of each family, particularly those with family members involved in petrol sniffing. We would also suggest running group training in energy, which is introducing people to energetics and how it works, along with a main focus of inner child work, which is about learning how deep emotional issues from the past remain stored within the body until they are resolved or until they transmute into a physical illness.

It is interesting to note that Aboriginal people have a shorter life span than white people, and they have huge health issues such as diabetes and heart disease. We are saying that this relates to the huge emotional burden carried by individuals and passed down from generation to generation. It can stop here if the full extent of the problem is addressed rather than a bandaid solution being applied as has happened in the past.

We suggest teaching about the power of the mind and the inner power of the spirit, focusing on what they can do rather than teaching about limitation. I have taken this program into the women's prison at Northfield and into the men's prison at Yatala. In two years, we put 64 Aboriginal men and women through our program. It was a four-day program of healing, dealing with family issues and introducing participants to meditation, relaxation and visualisation techniques. Since all Aboriginals are inherently spiritual, we found this program to be highly

successful and we had wonderful responses. We included two private healing sessions per person in the program.

One of the most upsetting things was that the participants told us that they wanted the program to continue and that they were fed up with good programs that did not follow through. They asked us to please make sure that this did not happen to our program. Unfortunately, as happens constantly to other programs, we ran out of funding and the program had to be stopped. Many of those prisoners have remained in contact with us and have come to us for help upon leaving prison. Often, we provide this assistance without pay.

I would like to read a letter from one of those participants who continue to contact us today. This young man is serving a long term in prison and was an extremely angry person when we met at the course. This letter was written on 5 October 2005. He said:

Dear Lorraine

I have just finished reading chapter 2 and chapter 3 of your book. I must say they are very eye-opening and your life stories brought tears to my eyes, not just because of the hard life and sadness you have been through but because—and this is hard to me to say—the little girl trying to stop her mum's boyfriend from bashing her mother is my daughter and son stopping me from doing that to their mum. That has always been hard for me too—not so much to see it but to accept what I have done and the hurt I have caused.

I have come to a decision: once I have worked through all I need to work through to heal myself—and I understand it will take a long time—I am going to set myself a goal that I will try to help men who are violent towards their wives or girlfriends. This is my long-term goal out of life. I know I'm here for a reason now, and this may be it. This is going to be so hard, and I can feel my body draining of energy right now just writing this.

I have seen so far in your book that you've got all that is or has been on the receiving end of the violence or abuse, and I feel that I've a need to help people who dish it out, since I've dished it out myself. I've always thought that it was monkey see, monkey do, but I also know there is more to it and spirit has told me I need to help. Spirit told me this long before I done your course, but your course helped me believe that I can do it and it is a realistic goal that I can achieve. Reading your book has really slapped me in the face and is starting to awaken me, but I will take my time and try to heal my inner child first.

The other thing is my mother has told me her story about how hard it was for her childhood. I listened at the time but did not understand. But I did listen and I can remember how abusive her father was not long before he died. I never met my grandmother or my mother's stepmother, but I know she was not accepted. My mother was not accepted and got heaps of abuse because she was the oldest.

My father's story no-one knows because he has always changed the subject. He passed on when I was transferred up here, but I do see him in me and my attitude and my violence. But I do not blame my parents anymore. I'm starting to take responsibility. I would like to find out about how my father grew up, but I do not know how to contact his family or whether they would help anyway, because he was disowned for some reason. I have my suspicions why, because I have seen and experienced his destructive ways for myself. I know he has two other children that I've tried to trace down through the Salvation Army, but they was unable to help.

I want you to know something. I am writing my day to day in a journal, and before you wrote to me up here and before I started reading your book I was so depressed I started every day by saying, 'Why have I woken up today?' and I finished

off every night writing, 'I hope to die tonight; please, let me die.' Now I am happy to wake up every morning and I am always energised. I do my daily work in the mornings and afternoons, and I want to just live and achieve what spirit told me I need to do. I know I can do it. I want to do it and be an example for my children to look up to.

Well, Lorraine, thanks for sending me your book. It's really helping me and I will do the exercises.

With love ...

As well as the prison program, we also took the program to the Yalata community of Ceduna and did a four-day training program with a group of 10 women from that community, as well as one-on-one healing and massage.

Because English was the second language for these women, we did the program mainly through demonstration and drawing, encouraging the women to draw about their pain and discuss their drawings. The women loved the program and could see the value, and they wanted to be taught the healing techniques and program to take back to their community. However, once again there was no continuation in the funding to allow this to happen.

We were invited at the beginning of 2005 to go to Perth and work with a team of counsellors from the Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service. We did this all of last year and we trained 10 people there. We trained a group of workers in spiritual healing. They are now using the techniques in healing with their clients as well as counselling going hand in hand. They are beginning to see now how this type of therapy can assist their clients.

We would like to see a long-term healing program of at least four years, if not longer, with our organisation taking teams of healers into each community and doing healing consultation and training—perhaps monthly visits and long-term visits. We would identify a small group of people in each community to be trained in healing techniques as well as presenting programs in life skills and meditation. Once these people were sufficiently trained and able to handle the healing needs of their communities, our teams would withdraw. Adelaide Healing Energy would still be able to support the healers and trainers in each community, offering backup support. There would be a purpose-built house in each community set up as a meeting place, therapy room and workshop base. We see the trained healers working with the traditional healers of each community, adding to and not detracting from the traditional ways and methods. This way, when there is a death or a tragedy in the community, there is an immediate response from the trained healers rather than a time lapse while waiting for a response. The important thing is that the response is community driven in the very early stages. Finally, I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity.

CHAIR—Mr Rawson, do you have a statement to make?

Mr Rawson—Yes, I have, thank you. In my written submission of 28 October last year I addressed seven issues for consideration by the panel. I listed them separate. The first one was healing. I think Lorraine has covered that perfectly and I do not want to elaborate on that any further. I totally support what the Adelaide Healing Energy Centre has been doing. I think it has some solutions for this inquiry.

The second recommendation was on communication. From experience gained in providing communications services to remote Indigenous communities I have suggested that consideration be given to the establishment of new infrastructure—buildings and equipment—at the community level so that Aboriginal people, particularly the youth as a whole, can access it at any time. These buildings are really aimed at information technology. I question why, with all the advances in technology, the major business corporations, through subsidies, cannot open up communications centres in remote communities and give the kids something to do with their spare time. They are generally on CDEP for two days a week. The rest of the time is just wasted. Everyone blames boredom as one cause for sniffing. This initiative would be a way that they would be able to access facilities currently denied to them. Aboriginal people in remote areas generally do not have the financial capacity to get IT equipment of their own. The denial of access leads to anger, resentment and then violence. By providing these facilities, the youth and their community could be trained and further their education. Funding would probably come from service providers if at all possible.

The next recommendation was music and entertainment. Indigenous people of all generations love their music and share songs and dance. Music leads to calmness and creates changes within an individual. I have been advised that, given a chance, sniffers can in fact change their habits through the calming influences that music offers. It is, again, a healing process. I witnessed a country and western night some years ago at Yuelamu community at Mount Allan station, which is about 200-odd miles north-west of Alice Springs. It was organised through the local community council, and the bush telegraph worked very well. There were over 200 people attending from a wide area. The elders commented to me afterwards that they had not seen their children dance and enjoy themselves so much.

There were petrol sniffers present. They were given the opportunity to participate and did not disrupt any part of the performances. There have been many statements made that music is a very important part of the regalia of petrol sniffers. The style of the music they choose is selected in deliberate contrast to the choices of most others. I recommend that any chance to expand opportunities for music and dance in communities be taken. It is a part of the overall culture, and each community would have its own unique ownership. Ongoing funding would be required from service providers. These are only my thoughts.

Petrol seems to be at the very heart of the problem, but it is not really. I have seen first hand the effects of the sniffing of petrol and solvents by Aboriginal people. I saw that back in the early eighties, when I first went to the AP lands. I highly recommend the initiatives taken and plans made for the roll-out of Opal petrol in some regions. I have noted the comments of presenters at earlier hearings of this inquiry. However, what I would like to say to this inquiry concerns the downside, that people who are in the cycle will, as they have been able to do before, find ways of getting around it. We have already heard Mr Colson's statement; there are others that are similar. Policing needs to be stronger. But the first signs notably fall back within the community when people actually witness petrol sniffing and consciously have to make a decision to do in a person. However, that person could be one of his or her immediate family. This is at the heart of the issue, because they may be perceived as being part of the problem.

The training and education that the Adelaide Healing Energy Centre would provide would be through a process of healing at the family level. Lorraine has already mentioned the centre's successes in this area. I have seen them myself. Unfortunately, mixing fuels is not difficult and

there are still people who know ways of getting leaded fuel as well as other substances, drugs and alcohol, into a community without any difficulty. Even in non-tolerance areas people can meet at boundaries before they enter their community again and get their fix at the gates. How to stop that is something that community councils and appropriate judicial systems need to tackle. There are always deviates that will exploit a system for cash and pay off people for their own benefit. The police and judiciary should amend laws across states and territories—this is my opinion—for the sake of consistency in dealing with the smugglers that go to these communities and the sniffers themselves. This is why some sort of alternative and tried program of healing and proper education at the very start of a child's life could be so beneficial and cast the past problems completely from the minds of the people who become linked to this horrible problem.

During remote visitations, Aboriginal people in remote areas advise me that the use of petrol and everything that goes with a sniffer has become what could be classified as a source of power in what is an otherwise powerless environment. Some Aboriginal people advise me that sniffers gain what is perceived to be extra power in their bodies by becoming thin by sniffing petrol. The view has been expressed to me that sniffing dulls the requirement to eat and controls hunger. Some young men commented they did not want to be seen as being big like the women, so they sniffed to lose weight. I have read extracts from earlier hearings of the inquiry and I do not wish to duplicate any of those comments in my submission. However, the statements made by very committed Aboriginal people about their region need to be recognised. Given my life experiences, I totally support these people on the introduction and sale of Opal fuel in all roadhouses in some areas.

Mention was made this morning—and I have not put this in my notes—of people going to Coober Pedy, but people on the AP lands are so mobile these days that other petrol availability areas are available to them—Port Augusta would not be out of the question as well—and that is something that the inquiry can make some reference to. The establishment of police stations in every major community should be a high priority to stop the invasion of 'smugglers'—and that is a word that was used by Aboriginal people in the Alice Springs hearing.

I refer to sport and recreation. This activity has always been so important in the Aboriginal lifestyle and this needs continual development in all Aboriginal communities. Youth should be encouraged to do it more. Everyone should be given an equal opportunity to participate in sport, if that can be organised. Let us add value to what has already been started. I highly recommend initiatives to maximise investments from other partners. There has been huge involvement by Indigenous athletes over the last few years in assisting their own people, and these people need to be commended and should continue to be commended at the very highest levels.

Aboriginal youth love their sport—it is another way of beating the boredom. However, some youth—the sniffers—are sometimes excluded from sporting events because of the stigma attached to their problem. This does not help in their rehabilitation. Any role that is adopted by agencies and departments in developing sporting events for the youth is good but, again, should be continually resourced.

We have just heard one story about the shed with nothing in it. I used to pay for equipment for remote communities out of my own pocket and hand it out in those areas where I knew there where was not any sporting equipment. I have seen the success of sporting carnivals in remote communities such as Yuendumu, Amata and other areas in the Top End. They have all had

valuable outcomes and have set up successful networks between individuals and the communities that participate.

However, I know from experience that budgets in some regions for sport and recreation have been pathetic and were generally allocated to one organisation that was responsible for distributing the allocations fairly and equitably across a large region. I know in one area there was only \$10,000 for the whole year for the whole region. Many deserving communities missed out. There should be a mechanism in place for all communities to have a slice of the funding, especially in areas where there is known to be petrol sniffing. Whether the funds are used for sporting events, hunting, food gathering, setting up a gym, discos or arts and crafts, the constraints should be more lenient than what they have been in the past and allow the community to make their own decisions. Again, it is part of what I see as the healing process.

There have been several substantive studies on the subject of nutrition and I do not want to go into those. Nutritious food is essential to all people living in a remote community, just as it is in all areas. With lack of disposable incomes, people are simply in debt to some agencies and cannot possibly hope to come out of that cycle with the regulations that are reinforced at the present time. With little money and inadequate food, it is little wonder that kids turn to sniffing, in some cases, to dull the pangs of hunger. In my role of monitoring CDEPs and communities throughout Australia, there were instances where organisations set rules or policies for participants that were called 'no work, no pay'. In essence, participants in some locations might only receive minimal tucker money for them to survive on and, of course, that puts added pressure back on the family. This money would not be any more than \$20 to \$40 per week.

I was involved in the upgrades and monitoring of stores on the AP lands and other areas in my commercial role. Stores were classified as business entities and, as such, needed to produce a profit to cover loans, wages, stock, transport, and overheads such as power, insurance and freight. When the GST was introduced, prices went through the roof. The stores I dealt with were stocked with a variety of goods, but they could hardly be called nutritious. The bottom line was that the Indigenous people living in the harsh and remote areas had to use what limited money they had left over to purchase the cheaper junk food. Indigenous people themselves saw that stores were a source of providing operators wealth at their expense. It is no wonder that there is vandalism and break-ins in many areas, with the youth just trying to get some food or a drink.

The pressure of limited nutritional food, or food in general, comes back to the family to deal with. In many instances, there was blame forced upon the parents by the children. The results were inevitable. There was a lack of trust, arguments continued within the family and this, combined with other factors such as violence and other introduced drugs, sent the youth spiralling into sniffing substances as a part of their rebellion. Sniffing petrol continues to be a cocktail for disaster. We at the Adelaide Healing Energy Centre would include nutrition in training packages and healing courses.

With the committee's permission I have just one more subject to address. It is to do with retreats and rehabilitation centres. In a recent trip to the United States, I visited several areas. One of them was part of the lands of the Navaho Indians in Utah, Arizona and other adjoining states. It was simply inspiring to see what the Navaho have done to look after their heritage and, in particular, their children. They have a system whereby a child is cared for from the time they

are born until adulthood. I met some wonderful people there and we discussed the common links of the Navaho Indians to the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I have kept in touch with them and we share information about our cultures. It is my firm belief that there should be some investigation into how the Navaho, as one of the many indigenous nations in the USA, have been so successful in meeting their goals, setting up businesses and managing their affairs.

They were horrified to learn that petrol sniffing still existed in many communities in Australia and questioned why. They have rejected welfare benefits from the government, and they did that several years ago. They set up their own businesses; they are very successful. They have overcome similar problems within their nation in the past. They now send their children to school at nearby towns during the week, arranging to pick them up at weekends for them to spend time with their family, home and surrounds. This process preserves culture. It provides education and gives relief to the family, and the youth apparently adjust very well.

I see that it is possible, based on the success of indigenous nations overseas, for positive changes in Australia—to create retreats and centres in various regions and build up areas where sniffers can be sent and rehabilitated with professional help from the various agencies. However, alternative healing processes in working with the family at the community level should, in my opinion, be the starting point and the main focus. But let us not get tied up in thinking that there are connotations of removal like there was with the stolen generation when I talk here about sending the kids away to school. It has been done in overseas countries.

It is so important to gain the opinion of the Aboriginal community in general on this, as has always been the case. Again, it is my view that the Navaho and other American Indian groups should have some valuable contributions to make to this inquiry. Some kind of partnership may even be possible between indigenous groups in different parts of the world. I wonder if it is possible to explore this option further. I leave that to this inquiry to have a look at. Anything would be better than the continuing programs, which could be described as patchy, that exist in our Indigenous communities today.

We at the Adelaide Healing Energy Centre believe that, with my skills and experience in remote Indigenous communities together with Lorraine and her trained staff, we already have some answers for dealing with the emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of Aboriginal people and their families afflicted by petrol and other substance abuses. We see ourselves as becoming a partner to the government and community organisations in the process of change, and we hope we would not be excluded from any initiative.

In addition, I hope funding constraints to our operations—it is a business—as has been the case in the past, do not have a negative spin on the immediate delivery of services to the people who need help right now. That was precluded by policies set in the past: they could not fund businesses; the funding had to go to organisations. We have now created a not-for-profit organisation under our umbrella as a backup for funding if needed and hope that we are not judged, as I said, according to the policies and criteria of past years. There need to be changes in policies and programs so that skilled, trained and committed people can readily move into communities with the support of Indigenous organisations and commence, in partnership with the Adelaide Healing Energy Centre, our healing programs. We can start immediately.

I think it is appropriate that Lorraine complete our session by giving her final summary. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to address this inquiry.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Rawson.

Ms Webb—The only thing I would like to say is that there is a lot of talk about ‘sorry’. ‘Sorry’ is a very powerful word, but so is ‘forgiveness’. It is a partnership and a two-way street. Forgiveness frees people. There is a lot of anger, and a lot of people are running on anger, so as well as ‘sorry’ I think that we need to put some responsibility back on communities for forgiveness and have them meet us halfway. That is my opinion.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ms Webb.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Ms Webb, the techniques that you described in your submission and orally certainly seem quite impressive and appear to address the spiritual side of people’s condition which, it has been suggested to us, is one of the factors that leads to the problem of petrol sniffing. But have there been any evaluations or assessments of their effectiveness that would allow us to make a recommendation to the Senate about these programs? Obviously, I have the things that people who have been through your program have said, but is there anything we can point to by way of an independent evaluation?

Ms Webb—From the programs we have done there has not been a formal assessment. We have done assessments ourselves, and we have asked for feedback from participants. We have been working in this way within the general community for a large number of years. My business has been using the same techniques with the general public now for five or six years. We have lots of testimonials on people’s life-changing experiences from addressing healing from a holistic rather than just a physical point of view, recognising that we are more than just a physical body.

I believe that this form of healing is the way of the future, as I am sure that people are becoming aware. Alternative health is really coming to the fore. People, generally speaking, are starting to realise that they must take responsibility for their own physical health. Physical health relies on having a healthy mind, a healthy emotional system and a healthy spirit, and that produces a healthy physical body. So it goes hand in hand. We can no longer dissect people and only address one part of them.

But, to answer your question: there has not been a formal study, which has been a problem. Once again, that has been because we have had ad hoc funding. Really, we have just scraped money together from little bits and pieces. So there has not been the funding to do a formal assessment.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Mr Rawson, you refer to a buddy program that was at work in Indulkana a few years ago. Do you have any information about how well that was received by the community and whether it was regarded as having been successful in reducing the level of petrol sniffing?

Mr Rawson—I never saw an end result of what was called the buddy program. It was introduced through a partnership with the CDEP National Program Centre, ATSIC and also

Family and Community Services. Again, I am not sure of the statistics; you may have to go back to the people who have taken over responsibility from ATSIC, like DEWR or one other agency, probably FaCSIA. In Indulkana there was an incidence of petrol sniffing. Culturally, the program set out to have a mentor for each particular person. That mentor was an Aboriginal person who was also living within that community, and this is where I see the healing side of it coming into it. The person was known as a 'buddy'. The buddy could look after the person who was in strife with petrol sniffing and help him or her through a process of grief and anger that they were going through individually. I am not sure how many buddies there were. There were a few. But, again, it fell back to the responsibility of funding agencies and the cyclical events of funding, and it just lapsed.

When I left ATSIC a couple of years ago, nothing more had been done about the buddy program, and I see that as being still a very valuable commodity within communities. I think it needs reactivation and perhaps to be included within things that the Adelaide Healing Energy Centre can do. We cannot support everything on the ground, as Lorraine has said, but I see these types of buddies or mentors or people at the community level. They are there and, as Mr Colson said, they are just crying out for help. We can provide the help. If they can assist in any way, I am sure they will, because culturally the people are very loving and caring people.

I hope I have answered your question, but I just fear. The fear I could see was, again, another good program going down the drain because of no continued funding. This is why you cannot have triennial funding. I do not think that is long enough. I think it has been explained in this inquiry as well as others that you need to have a minimum of at least four to five years—and people are now talking about a generation—of funding. I see that as being in the right direction.

Senator WEBBER—I would find some of those challenges confronting. I am sure all of us here have issues, but we do not have quite the challenges that face some of the people you deal with. You talked a lot about the need to address the individual. In Western Australia we have entire communities that are in crisis, so how do we marry what you do to assist individuals with assisting whole communities or townships?

Ms Webb—The way I see it is that people should have individual time with therapists but also group training within the community. To use the training I did in the prison as an example: we were able to give them fascinating information as a group—and we were doing 10 people at a time for four days. We were able to explain things like how the mind works and how you think what you create. A lot of the basic self-help and personal skills have never been passed on, and they were fascinated. We did drawings to show how energy works. I did drawings to demonstrate how the pain in the belly passes to your baby—if you have anger, your baby has anger. The Yalata women said: 'Oh, so my baby carries my pain. To fix my baby, I have to fix me.' We could see all the lights go on with these little demonstrations. It is stuff that we may take for granted, but they do not realise they have power within them.

That is the lost sacredness, the lost spirituality. There are a number of people in the community who are very close spiritually. There are traditional healers and there is a group of people who are still very spiritually connected. But there are a lot of people who have lost the spirit. They have lost all of that. They are lost. So it is about doing that training within the whole community, with everyone in the community being welcome to come to the training. But that is

not enough. You must do the whole community, but you must also talk to the individual families about their individual problems. They need private time as well as coming in for training.

Within that training, you get to identify the leaders in the community—the people who are fascinated by what you are doing—like the 10 women from the Yalata community. Two of the women leaders from that community said: ‘I want to come to Adelaide. You teach me and I will take it back.’ They are on the phone saying: ‘This woman has tools. We want these tools.’ They are hungry for anything new that they can see works. They can learn these techniques and eventually take over the program so that there is a continuation of the program. You go in there saying: ‘We are here to teach you and show you stuff, but we are not here to stay. We are here to help you to do it and then we are happy to withdraw.’ They then know there is a future plan for them to take control of the whole thing, and there is a passing on of knowledge and information.

But it seems to me that there is not a passing on of knowledge and information. And it is not just Aboriginals. There is a socioeconomic attitude of: ‘You don’t get to know. You’re not up with us.’ It seems to me that only some people get to know about the way the mind works, the power of the spoken word, the power of thought—how what you think, you create, and how you manifest that. Others do not get to know about that. It should be a human right that everyone gets to know. When I went into the prison, I looked at the faces and they had labels on them. Their attitude was: ‘I am what I’ve done. I am a bad person.’ We started saying: ‘No, you are not what you did. You are a soul—and, underneath, your soul is identical to mine—and you are pure.’ I cannot tell you the relief on those guys’ faces. They then opened up and we started talking. We did not ask, ‘Why did you do what you did and how could you do that?’ We asked, ‘Based on the experiences you have had through your life, how could you not have done what you did?’ We turned the whole thing around. It was like asking, ‘Is the glass half-empty or half-full?’. They got it, and the lights went on. It was such a relief, because they now feel valued.

For people to succeed, they have to feel like they mean something or they have value. That is the spiritual side of it: giving people value as equal human beings. They do not feel that. It is not just Aboriginal people; there are a lot of people who do not feel valued. That is why our society is not working. We need to value ourselves and each other and recognise that we are all equal spirits and we are all here doing the best we can with what we have been given in the circumstances we have been born into. At some point we can change our circumstances, given the right information. But if you do not get the information, it is like: ‘I’ve got a secret and you can’t have it.’ I think there is a lot of that going on.

Senator ADAMS—I want to follow up on your work at the prison. Obviously, it was very successful. Was that program not evaluated once the funding ran out?

Ms Webb—No. I probably got the funding by default. One of the workers from Human Services managed to get a one-off grant and said, ‘Here, Lorraine, do your best.’ We took it, we ran with it and we made it last. It actually cost me quite a bit of money as well, but we had something to prove. We went into Northfield. We had to fight our way in, beyond the psychologist, who said that we were going in to open up a can of worms and we did not know what we were doing. We changed that mentality in the women’s prison, and then we were invited to go into Yatala. We were told: ‘The men won’t be as easy as the women.’ We found it to be the direct opposite; they were pussy cats. They loved us. We did not go in there challenging; we went in there saying: ‘I’ve got something to talk about, something to teach you. If you want

it, we will give it. If you don't, we will go.' They said: 'Give it to us. We want it.' They said things like: 'Please don't go out for lunch. We'd rather stay in here and miss lunch.' So it was successful, but no-one was particularly interested. It was one worker who happened to write off for some funding, got it and said, 'Lorraine, guess what? It's yours. Do your best.'

Senator ADAMS—And you have not tried again to get funding for a similar program?

Ms Webb—Yes. We have not got anywhere because, as Peter said, when we tried for funding after that we were told that it only goes to organisations. Unless you set up as an organisation, it will not go to private businesses. Then we had to sit back and say, 'Do we go to that step or do we say that it was working well, but let's just wait until somebody puts their hand up and says, "I know you've got something; we want some of it"?' I have taken more of a back seat approach of: I know we have something huge to offer but if nobody is interested, how long do you bash your head against a brick wall?

Mr Rawson—I will go one step further there in support of Lorraine. There was the Stronger Families and Communities policy that was driven by FaCS. I think that the centre had all the answers for the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy but we could not gain any funding because of that constraint. It was a constraint imposed by the department that businesses were not to be funded; it had to be a not-for-profit organisation. At that stage, we did not have the skills and time to set up that organisation. We have been able to do so since.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Ms Webb, the substantial information you have given us in the folder you have left today may cause senators to have questions. If they do, they will be in contact. We did not get as far as reading the questions. Senator Webber did. So we will follow through with you. If you want to add anything to your submission, please contact us, both of you.

Ms Webb—We will leave our papers from today, if that is all right.

CHAIR—That will be fine. Thank you very much, and thank you for your patience.

Mr Rawson—Can I just add one more thing? I think Lorraine has forgotten to emphasise her phone number at work. If there are any inquiries from the general community once *Hansard* is printed in its draft form, her number is (08)83424109. What is your website address?

Ms Webb—It is: www.adelaidehealingenergy.com.au.

CHAIR—It is lucky we are not the ABC, Ms Webb! It is now on record. Thank you very much.

Ms Webb—Thank you.

Mr Rawson—Thank you.

[4.05 pm]

NETHERCOTT, Ms Rosalie Evelyn, Private capacity

CHAIR—Welcome, Ms Nethercott. I know you have been waiting to make a statement to us. I know you have not received any of the standard information about parliamentary privilege and so on but I think, at this time of the afternoon, we will just have a talk and see how it goes.

Ms Nethercott—Thank you. I am a kinship mother of a young Yankuntjatjara Pitjantjatjara man who is suffering from organic brain injury as a result of petrol sniffing. I would like to acknowledge that we are on Kaurna land and to pay respect to their elders and to the deep spiritual beliefs they have that attach them to the land. I would also like to acknowledge my Pitjantjatjara Yankuntjatjara law mother, Auntie Mona, who was sister to my Yankuntjatjara mother, who I met when I was three years old. She was friends with my grandmother from Ireland who worked at Hermannsburg. This year our family is celebrating 50 years of being a blended, bicultural family. We have kinships on Irish and Aboriginal sides now that extend for the 50 years that we have been the one family.

I am speaking today as a mother and I want you all to listen to me as if you are the mothers or fathers of this child who has grown to be a man in such tragic circumstances. I met Desmond, my son, when he was nine months old. He is almost the same age as my own daughter. He was in the care of his grandmother who is my Yankuntjatjara mother, old Daisy Morgan, who was a ngankari—a traditional healer. He had been taken from the care of his own mother and father because of the mother having really serious problems with alcoholism. As old Daisy used to say, Desmond was born skinny and drunk. This was because the mother drank alcohol every day of the pregnancy and she is still drinking alcohol for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I love her—she is my sister-girl. She has no resentment of me for carrying on her mothering duties for Desmond and, in fact, she has thanked me many times. It certainly has not been an easy road.

Daisy and I, in the early days of meeting one another again—I was 30 at the time, recently widowed and had my own little girl—went on a women's business corroboree together up in the Kimberleys. It rained overnight and the Gordon River flooded. We got stuck on one side and all the tucker was on the other side. Daisy was feeding Desmond out of a titty bottle and she ran out of formula because we were stranded for at least a few days. I started to breastfeed Desmond because I was feeding my own daughter, so a very strong bond developed.

This strong bond has weathered the ups and downs of life and all its vicissitudes, and it was with some regret that I left Desmond in a town camp in Alice Springs with all the poverty, squalor, drunken violence and disorderly behaviour. I worried about him every day and I used to cast my spirit to him to protect him in that violence. Desmond, as a young man now with organic brain injury, is kind of blamed by every health sector that I take him to for help. He does not fit into the mental health system because they say: 'He is not a schizophrenic or bipolar. He does not have a mental illness. He has acquired brain injury or an organic brain injury.' So I take him to the acquired brain injury disability mob and they say, 'He was not hit by an axe or he was not born like that.' So he does not fit into their little box either.

Desmond is currently in Port Augusta jail. He is on remand for very trivial offences, having been picked up on an old warrant. I am jumping ahead of the story. Desmond does not fit into any Western healing categories. He has no place in society. He is treated as an outcast, except for when he is with me and his family. He is treated as if he is to blame for his condition. He is treated as if he got up one day, like certain lawyers might on a Saturday night, and said, 'I'm going to let rip and have a few whiskies and have a toke of marijuana,' and that he is making some kind of decision about engaging in a recreational drug activity. This child became a petrol sniffer because he was abused, neglected and abandoned by the people who should have been looking after him when he was not in my care. They in turn felt so abused, so neglected and so abandoned by the governments and the systems that were supposed to be looking after them that the abuse and the neglect became cross-generational.

There is a very strong link between alcohol use and abuse and the subsequent violence and child abuse and neglect in Aboriginal culture and in all cultures. That is linked with petrol sniffing. Daisy—his grandmother; my mother—and I brought him up until he was about 10 years old. It was then time for him to go to his father's country, which was Docker River. Docker River has many of the same problems that Aboriginal communities have across Australia: alcoholism, poverty, despair, rampant domestic and family violence, the cross-generational burdens of racism, the wounds of invasion—the whole gamut of the shit and the layers of shit that Aboriginal people find themselves burdened by and trying to dig themselves out from under.

His mother, never having had any effective treatment for her alcoholism, lasted a fortnight until she got Desmond's kid money. She then disappeared back to Alice Springs with the father, went on a big bender and left Desmond in the community. We could say that she has committed child protection offences and she is an abusive, neglectful, drunken mother. We could make all kinds of judgments upon her. But if you look at the circumstances of her life, as the lady from the healing said, 'How could she have been any different?' That is what we all have to ask ourselves here today: how could this have happened differently in an environment in which these people have been burdened by racism; by being called subhuman; by their law, culture and land being stolen; and by being treated as if they were invisible in their own land? Looking at the grief and loss that is layered upon layer upon layer of grief and loss and the fact that these people never get time to heal from one loss before the next wound, we all need to ask how this could have been done differently and see how this has happened through our indifference.

We also need to say that this is a process. Whether it is petrol sniffing, alcoholism, glue sniffing, gambling or whatever, it all comes from this incredible wound of having been invaded—having been treated as if you were invisible and as if you had no right to have any say in your life. I am distressed to see that none of you senators have an Aboriginal elder sitting next to you. I am insulted that I had to go into the dining room and ask for food for my Aboriginal mother, who is a diabetic, because you mob were stuffing your faces in the parliamentary dining room and left all our Aboriginal elders with no tucker. You cannot even get the basic things like that right. They are now my people, and I will not have them treated like this. It makes me ashamed. I am ashamed of each and every one of you. You have all been voted in and you all got big money to come here, and you cannot give this lady a sandwich because you are so used to being the ones who have all the answers and all the rights and because you are so used to treating this mob as if they are invisible. They are my mob. I will not have them treated like this.

My son is in Port Augusta jail, and he cannot be bailed to me because I have nowhere for him to live. He is so extreme in the expression of his grief about what has happened to him and his culture that he is dangerous to live with. He loves me and I love him. I breastfed him and I grew him up. I watch him every day—if I am not there physically I watch him in the spirit. He is so wounded by this. He screams over and over again: ‘Mummy, you keep trying to help me but you can’t help me; no-one can help me. I want to get a knife. I want to die; I want to stick that knife in my throat and rip it and kill my young life.’ He is 23 and he is saying these things because you people will not listen. Well, you will listen. I will not lose my son.

Recently I had given up on the government doing anything. I found Desmond in Alice Springs jail when I was on ceremonial leave in Santa Teresa, singing my grandson into the law—saying goodbye to him as a grandmother and singing for one of my kinship grandsons and dancing for him as he went into the law. I then heard that Desmond, who was in Alice Springs jail, had tried to hang himself, so I asked for leave from the ceremony and went and got him out of jail and brought him down here. I had heard that the government was going to build a petrol sniffer’s rehab centre at Amata. I did not know that they had promised it two years ago, and I did not know that they had promised it in 1986, but I want it done. I will not leave this alone until it is done. Out of desperation, I applied for the early release of my superannuation, which was the princely sum of \$35,000, to build my son a cabin on my land in my law so that he could be looked after with carers. Unfortunately, the money ran out before it was finished and an unscrupulous builder has ripped me off, and it is now without a roof and cladding.

I should not have to do this when hundreds of thousands of dollars are being wasted by this government. You say, ‘It’s this one’s fault,’ or ‘No, it’s that one’s fault.’ Stuff it all. You have the money; pay for that facility and make sure it gets built. Harass the government until they build the thing. Why should I? I now have no superannuation. I am this child’s mother, not even his womb mother, yet I am prepared to front up with my money and say that I will not allow my son to die. My son will not die on the end of a rope; my son will not die in the jail. My son will grow and get better. I will absolutely insist upon it. I am not going to have him go down the tube. I have already lost a grandson to petrol sniffing, marihuana and all the white man’s poisons.

I work in Aboriginal child protection and I have devoted my life to this, and I suggest that you all do the same. It is shameful that in this day and age a mother has to sit before a parliamentary committee—having waited all day, I might add, while all these gasbags from the government come along and promise all kinds of things that they never deliver. I want to know what help I can get to get my son’s building finished, because I do not believe that you people will ever do it. Hear this, all you government wallahs: go back to your Premier and ask him to put forward the money for one Aboriginal kid. I am sure we will not see it any more than we have ever seen money for any Aboriginal kids to be properly serviced. Successive governments have failed in their duty, and it is an indictment upon the Australian government that my son feels safest in jail.

He is planning in his mind to commit crimes of increasing severity so that he can get longer periods in jail, because the safest place for a young Aboriginal man—where he gets service delivery, where he gets three meals a day, where he sleeps safe and sleeps warm, where he watches videos, where he has a job making furniture and where he does art—is in jail. That is the only place he can get all of those things together. What are we doing? This is bullshit.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ms Nethercott. You now have on record the statement you wanted to make. The people from the state government have heard your statements, and we will see whether we can get back in contact with you. If you want to, leave with the secretariat the name of your son so we can trace that through. We do appreciate the patience that you showed, but as we explained to you the segment was very carefully filled. We wanted, as your representatives, to give you the opportunity to put that on record. It now is.

Ms Nethercott—All right. I would like next time I come, because there will be a next time, to see an elder—from your communities, from the communities involved—sitting alongside every one of you. Why are three-quarters of the people in this room white?

CHAIR—It is a public process, Ms Nethercott.

Ms Nethercott—Yes, and you did not give them any lunch. It is really rude. It is rude in your own culture not to feed people when you invite them for lunch. It is a massive breach of social etiquette.

[4.21 pm]

KAY, Mr Peter William, Manager, Substance Misuse and Youth Programs, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, Department for Families and Communities, South Australia

LARKIN, Mr Christopher Edward, Director, Indigenous Services, Department for Families and Communities, South Australia

CHAIR—I welcome the officers from the South Australian Department for Families and Communities. Because of the importance of public servants appearing before the committee, I will go through the standard process because of the sensitivities involved. I know that you have the information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public but it may be taken in camera, if that is your choice. As you are departmental officers, I remind you that the Senate has resolved that you shall not be asked to give opinions on matters of policy. This resolution prohibits only questions asking for opinions and does not preclude questions asking for explanations of policy or factual questions about when and how policies were adopted.

The committee has before it the submission from the South Australian government, which was received a while back. I now invite you to make an opening presentation, to be followed by questions from the committee. I know that you have listened to evidence during the afternoon, and you would be aware there are a number of questions arising out of that evidence. We will get the opening statements on record and then we will go to questions.

Mr Larkin—I know it is getting late in the day. We do not have a long opening statement but I will explain why we are here. We do not appear here because of some plot. The minister is in the AP lands today because his trip was planned, at the invite of the AP executive, before we knew of the Senate committee's appearance here in South Australia. We will talk to you a little bit later about the good works up there that the minister is opening today. I am an Antikirinya person who has spent over 30 years working in and out of the AP lands in various roles. I have one grandmother who comes from Finke, and the other grandmother comes from the Maralinga area. It is important for me to get this right not only as a professional public servant but because it has a little personal interest for me as well. The language of the area is my first language. I am also very good at listening.

I have spent many years working up there in various roles. On the first job, 30 years ago, I went up there with Andrew Collett, the lawyer who appeared before you earlier, as an interpreter and a field officer for the Aboriginal legal services. My roles have ranged from where I started working, in the AP lands, to running the Aboriginal Lands Trust of South Australia and have included land management, Commonwealth Aboriginal employment and training programs, and running management training programs with the department of technical and further education. Prior to taking up my role in coordinating and managing the Department for Families and Communities programs in the AP lands, I was for five years the General Manager of the Aboriginal Housing Authority of South Australia. So I have had a long involvement in that area.

As I said, my current role is managing and coordinating Department for Families and Communities programs in the AP lands. These range from disability services to aged care, youth work, substance misuse, housing and alternate care, and, while I do not manage the statutory services of child protection, they are part of our portfolio. Our current approach to how we do business there is to work on building the capacity of communities by employing and training local people, taking jobs back to give jobs in those areas. We cannot effect the sorts of things we are trying to without focusing on all of the issues that impact on Aboriginal people.

This morning Andrew Collett, from the Law Society, referred to capacity building for communities and NGOs. But I see my biggest role as lifting the capacity of government services and government agencies to be able to deliver services properly and to develop partnerships that are not based on us having all the resources and everyone else sitting down there with nothing. So it is about building up the capacity of those organisations and providing them with those resources.

We were criticised for that approach, for employing youth workers who were not qualified. But we persisted, and we will provide you with some newsletters put together over the last 12 months by Aboriginal people who have now attaining certificates I, II and III—and, in a few cases, certificate IV—in youth work. So they are getting the trading on the job with support and mentoring, and we are building a partnership that is based on equality. We are providing training with day-to-day support. Doing things with people, and not to people, is the issue for us. It is very easy for me to run in and do things to people, because everyone wants it to happen today. But I am more interested in wanting it to happen and keep on happening, and in having people on the ground being able to do that.

The other issue we have talked about today is training up locals. All of us here train our children to give them choices. I used to have great arguments with our education department because they trained people for jobs in the AP lands. That is like a life sentence. We want to give people skills that are transportable, so if they want to be a youth worker in the parks in Adelaide or in Hindley Street or those sorts of things they have the same qualification that is used there. So we want to build that capacity so that people have transportable skills.

We share responsibilities between families, individuals, communities, non-government and government people so that we all understand clearly where we are coming from. We develop a shared vision and agree on who is responsible for what, agreeing on the steps to achieve those outcomes and negotiating the time frames. We build capacities within individuals and communities, as I have talked about. There is an example I can give you. I have a couple of newsletters here that have been put together by Aboriginal youth workers. These come out quarterly, and they show you the gradual advancement of what is happening there—the activities across the land.

Our organisation has a team of people now who have been in Marla and on the lands for a while. Mr Kay has been living on the lands for 18 months and has been visiting for three years—Peter is our technical expert and probably the most qualified person to talk to you about the technical aspects of volatile substances. We have a senior coordinator up at Marla who spends most of their time on the lands. We have someone who looks after disability services, a manager of special needs and two family support workers who happen to be local Aboriginal women who go into the houses and do the sorts of homemaker things that we are talking about. That

homemaker service where we go in, teach people and show people—'This is the mop and bucket, this is how you do it'—is the best health infrastructure you have. That program is connected up with the child protection stuff. When CYFS tell us that there is someone over here who has a failure to thrive child or a child that needs assistance or who is a young mother, we will go and provide that support. Those two ladies work with Aboriginal women who are local community people to build their capacity and engage with them so that when our two coordinators are not in the community these ladies can take that on. They have been provided with the resources to do that.

CHAIR—We have a very detailed submission from your state government and I know that the senators would probably be more interested in asking specific questions. We have received evidence now from a number of people for a while. Is there anything in particular that you want to highlight? You are going through a whole statement on the various things the government does. That is listed, I think, in your submission.

Mr Larkin—Some of it is. In one way, I was thinking it was nice to be last; we get the last word. One of the things that we have not been good at, and we acknowledge that, is getting the information out. People talk about spin. I will give you the up-to-date information that perhaps is not in there. There are all the things that we have talked about today, how we actually have services connected up, how there are tri-state agreements for police, drugs and petrol which have had some really good successes in the past three months. There was the prosecution of a local Aboriginal person who got six months jail for bringing in petrol. We are talking about communities having the strength to stand up and point at one of their own. The bringing back of police into those communities and the 10 community constable positions—not all of them are filled at the present time—are giving communities confidence to actually stand up and do those sorts of things.

There are tri-state agreements on disabilities so that the white man's border does not seem to be significant in that process now. There are agreements about youth strategies. There is infrastructure housing for youth workers or disability services and those things. You might have seen an announcement recently by Minister Vanstone and Minister Brough about lifting up Woomera houses and distributing those as part of that strategy, which will be a huge gain for us. If you come from the bush you will know the difficulty, while we have had a housing boom, of getting contractors—it is not an excuse—to go to remote areas. It is a huge problem in remote Australia. Thank you: I am seeing people from the bush nod their heads. It does take us time to get houses built in those areas. There is the issue of juggling when Aboriginal communities say to us, 'Look, we want it now.' When we have had large infrastructure projects we have brought in a company from Western Australia which did those 16 houses at Amata, but every contract that goes on on AP lands has a clause about Aboriginal employment. What we do not have is numbers of employment-ready Aboriginal people who can take those jobs.

We met with TAFE last week at Marla to try to line up and coordinate all of our training so that, for the common bits, we can bring everyone together and they can go off on streams and build local businesses in the recycling of rubbish. There is a little repairs and maintenance business going on at Ernabella where they are building doorframes and those things. These are the positive things that are happening. There are 40 Aboriginal people employed in the HACC program—they are working for Meals on Wheels, training in food preparation, training to be chefs and all those sorts of things.

I could go on for a fair time here but I know you do not want to do that. Before we finish, I want to talk to you about our positive behaviours program. This is a program we are using for people who have a severe brain injury and have had self-destructive behaviours. I will explain that to you a little more but I am running away with myself have not introduced you to Mr Kay.

Mr Kay—I will introduce myself. I attended the inquiry in Alice Springs but at that stage the South Australian government was in caretaker mode so it was not appropriate for a public official to speak. On my own background, my particular experience and expertise is on substance misuse. That has been gained since the late 1990s as, first of all, director of the AIDS Council of South Australia, then as program development manager at the Drug and Alcohol Services Council and then manager of policy and planning at the Drug and Alcohol Services Council in South Australia. In 2001 I commenced work visiting the APY lands when I was manager of the drug programs branch in the health department. In 2004 I was invited to be seconded for 12 months to the Aboriginal health division, concentrating on substance misuse in the APY lands.

I have represented the South Australian government on the cross-border reference group on volatile substance misuse, the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs National Inhalant Abuse Taskforce and the OATSIH review of the Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council and I was a state government witness at the 2004 coronial inquest. Following that inquest, I lived in Ernabella every three weeks out of four for three months and then I lived for six months at the community of Mimili in vacant teacher housing. In July last year I commenced full-time work on the APY lands and moved from Adelaide, both in a work sense and in a residential sense, to Marla, which is a community on the Stuart Highway just 60 kilometres from the APY lands.

The particular programs for which I have responsibility are the youth and substance misuse programs. I am supported by one youth work coordinator, but I can particularly answer any questions you may have about youth workers and the community based substance misuse programs. I have also been involved in the consultations about the rehabilitation centre, so I am very able to answer questions about that. Other details are already contained in the submission. I might just add that I am currently studying for a Doctor of Public Health degree at Flinders University. The topic of my research is the way the media has dealt with petrol sniffing on the APY lands from 1995 to 2005 and its possible links with government policy responses.

Senator CROSSIN—That is in your spare time, is it?

Mr Kay—Yes!

CHAIR—When are you due to complete that?

Mr Kay—It will be at the end of 2007.

CHAIR—That would be very interesting. In the evidence and submissions we have received, a number of things have been said about the government response. Senator Humphries will start the questions and then as we move through the questioning we will see how we build the information.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You have been sitting here today and you have heard quite a lot of criticism about government responses to this problem. I am happy to give you a chance to respond to some of those things in a general sense, but could I ask you first whether you would say that the problem of petrol sniffing in South Australia today is better or worse than it was, say, five years ago.

Mr Kay—The impression I get from people I talk to in communities is not so much that there is less sniffing but that in the last 12 to 18 months sniffers have caused less trouble and are slightly less visible compared to five years ago. The data available from Nganampa health—which is funded by the South Australian government; it is the best data we have got—indicates that since the introduction of avgas it has been less prevalent, but in the 2004 survey it increased slightly. Nganampa health has advised me, not in a published document but by email, that its latest survey, which is not yet in the public domain, indicates that there has been a slight decrease in numbers.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Is Nganampa health covering a certain part of South Australia or all of it?

Mr Kay—Nganampa health works, as far as South Australia is concerned, only on the APY lands.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What are the figures like in parts of South Australia other than in the APY lands?

Mr Kay—We do not have figures for Yalata community, but that is the only other community I have worked with in which I am aware that sniffing is a problem. There are programs being run in Yalata, but there is not an agency there that collects the data on sniffing in the same way as the one we fund at Nganampa on the APY lands. The only good data there on Indigenous substance misuse was collected as long ago as 1994 in the national household survey that occurred at that time. That survey only included urban Aboriginal people. We support the view of the Law Society wherein they express that there is a problem with data in this area. As far as Indigenous substance misuse generally is concerned, there is a problem with data, aside from the issue of sniffing. I am aware the intergovernmental committee on drugs has a project that is attempting to address that issue.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What about the other source of data, which is deaths attributable to petrol sniffing? Do you have figures on how many have occurred in South Australia over last five years?

Mr Kay—As the Law Society indicated, that data is not robust. There are issues around the methodologies, so I am not really able to answer that question with any great clarity.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What they said was that there were some deaths that might occur in major population centres, like Adelaide, which may in fact be partially or even substantially attributable to petrol sniffing, but which were not recorded as such. I am interested in the deaths that are actually recorded as having been caused by petrol sniffing. I assume, from what they said, these deaths were mainly in remote areas of South Australia.

Mr Kay—That is correct. I do not have all of that data in front of me at this time.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I am trying to establish some sense of whether the problem is getting better or worse. I would have thought they were fairly reasonable figures to be looking at. Can you produce those figures for the committee?

Mr Kay—We will endeavour to get those, yes, bearing in mind the methodological problems in that it is highly likely that it is underreported.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Indeed, but at least then there is some indication there. It might not be the complete picture but it might give us some indication. Can you give us annual figures going back 10 years? Whatever you have got that will give us some picture—

Mr Kay—We will give you whatever is there, but the data in this area is not good.

Mr Larkin—We will have a go.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I want to turn to some specific issues that were raised by witnesses, in this case by Kate Reynolds. I think you were here to hear some of that. One issue that was raised was the building of the new police cells, which respond to some criticisms made of the old facilities. We are told that in April 2004, Bob Collins recommended that there be funds for short-term detention facilities at three communities. There was a decision a month or two later to say that would happen, that it would cost \$500,000, but there is still no indication of when that money is going to be spent. Can you tell us what the story is with those upgrades?

Mr Larkin—As I understand it, some of those upgrades were in the process of going ahead.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Were in the process or are in the process?

Mr Larkin—They are in the process of going ahead. I was aware of an issue about asbestos in one of those areas, which of course then has an entirely different process. The closest dump is, I think, at Port Pirie or Alice Springs and specialist teams come in. It is also one of the reasons why I talked about the lack of contractors available in remote areas, as people often make statements without understanding the time frames involved. I can get back to you about which ones are in the process of being finished and what stages the other ones are at.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Are you saying to us that they have not been built because there has been a problem in obtaining contractors to do the work?

Mr Larkin—No. I am saying one of the issues we have had as to time frames for housing, police stations and a whole range of infrastructure programs has been, as with the rest of Australia, getting contractors in. But I will take that on notice and give you details of where the stages of building are at.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Presumably, there is no issue about not being able to find contractors in the question as to the substance abuse rehabilitation facility, which was also talked about two years ago in response to the report of the coroner. There is no issue there because, as we have been told, there has not even been a location for the centre identified at this stage. Can

you tell us what the story is? The chair of the task force apparently announced that there would be a facility up and running in 12 months to 18 months, which incidentally means that that should have been operational about now. What is the reason for the delay?

Mr Kay—I gave evidence at the coronial inquest that, as a substance misuse professional, I had something of a problem with the coronial recommendation in the sense that it was trying to put all sorts of people who have a petrol-sniffing problem in the one place at the one time. When you deal with substance misuse issues, you would not normally put people with an acquired brain injury with people who are casually engaging in petrol sniffing. Since that time we have engaged in an extensive consultation process, which is still ongoing, with people on the lands.

I, as do my two other colleagues who are located on the lands and at Marla, have a standing invitation to attend every meeting of the APY executive. The APY executive made it very clear that they wanted help and expertise from people such as me who knew something about substance misuse. But they wanted this facility done in an Anangu way, not a white fella way. They did not want white fellas going away, drawing up plans and then bringing them back and saying, 'Approve this and we will decide for you where it goes.' There have been several rounds of consultation. There is now general agreement on the basics of a model. I can table for you the consultation paper that is now going around on the lands.

APY executives asked that what we call a malpa be appointed. Malpa, in literal translation, means 'friend' but it has the connotation of 'guide'. Immediately upon that request being made, the South Australian government funded that position so that the consultations are going on through the communities with a local Anangu guide who can interpret but is also guiding people in cultural ways. 'Who are the people who need to be here for this consultation?' 'Can we have this consultation today?' Sometimes the answer is no, as the right people are not there.

The issues to be resolved at this point are focused on how many buildings there will be, how much space there needs to be for families who want to visit and what numbers of non-Anangu staff and Anangu staff there should be. It is basically proposed at this time that there will be two non-Anangu staff and that the rest, probably about six or seven, will be local Anangu. Specialist medical involvement, through a doctor and a physiotherapist, is funded and it is planned that they would in fact be visiting. The other issue is that we are proposing to employ natural healers, called ngankaris in Pitjantjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra. They are traditional healers. I offer the committee this consultation paper.

That is where it has got to, and that consultation is now taking place at the request of the APY executive. I am not here to be critical of that process, but it really is important that—and the coroner emphasised this—unless this goes ahead with broad Anangu support, it will fail. Anangu on the lands joke with me a bit. They say, 'Peter, we don't want you to build a white elephant; we want to be involved at every point along the way in how this thing will work. We want your help and assistance, but we don't want this imposed on us.' On that consultation process, there has already been one general meeting, which was broadcast on 5NPY, of Anangu Pitjantjatjara across the whole of the lands. It is proposed that there will be another special general meeting in June or early July to finalise that. A number of locations are being considered. One possible location is Umuwa, which is an administrative centre.

Mr Larkin—Between Ernabella and Fregon.

Mr Kay—The Anangu appear to me to have mixed views about the possible location. At a consultation we had recently at Amata community—

Senator HUMPHRIES—Could I interrupt you there? I am not actually particularly interested in where it is going to be. I am looking at the process. Perhaps other senators are interested in that, but they can ask those questions if they are.

Mr Kay—All right. That is where the process is likely to take place.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I am interested in what you say because, according to the evidence we have received, the department's progress report said in October last year:

Consultation with communities and Anangu organisations has been completed and detailed implementation planning is now underway.

It does not sound as if that is actually the case, does it?

Mr Kay—At the October meeting of the APY some plans were put forward. As a result of those meetings they asked for a malpa to be appointed and for another round of consultation. That was at the request of the APY executive. I can table for you the consultation paper which we have produced since that time to focus on those issues which they wanted particular input on. I can also provide the draft plans for the facility.

Mr Larkin—Understand that the APY executive at that time was going through amendments to the legislation and a whole lot of those things. While this seems to be our most important issue, it was not for Anangu at the time. We asked them to go off and talk again about the location and provide some more detail about that. But at the last meeting I attended, in April, they said they would tell us in June where they want it to be. We want to ensure that people from the west do not have to drive too far as well—so it is the closest, most central point for families to be able to visit their kids.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I come back to the point that you made a little while ago—that you have not been very good at disseminating information. All of the Indigenous representatives that have come before us today have complained about lack of progress and lack of action—promises that are not delivered and things like that. You are saying to us that these things have happened not because of communication delays or a failure to complete consultation processes and so on.

Mr Larkin—No, not at all. I do not have the luxury of being able to respond to some of the things I have sat and listened to, unfortunately. I can talk to you about the progress we have made and I can show you some of the transcripts where people say we are doing a great job and that the support we are giving people is much appreciated. For example: 'Families and Communities have funded five petrol sniffers to work with me;' 'Environmental health worker positions'—we have done those things. No-one is going to get a chequebook for free. You are going to have to give us a one-pager that shows us where you are going to spend it and I am going to get detailed accounts from you. I do not want to get into nitpicking back and forward either. I do not think that serves a purpose. I have to very patiently move forward.

CHAIR—Mr Larkin, the evidence that we have received today is now on public record. The normal process we have is that there is now the opportunity for people to have a look at that record and, if there is a desire to respond to specific statements that are made, we would encourage you to do that, because, as these statements are now on the public record, that record will say, ‘This is what people’s views are.’ That is fine, but I know that there was a whole list of things there. If possible, it would seem to me that this process would progress more effectively if, when the transcript comes out in a week or so, you could take it on board in your department and do that. That is quite common practice.

Mr Larkin—That serves my purpose. You would be here until 12 o’clock for me to—

CHAIR—We would like to see you respond, and then it could go around again. But nonetheless I think it is important that specific things are responded to.

Mr Larkin—Absolutely.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I think that would be great. That would be a good thing. Considering the time, I just have one more question. We heard evidence today about people being able to adapt non-sniffable fuels like Opal to sniffable mode by the addition of polystyrene and things like that. I had not heard about that before. Is that a problem that you have detected in significant parts of South Australia? Is it a growing problem, or is it exaggerated as a concern at the moment in connection with Opal’s use?

Mr Kay—For a detailed answer on the chemistry of that, I would encourage you to talk to BP, which makes the fuel and which is where I get my information from. The contact there for you is Dr Mark Glazebrook.

I have seen this with substance misuse people not just on the APY lands, but people who are desperate, who have an addiction, will try all sorts of things. My understanding is that there are not sufficient hydrocarbons present in Opal fuel for you to get a ‘high’ response from it. Chemists have advised me that there is nothing you can put with it that will give you an effect which is greater than the sum of its parts. People are experimenting with all sorts of things. I am aware of people putting bread in it—bread, sugar, and the latest thing is Windex. That appears to me in recent weeks to have gone, because in fact if you pour Windex into a glass and sniff it you will get a slight high. But my advice from chemists is that, while people might think they are getting a response from this because they are used to that—and my own anecdotal observation is that they will try the Windex thing for a fortnight and then go around looking for something else, so then it is the polystyrene cup.

I think the bigger issue, given the lack of a sniffable petrol—and it is a concern to me from a drug and alcohol perspective—is what people who have a substance misuse addiction may substitute for that, because that is what normally happens. My anecdotal feeling is that it is cannabis, but I do not have any hard evidence about that. But more and more people are talking to me about that. People are also saying to me: ‘We sniff this and sniff this, and there is nothing there anymore.’ A number of people—elders, but also people who sniff—are coming up to me and saying, ‘We can’t get this high from it.’ So my information from chemists is that the suggestion that you can mix something with Opal so that it is sniffable is nonsense.

CHAIR—But you may think so.

Mr Kay—That is right. And that is not an experience isolated to people who use petrol.

CHAIR—No. I like Diet Coke!

Mr Kay—That is right!

Senator BARTLETT—We have had a few of the witnesses mention today or in their submissions not just the coroner's recommendations but also the recommendations of the royal commission into deaths in custody. In one of the submissions, Ms Reynolds indicated that the department had:

... promised that it would "introduce a systematic and ongoing reporting process" whereby all relevant agencies would have "to provide up-to-date information" on the progress they had made in implementing ... recommendations.

Is that system in place? Is there a report in process now about how you are going with implementing in a formal sense the recommendations of the deaths in custody report or the coroner's recommendations? I know there are occasional announcements.

Mr Larkin—We do have regular reporting to the AP lands task force, or the Aboriginal lands task force. They are put on the website and then they are updated. We do do that, and we continue that process.

Senator BARTLETT—There is a quote in Ms Reynolds's submission on page 19 that details that. There are a couple of quotes, I presume from a government response, about recommendations from the deaths in custody report. Maybe you could just take this on notice so we can get a precise sense. You would have heard the evidence from the previous witness regarding acquired brain injury services and the lack of fit with injuries due to substance abuse. Is there any attempt to address those eligibility criteria?

Mr Larkin—I am not speaking to you as an expert on that, but I am aware that now people with chemically acquired brain injury are accepted. There was a divide between mental health and disability. There is now an exceptional needs unit in South Australia as part of Julia Farr Services. I think they are working with those people in particular. I will be happy to follow up the lady's experience. If she is not aware of that or if she is being given the run-around, I will follow that up.

Mr Kay—Could I add to that. On the division of work, I am focusing on prevention and diversionary programs. There is a colleague of mine, Archie Baker, who is called manager, special needs. With people who have serious and complex needs, we are dealing with them on a case-by-case basis and trying to link in the various services that are around. These people usually and quite often can fall through the gaps. We absolutely accept that. There is one position, that of a colleague of mine—who shares a house with me, as a matter of fact—that is absolutely focused on dealing with the difficult cases on a case-by-case basis, whereas I concentrate on the more generic responses.

CHAIR—Is that position part of your department or part of Health?

Mr Kay—It is part of our department.

CHAIR—It is a position within Families and Communities.

Senator BARTLETT—One of the regular criticisms is—you might feel like we are picking on you today, but obviously these are criticisms made all the time, across all states and the federal level—that there are a lot of programs, but particularly in the Indigenous area resources get soaked up in middle management or in positions in the cities and not enough gets to ground level. Are you able, perhaps again on notice, to give us some stats on how many actual workers there are on the ground in this area of health and substance abuse? Perhaps the areas are not neatly divided to specify petrol sniffing, but perhaps there will be stats on the broader substance abuse issue.

Mr Larkin—This is a factual thing also. We talked about who is driving the graders and the trucks. Peter, who has been there for three years or 18 months, has never seen a non-Aboriginal person driving a truck or a grader in the AP lands.

Mr Kay—I have never seen a whitefella driving a truck or a grader out there. I do not know where people are getting that information from.

Mr Larkin—But we will take that on notice and provide you with that information.

Senator BARTLETT—You mentioned in your submission the peak body TKP. Again, you would have heard evidence that your department's Indigenous services section does not actually have a representative on that body. Is that right? I am referring to the South Australian state representatives.

Mr Larkin—No. DPC is the body that is responsible for cross-government coordination. That is what TKP is for. Our organisation provides the delivery. I get the minutes of TKP. I am fully aware of what goes on there. They report back to the Aboriginal lands task force, and it keeps me away from another meeting.

Mr Kay—To add to that: representatives of our department, including my direct supervisor, the coordinator, who lives and works at Marla as well, have from time to time attended meetings of the TKP and provided briefings on the work we do on the ground.

Senator BARTLETT—Sorry, what was the last little bit of that sentence? I did not catch it.

Mr Kay—Officers of the Department of Families and Communities have from time to time, when requested, attended meetings of TKP and provided briefings on the work that we are doing on the ground. It is not a regular occurrence.

Senator BARTLETT—With the changes in offences relating to petrol, you mentioned there had been a conviction or someone charged. How recently was the change made?

Mr Larkin—I do not know when the changes were made to the legislation about trafficking, but the person being sentenced to six months jail happened in the last four months.

Mr Kay—It was before Christmas.

Senator BARTLETT—Do you know of other people that have been charged, or was that the first conviction?

Mr Kay—That was the first one for a long time.

Senator SIEWERT—I would like to follow up on TKP. If you are the agency that carries out the implementation of decisions, would it not be better to have someone there who has experience of implementing the decisions on the ground?

Mr Larkin—That is a decision for someone else, not me, but we good public servants work together very closely.

Senator SIEWERT—I do not know whether you were here for the Law Society this morning, when we were talking about the legislative review and coordinating across the tri-state area laws. I understand the tri-state committee is talking about that.

Mr Larkin—There are different tri-state committees. Which one are you referring to?

Senator SIEWERT—I do not know!

CHAIR—I know that I am getting increasingly confused by the various bodies that are involved, and it would be useful to have a glossary of all the groups.

Mr Larkin—I would love to have three hours with you and a whiteboard!

CHAIR—That might be the only way, I reckon.

Mr Larkin—Yes. Unfortunately I do not have that. There are tri-state agreements on disabilities and family violence. There is a tri-state committee on justice matters, on substance abuse and youth.

Senator SIEWERT—On youth?

Mr Kay—That is the Cross-Border Reference Group on Volatile Substance Misuse. I go to that, but I think the committee that you may have been focusing on is the tri-state justice one, on which we are not represented but police are.

Senator SIEWERT—You are not represented on that, so are you saying you do not really know, in that case, how the legislative coordination across the different states is happening?

Mr Larkin—I guess it is what you concentrate on. I hear about those legislative changes and I am in the loop about them, but I must admit to you that I have not spent my life reading those.

Mr Kay—But we could provide you with a report on where that project is up to. We would get that from the police for you.

CHAIR—This sounds a lot like a Senate estimates question, but is there a South Australian government coordinating body which is responsible for coordinating the South Australian government response on all these committees? The federal model of whole-of-government approach is based on having one level of everybody getting together and then little things—

Mr Larkin—It is the Division of Indigenous Services within the Department of Premier and Cabinet are the people on TKP, Wiru Palyantjaku and all the different committees.

CHAIR—So, if there were going to be a South Australian approach to these issues and updates of information, it would seem to me they would have to be drawing data from a whole bunch of people.

Mr Larkin—That is right.

CHAIR—You are saying the group in Premier and Cabinet is responsible for doing that?

Mr Larkin—Yes, and that is what they do.

Senator SIEWERT—My understanding is that in the announcement of the way this program was being rolled out there was a lot of emphasis put on the tri-state approach, which is why we are keen on talking about it and finding out about it. It is one of the key tools to implementation.

Mr Larkin—Absolutely, and the last announcements were about youth strategies and petrol-sniffing programs across the tri-state, and there was the announcement about the extra houses coming from Woomera and the Commonwealth budget measure paying for the picking up and retrofitting of those. So we are very much a part of that. Joslene Mazel from DPC is the representative on that for the state government.

CHAIR—Where is Ms Mazel today?

Mr Larkin—Ms Mazel is in the AP lands with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation.

Mr Kay—I could add that the workers on the ground in the non-government organisations and government departments, particularly between the Territory and South Australia and to a lesser extent Western Australia, talk to each other on a daily basis and make things happen all the time, apart from the coordination mechanisms that may occur in Adelaide. For instance, when there was a vacancy with a youth worker at a particular community called Fregon during the last holidays, we got together with the youth program worker at the NPY Women's Council and provided them with some additional funding so they could run a holiday program for us in that community, because we did not have it covered. You will see some of that in the newsletter that I presented to you. So on the ground we are doing that sort of day-to-day coordination between workers all the time.

Senator SIEWERT—If we could have the specific details of each of those committees, I think that would be helpful. There was a specific question about special needs I had when you were talking about that. Does that unit or process deal with people in prison? Does it pick up

people who have chemically acquired disabilities? Does it help people in prison? What is the process that you use?

Mr Larkin—Yes, it does, especially when we are looking at the increasing numbers of people who find themselves in prison because they are not fit to plead. That is one of the difficulties that I think this lady was talking about earlier as well. Because of the brain injury her boy had, he was not fit to plead in court, and the only place they could put him, with his violence and particular illness, was in a prison, James Nash House.

Mr Kay—We specifically facilitated an individual whose circumstances were not dissimilar to the case we heard about just before we spoke. To get out of prison and to be located back in a community on APY lands, where his family is, we facilitated some case conferencing with relevant service providers but also with members of his family and with interpreters. Because of the protocols that we have set up with the family about his behaviour, he is now functioning in that community.

Senator SIEWERT—How do you identify people in similar circumstances to the ones we have just heard about, and why hasn't that been picked up yet?

Mr Larkin—How do we or why hasn't it? What do you mean?

Senator SIEWERT—There were two questions there. You have just explained to me what happened in a particular case. How do you ensure that other cases of people in prison are identified and handled in a similar manner?

Mr Larkin—We were talking about one. There have actually been three or four cases where we have been involved in getting people out and transitioning them back into their communities with that support. We do that by dealing regularly with our exceptional needs area. That works closely with the parole and community corrections area and their medical staff, who identify that this person has an issue we need to deal with. Also, for communities, it happens when they first come before the courts, because the community is saying the behaviour of this person is so bad they are a danger to themselves and to others. So they either get put under an order or, unfortunately, are left until they run foul of the law.

Senator SIEWERT—My question then is: why has this young man not been identified through the system?

Mr Larkin—Which young man are you talking about?

Senator SIEWERT—I am talking about the young man whom we just had the evidence about. It seems to me that he clearly falls into those criteria.

CHAIR—That is on the basis that you do not have his name and you may go back and find out.

Mr Larkin—I am going to find out whether we are running the same story. I believe I know the person we have been talking about.

Senator SIEWERT—So are you saying the system has picked them up? I am not having a go about whether he has or has not been picked up.

Mr Larkin—If it is the person whom I believe it is then the system is involved.

Senator SIEWERT—That was my question. It was: if the system is not involved, why not? If it is, you are dealing with it and there is no question. It would be good if you could get back to us.

Mr Kay—We have to be honest and say it is possible that we have not picked this person up. The South Australian government is not here today to suggest for a moment that we have the situation of petrol sniffing on the APY lands completely under control, that all the necessary programs are in place, that there are no gaps in services or that at this point in time everybody who needs help gets it immediately. The team of which I am a member has been on the ground full time for 18 months. In terms of the problems that we are dealing with, we are starting from a very low base and there is a long way to go. I am very open to the suggestion that there are gaps and that we do not have the situation under control yet. It will be some years before we do.

Senator SIEWERT—I have one last question. You were saying that you now have your chemically acquired injuries system in place. What I understood from the previous witness was that Ms Nethercott first tried to seek services in Alice Springs. How are the tri-state areas lining up? Do each of the states now have the same process? It sounds like it is bit different here, although the Northern Territory and Western Australia are also identifying chemical acquired brain injuries as well.

Mr Larkin—I would have to talk to someone from our disability area to get you the story about that. I can say that we have changed the rules in South Australia to make sure that it works there. I am not sure how the other states have done it, except to say that Alice Springs, being the closest large centre, sees everybody and Nganampa Health, an NGO which looks after health in AP lands, is in Alice Springs; it goes in there first.

Mr Kay—Certainly, around mental health, the South Australian government and Nganampa Health contract services from Alice Springs. It is a visiting service. We are talking with Territory Health a lot about contracting services out at Alice Springs where possible. Are they all in place yet? No, and we are not pretending they are.

Mr Larkin—We have spent several years lining up the state's mental health legislation, because we would commit somebody, put them under an order in Amata, which is 20 minutes into South Australia, and they would go to Alice Springs and our legislation would not apply. So we have spent a fair bit of time lining those things up.

CHAIR—We received a lot of that information at the committee's hearings into mental health, when we were talking about exactly those things and that process.

Senator CROSSIN—Where is the main ICC you are dealing with? Is it in Alice Springs?

Mr Larkin—It is in Adelaide.

Senator CROSSIN—So you would be going to Adelaide ICC for—

Mr Larkin—I deal with Adelaide. Peter deals with Port Augusta Indigenous Coordination Centre.

Senator CROSSIN—There would be some people who would be across the Central Australian region who would be dealing with Alice Springs. Is that not in itself a problem? We are talking about the one APY lands but we have three ICCs that you are also dealing with. Would it not help if there were one central contact point for Commonwealth agencies?

CHAIR—What is the coordination model for you dealing with these things, in terms of what you can respond to?

Mr Larkin—We have had 30 years of being up there—having people shift to Alice Springs and then back to Port Augusta. I do not think it has added any value whatsoever having agencies trying to deliver services out of Alice Springs.

Senator CROSSIN—For the APY lands?

Mr Larkin—For the APY lands—none whatsoever. And I have worked up there for the Commonwealth and the state over those 30 years.

Senator CROSSIN—It is still better if it is delivered out of Port Augusta ICC, is it?

Mr Larkin—Out of South Australia, because the people you work with are in South Australia—except for two NGOs that operate out of Alice. Everyone else you deal with is in a government agency or NGO in South Australia. All the politicians and all the other professional services we deal with are South Australian.

Senator CROSSIN—Tony Abbott made a statement a couple of months ago that any community that wanted the Opal roll-out is able to get it. When we had OIPC appear before us a couple of weeks ago in Canberra I was able to elicit from them that that is not entirely true. Any community that wants Opal can apply for it and if they meet certain criteria then they can get it. Do you know, or are you aware of, any communities that have requested Opal and have had problems accessing it?

Mr Larkin—I think the issue was on the Western Australian side. Their map showing where you can get Opal was not large enough—there was an argument about it. In APY lands in South Australia we have not had any issues about that.

Mr Kay—All major communities on the APY lands have Opal fuel available. When it first became available there were a couple of communities that did not have it. We worked with the Commonwealth government to get them on the scheme. The exception to that at the moment is the Mintabie opal fields, which are technically on the APY lands but have a lease arrangement. I am aware that the Australian government and OATSIH are in active negotiations with the Mintabie supplier for that to happen.

CHAIR—That is down near Marla?

Mr Kay—It is about 30 kilometres from Marla. The communities on the lands are looked after and they have no trouble getting on the scheme. The issue then arises of the non-Aboriginal communities on the Stuart Highway. At this point in time you cannot get Opal at Marla. I do not think it is yet available at Kulgera. Then there is the issue of how far south you go and whether Coober Pedy should be involved from the South Australian perspective. For us it is not the Aboriginal communities—they are taken care of. It is the nearby non-Aboriginal community.

Senator CROSSIN—Technically, as far as you are aware, most of the Aboriginal communities at least in South Australia have got Opal fuel. Is that right?

Mr Kay—As far as the APY lands are concerned, all that have the ability to sell petrol only have Opal. In terms of the supply of unleaded petrol, the only unleaded petrol they are selling is Opal.

CHAIR—The only petrol pumps are Opal?

Mr Kay—Yes. They have diesel as well.

Senator ADAMS—Not the premium fuel?

Mr Kay—No. That does not mean that there are not people with tanks on home lands and private property. But, as far as communities that sell petrol are concerned, it is only Opal fuel that is being sold. It is not the case on the Stuart Highway.

Mr Larkin—We dispute Western Australia's claims about where the drugs and petrol are coming from. Yankunytjatjara people tell me it is coming the other way.

CHAIR—We have heard evidence both ways, Mr Larkin.

Mr Larkin—I just wanted to get our bit on the record.

Mr Kay—People from the Yalata community tell me all the petrol comes from Indulkana; people from the Indulkana community say it all comes from Yalata. Who knows?

Senator CROSSIN—Is the Aboriginal Lands Task Force still operational?

Mr Larkin—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you tell us what its role is now?

Mr Larkin—The CEs or their representatives put together a strategic plan of how we will deliver services in Aboriginal lands across South Australia in a way that is coordinated so that we can ensure that the planning we are doing fits in with the state's strategic plan. That should then also fit in with the grants commission report on the priorities of the Commonwealth about delivering services.

Senator CROSSIN—You mentioned a HACC program quite early in your evidence. You said you had people involved in delivering aged care programs. Is that correct?

Mr Larkin—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Are they Indigenous people on communities?

Mr Larkin—There are somewhere near 40 Aboriginal people employed in that program.

Senator CROSSIN—Are they employed, or are they on CDEP?

Mr Larkin—There might be a mixture of people, some who are employed and some who are on CDEP and topped up.

Senator CROSSIN—Why are they on CDEP? Why isn't the state government employing them?

Mr Larkin—I guess because in some communities—and it depends on the community you are in—they made their own decisions about how they would increase the number of people getting an income for training and employment. Otherwise, we would get into a situation where we might have eight youth worker positions, only train eight people and then when one of them decided that they were going to go off and be the health worker or whatever we would be left with this big hole. There is often a succession plan.

Senator CROSSIN—Are you telling me that people on CDEP are actually genuinely being trained to be work ready, are getting training and then moving off into real jobs?

Mr Larkin—That is the plan, and that is often the process. Whether it is followed right through varies in different places.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you take on notice for us the number of participants you have on CDEP in the AP lands? I will not get you to do it for all of them.

Mr Larkin—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—And where they are?

Mr Larkin—Yes. And 100 kilometres in South Australia is also only round the block.

Senator WEBBER—I want to go back to this structure thing, because I am even more confused than my good friend Claire Moore.

Senator MOORE—No, you are not.

Senator WEBBER—Mind you, that has probably got something to do with getting up at five o'clock in the morning—or perhaps I am easier to confuse. We talked before about how you manage people with special needs on a case-by-case basis to try and make sure that things do not fall through the cracks, which is a very good approach. Who coordinates that? How do we coordinate the whole-of-government response to this issue so that nothing falls through those macro-level cracks? You have talked about the how you talk to your tri-state colleagues who are

out there, but that seems to be a very informal process. We do not seem to have a robust formal structure that makes sure that we deliver.

Mr Larkin—No. Until—

Senator WEBBER—I might just be confused.

Mr Larkin—That is all right. You are not an orphan. Until a fortnight ago, South Australia had four separate bodies operating in the disability area. There was BIOPS, Julia Farr, IDSC and someone else. They dissolved all of those boards. We now have a disability services organisation and they are all working together. What we have are our technical people in Adelaide working to the person we have at Marla who is responsible for working on all of those disability programs. We fund the NPY Women's Council to do advocacy work for people with disabilities, to do respite care and to do the case plans. What are they called?

Mr Kay—Case management.

Mr Larkin—Case management plans. So we will get our person on the ground, getting the technical advice, to work with the NGOs there and develop the service. So our person will know about every bit of disability service that happens in South Australia and know where it goes.

Senator WEBBER—What I am trying to do is get at more than disability services. That is my struggle with the concept. I will drive my colleagues mad by saying that in Western Australia we had 15 different government agencies appear before us because they all have some input. We had the police—he is now the deputy commissioner of police, but he was an assistant commissioner then—and we had Health and what have you. It was very easy to identify that the lead agency in that was Health, but they all appeared before us and they all spoke to us. In the Northern Territory—it is a much smaller government—there was more than one government agency and there were people from the Chief Minister's department. Who is in charge of making sure that nothing falls through the policy cracks here? Is there someone who makes sure that you all contribute to the whole?

Mr Larkin—It is coordinated through the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The Premier holds his CEs, from all of those government departments, responsible for the delivery of what we say we are going to deliver. I am responsible for delivering all of the Department for Families and Communities' programs on the AP lands.

Senator WEBBER—So, if I went to the Department of Premier and Cabinet, I would find somebody who is responsible for coordinating this state government's response to the issue of petrol sniffing?

Mr Larkin—Yes.

Senator WEBBER—And is that the person who is away with the minister at the moment?

Mr Larkin—Yes.

Senator WEBBER—Is there more than one person? I have to say us appearing here today was the worst kept secret in Australia, because we have delayed appearing. I do not want you to take it personally—it was very good of you to spend all day here, and you have tried to address some of the concerns—but it perhaps would have been easier for the committee to get a better understanding of what is happening if someone who is responsible for coordinating that activity had come to talk to us.

Mr Larkin—The people who are responsible for delivering the services and providing advice to the people who coordinate the services would not be able to give you the detail that we have been able to provide you with today. And I am sorry, but it was short notice; we did not know when you were turning up in South Australia.

Senator WEBBER—Ouch. That is certainly not our impression, but anyway—that is obviously an issue. I have one other quick question. You may have to take it on notice. I am sure South Australia is like Western Australia in that there are some communities that are affected by petrol sniffing and others where it is just not an issue. Are there communities outside the APY lands that have this problem? If so, how do we address the problems with things like acquired brain injury from sniffing or what have you for people outside the APY lands?

Mr Larkin—If you are talking about areas like Coober Pedy, Port Augusta and those other areas, there are Aboriginal health services, hospitals and all the other services available, and people are identified through that process—the same process that occurs in the AP lands when people come to our attention either because they have got in trouble with the justice system or because Nganampa Health says, ‘This person is a danger to themselves.’

Senator WEBBER—But do we have a Mr Kay or someone in those areas who will make sure that those people are dealt with on a case-by-case basis and do not fall through the cracks?

Mr Larkin—Of course we have a range of government services in all of those regional areas as well. The reason we are here today talking about this being a big deal is that for the past 12 or 15 years the government has not had a presence on the AP lands except for the school, school teachers and community constables. The government made a commitment in the last five years to go back and provide those services—to establish government services on the lands and not rely on NGOs to deliver those services. What we are attempting to do now is to establish the services, and to train and employ local people to be able to deliver them as well.

Senator ADAMS—The Law Society spoke to us about the coding in relation to morbidity and whether health workers have the expertise when they are in the lands to do the coding. Someone who is a chronic sniffer may possibly die from a related cause with the primary cause being petrol sniffing, but it is not recorded as such. Their death may be recorded as pneumonia, malnutrition, diabetes or anything like that. Is there any way training can be done or is there any program that you are looking at with respect to that so that you can pinpoint the fact that these people’s deaths have been caused primarily by petrol sniffing?

Mr Kay—There is nothing much I can add to the remarks the Law Society made. I absolutely support everything they have said about the coding issue and the collection of data. The issue of data collection is being addressed around Aboriginal substance misuse by the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs as an Australia wide issue, and some of this will get picked up there. But

the APY lands task force also has the issue of data collection on its agenda to address. In terms of data collection, the APY lands used to be part of a collection district called the Unincorporated Far North. In recent times, the state government has moved that it is now a collection district in its own right. That will, however, make comparisons difficult, so we have not got good baseline data to work with. But it is being addressed as issue, yes.

Senator ADAMS—Do these run on Opal?

Mr Kay—The bikes?

Senator ADAMS—Yes.

Mr Kay—They can run on Opal, yes. The bike program on the APY lands does not import sniffable fuel. If there was anything I was going to get right, it was that.

Mr Larkin—Can I just say that the young fellow built that track on his own time.

Senator ADAMS—I was just reading about that. That is very good.

Mr Larkin—It is part of the approach as well. He is a young fellow who has to be very fit to stand up for 2½ hours doing 250 kilometres an hour. He is one of the pillars we are working on building as foundations. Kids look up to this young fellow. It is the biggest event that happens in Central Australia. This year there are six or seven young fellows competing.

Mr Kay—About that, yes.

Mr Larkin—And someone in a buggy as well. All the AP lands will be going to Central Australia to watch these young fellows. He has done more than that. He has actually said to these young kids: 'If you stop doing that petrol-sniffing stuff, you can come here and we'll fix your motorbike and get you a track. Here are the rules for the track. You put these clothes and helmet on,' and that sort of thing. They have had to do first aid. They have had to qualify in Alice Springs—all of those things. They have worked their way through that. It has been brilliant.

Mr Kay—I will leave this video with you. Item 19 is produced by PY Media. The senator from the Territory may have seen it already because it has been screened several times on television in Alice Springs. It describes the dirt bike program in Pukatja. Item 18 is about the bringing of Opal fuel to Amata. You may have an interest in that.

Mr Larkin—I wanted to talk about the positive behaviours program, but I think I will write you a couple of pages and ask you to please read that. It is a most positive thing about people with chemically acquired brain injury.

CHAIR—In terms of the coroner's recommendations, that would be the tertiary level of treatment?

Mr Larkin—Yes.

CHAIR—So that is the South Australian key response?

Mr Larkin—We are systematically working through those.

CHAIR—Good.

Mr Larkin—It is not going to happen tonight or tomorrow. We are there for the long haul. People have said to us, ‘What are you doing—you are still here?’ Especially to him. We are actually making it happen. After 32 years of me running in and out of there, I feel more positive now about us putting steps together than I have for many years.

You mentioned the program last night. I was saddened to see what I thought came over as sensationalism from the ABC, giving such graphic details of abuse. That sort of abuse is in no way part of my culture. That is rubbish by people who are deviants for all sorts of other reasons—that is not part of Aboriginal culture. People will feel strong enough to do in and stand up when they get support. The one thing that woman did not say last night was, ‘Support Aboriginal communities to be strong enough and be there after they have been the witness.’ She did not say that. I went to bed with a very bad impression of what happened last night, and a bit angry.

Senator ADAMS—They are continuing it tonight.

Mr Larkin—I will have to watch it tonight with some substances I think.

CHAIR—Thank you Mr Larkin and Mr Kay. I am very keen that the department provides that extra information and also that you look at the transcripts. There are a range of specific issues that we will not go through. Mr Kay, you are desperate to say something?

Mr Kay—There is one point I want to make about substance misuse. All races everywhere, all people everywhere, tend not to give up and not to achieve abstinence on their first attempt. It does not matter what the substance is—tobacco, alcohol, petrol or whatever. I have heard today evidence and people saying, ‘This program failed,’ or whatever. In no other area of substance misuse do we say a program failed because a person went through rehabilitation for three months and then went back on the substance. It is very common for people to have to go through rehabilitation with things like heroin, cannabis, alcohol abuse and tobacco 15 times. I do want to make a plea that, in terms of reasonable expectations about people achieving outcomes, failure after one go at rehab does not mean that a program has failed. The sixth attempt succeeds because you went through the other five. I do not think we should be putting expectations upon Aboriginal people who sniff petrol that we do not have for people who, for instance, take cocaine or heroin. We expect them to take six or seven attempts and we expect that of people who smoke.

CHAIR—That point has been made at most of the previous inquiries. Certainly it was made in the Senate inquiry in the eighties that looked at substances.

Mr Kay—As a drug and alcohol professional, it is a point I want to get across.

CHAIR—The committee would like a response on specific questions on notice. It may well be that you want to contact us to double-check on the questions. It is important. We may get in contact with you as well. I would also like to have some confirmation of when the advice of this committee was given to the South Australian government so we can clarify the issue. A statement was made by ANTAR on record today that reflected immediately as to why other people were not at this hearing. I think it is important that that is acknowledged as well.

Mr Larkin—We ran into the director on Friday in Alice Springs, who said, ‘We have been waiting for so long for this minister to come up here. There is no-one from the AP lands executive there.’ They did say, ‘If there were anyone who could tell people about the programs and the detail that is involved, it would be you two.’ I was feeling quite chuffed about that, and not because of any conspiracy.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned at 5.44 pm