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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities

FRIDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2003

DUBBO

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS
Friday, 7 November 2003

Members: Mr Wakelin (*Chair*), Mr Cobb, Mrs Draper, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Dr Lawrence, Mr Lloyd, Mr Melham, Mr Snowdon and Mr Tollner.

Members in attendance: Mr Cobb, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare and Mr Wakelin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Strategies to assist Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders better manage the delivery of services within their communities. In particular, the committee will consider building the capacities of:

- (a) community members to better support families, community organisations and representative councils so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities;
- (b) Indigenous organisations to better deliver and influence the delivery of services in the most effective, efficient and accountable way; and
- (c) government agencies so that policy direction and management structures will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people.

WITNESSES

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Committee met at 9.43 a.m.

DUNCAN, Mrs Cathy Joyce, Chief Executive Officer, Chairperson, Aboriginal Employment Strategy Ltd.

ESTENS, Mr Richard Lucas, Director, Vice-Chair, Aboriginal Employment Strategy Ltd.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing. We have been going, as the committee understands, for coming up to 18 months. We believe this will be our final regional visit. We are pleased to be in Dubbo today and to talk with the various groups that have a great interest in the issues that we are interested in. We particularly welcome, as our first guests today, Mr Richard Estens and Mrs Cathy Duncan. I invite you to make a brief opening statement and then we will have some general discussion.

Mr Estens—I will talk briefly about the Aboriginal Employment Strategy. It was set up off the back of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody at end of the 1980s. It took us five years to establish funding. We got under way in February 1997. Right from the beginning we knew that, to make a difference in a town like Moree, we had to concentrate on raising the self-esteem of the Aboriginal community as we pushed people into work. The Aboriginal Employment Strategy is a relationship building company: it seeks partnerships; it gets commitments from businesses. Part of its role is to move communities—that is, both black and white—which it has been successful in doing in Moree and is in the process of doing in Tamworth.

The whole program revolves around Aboriginal community people doing the moving and making the difference. Over the life of the program in Moree, 300 or 400 Aboriginal people have been put into 700 part-time, full-time and casual positions. Another office has opened in Tamworth, which we launched last week. On 6 May this year, a small team of five people had placed 75 Aboriginal people into part-time and full-time jobs.

We are a unit. However, because we are paid on performance—that is, putting people into work—we have trouble seeking money on our capacity building side. It has been a real issue for us. It has been a real issue for us in dealing with the department that funds us, DEWR. Getting them to understand that the Aboriginal Employment Strategy is the way to go for fixing Aboriginal employment has been a hard slog. Generally, the government has relied on the Job Network providers to fix Aboriginal employment—and that will never work.

I think we have proved, especially this year, the great thing about the unit. Tamworth has no town committee around it. The department's attitude was that the program could not work in another town unless there was a local champion driving it. I do not think that is the case. It is about having faith in a community's ability to deliver for itself.

Part of our program is to free up things. A lot of the programs put boxes around Aboriginal people and put too much on top of them. Our program is designed to get the creative thinking rolling, to bring out the flair, to get people working to their strengths. The whole program takes a business rather than a social worker approach. It has been an inspiring program and has really delivered for the Aboriginal people. I will leave it at that. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for that. I should have asked you before whether you were comfortable with the media present.

Mr Estens—We are fine.

CHAIR—Cathy, I now invite you to say a few words.

Mrs Duncan—I am finding this hard because I do not get a lot of time to talk, and I do like to talk. I would like to say yaama, which is ‘welcome’, from my country—Kamilaroi country. In terms of community capacity building and moving communities, the Aboriginal Employment Strategy has allowed Indigenous people to come from a business point of view and to be businesspeople within the business structures of local labour markets and communities.

We are working not from what Dick calls a social worker perspective—do not get me wrong: we need those people in our communities—but from a business perspective. We tend to be a business orientated model that builds partnerships with the business community and then moves our Indigenous people into a world of work, which can be a bit foreign to them if it is in mainstream employment, especially private enterprise.

We are a company that looks at the words ‘pride’, ‘passion’ and ‘commitment’ and instils them back into our Indigenous communities. Aboriginal people are very proud people, but for many years there has not been a lot for them to be proud about. In Aboriginal affairs we rejoice in our sports heroes and our actors, but in the employment arena we are not in the higher fields that I as a young Indigenous woman would like us to be. We have our Indigenous doctors, but you can count them on your hands.

We look at community capacity building. We have done it in Moree with no funding but sheerly on the passion of Indigenous people. We have put together programs that have looked at school to work transitions—not warm and fluffy government ones but ones that are real, such as for a kid who was not coping in school and needed to be taken out in year 8 and given two days a week in a workplace. Now that young gentleman is in the third year of a panel-beating apprenticeship. I do not believe any kid needs to be taken out of a school but, at the end of day, schools are white institutions which were not created for Indigenous kids. We have to look at the structures that are around Indigenous people and, if they are falling through them, look for avenues out. We have worked with kids in schools. We have a young lady now who is in Western Australia at a university undertaking Aboriginal production management and theatre. She just came out of year 12. So we have worked on all facets of our kids.

As Indigenous people we work with true Indigenous people who have their hearts in a community perspective. We try to look at what our people want to be and take them there in reality. We work with Aboriginal security. We are not reactive in security; we are proactive in our Aboriginal security. We have just developed our own MAES’s licence. We secure and we work in front of the police to alleviate a lot of incidents that were happening in Moree. We tend not to come in when the trouble has happened. Instead, we ask: where will the trouble happen? We looked at football matches for the second division where there was liquor near a particular venue. We all like to drink; that is not about colour. We looked at putting security in. We engaged the Woolworths people and the police. We brought them to a meeting with the second division and told them what they needed to do before it blew up.

We try to look at any element in our society that is feeling oppressed or not worthy. What AES tries to do in Aboriginal communities is put self-esteem back in. With self-esteem will come pride and commitment. Eighteen Aboriginal kids are now in year 12 in our town. Twenty years ago we were lucky to have two. Ten years ago we did not have five. We have 18 kids now, because they see hope and a future for them in the town that they live in and were born in—plus on their tribal lands, if I can put it that way. A lot of people do not want to leave. They do not want to be farmed out to Sydney and places like that. They want to stay in their local communities.

With isolation comes a lack of labour market opportunities, so in our wisdom—and with me beating Dick up a bit—we have looked at an enterprise. We are going through AusIndustry to look at Aboriginal business and an Aboriginal incubator. Because labour markets in country areas are not going to be sustainable, we are not going to get all 3,000 Indigenous people in a population of 10,000 into jobs in Moree. So we need to look at enterprise. Aboriginal people want to be businesspeople. There are lots of programs available, but they tend to have shortfalls, so we are looking at the idea of building what we call ‘Our black vision’—which is a bit of a pun. We have a feasibility study by AusIndustry now to look at that Aboriginal incubator. We are also looking at an Aboriginal coffee shop in town that is up-market Sydney cafe style but involves Aboriginal women doing the work and may also have a bush tucker slant. Arts and craft is always an important area for Aboriginal people. Instead of just getting people on treadmills at TAFE to do arts and craft courses and running the Abstudy bill up, we are looking at how to get them into marketing and selling and how to get them into niche markets in Germany and Britain. We are not talking about them just going off and selling at the markets around Sydney.

We are an organisation that comes from business. We are an organisation that is in partnership, and we are only as good as our partners. As Indigenous people, we are only as good as the non-Aboriginal people that stand with us and walk with us. We tend to work together, learn together and live a little bit together. We realise that in society we all live in different worlds. In Moree, we start breaking up communities and looking at where certain communities sit and how we can start to get communities to dance together. I do not have time to explain it all, but I think in Moree we have been successful in creating what I like to call modern-day corroborees. It is about getting Aboriginal people to start to work together, because we have a lot of factions. They do not take five minutes; they’re not Demtel ads where, for 5c more, you are going to get this. They take years, and they will take years and years more to deal with in Moree, let alone in Tamworth or Dubbo. We have to look at reconciling ourselves. Then we have to make a movement for Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people to meet. It is not all about using the word ‘reconciliation’; those people who live in contemporary New South Wales live in a white world and go to school in a white world, and they need to learn how to cope in the white world and understand what ‘commercial’ means.

That is the one thing that the AES is doing out there: it is getting Indigenous people to understand the commercial world, which has a lot of values different to those of Aboriginal culture, and they can clash. Indigenous people in their own right are making it in the commercial world. The AES’s biggest struggle at the moment is that we did not fit in boxes. I quit an 11-year government job; I was not going to fit in a box. I enjoyed the work that I did within the government structure, especially in the education sense, but I could see that we could do more if—how would you say it?—we were unleashed a little bit and were allowed to dream our dreams.

What we have been able to do has outweighed my expectations. Since I came on as chair in 2001, Dick and I have worked very hard to build our structures and internal staff. We went to Tamworth and we blew the Tamworth community away. Without a strategy, you do not just get 75 people in jobs—part time and full time—and 65 of those people are still in work. It is seasonal. Our numbers will drop. There might be 600 jobs, but when you work in a town that relies on seasonal work and a government contract that says that, if you work three months on the cotton, have a break and then do the wheat, those breaks do not count as continuous work, that figure will drop.

Tamworth has been a good example of a model that is there if communities want to embrace it. We are not a model for every Aboriginal person, I need to say that. And we are not a model for every non-Aboriginal person. We are a model for Aboriginal people if they want to work, and all we want is a will and attitude to work. Also, we are not for the non-Aboriginal person who wants a free Aboriginal person so that he can collect a bounty or a subsidy and who only wants a blackfella for the training and development, and when the treadmill finishes, he says, 'I'll take another one.' We are about building sustainable jobs for our people for life. We are about leaving lasting relationships in communities that build for their children and for the future. If we do this now, our kids will do a better job for us in the future.

CHAIR—Well done. That was excellent, Cathy.

Mr Estens—I would like to add that, if you build pride, you build self-esteem, and you will get peer pressure rolling and that is what we drive for.

Mr JOHN COBB—I thank you for being here with us today. Only a fool would say that without employment we are going to solve any problems anywhere, let alone in western New South Wales. Dick, you made the point earlier that you do not think that it can be solved through the normal Job Network, and I would agree with that.

Mr Estens—There is absolutely no way it can.

Mr JOHN COBB—Quite obviously it cannot. I know that you have been asked here before to talk about this. Could you give us a very rough idea of how you think it can work in Dubbo? I am particularly interested in smaller communities where perhaps the white population is not dominant and the Aboriginal population is far bigger. Can it also work in those sorts of areas? I realise you have to have the opportunity for employment as well. Have you looked at the smaller communities at all?

Mr Estens—Our program can work anywhere as long as we can get funding to drive it. We are getting pushed by Gunnedah, we have to go to Armidale and we have been asked to Walgett, Boggabilla and Toomelah. Probably 150 towns have asked us to set up a unit. It revolves around self-esteem and building pride. We get paid on performance. We do not offer businesses the \$4,000 that the government offer people for employing an Aboriginal person. We call that a bounty; it lowers self-esteem. A lot of our jobs have not attracted that.

As I said, we have had a big problem, an intractable battle, with the department in the last few years. It is a tragedy what they do not know. There is no expertise in the department on how to make Aboriginal employment work and how to drive it. We take on a whole town approach. In

the first week in December, Cathy and I are going to Tennant Creek for a week to see what we can do for that community. The whole program is about building self-esteem and pride. If you build that, you will unleash a lot of forces. It is about having confidence in the community. It is what I call a big game of patience. You cannot run faster than you can bring the community along. That is something that will be hard to do in Dubbo because a lot of community people have been brought into this town. There is a lot of anger here. It took us three years to quieten Moree down. There is a lot of anger in Moree, but the programs work. And, in my opinion, they will work anywhere because it is community people helping their own community and linking in with businesses. What Cathy and I are able to do is to bring towns with us.

Mr JOHN COBB—You said before that you have to do it to suit the community. Is it the case that what you did in Moree is very different from what you have done in Tamworth?

Mrs Duncan—I was actually joking, because I said, ‘I think we’re like the Kentucky Fried Chicken chain. You can have burgers and chips in Moree and you can have nuggets in Tamworth and we might have to go to those little popcorn chickens when we are out in Dubbo.’ I know it is funny to say it like that, but I have to because Aboriginal politics and affairs and Aboriginal work is very close to the hearts of people who are Aboriginal. So you have to put some fun into it so you can actually look at it neutrally. But what I would say is that the formula and philosophy of the AES, the workplace culture and the work ethic, are the same in Tamworth and Moree but we adapt to the community. Tamworth is a community that was waiting, I believe, for a slick black outfit, and that is what we put in there. When we looked at Dubbo—and we have only done a few visits and some staff are coming back next week to do the women’s group and the men’s group—we saw Dubbo as being similar to Moree—and that is no offence to anyone; I try not to make sweeping statements—because you have a labour market and we have the community capacity building stuff to be done.

There are a lot of good things happening in Dubbo—I have heard that from many people. We are not coming in to encroach on things or impede them. We have a program, we have a model and we would employ Dubbo people, people with skills in the community. We have a certain way that we go about things. We do not bring factions into our office. We do not talk about past wrongs. Even if your mob do not like this mob over here when you come into the AES, we work neutrally. We work from a business footing. It is about whether you can talk to the other guys and whether you can build a relationship with the other guys. It is about how I can get into your heart to get you to give one of my guys out there in the community a public house and the job.

Mr JOHN COBB—Do you have to address the family thing? It seems to me that, while the family is the strength of Aboriginal communities, it is also the weakness in that it does not allow them to integrate.

Mrs Duncan—It is a frustration to us that we are funded solely by DEWR—that is the only funding, although we have had some DEST funding—because when we do our mentoring—we have guys that mentor—if you do not do Aboriginal families you do not do Aboriginal people, because we are not individuals; we are with our families, and I have a family member with me today. Our families are more important to us—and I say this personally although I am sure most Indigenous people would agree—than anything else. My family is more important to me than the AES and work and money and cars and houses—the whole lot. So if we do not bring families

and communities along with the process of work and the world of work, then we do not win. We cannot win as a community.

That is why at the moment in Moree we are touching everything. There is a debutante ball on tonight. It was really not on because there was no public liability insurance, there were no security guards and there was no booze bus for at least two hours yesterday. Now there are security guards, a booze bus and the public liability insurance. We advocate for people and cut through structures that may oppress Indigenous people but we tend to touch everything. We have done Aboriginal security, we touch the schools, we have gone to speak at forums, whether they be women's groups or domestic violence ones, but we always use the carrot and the angle of employment. If you do not build your families, then when you get a guy and a job and he goes back into a community where only one in 100 has a job eventually that guy is going to be dragged back and he is not going to cope. I suppose what we do is raise the bar in Aboriginal communities and ask, 'Do you want to live on welfare for the rest of your life?' That was not something that we chose to do, and I need to say that quite frankly. I think it is something that is way past government.

Mr JOHN COBB—I agree with you.

Mrs Duncan—We were put on treadmills. What we are doing at the AES is saying, 'Get off this Aboriginality.' Domestic violence, drugs, alcohol and welfare treadmills are not Aboriginality. They are just the way Aboriginal people have accepted government programs and made them a part of life. I think what we do is break the moulds and say, 'We are proud Aboriginal people, we can cope in a business world and we can get more than welfare: we can get work, we can get business.' It is not about opulence and wealth, because a lot of Indigenous people are not materialistic. They are not looking for that. I think they are just looking to be treated as an equal within their community and be called a citizen. I think that is what the AES tries to achieve, so that we become quality citizens and take away the black and white altogether.

Mr Estens—The unit in Moree is clearly the centre of social change in the town. It acts as a family for Aboriginal people in a business culture. We get a lot of kids and people hanging out in the office. We have an open office so that they can breathe the culture. That is part of our lifting process.

Ms HOARE—You said that the crime rate in Moree has halved. That would be the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal crime rate. Cathy, you touched on domestic violence and child abuse as examples. Have there been any outcomes in those areas?

Mr Estens—Part of what they are doing is reviewing us now.

Ms HOARE—Who are they?

Mrs Duncan—The government.

Mr Estens—The government—probably FaCS, DEST and DEWR. Their figures run two or three years behind the fact. A couple of years ago I talked to the police inspector—I think he is up here for the next month—and he said, 'I'm not sure why crime is halving.' They had trouble working out why. But, as you build self-esteem, you build pride. Aboriginal people just want to

be respected; they just want to be respected. And, as we build that respect, you will get peer pressure rolling onto the back end of the community—and that is what we look for. That is free, that costs nothing, and that is what is helping to drive crime down in Moree. Our security we have rolling now is not as normal security guards or in partnership with the police but pre-emptive. It is before the police. What we essentially have is a really good psychological game plan. Our programs lay it all the way down the line, and it is about having an impact on people in the community. We take a full, broad approach.

Ms HOARE—Cathy, can you tell me any more about the domestic violence?

Mrs Duncan—Yes. What I would say is that we have a lot of organisations in town that all work in that area—and we link in—but tend not to do their job. For Aboriginal men, I actually did a presentation at a women's refuge; there are no refuges for men. My house is one—I have six brothers. What we found is that Aboriginal men are angry. Aboriginal men are not running the country; they are not even running their households anymore. So what we have tried to do is put worth and self-worth back into them.

The Aboriginal security men are men we have chosen. We took them off our reserves. I think our superintendent was quite surprised that we could find people down there with no criminal records, get them fingerprinted and go through the whole process. They are properly trained security guys. They come from all of our factions and they work at all of our events. We do not go and put one faction in; we put all factions in. We have a point lead person who does that in our community.

The guys come from longstanding Indigenous families within the community. They have their own pride from that factional part, and then there is what they have done in their own right. We started off with just a little security course; they want to take it to a masters course. One of our mentors goes to the courthouse when one of the guys we have employed or who have registered with us is in trouble. We have now got to the stage where I heard—on the street, not from one of my staff—that a guy said, ‘No, if you've got a job and if they get them AS fellas to go around—the way they look—that Prowsie's not sending us to jail.’

So all I see is that we are making an impact in that way. We are taking hard-core kids—if that is what you call them; I just call them our kids—and we are giving them jobs and telling them they can be somebody other than someone in a detention centre. We have surprised school principals, I think, with some of the kids that we have placed in employment, but it is about the mentoring. The mentor comes from our company, he understands the ethos of the AES, and our mentors run 24/7. Aboriginality is life and AES is life to us. We do not call it a job.

Mr JOHN COBB—Are the mentors always Aboriginal?

Mrs Duncan—Always Aboriginal. Our mentors are Aboriginal people who tend to come from the community they are mentoring. They tend to know their community. They can get lost because they get frustrated, and then what we do is sit together as a group and talk and look at how we can do it and move forward. We do a lot of brainstorming. We do not train our mentors—I need to say that straight out. You cannot train someone in life and you cannot train someone in Aboriginality. You can train people in negotiation, communication and all those skills, but you cannot train them in the experiences they have had. We tend not to take the cream

of the crop into our community—Aboriginal people who had made their own way in life. Our mentors tend to come out of our community, and we train and develop them in the AES. But their mentoring, their ability and their commitment come from their own hearts.

I think what they see is that they are doing it for their people. It is not the whitefellas doing it and telling us what to do. I do not need to put it like that, but they are doing it for their people and if they get angry they can come and talk to an Aboriginal manager who goes and kicks it into the white businessman, who will say, ‘Okay, we can do it this way, but in a commercial world this is the way you’re going to be seen,’ or, ‘In the business world, this is how the non-Aboriginal people are going to see it; we need to tone it that way.’ The one thing we have tried to do is take the anger out of our men. We still have domestic violence; we still have all those wonderful things! I am not sitting here with rose-coloured glasses on, but we are slowly—through employment, through Aboriginal security, through our men feeling self-worth—getting them involved.

We have community service order guys who come and do their probation hours with us all through the Croc Eisteddfod. We do not treat them as those probo fellas; they are just our people. We give them the same responsibilities as you would give the trained guard, but they are not actually out there doing security work. During Croc, the 10 volunteer people from our community worked with our trained security guards in policing our community. Some of these people had been in trouble with the law. When we are putting up tents, putting NAIDOC together or decorating a float, we bring in the fire department and the police to the Murris out there and we all work together. Somewhere along the line, people stop thinking, ‘Oh, that’s him’, ‘That’s that boy in blue’ or ‘That’s Dick’; they start to look at the heart of the person and think, ‘Yeah, he’s all right, that John.’ So that is the way we try to do it. A lot of it is psychological too.

Ms HOARE—What is the cost of putting an Aboriginal person into employment compared with putting any other disadvantaged, long-term unemployed or non-English-speaking background person into employment?

Mr Estens—We do not put a price on it. Generally our mentors place about 40 people a year. It depends. In Tamworth, they are doing more because they do not have the tough end of the community that we have in Moree and in Dubbo. They can place more people in jobs as there is less mentoring. If you have an Aboriginal person going badly in a job, he will take the resources of a person pretty heavily for a week or two to work through the issues to try to hold the position. Clearly that is our target clientele. Generally in a community, 30 per cent of Aboriginal people are making their way through life just fine and then there is that next 30 per cent. We want to get those people into real jobs because essentially what you are doing is giving the Aboriginal community where you operate a real mandate to look after that tougher end of the community.

Ms HOARE—Do you think the government evaluation that is going on at the moment might come up with a figure? We are talking about employment services, and you referred before to Job Network. I have a background in implementing Aboriginal programs in the old CES under the old TAP program.

Mr Estens—I presume that they will just look at specific figures and I am a bit concerned about their review. We have already had two reviews of our work. A lot of these people live in

Canberra or Sydney and they do not live in communities where there are large numbers of Aboriginal people. They clearly do not understand the problems well enough. What really disappoints me is that we are into our seventh year in Moree and none of those people has come up to Moree voluntarily to try to work out why our units are successful. I get concerned about their work. I am not sure what they will find. I do not have a lot of confidence in their work.

Mrs Duncan—We do not price-tag because I do not think we will ever get paid for the work that we achieve, and it is not about money. I worked in the CES with the TAP for the north-west New England area. What I see is that we do not go out and sell Aboriginal people: 'I'll give you 75 per cent this year and 25 per cent in the third year.' We just go in and build a relationship and say: 'These are quality people. You wanted continuity and consistency. You wanted sustainability. Indigenous communities sit in your community for most of their life.' There is not this nomadic lifestyle—that we go everywhere, we transfer everywhere, we live this wonderful life and drag our kids around—and I am getting a bit sick of that excuse. We tend to stay a bit more. We tend to move because of a lack of opportunities.

We do not price-tag because we are still mentoring and working with people. I worked with a young guy who is in the fourth year of his trade. He was placed 4½ years ago on the AES—not even in my era. He nearly dropped out. One of our mentors is a tradesman in the plant trade. We drove 300 kilometres to get him to Tamworth. We sat there with him, geed him up and told him he could do it. He only needed a little bit of financial assistance. He has now finished that last block of his trade. If in six years time that fella is still in a job and we are still in Moree—or whether it be in Tamworth—we will still go and help him.

We did a whole feasibility study on JNPs, and the reason why the AES would not be a JNP is that it is not about money. It would not matter if we were to make triple the money as a JNP or less; we will not cut our people off welfare because they will not come to an interview today or they will not go here or there. That is the same system we are coming out of—badgering and choke-holding Indigenous people through welfare reforms to make them get off their backsides and be quality citizens. We say, 'If you want to work, we'll help you.'

We are not people who drive statistics. I do not want that agenda of JNPs. I do not want to look at my people as a black stat. There is no disrespect to anyone in that comment. I have come out of a Commonwealth employment arena. I want to be with my people to get them to where they need to go. One client could take us one week; one client could take us five years. When you are dealing with people who are first, second and third generation welfare recipients, you are always going to have strike-backs. We are not going to stick a person into a job who has been unemployed—whether it has been for 12 months or 10 years—and expect him to stick at the job, be wonderful and go on for life. He might take three runs or he might take 10 runs before he gets a go. That is where AES gets hit a lot, because we are not statistics driven; we are driven by the heart and passion of the Indigenous people within the organisation. We are driven by communities a little I think, both black and white communities.

Mr Estens—In Tamworth there are three or four Job Network providers. One of those gave us an annual report last year and there were 44 employees in that Job Network provider. Last year, they put three Aboriginal people into mainstream jobs, and I think they did another handful on STEP programs. We have put 75 people into full-time jobs in six months and we have a staff of five. I sat at the front of that office when we opened the door and 75 Aboriginal people walked

through on the first day and registered. A total of 519 have registered in that office since we opened the door. Eighty businesses have registered in Tamworth wanting to employ Aboriginal people. It is just amazing. I said to the team over there and to some Aboriginal elders that came in—it is a flash office in the main street and the community clearly see themselves as having a business in the main street which is paid on performance and matching it with other businesses—'How much is this lifting the Aboriginal people in Tamworth? Is it lifting them five per cent?' I was down there looking at the bottom end to see what value there was. They said: 'No, this is not lifting us five per cent; this is lifting us 30 or 40 per cent. That is the magnitude of the lift we're getting from it.' It has amazed me because in Tamworth we put 75 people into jobs in the last six months and we would not have lost five of them so far. It could be nine, but it is just a handful.

Ms HOARE—You were initially saying that this could work anywhere. The Job Network is clearly failing Aboriginal people in rural, regional and city areas. How could this work in my area with a population of two per cent of the non-Aboriginal population? Could it be a sustainable project in city areas?

Mr Estens—It is sustainable. I want to put it like this: if you have a family member that is an alcoholic, are you going to take him to your local GP or are you going to take him to AA? This is about understanding people and reading people. The reason you take your family member to AA is that alcoholism is a psychological problem. It is a psychological issue and people who have those problems think differently and handle problems differently. So you have to take them to AA where you have people who have been through the process who understand the people to fix the problem. That is what this is about. If you have an Aboriginal community that is clearly thinking poorly of itself in town, who are you going to use to fix the problem? Non-Aboriginal people? You use the Aboriginal community people. I do not mean people that are Aboriginal for five minutes to get a job with us, I mean Aboriginal people who clearly mix and socialise within that community.

We opened the door in Tamworth and we were able to get our corporate philosophy and ethos out, and Aboriginal people were able to grab it and run with it. For example, our team do not go out asking businesses for jobs. We tell them to go out and build a relationship. All we want them to do is to go out and have a chat to people, and I say, 'People will know why you are there.' They will eventually get a job—it might take six months or it might take three years. When they get a job, we then ask them to go for a commitment. What I mean by commitment is that we want more than a job. We want a commitment that they will work with us for the next 12 months as we try a better kid in a job. It might fail. As Cathy said, we have to work with some who have been on welfare for three generations. We clearly have failures and one thing our team does not do is provide a guarantee. We tell our businesses that we are not here to guarantee that it will work; we are here to try and make a difference, and to do that we need their support. It is interesting that, in a town as tough as Moree, we have not lost the support of the community; we are still building our relationships and we are still delivering.

Mr HAASE—This is a breath of fresh air; it is pretty fantastic to hear. Cathy, you are obviously very passionate about and committed to this job. You made the point that you believe this is transferable, but I wonder whether your collective personalities are transferable, because I see them as being an integral part of your success. It concerns me that that is something we cannot easily replicate. Can you address that point?

Mrs Duncan—We were actually talking about this in the car because we knew we would be asked this question. We set up Tamworth with the philosophy that we needed to set it up, and I suppose we will do the same in Dubbo, when I can get away from the government telling me to talk to the Aboriginal community and I can start talking to businesspeople, because it worries me that we will be providing hope for the Aboriginal community in Dubbo without talking to businesspeople. I need to know how these people think. Dick and I do it together. We leave a program that the community and the local AES are able to pick up and run, which is what Tamworth has done. When Tamworth opened, we took three months to roll it out. There were 10 visits in order to roll that business sense in. I now go to Tamworth once a month, as well as talking to them on the phone. So Tamworth is being run by the Aboriginal people in the office and their Aboriginal manager, Steven. If we get stuck, if Woolworths is not letting us in in Tamworth but we have checkout chicks in Moree, Dick and I talk at a corporate level to the CEO of Woolworths. We play games; I need to say that. We play ‘black and white’ games. We get Dick to go in, if the white guy is looking at me like—

Mr HAASE—Good cop, bad cop.

Mrs Duncan—Yes. We actually do it quite well. If he still can’t see that I look like him, and he sees me as being Aboriginal, then we send Dick in. All of us went along to ‘beat up’ the Woolworths manager and we could not get to him. He kept ringing Dick and saying we were not delivering. Dick went over there and realised, ‘Hang on, he’s playing a little game here.’ In the end we said to him, ‘We don’t want a token Aboriginal guard when the second division football is on for five hours.’ He said, ‘What do you want?’ I said, ‘We want checkout chicks; we want Aboriginal girls, and I’ll go back and shop there. Even though we don’t have opulence and wealth, we’ve got to eat, and we won’t shop at your shop.’ He said, ‘I thought I was losing customers.’ I said, ‘No. If you put Aboriginal girls on the checkout, you’ll even stop the people coming through and thieving.’ We had young girls sticking icy poles down their pants—it is a bit hard for a male to chase them—and make-up.

We have put Aboriginal girls on the checkout at both Woolworths and Coles, and now the instances of girls running through there are not happening. They are being told, ‘Get out of here; this is my job.’ It is community pressure. Some people will not care about the person on the checkout and just do what they want, but that person might know who their grandma is or they might know the kid. What tends to happen is that they tell one of our mentors and they will go out and talk to the parents. They say, ‘While you’re doing them over, we’re never going to be able to get jobs there.’ That is just how Murris talk. I think it is transferable. I think it does need drivers. Dick and I drive them in the communities. I had to go to Tamworth to believe it myself, I will tell you straight out, and it is able to be run without Dick Estens and Cathy Duncan.

Mr Estens—A lot of our thinking is the reverse of the bureaucratic thinking. The bureaucrats said to me, ‘Dick, you’re going to have to find a white champion in Tamworth. You’re going to have to put a town committee around it.’ As I said to the bank manager, ‘If you’re going to open up a business in town and you have to put a town committee around it to help get you profitable, is that what you’re going to do? It won’t work.’ If we put our unit into Dubbo, we will deliberately not put in a town committee. With respect to some of the biggest problems in the Aboriginal community, we have all seen it with ATSIC and the land councils. Why do they fail? Why do we white people give them properties and get an Aboriginal community to run that property? We white people cannot even do it that way. And that is what we have as a business

philosophy. I think we could roll out 100 AESs; as long as they had line management in place, we could do it. It really annoys me that the bureaucrats will not fund a small corporate team for me. Cathy and I are involved in the process of working through the issues and rolling out Dubbo. Cathy is also managing Moree and we are managing Tamworth. I am not sure what the problem is, but clearly they need to review the way they handle Aboriginal employment.

Mr HAASE—You are not bureaucratic enough. That is why they don't trust you.

Mr Estens—That is the trouble. We set up Tamworth. The bureaucrats were not expecting us to put a big office in the main street. They underfunded us. They thought we were going to put an Aboriginal person down at the back end of town and that it would take us years to make a difference, but we blew them away in their thinking. They are now trying to put controls around us as we come into Dubbo. Clearly, what they are trying to do is not the way we want to do it, because we have a proven track record.

Mr HAASE—I am conscious of the time, but I would like to ask one more question. Cathy, you made a comment about how you ignore the factions. You commented that you strive for internal reconciliation, and you acknowledge the necessity for that. You then said that you run the show as a business and that you try to ignore what I interpreted to mean the cultural aspects of Aboriginality. I would like you to extend your comments on that, especially on how you prioritise the value of culture—and I am from Kalgoorlie, the desert people, so when I talk about culture I mean fair dinkum culture—versus economic survival and independence.

Mrs Duncan—Gee, that is a big question for someone who only did year 12! I would not say to ignore Aboriginal culture but to understand the difference between your culture and the commercial culture; I just wanted to correct that part. Traditional communities are a whole different ball game for us and that is something that we will look at when we go to Tennant Creek and other areas. I am not sure about all over Australia, but I know that this will work for contemporary Aboriginal people in contemporary New South Wales. When we talk about factions we are talking about people who live in different parts of the community—different families—not about different clan groups or different lingo groups and all that. That is a whole different ball game that we have not even touched on.

I will talk about where I come from. Moree has five factions. The *Oceania* report done in the 1950s factionalised our town and it has stayed that way. In our town the Soapie Row people are the workers and there is the top camp, the mission people, the uptowners and, now, the out-of-towners. All of those people are represented in the AES in Moree. My staff—and I am glad I did not bring any of them with me!—and I call people little chocolate skins through to little fair skins. We have jokes with each other to try to get rid of the Protection Board days. We do not need to split ourselves up; we know who we are. Jokingly, I said to one of my girls, ‘You’ve got to stop thinking mission.’ She said, ‘What do you mean?’ I said: ‘I understand that you are advocating for the people that you live with, but you’ve got to stop thinking mission and start thinking about the whole community and about how we get to the uptowners up there, the top camp people and the out-of-town people. How are we going to bring them in?’ She said, ‘Oh, okay.’ Now she runs it with all the NAIDOC, with all the Aboriginal girls and with all the town. She said to me, ‘I want to get into that white function.’ We now have two Aboriginal girls running in the white function.

It is not something that I would contemplate in the part of the land that you come from. We have done the same thing in Tamworth—from the fairer Aboriginal people to the darker ones and those from this part of town or another. We put two people together whose grandmothers had been very factionalised. If it works, we say it is professionalism. It is not professional to take another workmate down. That is where we talk about the commercial world and the world of business. You can drag down Dick in your own Aboriginal community, if that is what you want to do, but how do you ever raise the bar? Our staff are now starting to mix after hours. They go back into their little factionalised part of the community and someone will say, ‘They’re AES fellas,’ or something. In the end they sit quietly. They might say, ‘I will just go there for a job,’ but after they get pride from working for the organisation they will start to defend it and fight their own communities. In Moree we are fighting the opinions and attitudes of our own sections of the community and saying that we can work together. We are saying that, from the fairer Murris with nice cars and nice houses to the poor old fellas down at the mission, we all need to work together and walk together.

I am not going to answer your question, because there is no definitive answer. It is about looking at what is in the community that you go into and feeding off the people that you are employing locally and letting them say what they think will get rid of this. We have young people employed at the moment. That is not to say that we are looking for the young. Some of the people in our office have had enough of the Land Council stuff and the ATSIC stuff. I mean no disrespect to any of those structures, but enough people have been slammed with ‘every blackfella gets everything for nothing; we drive nice cars but we have paid for them’.

At the last Dubbo meeting a Job Network provider through which we have 25 people working at Peel Valley Exporters, an abattoir in Tamworth, said, ‘But you get 100 per cent funding for all those blackfellas.’ I said, ‘We do not get any funding for those Aboriginal people other than in the same way that you do—through commencements for 13 to 26 weeks.’ He said, ‘How did you sell it?’ I said, ‘We went out and learnt that man’s business.’ We wanted to know what he wanted, what he was looking for, and then we went through our community—and it is not always loved by this community—to find the person who would fit that business. It is not about their colour or about who they are; it is about the attitude to work and the will to work. We then backed that up with mentoring.

We had one guy driving a carload to that abattoir at five o’clock every morning until we could beat up DEWR to get money for a driver and maybe a bus down the road. He would do his full workload and then pick them up and go back again. In the end, he was getting sick of picking them up. One of those guys went and bought an old bomb of a car from a couple of weeks work. One had a licence and they are car pooling now.

That does not answer your question. I am not sure about your area. Because Dick is in Reconciliation Australia, he will say you can roll it all around Australia. For me, I think it is a model for north-west New England and the western side of New South Wales at the moment. If anyone wants to come and look at it, I am sure you can transpose it, but you would have to adapt it depending on those cultural groups.

Mr Estens—Essentially, what we do is get a community moving—get a community dancing. Part of what we do is we do not tell people to change; we create ways by which people are changed. That is one of the rules that we operate by.

Mrs Duncan—That is probably why it is hard for us to tell you what we do.

Mr HAASE—The people who are doing the right thing and maintaining regular employment et cetera are doing it because they realise the value of doing it.

Mr Estens—It is interesting to look at Moree now that our job side has clearly dropped off. We have got no wool and the cotton industry is not performing, but crime is not accelerating in Moree because we have lost jobs. Aboriginal people are holding more pride because there is more self-esteem, their peer pressure is working well and we are just hoping for the drought to break. We are tending to be more in welfare mode at the moment as we are trying to save people, rather than in business mode of punching into jobs. The dynamics of our office are continually changing. It is not set in tight parameters. That is what we do: we get the flare going in the community.

Mr HAASE—It is not associated, but you mentioned the Croc Fest. I am a great fan of the Croc Fests. How often do you have a Croc Fest?

Mrs Duncan—We have one every year in Moree. We have been in it for five years—AES leads all of the Croc Eisteddfod coordination for the local community.

Mr Estens—We make that unit work for Moree. We go to the cotton industry and will get \$7,000 or \$8000; we will run a party beforehand where we pool black and white together. We really drive that unit to get the best value for the town.

Mr HAASE—It is a very successful concept in my patch.

Mr Estens—It is a good program.

CHAIR—If I were to sum it up, for me it would be that one word: impractical. You just meet the issue where it is and you do not allow the Canberra model to hold you back.

Mr Estens—We have the confidence of the Aboriginal community, we free up the thinking and we get them moving.

CHAIR—There a number of issues that I would just like to touch on. I am drawing from one of your speeches, Dick—that is where I will come from. I want to pick up a little bit of the story. There was a stage when you were down to five people and they all did not turn up for work one day.

Mr Estens—That was in the first six months.

CHAIR—What I am trying to draw on is the determination that it really takes. Someone got in the car—or whatever happened—and you got four of them at work by the end of the day.

Mr Estens—That was in the first year of running. Moree had a lot of anger. There were a lot of government moneys coming in. We had street reclamer committees being formed that year. We had the police inspector in town. Quietly we went about putting Aboriginal people into jobs. At the end of the first 12 months we had 12 people. That was in September; we started in

February. Everyone was missing. It probably was my worst day and my best day. I really knew the value of the mentoring—get out, get them back on the job, get them going again and having the confidence. I have brought a folder along. It has probably got 100 newspaper articles. If you flick through it you can pick up the story of the AES.

At the end of the first year I brought in the local media and they saw that we had 16 people in full-time jobs. It brought full headlines in the Moree paper. Six months later I did the launch of the Aboriginal employment structure—like we launched Tamworth last week. We had another party—we got \$10,000 off the cotton industry. We pooled black and white together and got it rolling. I find now that if you are changing a community you have to be putting value into two main events a year. The two that we use are the Croc Eisteddfod in Moree and NAIDOC week. You can tell you have got an Aboriginal community moving in Moree now, and we drive it out of the AES—Cathy drives it. There are seven days and seven nights of functions for Aboriginal people driven by the Aboriginal people.

Mrs Duncan—We took it to nine days—we went over a week.

Mr Estens—It is growing. I look at Tamworth and there is hardly anything done on NAIDOC week. It is usually driven off a hospital or a school and the white people are doing it. As you see self-esteem and pride rising, you will see the Aboriginal community come in and really drive NAIDOC week very successfully. It is a measuring point. The Croc is the other one. Tamworth will probably use the country festival and NAIDOC week as the things that you push hard in. Positive local media is really important for letting people know what is happening out there and what Aboriginal people are doing, and lifting through the local paper is really important.

CHAIR—Can I ask about the Boomerangs rugby league team?

Mr Estens—That was a really interesting issue. It was a classic case where nobody liked them and we sat out of—

CHAIR—They have been kicked out, as I understand it. There has been a blue, obviously.

Mr Estens—Yes. We worked through it with the Boomerangs and they never used the racist card at all. We showed them how to get public opinion working for them so that we could get peer pressure behind rugby league to push them back into the comp. I think next weekend the vote is on.

Mrs Duncan—Yes. I think it was more to take the anger out of our men through football. The Boomerangs were always a powerful football team, even when knockouts came on—it was taking that anger out. But these guys have their own security team and they have a code of conduct. When we ran the knockout last year, pubs and clubs were not allowed to sell certain types of alcohol and there were no takeaways. That club did it themselves and—I had better watch what I say—it made a lot of Aboriginal people angry, but it raised the bar. In the end, there was a joke about a whole group of coppers sitting around and one of them said, ‘Who’s that blue team playing?’ The others said, ‘That’s the police—they were that bored.’

On the Friday night that the knockout happened in 2002, we even put an Aboriginal women’s football side in—I had to literally put my body on the line—to get our women involved in health

and sports and also, with the men, participating in football. Then the kids came along and we had cheer teams with the kids. From that, the second divisions came out of Moree. Now we have gone into group 4 or group 19 second division, which tends to be all our little local towns. We have all of our little factions—we have some pure non-Aboriginal teams and there are some all-Aboriginal teams. We helped a lot of those teams.

A lot of those teams have security—each team has its own security and we do the security outside the fence lines. It has helped to have football people who are playing in different factions working together and not having punch-ups and rows. Then we had cheer teams. They had little organising committees off each little faction in our Aboriginal community and it has actually worked. What was said on *Message from Moree* was that it was a modern-day corroboree. But it is very important, especially in Moree and with the Boomerang plight, that we back and sponsor the Boomerangs. They have a debutante ball. Even though they have never been affiliated, they are running a debutante ball for 10 debutantes. It is tonight, actually—I have to get back for it.

CHAIR—There would be a story in how you got the Boomerangs back into the competition—the negotiation of that.

Mr Estens—That is another story.

Mrs Duncan—Yes, it is.

CHAIR—This is this whole leadership issue.

Mr Estens—There is just one thing I would like to add there. People wonder why we got involved with the Boomerangs. In Moree there was a culture, with the Aboriginal community, to kick people out of jobs. All you guys have seen it. I can sit here and say to you now that there is a big culture with the Aboriginal community now to push people into jobs. We have completely turned that around. The first time I thought I was losing control was when five guys were missing. The second time was a year and a half later, when the community suddenly realised that we were putting Aboriginal people into real jobs. Staff working in an AES get hammered. It is the toughest job out there, because they just get no peace. There is no free time. Even when they go home, the community is hammering them for jobs. Aboriginal people want to work. With a lot of them we have to get the work culture going, but they absolutely want the work. Once the community realised we were getting successful, the staff came to me and said: ‘This is not worth it—we’re just getting kicked to death. We’ve had it—we’re quitting.’ Once again, I thought I had failed. The next day the Boomerangs came in, down in the face—they had lost a court case and they wanted me to help them. Nobody loved them in Moree. I said, ‘We could make this work for us both.’

Then straightaway it went on board with the Boomerangs. There was a big article on the front page of the paper: ‘Aboriginal employment strategy backs Boomerangs’. I sat down with them and worked through codes of conduct, the business plan and how we were going to handle the supporters. That is when I got on to the security and we started doing security courses. I gathered up all their records from 25 houses around Moree, brought it all into the Aboriginal Employment Strategy office and brought a lot of the Boomerang supporters. It really brought a lift from the Aboriginal community to the staff and that powered them through that next 12 months as we

were trying to change the whole culture of the Aboriginal community. It worked brilliantly. Every non-Aboriginal person in Moree thought I was completely mad at that stage.

CHAIR—This is a little bit out of left field, but in our brief here there is a response from Geoffrey Partington. Are you familiar with what he has said? You are not? We will follow that up.

Mr Estens—We generally do not worry about what people say about us.

CHAIR—This fellow I think would be very much on your team. He is an educationalist, if he is the bloke I am thinking of, from South Australia, and he would be very much on your team. He has a real issue about the state and the bureaucracy. I want to run another question past you. With respect to corporate involvement and the issues of Cape York and the Pearson approach, do you see some similarities?

Mr Estens—No. I am probably the only non-Aboriginal person involved. Our deal is clearly about pulling Aboriginal people forward and the whole Aboriginal community doing it themselves. I think, from a government point of view, there are too many trips up to Cape York and Arnhem Land by politicians having a look and feeling good about bringing a corporate thing together. The answers are, for the north and the traditional communities, backing the Aboriginal people in these rural communities. Seventy-five per cent of Aboriginal people live in rural Australia. Of those, 75 per cent are under 25. There is a real crisis developing out there.

It is absolutely critical that we get units like ours going as fast as possible. Governments and the bureaucrats should be backing us far harder than they are now. If we can get these rural community people moving forward, they are the people that are best placed to help the traditional communities more. They understand them. To me it is easy to fix Aboriginal employment in these towns where there are jobs. It is easy to fix. The Aboriginal people believe in these communities but it is clearly about them doing it. As I said earlier, the whole program in Moree has been a big game of patience. It is about reading the community as you go. I could not afford to get too far ahead of them. At times now, I get a lot of non-Aboriginal people wanting to come in and help and we have to beat them out. We get a lot of state government bureaucracy wanting to come in and latch on to the Aboriginal Employment Strategy and help them and that is all wrong. We will use them when we are ready to use them but, clearly, you have to keep drawing on and keep building the Aboriginal community. They have to do it and that has been the success of the strategy. I spend time beating people out.

It is critical I get a small bureaucracy going—a team built around Cathy—so that it lasts into the future. I am absolutely confident that it will last. A lot of people say to me, ‘Dick, when you go it will fall,’ and that is clearly not right. These people are just as good as you and me; they learn and they understand it. Cathy is probably the only person out there that fully understands how it all works. It is interesting; I had a white headmaster working with us, really successful, who is 43. He worked with us for a year. He is still a board member but he still clearly does not understand how it all works. I would love to employ a few Aboriginal people who have a degree in human psychology; I know there are a couple at the University of Wollongong in that area. It is a real psychological game plan that we drive by. It is how we impact on the Aboriginal community and how we impact on the non-Aboriginal community—a lot of the things we do leave people wondering but it works.

CHAIR—You have a board of 11, I understand, and a minimum of six must be Aboriginal.

Mr Estens—I would like to drop back. Essentially, Cathy and I drive the whole program at this stage. At some stage in the future, we probably need to broaden the board with Aboriginal people who live away from Moree. The board will always need to have a majority of Aboriginal people on it because they are clearly the leaders. I would like to think that in the future, as I let go of the whole program, they can sit around the table and decide which businesspeople—and that is what they will be looking for around these rural towns—they want on their board to give them a hand to drive the AES into the future. I have no doubts that the program will work. It is important that as fast as possible I can get six or eight units out there.

What are doing is really putting value back in the name of Aboriginal businesses, because in non-Aboriginal Australia there are clearly too many people at the moment who, the moment you mention an Aboriginal organisation, think straight into ATSIC and straight into land councils. It is really not their fault that non-Aboriginal people have put those structures out there that they have to operate in, and people have clearly lost confidence with Aboriginal people's ability to deliver themselves. We are essentially using younger Aboriginal people, who are clearly pissed off with those structures, clearly not happy about them. You have got real elders issues and things that become involved, and younger people cannot step in and take away from that. So essentially in the AES we are using younger Aboriginal people. They are psychologically less threatening to businesses. We do not get into debates about past wrongs. We are here to focus on the future and to get it right for the people.

Clearly what I want to do is grow out the model and try to keep control of it for a while yet, before the bureaucracy tries to let other communities copy what we are doing, destroy what we have built so far and get it wrong, because plenty of people have tried and failed. We are in the process of moving whole towns in positive directions now. That is all I would like to add.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Ms HOARE—I would like to ask a final question, if I may. It is a question that I usually ask administrators and deliverers of CDEP programs: why are Aboriginal businesses relying on CDEP? I was just flipping through our briefing papers, and I think we are going to be seeing one later on this afternoon. There is a lawn-mowing business, there is an aged and frail home care service and a multipurpose centre for aged and frail. They are businesses, but they are CDEP.

Mr Estens—That is old style; we are new style.

Mrs Duncan—I think it is just, as Dick was saying, a lack of confidence in ATSIC, in the name. There are structures all over the state that have let other people down. I do not like to compare us to CDEP and I do not like to comment on CDEP, because I know there are a lot of reviews and people will think that AES is competitive with CDEP because we fit outside Job Network and now we have become competitive with CDEP. Barriekneal and Lightning Ridge seems to me to be one; and I do not know anything about Dubbo CDEP as far as their enterprises. In my western area, Lightning Ridge had petrol stations and things like that. Moree has lawn mowing, and it has a mechanics business, but the problem we have is that it is not run by business, it is run by Aboriginal people. We are only just getting into the business world ourselves and understanding the commercial world. You guys have been in it most of your lives;

your fathers breed you to go into commercial worlds—no disrespect. They talk to you about work, they talk to you about business. Work ethics are instilled. How do you get business skills—whether you talk about old Aboriginal people or young Aboriginal people—when you have never been in a world of business? The word ‘commercial’ is not around in those structures.

In our businesses, our attitude is that we are sick of Abstudy treadmills—we want a coffee shop; we want food. Aboriginal people are good at food, but we want them to own it. We want the arts and craft area; the Kamilaroi people are wood carvers. We have not had our men carving for a long time and we want to look at carving and furniture manufacturing—things like that. We have Indigenous people who are coming to us now who are not in the CDEP structure but are in the structure of enterprise loans from ATSIC and NEIS schemes and all those things, and they are failing them. They are going to our white businesspeople and saying, ‘What do we do?’ But with the structures around them, they have never been taught things from bookkeeping to marketing to how to sell your business. You cannot just be black and sit back—this is nothing about the CDEP thing.

We have got a guy running our security business—he is one of our workers and this is something that hopefully will take off as an enterprise—and I said to him the other day, ‘You are Aboriginal; that means you have got to work twice as hard.’ I said, ‘You need to put an image into the white world.’ The other thing was: he let out all these quotes for these people for security, and he is waiting for them to ring him back. I said: ‘That is a typical attitude. Get off your arse’—don’t report that; I’m not allowed to say that word but I need to say it—‘get off your bum, go out and follow that bloke up. Get your tie and your suit on, ring him up, take your business card, and go out and say, “Did you get my quote?” or “What did you think?”’ In the business world you have to be a go-getter. You have got to get out there and market what you are selling; you have got to go and find your clientele.

It is the same as when we opened our enterprise next door. I do not want it to be a white elephant, black elephant or whatever. We have had too many of them in our past. We went to AusIndustry, we went to Austrade, we have talked to the likes of John Moriarty and his wife, Ros. We are not half-baking this place. We had funding to do it over 12 months ago, and we are still going through processes to make sure that when we go about setting it up, and when it is set up, these enterprises are not like what I have seen in my town. Ten years ago we had a couple of Aboriginal businesses uptown. We have not had one since. I worked in one as a young girl when I finished school. I worked in a boutique. I saw a woman who had all the commitment and the passion to do it but no understanding of the business world. So I do not know how you answer that.

Mr Estens—I will put it to you very simply: community organisations are only as good as their weakest people. Everyone owns a community organisation. If you have people in there with weak points, they have got to have a say and they are going to be able to do things their way which are quite wrong and that drags everything down. It surprised me a bit in working with my team that in private business you worked to people’s strengths. If we work to people’s weaknesses we go broke. Aboriginal community people are really good at flaring each other’s weaknesses. So the whole psychology of the AES is to get that teamwork going where everybody works to people’s strengths and covers people’s weaknesses. It is not normal thinking in Aboriginal community organisations—Cathy could probably speak to it now—but it is the psychology that we have developed. Do you want to add something, Cathy?

Mrs Duncan—No. You said it quite well.

Mr Estens—That is what it is all about—a business approach.

Mrs Duncan—You have said it better than I was trying to.

CHAIR—I need to ask this and I have been reminded by my secretary. You have touched on it and it is in the *Hansard* record. It is the issue of the government and how it responds. I cannot agree with you more about the frustration of, say, the Job Network or I could talk about CDEP—

Mr Estens—Do you want me tell you what I have said to the deputy secretary of the department?

CHAIR—where people are parked—say in Parkes, Mr Cobb. I believe they are parked there in perpetuity. There is no movement forward into the real job market et cetera. There are all those sorts of issues. In three months time we have to say to government: ‘We see all the failures and all the failings.’ But what would you do to government and particularly the bureaucracy? How would you tackle that? We want it on the record.

Mr Estens—I think I have finally won with the bureaucracy. I had a hard talk to the deputy secretary of the department. All this year nearly 100 per cent of my time has been spent working on the Aboriginal Employment Strategy. I knew this year had to be the breakthrough year. I was sick of the lip service. Ever since *Message From Moree* came out we have been building overwhelming forces in rural Australia. We have addressed New South Wales farmers and we have addressed other towns. Cathy and I have to go off somewhere next week. We are doing a lot of work to build overwhelming forces, as I said to Bob Correll, the deputy secretary of the department, so that I could crush his bloody department.

They sort of capitulated. I told him I was taking the Colin Powell approach and the George Bush approach, where I was giving him seven days to surrender and there was going to be no black and white. They rang me back on day six. Tony rang me three hours later to pat me on the back because I had broken through to them. I gave him a letter to the secretary of the department which had one sentence on it: Aboriginal employment becomes an intractable problem when managed by ignorant people. That was clearly the attitude in the department.

They powered back on Cathy and I in the next meeting so I got an article out in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which did a browbeat onto the bureaucrats. They finally capitulated again the other day. I could not believe it when the secretary of the department at the corporate leaders’ dinner in Canberra not two weeks ago said to me: ‘Dick, we’ve seen the light. We have underspent on Aboriginal employment in the last few years. We now know we have to do a better job on it.’ So I think we have won with them.

They have said that they are doing a review on us. They do not want us to do anymore employment strategies after Dubbo until the review has happened, but in the next 12 months I really want to assemble a small corporate team of young Aboriginal people. I can drive it all to the next level now. They think I can get them on board and train them in five minutes. It is clearly going to take me a year or two to train that crew up. I would like to move on that sooner rather than later for all these other communities that are demanding that we go in there. I say to

them that all that they can do is write a letter to the department and ask them, 'Can we get a unit set up in our town?' There are a lot of communities out here with Aboriginal people going nowhere at the moment. To me it is not an intractable problem; it is a reasonably easy one to fix. We have a good game plan. We have to get some resources in here so we can get out and attack the problem.

CHAIR—Do you have a comment about the levels of government—Commonwealth, state et cetera?

Mr Estens—The state has not been a great hope to us, except I had a really good meeting with Watkins. He has clearly seen what we have done in Moree, and we have halved crime. He gave us \$11,000 the other day—which is a pittance—to help us on the security side on preempting. We all want more police walking the beat, but more police walking the beat is not the answer. All I want to be able to do is have Aboriginal security teams walking the beat. It is about the mob looking after the mob; it is not about police looking after the mob. We can put an Aboriginal security guy out there for 20 bucks an hour. What does it cost to put a cop out there—\$200 an hour? Every now and then we do a browbeat and a beat-up about police not being on the street, you get them walking for a week and then they disappear on us again. We can put people out there 100 per cent of the time. In Moree I would love to somehow get money just to have two walking the streets. If you could get businesses to kick in, we could reduce shoplifting, because as the pack hits the town clearly our guys with two-way radios can interact with that pack, loosen them and push them into a direction. We could clearly do that in Dubbo if we could get funding.

We have had really good meetings. We have had Roger Corbett from Woolies come in. He was amazed that we have 16 people in the Woolworths store in Moree; we probably have a dozen in at Coles. They say they are the only big stores with large numbers of Aboriginal people working in them. We had John McFarlane come in from the ANZ Bank and Cathy sat down and talked him through a school based traineeship in the bank. He has made a commitment to put a school based traineeship in every rural bank in Australia, so we have helped there. We still had to sack a guy the other day because we are getting these major breakthroughs because our performance on jobs dropped in Moree, and that pisses us off.

Mrs Duncan—There is no jobs growth for blackfellas.

Mr Estens—We had a meeting in Tamworth the other day. We had a meeting with the Commonwealth Bank and they are really interested in taking up on that same program. We have had a good talk to the NRMA. They are clearly interested in coming in and backing us now. I have a young Aboriginal girl we could put onboard. I do not have the funds to fund her yet, but she is onboard. We know we have to get into private fundraising. The bureaucrats want us to give them a program of how we are going to capacity build in the community. We are never quite sure how we are going to capacity build. We get in here, we unleash the forces and then we go in the direction of the forces. Bureaucrats have trouble funding us on those issues. We want to get a small private fundraising team.

CHAIR—'Risk averse,' they say.

Mr Estens—Yes. The Fred Hollows Foundation, who I link in very well with, are going to help us to train an Aboriginal fundraising team so we can get the 1.9 million bridge walkers supporting us. At the moment we are still two teams of six, but we have achieved a lot. We need to have 100 teams of six out there, then we will be making a real difference.

CHAIR—Cathy, did you want to say any last words?

Mrs Duncan—No.

Mr Estens—Jess, do you want to say anything?

CHAIR—I was going to congratulate Jessica. I think she has done pretty well, hasn't she, listening to us?

Mr Estens—She has had to listen to us all the way down here too.

CHAIR—Well done, Jessica. I thank you very much, Cathy Duncan and Dick Estens. Your contribution is very much appreciated.

Mr Estens—We will leave you a folder of media stuff. We did not like to try and reproduce it five times. It will take you through a story. There are two best management practices there. I do not know whether you have that RA report.

Mrs Duncan—They do.

Mr Estens—We would sooner keep our copy of it then, because we have just about run out.

Mrs Duncan—We are non-profit.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. We appreciate it. You have had to travel four hours, I believe.

Mrs Duncan—We were up at 4.30 a.m. and I have to go back in another hour and a half to get to a ball. That is fine. It is called commitment. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

[11.03 a.m.]

COSTA, Mr Mark Robert, Chief Executive Officer, Public Officer, Binaal Billa Regional Enterprise Employment Training Aboriginal Inc.

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you for being with us today. Would you like to make a short opening statement and take us through the general picture?

Mr Costa—Thank you for the invitation. It is an honour to be considered to have knowledge in this area that is relevant to changes that need to be made. I have put together some basic information. Obviously, I did not have a lot of time so I have put together some basic information about some things I believe need to be stated—although some of them are blindingly obvious—from where I sit, and where our organisation sits in this community in Dubbo, about what we feel needs to be looked at and the points that need to be made.

First of all, our organisation was originally set up as an assistance organisation for the Aboriginal communities in the Binaal Billa region—that is what the BB stands for in BBREETAC—for employment coordination, training coordination, doing skills audits and working with CDEPs. CDEPs have been our core business since 1998. The head office is here in Dubbo. I have been with the organisation since 1999—it started in 1998. I became Acting CEO at the start of 2000. I was originally an enterprise development officer, developing funding applications, business plans and strategic plans. We went through some changes, which we learnt some lessons from, where some of our directors decided to take over the organisation. We had to overcome that problem, which identified the need for a good constitution—something that was a fair thing that also secured our organisation for the long-term future, especially considering that we needed to grow.

Originally DETYA was involved, then it went to DEETYA, then to DEWRSBE, and then to DEWR. So we had to evolve our organisation in order to continue to receive grant funds, in reality, at that point in time. As the departmental changes have occurred, we have had to work within those changes and philosophies. We also need to keep ahead of what is happening so that we are in a position where we can continue to operate, which is obviously what we want to do. I have sent some information through and I have a little document about BBREETAC that I can leave for you guys. It is very basic, but we hand this out in the communities because, again, even though we have been established here—

CHAIR—Could I have a look at that?

Mr Costa—Okay. I have a couple of the documents here. I am sorry if I appear to be a little scattered while I am jumping here and there.

CHAIR—No, we are appreciative of your time. Call it as you see it. I should have said at the beginning that we need just a brief three- or four-minute oversight, and then we will try and gather information from our questions. It is a discussion really.

Mr Costa—We hand this document out. The majority of our staff are Aboriginal people, all of our members are Aboriginal people, and all of our board are Aboriginal people. We are an Aboriginal organisation that is moving forward in a very tough environment, and it has not been easy. That is a little bit about us. We have had to evolve. After we had our struggle internally—with the committee doing what it did and deciding to sign up their own family as members, and then having to get the real committee recognised—we did not have an office to work from for about six months, and there were no wages. At that point I was Acting CEO. I had to pay the wages, which I did, for the remaining staff of four for that period of time. I worked from home. I had to get the bank to recognise our organisation and we had to get Fair Trading to recognise our organisation and the members. We also had to get our funding bodies to recognise our organisation and our members. All funds were obviously frozen and no-one would talk to us, and the committee was sort of dispersing at the time because of the pressure. This is all too common in Aboriginal community based organisations, purely because they are not set up correctly in the first place.

Once we overcame that major battle, which was an enormous struggle, we were able to refocus our organisation. It strengthened us in some ways. We then developed a solid constitution that evenly distributes membership throughout the Binaal Billa region. We have members from Albury, Moama and Cummeragunga. We have directors from there—currently there are nine directors in total, including three from the area around Dubbo and three from the middle region, including Wagga Wagga, Lake Cargelligo, Condo and Cowra. We developed the constitution and we have three-year terms for our board. There are three representatives from each of those areas, as such. At each AGM, one of those three directors from each region has to step down and then they can be re-elected or another person can be elected.

I am saying this because I believe it is very important that any Aboriginal organisation is set up correctly and has a constitution that secures the organisation's future. I do not want what happened to us to occur again. We nearly did not survive it. It was only through a lot of dedication. A fellow who works with me—Barry Coe, who is now a deputy CEO—stated to me when I first started with the organisation that, in order to be accepted and respected, you have got to lose 10 litres of blood. In that particular instance, after it was over and we had reformed, he said 'Yeah, you've lost your blood; now you're right.' So that was fun!

CHAIR—That brings you to where you are functioning—

Mr Costa—Yes. The point of what I am saying is that we had to then refocus. We knew employment was something that had a major impact in our communities in a lot of environments. You are talking about alcohol, drug issues, family violence and youth—there are so many things. While employment cannot cure all of those issues, in the long term it can certainly have a major impact on those issues in the communities. So we refocused. At our first meeting of board and staff after the whole thing had been concluded at the start of 2001—I had officially become CEO at that point—we decided we were going to become a Job Network agency. We had studied Job Network agencies and, at that point of time in Employment Services Contract 2, there was sustainable income that would give our organisation a future and a destiny that we could control ourselves rather than being underfunded and struggling all the time to survive.

CHAIR—We need to go to questions. Do you have one or two dot points as a concluding summary?

Mr Costa—Very briefly, I believe that Job Network 3 is good in a lot of ways, but there is one point that I would like to make, and that is that our capacity to affect employment has actually been decreased. Our staffing levels have been increased. I will give you a little example. We had a STEP contract—the same sort of situation that AES enjoys today, except our funding was far less and we did not have any operational funding as well. It was purely based on: you get someone a job, they stay 13 weeks and you get a payment—not a lot of money either, I might add. The reason we were working that way was that we had established that we could place people in employment and keep them in employment. We established a mentor program where we had trained 50 mentors in the communities—people who were respected. They worked on an independent basis to keep people in jobs, and achieved 80 per cent retention through doing that. Our program has been adopted by Job Futures nationally. I had two staff at that point working in job placement just getting people jobs. In the last seven months of that contract we had got 220 people into full-time jobs—and these were not casual, seasonal work; these were real jobs—with an 80 per cent retention rate.

We had transition from April to July and we have been in Job Network since then. Just in this ESA in Dubbo we have three officers and I have got eight full-time staff working for employment—case managing and working in Job Network. Our performance to date, in five months, is that we have achieved the average performance of any Job Network in this ESA as generalist providers. This is as a new organisation that is still nowhere near financially secure in regard to our income—we have had to struggle with that. Our percentage is as good as the generalist providers. It is still dismal in comparison to what we have achieved in the past. We have placed 24 people into work, with eight staff, in five months, as opposed to—

CHAIR—So you say that you are getting pretty good outcomes here?

Mr Costa—Yes, and it is just about to boom. We have done some major works—things that are happening right now that are going to be telephone number stuff.

CHAIR—Can we just hold it there and bring out your points as we go through questions?

Mr Costa—Certainly.

Mr JOHN COBB—Mark, you are an employment and a training company, in effect—

Mr Costa—Yes.

Mr JOHN COBB—and you work for the Job Network. Do you do that the way any normal Job Network employment agency does or do you do things a little differently from the norm?

Mr Costa—We are obviously an Aboriginal organisation and, as I stated before, our staff, board, directors and members are all Aboriginal people. Certainly, at least 80 per cent of the staff are. We developed a philosophy for placing people in employment—a successful one—when we were doing STEP, so we have tried to implement that same philosophy whilst expanding into Job Network. The philosophy is to work in a culturally appropriate manner that is successful with the

community, because you must have the community's support in order to be able to place anyone in employment. It has never been out there in the papers. We have not gone out and used all the media—maybe we should have—and, because of that, a lot of people do not know we exist. The community do.

So we have tried to apply culturally appropriate methods in our work in the Job Network. The difficulty of course is in the contractual arrangements, where you have to case manage people who are sent to you rather than go and find people as you do in STEP. We have tried to be a much more humanistic organisation in the way we treat our clients and our staff. We have a structure, of course. We are a business, we have to succeed, we have targets and all those things, but we have to try to do it in an appropriate manner so that we are not perceived as being the people who cut the community off from benefit payments, which then can negatively affect your support in the community.

Mr JOHN COBB—That is the job side. How big a part of what you do is training?

Mr Costa—Our mentor training course is being adopted by a lot of councils and organisations. At the moment there are three councils in this region and one out of the region that are negotiating with us to train the majority of their staff in mentoring—that is, Aboriginal people training non-Aboriginal people in mentoring and Aboriginal mentoring.

Mr JOHN COBB—Do you always use mentors in training?

Mr Costa—That is the training course we provide. At the moment we provide three courses in total ourselves and then we link to other RTOs, such as TAFE and other providers, for more conventional courses, where we would negotiate with those people who have some funding to deliver courses for free to the community—to people who are identified as needing that training.

Mr JOHN COBB—Do you compare yourselves to other Job Network agencies or training providers? Are you more or less successful than others? I am not asking that to be critical; I am just trying to work out how it works.

Mr Costa—I have to say this Job Network thing has been a major challenge—and, being new at it, it has been interesting. It was not getting people jobs and keeping them there that was the issue; it was more about managing the contract with the funds that were available. Our performance to date has been good but far below what I would have anticipated at this point. I think in 12 months you will see a major difference. I believe we are doing it far better. I believe that some of the changes with ESC3—such as contact with the clients every fortnight—are a great thing. That was something we were already doing, so it was not new to us, but it has certainly made a lot more Job Network agencies accountable. It makes sure that they are seeing their clients constantly and working with those clients more, because they have to contractually. I know that in the past a lot of Aboriginal people were coming to us because they were sitting in a Job Network agency, which would see them once every six months. We had one person who came to us after two years of sitting with a Job Network agency in this town. We redid her resume and she started working the following Monday; that was on a Friday.

Mr JOHN COBB—Do you find your own results vary widely from one town to another?

Mr Costa—In each town it is interesting that the principles still apply absolutely—working with the community and getting community support. You cannot get total community support, regrettably, but over a period of time you do get some respect from people who did not want to support you initially. The principles do apply, but in the three regions where we operate now—the Griffith ESA, the Wagga ESA and the Dubbo ESA—we have totally different dynamics. We have different populations, we have different factions, we have different leaders and we have different groups. Therefore, you must understand that before you can even start to be effective. That is the dynamic you must work with first.

Ms HOARE—Is Job Network your only business?

Mr Costa—No.

Ms HOARE—Did you mention that you are also CDEP?

Mr Costa—No; we are not a CDEP but do work closely with CDEPs in the region, because that really is where a lot of the clients are. I heard the comments made previously about CDEP and that people sit in CDEP—and that is dead right. I could say a whole range of things about how CDEPs could be improved. We are not a CDEP; we just work with CDEPs.

Ms HOARE—Do you get a payment if you place somebody in a CDEP?

Mr Costa—No. With Job Network, a person on CDEP has to choose and sign up to our organisation. If after a certain period of time and our having done X amount of work we then refer them into the correct category and place them in the correct way, we can actually achieve some income. Just recently we placed someone who was on CDEP and had signed with our organisation but, because of the continuum and the structure, we did not receive a cent. However, the IEC at the local CDEP had that person on its list and received \$6,600 for that placement.

Ms HOARE—You say here that you are the only Aboriginal-controlled Job Network anywhere in New South Wales west of Sydney. I know that in my region, in Newcastle, there are none. We know from travelling around, particularly in metropolitan areas, that Job Network is failing Aboriginal people. Why is that?

Mr Costa—There is a lot to that question. I will refer back quickly to the other question, because I did not answer it properly. We do a lot of other programs as well. We apply for funding and so on with different programs. We are into any kind of support service for Aboriginal people and we will apply for funding for those things—whether it is planning, training or disability services. Whatever it might be, we are willing to take it on because it helps support our organisation and service delivery to our community. I just wanted to say that.

Ms HOARE—I might go back to that shortly.

Mr Costa—Referring to how it is failing, Job Network is extremely complex. To do it right and to do it correctly contractually takes a lot of effort. That is one issue. The income generated from getting jobs for people is good but not great; it is nowhere near great and nowhere near enough, in my opinion. It depends on where someone falls; regardless of whether they are 10

years or two weeks unemployed, income is derived from where they fall in that continuum, how they are placed and the 70 per cent reduction in Centrelink payments and so on. There are quite a few aspects where you cannot say that this policy is relevant for every community across Australia, because every community is different. People have different working habits. A lot of people work casually. There are all sorts of different things. So, in the way I see it, one area where it fails and there is a problem is in the way it is paid.

Ms HOARE—That is where it fails generally, but why does it specifically fail Aboriginal people?

Mr Costa—Again it fails in many ways. One problem we have encountered concerns our being a new Job Network agency and an Aboriginal one—and here, especially—and changes brought about by the ESC 3 as to the amount of contact with clients. There is a lot more contact with clients, not only those who have been referred to us after being in the spinning wheel and coming out of BBREETAC, Job Futures, but also those who have chosen to work with our organisation. A lot of people out there do not want to work. A lot of people do want to work, but a lot of people are professionally unemployed. That is just the reality.

The perception is that people are forced to come and see us and that, if we do not see them, we are forced to put in a participation report against them as they have not arrived. Even though we would not work in a conventional manner and do that instantly, we would do that after maybe seven appointments that we have made and after attempting to contact the person. We are being blamed for the disparity between how ESC 2 and ESC 3 work—the different contacts, the different things that must be done and the mutual obligation. The perception in the Aboriginal community is that it is us who are doing that. Where it is failing is that the difference has not been explained to anybody.

I have a driver's licence and it is sort of like having changed the law with regard to speeding offences, but I was not informed. So when I got done for speeding three years ago, I then found out the new laws. Even though I had a good record, I was not aware of the new laws and I had to walk for three months. This is the same thing. We have people who are used to a certain system that they have had for the last three years. They are in the new system now and they do not know how it works. It is very difficult to work with people who do not understand the system because they have not been told about it. All they know is that we are making appointments for them.

It also fails in that a lot of the time people come to us—and they are people who really want to work; tonnes of people come in all day who want to work—walk in and, because they have not been referred to us and are not one of our clients, we cannot sign them up. They want to be with us because they are aware that we are an Aboriginal organisation and we get some results, but they cannot become our clients unless they go back to Centrelink. They are locked into the agency that they are with and they are locked in for the next three years, unless that agency says they will exit them and allow them to come over to us.

A lot of people are walking in and saying: 'Can we be with you? Can you help me to do this training? Can you help me to get my licence? Can you pay this fine?' We cannot pay anyone's fine under the new contract, but that is one of the problems: not many people have licences. The reason not many people have licences, which is a big barrier to employment, is that a lot of people have fines outstanding. That does cause a problem. I understand the principle behind the

rule that we cannot pay people's fines to get them back their licences, but that is a relevant issue. It is one of the barriers as well.

Then someone from CDEP comes in. We go and talk to them and say: 'Would you like to be with our Job Network agency? You have to be with one'—and so on. Then they say if they come on and be our client they have to participate and do additional things in order to be our client that they would not have to do if they were not with us as a Job Network agency. We say: 'After a certain period of time, you can get a job seeker account allocated against your name. We can pay for some things to help you get into employment and work with you.' Again, the problem is that it does not just happen.

Mr HAASE—The committee has been told that generally the level of literacy and numeracy skills is diminishing with Aboriginal youth. I wonder whether that is the case here in Dubbo, whether you have any information for us as to why it might be the case and whether you have any smart ideas as to how we might improve the level of literacy and numeracy.

Mr Costa—I could not comment exactly as to whether it is increasing or decreasing. I know the standard of literacy and numeracy skills of Aboriginal people leaving school is certainly far lower than that of non-Aboriginal people. As to why that is occurring, obviously there is failure somewhere in the education system that is causing this problem to occur. As to a suggestion how it can be improved, something that we have been starting to do through AASPA programs in schools is to train students—

Mr HAASE—Through what sorts of programs?

Mr Costa—Through an AASPA program: an Aboriginal Social Support and Parent Awareness Program. Money is allocated as per the number of Aboriginal students at a school. An AASPA committee is formed and they have some funds to use for the benefit of those students. Some good things certainly happen through the AASPA committee. We have trained selected individuals from schools to be mentors through a short course that is adapted to their environment. That has been very successful because the people there learn a lot themselves while doing the training about what is going to happen when they leave school, the outside world and employment.

It is no good if no-one has a goal and they are just sitting there—if this is their world and this is where they are at and they do not think about tomorrow. This is so common, especially for kids in school, and I was the same. They know that they are going to have employment or that they are not going to have employment. But if you have skills or an education, you will have something to apply those skills to when you get out—so you can go further. The mentor program has given the people who have been trained a whole new perception. The people selected to do that training have then had a major impact in the school. These are people that are leaders from the different factions and so on. That is having an impact. It is not the complete answer but it is certainly something that has been effective so far.

CHAIR—You mentioned earlier some statistics on the placements, but you had an expectation of improvement as you overcome the difficulties.

Mr Costa—Yes, as we settle in.

CHAIR—My first question is: can we have the latest statistics to the end of December?

Mr Costa—Do you mean what I would anticipate to be the number of people that we are going to place between now and then?

CHAIR—I would like to track this through and see how it is going. As we write our report, it would be nice to see how it has picked up. The statistics were not too bad. As you pointed out, they were within the state averages.

Mr Costa—Yes, the ESA averages. They are comparable to the other Job Network providers that are not specialist.

CHAIR—Within New South Wales?

Mr Costa—Within this region—within the Orana ESA.

CHAIR—Could you take that on notice?

Mr Costa—Certainly.

CHAIR—Could you give me the approximate unemployment rate for Dubbo, Griffith and Wagga?

Mr Costa—Off the top my head? I have a lot of things going through my head.

CHAIR—What would be the unemployment rate in Dubbo?

Mr Costa—Obviously there is the employment rate and the Aboriginal employment rate. Obviously we concentrate on the Aboriginal employment rate.

CHAIR—Is the general rate less than seven per cent and the Aboriginal rate less than 25 per cent? Is Dubbo at a rate of some 40 per cent?

Mr Costa—Yes, Dubbo is obviously extremely high, in comparison to the Griffith and Wagga regions that we are working in, and that is purely because of population.

CHAIR—I do not have any other questions. Would you like to make a brief closing statement?

Mr Costa—We would like to be evaluated, as time goes on, as to our performance. Our organisation would like to be given the chance to do this without other influences in the community. You do not get credibility and community respect overnight; we have been at it for five years and we have come a long way. We have not solved the problems of Dubbo and we are far from doing that. But we know how to get people jobs. We know how to change these things; that is not the hard part. Making it happen is the hard part, and it is not an easy thing. There is a large community here and there is a lot of work to do. We are completely under-resourced and that is one of the reasons. That is something that I think is very relevant. There are a lot of things

that really should be changed. I have some comments here, and I suppose I could leave with you this document that I have prepared.

CHAIR—That would be extremely helpful.

Mr Costa—They are very brief comments, because they are notes for me to read from. But if you want to seek clarification at a later stage, I can certainly provide that.

CHAIR—I thank you very much and wish you well. As we have all acknowledged, it is a very challenging task.

[11.35 a.m.]

MATTHEWS, Councillor Greg, Mayor, Dubbo City Council

MUNDINE, Councillor Warren, Deputy Mayor, Dubbo City Council

CHAIR—I welcome representatives of the Dubbo City Council here today. I compliment you, Mayor Matthews, and you, Councillor Mundine, on the fine city of Dubbo.

Councillor Matthews—Thank you.

Councillor Mundine—We work hard on it.

CHAIR—Absolutely. Some of us passed through in July/August.

Councillor Matthews—We especially organised that little wash-down for you this morning.

CHAIR—I said to Mr Cobb that I thought there was a drought out here. You were not here when we explained earlier where we come from, so I think we will do a re-run.

Mr HAASE—I am the federal member for Kalgoorlie. Kalgoorlie electorate is very sparsely populated. It has a 14 per cent Indigenous population and covers 91 per cent of Western Australia.

CHAIR—Similarly, my electorate of Grey covers 97 per cent of South Australia. It has a five or six per cent Aboriginal population, including Maralinga, Ngaanyatjarra and Pitjantjatjara.

Ms HOARE—I am the federal member for Charlton, which covers west Lake Macquarie—half the city of Lake Macquarie.

Mr JOHN COBB—I have about an 8½ per cent Indigenous population in my electorate.

CHAIR—I invite you to make a brief opening statement and then we will have an informal discussion.

Councillor Matthews—I will hand over to Councillor Mundine to make an opening statement.

Councillor Mundine—I would like to present a short opening statement talking about some of the local government issues here in Dubbo in the Indigenous community and then I will talk a bit about overall local government stuff in New South Wales and how Aboriginal communities are working in that area. It will then be up to you to question us on that. In regard to the council ourselves, at the moment we have only one full-time Aboriginal employment position which is looking at Aboriginal services. It is in the business support branch of the community service division of the council. All other council services are equally available to all sections of the community and do not necessarily target sections based on race or anything else.

The main issues for Dubbo are in regard to unemployment, crime and drug and alcohol abuse. We also have problems with parenting skills and school truancy is a major issue. Coming out those things is the issue of health. From ABS figures, just over nine per cent of Dubbo's population is Indigenous. We believe that is probably not correct because Dubbo is a large city that has a large transient population come in from western areas. It may surprise the members of the committee to learn that people see Dubbo as the big smoke and a place to come for a good time and for employment. So we have a lot of population movement backwards and forwards from places like Goodooga, Walgett, Brewarrina, Wilcannia, Broken Hill—that whole western area and the places in between. That means that some of our figures are probably skew-whiff and we probably have a larger population.

From 10 July to 12 July 2001 an Aboriginal summit was held in Dubbo—and I believe you are talking to this group later on. It was sponsored by the Binala Billa region of ATSIC. ATSIC members, politicians, service providers and community members participating in the two-day summit, which was held at the Police and Citizens Youth Club, looked at the issues of Dubbo. The Dubbo Koori Focus Group was established following that summit. They will be talking to you later, so I will move on from there.

In Dubbo we looked at having a committee to work with the Dubbo City Council. In 1996 the Aboriginal Consultative Committee was set up to improve communications between the council and the Aboriginal community. Unfortunately, it did not quite work out, due to the inability of committee members to regularly attend the meetings. It ceased to exist after a while. We tried to kick it off again in 2000 and again it failed because people were too busy and we were not able to get meetings up and running.

What council then did was to form an informal group which worked with the Dubbo Reconciliation Group on a lot of Aboriginal issues. It also set up its Community Safety Committee, which has Aboriginal representation through the community and also through the Koori Interagency Network, which is made up of different community groups and government departments. The council also works very closely with the Macquarie Area Health Service on many projects which are aimed at quite a wide range of Aboriginal issues, such as the birthing project, immunisation programs and the accreditation of Aboriginal health workers. It also includes the before school breakfast program. There are several nutrition programs here in Dubbo, because of the problem of kids going to school over in West Dubbo and here in the main CBD without having any breakfast. The council is also working with the health service on the vascular health program, focusing on nutrition and exercise. There are cooking programs about feeding the family, and fruit and vegetable programs, where council is working with the CDEP.

The other thing is employment. Unemployment for Aboriginal males in Dubbo is at about 26.8 per cent, compared to only 6.2 per cent for non-Aboriginal men. For Aboriginal women unemployment is 23.2 per cent, compared to five per cent for non-Aboriginal women in the wider community. The issues of unemployment have been linked to poor health, lower standards of education, lower standards of living, drug and alcohol problems and crimes such as assault, theft, vandalism and domestic violence. Employment is seen as one avenue for reducing many of the problems currently experienced by Aboriginal people. The Dubbo Chamber of Commerce and Industry has taken initiatives in this area to assist in promoting employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. The development of Aboriginal tourist programs and attractions which

employ Aboriginal people is one means of providing employment and at the same time encouraging Aboriginal people to be independent and entrepreneurial.

Training programs run by tertiary institutions specifically catering for Aboriginal people are also of benefit, by not only providing education but also building confidence and self-esteem. Government-funded employment training projects are beneficial initiatives and have assisted many unemployed to gain the necessary skills to gain full employment. Currently, council is working with the Orana Development and Employment Council in providing traineeships throughout Dubbo, with full assistance and mentoring being made available.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees working for the council make up 3.13 per cent of the council's total work force. Council is striving to achieve a target of nine per cent of its work force being Aboriginal, in line with the percentage of Aboriginal people in the total Dubbo population. That is part of our management planning and strategies. We have a strategy set up for council staff to report to council and look at the targets—at how they are performing and things like that. Councillors, the media and other people have an opportunity to raise issues about whether council is achieving or not achieving these things.

Local government in New South Wales is a bit different from in other states. I do not know if you have been to other states and seen how they operate. In New South Wales there is no specific delivery of service through Aboriginal organisations in local government; it is done through mainstream council systems. For the last 16 years there has been an organisation called the New South Wales Local Government Aboriginal Network, which was initiated by the Department of Local Government and the Aboriginal people themselves. The organisation started off with four elected councillors back in 1988. At the last council elections, in 1999, that figure went to 31. So the Aboriginal population of New South Wales is two per cent of the population, and in the elected arm of local government in New South Wales it is two per cent. In that regard, we have reached that goal. Through the network, there is a campaign to try to get to four or five per cent after the next local government elections, which are earmarked for March 2004, depending on what happens with amalgamations and many other issues.

That area has been very successful, but where it has been a bit of a let-down is in a couple of areas, including employment. At the Dubbo City Council we have 3.13 per cent, but we need to get to nine per cent and we are planning to do that. But other council areas have not been so successful. They have very low employment rates for Aboriginal people and, where they are employed, they are at the lower end of the scale, if you want to put it that way, with the outdoor staff. I suppose the outdoor staff would not call it that! They are in labouring jobs and things like that. We are looking at trying to get them into the indoor areas and management positions. In our policy we are looking at the overall percentage of Aboriginal employment within the council, but we are also looking at employment within each of the divisions. The divisional managers have to look around and ask why they do not have nine per cent Aboriginal employment in their area, and work on those things. This includes the IT sections, accounting, engineering et cetera. We want to start getting people into those positions. That is how our plan is operating. That is one area in local government that is lacking.

In other areas they are going quite well, such as in providing basic services like water, sewerage and kerbing and guttering to the communities. But in some areas we are still struggling in providing those services and there is still an ongoing battle about local councils providing

those basic services to Aboriginal communities. Those are some of the major issues in those areas. There is a genuine approach to capacity building in local government areas, but we are a hell of a long way down the track and we have a long way to go.

Mr JOHN COBB—Thank you both for being with us and for giving us your time. Warren, you talked about the fact that there is no direct program and about how it is worked through local government for Aboriginals. I think I understood you to say that the programs that exist are done through the organisations, rather than being a direct program from government.

Councillor Mundine—That is correct.

Mr JOHN COBB—How do you believe the cooperation between state, federal and local government has been going in trying to deal with Aboriginal services and Aboriginal problems? Is it hopeless? Does it work at all? Do you have any?

Councillor Mundine—To be honest, there are a lot of programs out there. There are a lot of good things that could be happening, and some are happening, but the issue is how it is coordinated and how people are actually working together. I think there could be better coordination between local, state and federal government and I think they could be working in a better partnership for having better outcomes. I think there is a bit of duplication in some areas and sometimes there seems to be a bit of competition in regard to who does what. I think it would be a lot better if the three tiers of government sat down and worked with the Aboriginal communities to come out with better outcomes. I think that if there were better coordination and better working partnerships with those three spheres of government and the Aboriginal community there would be much better outcomes and a better ‘bang for your buck’, rather than what I think is a bit of duplication at the moment.

Mr JOHN COBB—Do you have specific areas where it really clashes or does not work at all? One of the things we are looking at very much is cooperation between the levels of government.

Councillor Mundine—If you are looking at some of the economic development areas, like tourism, they could be a lot better. Some of these employment programs could be a lot better by working with the different spheres. It has to be all three spheres, because in western New South Wales local government is the major area for employment issues and things like that. It also has a diversity of skills which other organisations do not necessarily have, such as IT, accounting, engineering and labouring. We need to have more cooperation between the spheres of government in how we can approach these things. One of the big problems we have is actually tracking down programs, getting programs and grants and stuff like that. We have just gone through the exercise of employing a grant officer who will help us to access those types of funds.

Councillor Matthews—There is a real fragmentation right across the spectrum—not only in the cooperation of governments—and the ability for the flick pass is legendary. We have groups of people that are nobody’s problem. They move from one age group to another. They move from one sphere of employment provider to another, and there is no history of what has been happening. There is no consistency in our approach. The three levels of government definitely need to work more closely together to close the gaps that exist within the government sphere and also in employment and our welfare agencies right across the board. There is too much ability

for no particular person to be responsible for a group, a family or a community unit. Without that responsibility, things just do not happen. Everybody assumes someone else is doing it.

Councillor Mundine—On the other side you have ATSIC, ATSIS, the land councils and all those different spheres. They need to be better coordinated and working together in providing outcomes for communities. I think Murdipaaki and the region near there are looking at working together with local government and the Aboriginal communities at different levels—the land councils and ATSIC—as well as the federal and state governments. Their approach is probably a good model to look at in regard to what is happening.

Mr JOHN COBB—Just to change track slightly: when the council is trying to deliver services in Dubbo, do you do your programs differently for West Dubbo, or for the Aboriginal community, than you do for the rest?

Councillor Matthews—Yes, we do. We take that into consideration. Our overall strategy and management plan is that all of Dubbo is the same, but when it comes to, for instance, the Gordon Estate we have a street sweeper go there probably four times more regularly than any other residential area in Dubbo. We have different agreements with the CDEP for maintenance of the street that go far beyond anything that we do anywhere else in Dubbo. We take the special needs of different communities into account and we certainly take the needs of the Aboriginal community into account when we go into those areas and we try to address the issues. I have spent time with the men's group over in the Gordon centre identifying the issues that are important to them and seeing how council can alter its programs to assist with those programs. We recently, at their request, went over and did a whole heap of tree lopping. Whether or not it was council's responsibility, we got in there and did it so the street sweeper could get closer to the road. We are continually managing our programs to suit the identified needs.

Ms HOARE—Does the council employ people on CDEP?

Councillor Matthews—I am unaware of any people employed on CDEP. We work with the CDEP and we subcontract some functions to them. Waste removal in the Gordon Estate is also done by the CDEP contracted by the council.

Ms HOARE—So CDEP participants do not make up any of the 3.13 per cent of Indigenous data.

Councillor Matthews—No, not that I am aware of. I have not asked that question of my staff.

Councillor Mundine—You will find that most of those people have been long-term council employees. That figure is the permanent staff and some of them have been around for 10, 15 or 20 years. There are some very long-term staff. Only a very small percentage of that would be very recent.

Councillor Matthews—I do know that many of our Aboriginal staff did start on one program or another and then progress into full-time employment. We have quite a few in that situation.

Ms HOARE—You said that you contract out functions to CDEP programs. If the CDEP programs were not there, would you still contract out those functions?

Councillor Matthews—Possibly not. We contract to the CDEP on Aboriginal-specific areas of need. We get someone who understands the community to go in and help the community rather than just send a guy with a truck and a shovel and no cultural awareness. I understand that our use of the CDEP is cultural-specific, so I would not imagine that we would be doing that without them.

Ms HOARE—Warren, in your statement you identified the main issues for Dubbo. This is our last regional visit, I think, for this inquiry, and the main issues for Dubbo are the main impediments to capacity building that we are finding everywhere. One of the areas that we are looking at is how the different levels of government can help build capacity, which would help to knock over some of the impediments to capacity building in the initial stages. So I am interested in what local council can do but also what council think the Commonwealth can do.

Councillor Mundine—I agree entirely. I read an article the other day in the *Business Review Weekly* about what the problems in capacity building were in the Northern Territory, and they have similar problems to the ones we have here. There is a wide range of things that we have to confront. I found one thing interesting, and you have probably heard about it. There are a lot of claims about juvenile crime issues in Dubbo—mainly Aboriginal juvenile crime. When we looked at a lot of things—it was really strange—we found that a lot of kids actually fell between the gaps. They were not even registered in any schools. They were 10-, 11-, 12- and 13-year-old kids who had not even accessed the education system. You could see what the long-term problems were going to be—the statistics tell us about the problems and what is going to happen. The federal and state governments, working with local government, need to work out the division of roles—whose role it is to do this and whose role it is to do that—and not duplicate things.

We also need to get back to the basics. The basics are support for the family units—looking at how we can work with them—and addressing the education problem. Quite frankly, it has got to the stage now where we have to declare a war on the problems with education, because the failings across the system are quite glaring to us. We need to really start addressing the basic things, starting from the preschool areas, looking at literacy, numeracy and many other issues. We have to really start working back to the basic areas—the support for the family and the self-esteem of the kids—from the preschool stage. I think the statistic is that 50 per cent of the Aboriginal population of Dubbo is under the age of 15. That is a huge youth issue. We need to really focus on the issues of youth. We have large families. In fact, our Aboriginal population is growing very quickly—we must be very sexy people! We are having a lot of children. The problem is that we are having children who are having children who are having children. People are grandparents by the time they are 30, so we really have to address the underlying social issues. If we do not do that then the problem is going to continue.

The other issue, of course, is building a future for people. I interviewed a lot of people looking for employment and the kids were asking me: ‘Why do we need to be at school? Why do we need to be educated? We’re not going to get jobs at the end of the day. We’re not going to go anywhere.’ So we have to start focusing on those things: self-esteem, building employment outcomes for people and building a future for them. Unfortunately in some of the communities in western New South Wales there is a drop in population and a drop in economic futures for people. Where the white people pack up and leave, the Aboriginal people stay in large numbers and we have to start looking at how we define employment and work with them to build

enterprise development for them. We need to look at how we can do those things. There is a big challenge for that to happen.

Mr HAASE—In your opening statement, Warren, you mentioned the problems with alcohol and drugs. Are there any strategies or protocols in place here in Dubbo that address those issues?

Councillor Matthews—We have the national strategies of course, but the safety committee has come up with a crime prevention plan which addresses drug and alcohol abuse. We put an alcohol-free zone into the CBD of our city. We have an overall strategy of lockouts at one o'clock at the pubs. Even though the pubs trade until five o'clock in the morning, there is an agreement that is noted on their licence that all hotels will not allow any new person into their hotel after one o'clock. This saves a lot of fighting et cetera on the street as people come and go from different pubs and stir up the existing drinkers. The effect of that is that there is not a lot of alcohol walking on the street.

I guess it sounds strange to put it that way, but we did notice that we had an issue of people transferring from one pub to another pub with a stubby in their hand. Groups of young kids—largely Aboriginal but not exclusively—were then causing problems trying to get that drink off the drinker: 'Give us a drink, mate,' or 'Lend us your bottle; you're going to the other pub,' and that sort of thing. There was quite a bit of disturbance generated by that. The reason that we put the alcohol-free zone in the CBD was to stop the availability or the potential availability of open containers moving about late at night. Within our powers of local government, they have been the main areas that we have approached. There are not many other areas that we have the power to control.

Councillor Mundine—As I said before, 50 per cent of our population is under 15. It was a youth problem. The safety plan that we put in place was taken to the New South Wales Attorney-General's Department and we have now received funding and are looking at a youth development officer and working with those issues. We have also worked closely with the PCYC with regard to the sorts of programs that they are now putting in place that look at deterrents and diversionary programs. We are working very closely with those programs.

Councillor Matthews—Within our crime prevention plan we have funding for a bus that will pick the kids up off the street. As they identify kids at risk who are wandering around, they can take them home or over to the Gordon centre, which will be funded for longer opening periods through this plan.

Mr HAASE—What time do the liquor outlets open?

Councillor Matthews—I am not an expert on that, I am sorry—but I did notice that the RSL here was open at seven o'clock one morning when I came past.

Mr HAASE—So it is fair to say that you do not have any particular liquor accord to address any abuse of alcohol—

Councillor Matthews—Our only accord is the lockout at one o'clock, so that there is no transfer of drinkers or new drinkers coming in after that time.

Mr HAASE—Warren, you mentioned the preschool breakfast program. Is that funded by AASPA?

Councillor Mundine—Some of it is. The Red Cross run the program at the Gordon centre and the PCYC runs the program at the PCYC.

Mr HAASE—Would you have any idea what percentage of the Indigenous children population would be given a free preschool breakfast?

Councillor Mundine—I would not know what the percentage is, but I would say it would be—

Mr HAASE—Would you say it was the majority or the minority—

Councillor Matthews—It is a large minority.

Councillor Mundine—It is a very large minority. You are probably looking at 40 or 50 kids going for it at a time.

Councillor Matthews—It varies greatly. West Dubbo Primary School had one, and that was for a large majority of their students.

Mr HAASE—Was that paid for out of AASPA funds?

Councillor Matthews—I am not sure where that was funded from. I do not know the exact numbers, but there is a large majority of kids who do call in at those—

Mr HAASE—And it is only meals; it is not clothing, showers and so forth?

Councillor Matthews—Just meals.

Mr HAASE—My final question takes a totally different tack. We have had a bit of flack about the national competition policy and how it impacts on local government. Do you have any trouble here in Dubbo that you would like to comment on, especially as it impinges on your call for tenderers for local contracts?

Councillor Matthews—I am unaware of any direct problem with the national competition policy as far as Dubbo is concerned. We did have initial issues, but that was prior to me even being a councillor—it was a big issue then, but we seem to have worked through it and be working within the system.

Mr HAASE—I am sure that is reassuring for some people.

CHAIR—That just about wraps us up. I have got two or three things I would like to reiterate. I would like to talk about the perception of local government by Aboriginal people and Aboriginal organisations. It has been my experience over the years that from time to time Aboriginal organisations seem to have a go at local government. They have a go at federal government too. But what do you think? I should add that it has been my experience that I see

more and more Aboriginal people participating in local government. In other words, the general question is: where are we at with local government and Aboriginal issues?

Councillor Matthews—The problem is broader than just with Aboriginal people and organisations. I know we are here to talk specifically about Aboriginal perceptions, but the perception of the community is that local government is there in their way until they need us to help them. Before I became a councillor my perception was, ‘What do they do?’ Now, as mayor, I have some idea of what they do, but do not ask me. It is a broad problem in that people do not see the programs there. We do a lot of community consultation—we spend our time out there trying to talk with groups and people yet people still do not know why we are there or what we are doing. It is only when there is an issue that is a specific problem and they come to you with it that they realise that there is some help available. I do not know how you would fix that on any level of government—I believe it is the same with all governments; everyone pretty much ignores them until the government gets in their way or they need some help. I am at a bit of a loss.

Obviously, with Warren on our council and as deputy mayor we do have contacts with Aboriginal networks that we would not otherwise have, and Dubbo does have a fair understanding of that. We do have quite a few Aboriginal people on different committees, but the fragmentation of not only government services but also the Aboriginal community is an issue in Dubbo. If you get one group of elders giving you direction you are immediately putting off another group somewhere else because they see you as taking sides or playing favourites. We treat the Aboriginal community as a single community—I do not believe that it is a single community and it is not a single problem; obviously, there are very many areas where they identify together but there are very many areas where they do not. I cannot get a handle on your question.

CHAIR—That is a pretty fair answer. I wanted to have a bit of a go at it. The broader question is how Aboriginal people and the community generally relate to government and what the issue is for government at all levels about how we actually react as well as we can.

Councillor Mundine—There is a bit more on that in relation to the conflict areas. There was always a big debate about the FAGs grants and how they are divided up and sent out. There have been arguments because there is a provision in the FAGs Scheme for Aboriginal groups but the grants they are giving out are given out for councils to use as they please, so that has always been a contentious area, with people asking, ‘Okay, they are receiving money; what are they actually spending it on for Aboriginal people?’ The other issue, of course, is that in NSW because of the land rights act, which says land is transferred over to Aboriginal communities as vacant crown land, which is not rateable. This council does not do it, but other councils actually charge rates on undeveloped land, and that is a contentious area in that they have land that they did not charge rates on before but do now—it is just a vacant block of land, and some of it is like a goat track hanging off the side of a mountain. So there are a lot of arguments over that.

New South Wales just went through a rating battle over rating exemptions for Aboriginal land. I think that battle is still going on in regard to that. As to the provision of services to Aboriginal land, because of the land rights act, some councils have taken the view that it is private land and, therefore, they cannot go in there and provide those services. So that has also been a very contentious area and big arguments have come out of that.

CHAIR—That is a really important point. I remember when I used to be down at Wentworth years ago and this sort of issue arose about the land tenure itself.

Councillor Mundine—Some councils have resolved those through a memorandum of understanding on providing those services. At other councils it has just been a contentious battle going on and on. So they are the arguments. Of course, there is the ongoing argument in regard to employment opportunities in those contractings. That is where you have these battles in local government. In some areas, local government has been very good. We are fortunate in one sense, in that we actually do not have a mission with people living on it, whereas other towns do. That is where you get those big battles of service provision.

CHAIR—I am reading a piece that was in the *Sydney Morning Herald* back at the end of May. It makes a really good point about your beliefs about governance and how important it is to have sound governance. That just jumps out at you off the page. It takes the opportunity to mention the importance of good governance and that the basics of good governance are to give everything an opportunity to work as well as it can.

Councillor Mundine—It is a major issue within our communities. My personal opinion is that we are bit overgoverned. There are 110,000 Aboriginal people in New South Wales and we have 120 land councils. Then we have ATSIC and other bodies. I think federal and state governments need to look at whether we need federal and state government Aboriginal bodies. Why can't one Indigenous body represent one area, be recognised by the federal and state governments and be funded accordingly? That would do away with a lot of duplication and money could be better spent. That is one area where I think state and federal governments need to sit down and openly talk with the Aboriginal communities about having this recognition.

The other thing is I think there are too many different Aboriginal organisations fighting over a very limited amount of funding. Housing is a good example of that. You go to some towns and there are five or six housing companies in the town. That to me is just nonsense. The other thing is the importance of governance. When you look at a lot of our problems and issues, they are not so much structural things—they are in regard to how an organisation's governance actually operates. You only have only to look at the New South Wales land council. That is going through a few problems at the moment after an investigation report there. You only have to look at the issues that happened with ATSIC. I think that, if we can look at the area of governance and work with Aboriginal communities to improve that, we will resolve a lot of problems and end up getting a lot of good outcomes. I think the core to the operation of our communities is that we need to address that governance issue.

CHAIR—My last question is following on a little bit in this governance vein. It is about Murdipaaki and COAG trials, which you would be aware of. The mayor has touched on this too. This fine balance between respecting specific groups and operations, if you like, yet getting a cooperative arrangement across a region that, hypothetically or in reality, Murdipaaki is perhaps aiming towards is a difficult area, but I would just appreciate a view about Murdipaaki and about the COAG, if you have one. That would be useful.

Councillor Mundine—I think Murdipaaki is moving in the right direction. I think a lot of work still needs to be done, and having a reasonable approach to things is a better way for it to happen, as is getting partnership agreements with the local, state and federal governments in

those areas. That alludes to my first comment—that we need to stop local government having an Aboriginal body, state government having an Aboriginal body and federal government having an Aboriginal body. We need to have one body that is representative of Aboriginal people for that area. Then the federal, state and local governments will know who they need to go to and deal with for outcomes and benefits for those communities. I like that idea. That idea of the Murdipaaki, of course, came out of the Torres Strait Regional Authority, and that is the model that they are looking at and approaching. That is a very good model for us to move forward on.

In that way, there could be a lot of expenditure. I do not think the issue—and I agree with one of your comments in the paper—is one of finance. It is getting back to how we can better spend our money and better organise ourselves to get outcomes that are of benefit to our communities. The push needs to be to get us off the welfare system and into the economy. I support a few contentious areas, like moving towards private enterprise. I am a great supporter of Aboriginal communities moving into those areas rather than having community organisations acting as private enterprise, because I think the record of that is that it has not been successful. We need to encourage young Aboriginal people—and even old buggers like me—to come through and be active in that enterprise and private sector area, and we need to do a lot more work on it.

One of the things which I fully support is the federal government's approach with regard to cadetships. It was a very good idea to encourage young Aboriginals to go through universities and encourage large corporations to take those people up to train them as middle managers who can then, on their merits, work their way up through the organisations. That was a very good idea. It was also in a language that private enterprise and large corporations understood. They do cadetships all the time. And it was easy for Aboriginal people to then fit into that scheme. Of course, the big challenge for western New South Wales and, I suppose, other areas is going to be the small business sector. We need to encourage more Aboriginal people into that sector and encourage the small business sector to take them on.

CHAIR—We very much appreciate your appearance. Thank you very much. It has been a very valuable interchange. Off the record—but on the record—I acknowledge that we were also in Redfern. We went through the whole area and spent a day there. We had a great time. Thank you very much.

[12.18 p.m.]

DOOLAN, Mrs Patricia, Member, Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party

WILSON, Mrs Shirley, Chairperson, Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party

WRIGHT, Miss Lorraine, Member, Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party

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

Mrs Wilson—I am also the administrator at the Allira Aboriginal child-care centre.

Mrs Doolan—I am a community member of the Wiradjuri of Talbragar. I am also in full-time work with Community Services.

Miss Wright—I am also the General Manager of the Western Aboriginal Legal Service, looking at issues facing our people in the criminal justice system today.

CHAIR—Thank you. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Miss Wright—The Dubbo working party eventuated out of a summit that was held in July 2001 at the Police and Citizens Youth Club. At that summit, a number of issues were raised by Aboriginal people of this community. Those issues were: law and justice, economic issues, education, housing and accommodation, and just the wellbeing of Aboriginal people living here in Dubbo.

Also, out of that forum there were workshops held so that people could raise issues and bring those issues to the floor. That was done in consultation with government departments—to sit and listen to what the issues were and what was happening within our community. Within that, a selection of people were nominated from the floor to take these issues on board and look at how, as a community, we can address all the social issues that are involved.

Mrs Wilson—From the summit, we have all come together and nominated for the committee. It is made up of 15 representatives of community people in the Dubbo community. We are all Aboriginal people, and it is made up of both men and women. At the moment we are trying to get all our terms of reference and everything else in order to run the organisation. We have also started to have meetings within the community with the youth, the women and the men to find out their issues as well. That is going well. We are only a new body. We are trying to deal with issues in the community that are hardest to address. There are lots of issues and a lot of groups and their needs to try to satisfy. We are going along steady, but we are going along okay.

Mrs Doolan—I would just like to note for the record that I am actually appearing as a community person and not a DOCS person today. We had a women's gathering in Dubbo recently—on the 16th—which was an information day for women who would not normally access information that is available to them. Several things have come out of that. We are

actually meeting on Tuesday to finalise the report, but in the interim some things have come up from the youths in relation to the youth meetings that we had to try to set up a youth forum—which we have done. The youth forum is to be held on 18 December. Out of that have come some referrals with regard to counselling and wellbeing. We have already referred some young people who are at risk and who could be potential victims of breaking the law. The forum has been involved with trying to get someone to put something in place to address some of their emotional and social issues.

We have got a workshop planned for them this month. They will be working with our local community partners on 18 November. A set target group of people in the 12- to 25-year-old age group will start looking at the issues I just mentioned. We are hoping that that will be an ongoing 12-month program but our problem, as always, is money. As you are parliamentarians, I am going to hit you for some money because that is what we do not have. At this point in time, a lot of our groups work with no money. I have been working closely with two of the main groups in Dubbo. One of those groups is in West Dubbo—I am told you are going to speak with them this afternoon at the Gordon centre—and the other is the mother's group in east Dubbo. Those women formed their groups in relation to the petition that was circulated in Dubbo, which collected some 11,000 signatures in relation to kids walking the streets. Out of that have come positives—these mothers have formed groups to try to address those issues themselves. They will talk about the Gordon centre later.

I know you will not get a chance to see the other group, but they have also done some really positive things. Just recently—on the weekend—they had the *Deadly Vibes* people here for a three-on-three sporting event held at the Dubbo Sports World complex, which was a free event for all children in Dubbo, but predominantly Aboriginal kids. It was really successful, and the reason it was successful was that it was no charge. For any of our kids to get into sporting events the fee for joining is pretty high and a lot of kids are eliminated from that. But they were at this event. One of the things that came out of it—I feel, as a worker in the community—is that they had 12 volunteers that included mothers from both those groups I have mentioned. So those are the positives in response to that petition that was circulating back in August. Out of that we have since been meeting with the crime prevention officer and a sportsperson to try and look at issues around young people, because they are often being left out. Thanks.

Miss Wright—I will take that just a bit further. As the mayor said, there is a youth officer working with the council at the moment. We are looking closely at what they are doing within the schools and things like that as well, because we are all working to the same focus and we all want the one outcome. So, instead of all going in different stages and doing all our different things, we are all going to take a more coordinated approach to look at what the needs of our youth are and what it is that our youth want. We have to sit and listen to what people are saying. The fundamental of any Aboriginal community is the family structure. If that structure is broken down, whether it be of a criminal nature—dad has gone off to jail because he has committed offences—or whatever, there are all these underlying issues that nobody tends to. That is how I see it as an Aboriginal person. We are not addressing the real needs. Governments need to have a mind shift in relation to what it is out there in our communities and where our people are standing at this point in time.

Crime does not happen between nine and five, when governments open their doors from nine to five. You cannot budget for what we have in our communities, so we need to have a more

collaborative approach. We need to start working closely together to start looking at addressing all of these underlying issues. That is an area in which we have to take on that responsibility as Aboriginal people too, because at the end of the day we want employment, we want education, we want good housing, we want good health—and we are entitled to it. And this is what our people need to start looking at: making sure we are going to get there. I welcome the Dick Estens with their programs. We need to look at those sorts of programs to lift our people, to look at self-esteem and to build on what we have got within our community.

CHAIR—That is very good. Thank you. That is very valuable.

Mr JOHN COBB—I note in your submission that you concentrate very much on family bonds, for obvious reasons. I do not really suppose Dubbo is much different to anywhere else when it comes to that. If there was one issue that you would put that down to more than any other single thing, would it be alcohol?

Miss Wright—Alcohol, drugs—

Mrs Doolan—I do not think you could separate them.

Miss Wright—No. You could not separate any of it. Where there is no employment, there is no—

Mrs Wilson—Employment is a big factor.

Miss Wright—And violence is a big factor. It all rolls in together. You really cannot separate it.

Mrs Doolan—I am quite amused, actually, that the stats on unemployment have gone down—I heard that on the news last night. That does not include my people, because here in Dubbo alone people just cannot get jobs, so that affects the wellbeing and the social attitudes of a lot of people.

Mr JOHN COBB—I totally agree that employment is a key issue—we have had two employment groups here this morning—but that is going to take time. I am wondering if we have got that much time to deal with the violence side of it. The time it is going to take us to solve the employment problem is too long a period to have to deal with the violence.

Mrs Wilson—One of the things that came out of the seminar regarding domestic violence was a safe house. That is what we need in our community—a safe house. The other issue about domestic violence is that the women's refuge here is totally booked out; you cannot get in there. They would like to see the perpetrator, meaning the male, taken from the house instead of the mother and the child. The child and the mother could remain in a safe environment and the guy could be taken from the house and not put in jail but put in a safe place as well. He could recuperate overnight and deal with what has happened the next day, because it is usually related to either drugs or alcohol. Wouldn't you agree?

Mrs Doolan—Absolutely.

Mrs Wilson—It would mean not always taking our men off and chucking them in jail—do you know what I mean?

Mrs Doolan—Or taking our kids.

Mrs Wilson—It would mean taking them out of the environment that they are in for the night, and putting them in a safe house as well. They might be able to get some counselling the next day and talk about what issues they have got and what has triggered the domestic violence in the house.

Ms HOARE—Who is going to do that?

Mrs Wilson—If you give me the money, I will do it.

Ms HOARE—Are his peers going to do it? Or are his peers doing exactly the same thing in their own homes? What I am asking is: rather than needing safe houses and refuges and needing people to take the perpetrators away, how are we going to have it not happen?

Mr JOHN COBB—How are you going to make that work—that is what you are really asking, aren't you?

Ms HOARE—Yes.

Mr JOHN COBB—You have obviously thought this through a bit. How would you practically—

Mrs Wilson—Get everyone involved who has a role to play in that area, because at the moment I feel that is where everything is falling down. People who have the responsibility to look after health issues and drug and alcohol issues are not dealing with them and they are not consulting correctly with communities on ways that that should happen and that they should deliver the service.

Miss Wright—We also need to start looking at legislation and getting more political too in relation to what our needs are. I do not support domestic violence for one minute, but at the end is the criminal charge and what the severity of that is. We should be saying to people, 'Let's look at time out for mum and dad,' if there is domestic violence or whatever it may be, and then start saying, 'What's wrong with you; what's the matter?' We need to sit down and talk to people; sit down and say to people, 'What do you want me to do to help you?' They are all commonsense approaches. It does not need to be about all this money and that type of thing; all you need is to have some commonsense or put some simple processes in place to let that happen.

Mr JOHN COBB—I thought Shirley's idea of removing the man, rather than the family, and putting him in a halfway house or whatever for the night was a great idea. Like my colleague, I am wondering who would do that. Who would actually do it?

Mrs Doolan—The community itself.

Mr JOHN COBB—Obviously the police could not, because things are a bit more black and white for them; they either arrest you or they do not.

Mrs Wilson—That is right.

Mr JOHN COBB—We would actually have to have some function within the community to make it happen.

Mrs Wilson—It is in the summit papers so, therefore, the working party would have to take it on board to look at that area. But to me, that is a more commonsense approach than locking our people up for the night. The police sometimes pick our men up from a domestic violence situation and take them over the road or take them to another relative, so why not take them for the night and put them in a safe house and given them counselling the next day and look after them a little bit better? Our jails are filled with our people and it is unreal if that is the only way to go.

Mr JOHN COBB—Is this something the group is working on?

Mrs Doolan—It is happening in communities. The kinship structure is always there. The problem is that a lot of the programs are in organisations where the guidelines and whatever are too rigid, and a lot of the guys will not go there. We need a community based organisation run by our own people to provide the kind of service that is in touch with the cultural issues. In this community alone, we have got 14 different dialects, and in West Dubbo we have got tribes from all over. When you get all those tribes together, you need to be conversant with the kinship structure—and that is not happening with a lot of the service providers. If there were a community based organisation run by community people to provide those programs—including social wellbeing and looking at how you get from A to J, which is a long road, we know—and working around cultural guidelines, then we are looking towards long-term outcomes. I agree with you: it does not happen overnight.

Mr JOHN COBB—In Queensland, for example, they have—what are they? Justice—

CHAIR—Justice action group?

Mr JOHN COBB—They are local—

Mrs Doolan—We have circle sentencing here, and that appears to be working. We are getting more and more elders involved in that. That is not my brief, but I know it is working. There are more and more community people getting involved in that circle sentencing. When it first came to Dubbo and people were talking about it, it was a no-no. People just did not want to go there—mainly in fear of the repercussions. But now people are saying, ‘This is working for our people.’ So that is one thing, and that is for a certain target group. The other thing is that there are men’s groups forming in various parts of the city. I mentioned east and west. That is already happening, and it is governed by the people who live in that community. I should also say that it is not only Aboriginal people; it is mixed groups. People who live in housing estates are all in the same bucket of low economic groups. So those kinds of community based things are there.

I do not know what your brief is; I was roped into this, but I am saying as a community person out there—not a DOCS person—that this is what needs to happen. People are working already, with no resources and no funds, but if it is to happen and we are to go further and take it up to J, then we certainly do need a financial commitment.

Miss Wright—I think too that the circle sentencing concept can be adapted for other programs within our community base. It gives ownership and gets people involved in the criminal justice system, whether it is the handing down of the sentencing or even just addressing those issues about why people come to circle in the first place. I guess the overall aim would be to try to cut those numbers of people so that there are not so many reoffending. That concept can be applied to any other areas, like education or employment—all those sorts of things. You could use a lot of those practical things in relation to developing the community. It is all about building blocks and all those sorts of things. We have got to utilise what we have got within and start building on that.

Mrs Doolan—I also think that cultural training has to happen to improve relationships. I will qualify that by saying that there are packages around that train people in cultural issues, about the invasion and all the rest of it. We want packages that talk about ‘How do I work with this person right here and now on the ground?’ and trying to build and cement those relationships. One example is that community-police relationships are not happening. We work hard, as high-profile women in the community, trying to bridge those gaps, but then we get an incident where it is out the door. Those kinds of things need to be worked on. If they are not worked on locally, maybe that is something you guys should put in your brief—certainly you, John. With Aboriginal issues it is not happening as far as police-community relations go. We are still getting: ‘Get in there! Get in the back of the wagon!’ There is no negotiation whatsoever. We need to have that kind of understanding. If that involves cultural training, then so be it. One guy, a contractor with the Department of Housing, said to me, ‘I have to go off to this thing called cultural training.’ I said: ‘You need to go there. Keep an open mind when you go there and then come back and talk to us.’ His attitude was: ‘Why do I need that? I’ve done that in school.’ Things have changed; it is needed. We know, from the stats, that the programs are not working, so they need to be aware of the kinship structure.

Ms HOARE—I do not have any questions but I do have one comment. You are a relatively new organisation and you are all very much across your brief, so to speak. All I would like to say is: good luck; I wish you all the best. From the commitment and dedication that you have shown here today, I know that you will go a long way with it.

Mrs Wilson—Thank you.

Mr HAASE—I was encouraged by your collective comments about the need to make change. Miss Wright, I think you made the point about the problem of the relationships between groups within communities and how that gets in the way. I have heard generally that culture is important, yet you are applauding Richard Estens’s efforts in his private enterprise approach. I asked the question earlier today, and I ask it again of your group: how do you prioritise the significance of adherence to culture and cultural ways versus the necessity for economic independence through private enterprise and rigid business and marketing practices? Can you comment on that?

Mrs Doolan—In relation to the women's gathering that just happened recently, one of the briefs was that the women should start looking at setting up their own enterprise and forming a cooperative. My response to that, working with the women's groups out in the community, was that they should not, because we are not at that stage. We need to ensure that the information is not just for a select group but that it gets out to the wider community, and from there we can start building on the kinship and cultural structures, using the elders in the group. I would not see us forming a co-op just yet. There are women like ourselves who are out there doing lots of things, but to really start looking at our own economic base we need to skill those people and bring them to the level where they can say, 'Yes, we can do this.'

Again, we are doing that on a minor scale by working with our community partners. One example is that east Dubbo have been given three vacant blocks of land. They are going to start putting in a native garden—a community garden—and so on. It is all community stuff but it is not based around bringing back dollars to the community; it is based on bringing that community together and looking at self-esteem. I would see it as a long-term goal, but right now we do not have that economic base out there and I, for one, would not be pushing my women to go that way just yet.

Mr HAASE—I will ask the question in a different way. I often hear people speak of cultural significance and the necessity for non-Indigenous people to have cultural training. I am fairly well informed because this is my patch, so I am conscious of the rivalry between skin groups, family groups, language groups et cetera which often gets directly in the way of economic development.

Mrs Doolan—Yes, agreed.

Mr HAASE—So I am asking the question: should we encourage the cultural aspect of the importance of family—and one family as opposed to another family—or should we be prioritising the necessity for families to cooperate with each other and share whatever vestige of economic sustainability there might be, for the betterment of the whole, and to overcome or ignore to a certain extent the significance of one family group being dominant to the exclusion of another family group within the same community?

Miss Wright—That is the whole aim of the Dubbo working party—bringing all factions and groups together, looking at the economic base again. I think that is a key element in our communities. We need to start looking at becoming self-sufficient. We need to look at employment and education. Our stats tell us today that we are not getting too many kids coming through school with school certificates or higher school certificates. Our employment stats are pretty low. We could tap into a lot of those industries, like the trades area, and start to get our people the skills required so that they can compete out in the open market. We as the Dubbo working party are committed to bringing together all those family groups, like you are saying, and those cultural differences. What we need to do as a community to move forward is to all come to that agreement and, when we do move, we all move together.

Mr HAASE—Yes. Well said.

Mrs Doolan—I think I have answered your question previously by qualifying the cultural component. I am not going back to the historical factor but looking at working with the client

where we are today. I gave you an example of the 14 different tribes here in Dubbo; how do we access these 14 different tribes? That is what I am talking about—building the cultural and kinship component of it so that a service provider does know, ‘I cannot just work with this one family group. I have to work right across.’ And I think we are doing that. I have already said that the women’s gathering has brought all the faction groups together; I saw it on the TV.

Mrs Wilson—That was positive; that was very positive.

Mrs Doolan—Yes, and it is working. The West Dubbo mothers’ group meets every Friday morning and we have the east Dubbo mothers’ group going across to meet with them, and vice versa. So that is happening already.

Miss Wright—To take it further, I strongly believe there has got to be a focus on education awareness and those sorts of things within the community. We have to think, ‘What is out there that has an impact on me as a person on the street?’ It does not matter who we are. ‘What legislation or changes are out there that will have a big impact on me as a person?’ I know our organisation does not get funded for any community awareness. We are more or less at the end, the last extreme. That is when people are facing incarceration. We are not doing anything at the front to combat any of that type of thing, and that is where we need to start putting our focus.

Mr HAASE—Just briefly, could I have a comment from each of you as to why you believe children are not attending school? It is endemic across the nation that children are not attending primary school at satisfactory levels and falling behind. It is quite obvious. With low achievement they are not very happy about going on to secondary school, they want to be away from it as much as they can and they sure as hell do not go on to tertiary education. What is the barrier—what would make young mothers keen to send their children to school?

Miss Wright—I will just give you one example. What hope has a child got when mum and dad are at home with syringes in their arms? Where is the education there? Again, I come back to education within our communities. Our people are facing this. Our people are there now, today, on drugs, alcohol and that type of thing, so what is the future? We have to now try to brighten that future for that child and start addressing those underlying issues. What are the issues in the community and how do we turn a negative into a positive? That is what we have got to get into.

Mr HAASE—How do we make people take responsibility for their own actions?

Miss Wright—And responsibility; that is exactly right.

Mr HAASE—Do the other ladies have comments to make on that?

Mrs Doolan—I think we are doing that by working with the mothers’ groups and the grandmothers. Anything that flows down through a family cycle will happen from there—just the fact that the women, in response to the petition that has been circulating in Dubbo, have taken it on board. Women with very little education on where to go and what to do—no knowledge of you people, certainly—have stood up and said, ‘Hey, they’re our kids. We want to do something about it.’ They have gone public and said that. That is happening already, but the education structure out there certainly does not meet the needs of the kids. When you get to kindergarten it is fun and it is a happy place but, when you start moving into the other levels of

education, kids do want to leave. They do not want to be there for lots of reasons. I think that what is happening right now with the review that is coming up some time at the end of the year, looking at the state system—where do we go and what is happening with kids—is a good one. That will give community people, rather than the people who work in the system, more of an opportunity to have a say. I am talking about Aboriginal education assistance, which is the first point of call for anything around Aboriginal education. They are there as an employee. If you need information, get out in the community and get it. Thank you.

Mr HAASE—It strikes me as interesting that you speak about a petition getting 11,000 signatories. I would have thought that there were a lot fewer than 11,000 Aboriginal children attending school. If 11,000 people want them to go to school, why don't they just send them?

Mrs Doolan—Sorry, it was not just about school.

Mr HAASE—Okay.

Mrs Wilson—A lot of people in the community really regretted signing the petition after they had signed it, because they had not read it correctly. That was another comment. I have a background in early childhood matters. I think that is the key issue for our kids growing up today, but also the support mechanisms need to be put into families, because our teenage mums and dads are becoming younger and younger and there is nothing there to support them or educate them on the importance of education. If they have not had it then they are not going to pass it on to their kids, so that is a big issue. Also, the structure of school is not for our kids: being stuck in classrooms all day and having teachers who do not really understand them or know how to support them—they have not got the level of expertise in that area and they let us down as well. Our comment is that our parents let us down. But there is a system out there that really needs improving and, until that is done, I do not think our children have a chance at much of an education. They are forced to go to school until they are 15, and then when they turn 15 they are out of there—it is that simple.

Mr HAASE—So are non-Indigenous children, though—it is the same system.

Miss Wright—Yes, of course they are, but there are higher levels of statistics for Aboriginal people. When you look at equity right across the board—whether it is in employment, training or business—we do not have that. I think that is the key element here. We have to bring people to a level or to a standard—raise the bar—and we have to raise our expectations as community people and community leaders as well. We are taking that information back to the community, and then it is fed up the line to us and we feed it to you guys.

Mr HAASE—Yes, there is a lot to be done—we agree on that. You have probably heard about this: in the Northbridge area of suburban Perth in Western Australia, the cappuccino strip, a much talked about curfew has been imposed on young children living in that area. Has anything been done in Dubbo with regard to a curfew on young children to address crime?

Miss Wright—Yes, there has. We have a men's group over at West Dubbo that is looking at picking up the children. The mayor has also stated that there was some funding for a bus. We are looking at those issues—why people are out there on the streets. The hours of the service at West

Dubbo, with funding, can be extended if we have problems in those areas. They are looking at night patrols and things like that as well.

Mr HAASE—Are those night patrols made up of volunteers or are these paid positions?

Miss Wright—They are voluntary at this point in time. We are out there on the ground helping to solve these issues and problems but a lack of resources is also an issue. You cannot expect people to go out and work for nothing. Those days are gone. It is the same principle if we have anybody employed in the street—or any government department or whatever it may be. We also have to give an incentive to the community to address those issues.

Mrs Doolan—I would like to issue an invitation to John, as a local MP, to start getting out there with the community groups.

CHAIR—There are a couple of questions I would like to ask. Every Australian I am sure would agree that, at the very least, we should not rest until the incarceration rates are at least commensurate with the rest of the Australian community. We know that the incarceration rates are totally unacceptable. My question is: if I say ‘diversion programs’ does that mean very much and is it happening? Can you talk about a diversion program and what it means?

Mrs Doolan—Is it happening?

CHAIR—I am talking about alcohol and drugs in terms of the courts and incarceration. You have touched on it with safe houses and bringing the male out of the house.

Miss Wright—I would like to raise an issue in the way of diversion. If you are looking at rehabilitation for our people, you need to look to the people who best know the problem—and that is us. If we send people away to rehabilitation centres, we take them out of their own environment and there are no support people there and there are no support mechanisms in place for that person.

CHAIR—Perhaps it would be useful, Lorraine, just to explain what happens now. When people go to rehab they go well away.

Miss Wright—They go to the coast—out of their environment. How can it be a good rehabilitation program when all their support people are back here? People are leaving the rehabilitation centres because they do not have that backup support. We are really not rehabilitating that person because that person comes straight back into the cycle again.

CHAIR—And when you represent that to the authorities, what response do you get? What response are you getting? I accept that you are a relatively new group—and everyone should be congratulated on the initiative—but can you give us a snapshot of the response you would get if you raised this? In defence of the people running these programs, it is not always practical to allow everybody to be in the immediate community, but what response would you get if you said that, wherever possible, the person should be in the immediate community—as the whole-of-family approach is accepted as one of the best opportunities to have some success in this very difficult area? Has that been raised? What do you think the response would be?

Miss Wright—It has been raised. We looked at this at the summit—and I will leave this paper with you as well. People were looking at, I guess, healing places. We cannot feel good about ourselves unless we are feeling good within. We have to heal within, and not only heal ourselves but also heal the mother, dad, brother and sister—the whole of that structure. That is the key element. I would say that, with rehabilitation as it is today, we are not getting the service that there should be. If we are looking at families becoming more involved and taking that responsibility or whatever it may be, we have to start with that structure first.

CHAIR—I started by talking about the diversion program. You are aware of it, but you are not aware of it as a practical resolution.

Mrs Doolan—It is not happening on the ground. One classic example is incarceration. When our boys are sent to Bathurst, quite often the families from here will pack up and move there. That relocation leads to loss of house and loss of support from back here. In the interim, the liaison people have buses. If we are talking about improving the service, they could make a bus available once a fortnight or once a month. Right now, people who are on benefits have to catch the bus down. The bus leaves here at seven in the morning. If they want to spend the day there, they have to catch the two o'clock train back to Dubbo to get back on the express service, so they only get a couple of hours there. For family support to be constant, that kind of support needs to be built in. It is not built in, and that causes a financial drain on people.

CHAIR—That demonstrates the very practical issue about where the rehabilitation and the institution are and the whole issue of distance that people in the regions know so much about.

Mrs Doolan—Absolutely. One example is that the women are trying to overcome that gap themselves at the moment by pooling together to try to get there. But that is not always practical either. They might have a car that does not work.

CHAIR—You have started this journey, and all strength to you. Congratulations. We will do our little bit. As we all know, we have a long way to go. On behalf of all of us, I thank you very much for your contribution today.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 1.02 p.m.