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STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Reference: Petrol sniffing and substance abuse in Central Australia

THURSDAY, 12 MARCH 2009

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**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
Thursday, 12 March 2009**

Members: Senator Moore (*Chair*), Senator Siewert (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Adams, Bilyk, Boyce, Carol Brown, Furner and Humphries

Substitute members: Senator Fifield for Senator Adams and Senator Crossin for Senator Carol Brown

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Barnett, Bernardi, Birmingham, Mark Bishop, Boswell, Brandis, Bob Brown, Bushby, Cameron, Cash, Colbeck, Jacinta Collins, Coonan, Cormann, Crossin, Eggleston, Ellison, Farrell, Feeney, Fielding, Fierravanti-Wells, Fifield, Fisher, Forshaw, Hanson-Young, Heffernan, Hurley, Hutchins, Johnston, Joyce, Kroger, Ludlam, Ian Macdonald, McEwen, McGauran, McLucas, Marshall, Mason, Milne, Minchin, Nash, O'Brien, Parry, Payne, Polley, Pratt, Ronaldson, Ryan, Scullion, Stephens, Sterle, Troeth, Trood, Williams, Wortley and Xenophon

Senators in attendance: Senators Bilyk, Boyce, Furner, Humphries, Moore and Siewert

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

- a. the ongoing effectiveness of the eight-point plan in combating petrol sniffing in central Australia;
- b. the extent of the roll out of Opal fuel;
- c. the delivery of youth services in affected areas;
- d. the effectiveness and adequacy of resources provided to address petrol sniffing and substance abuse in central Australia; and
- e. what more needs to be done to effectively address petrol sniffing.

WITNESSES

**BOERSIG, Dr John, Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Justice and Legal Assistance Division,
Attorney-General's Department 1**

**GILLAM, Ms Adrienne Jayne, Executive Coordinator, APY Lands, Program Performance
Group, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs..... 1**

**GOODWIN, Mr Stephen, Branch Head, Indigenous Policy Branch, Indigenous Group,
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 1**

**MOODY, Ms Donna, Group Manager, Program Performance Group, Department of Families,
Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 1**

**PODESTA, Ms Lesley, First Assistant Secretary, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Health, Department of Health and Ageing 1**

**SAASTAMOINEN, Ms Tarja Annikki, Assistant Secretary, Family Health and Wellbeing
Branch, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, Department of Health and
Ageing..... 1**

**VAUGHAN, Mr Steve, Manager, Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Strategy Unit, Department
of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 1**

Committee met at 3.36 pm

BOERSIG, Dr John, Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Justice and Legal Assistance Division, Attorney-General's Department

GILLAM, Ms Adrienne Jayne, Executive Coordinator, APY Lands, Program Performance Group, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

GOODWIN, Mr Stephen, Branch Head, Indigenous Policy Branch, Indigenous Group, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

MOODY, Ms Donna, Group Manager, Program Performance Group, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

PODESTA, Ms Lesley, First Assistant Secretary, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, Department of Health and Ageing

SAASTAMOINEN, Ms Tarja Annikki, Assistant Secretary, Family Health and Wellbeing Branch, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, Department of Health and Ageing

VAUGHAN, Mr Steve, Manager, Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Strategy Unit, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

CHAIR (Senator Moore)—Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for coming. We do appreciate the cooperation of and the work that the departments have done in this area. This is a hearing of the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs inquiry into petrol sniffing and substance abuse in Central Australia. I welcome all the officers who have joined us. As public servants you are all very experienced in the way these things operate, so you know you will not be asked questions that would be in any way confronting or put you in a difficult situation and so on. Do any of you have an opening statement you would like to make?

Ms Moody—I have an opening statement on behalf of the four agencies.

CHAIR—That would be fine, Ms Moody.

Ms Moody—As you know, there are four agencies here today, and together we have responsibility for the implementation of the Australian government petrol sniffing strategy. In 2005, petrol sniffing was endemic in Central Australia. Estimates in 2008 are that petrol sniffing in the region has dropped by as much as 95 per cent. Instead of being a chronic problem, it is now an opportunistic and episodic problem, so it still exists but not on the same scale. In the same period, the environment in Central Australia has changed considerably. Not only has the incidence of petrol sniffing decreased but different resources have also come into the region through the Northern Territory emergency response and various decisions of COAG. At the same time, some of the governance and structural arrangements in parts of the areas covered by the petrol sniffing strategy have changed—for instance, the introduction of shires into the Northern Territory.

The way we work the petrol sniffing strategy is evolving in response to that changing environment. Wherever possible, we seek to build partnerships and to link government programs. As a result, we do not depend just on funds associated with the petrol sniffing strategy; we draw on whatever programs or resources we can and work with Indigenous communities, with non-government organisations, with shires and local councils, with state governments and with the whole range of Australian government programs. We also work outside the Central Australian petrol sniffing strategy zone, and one of the challenges we have is to address outbreaks—to stop petrol sniffing in other areas before it becomes entrenched.

We would like to acknowledge the important work that state and territory governments and organisations such as CAYLUS, Bushmob and NPY Women's Council have done and continue to do in combating petrol sniffing and youth substance abuse in Central Australia. We would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Indigenous people to overcome and recover from the impacts of petrol sniffing on young people, their families and their communities.

The rollout of Opal fuel has clearly been crucial in reducing petrol sniffing. Removing intoxicating fuel from communities removes ongoing opportunities to sniff petrol and provides space and environment where recovery can take place. However, as the original designers of the petrol sniffing strategy recognised, we need to act on a broad front and for a prolonged period, which is why the strategy is a 10-year strategy and why it works across the eight-point plan: the rollout of Opal fuel; policing; legislation; building and supporting communities; treatment and rehabilitation; alternative youth services and activities; communication; and evaluation. For this reason also, the strategy is delivered by four agencies, although we work closely together on it. The four agencies represented here today have already provided a joint submission to the inquiry, and we appear here together, happy to assist the inquiry. We welcome any questions you may have.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I will start with a few questions about the nature of problems in areas around the Northern Territory. I realise the focus of our activities until now has been on the Northern Territory and I am aware of the plans we have for rollout in places like Tennant Creek and Katherine. I would like to be updated on where those plans stand, please. But I am particular keen to know what you see as the issues associated with further rollout in areas surrounding the Northern Territory, particularly in order to deal with the crossing into areas that are not covered by Opal to allow people to access the fuel and bring it back to the communities where it is now not available. In particular, I want you to comment on the legal issues you see as being necessary to overcome that problem.

Ms Moody—Senator, were you referring particularly to the rollout of Opal or the rollout of the strategy per se?

Senator HUMPHRIES—The rollout of Opal.

Ms Podesta—I will take that question, Senator. Thank you very much for the question. Shall I put in context the way Opal has been rolled out across designated communities first, and then we can talk a little bit about particular regions?

Senator HUMPHRIES—If you like, yes.

Ms Podesta—The program is very much a demand driven program, with the exception of the designated regions in the Central Australian region. For a number of years now the Department of Health and Ageing has provided that to communities who seek to substitute their fuel supplies with Opal. As of today there are approximately 120 communities and outlets providing Opal fuel across Australia in communities that service Aboriginal people. The designated region is the region that covers the tristate cross-border region. That has been quite successful. It was a different strategy with regard to Opal. Prior to a designated region being determined by government, communities elected to have Opal and it was supplied to them. The designated region was a concerted attempt by community organisations, by local government, by communities themselves, and by the state and territory governments involved and us, to cover the region with a range of strategies including Opal. There are 65 sites now receiving Opal fuel in the central desert zone and in the expanded central desert zone.

Senator HUMPHRIES—This is across South Australia?

Ms Podesta—It includes the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You say you have been supplying to communities. Communities might ask for it, but it is really the retailers of petrol in those areas that need to be involved in those decisions, isn't it? I will come later on to this question of communities or retailers in the Northern Territory that are not yet prepared to exclude the sale of ordinary fuel, but for the areas where the widening concentric circles are going out—I assume that is roughly the way it is working outside the Northern Territory—what do you see as the issues associated with that? For example, we heard when we went to South Australia about Yalata and how there was a desire there for the community to get Opal provided. I think they said they had lost their service station altogether—they do not have one at all. They wanted to be supplied with one. What are the issues necessary to make sure that those communities are served as they wish—because it is not a question of synchronising their wishes with those of the retailers?

Ms Podesta—That is exactly right, Senator. The critical issue is to ensure that there is security of supply and that there is community awareness and acceptance to have Opal in that community. Yalata is a good example of some of the logistic issues that confront some of the remote communities in achieving that wish. We have approved Yalata to receive Opal fuel, but they do not currently have a working fuel pump, as you indicated. So we have agreed to work—and we are working closely with the South Australian government—to provide funding and support for the provision of a stand-alone fuel outlet so that Opal fuel can be provided to that community. This is being trialled. We previously have not provided the funding in this program for a fuel unit, but we have recognised that, for this community to be able to achieve the provision of Opal, we need to see if it is possible to do that. So we are working with the community to look at the business opportunity that this will provide, to look at the plans that need to be put in place to make sure the community has the capacity to maintain the upkeep of that fuel unit and to make sure that the revenue that is generated is managed appropriately within that community. The South Australian government and the Ceduna Indigenous Coordination Centre are working with that community. There is currently an Indigenous Small Business Fund application to complete this work. Once this has been approved, we will undertake some work with a consultant to provide relevant skill training within that community to ensure that they are able to operate this as a business.

We are quite keen to make sure that this works, but we are also very conscious that to just install a fuel pump—without any of the prior work around viability, security, management and appropriate skills within that community to run a business involving fuel supplies—is an inappropriate way to do this. So we are working very closely with all of the partners involved in that process to make sure that the trial can be put in place in the most successful terms and then, when there is a fuel pump in that community, Opal will be the fuel that is provided to that fuel pump.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Let us turn to this question of reluctant suppliers. We have heard a number of suggestions about how to deal with those people in the Northern Territory who do not choose to supply Opal exclusively through their pumps. One suggestion includes refusing them access to the BasicsCard so that one of their income sources is cut off if they do not reciprocate with the supply of Opal fuel. The other suggestion is legislating to force them to supply only Opal, which I assume would be a matter primarily for the Northern Territory government rather than the federal government.

Ms Podesta—I am sorry; I did not hear the second part of that.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The question is whether you might be able to force people to supply only Opal by legislating—making it illegal to supply ordinary fuel in some communities. I assume that would be a decision for the Northern Territory government rather than the federal government. What is your approach to that? Do you accept, first of all, that it is still a significant problem in those communities where it is supplied—

Ms Podesta—You mean: is it a significant problem in regard to petrol sniffing itself?

Senator HUMPHRIES—Yes.

Ms Podesta—We collected baseline data when we commenced the rollout. We have done a further visit of the numbers, and I would concur with Ms Moody's opening statement. There is not now an endemic problem in regard to petrol sniffing. What we have are sporadic outbreaks. Without having undertaken the qualitative analysis of the causes of the sporadic outbreaks, there certainly does seem to be a link to boredom and school holiday periods, and also people coming from other communities who may have sniffed petrol and who encourage people to sniff petrol. But it is an incredibly positive story, I think, that we have been able to see a decrease of more than 70 per cent and in some communities, as Ms Moody said, up to 95 per cent. We are not looking at the size of the problem that we looked at previously. The original study showed that there were about 600 sniffers in this region. There are nowhere near that number now.

ACTING CHAIR (Senator Siewert)—The question was about the three communities, or the three roadhouses, that we are aware of who are not stocking Opal. We have certainly had evidence to this committee, and I have actually had it on other visits, that communities are having petrol run into them from those roadhouses. The question was about those roadhouses in particular.

Ms Podesta—I think there were two parts. I was answering the first part of it, which was whether we think that the prevalence rates are still significant and whether it is still a significant problem. I am happy to answer the question in regard to the region. There are 65 sites which are

currently supplied with Opal—65 outlets in the region—and there are nine sites in and around the designated Central Desert region that have chosen, at this point, not to supply Opal fuel. That does include four sites in the designated region and five sites around the region which could be seen to be potentially a source of supply of fuel.

Senator HUMPHRIES—It would be helpful if you named them, I think.

Ms Podesta—You wish me to name the sites in and around the region?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, please.

Ms Podesta—Okay. There is the Laramba store, Maryvale Station, Ti Tree Roadhouse, Tilmouth Well Roadhouse, Cadney Park, Jervois roadhouse, Rabbit Flat Roadhouse, Ross River Resort and the Urandangi community store.

Senator BOYCE—Does that include Mintabie?

Ms Podesta—Mintabie? Can I take that on notice and come back to you?

Senator BOYCE—Is that how it is pronounced?

Ms Podesta—Senators, one of the things that I did not say is that Adrienne Gillam, who is our APY Lands Coordinator, is here. If there is a particular question about South Australia, we can probably give you some information about that.

Senator BOYCE—So, we have nine in the Northern Territory. Can we have the same figures for South Australia and Western Australia.

Ms Podesta—I was naming the ones in the designated regions.

Senator HUMPHRIES—This is in all three jurisdictions? There are some in each of these jurisdictions?

Ms Podesta—There are, yes.

Ms Moody—Mintabie does have Opal, Senator, but it also does have regular fuel as well.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Okay.

Ms Podesta—I think you asked me if we had had discussions and what we have done with those sites.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Actually, that was not the question I asked. I realise discussions will need to be had and issues worked through, but, as Senator Siewert pointed out, I think some communities are now saying to us, ‘We have been waiting and waiting for some action here, and we are not getting it.’ Some people are certainly now urging us to take stronger action, such as depriving those roadhouses of access to the BasicsCard or even legislating to force them not to

sell the regular fuel. What is your reaction to that suggestion—(a) is it a necessary tool in your armoury and (b) are there any problems, from your point of view, in actually making that happen?

Ms Podesta—I think you are asking me to give my opinion on a potential policy option, and I am not in a position to give my personal opinion. I can certainly give you information as to what we are doing with the outlets that have chosen not to—

Senator HUMPHRIES—I will rephrase the question. Are you comfortable that you can, in fact, roll out Opal in those communities that want it without having any of those other sorts of tools that I have spoken of at your disposal?

Ms Podesta—I do not think I can answer that question either. What I can say is that there are 65 Opal outlets and there are a number of outlets who have made a decision at this time not to stock Opal. I am aware of a number of calls from community organisations who have sought other measures. It is a government decision. It is not my decision as to what is the next step forward.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I am not asking you for the government's view on this; I am asking you what the problems associated with it might be. Let's assume that it is the government's policy to make this happen and the government said to you, 'Can we stop letting particular roadhouses use the BasicsCard as a condition that we impose on them for selling regular fuel—can we connect those two things?' Would you say to them that that is possible to do or would you say it is not possible?

Ms Podesta—I might ask my colleague, who looks after the BasicsCard, to comment on that.

Ms Moody—I think there are some complex both legal and practical issues associated with that—particularly when you are dealing in the Territory, where there is mandatory income management—such as whether, if you took away the BasicsCard, that would disadvantage certain elements of the community because they cannot access services in the most convenient way. I think it is a very complex problem and not one that I am aware that we have actively explored at this time.

ACTING CHAIR—How many of the stations that you mentioned have facilities for the BasicsCard?

Ms Moody—I am sorry, I am not aware of that and I doubt that my colleagues would be.

Senator SIEWERT—Would you take that on notice? I appreciate you may not have that information, but I would have thought you could easily provide it.

Ms Moody—Yes. Can I just add a point to that? Remember that the BasicsCard is still in relatively early rollout, so we can check that now, but the BasicsCard—

Senator SIEWERT—There have been 22,000 rolled out already, as I understand it—

Ms Moody—Cards, yes.

ACTING CHAIR—That figure was given in answer to a question during estimates, I think.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Can I put it to you this way: I am going to urge my colleagues to recommend that we ask the government to explore these devices to push the issue in those communities where it is not happening, because I think the benefits are so clear. And I want to congratulate the departments concerned on having achieved so much with the rollout of Opal; it has clearly been a major success story in Indigenous policy in Australia—a really bright light in what is not always a very bright sky. But I want to make sure we keep driving those changes forward, so I think there is a good chance the committee will recommend that we look at those things to force the recalcitrants down that path. When we make that recommendation, I assume you will be asked by the minister to advise her on what she should do in response to that recommendation from the committee. I put to you as a question on notice to think about and see whether you can give us any advice about whether this is a sensible policy step to be taking towards getting further traction for this policy. That is more a statement than a question, I suppose.

Senator BILYK—Would you tell me what work is being done to find an alternative to premium and what progress has been made to date with regard to that.

Ms Podesta—We do not have any information on what work is being done with regard to an alternative to premium. It is a commercial operation and it is the company's decision whether or not to be public on that.

Senator BILYK—Sure, okay.

Ms Podesta—The reason we were all looking around is that we were thinking, 'Why don't we know we know that answer?' but it is not within our purview.

Senator BILYK—No, that is fine. I was not quite sure whether it was something that we were involved in or not. The answer may well be the same for the next question. I think there were going to be some guidelines developed for the responsible sale of premium unleaded.

Ms Saastamoinen—In consultation with the fuel industry and community organisations we have developed the guidelines for responsible sale of premium unleaded fuel. It is a voluntary code of practice and it is being printed as we speak.

Senator BILYK—So they are not yet distributed?

Ms Saastamoinen—They will be released shortly.

Senator BILYK—You said it was being done in consultation with the industry. What sort of feedback were you getting with regard to that? Bearing in mind that it is a voluntary code of practice, do they appear happy to implement it?

Ms Podesta—The fuel industry have been incredibly receptive and very responsible in regard to this and we have made sure that they complement the existing guidelines around the responsible sale of volatile substances. We think it is very positive. We have continued to periodically seek advice from industry about what options they see in regard to alternatives to

the premium. It is a commercial process from their point of view and they have chosen not to share that with us at this stage.

Senator BILYK—I would not expect them to share anything that is commercial-in-confidence but I just wondered what their overall response was. You said that they have been very positive; that is good to hear. One of the points in the eight-point plan was about communication and education around implementation. Can you just give me an update on how that is all going, please.

Ms Podesta—Is there anything in particular you want—

Senator BILYK—No—just an overview, really.

Ms Saastamoinen—What we are currently doing with the communication strategy is focusing on the communities as we do community-by-community rollout. The communication and education site is about preparing communities for the rollout of Opal and passing on information about the safe use of Opal fuel and the context in which it can be used. We are looking at revising the overarching communication strategy at the moment. That might come up with some other recommendations for doing broader based communication strategy.

Senator BILYK—Thanks. That is good.

Senator BOYCE—You mentioned, Ms Podesta, that there are 120 communities in Australia that have Opal. Could you break that down for me state by state, please.

Ms Podesta—Certainly.

Ms Saastamoinen—There are 17 in South Australia, 76 in the Northern Territory, 20 in Western Australia and seven in Queensland. That is a total of 120.

Senator BOYCE—Can we have the sites for those, please.

ACTING CHAIR—Is it possible for you to table that list now so we can have it in front of us?

Ms Saastamoinen—We have not tabled that previously on the basis that there has been some sensitivity from some communities about their wish to be part of this program. It is not about trying to withhold information from you; there is an issue about respect for privacy in some of the very small communities who have chosen to enter into the program. Do you mind if we just take some advice on that and come back to you? I know you will appreciate that some of these communities are extremely small and there has been quite a discreet decision by some of them to take up this program as it as an admission of having petrol sniffing within their communities. We have expected that confidentiality up until now.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Is it possible for us to accept the list but not arrange for it to be published? It would just be for our information.

Senator BOYCE—That would be useful.

Ms Saastamoinen—I do not have multiple copies either.

ACTING CHAIR—We can photocopy it.

Ms Podesta—I just sought confirmation from the person who works on this program every day. The reason for my reluctance is that, noting we anticipated that you would wish to have this list, we did seek permission from each one of the communities to be able to distribute this to you but we have not received a response from all of them. So it puts us in a slightly difficult position on the basis that we have sought their permission to make this publicly available if the question was asked of the department and some of them have not replied. It is a difficult ethical situation from our point of view because we did seek to get their permission to make it available to this committee, noting that you would probably want to know.

Senator BOYCE—Nevertheless, natural justice would suggest that, given we have the names of many of these communities, we should have the full names. The other point, as Senator Humphries mentioned a minute ago, is that there is public money being invested at fairly large rates into these communities. So it would seem that at the very least the committee should see the list. Whether it is published or not is another question, but our view is that it certainly should be available to the committee. I do not know, Chair, how we—

Senator HUMPHRIES—I think, if you go to the community concerned, it is obvious that they have Opal isn't it? Isn't it labelled at the bowser?

Ms Podesta—Not always. They often just have a very discreet Opal sticker which is not particularly public. There has been a decision made by elders that they would have Opal in their community. I want to reassure you, Senator, that I am not in any way trying to prevent you having this; I am just completely conscious of the fact that some of them have not agreed at the moment to do so. I will make an executive decision in that we will make this list available to you—

Senator BOYCE—Certainly on a confidential basis at this stage.

Ms Podesta—but we seek the Chair's agreement that it not be made a public list.

Senator BOYCE—That is fine. That would good, thank you. So we have that list of who has what. I think Senator Humphries asked earlier about where you were at with introducing Opal in Tennant Creek, Katherine, Kakadu, Gove, the Nullarbor, the Gulf and Cape York. Can we have a half a sentence on each one of those in terms of where you are at?

Ms Podesta—Each one of those? Okay.

Senator BOYCE—We are trying to get a sense of the status of the rollout.

Ms Podesta—Sorry, Senator, I missed the full list. But if I go through the regions—

Senator BOYCE—It is from your list on page 20 of the continued rollout: Tennant Creek, Katherine, the Nullarbor, Gove—

Ms Podesta—Shall we start with Tennant Creek?

Senator BOYCE—Yes, please.

Ms Podesta—Before we do, I think one of the things that we need to put in context here is that one of the significant logistical challenges in the rollout of Opal is the distribution points. I wanted, with your permission, to give you some information about how this managed at the moment. We might use Nhulunbuy as an example of what needs to be done to make sure that the fuel is able to get there.

Senator BOYCE—I think we have had this explained to us in fairly good depth by Northern Territory and South Australia and by BP. They had their logistics people there to explain it to us, so I do not think we need to hear the logistics side of it. I would just like a sort of, ‘It is happening now’, ‘It will happen in six months’, or ‘We are not sure when we get it happening’ type of response.

Ms Podesta—Okay. Similar to all of the sites in Northern Australia, fuel distribution to Tennant Creek is a very significant logistical challenge because the fuel is stored in bulk in Largs North, South Australia. We are working with the fuel industry to overcome that logistical challenge. It is complex. Each site requires a very tailored solution. We have undertaken consultation with service stations and local government in Tennant Creek regarding the rollout, but until that fuel distribution issue is resolved in regard to Tennant Creek, we are not able to supply Tennant Creek.

Senator BOYCE—Is distribution the only barrier, so to speak, to the rollout of Opal in Tennant Creek?

Ms Podesta—Fuel distribution is the first and major one that we are addressing.

Senator BOYCE—What about Katherine?

Ms Saastamoinen—The community of Bulman has been approved on the program and received its first delivery of Opal in July 2008. We have interim arrangements in place in Katherine, with one bowser at a fuel depot now supplying Opal fuel so it is easily available for residents and contractors travelling to nearby communities.

Senator BOYCE—But there are mixed types of petrol?

Ms Saastamoinen—Yes. We have undertaken consultation, and we are currently doing that at the moment with stakeholders for further rollout of Opal in all locations in Katherine, Mataranka and Timber Creek, including the roadhouses and communities. Again, fuel distribution is an issue around that area as well, and we are currently negotiating for other arrangements in that area. If we can resolve those distribution issues then we are expecting rollout to be completed by the end of this year.

Senator BOYCE—Have the roadhouses there indicated their intention to participate?

Ms Saastamoinen—I will double-check. Yes, they have.

Senator BOYCE—Okay, thank you. Kakadu?

Ms Saastamoinen—There is one site receiving Opal fuel in Kakadu at the moment. After we were advised of an outbreak in January 2009 in the community of Oenpelli, we commenced consultation with communities, fuel retailers, the Northern Territory government and other stakeholders regarding a more comprehensive rollout of Opal across the region. Four sites have been identified: Jabiru, Bark Hut, South Alligator and Cooida. Again, distribution is an issue there and, again, we are trying to negotiate a solution to that. If we can do that then we are expecting the rollout of the fuel by July of this year.

Senator BOYCE—That sounds like a quite prompt response there.

Ms Podesta—I think we are prompt every time, Senator. But, as I said—

Senator BOYCE—I am not suggesting it is your lack of action on the topic. I know there are some issues that are difficult to resolve. In fact, I think the BP logistics people spent about 20 minutes explaining to us about the next one, which is Gove. Where is Gove at in your terms?

Ms Podesta—Nhulunbuy; that is my favourite one, Senator. We now have a barge that goes to Nhulunbuy and we have tanks that they opened at the Rio Tinto facility. The petrol is then shipped to the service stations in Nhulunbuy. Gove is now receiving Opal fuel.

Senator BOYCE—And again we have mixed types of fuel at Gove?

Ms Podesta—There is premium fuel. As you know if there is premium we do not have a substitute for it.

Senator BOYCE—The Nullarbor?

Ms Saastamoinen—Yalata has been the main focus of the rollout of Opal on the Nullarbor. Once we have resolved issues around Yalata then the next priority will be to roll out—

Senator BOYCE—It will be easier everywhere else?

Ms Saastamoinen—Yes, absolutely.

Senator BOYCE—I am pleased to hear you call it ‘yahlata’. We had some people calling it ‘yellata’. As a Queenslander used to saying ‘Yatala’ I was have a lot of trouble with it all.

Ms Podesta—It depends which school you go to.

Senator BOYCE—And now the two that I am particularly interested in—the gulf and Cape York. Perhaps we could do the gulf first.

Ms Podesta—There are three sites receiving Opal fuel. We have Doomadgee-Mornington Island and the Doomadgee zone and we have got a number of additional sites that we are approaching to take Opal.

Senator BOYCE—So what we are saying here is that the community is half covered at the moment?

Ms Podesta—There are three sites that we have chosen at the moment and we are approaching others to encourage them to take up Opal. Once again it is a northern Australia issue about supply and being able to get the supply up there. The distribution issues are still continuing to be a challenge for us but we have been able to supply the sites that have elected to at the moment. We are negotiating with others to come on to the program.

Senator BOYCE—So you have others who want to be included in the program but cannot be because of distribution issues or you have not yet finished negotiating for their inclusion?

Ms Saastamoinen—I think it is true to say it is the latter. We have not yet finished the negotiation for their inclusion. There is a small number of additional sites around the Mornington Island-Doomadgee zone. The three sites that we have in Mornington-Doomadgee actually are servicing quite a substantial proportion of the fuel needs of such a small area.

Senator BOYCE—And Cape York?

Ms Podesta—We have not been approached as to Cape York.

Senator BOYCE—It is in your submission that it is one of the areas that you would be looking at rolling out Opal to in the future.

Ms Podesta—We have one site in Cape York and we have not received any other requests at the moment as to Cape York. We do not have high incidences at the moment of petrol sniffing in Cape York, so it has not been a priority in the same way as it has been for resolving the supply issues within the designated region and other regions where there are outbreaks. For example, because of the outbreak that we saw near Yalata it became one of a higher emphasis.

Senator BOYCE—We heard when we were in Lake Nash, which has Opal, that a number of people were going to a roadhouse just over the border in Queensland and that that roadhouse had attempted to stock Opal but been told by the distributors that that was simply not possible. Do those issues get brought to you and what do you do if they are?

Ms Saastamoinen—We have officers on the ground. We have officers based in Brisbane and in Alice Springs and often they get community feedback or reports from local stakeholders about whether there are any problems. I do not know whether or not that particular issue has been raised with our staff.

Ms Podesta—The community store in Lake Nash does receive Opal—

Senator BOYCE—Yes, I realise that, but—

Ms Podesta—Are you talking about the other retailer?

Senator BOYCE—Their concern is that people from Lake Nash are going to a roadhouse just over the border in Queensland. The woman who owns that roadhouse has sought to stock Opal

but been told by her distributors that this is not currently possible, which is quite reasonable—it is one small roadhouse. I can imagine that these people do not want to cart tankers worth of petrol. It becomes a matter of the quantity required to do it, and I appreciate all the problems associated with that. What do you do when those issues are brought to you?

Ms Podesta—We have approached the retailer in that instance. The retailer at the moment has declined to participate.

Senator BOYCE—In Queensland?

Ms Podesta—That fuel retailer has declined to participate in the program.

Senator BOYCE—Is the ‘fuel retailer’ an outlet or a distributor of petrol?

Ms Podesta—The outlet.

Senator BOYCE—So you would have assisted with the development of the logistics if they had said yes—is that what you are saying?

Ms Podesta—We do that all the time, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I just clarify something. Is the fuel retailer—I do not even know the name of it; I have forgotten it—across the border the one you are saying has declined—

Ms Podesta—That is correct, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Because we were told that they could not get access to it.

Ms Podesta—There might have been a reason that they declined that they did not disclose to us, but we approached them and they declined to participate.

Senator BOYCE—That is interesting. We had some suggestions that Mintabie was causing some problems in some ways. The availability of fuel at Mintabie, the way that key cards were being used there et cetera was causing some problems with the APY Lands and the petrol sniffing strategy. What involvement has the department had in hearing those concerns, and what has happened about that?

Ms Podesta—We have not had issues in regard to Mintabie drawn to our attention. What I can say is that we have a significant investment in the Nganampa Health service on the APY Lands, who undertake a very thorough survey every couple of years in regard to petrol sniffing. They identify any teenagers who may be involved in petrol sniffing and the treatment and support that may be required. We have not had a request in regard to Mintabie and Opal fuel as I understand.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to go back to the rollout of fuel beyond Yalata. You said that there are plans to, once it has gone to Yalata, roll it out to the other communities. When we were in South Australia they seemed positive that it was going to happen sooner rather than later, but that may just have been my interpretation of what they were saying. What is the timing for rolling it out to other communities on the west coast of South Australia?

Ms Saastamoinen—We do not have a specific time frame. As Ms Podesta said before, we are in ongoing discussions around the rollout in Yalata. We are hoping that the business plan and the project to assess the viability and the community capacity to have the fuel pump operating in Yalata will be completed in the next three or four months. Obviously, what the business plan says will influence our rollout in Yalata, and, as we are considering that, we will also consider the time frame for moving across the wider Nullarbor region as well.

Ms Podesta—It is one of those issues where, if the communities come to us and we approve it, it is relatively straightforward and it will not be a problem. The issue will be if they come to us and there are either logistics issues or management and safety and security of fuel supply issues that then need to be worked through. Without knowing what the conditions are in each one of those communities, if they are in a position to have secure fuel, they have community support and they apply, it is pretty quick. That is the way the program has run out all the way through the country, except that when we made a decision we would designate an area and then go forward and try to win hearts and minds to come onto the program, which was a little different. But where there is a voluntary wish to take up the program, we and the Indigenous Coordination Centres help to resolve logistics, security and management issues, and we—as a health department—help with fuel distribution issues, and the supply issue is relatively straightforward.

Senator SIEWERT—Do I take it from your answer, then, that these communities have not applied yet? Is that the point?

Ms Podesta—I do not believe we have any application, no.

Senator SIEWERT—So it is not just about whether Yalata comes online or not—it is actually that, at the moment, they have not applied anyway?

Ms Podesta—As far as I know, we do not have any outstanding applications in that region. I am happy to be corrected, but—

Ms Saastamoinen—No, we do not.

Senator SIEWERT—I do not want to verbal you, but they put applications in and, providing they meet the criteria that you have just outlined, they will be able to roll it out.

Ms Podesta—Absolutely, and that has been our record all the way through this. This is one of those programs where we are genuinely delighted when a community comes forward and they are able to do it. We have seen the benefits.

CHAIR—Ms Podesta, in terms of this inquiry, you would have seen the transcripts from our hearing in Adelaide a week or so ago—they are out. The major focus in the morning sessions of that hearing was concerns about Yalata. In fact, they came from NGOs who came to the hearing and who were particularly concerned that there had been delays. They were allocating that delay jointly to the state government and the federal government. It seems to me, if that is not true—and I am taking evidence, quite rightly, as you have given it—there has been a major breakdown in communication with the community itself, with the NGOs, who are very interested in this issue, and also with the media. We went into that hearing having a list of people coming to see

us, and I was frankly taken by surprise by the focus on one community—but it seems to be significant issue for South Australia. You have made it clear that there have actually been processes and that there is no clear application, and all those things, but I think there needs to be a little bit of work done to make that clear.

Ms Podesta—Yalata as a community has been approved.

CHAIR—I think the first two people who came to see us in Adelaide were specifically on Yalata, and the only interest that the media had was that community. So there seem to be some issues there, and I think it is something we need to look at.

Ms Podesta—They do not have a working fuel pump—that is the problem. Once we can resolve a working fuel pump, a business plan to manage it and to make sure it is a safe and secure supply and that the revenue is managed appropriately—

CHAIR—That seems to me to be a fairly simple message to get out there, but it is not.

Senator BOYCE—We now have this list, which is not for public release, of places that have participated in the Opal scheme. But I have noted here one roadhouse that I understood you to say had refused to participate in the Opal scheme. I am a bit confused. Should I name it?

CHAIR—Yes. If they have refused and it has been said that there is no commercial-in-confidence—

Senator BOYCE—Ms Podesta, I understood you to say that Jervois Roadhouse was one of the ones which had said they did not want to participate in the scheme. Am I wrong in saying that?

Ms Podesta—No, that is what was in my briefing. It says here ‘September 2006’. Let me just clarify. I am embarrassed. I do not know why it is in my briefing notes that it is refused. It is on this list; it is there. I will have to clarify that.

Senator BOYCE—So we can correct that to say that in fact Jervois Roadhouse joined the program in August 2006 and commenced receiving Opal fuel in September 2006. I was just a bit confused.

Ms Podesta—Thank you, Senator. We will clarify that. It is in our briefing papers that they have refused.

Senator BOYCE—So does that in fact bring us down to—

Ms Podesta—Potentially, eight, if that is correct.

Senator BOYCE—eight sites that have said they will not participate?

Ms Podesta—Depending on timing, we might be able to clarify that with our office. We do not wish to mislead; I promise. We also do not wish to have on the record a service that may well be doing the right thing. We will clarify that.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, I think you better—a very big clarification.

Ms Podesta—The gentleman who looks after the program is immediately leaving the room to do so.

Senator SIEWERT—I would like to go on to the youth services part of this program. We have had a number of submissions and we also took oral evidence from people in Alice Springs and, in particular, we also took evidence from Mission Australia who were pretty frank in admitting that they had been slow in rolling out the services and had actually put in place a number of procedures to address issues. I will ask some more questions around that later. As we understand it, under the Integrated Youth Services Project, services were rolled out into only four communities. We have talked about those four communities in the past.

Ms Moody—Youth services under that program, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I am aware that school holiday programs have been rolled out into other communities. Why were only those four communities chosen? What happens to those other communities that do not have the rollout of those integrated youth services?

Ms Moody—The first comment I would make on that is that there is a range of youth services available in communities within petrol-sniffing zones outside those ones funded by this particular program. They have subsequently been supplemented in the Northern Territory part of the zone through the Northern Territory emergency response where the department has used approximately another \$8 million of Northern Territory response money on youth related activities. The department, through other programs such as Reconnect, also funds other youth services. The Territory, state governments and local governments also have a variety of services available. Certainly, this particular program focused on four communities but there is what I would describe as a bit of a jigsaw puzzle of services across the area, funded from a variety of sources.

In terms of funding only four under this program, I guess there is constant tension: do you try to do something more comprehensive in a smaller number of locations or do you spread the resources more thinly across a wider number of locations? I cannot give you all the background on why those four in particular were chosen because, to be honest, I was not in the department then. But there really is that tension over choosing four that have particular issues. Some of those communities were seen as having particular issues with petrol sniffing at the time and it was about trying to make a difference in those particular communities.

Senator SIEWERT—Services have been rolled out that complement the services that are in the four communities that are funded. Did you look at what youth services are available when Opal is put into other communities?

Ms Moody—Particularly in doing the Northern Territory emergency response youth funding we were looking at what other services are available, where the gaps were, where we could help make more sense of some of the services on the ground. For instance, in some cases if there were services but they were short in some infrastructure or capital perhaps we could use that. So we tried to make a bit more sense of how that worked. I think it is fair to say that the two major obstacles to the rolling out of youth services—which is true of the mission contract and also,

basically, of most other providers in the region—are the ability to recruit and retain suitably qualified staff, and infrastructure, both in housing those staff on community and having facilities to use in those things. So what we have tried to do, particularly with the Northern Territory emergency response money, is look for where there are gaps in those things and try to use that money wisely to plug some of those—particularly because in the Northern Territory emergency response at this point we have funding agreed for the current financial year. That has been particularly useful to look for gaps in the infrastructure and try to use that money in a one-off way to help with that. We have been trying to work our way logically through that.

Senator SIEWERT—In each of these communities is there a male and a female youth worker? I know in APY Lands, for example, there is not. There is only one in Amata.

Ms Moody—In the four communities covered by the petrol sniffing youth strategy, there is a male and a female. Clearly, from time to time one of the staff will leave or they will have to be replaced, but that is what they are funded for and that is what we try to have on the ground.

Senator SIEWERT—I am talking about the other.

Ms Moody—I am sorry. Outside of that, I could not tell you comprehensively. In terms of APY, I might ask Ms Gillam to come to the table.

Ms Gillam—The South Australia government is presently working on developing a youth strategy, a more comprehensive strategy than they are able to deliver on the ground at present, which is, as you have mentioned, Senator, one youth worker in each community. They have expressed a desire to have a male and a female in each community and they are addressing things like housing and being able to recruit and retain those workers. I think, as they gave in evidence to the hearing in Adelaide, that they are working towards that as a goal. They are rolling out training through Relationships Australia to try to retain people and give them some support so that they stay in those roles.

Senator SIEWERT—In the other areas in Central Australia beyond the four communities there is no designated youth service funding through this program. Is that correct?

Ms Moody—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—Is there likely to be in the future?

Ms Moody—Not at this point through this program. We do take opportunity. As I said, with the Northern Territory emergency response and other programs we try to be opportunistic where we can and we see other opportunities to put money into those activities, but at this point not under the petrol sniffing strategy itself.

Senator SIEWERT—Under the NT intervention, how are those youth workers appointed? Who appoints those youth workers?

Ms Moody—That would depend. We engage with a variety of service providers, so the department is not doing it directly. We are doing it through a range of service providers. It depends in different areas who might be the best service provider.

Senator SIEWERT—Can we go back to the specific tender processes. I have already mentioned Mission Australia. We have talked about that before in estimates and things like that. I am raising it as an example of the tender process that I personally think was flawed, because you had in place an outside organisation that had not worked in the area before and was very slow to hit the ground. That organisation admitted in the hearing and in their submission that there had been problems. It seems to me that the mistakes of that process may have been repeated. I am wondering now what local expertise CAPSSU uses when they make decisions around their tendering process.

Ms Moody—I can say that the process used for the Mission contract has not been repeated in totality. We are still on the first term of that contract. In terms of the NTER, we did not go through a similar process, partly because we only had the money for one year and we had less time to put arrangements in place. So going to the more tender oriented process that we used for the Mission contract was not something we had time to do.

Senator SIEWERT—So how did you do it in the NTER? I am interested in the process you used for the Western MacDonald process.

Mr Vaughan—In terms of how CAPSSU now go about a tender, originally under the NTER process, as Ms Moody said, there was a very short time line and we went to a selective process to obtain the services of youth workers for the school holiday programs and some other programs that we ran at that time. This year we had a slightly longer lead time and we again went to a restricted process. We put it out to a number of potential tenderers and then selected a tender from that process to run a series of programs—school holiday programs, the BMX program and a number of other learning programs. We have actually this year tied all those programs into a learning process with the Northern Territory education department. So we are trying to tie education and some employment for the Anangu people into these types of programs.

Senator SIEWERT—What process was used when Red Sun Technologies were allocated the tender for the school holiday program?

Mr Vaughan—Are you talking about the first year or this year?

Senator SIEWERT—How is the first time different to this year?

Mr Vaughan—In the first year there was a more restrictive tender process. This year we invited a wider group of tenderers. We had refined the programs that we wanted slightly and also involved, as I said, an educative process in partnership with NTDET so that each of these programs was tied in to a future attendance at school or getting young people into school. That was one in a series of programs that we put in place.

Senator SIEWERT—Who made the decisions on who the tenderer was?

Mr Vaughan—CAPSSU staff made a decision in concert with central office on where we would go. We had a list of prospective tenderers.

Senator SIEWERT—CAPSSU in Canberra?

Mr Vaughan—No—in Alice Springs.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry, I must have misunderstood what you just said, because you said CAPSSU and Central Australia.

Ms Moody—The national office of the department of FaHCSIA. We had \$8 million but that still does not give you everything you would like to have across the entire Territory obviously, so the first decision was on where the most likely sites were where we would have activity before going to who were possible providers for those sites.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you give any weighting for local organisations that are already on the ground?

Mr Vaughan—We did indeed, and those organisations were also invited to tender. In terms of selecting potential sites, we spent quite a bit of time talking to different people within the area and really involved the new shire councils, because they now have responsibility for all those communities. In this year's cut—for want of a better word—of programs, there are quite a number of communities that are not actually within the designated area; they sit just outside. But we have been able to identify that they had problems with petrol sniffing and other substance use. We decided to put money into that area. Although they were outside that designated area they were causing us problems, so we are trying to address those.

Senator SIEWERT—Is that for this year's school holiday program?

Mr Vaughan—For a number of programs.

Senator SIEWERT—You did not answer my question about local experience in not only picking the locations but also selecting the successful tenderer? What weight do you put on local knowledge?

Mr Vaughan—We put quite a considerable weight on local knowledge and also on the contents of the responses to a tender process. That is what it is judged on.

Senator SIEWERT—What application do people have to make?

Mr Vaughan—There is a formal tender process and documentation is supplied to each of the potential tenderers. They have an opportunity to come to a mailbox and ask certain questions about a tender if they do not understand. They then choose to submit or not to submit.

Senator SIEWERT—I am trying to work out how you have managed to pick a number of non-local tenderers to supply services, above some pretty well-known locals who have a track record.

Mr Vaughan—The process that we have gone through with the tenderers is decided on what is in the tender document, on the judgment of the tender panel for the quality of service, the costings of that and what they are going to deliver.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand from the submission to the inquiry that Red Sun Solutions, that are based in New South Wales, ended up delivering the program at nearly twice the cost that was originally planned over other tenderers. The decision was made to select Red Sun Solutions after CAYLUS had been given to understand that they were going to deliver the services.

Mr Vaughan—I disagree with that.

Senator SIEWERT—That was in their submission.

Mr Vaughan—I do not agree with that proposition. CAYLUS certainly had discussions with a number of communities. We followed the process that we have to follow to go to a tender process to spend the money. They were invited to a tender and, from my recollection, they did not put in a tender for that particular one.

Senator SIEWERT—I will get the committee to go back and check with CAYLUS because, as I said, it was in their submission. Who is involved in the decision making for a successful tenderer? Are local people involved?

Mr Vaughan—No, government officials decide on the tender process.

Senator SIEWERT—So no local knowledge is used in that tender process?

Mr Vaughan—I am not sure exactly what you mean by local knowledge.

Senator SIEWERT—There is no local knowledge involved in determining the tender process?

Mr Vaughan—We make a decision based on the documentation we receive from potential tenderers; how it complies with the tender's specifications, what they will deliver, when they will deliver certain services and the cost factor.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand you selected the MacDonnell Shire for the most recent tender?

Mr Vaughan—We have selected the MacDonnell Shire, most certainly, to deliver a series of services through the MacDonnell Shire.

Senator SIEWERT—How did you select them above some of the other providers of services or tenderers that may have applied?

Mr Vaughan—We made a judgment that the MacDonnell Shire is responsible for service provision across a certain number of communities. They have processes in place as a shire to deliver those services, and we saw it as the best chance to deliver an integrated service and address the services that we required. Their tender particularly showed that, and that is why they were selected.

Senator SIEWERT—So they were able to demonstrate that they understood the issues associated with providing new services in remote Central Australian communities and had experience in undertaking previous infrastructure projects?

Mr Vaughan—I cannot remember the exact detail of the staffing arrangements, but the shire's tender showed that they have certain staff in place, such as community coordinators. They employ youth officers and sport and rec officers in these communities. So it gave us an opportunity to have not an ad hoc approach but more of a standardised approach. Part of that tender was also for the provision of infrastructure, such as motor vehicles and youth worker housing within those selected communities.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand that that tender is only for six months. Is that right?

Mr Vaughan—It is a tender which finishes on 30 June this year under the NTR appropriation.

Senator SIEWERT—How much was it for?

Mr Vaughan—Two point four million dollars.

Senator SIEWERT—Two point four million dollars for six months?

Mr Vaughan—It was slightly longer than six months, from recollection, but it effectively ends at 30 June.

Senator SIEWERT—What are we buying for \$2.4 million.

Mr Vaughan—For \$2.4 million you have six remote communities. It will provide houses for youth workers in three of those communities. It provides youth worker infrastructure, training and employment for people across six communities. From memory, I think there are seven Toyota four-wheel-drive 'Troopie' vehicles for transport of young people and for use in those communities by the youth workers and the sport and recreation workers.

Senator SIEWERT—Is it providing six months worth of services or are you providing this infrastructure for ongoing services?

Mr Vaughan—This infrastructure, naturally, will stay there to provide services into the future. When the shires came into the Northern Territory, they clearly identified themselves as lacking infrastructure, as we already knew and as non-government agencies, you would be well aware, complain all the time. We are very sympathetic to that. The same thing happened with Mission Australia. There is no infrastructure in many communities, so a large portion of this is to build youth worker infrastructure so that they have ongoing infrastructure. It is the same with vehicles. I am sure you are aware of the distance and of the wear and tear on vehicles. They did not have the necessary infrastructure. You cannot run that sort of program without that; that is our experience and one of the things we have learned.

Senator SIEWERT—What is happening with the ongoing provision of the youth services—the people on the ground?

Mr Vaughan—The shires will have provision within their budgets to have ongoing youth services. It is the initial start-up that they have the extreme difficulty with.

Senator SIEWERT—This is more than just school holiday programs? This is ongoing and permanent?

Mr Vaughan—This is permanent and ongoing for six of our communities within the West MacDonnell, and I have their names here if you wish to hear them.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be great, thanks.

Mr Vaughan—The communities are Kintore, which has been quite problematic—as you would be aware, CAYLUS has provided youth workers in the past from their brokerage funds; Papunya; Ikuntji; Mount Liebig; Ntaria; and Areyonga. They have all been communities without infrastructure in them.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Ms Moody—From other sources of funds—the Aboriginal Benefits Account—Tangentyere Council and CAYLUS received a major infrastructure grant as well, so we are attempting to build up that infrastructure, which takes away one of the barriers to the roll-out of services that we have experienced.

Mr Vaughan—If I could add to that, we have spoken at length with CAYLUS about which communities they would put infrastructure into versus what we would use our money for, so we are trying to get across the best bang for the buck, basically.

Senator SIEWERT—That was, in fact, going to be my next question. What level of consultation has gone on to make sure that it is a coordinated approach?

Mr Vaughan—CAPSSU actually recommended that application to the ABA to get Tangentyere and CAYLUS that funding. They have quite ably put it into some recreation halls and quite a number of, again, youth worker accommodations.

Senator SIEWERT—I have got lots of other questions. I will put some more on notice.

Senator FURNER—Thank you for the table in regard to the use of Opal throughout the pastoral properties, the service station roadhouses and the communities. Are you able to explain why there are no pastoral and service station roadhouses at all in Queensland that have Opal?

Ms Podesta—They have not applied.

Senator FURNER—They have not applied. So that comes back to that voluntary issue, doesn't it?

Ms Podesta—It is their decision as to whether they wish to participate. In most cases it is because communities have approached them and sought their participation, and they then apply.

If a community approaches us and asks us to make contact with a commercial station close by that community, we will certainly do that.

Senator FURNER—Do we keep a tally of how many—whether it be pastoral locations or roadhouses—deny having the use of Opal at all? Do we have those figures?

Ms Podesta—Who choose not to participate in the program? We do. I just want to clarify that this document was not meant to be a tabled document for senators' information. It is an internal working document, from our point of view. It is a piece of paper that we keep to make sure that we have got our records up to date et cetera. I just want to clarify that, because I think you might not have been in the room when we had the discussion about the status of that document.

Senator FURNER—Sorry.

Ms Podesta—No, that is okay. I just wanted to make sure that was clear.

CHAIR—You will not find it on—

Ms Podesta—It is an issue about keeping faith with the communities. We have a good relationship with most of the communities, and partially it is because we try not to do the wrong thing by them. Yes, we have information about organisations that have chosen not to take up an offer to be part of the program.

Senator FURNER—Are they substantive lists or are they minor?

Ms Podesta—I read out the organisations in the designated region who have chosen not to.

Senator FURNER—I think it was last year that the committee visited Alice Springs and heard from one of the witnesses indicating their view that Opal should be mandatory, across the board. I am just wondering what the impediments are to ever even reaching that type of legislation, if it is possible at all.

Ms Podesta—What are the impediments? It is probably too early for us to be able to answer that question for you. We are certainly undertaking some work to do a detailed cost-benefit analysis in regard to potentially introducing legislation. It is advice that has not been provided to government. As a department, we are not in a position to give advice to government yet, because we have not undertaken that work. I am sure you will be aware, Senator, that it is Australian government policy that a regulatory impact statement, including detailed cost-benefit analysis, is part of a process. We are about to commence work around a cost-benefit analysis, so it is probably premature of me to speculate on benefits or otherwise about legislation. With permission, Chair, I would like to clarify the Senator's question in regard to Jervois—I wish I could pronounce it correctly; I think it is 'Jervois', but I am happy to be—

Senator BOYCE—We will all be consistent around 'Jervois'.

Ms Podesta—It is the benefit of having staff in the room who can go and clarify. That site did apply and has received Opal since, I think, about 2006. However, in the last year they have chosen not to receive Opal.

Senator SIEWERT—That is why they are back on the list?

Ms Podesta—They are on both lists. Their status is that they have been approved and—

Senator BOYCE—So this list is of those that commenced receiving, but there is no column that says ‘stopped receiving’.

Ms Podesta—That is right. It was a list that was not meant to be distributed. It is always one of those difficult questions in government.

Senator BOYCE—So all of those clarifications we made earlier, then—

Ms Podesta—That is right. It is one of those issues, Senator; it was a piece of paper from our point of view. If you had asked us to table something that showed the next part of it, obviously we would have updated that. But it was not meant for that purpose. You correctly said, ‘Hold on, there’s a contradiction here,’ and of course that is right. If the document had been written for that purpose, we would have had a further column.

Senator BOYCE—Perhaps you could keep us up to date. You said you had asked some of these communities for permission to make this information public—

Ms Podesta—We have.

Senator BOYCE—and if you could just keep us up to date on how soon this document can be made public, or concerns about that.

Ms Podesta—We would be happy to.

Senator BOYCE—I just have one more question, related to CAPSSU. In the Erebus report that was printed in June 2008, I think it was, there is a section talking about what was needed to roll out the youth programs properly—26 community-based male and female youth workers, six youth workers in Alice Springs et cetera, including 28 local Indigenous trainees. Can you update us on the latest numbers of people who are actually on the ground now in those positions.

Mr Vaughan—Senator, I assume we are talking about the Integrated Youth Strategy?

Senator BOYCE—Yes.

Mr Vaughan—Okay. Mission Australia have changed their structure slightly, and on the ground we have two youth workers in each community, a male and a female; they are non-Indigenous workers. That is four communities, so there are eight workers. We have two senior youth workers, who are I suppose overseers and operate out of Alice Springs now. We currently have two outreach workers who are used to relieve, and there are Anangu trainees in each of those communities. I do not have the—

Senator BOYCE—So there are four trainees?

Mr Vaughan—No, it does vary. Ideally, there are meant to be four, but it depends very much on those communities and who is available at the time. The young Anangu people do not hold down normal nine-to-five jobs. They may come one day and then family or community commitments might take them away for a week. So there could be a group of eight or 10 in a particular community, and Mission will have three, four or five of them working at any one time on almost a split shift basis, depending on who is available. That is just the reality of the way it has turned out. Ideally, we would have a fixed workforce, but in practical terms that has not happened. They are receiving some training from Mission Australia in youth work.

Senator BOYCE—My next question was going to be about when responsibility for these programs would be handed over to local communities, but you are saying that a youth program based on Western ideas of what a youth program looks like is never going to be sustainable with Indigenous staff.

Mr Vaughan—I do not think I am saying exactly that. We are trying different approaches, basically. We are working very closely now with west MacDonnell Shire, where we are trying to work very closely with Central Desert, also from CAPSSU, and, as I indicated before to Senator Siewert, they have employed Indigenous staff within the purview now of the shire taking over these communities, and we are really encouraging that and working with the shires and with DEEWR to get training money to train up these Anangu people.

Senator BOYCE—How does Mission Australia fit into that?

Mr Vaughan—At the moment Mission are working with their Anangu workers to continue their training. That contract finishes in 12 months time. No decision will be made for some time yet as to where that will go. That is something that the department and government have to decide. But the whole scene has changed since Mission Australia came on board. We have had the NTER and we have had the shires come in. They were not really thought of when this all started, and the shires have taken over responsibility right through the Territory for those communities so they have their own local government shire structure, which is still, in some cases, in its infancy, but it is developing. So they will have community coordinators, youth workers and sport and rec workers within their structure, employed by the shires. We have encouraged them to work with DEEWR and Training to start to train their staff, particularly the CDEP staff, for instance—it is not just training people in the youth work environment but also to train people to take up this sort of work.

Senator BOYCE—I would think from the number of communities we visited that, if we are to end up with programs that are capable of being sustained by the local communities, they are going to look very different from the sort of ‘deliver it, give it to you’ type approaches that we currently have with services. Thank you.

Mr Vaughan—I would agree.

CHAIR—I have a question about Opal fuel. We heard about the possibility of the construction of a bulk storage facility in Darwin and that was noted in your submission. What is the current status of that?

Ms Podesta—It is still under investigation. We have scoped it. It is a very costly and complex infrastructure project. It would take a considerable period of time. It is Northern Australia. It is a very expensive issue. If we do this, it will require us to enter into very long term tenure. We are looking at it but we are also actively pursuing what other fuel distribution mechanisms are available across Northern Australia. It is a very high cost option.

CHAIR—I have two questions. One is about policing and then the other is a general one. Consistently in communities there is discussion about effective policing and the role of police. One of the key aspects of the eight-point plan was looking at effective policing and then the issue of restorative justice. Is there anything you want to add on those two points, on the record, beyond your submission?

Ms Moody—I do not think so, not particularly. We funded the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk which operates in Central Australia. It has been very successful.

CHAIR—It is an awful title, I am sorry, Ms Moody.

Ms Moody—I know. It is an awful title.

CHAIR—The substance intelligence desk.

Ms Moody—And we have made it worse because we have now funded a second one.

CHAIR—A second desk?

Ms Moody—It is in Katherine.

CHAIR—Yes, I saw that.

Ms Moody—That is based on the success of the Alice Springs one.

CHAIR—Has there been any evaluation of that? You had one and then you obviously had some form of evaluation to go to the second one.

Ms Moody—We have not done a full-blown, formal evaluation. We are very pleased with the results the desk gets in disrupting the supply of illegal substances through the Territory and in that cross-border region.

CHAIR—And transmission.

Ms Moody—Yes. We also fund operational dog units with it so that they have the capacity to go out and find substances.

CHAIR—There were questions about dogs in Adelaide, were there not? Weren't there definitely questions about that, Senator Scullion? When you have a look at that, you will see that was raised.

Ms Moody—Under Northern Territory emergency response money we are funding a separate operation in Katherine which is sort of modelled on the Alice Springs one but will be adapted by the Northern Territory Police to what works best in a different environment. At the same time, in South Australia, in response to the Mulligan inquiry the Commonwealth has provided funding for additional police accommodation in the lands.

CHAIR—The accommodation issue keeps coming up. It does not matter what aspect of it.

Ms Moody—It does not matter where you are. The Commonwealth has provided funding for that and there are additional police in the Northern Territory as part of the Northern Territory emergency response as well.

CHAIR—One of the things that we talked about in the last inquiry was the coordination and that there was going to be a new way of coordinating across all departments. The fact that you did a joint submission to this group indicates that that has moved on significantly since the last one. But we keep hearing at our inquiries and on our visits about the complexities of red tape and how difficult it is to get anything done. I am just wondering whether in your cross-party group that is an issue in terms of streamlining processes, making things more accessible and also that idea of engaging the community so that they do not feel intimidated by the process. I am checking whether that is a fair kind of comment.

Ms Moody—There are various types of red tape, I guess. In a different guise I have responsibility for the way a range of programs are administered both within FaHCSIA itself. Also FaHCSIA is the lead agency in the Indigenous affairs arena and is actively working with the other Commonwealth agencies in the space to try to fix what I would call the ‘paper side’ of red tape. That does not go to your engagement question, but to how we actually make sense. It is not so much about whether you have a single contract, because you can have a single contract and if you have still got all the same reporting requirements that does not make it any simpler. For instance, we have been working on the performance indicators to come down to a much simpler set and quantity of performance indicators that would be more common across the programs particularly in the Indigenous space, although we are now working to try to introduce that into the rest of FaHCSIA as well.

At the moment we are also actively working to try to make the terms and conditions—because there are always some people working who regard my red tape as their accountability, or vice versa—simpler for the standard terms and conditions that apply certainly to all the FaHCSIA grants. I do not want to use the term ‘plain English’ because I would rather undersell and over-deliver and plain English is one of those things that is a bit hard to live up to, in a sense. We are working with the other Commonwealth agencies and Indigenous Affairs to see if we can get them agreed to there as well. So they are all steps in the right direction and I think that we are on the verge of making some progress there. It has taken us a while to get there but we are trying to carry a lot of people and a lot of organisations along with us.

Having said that, that is still only a step and there is still a lot of work to do. Many agencies funded by various departments might only have one or two providers, because they are mainly in a particular stream. But there are a smaller number of providers who have a large number of grants and certainly in Indigenous Affairs there are a number of providers who have that range of grants. While we try to do the top down and try to make the structure better, we are also looking

at a local level, using the ICCs and our state networks to look at some of those providers who have particularly complex arrangements to see if, from the ground up, we can help make more sense of that. I would be the first to say that we have got an awful long way to go, but I do think we are starting to build some momentum in that space.

Engagement is probably a different issue. In the Northern Territory now we have government business managers in 58 places—it fluctuates around that number—as well as of course Indigenous coordination centres. Ms Gillam, whom you saw before, is now the APY Lands Coordinator. So we have a lot more people on the ground, for want of a better word, who are in regular contact with communities and organisations and we try to funnel more communication through those people so that they are able to give a more comprehensive government story to communities and those people within the communities who need to hear that story. We want to talk to everybody but not everybody needs to know and we need to know who the people are we should be talking to about the issues. So the landscape is quite different in that space and having those people on the ground gives us a tremendous advantage that, to be honest, we did not have when the petrol sniffing strategy started.

CHAIR—And the engagement with state governments? The three state governments were very active in the development of the first plan.

Ms Moody—That happens in systemic ways through various steering arrangements in each state as well as on issues based arrangements. For instance, substance abuse intelligence is a tri-state police activity so it gives us an opportunity to bring police together from the three states to discuss common issues as well. So there is not one answer, I guess, but there are a range of relationships and ongoing dialogue happening.

CHAIR—I was trying to mop up some of the issues that were raised in our first report, which was really the reason for our second inquiry which was to see how they had gone. Are there any final questions?

Dr Boersig—You raised one other matter earlier. Is there anything I can clarify? I was not clear on the issue that you were raising. Currently in the Alice Springs area we fund some restorative justice officers locally who work in the community around Alice Springs. We have been working in the APY Lands to develop a conferencing process. We have consulted in detail with the community about the kinds of processes they want. We are working with the South Australian government on that.

CHAIR—It had been mentioned and it was also part of the process. Would you like to add to your submission where you said you believe that restorative justice programs could address some of the antisocial behaviour—health aspects and behavioural aspects that came out of the process. The coroner's report also referred to the need for those kinds of things.

Dr Boersig—I think the Mulligan inquiry has also picked up those same issues but, in essence, the kinds of processes that we are trying to develop are capacity building within the community—a little bit like the notion of being job ready in the sense of taking responsibility. You need to work with people to get them able to help develop a civil society. That is at the heart of those processes.

CHAIR—Thank you, again, for your cooperation, your submission and your time this afternoon. I would like to thank Hansard. We are moving towards next Thursday for this committee to bring down its report. I believe there is quite significant community interest in it. So it should be a bit of a show next Thursday.

Committee adjourned at 5.12 pm