



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES

(Budget Estimates)

FRIDAY, 5 JUNE 2009

CANBERRA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

TO EXPEDITE DELIVERY, THIS TRANSCRIPT HAS NOT BEEN SUBEDITED

INTERNET

Hansard transcripts of public hearings are made available on the internet when authorised by the committee.

The internet address is:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>

To search the parliamentary database, go to:

<http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au>

SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS**LEGISLATION COMMITTEE****Friday, 5 June 2009**

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

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Back, Barnett, Bernardi, Bilyk, Birmingham, Boswell, Brandis, Bob Brown, Bushby, Cameron, Cash, Colbeck, Jacinta Collins, Coonan, Cormann, Crossin, Eggleston, Farrell, Feeney, Ferguson, Fielding, Fierravanti-Wells, Fifield, Fisher, Forshaw, Hanson-Young, Heffernan, Humphries, 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, Sterle, Troeth, Trood, Williams, Wortley and Xenophon

Senators in attendance: Senators Adams, Back, Boyce, Carol Brown, Crossin, Furner, Humphries, Moore, Payne, Scullion and Siewert

Committee met at 8.31 am

CROSS-PORTFOLIO: INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**In Attendance**

Senator McLucas, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Dr Jeff Harmer, Secretary

Ms Glenys Beauchamp, Deputy Secretary

Mr Bernie Yates, Deputy Secretary

Mr Geoff Leeper, Deputy Secretary

Mr Bruce Hunter, Deputy Secretary, Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer

Ms Cate McKenzie, Group Manager, Children and Family Safety

Mr Evan Lewis, Group Manager, Community Engagement and Development

Mr Anthony Field, Group Manager, Legal and Compliance

Mr Steve Jennaway, Acting Group Manager, Business and Financial Services

Ms Donna Moody, Group Manager, Program Performance

Ms Lynne Curran, Group Manager, Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination

Mr Robert Knapp, Group Manager, Corporate Support

Ms Kerrie Tim, Group Manager, Indigenous Leadership and Engagement

Ms Amanda Cattermole, Group Manager, Indigenous Remote Services Delivery

Ms Lisa Foreman, Acting Branch Manager, COAG Implementation: Indigenous

Mr Stephen Powrie, Acting Branch Manager, Performance and Evaluation

Ms Annette Gath, Branch Manager, Indigenous Investment and Northern Territory Bilateral

Ms Alison Smith, Branch Manager, Indigenous Policy

Mr Matthew James, Principal Adviser, Office of Indigenous Policy Group

Mr Bruce Smith, Branch Manager, Indigenous Policy

Mr Mike Zissler, Commander, Northern Territory Emergency Response Operations Centre
Mr Phil Brown, Branch Manager, Compliance
Ms Megan Lees, Branch Manager, Indigenous Housing Policy
Mr Robert Ryan, Branch Manager, Indigenous Housing Delivery
Mr Greg Roche, Branch Manager, Portfolio Governance
Ms Caroline Edwards, Branch Manager, Land Reform
Ms Helen Board, Branch Manager, CDEP Program Management
Ms Kari Ahmer, Branch Manager, Indigenous Economic Development and CDEP Policy
Mr Geoff Richardson, Branch Manager, Indigenous Representative Body
Ms Karen Pickering, Acting Branch Manager, Leadership Delivery
Ms Mandy Doherty, Branch Manager, Reconciliation and Repatriation
Ms Elizabeth Stehr, Branch Manager, Money Management
Ms Janet Stodulka, Branch Manager, Safety Taskforce
Ms Linda Young, Deputy Branch Manager, Safety Taskforce
Mr Gavin Matthews, Branch Manager, Welfare Payments Reform
Ms Allyson Essex, Branch Manager, Children and Parenting Support
Mr Anthony Beven, Registrar of Indigenous Corporations
Mr David Fintan, Branch Manager, Commercial and Indigenous Law
Mr Ty Emerson, Branch Manager, Child Support Policy
Ms Kim Vella, Acting Branch Manager, Budget Development
Mr Kurt Munro, Branch Manager, Financial Accounting
Mr Scott Dilley, Branch Manager, Financial Management and Governance
Mr Bernie Doman, Section Manager, CDEP Program Management
Mr Andrew Lander, Branch Manager, Communications and Media
Ms Lynette MacLean, Branch Manager, People
Ms Susan Black, Branch Manager, Ministerial, Parliamentary and Secretariat Support
Mr Dave Agnew, Branch Manager, Property, Environment and Protective Security
Ms Carol Ey, Acting Branch Manager, Research and Analysis
Mr Brian Stacey, State manager, Northern Territory
Ms Jill Farrelly, Branch Manager, Community Investment

Aboriginal Hostels Limited

Mr Keith Clarke, General Manager
Mr Russell Lane, Assistant General Manager
Dr Kamlesh Sharma, Company Secretary

Indigenous Business Australia

Mr Ron Morony, General Manager
Ms Kaely Woods, Deputy General Manager
Mr Satish Kumar, Chief Financial Officer

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Australian Agency for International Development

Mr Robert Tranter, Assistant Director-General, Pacific

Department of Health and Ageing

Ms Jane Halton, Secretary
Ms Rosemary Huxtable, Deputy Secretary

Mr David Learmonth, Deputy Secretary
Ms Mary Murnane, Deputy Secretary
Ms Shirley Browne, Assistant Secretary, Ministerial and Parliamentary Support Branch
Ms Linda Powell, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Portfolio Strategies Division
Ms Georgie Harman, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Mental Health and Chronic Disease Division
Ms Virginia Hart, Assistant Secretary, Drug Strategy Branch
Ms Meredith Taylor, Acting Assistant Secretary, Chronic Disease Branch
Ms Colleen Krestensen, Assistant Secretary, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Programs Branch
Ms Joan Corbett, Assistant Secretary, Program and Planning Branch
Ms Lesley Podesta, First Assistant Secretary, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
Dr Geetha Isaac-Toua, Senior Medical Adviser, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
Ms Joy Savage, Assistant Secretary, Remote Health Services Development Branch
Mr Mark Thomann, Assistant Secretary, Policy and Budget Branch
Mr Garry Fisk, Assistant Secretary, Performance and Quality Branch
Ms Alison Killen, Acting Assistant Secretary, Chronic Disease Branch
Ms Tarja Saastamoinen, Assistant Secretary, Family Health and Wellbeing Branch
Mr Andrew Stuart, First Assistant Secretary, Ageing and Aged Care Division
Ms Sallyanne Ducker, Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Aged Care Taskforce
Ms Mary McDonald, Acting First Assistant Secretary
Mr Richard Bartlett, Assistant Secretary, Office of Hearing Services

Prime Minister and Cabinet

Ms Yael Cass, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Social Policy Division
Mr Bob Eckhardt, Acting Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Policy

Department of Human Services

Core Department—Outcome 1, Output 1

Ms Jenny Thomson, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Families and Income Support
Ms Marie Johnson, First Assistant Secretary, Chief Technology Architect

Centrelink—Outcome 1, Output 1.1

Mr Grant Tidswell, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Customer Service
Mr John Wadeson, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Information Technology
Ms Moya Drayton, General Manager, Education Employment and Support Programs
Ms Vicki Beath, National Manager, Education, Employment and Disability Services Branch
Ms Jo Gaha, National Manager, Indigenous Services Branch
Mr David Cook, Business Manager, Budget and Management Accounting Branch
Mr Tom Munyard, Business Manager, Budget and Management Accounting Branch
Mr Eija Seittenranta, General Manager, Business Systems
Mr Peter Searston, General Manager, Remote Servicing
Mr Graham Maloney, National Manager, Income Management Branch

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Ms Lisa Paul, Secretary
Mr Robert Griew, Associate Secretary
Mr Michael Manthorpe, Deputy Secretary
Dr Michele Bruniges, Deputy Secretary
Mr Ewen McDonald, Deputy Secretary
Mr Bill Burmester, Deputy Secretary
Ms Malisa Golightly, Deputy Secretary
Mr Graham Carters, Deputy Secretary
Mr Craig Storen, Chief Finance Officer and Group Manager, Finance Group
Ms Catherine Wall, Group Manager, Indigenous Pathways and Early Learning
Dr Carol Nicoll, Group Manager, National Education System Group
Ms Susan Smith, Group Manager, National Initiatives Group
Ms Rebecca Cross, Group Manager, Lifting Educational Outcomes
Dr Russell Ayres, Branch Manager, Early Childhood Education Reform Branch, Indigenous Pathways and Early Learning
Ms Kathryn Shugg, Branch Manager, Indigenous Early Childhood Branch, Indigenous Pathways and Early Learning
Ms Robyn Priddle, Branch Manager, Foundation Skills and Pathways, Youth and Industry Skills
Dr Caroline Perkins, Branch Manager, Tertiary Participation and Equity, Tertiary Skills and Productivity Group
Ms Jody Hamilton, Acting Group Manager, Indigenous Group
Mr Damien McGrath, Branch Manager, Innovation and Partnerships, Indigenous Group
Ms Julie Polson, Branch Manager, Strategic Support, Indigenous Group
Mr Shane Hoffman, Branch Manager, Indigenous Policy, Indigenous Group
Mr John Baker, Branch Manager, Indigenous Implementation Strategy, Indigenous Group
Dr Alison Morehead, Group Manager, Social Inclusion and Participation Group
Ms Robyn Shannon, Branch Manager, Income Support Policy Branch, Social Inclusion and Participation Group
Ms Marsha Milliken, Group Manager, Income Support and Stakeholder Group
Ms Debbie Mitchell, Branch Manager, Income Support and Stakeholder Group
Ms Jo Caldwell, Group Manager, General Employment Services Group

Treasury

Mr Peter Robinson, Principal Adviser, Social Policy Division

Attorney-General's Department

Ms Katherine Jones, First Assistant Secretary, Social Inclusion Division
Dr John Boersig PSM, Assistant Secretary, Human Rights Branch
Ms Joan Jardine, Acting Assistant Secretary, Indigenous and Community Legal Services Branch
Mr Kym Duggan PSM, Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Policy and Service Delivery Branch
Dr Susan Cochrane, Director, Copyright and Classification Policy

Australian Federal Police

Assistant Commissioner Frank Prendergast, National Manager, International Deployment Group

Commander Shane Connelly, Manager Operations and Missions, International Deployment Group

CHAIR (Senator Moore)—Good morning, everyone. I declare open this hearing of the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee hearing on cross-portfolio Indigenous issues. The committee is considering budget estimates on Indigenous issues which, to assist the committee and portfolio departments, have been grouped on the program into themes and issues for consideration across portfolios. Our committee deeply appreciates and acknowledges the assistance of FaHCSIA in the coordination of portfolios and also in working to have a sequence of evidence to make it work as well as possible. So, as always, Dr Harmer, we deeply appreciate the help of your department in doing that.

Under standing order 26 the committee must take all evidence in public session and this includes answers to questions on notice. Officers and senators are familiar with the rules of the Senate governing estimates hearings. If you need assistance, the secretariat has all the rules here. I particularly draw the attention of witnesses to an order of the Senate of 13 May 2009 specifying the process by which a claim of public interest immunity should be raised and which I now incorporate into *Hansard*.

The document reads as follow—

That the Senate:

(a) notes that ministers and officers have continued to refuse to provide information to Senate committees without properly raising claims of public interest immunity as required by past resolutions of the Senate;

(b) reaffirms the principles of past resolutions of the Senate by this order, to provide ministers and officers with guidance as to the proper process for raising public interest immunity claims and to consolidate those past resolutions of the Senate;

(c) orders that the following operate as an order of continuing effect:

(1) If:

(a) a Senate committee, or a senator in the course of proceedings of a committee, requests information or a document from a Commonwealth department or agency; and

(b) an officer of the department or agency to whom the request is directed believes that it may not be in the public interest to disclose the information or document to the committee, the officer shall state to the committee the ground on which the officer believes that it may not be in the public interest to disclose the information or document to the committee, and specify the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or document.

(2) If, after receiving the officer's statement under paragraph (1), the committee or the senator requests the officer to refer the question of the disclosure of the information or document to a responsible minister, the officer shall refer that question to the minister.

(3) If a minister, on a reference by an officer under paragraph (2), concludes that it would not be in the public interest to disclose the information or document to the committee, the minister shall provide to the committee a statement of the ground for that conclusion, specifying the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or document.

(4) A minister, in a statement under paragraph (3), shall indicate whether the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or document to the committee could result only from the publication of the information or document by the committee, or could result, equally or in part, from the disclosure of the information or document to the committee as in camera evidence.

(5) If, after considering a statement by a minister provided under paragraph (3), the committee concludes that the statement does not sufficiently justify the withholding of the information or document from the committee, the committee shall report the matter to the Senate.

(6) A decision by a committee not to report a matter to the Senate under paragraph (5) does not prevent a senator from raising the matter in the Senate in accordance with other procedures of the Senate.

(7) A statement that information or a document is not published, or is confidential, or consists of advice to, or internal deliberations of, government, in the absence of specification of the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or document, is not a statement that meets the requirements of paragraph (1) or (4).

(8) If a minister concludes that a statement under paragraph (3) should more appropriately be made by the head of an agency, by reason of the independence of that agency from ministerial direction or control, the minister shall inform the committee of that conclusion and the reason for that conclusion, and shall refer the matter to the head of the agency, who shall then be required to provide a statement in accordance with paragraph (3).

(d) requires the Procedure Committee to review the operation of this order and report to the Senate by 20 August 2009.

(Agreed to 13 May 2009.)

(Extract, Journals of the Senate, 13 May 2009, p.1941)

Officers should have before you our agenda. We will begin today's proceedings with questions on topics and issues as they appear on the program.

Before we commence the formal hearing, the committee wants to place on record our acknowledgment and appreciation of the work of Major General David Chalmers. Major General Chalmers had worked closely with us over the period that he was working on the intervention team and gave evidence at our last hearing, and neglected to tell us that it was his last day in the job. As a committee, we all particularly wanted to put on record our appreciation and best wishes for Major General Chalmers.

Senator BOYCE—I would just like to support those words, thank you, Chair. In the 18 months that Major General Chalmers undertook his role as head of the emergency response, he achieved a significant amount of work and we certainly from the coalition supported and appreciated the work that he did and the assistance that he gave this committee.

CHAIR—Thank you. I welcome the Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing, Senator the Honourable Jan McLucas, for the first time for our committee. Welcome to officers, of whom I see many who have come to the last two hearings, so we are getting this process right, I think. Welcome to you all. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Senator McLucas—No, but Dr Harmer does.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, would you like to make an opening statement?

Dr Harmer—Thank you, Madam Chair, just a brief statement. Can I begin by thanking you and the committee for the comments in relation to Major General Chalmers. He did a truly outstanding job for us all in that period he was with us. As you noted in your opening statement, Madam Chair, we have worked with you on the agenda and the sequencing of events. FaHCSIA officers will be here all day, but officers from other portfolios will be here as identified.

If I recall last estimates in this room, we had some issues that were not considered here and we did not have the people. If there are some issues that need to be covered or that senators wish to cover that are not on here, if we can have some very early advice, we can make sure that we get people to cover those issues from other departments.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, I share that view totally. Sometimes it comes as a great surprise to all of us when the issues come up. But, where possible, we will work very closely with you.

Dr Harmer—If there is any reordering, it would be good to do it now. Finally, I advise the committee that we in FaHCSIA—and, I am pretty confident, in all of the portfolios—have responded to all of the questions on notice.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. On the issue of housing and land reform, the view of the committee is that we will focus on that in the second session. In the general area, as much as possible, we will not go there, because there are considerable questions in that area. Rather than double-dipping, we are going to concentrate on that in the second session. My aim, depending on how it flows, is to have the first area completed by 10 o'clock. On that basis we will go into general questions and I will call on Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT—I would like to start with the government's *Future directions* document, released around 20 May. Was it produced by the department or the minister's office or a combination of the above?

Dr Harmer—Documents such as this usually arise out of advice from the department and consideration by the minister. That would be the normal practice, but I will let Ms Curran answer.

Ms Curran—As you would see, the document does have a foreword by the minister, so it is a policy document from the government. The department obviously assisted in the development of the publication.

Senator SIEWERT—It will come as no surprise that I disagree with some of the content of the document. What I am particularly concerned about is the information that is provided around the Racial Discrimination Act. It seems to me—and obviously this is a policy comment—that some of it is inconsistent with the RDA, the comments around the special measures in particular. It seems the document does not give the advice around informed consent that is required, in my understanding of the RDA and what count as special measures. I am wondering why it was not included. Was there advice provided by the department to the minister around the issues around the RDA?

Dr Harmer—I would prefer to regard your comments on the paper released by the minister as comments. As you know, we are not able to give you information about our advice to government in relation to that or any other issue.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. In any negotiations you do with Aboriginal communities, do you talk about the issues around informed consent?

Mr Field—The discussion paper does not use the term ‘informed consent’, as you have pointed out. The government has made clear its commitment to change the legislation relating to the Northern Territory emergency response if required and as required so that it conforms with the Racial Discrimination Act. The discussion paper sets out, in relation to the measures, what is proposed at this stage and the consultation process. Following consultations—and we can give you more detail around what those consultations will look like—the government will make decisions in relation to each of the measures set out in the discussion paper and how they should be redesigned if necessary to comply with the Racial Discrimination Act.

Senator SIEWERT—There are a couple of problems there. I will get to the issues around consultation in a minute, but maybe I should ask a question prior to going into my next set of questions, and that is: am I correct in my understanding that informed consent is required for special measures?

Dr Harmer—I think we need to regard that as your opinion and assertion. I am not sure that we are qualified to speak on such an important matter.

Senator SIEWERT—Point taken. Who will be carrying out the consultations?

Ms Curran—The consultations will be led by our Indigenous leadership group in FaHCSIA and it is envisaged that there will be four tiers of consultation. The first tier is underway in the southern region of the Northern Territory and that is being conducted by our GBMs.

Senator SIEWERT—By who, sorry?

Ms Curran—By who our government business managers in each of those communities. The second tier is going to be a series of meetings in each of the communities. They get underway on 16 June.

Senator SIEWERT—Who runs them?

Ms Curran—They are going to be run by our ICC managers. The third tier is a series of regional workshops which will be led by our Indigenous leadership group and that will draw from—

Senator SIEWERT—The tier two?

Ms Curran—Into FaHCSIA.

Senator SIEWERT—There is a lot of independence here, isn't there!

Dr Harmer—The people who Ms Curran refers to as our Indigenous leadership group are the group across the country who run—and have been running for some time—Indigenous leadership programs. They are coordinating the consultations on the rep body. They are a very experienced group. You say that about independence but the truth is that with something like this we need to send in people who have considerable experience in consulting and liaising. I should say one more thing and that is that the government business managers who are leading the early stage will be supported by their Indigenous engagement officers, who are recruited to work with government business managers in many of these communities. It is a significant

initiative of the government to provide additional on the ground assistance from the community to work with the government business managers. These people will be heavily involved in the consultation.

Ms Curran—That is correct. And to go to the issue of independence, I just make two observations. Prior to the discussion paper being released there were discussions with Mr Calma, about both the way that we were proposing to do the consultations and the content of the paper itself. And we have engaged CIRCA to provide assurance about the way that we are going to conduct the consultation process and I think that they are widely regarded as independent and transparent experts in Indigenous consultation practices.

Senator SIEWERT—I will go back to that in second. What is the fourth tier?

Ms Curran—The fourth tier is with stakeholders. They will be both service providers and national bodies.

Senator SIEWERT—And who is doing that?

Ms Curran—They will again be done by the Indigenous leadership group.

Senator SIEWERT—Will the report by CIRCA be publicly available and released?

Ms Curran—That is an issue for government but it would be our expectation—

Senator SIEWERT—In one breath you are telling me that is there to guarantee it and in the next breath you cannot tell me whether it is actually going to be released.

Dr Harmer—We never can. When it is something like that it is always a matter for government and we cannot make commitments.

Senator SIEWERT—With all due respect, Dr Harmer, the government can tell us. The government is the one that has prescribed this approach and it can say upfront.

Dr Harmer—But you are asking us and we are not the government. We are officials from the department.

CHAIR—Senator Siewert, it is a question for the government, not the officers at the table.

Senator SIEWERT—All right. Could the parliamentary secretary take that on notice, please? I am being told that I cannot ask that, essentially.

Dr Harmer—You can ask but you cannot expect us to make a commitment.

Senator SIEWERT—How are the consultations going to be carried out? There are a set of questions here already. The information that needs to be provided around informed consent is not provided. The minister has clearly said that she—or the government—thinks that these count as special measures. Without any justification, without the proper information being provided about informed consent and the processes that need to be undertaken to declare something as a special measure, how can the community have any faith in the fact that this is independent and that you are not just having consultations to get the answer that you want? I ask that because there are a set of questions here that are around the proposed alternatives—for example, around income quarantining—that do not even go to whether it should be voluntary or not. It is not even one of the questions.

Dr Harmer—Senator, we will regard that as a comment unless you have got a specific question in there—

Senator SIEWERT—My specific question is: how are you going to handle that?

Dr Harmer—We are doing a very extensive consultation process, as Ms Curran has outlined. We are going to all communities. It is a very extensive process which has been very well planned and which will be well documented. We are very confident that—

Senator SIEWERT—Mr Harmer, you didn't answer my question about how you are going to handle the fact that not all the information that should be provided is being provided and on how the very act that you are talking about works.

Ms Curran—May I make a few observations, Senator. It is intended that the consultation process will be very open, so we are actually asking people what they see as the benefits and what they would like to see being done differently. We are not closing the conversation; it is intended to be a very open conversation. It is intended that for the tier 2 and tier 3 consultations there will be a record of the consultations provided. We will be seeking to ensure that it is agreed by the people with whom the consultation occurs that that record represents a fair record of the consultation.

We recognise that there are going to be groups of people who do not agree with compulsory income management; we are not going to try and hide that. We have in development a mechanism that is IT based that will be capturing all of that information. As we are going through, I think that you and others will be interested in the views of individual communities about particular aspects.

Senator SIEWERT—Will the actual records of the meetings be publicly available, or can you not tell me that?

Ms Curran—I do not think that they will be publicly available. They will be available for the community and it will be up to the people in the community how they handle that. Tier 2, particularly, is not going to be a public meeting. There could be a series of smaller meetings with different groups of people. The tier 2 consultation has tended to be a much more structured conversation.

Senator SIEWERT—Carried out by ICC personnel?

Ms Curran—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Carried out by government?

Ms Curran—As Dr Harmer said, the Indigenous engagement officers, who have a very high credibility in the community, will be there, and we are going to have CIRCA providing assurance around the way that we do it.

Senator SIEWERT—How will they undertake that evaluation?

Dr Harmer—Just on that, Senator, it has never been my experience that Indigenous communities in remote areas or elsewhere are at all intimidated in giving their genuine opinion, whether it is to government officers or not. So I do not think the fact that FaHCSIA employees are doing the consultations will in any way constrain the sort of information that we get from the community.

Senator SIEWERT—Dr Harmer, you must have been in very different meetings to the ones that I have been in in Aboriginal communities when government officers have been present. That is a comment; I appreciate it.

Who decided how the consultations would take place? Was it a government decision that it would largely use government officers to carry out the consultation process?

Dr Harmer—The process—and I can be corrected on this—would have been decided by government on the basis of advice from the department.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay, thank you. How is CIRCA going to evaluate the independence—

Ms Curran—Around the assurance?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Ms Curran—I will ask my colleague Mr Smith to elaborate on the actual arrangements, but there was a meeting in the southern region last week, in Alice Springs, of all the government business managers and Indigenous engagement officers who will be involved in consultations in Alice Springs. CIRCA were present at that information session prior to the consultation process getting underway. They have looked at our engagement strategy. It is intended that they would attend a range of both the tier 2 and the tier 3 consultations—I stand to be corrected there; it is not tier 1, Mr Smith? No.

Given their very, very wide ranging experience in consultations with Indigenous communities, particularly in the NT, we think that they will be able to provide us with an assurance about the way that we are using interpreters—because we have a very comprehensive program in train to train interpreters so that we are not speaking in English; we are speaking through interpreters, explaining the material in language—and that the communications materials that we have to support that are appropriate and the way our staff conduct the consultations is culturally appropriate.

Mr Smith—In terms of the specifics, CIRCA were engaged—as Ms Curran said—to attend the first of the GBM and ICC training sessions in Alice Springs last week, which CIRCA did. In addition, they will attend at least 13 tier 2 consultations, which will be spread through the Northern Territory, and at least one tier 3 regional workshop. In addition, it is open to CIRCA to say to us that they would like to attend more regional workshops or tier 2 consultations, and we would consider that.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. Are you going to each of the 73 prescribed communities?

Ms Curran—Yes, that is the intention.

Senator SIEWERT—And I presume that the tier 1 consultations are being carried out in communities where the GBMs are located.

Ms Curran—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—They are not located in all of the communities; it varies.

Dr Harmer—But they cover all the communities—

Senator SIEWERT—There are around 60 at the moment, aren't there?

Ms Curran—That is correct, but a number of them cover more than one community.

Senator SIEWERT—So they will go to those other communities?

Ms Curran—Yes.

Dr Harmer—They will be present, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Who will be recording notes et cetera from that meeting? Will they be doing that themselves, or do you have secretariat support for them?

Ms Curran—No, they will be doing that themselves.

Dr Harmer—Assisted by their Indigenous engagement officers.

Senator SIEWERT—Who is responsible for pulling all the consultation together?

Ms Curran—In terms of the overarching—

Senator SIEWERT—There are four tiers. Who is responsible for pulling all that together?

Ms Curran—We have a steering committee within the department. It comprises representatives from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Attorney-General's Department, and it is chaired jointly by Mr Field and me.

Senator SIEWERT—So the department will be pulling the report together?

Ms Curran—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I am just trying to remember the time line in here. It was for September?

Ms Curran—Yes. We anticipate that the consultations will be concluded at the end of August or early September.

Senator SIEWERT—How much notice are you giving communities when you are going into them? You said the first one was on 16 June, I understand.

Ms Curran—That is correct. That enables the training of interpreters to be completed.

Mr Smith—In fact, the first consultation starts on 15 June. We will shortly be putting the consultation schedule on the website. But GBMs are already letting communities know, particularly the communities that are having the earlier consultations, about the dates.

Senator SIEWERT—And how many regional workshops are there going to be?

Mr Richardson—There will be five regional workshops and three additional workshops—two of those will be with representative organisations in the Northern Territory and one with the Aboriginal advisory body in the Northern Territory—so there will be eight altogether.

Senator SIEWERT—And is the advisory body the one that the minister set up not long after she became the minister? Is that the one?

Mr Richardson—It is the Northern Territory representative advisory body.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you know where the five regional workshops are going to be yet?

Mr Richardson—The locations? Yes, they will be in Darwin, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, Katherine and Nhulunbuy.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. Will further information be provided to workshop participants on the issues of informed consent and the decision-making process on special measures so they are fully informed of the legal requirements under the RDA?

Mr Field—At this stage, it is not intended that detailed specific information would be provided. The context in which the government's commitment to conform with the RDA is made sets the tone for the process that is set out in the discussion paper. The tier 3 consultations, as a part of that process, will clearly feed into any decisions that government makes following the consultations about the redesign of the measures, if that is required.

Senator SIEWERT—Will the stakeholder meeting, the fourth tier, be carried out in the Northern Territory or do you envisage that occurring elsewhere?

Mr Richardson—All the meetings will be held in the Northern Territory.

Senator SIEWERT—What about including some of the stakeholder groups? I am not disagreeing with you, by the way, but I am wondering how you include stakeholder groups that are taking a strong interest in this issue but do not happen to be located in the NT.

Ms Curran—We anticipate that there will be some discussions with those groups in the course of the consultation process but, because these measures are directed towards the people in the Northern Territory, our formal consultation strategy and process is very firmly directed at garnering the views of the people of the Northern Territory.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand that, but you would also be as aware as I am that there is a lot of interest in this around Australia, and some of the measures have implications for elsewhere in Australia. So I am wondering how you are going to gather the views of other stakeholders outside of the NT.

Ms Curran—We anticipate that people who are not in the Northern Territory and have an interest in this will be writing to the minister.

Senator SIEWERT—Will be—

Ms Curran—They will be writing to the minister and seeking some sort of opportunity to provide input.

Senator SIEWERT—Could they be invited to the workshop in the NT that is held with stakeholders?

Ms Curran—That would not be appropriate because it is very much a NT specific focus. Should there be sufficient interest, we could look at something broader outside the NT.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

CHAIR—Does any other senator have questions on this issue—the future directions in the Northern Territory? No? Okay. No more on that one. The next issue, Senator Siewert?

Senator SIEWERT—I am not going to go through the list of what has been spent this time.

CHAIR—I think Senator Mason may want to.

Senator MASON—I may have a look at that, Senator Siewert. You can help me if I stumble.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you want to start there then, because I want to go into the actual budget items.

Senator MASON—All right. In the February estimates, Senator Siewert procured a document, the NTER Cross Agency Expenditure Report as at 31 January 2009. Dr Harmer, do you remember that discussion?

Dr Harmer—I do. I remember it well, Senator.

Senator MASON—That's the way! I think it is fair to say that I asked some questions relating to what seemed to be a delay in expending money. I just want to see where we are up to because I was promised that, by these estimates, we would have a full accounting of the expenditure of those funds. I asked questions in relation to enhancing education and the fact that the budget for 2008-09 was \$18.6 million and expenditure as at 31 January 2009 was nil. I simply wanted to know what was happening because it seemed slightly incongruous. What has happened since? Has the money been expended, how much and on what programs?

Mr Yates—For the assistance of the committee, we would like to table a document which provides the latest up-to-date picture—

Senator MASON—Terrific. Great. Thank you.

Mr Yates—of all of the measures against the various departments who are involved in the delivery of those measures. I will have that circulated now. That will then provide a context for the interrogation of specific matters with the different agencies that are involved.

CHAIR—You have given it to us in big print.

Dr Harmer—It is a very big table!

Senator MASON—I hope I can understand it, Dr Harmer.

Dr Harmer—I am sure you will be able to understand it, Senator.

Senator MASON—Senator Siewert may have to help me again.

Mr Yates—I was going to just introduce the table just for the assistance of the committee but, in light of the feedback we had from the last estimates, we have tried to be as comprehensive as we can. The data in this document, 'NTER Cross Agency Expenditure Report as at 30 April 2009', all relates up until the end of April. Some agencies may have more recent data, but that was the point at which we could provide a comprehensive story to the committee. As you look at this document, you will see that attachment A provides the information against each agency that is represented at estimates. Attachment B takes as its main reference point the individual measures themselves. Let's work with attachment A, because that is likely to be the most useful. As you go from left to right across the document, we have agency, the particular broad theme and the measures specifically. The committee was interested in both the administrative expenditure and the departmental expenditure, both what was budgeted for and how we are travelling year to date, and that is expressed in dollar terms as well as a percentage. Then we give the aggregates in the far right columns that combines both the administered and departmental expenditure. That provides a reference point for the

committee to look at the overall picture and then to examine the specific measures. I think, Senator Mason, you are going to the issue of 'enhancing education', which is against the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations agency, towards the top of the page. They can now speak to the state of play in regard to spending as at the end of April, or more recently if they happen to have any more data. I will hand over to Mr Carters.

Senator MASON—Welcome back, Mr Carters.

Mr Carters—Thank you, Senator. In respect to the expenditure and expected expenditure on the 'Enhancing education' measure, there has been a delay in spending those funds, primarily due to negotiating our funding agreement with the Department of Education and Training in the Northern Territory. However, that has been completed. There has also been a significant organisational restructure within the NT department as well. We do expect to expend those funds.

Senator MASON—You do?

Mr Carters—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Is that why the greater enrolment, the 200 teachers, is so low as well?

Mr Carters—That is different; that is not covered as part of this one.

Senator SIEWERT—No, it is part of 'Enhancing education'.

Ms Hamilton—The 200 additional teachers measure is actually separate to the 'Enhancing education' measure.

Senator SIEWERT—It is listed in the theme of 'Enhancing education'. I accept that it is a different line item.

Ms Hamilton—I am sorry. I thought you were asking about the 200 additional teachers. You are asking about the general measure?

Senator SIEWERT—That is right.

Ms Hamilton—Sorry.

Senator SIEWERT—There is a general measure of 'Enhancing education' and there is a specific item—and we have talked about it before—of the increase in the number of teachers. According to this—and I seem to remember last time we had not made much progress on it either—36 per cent of the money has been spent.

Ms Hamilton—On this table it is shown within 'Enhancing education', but it is a separate measure. The three key items under 'Enhancing education' of 'accelerated literacy', 'additional classrooms' and 'quality teacher package' are all expected to be expended. For 'Additional teachers', which is, as I said, a separate item, the full expenditure is not expected to happen this financial year.

Senator SIEWERT—Does that mean you have not been able to get the new teachers?

Ms Hamilton—Correct.

Senator SIEWERT—What is the reason for that?

Ms Hamilton—The Northern Territory government is obviously responsible for implementing this measure, and they report that they have had some significant challenges around shortage of teacher housing. We are currently working with them on strategies to ensure that they can implement this measure by the end of the calendar year.

Senator SIEWERT—I have got other education questions, but I will come back to them.

Senator ADAMS—Ms Hamilton, can you give us an indication of how many extra teachers have been employed?

Ms Hamilton—I think, at the last Senate estimates, we reported that 48 teachers had been employed at that time. We can report now that 54 have been employed.

Senator ADAMS—They are still all in place?

Ms Hamilton—Correct; 54 are still all in place.

Senator MASON—In the February estimates, Mr Carters, you mentioned that—I have a copy of that table here—nothing had been expended. An excuse given was that education operates on a calendar or education year—that is, February through to November-December—and not a financial year. I understand that, but your evidence from last time was that this money would all be expended by the end of this financial year. So what have we got? We have nearly \$15½ million to go, to be spent in two months—May-June? That is right, isn't it?

Mr Carters—Yes, that is correct.

Senator MASON—That is right.

Mr Carters—We do expect to make a substantial payment to the NT government in June—this month.

Ms Hamilton—I think one of the elements we explained at the last Senate estimates, too, was that, particularly with the school nutrition program, the payments are made at key milestones. So significant payments come at certain times.

Senator MASON—Yes, but the top component there, 'Enhancing Education'—let us talk about apples and apples here—is 17 per cent. That is right, isn't it? Year to date expenditure is \$3.2 million against \$18.6 million, which is only 17 per cent. In real terms, that is \$15½ million to be spent in two months. I am not happy, but I suppose, when we come back again in October, you know what questions I will be asking, Mr Carters, don't you?

Mr Carters—I do indeed.

Senator MASON—All right. Thanks very much. Thank you, Chair.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you for that table. That is what I was actually going to ask for, rather than making you go through it item by item as I usually do.

Dr Harmer—Mr Yates suspected you might ask for that.

Senator SIEWERT—Obviously I will have more questions around each of those individual items as they come up, but what I would like to do is go to the new budget and go through a few of the items generally. I do not actually want to talk about the items but I want to get a bit of an explanation, please, of the planned expenditure under a couple of the items.

Dr Harmer—The announcements made in the 2009 May budget?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, what in theory we should be talking about: the PBS. There have been further allocations made against a number of the existing items. Now they are all listed as Closing the Gap, so I presume that means we are not, after the end of this financial year, going to be having the NTER any more. It all seems to be listed now as Closing the Gap NT and various measures under that. Is that correct?

Mr Yates—That is broadly the case in terms of how the government is representing its expenditure in the Northern Territory. I guess that reflects a greater harmonisation of our efforts in closing the gap between the historical measures from the NTER and the new investments that are being made in the NT Closing the Gap.

Senator SIEWERT—There is \$89.2 million allocated against income management and associated Centrelink delivery. Are you able to break that down for me? That is for the next financial year. I am wondering what that money is for, given that there was a substantial amount of money in the previous NTER budget and a lot of that was, I thought, for setting up the whole income management process. So I am wondering what that quite large amount of money is for.

Mr Matthews—In 2009-10, there has been, as you said, \$89.2 million provided for income management in the Northern Territory. About \$82.3 million of that is for Centrelink for service delivery, which is really to continue the same business that we have been doing to date. It funds all of the Centrelink workers, the remote visiting teams and the systems to run income management. There is also \$2.8 million for FaHCSIA; \$4.1 million for the DHS, the Department of Human Services, for the cost of the BasicsCard and for the contract; and \$4.9 million for money management.

Senator SIEWERT—Money management is the financial counselling?

Mr Matthews—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—The \$82.39 million for service delivery is quite a large amount of money. Could you take it on notice to provide a breakdown of how much it costs to provide the remote servicing teams. If it is easier to do now, I would like that now. If not, could you take it on notice.

Dr Harmer—We have Centrelink people here, but I suspect we may need to take that specificity on notice.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could, I want the line items basically.

Dr Harmer—Let me check that.

Mr Tidswell—We can provide you with a breakdown of the \$80 million for this year—or is it the breakdown for next year?

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry, I would like the breakdown for this year, because I do not think that individual detail is provided here, but also for next year.

Mr Tidswell—I will ask Ms Gaha to do that.

Ms Gaha—Up until April of 2009 we had spent \$23,256,983 on salaries and \$594,714 on staff related costs. Our IT was \$4,838,000. Agent fees and professional services were over \$11 million.

Senator SIEWERT—What is that?

Ms Gaha—We run an agent service. They are third-party providers of access to Centrelink services.

Senator SIEWERT—That is where you have Centrelink services in community facilities and things like that.

Ms Gaha—That is right. So that is the total salary picture. Under administration, our vehicle costs were over a million dollars. Travel and fares were close to \$4 million.

Senator SIEWERT—Is that to get people up to the NT?

Ms Gaha—Yes, our staff work there on a rotational basis.

Mr Tidswell—It is also to move people around the Territory.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand that bit. How many extra staff have been employed to manage income quarantine?

Ms Gaha—We did not employ extra staff specifically for the work in the Northern Territory because we chose to use our more experienced staff and as often as possible our Indigenous staff, so we had approximately 280 Centrelink employees working in the Northern Territory on the welfare reform initiatives.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate the point of using the more experienced staff, but does that mean you then put other staff in other places, so you still had to employ additional staff, just not necessarily those in the NT?

Mr Tidswell—We have a blended approach. We try and use experienced local people who have good knowledge of the local area and then through expressions of interest we get other people to either backfill those experienced people across the Territory in other places or bring in others.

Senator SIEWERT—I am trying to work out the additional expenditure that is against this item, which is just over \$23 million on salaries. Obviously you were providing Centrelink services in the NT prior to the intervention, and I appreciate there is a lot of extra work in income quarantining, so I am trying to work how many additional staff were specifically related to the procedure of income quarantining.

Mr Tidswell—I am not sure if we have got that exact figure, but you are correct: we have increased the base level of staff across the Northern Territory to deal with income management and related welfare reform measures. We can probably get that to you quite quickly. I am not quite sure that we have got that figure exactly with us at this moment but we could probably get that to you after the break.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could that would be appreciated. There is not an individual line item for the remote servicing teams; that is presumably in the breakdown of these figures—extra staff, the vehicles and the travel. Is that where it is accounted for, rather than a specific line item?

Mr Tidswell—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—When you are looking at the staffing issues could you tell me how many remote teams there are?

Ms Gaha—I think we could do that now.

Mr Tidswell—We might be able to do that now—Mr Searston will join us.

Mr Searston—We have got about 30 teams that travel out in the Northern Territory.

Senator SIEWERT—And that is through a rotational basis, including the people that rotate up to the NT?

Mr Searston—Yes. We have people coming through a number of expressions of interest, as Mr Tidswell said earlier. We regularly refresh the people and look for experienced people; some people with knowledge of the Northern Territory, some people with the skills to do the visiting and some Indigenous people. We regularly refresh those people coming to the Northern Territory to do that visiting.

Senator SIEWERT—Are all the staff that are allied to this measure rotated in, or are some there permanently?

Mr Searston—We have some people permanently there. As we get certainty over time about what the future of this initiative might be we will look to have people permanently in the Northern Territory and we would—

Mr Tidswell—We are keen to make sure we get good embedded local staff to be there and work on these initiatives, particularly local Indigenous staff. That is our overarching goal, but difficult to do in scaling up quickly and getting staff and capability across the Territory.

Senator SCULLION—With reference to the document that Dr Harmer so kindly provided which benchmarked a few of the areas we need to look for; I have only just received it but at a quick glance could you indicate exactly where the housing expenditure is?

Dr Harmer—We can. As the Chair mentioned at the beginning we were going to do housing after the break and it may be better to go to it then. I can bring them up—

Senator SCULLION—No—I do not wish to ask a question on it, I just want to know where it is on the budget papers—I understand and will ask it then. I just noticed that it appeared to be missing and perhaps I have missed it.

Dr Harmer—Sure.

Mr Yates—The only coverage of housing related matters connected to the Northern Territory Emergency Response measures on this table arises out of staff housing. If you are interested in our broader investment in housing in communities, as you would recall the history of that investment preceded, or was separate from, the NTER. As such, this table does not—

Dr Harmer—This is just the NTER measure.

Senator SCULLION—Indeed. I will go to that when the housing measures come up. I thought there may be some information.

Senator SIEWERT—I just want to go back and make sure I have a proper understanding of the budget. Am I correct in understanding that the budget for the Closing the Gap initiative in the NT is \$807.4 million for the new financial year?

CHAIR—2009-10.

Mr Yates—That is over the forward estimates period.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you give me the figure for the next financial year?

Dr Harmer—So what you are after is the Close the Gap money through the budget for the NT for 2009-10?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, please. Or, to make this easier, could you break down the \$807 million over the out years?

Dr Harmer—We might take that on notice just to save time, unless someone has got it quickly?

Mr Yates—Yes, the figure for 2009-10 is \$491.9 million. For the 2010-11 financial year the figure is \$336.9 million and the figure for 2011-12 is \$340.7 million.

Dr Harmer—Senator, I am informed that it is set out in the portfolio budget statements on page 27.

Senator SIEWERT—I have the overview here and it is not broken down in the overview. Thank you.

CHAIR—Let us now move to welfare reform.

Senator ADAMS—I have a question relating to the general feedback the department has received from income quarantining and how Centrelink is managing it. How are people accepting it and how is Centrelink dealing with the extra workload? Also, I know that within the prescribed communities it is a blanket cover but are you getting people from other areas saying that they want to be income quarantined in the same way?

Mr Matthews—If you are just after a bit of a general overview, I am happy to give that, but if there is anything specific please ask on the way through. In the Northern Territory at the moment, as at around 8 May, all the communities are switched on for income management. There are about approximately 15,165 at about 8 May who are being income managed.

Dr Harmer—So it is almost 16,000 who are being income managed.

Mr Matthews—So it is operating at full capacity at the moment in all of the communities in all of the areas that it was intended would be income managed. In terms of feedback around whether people are happy with it, are you talking about clients, or staff working in the field?

Senator ADAMS—Probably both. I would just like to know how the communities are generally. I know there was quite a lot of backlash to start with but I would really like to get an overview as to whether it is settling down. I also want to know how the Centrelink staff—because they are the ones who are having to deal with it—are coping?

Mr Matthews—I will leave the Centrelink staffing issue for Centrelink but in general the customer feedback we get is actually really quite positive. On its introduction there was obviously a period there where getting customer understanding about income management

took a while to build but increasingly, as we move forward, we find the understanding of income management itself—how it operates and the flexibility there is in the system—to be increasing all the time. So we have fewer issues with that and we have probably more customers being happy. The BasicsCard has been received really quite positively by both merchants and customers and seems to have addressed a lot of the issues and frustrations that people had with income management, particularly around mobility and accessing stores and things like that. So we find that those types of things tend to be received really positively. All of the feedback we get from people in the main, people from the communities, our ICC network, government business managers and Centrelink staff on the ground is very positive. There can be some challenges at times, but overwhelmingly we find that the feedback we get from clients is that they find the thing quite helpful and very positive. In particular, most of the feedback we get from women, the vulnerable and the elderly is that the income management provides them with quite a good service. I will hand over to Centrelink at this stage.

Mr Tidswell—There is no doubt about it—it was a difficult early implementation of income management and it was a tricky thing to do. We had never done it before, but we have learnt week by week and month by month. Our sense now is that we have a good process of connecting with communities, connecting with customers and making it clear to them how the whole system works. The anecdotal feedback from our staff which is directly from customers is that there is more and better food on the table and people understand how the whole system works now. There were teething problems at the start, absolutely, but bit by bit we learn more and build up our capability. The great thing is that this initiative has enabled us to get our staff out and amongst those communities to do all the general servicing work that was very difficult for us to do such as making sure that people were on the right payments and getting the right rate for the suite of payments the Australian government provides. The initiative has really helped us in that area. Mr Searston might have some other anecdotal feedback.

Mr Searston—To confirm what Mr Tidswell has said, our anecdotal feedback from customers is that they are understanding more and are appreciative of Centrelink people being out into the communities to be able to help them not only with income management but also with their general Centrelink business. We also have people who are using our call centres to get assistance from Centrelink. The general feedback is that people are much more aware of income management and understanding it and much more appreciative of the Centrelink service.

Senator ADAMS—Is Centrelink employing any Indigenous people as interpreters or training anyone from the communities to work with you?

Mr Tidswell—Absolutely—and that is a really important thing for us. We would like to be able to employ more local Indigenous staff in communities to assist us with the process. We have been looking at our service approach in some of those communities with our remote area service centres, where we predominantly employ local Indigenous staff and train people to do the work that is generally done by Centrelink staff across Australia. We are making small steps, but we are always keen to recruit, train and build up capability in that area.

Mr Searston—In our area in Northern Australia, about 25 per cent of our staff are Indigenous. We have about 12 or 13 per cent of people currently visiting our communities

who are Indigenous staff members. As Mr Tidswell said, we have a regular program of trying to increase the number of Indigenous staff, not only in our areas but also in the people visiting the communities.

Senator ADAMS—As far as the budget for training goes, I am trying to see where we could break that down. Have you enough budget funds to have extra training programs for community people?

Mr Tidswell—Yes, we are very happy with the dollars that we receive and we can make the whole program of work that we have been asked to do work well.

Mr Searston—All the people who come to the Northern Territory go through a training program which includes a cultural awareness training program.

Senator ADAMS—I am fully aware of that. It was just that in the smaller communities extra staff could be taken on and trained sufficiently to be able to deal with the issues.

Senator BOYCE—What financial planning capacity are you building into the income management programs in each community?

Mr Tidswell—One of the things is that the individual conversation about how much you spend a fortnight on food, clothing or other priority needs triggers, at a very base level, the ability to start the conversation. It has really helped, I think, to—

Senator BOYCE—So it is informal at the present time?

Mr Tidswell—It is informal in that sense.

Senator BOYCE—Is there an intention to develop that further?

Ms Beauchamp—In addition to what Centrelink are doing in those face-to-face interviews, the government has invested quite substantial amounts of money around financial literacy and financial management programs.

Senator BOYCE—I realise that, but I just want to know if the income management program itself has within it its own obsolescence, so to speak, in that it is building the capacity for people not to need an income management program.

Mr Matthews—There are probably two elements to that. As Centrelink were explaining, part of it is around the discussion that the Centrelink staff have with the person to set up their deductions and their income management. That is normally a process of sitting down with the individual and talking through just the basics of life—how much their rent is, how much they spend on food, how they manage that, how it balances out in their family, what their day-to-day needs are and where they shop. There is a lot of that stuff to provide a basic level of education that probably many may not have had access to before. That is one of the themes around how the service delivery going back in provides a way to re-engage with people through the community on a fairly ongoing basis. That gives us a reasonable base. It is not necessarily a formalised money-managing training course as such but a simple process of sitting down and working through how you plan your expenditure. It provides a base level, we think, of assistance to educate people around that. Then we also have some funding for the money management program.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you.

Senator ADAMS—As far as the BasicsCard goes, I know there were a number of problems. Has that settled down? Also, do you have any evidence as to whether the BasicsCard is being abused? That was the worry at the start.

Mr Tidswell—The BasicsCard has been a big success in Indigenous communities. I think I cited some figures—upwards of 96 per cent of the income managed have a BasicsCard. It became a bit of a currency in communities: people wanted that green card. It has helped people to do their work and get their income managed funds and their goods et cetera. It has really been a good initiative and an improvement in that service offering income management.

Mr Searston—Recently we have had some feedback from our merchants that indicated to us that they believe customers had a good working knowledge of using the card and that very few problems were experienced with the card's use. They were commenting that the customers know how to use it, and so they must be getting the right information from Centrelink and from within the community about how to use it. The feedback from merchants as well has been positive about the use of the card.

Mr Tidswell—There are a broader range of merchants—and that is a good thing—than previously, where there was some critique of the broadness of the application.

Senator ADAMS—As we have moved around with our select committee in regional and remote Indigenous communities, it has been amazing. At the start we had feedback about the BasicsCard and the way it was perceived to be rorted. Now, six months later, there is such an improvement and not nearly as many complaints coming through—as far as the committee heard, anyway. I just wanted to know how you felt it was going.

Mr Tidswell—We have learnt a lot, we continue to learn and we continue to think about the service recovery approaches we need to put in place for people and make it clear about how the whole system works. We are pretty happy about how things are going as we speak.

Senator SIEWERT—I have certainly had a number of complaints around the fact that people cannot get onto the hotline and that it is costing people in communities \$2. I understand you are expecting to launch a 1800 number, because I have heard a lot of complaints about that. I have heard that they like using the hotline but they cannot use the hotline. They cannot get their balances and they have had trouble going into stores when they have not known their balance and the card has been rejected.

Mr Tidswell—The balance issue is a big service delivery issue for us. It has been a challenge, but we have been putting in place a whole range of things and continue to do that to improve that service offer so people and merchants get an understanding of what people's balances are. I might ask Mr Maloney to describe what we are doing in that area.

Mr Maloney—I think you are right. There has been some criticism around the balance issue for customers. As you probably know, there are a number of ways that customers can obtain their balance, all through Centrelink—either through one of our offices, a customer service centre, a RASC, or through some of our staff when they are out in the field. There is also an online application, which is used to some extent in some places. Telephone is probably the primary means for customers in remote communities, in particular. Certainly, from time to time—as with all call centre operations—there are access issues associated with that.

Apart from starting issues inside our call centres, which we are addressing, there are a couple of things that we have done to try to overcome that. We have made an IVR self-service application available. When we first put it in place, I have to say I was a little dubious about the value of that.

Senator SIEWERT—An IVR?

Mr Maloney—It is a self-service application. The customer rings and does not talk to an operator.

Senator SIEWERT—This is where you put the numbers in?

Mr Maloney—Yes, put the numbers in. It is an interactive voice response. It has been amazingly successful, I have to say, both in terms of the ability of the customer to use that application and the number of times they have actually been able to use it successfully. It is not technically difficult, and it has probably increased significantly people's access to their balance. We are looking at a free-call number, as you noted. I think sometime, in the next couple of weeks, we should have that nailed down and be able to roll that out.

Senator SIEWERT—In terms of the IVR, I have heard of people using it, but I have also heard a lot of people complain about it: that it is too hard, that you have to wait too long and that you have to remember a lot of numbers. How many people are using it?

Mr Maloney—Up to the beginning of April, 128,000 successful uses have been made of the IVR. If a customer does fail to use it, they do drop through into the call cue; they go through to a CSO—a customer service operator.

Senator SIEWERT—Is the IVR number a free-call number or is it one that you have to pay for?

Mr Maloney—At the moment, it is a 13-number, but we will be attaching that to our free-call number.

Senator SIEWERT—So that will get the free-call number, as well?

Mr Maloney—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—When we were at Milingimbi a few weeks ago, the Telstra line went out, so the store came to a grinding halt. What contingencies have you got when that happens? Because it did cause quite a lot of confusion, and it just so happened we were right there when it happened and we were able to observe the problems that occurred from it.

Mr Searston—We have some contingencies in place for when those issues happen. Generally, the store can contact us to let us know that that happened and we can arrange to move money from a BasicsCard into the store, so people can get access to their money in the store. A lot of times, some of the issues with the use of the card are intermittent: it might work; it might not work now; it might work in five minutes time. I understand in Milingimbi there were some intermittent problems with the use of the card. But we have a range of contingencies in place for when that happens for customers to get access to their money.

Mr Maloney—Yes, the Milingimbi incident was unfortunate, both in terms of its timing and—

Senator ADAMS—It was good timing because it gave us the ability to really see that there is a problem here.

Mr Maloney—We did anticipate it would come up. As Mr Searston said, the problem in Milingimbi was intermittent. And, on the basis of it being intermittent, the store managers decided that they would not advise us. In fact, Centrelink became aware of the problem after the event, when the problem had been resolved. As Mr Searston also said, had we known at the time, we could have made a number of contingency arrangements, which we have in place anyway: to either allocate money directly to the store, so the customers did not need to use their BasicsCard; or to make some one-off payments to customers, if we needed to.

Our contingency arrangements are really contingent on the nature of the actual outage—things like the duration, the particular customer's need as to whether it is urgent or not urgent et cetera. So we have a series of arrangements in place that we can put into action. But, on this occasion, we did not actually know there was a problem there, until afterwards.

Mr Searston—There have been other stores where that has happened and where we have been able to make those payments into the store so that people could get access to their income managed funds.

Senator ADAMS—I thought I would raise it because we need to know just what is there so that there are not any more problems in future.

Mr Tidswell—We are really conscious that we are vulnerable to the backhoe or to a cable somewhere. We want to make sure that people can get access to those funds to buy their priority goods. That is our clear charter in this area, so we continue to work at improving our response in that area.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to go back to this issue of the provision of services to Aboriginal communities. I noted your point very clearly that a lot of people are liking the remote servicing and the provision of services that Centrelink are now providing to people in these communities. My views on income quarantining are well-known. However, what this has done is provide people with a level of service that people in non-Aboriginal communities expect. The amount of money that is being provided to Centrelink in the next financial year is going to be \$90 million. A lot of that is about servicing Aboriginal people, giving them information and helping them access and understand the system better. This is the level of service that people would expect, is it not?

Mr Tidswell—Effectively, what you are able to do with that envelope of funding is provide a visitation service over and above what we were able to afford previously. As we say, 'When the bonnet is open, we are able to do a whole lot of work.' To do income management, you need to sit down and make sure that people's entitlements are correct, that they are going to the right place and getting the sort of service they need.

Senator SIEWERT—With all due respect, I would have thought that would have been what we should have been doing anyway. Whether or not we were doing income management, we should have been making sure that people understood the service and that they were getting their entitlements et cetera.

Mr Tidswell—I agree, Senator. This has given us the extra capability to be more visible and rather than having a six-month visitation program, to have a much more constant visitation program and help people get connected to the entitlements that they are entitled to.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate you may not be able to answer this straight away. An issue I have been following quite strongly is the number of people who have been through the welfare-to-work process and, prior to that, the number of people who have been breached. I understand some of those requirements have changed with the employment reforms. Have you noticed a drop or an increase in the number of people who are able to re-engage with the process more quickly or noticed that people are not dropping out of the system as much?

Mr Tidswell—I might ask one of my colleagues to join us at the table. What we are able to do, as you have said, is be out there connecting people to the services they need. What I do not have is a sense of the level of breaching activity that has occurred across the Territory as a result, but we can certainly take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT—Previous figures were showing that the number of Aboriginal people that were being breached had significantly increased through the previous welfare-to-work reforms. I am interested in knowing if that figure has changed. Given that the new employment reforms have only just taken place, I suspect you have still got figures from the old process that could give us a bit of an idea.

Ms Gaha—The new process has not started, so we are still using the old process. I am pleased to be able to report that the number of Indigenous people who now have serious failures has dropped quite dramatically. That is because of a process that Centrelink put in place where an Indigenous cultural adviser—one of our Indigenous staff—has been used as a consultant whenever an Indigenous person was at risk of becoming a serious failure or being breached as you put it. So the numbers have reduced to 283 as at 1 May, and that is proportionately smaller than the numbers in the participation population of Centrelink.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you provide me with a breakdown by state? If you can do it now, that would be great. If not, could you take it on notice for me. That would be much appreciated.

Ms Drayton—We will have to take that on notice. We will get that to you as soon as we can.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay, thank you very much.

Senator SCULLION—It is always difficult when you are probing into these statistics—for me, anyway. I would like to know if you have any sense of how many people are being breached and how many people are not being breached. As you claim, there has been a substantive change in the trend. There is no unique solution to these things. It may be simply that we have decided not to breach them anymore—that would be one way those statistics would change. What sorts of interventions do these cultural officers make? After these individuals have been spoken to are they inclined to reappear at work and do the right things and therefore not get breached, or does that intervention provides some other time period to ensure that they are not breached?

Ms Drayton—It is probably a combination of both of those things. What we find is that often when someone is speaking to one of the Indigenous specialists, they are disclosing information that the customer may not have been talking about previously with other staff. So we become aware of customers' personal circumstances to a greater extent and whether they had the capacity to do what they were asked to do or whether there were other factors influencing their behaviour. We also find equally that it does sometimes help customers to understand what their obligations are and then fulfil them. So it is a combination of both.

Senator SCULLION—I am sure other senators receive anecdotal evidence. I have certainly seen it for myself in some communities. I have spoken to the person responsible for the CDEP. He tells me they turn up in the morning and say, 'I'm here,' and then in five minutes they are gone. I asked him if they were then breached. He said: 'That is not my responsibility. I pass that on. They keep turning up, so clearly they are not breached.' Do you have some comments about that circumstance? I am sure it has been passed back to you, because I have also had discussions with some of the government business managers on that matter.

Ms Drayton—In relation to CDEP, Centrelink would not have many comments on that. It might be something we would need to pass to one of the policy departments. I am aware of the work that happens at a local level in trying to make sure people understand what they have to do. But the specifics around the CDEP are not something Centrelink has information on.

Senator SCULLION—Perhaps not the CDEP. Ali Curung is directly adjacent to a large melon farm. I speak to the melon farmer and I speak to the people on the same day. One would think there are a number of incidents or situations where there is a great deal of employment and a great number of unemployed people. The number of people who are breached for not attending work is no higher in those communities than in any other—perhaps not necessarily with CDEP but in the broader employment. What have you to say about that anecdotal evidence? Those conversations have been had with the government business managers and I am sure you would be aware of the situation.

Ms Drayton—What I can say is that the current policy around participation has not changed. We are about to move into the reform of employment policy. It is true to say that the number of people who are facing both eight-week nonpayment periods and participation failures or breaches has decreased in the last 12 to 18 months. That has been really around focusing on the firm and fair approach to decision making, and looking at a person's entire circumstances. We do a lot of work on a local level between Centrelink areas and the local employment service providers to try and understand what the situation is for both the job seeker and the providers to make sure everyone is clear about what they have to do and what the requirements are. But the policy itself has not changed in that time.

Senator SCULLION—It has been put to me that the principal issue is not necessarily communication—it may be partly communication—but simply that they are not turning up. They do not arrive at the workplace. So it is not about what they did at the workplace or some misunderstanding about their tasks or about transport; they simply do not show up. Perhaps it is something you may want to take on notice, but would these cultural liaison officers be able to deal with all those people who this intervention has been provided for and the explanations

for not turning up and so on? I know that anything more in-depth would be almost impossible to deal with, but I thought that might be useful.

Dr Harmer—It may be better if we give you on notice an explanation of the role. It is pretty difficult for the officer to respond to hypothetical or anecdotal information. To give you a detailed explanation of the role and the policy is probably the best we can do.

Senator SCULLION—We are looking at a trend, if the people are now not being breached. I want to know if the reason they are not being breached is simply because we are lowering the bar. Of course that would happen, but that is not in anyone's interest. So that is why I would like to perhaps drill down into that and have some numbers about when they are being breached. Is it because of a communications issue? I think it might be useful for all of us to know the reasons why they are being breached and put them into maybe two or three general areas: either through nonattendance, noncommunication or an issue in the workplace. There must only be three or four principal areas. I think it would be very useful if we could have that broken down into those areas; plus those numbers that would have been breached had it not been for the intervention and some of the issues around that.

Dr Harmer—We will try to get you some information.

Ms Drayton—We can certainly get you information on the first part of that question and we will look into whether we track the information about the outcomes after Indigenous consultation. We can certainly do the first part of that.

CHAIR—I propose to go onto IBA now and Senator Siewert has a question about ABA.

Mr Tidswell—Senator Siewert, I have an answer to the earlier question that you asked in relation to staffing numbers. You asked for a comparison between the base level of staff you have got in the Northern Territory and what we put on as a result of the income management suite of proposals. We have approximately 472 staff working across what we call area north Australia—that includes all of the Northern Territory into Western Australia and the Kimberleys and a little slice of the top end of South Australia. And in the Northern Territory income management teams we have about 190 staff.

Senator SIEWERT—In income management?

Mr Tidswell—Across the income management suite of issues.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I just double check that you will provide on notice the break down of the 2009-10 money that is allocated to the income quarantine?

Mr Tidswell—We have not done that work yet, but we will provide that on notice.

Dr Harmer—Senator Siewert, I should mention that we were not aware that there were going to be questions about ABA. The person from FaHCSIA who would be best placed to answer that is not here. We could bring them along, but that would be later in the morning or in the afternoon. Would you like someone here?

Senator SIEWERT—I will put my question on notice. It is not worth dragging them up. When we had checked about this we will told that it was in the department, so it would be okay.

Dr Harmer—It is, but—

Senator SIEWERT—That is fine. I will put it on notice. There is no drama.

[9.55 am]

Indigenous Business Australia

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, because of the time frame we are going to go through with this agency until 10.30, so there are a few more questions there. We now have IBA. Good morning, Mr Morony. Senator Boyce?

Senator BOYCE—I was primarily wanting to have the opportunity to talk to IBA in the current economic environment, because most of your funds come from investment. I was wondering if you could talk me through the difficulties of the last 11 months and tell me what has changed in the investment strategies of IBA over that period.

Mr Morony—The economic climate and the global financial crisis have had a number of impacts; some of them have been positive and some of them have, obviously, been negative. The positive side is that we are receiving a number of more direct inquiries from the private sector about investment opportunities, so people are actually coming to us and talking about opportunities—

Senator BOYCE—Asking you to invest?

Mr Morony—Yes, particularly where people face the situations of a credit squeeze. So that has actually opened up opportunities.

During the early stage of the crisis, we had a look at the way in which we could assist our clients—the lenders that we have. I will quickly go through the main areas of activity that we are involved in. We have a home loans program—

Senator BOYCE—I wanted to ask questions about home loans and home ownership on Indigenous lands.

Mr Morony—As I said, we have a home loans program, we have a small-business loans program and we have our normal investment program where we bring Aboriginal people and the private sector together. When we were assessing the way in which we need to keep in touch with our clients, we decided on the good old-fashioned banking approach, which is to keep in close and regular contact with our clients. We have a system with not only our own loans but our business loans whereby we talk to and provide support to people when we see signs of them moving into arrears.

We have also initiated a program of information provision through which we have arranged a couple of briefings in strategic locations and through which we can give people access to good commercial advice about the economic climate and its impact.

Senator BOYCE—So these are people who have small-business loans with you? Are they the people you are talking about there?

Mr Morony—These are Aboriginal groups that are in business and want to attend various briefings. It is not dissimilar to some of the initiatives that the government has embarked on in the form of summits, but we wanted to provide very specific briefings to groups like the people of the Tiwi Islands and Groote Eylandt for whom, on a day-to-day basis, the media is often the source of information.

We are finding in the small-business area that there is a trend, and we are closely monitoring it—I cannot give you the exact numbers right here at the moment, but I can take that element on notice—towards a decline in the small-business sector and a tendency to move into arrears. We are having to closely monitor some of our small-business loans.

Senator BOYCE—I would appreciate a list of how many loans you have got, the value of those loans, the industry sectors that the loans are in, any people who have defaulted on their loans during the—

Mr Morony—Senator, I can provide that, but I would need to take it on notice.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, I realise that.

Mr Morony—In the area of our home loans, we are noticing that the number of discharges on mortgages is declining because of the uncertainty. We normally receive—

Senator BOYCE—You have to extend the period of the loan, is that what you are saying?

Mr Morony—People are just staying with us for the time being. What normally happens in our program is that once our clients get up to a point of equity they want to move into a larger house or do an extension. They often then go to the private sector. They are tending to stay with us for a little bit longer at the moment.

Senator BOYCE—And that is the choice of the borrower?

Mr Morony—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—It is your choice, not their choice as to how long they stay with you?

Mr Morony—No, it is the borrower's choice. On average a borrower would stay with us about nine years, which is not a bad turnaround when you think that the clients that we provide business for—

Senator BOYCE—Are not your average 30-year mortgage.

Mr Morony—They move on to the private sector and then we are able to use that money to lend out to other clients—but that is slowing. That normally enables us to write around \$100 million a year. We think that in this next year it will probably be somewhere between \$80 million and \$90 million in business that we would write.

Senator BOYCE—What will happen to IBA's own income from investments this year—will that decline?

Mr Morony—Our earnings from interest rates have seriously declined and we are seeing a decline in yields but we will not get all of that information until the final audit reports come in at the end of this financial year. So I cannot give you an accurate number as to the actual level of decline.

Senator BOYCE—But are we talking of a level of 10 per cent or 20 per cent?

Mr Morony—Fifty per cent is in interest rates, for example. We were—

Senator BOYCE—Are you expecting a 50 per cent decline in income from investment?

Mr Morony—No—certainly not at that level. At this stage I think it is in the order of about 10 to 12 per cent but I am particularly guessing in the investment area, where we have got

some areas in tourism. That particular sector has been down for some time, it has not just been the global economic crisis. That sector has been buoyed by a very strong business sector but the tourism element has been down for some time. We are now starting to see that business in the accommodation sector of the tourism industry is actually starting to decline and that is affecting numbers. It varies quite a bit; we have a business in Cairns—Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park—that is down about 30 per cent in revenue.

Senator BOYCE—I think most of the Cairns tourist industry would tell you that is not uncommon at the moment.

Mr Morony—Yes. Business is still very strong at the Holiday Inn that we own in Townsville and the decline is very low. It is a similar thing in Kings Canyon in Central Australia: I think it is mostly the Japanese market that has declined and so Kings Canyon is down—I am not sure of the exact number there, but it is down. Kakadu has been relatively strong, but there are signs now that it is going into decline. So it varies according to location. In an overall sense we think that there will be suffering in some areas but we are fairly confident that we can provide the support both to our clients and to our investments to keep them alive.

Senator BOYCE—In your annual report last year you suggested that you were going to look at investment in the mining sector in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Did that take place?

Mr Morony—We are constantly talking to groups about different sectors. We were certainly very confident about the Western Australian situation. Those discussions are still continuing in terms of opportunities but no new projects have been initiated in the mining sector.

Senator BOYCE—Turning to homeownership on Indigenous land, can you tell me how many homes on Indigenous land you assisted with the purchase up until the March quarter—or whatever the most figure you can give me there is?

Ms Woods—So far we have approved three loans for homeownership on Indigenous land in the Tiwi Islands, and we are anticipating that there are a number of others that will be issued in coming months. There have been obviously some new headleases, township leases, that have been executed at Groote Eylandt as well, and we are hoping that that will also result in some more home loans.

Senator BOYCE—Can you just give me the time frame for those. Are they this calendar year to date or this financial year to date?

Ms Woods—Of the three loans that we have approved on the Tiwi Islands, one was actually approved a long time ago. It is actually not on Nguiu; it is on Melville Island. That was a standalone lease, not part of the township lease. The township leases are subject to finalisation of the subleases for individual purchases, and that is getting very close, we understand.

Senator BOYCE—How many homes would be involved in that one?

Ms Woods—There have been two loans approved so far. I understand we have around about 23 people who we are engaged with in terms of—

Senator BOYCE—Twenty three potential homeowners, is that what you are talking about? I looked at some of your figures and thought, ‘That’s fabulous,’ and then realised we were talking about all the individuals in families. Your target for last year in this area was to have six communities participate. Did you reach that target?

Ms Woods—No, we did not and the reason behind that is around the pace of the land tenure reform and the development of those township leases and then the individual subleases.

Senator BOYCE—They were in New South Wales and the Northern Territory, from memory. Or have I got that wrong?

Ms Woods—The primary activity has been around the development of township leases in the Northern Territory. The Queensland government have also legislated to allow long-term individual leases on Indigenous land, and that process will enable a number of communities to enter into homeownership. We are in discussions with a number of communities there as well.

Senator BOYCE—Can you give me perhaps a table of all the homeownership on Indigenous land projects and where they are at, as far as possible, up to—

Ms Woods—Certainly. We can provide that on notice.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you; that would be good. I have got some other questions there that I will put on notice, but I have just one last question. The Outback Stores subsidiary that you have is a newish area for you. Could you tell me a little bit about that—how it is going and what you are planning in that area?

Mr Morony—Outback Stores is a subsidiary company of ours which was set up to address the ongoing management problems in community stores. It provides a—

Senator BOYCE—Certainly from what we have seen out in the field, there have been very, very successful developments in terms of improving both service and food in the areas where they operate.

Mr Morony—Our whole approach, where we see issues in communities, is to look for a commercial solution, and that is what Outback Stores is about. It is about providing healthy food, providing an opportunity for communities to join a consortium that has bulk purchasing powers and providing support and training to—

Senator BOYCE—How is Outback Stores travelling financially?

Mr Morony—Financially, I have not seen the latest accounts for Outback Stores. They are not due in until the end of this financial year. Our program is one of monitoring, and there is an established board.

Senator BOYCE—But you would expect to know if they are having a boomer of a year or an awful, awful year, wouldn’t you?

Mr Morony—I received a call from the chairman of Outback Stores about a week ago. He indicated that they had had a meeting to review some of their operations that they are having to cut back in terms of some of their administration costs and that they are focusing on a more commercial model. Beyond that I do not have the actual numbers from them and I would not expect to receive the financial statements until the end of the financial year.

Senator SIEWERT—Have you worked with any Aboriginal communities around setting up carbon offset programs?

Ms Woods—We have undertaken a range of briefings to try to ensure that some of the landholding entities are informed about the proposed framework for carbon trading. Our role to date has primarily been around providing support, information and access to the right sorts of information. The market is, of course, not well established at this point in time. There are significant opportunities for landholding bodies, so our primary focus at this stage has been on support, information and bringing together the range of experts to advise Indigenous groups.

Senator SIEWERT—Is that informing them around the proposals under the CPRS?

Ms Woods—That was the intention. We ran a briefing in Coffs Harbour a couple of months ago. That was primarily focused on Indigenous landholding groups in that north-east New South Wales area, but it was open more broadly. It was really to give them the information on the CPRS and what the potential was. We had experts from the CSIRO and the relevant policy agencies of the Commonwealth.

Senator SIEWERT—Is it your opinion that Aboriginal organisations will be able to participate in the CPRS?

Ms Woods—There is certainly significant potential.

Mr Morony—If I could just add to that. We have received a number of inquiries from Aboriginal groups looking to take a commercial position in this whole area. Until there is certainty, we are taking advice and we are informing the community. At the moment we are assessing a proposal from one Aboriginal group to IBA to finance them into the sector. At this stage our advice has been, ‘Wait and see what the final product looks like before you start engaging in a commercial activity in this area.’ In the long term, Aboriginal groups throughout the country are talking about the fact that they have access to land and that could well be a fairly valuable commodity in this whole area in the future.

Senator SIEWERT—One of the reasons I am keen on this is because carbon offsets are seen as one of the big potential areas, as you have just pointed out. There is a suggestion that savanna burning, for example, will not be included in the CPRS. Is that not in fact your understanding?

Ms Woods—I understand that the policy settings are still being determined. Our advice to Aboriginal groups is to actually be aware of what the proposals are and to wait to see what the final product is before they make significant investment decisions.

Senator PAYNE—I have some questions, as I indicated, around the Indigenous Healing Foundation, which I understand should be asked in this part. I also have some that go to the national Indigenous representative body. Let me start with the representative body. I am sure there is broad awareness of the government’s commitment to establish a national Indigenous representative body by 2010, as I understand it. Dr Harmer, can the department confirm what progress has been made towards establishing the national Indigenous representative body and what the current planned deadline is for that establishment?

Dr Harmer—I will ask Mr Richardson to answer that question.

Mr Richardson—There have been two lots of consultation done on this. Currently a second phase is still underway. The government's commitment is to establish the representative body in this term of office.

Senator PAYNE—So that could conceivably take it beyond 2010, but none of us have a crystal ball. Okay. Thank you.

Mr Yates—The current statements that the minister has made indicate that she is aiming to try and have the new body established by the end of this calendar year. That is what we are working towards.

Senator PAYNE—That gives me a broad spectrum between this term of office and the end of the calendar year. Which do you suggest I choose?

Mr Yates—I think you take the shorter of those two, so the end of this year.

Senator PAYNE—Done. Can you point me to a funding allocation for the establishment or the operation of the national Indigenous representative body in the current budget?

Mr Yates—No, we cannot, because a provision has not yet been made. The nature and functions and funding arrangements governing such a body have not yet been determined.

Dr Harmer—We have not yet established sufficient detail to be able to go to government for a bid for money. That is what Mr Yates is saying.

Senator PAYNE—Dr Harmer, if it is to be established by the end of calendar year 2009 from where in your budget will it be funded?

Dr Harmer—We would have to go to additional estimates.

Senator PAYNE—Where has the funding for the consultation processes that have taken place already—and I see from the website, as Mr Richardson and Mr Yates have said, are extensive—come from so far?

Mr Yates—They have been met from within departmental resources in the group that Mr Richardson is employed in.

Senator PAYNE—Could you provide for us, on notice, Mr Richardson or Mr Yates, details of the costs involved thus far in the proposed establishment of the body, including but not limited to the meeting costs, travel costs, staff costs and printing costs for materials?

Dr Harmer—We can take that on notice.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you very much. In relation to the Indigenous Healing Foundation, the funding which is identified is just over \$26.5 million over four years. Is that correct?

Mr Yates—Yes, Senator.

Senator PAYNE—Is that for the consultation and establishment costs or the operational costs or both?

Ms Doherty—Yes, the little over \$26 million is for the consultations, the establishment of the foundation and ongoing after that.

Senator PAYNE—What is the anticipated establishment date of the national healing foundation?

Ms Doherty—I think the government is keen for that to be established in January 2010.

Senator PAYNE—Dr Harmer, can you explain for me the difference between the development of the national healing foundation and its establishment and the national Indigenous representative body and its establishment, in the way the budget is arranged? One has very specific funding components spread over four years and the other is a bit of mystery, except to the extent you have explained it to me today.

Dr Harmer—One of them is reasonably specific and able to be costed and bid for. The other is still being developed and, therefore, we are not in a position yet to describe it in a way that would allow an accurate budget bid. That is probably the simple explanation, Senator.

Senator PAYNE—I am confused because the press release of the minister on 26 May indicates that consultations have just started on the development of the healing foundation. How is that different from consultations on the development of the Indigenous representative body?

Ms Doherty—Consultations have just started on the healing foundation. However, when the government announced the healing foundation it indicated that it would be providing healing services and doing research and other such functions.

Senator PAYNE—I appreciate that.

Dr Harmer—There are a number of components of the healing foundation that are already committed and able to be funded.

Senator PAYNE—I might come back with further questions on notice in relation to that, as well. Thank you very much, Dr Harmer.

CHAIR—Senator Siewert has one more question on stores.

Senator SIEWERT—I am interested in the evaluation of stores. I know that there have been a number of evaluations of stores, but they have all been in-house evaluations. I am wondering if there is a proposal to do an external evaluation?

Mr Yates—I do not think we have a current intention to conduct an evaluation as part of our immediate future evaluation program. I am aware that the Office of Evaluation and Audit in the Department of Finance and Deregulation is looking at its future evaluation program and is considering conducting one in respect of outback stores. I will allow Ms Curran to talk about the specifics of where we are in our work on stores.

Dr Harmer—Would you mind repeating your question for Ms Curran, Senator?

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you, Mr Yates, for that update. While I appreciate that it would be good for ANAO to do an evaluation, they are probably not going to do the evaluation to look at the things that we are particularly interested in looking at here—that is, whether the process is actually delivering better outcomes. You have a virtual monopoly, which now has a licence provided by government, with a guaranteed clientele because they cannot go anywhere else and they have to use their BasicsCard. Is there going to be some

form of independent analysis other than just asking store owners whether they are selling more fruit?

Dr Harmer—I stand to be corrected here, but there is a comprehensive evaluation planned of the elements of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, of which the initiatives to license stores to allow them to participate in the welfare-quarantining initiative is part. So there is one planned. I do not think we have, to this point, got agreement about precisely how that evaluation in 2011 will be done, but given that this was a significant element of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, I would anticipate it would be covered by that pretty comprehensive evaluation.

Ms Curran—You are probably aware that there is an inquiry in the House of Representatives on stores which actually goes to the funding model for outback stores. I imagine, when that committee reports, that that would be one of the factors on which they will be making recommendations to government. I cannot remember the exact number of outback stores. I could get that for you. But I think that in the Northern Territory they have about 22 stores at the moment. They do not have a monopoly position at all. There are a very large number of different operators in the Northern Territory, including ALPA—

Senator SIEWERT—They do have a monopoly in most communities they are in. They are the only store.

Dr Harmer—There are 84 community stores with licences in the NT and, as Ms Curran says, outback stores have 22.

Senator SIEWERT—But I am not just talking about outback stores. I am talking about the initiative to look at how they have been licensed. When you do your surveys, you do not just survey the outback stores.

Ms Curran—No.

Senator SIEWERT—So the outback stores are one part of it and I appreciate you talking about that. But what comes out of the survey of the stores is, ‘Yes, we are selling more food; therefore people are healthier.’ Sorry, that is not independent. You are ringing up the people that are in a situation where they generally have a monopoly, because they are now licensed and they have access to, or are licensed—

Ms Curran—They are an accredited BasicsCard provider.

Senator SIEWERT—Exactly. What I am after is: is there going to be an independent analysis? The pricing, I understand, will be picked up by the House of Reps committee, but there are issues around pricing. I know you will have heard of those, too, and there are issues about whether it is actually better.

Ms Curran—I think that the broader issue you are raising is one of food security: what are the regulatory and market failures in the provision of community stores in remote Indigenous communities? We are doing some policy thinking about that. I cannot commit at this stage as to whether that will see its conclusion in an independent review of the stores but, as Dr Harmer has said, we are going to do an overarching evaluation of the NTER. Stores is one element of that. One of the very good things about the NTER and the licensing regime is that we have lifted the bar a little bit and that there are stores in communities where there were not

stores before. I do not know whether you have had the opportunity to go to some of the community stores in the NT—

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, I have.

Ms Curran—but my impression is that over the last 12 months there has been a change in the quality of food that is available—

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that. In the places I have been, it looks like there has been a change in some, but I am after more of a proper analysis that people's anecdotal evidence.

Dr Harmer—I understand what you are saying, Senator, and there is no doubt that, as Ms Curran said, we are doing some work in this area of food security. The Northern Territory emergency response and the application of welfare quarantining has certainly made our department aware of the situation. We were always aware that food and appropriate stores are important, but I think we are coming to the view that it is even more important than we realised before the intervention. We will be putting quite a lot of policy thinking and effort into how to promote and provide food security.

Senator ADAMS—Dr Harmer, within that survey that you will be doing, will the percentage of Indigenous employment through those stores be included?

Dr Harmer—That would be something that we would anticipate looking at in a comprehensive review, yes.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I ask on notice about the Yuendumu store. You will be aware that there is a great deal of concern about what has happened in Yuendumu over the store. I would like to know about the process that was gone through to license the Outback Store and not license the Yuendumu Social Club and the way their lease was changed. I am particularly interested in the time line on the way the lease decisions were made and how they were changed. Could you take that on notice?

Dr Harmer—I think given the specificity of the question—

Senator SIEWERT—Would you like to write it out?

Dr Harmer—I doubt whether we would have that information to hand here.

Senator SIEWERT—That is why I am asking it on notice.

Dr Harmer—Thank you.

Senator SIEWERT—I realise it is quite a complicated question, but I want all the details about the licensing of the Outback Store and the lease changes—and I am sure that you know what I am referring to—

Dr Harmer—Indeed.

Senator SIEWERT—over the Yuendumu Social Club. I am particularly interested in the time line and who made those decisions and how.

Senator PAYNE—Madam Chair, before we go off this generally, I have one question about a specific New South Wales community, if I can ask it?

CHAIR—Absolutely, I was just going to go to that, Senator. We have run out of time in this area, but we have one specific question about a New South Wales community and one specific question about a Western Australia community, so I intend to let those two questions go through before we cease.

Senator PAYNE—Dr Harmer, I wanted to ask some questions about recent media reports relating to the Wallaga Lake community in New South Wales, particularly two stories on SBS on the *Living Black* program and a number of other media reports on the ABC. I visited Wallaga Lake about five weeks ago and wrote to the minister seeking some urgent advice on Commonwealth views of, and intentions in relation to, the concerns about the presence of asbestos across the Wallaga Lake community. To date, as far as I and my office are aware, I have received no response at all to that correspondence, and I wonder if you can advise me when I might expect a response?

Dr Harmer—I am just hoping that someone from behind me will come forward, Senator.

Senator PAYNE—You appear to have a range of volunteers, Dr Harmer.

Mr Fisk—With regard to the asbestos issues at Wallaga Lake, there has been a response provided to the community.

Senator PAYNE—Mr Fisk, I am not in fact asking about the response to the community at this point. I am interested in a response to my correspondence, as a senator for New South Wales, to the minister.

Dr Harmer—Senator, you wrote to—

Senator PAYNE—Minister Macklin.

Dr Harmer—We will follow that up and get you advice.

Senator PAYNE—Okay, thank you, Mr Fisk.

Dr Harmer—It is something where the minister will probably have asked the department for advice.

Senator PAYNE—I thought so.

Dr Harmer—I suspect the hold-up is that the department have not been as fast as they might have been, but now that you raised it we will be quick.

CHAIR—It is very good of you to say that, Dr Harmer.

Senator PAYNE—I appreciate that, Dr Harmer. Could you elaborate, Mr Fisk, in relation to the community?

Mr Fisk—I would just like to point out that there has been a couple of responses to the community.

Senator PAYNE—To whom were they sent?

Mr Fisk—To the Katungul Aboriginal Community Corporation & Medical Service. What was advised was that health surveillance was asking about having funding for screening. The advice was that health surveillance is not generally recommended for non-occupational exposure to asbestos. Medical examinations of people recently exposed to asbestos cannot reveal the presence or absence of any evidence of impending health problems related to the

exposure. But further to that, an occupational hygienist has recently visited Wallaga Lake, undertaking testing of both ambient air and soil samples at the site.

Senator PAYNE—Who sent the occupational hygienist?

Ms Podesta—The New South Wales government is responsible for the testing, and we liaise with the New South Wales government who provided the information back to us.

Senator PAYNE—So would that have been the Department of Environment and Climate Change, or Health?

Ms Podesta—We would have to take on notice which part of the New South Wales government it is, but it is their line agency with responsibility for asbestos testing.

Senator PAYNE—I am just not sure whether it is DECC or Health, so if you would do that, Ms Podesta, that would be helpful, thank you.

Ms Podesta—We will.

Mr Fisk—The advice that we have received is that the preliminary analysis showed no free asbestos fibres in any samples, indicating that there is no present risk.

Senator PAYNE—So does that mean that the Commonwealth is comfortable that in the community of Wallaga Lake, in 29 houses and three dump locations and a range of other areas including existing buildings which are currently being renovated, there is a very high prevalence of asbestos—broken, disturbed asbestos—under houses and in areas where children, in particular, are active?

Dr Harmer—I think what the officer was doing is giving you the results of the testing undertaken by the New South Wales government. I do not think he is going as far as saying that. I do not know that the officer here would be qualified to make such a statement.

Senator PAYNE—Well, Dr Harmer, can you tell me what view the Commonwealth has about this asbestos problem? The letter that I wrote to the minister indicated my concern, which is that the community itself may be left in a position where it is always someone else's job. The Commonwealth might say that it is the state government's job and the state government might say it is the local council's job. Nevertheless, I am advised by members of the Katungul board and the Merrimans Local Aboriginal Land Council that there are very elderly people—long-term residents of Wallaga—who are using it as a fishing implement and in other aids, and that very young children are literally playing daily in areas of broken asbestos. I am concerned to know what approach the Commonwealth might take to assist in the coordination of addressing a clean-up for starters.

Dr Harmer—I would be very confident that the government and the minister are very concerned about those sorts of things. We will try to get you a response to that very quickly.

Senator PAYNE—I would appreciate that. There are also reports from May, Dr Harmer, of suggestions within the community that a number of the houses which were—as they all were at the time—made with asbestos linings and so on were demolished by local community members as part of what was then, I imagine, a CDEP project, or its predecessor. Could you seek some information for me as to whether that is the case? If it is the case, can the department advise what approach the Commonwealth takes to the involvement of individuals

in federally funded projects that may have been impacted by the work they did in these communities?

Dr Harmer—We will get you some information on that.

Senator PAYNE—Madam Chair, I may review the answers that were given by Mr Fisk, Ms Podesta and Dr Harmer in that discussion, and put further material on notice, once the *Hansard* is available.

CHAIR—I would expect so, Senator.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you.

CHAIR—Senator Siewert, do you want to follow up on the Western Australian issue before we move on?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. How is the situation in Narrogin now? Has the WA government made any approaches for funding to assist in Narrogin beyond what we have already talked about? I recollect that you were in negotiations or discussions with WA about the provision of resources to assist with the situation in Narrogin.

Ms Podesta—Do you mean from a particular time? Do you want to know the additional funding since the issue of suicides has been raised?

Senator SIEWERT—Since the issue of suicides has been raised.

Ms Saastamoinen—Since the issue of suicide was raised in Narrogin, the department has provided funding for a full-time social worker in Narrogin. They commenced on 8 December 2008, and, by the end of March this year, they had 238 client contacts for a case load of 50 clients. That is being funded through the South West Aboriginal Medical Service, or SWAMS, and they are in the Noongar community in the Narrogin area. SWAMS is also working with other community groups, state and Commonwealth government departments and the traditional owners, consulting with them about other actions they might be able to take in the Narrogin area. They had an Indigenous family support worker commence on 3 February 2009 and, due to demand by females, they have put in place a female Aboriginal support worker as well.

Senator SIEWERT—So there are two?

Ms Saastamoinen—Yes, as well as a part-time administrative assistant. The female Aboriginal support worker and in the administrative assistant positions have been filled from March until the end of June this year. The Injury Control Council of WA has also received \$100,000, GST exclusive, under the National Suicide Prevention Strategy. That is to provide educational programs and services to families and to talk about—

Senator SIEWERT—Where is that position based?

Ms Saastamoinen—I would have to get back to you about where it is based, but it is with the Injury Control Council of WA. They are working with the Narrogin Aboriginal reference group to deliver a suicide safe South West program. I am not sure if they are based in Narrogin, but they are certainly working with the Aboriginal reference group in Narrogin around suicide prevention strategies.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Ms Saastamoinen—Through the Suicide Prevention Strategy funding, they held programs in Narrogin on 18 December 2008 and again from 1 to 2 April 2009. They are broader community programs to talk about education, about how to reduce the shame of talking about suicide and to talk to the community about how they might address some issues around suicide prevention.

ICCWA is also working with the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention and SWAMS. They are going to be delivering suicide awareness training for health workers based in Narrogin on 13 and 14 July. Again, that will be about raising awareness but also how to address suicide or mental health and depression issues as they identify them through their health services. They are also planning an Aboriginal cultural awareness training session so that mainstream service providers in the area develop the capacity to address the issues affecting the Aboriginal community there.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. Does the suicide prevention project focus on Narrogin or on the whole of the South West?

Ms Saastamoinen—I would have to go back and find out the answer to that. I know that there is a strong focus on Narrogin; I do not know if the sole focus is on Narrogin.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be appreciated. You mentioned that the funding for the family support worker was available through to June. There are still issues going on, so I am wondering about the period past June.

Ms Saastamoinen—At the moment, we are working with the Western Australian government. We understand that the Western Australian government also has a proposal for a more integrated mental health and suicide prevention program in that area. We have not yet heard the results of the Western Australian considerations, and we are working with them. Whatever the Western Australian government's response turns out to be, we will be working with them to put in place wherever is needed after June.

Senator SIEWERT—It is just that it is 5 June today, so that is not very far away. Are these support workers going to be there after June? Do they know their future?

Ms Podesta—We will take that on notice, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—So at this stage we do not know. It is unlikely that they will be continuing straight on after June?

Ms Podesta—I think the answer 'unlikely' is probably less likely than not. We will consider whether there is an ongoing need and it will be part of the broad planning that is provided for primary healthcare services in the region. As Ms Saastamoinen indicated, we are working closely with the Western Australian government around the provision of services to make sure that they are integrated. There is a genuine opportunity there to do some integration with the state government and with the community controlled services.

The funding that was provided was one-off funding; it was to avert an immediate issue of crisis but also to look at the medium-term. I think it would be fair to say that it would be unlikely for any one of the governments to step back from any services which had well trained staff delivering good programs, but the way that it is delivered is a matter of

discussion between the two governments. We fully intend to continue to support vulnerable people in that region.

CHAIR—That is the end of the first session of general questions. I know there are many other questions that will have to be put on notice but I thank all the officers who took part in that first session. We are now moving into housing, where I know there is—

Mr Yates—I will just correct some figures I gave to Senator Siewert, because she will pick me up on my arithmetic I am sure. I gave her some figures for the Closing the Gap Northern Territory spend as a whole and my colleagues pointed out that she was looking to understand the break-up of the new budget spending of \$807-odd million that was announced in the recent budget.

Senator SIEWERT—I had noticed that it added up to more but I was being polite and would have asked later.

Mr Yates—That is very kind of you! The numbers I gave included historical funding that was still feeding through into the financial years ahead and you were specifically targeting the new money. I can give you those figures: for 2009-10 it is \$310 million, in 2010-11 it is \$249 million and in 2011-12 it is \$247 million.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. I know the Chair will do something terrible to me if I keep prolonging this—

CHAIR—I will.

Senator SIEWERT—But can you provide me with the programs that are carrying on, and for how much, on notice?

Mr Yates—Certainly.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, we got a lot of dot point in the housing area and I know there is real interest in the issue of Alice Springs town camps. I want to go through dot point by dot point and see whether we have got questions, but I know there are considerable questions around the town camps.

Dr Harmer—Your proposal is to go through in the order that they are there?

CHAIR—In the order that they are there.

Dr Harmer—Thank you—that helps.

CHAIR—We will see if there are questions, but we will just put on the record that it is Alice Springs town camps and some questions on hostels that will take up most of the time. We will start with remote Indigenous housing.

Senator PAYNE—I want to start with some questions on the NPA on remote Indigenous housing. Page 20 of the ministerial statement in reference to the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing refers to an additional \$1.9 billion over 10 years to four states and the Northern Territory for remote Indigenous housing. Can the department indicate which four states are selected in that group?

Mr Leeper—Those states are Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales. Obviously the Northern Territory is part of that as well, but those are the four states.

Senator PAYNE—I was taking that as a given, I must say—in fact, the document says NT plus four states. Outside the Northern Territory can you indicate how many houses are expected to be built and how many upgraded as a result of that funding?

Mr Leeper—We do not have that figure to hand. We have the national figures but not that individual figure. We could take that on notice if we may.

Senator PAYNE—Could you take that on notice and could you also break those figures down by state and by community?

Mr Leeper—Certainly, I think we can provide it by state. Beyond the state level we would expect to be engaged in a process of dialogue with the state government people to determine where the actual program of housing would be rolled out. So it may not be possible at this stage to give you a clear indication of spending by community. It would be artificially precise and, looked at from the other end of the process, it would almost certainly be wrong.

Senator PAYNE—How long do you expect the dialogue to take?

Mr Leeper—After having signed the implementation plans under the agreement, we are now commencing the joint steering committees that will give effect to the spend under the program. So we will be consulting with the state governments over the next couple of months to design the program in each of those jurisdictions.

Senator PAYNE—Once the program is designed over the next couple of months what has to happen to it after that?

Mr Leeper—I might ask for correction from my right-hand side here in a moment if I get into deep water. Using the model we have employed in the Northern Territory, once we determine in broad how much money would be spent in a particular community, the contracting model we are following—the alliancing model in the Northern Territory—would suggest that there be a process of community consultation. What we found in the first three communities in which we have done that consultation is that there is a much stronger appetite for refurbishment of existing houses than there is necessarily for construction of new houses. That is something we have learned already from the first three communities. What I am leading to there is that we would expect anybody delivering this housing to go through a process of consultation with those communities and, therefore, the numbers of houses built or refurbished could well be dependent on those consultations.

Senator PAYNE—From what you have just said, it might not be the first ‘sod’ to be turned; it may be the first refurbishment to literally start, tradesmen to walk onto the property. When would you expect that to start? I am particularly interested in outside the Territory.

Ms Cattermole—That will be different in different places. It will be the result of consultations and agreement through the joint steering committee arrangements that Mr Leeper referred to. Under those, in each jurisdiction a procurement plan will be agreed to which will undertake a similar analysis to the one we did in the NT—asking the question about which will be the best procurement methodologies for new housing and upgrades.

There will also be a capital program agreed to which will then step through the rollout. So it will be a bit difficult to say at this point exactly when those things will take place, because they will differ in different jurisdictions. But certainly, the intention is that the joint steering committee arrangements will commence almost immediately now that the plans have been signed. The first thing we will do is work through the process of that procurement and capital program rollout.

Senator PAYNE—I assume the joint steering committee comprises the Commonwealth, the four states concerned and the Territory?

Ms Cattermole—Each jurisdiction will have its own steering committee for each one. So you are a right, but there will be the Commonwealth and each jurisdiction on its joint steering committee. These are similar arrangements to the ones we have in place in the Northern Territory.

Senator PAYNE—Can you indicate whether the Commonwealth and the states and territories have established any benchmarks or deadlines? A 10-year period is very long. One would not want to be here in 2017 looking at progress and to have you tell me that the joint steering committees were still having a good hard look at things. So what benchmarks and deadlines are in place for progress?

Ms Cattermole—Benchmarks have been set under the national partnership itself, around requirements for new housing and upgraded housing. They will then be established further in a series of targets to be achieved throughout the life of the program. Then we will sit down and work out all through the detail of that in the way that I just described. The payments will be made upon the achievement of milestones and that will be reviewed periodically through the life of the agreement. So there is every intention to be able to set targets and achieve them. Those payments then flow from the achievement of the milestones through the program.

Mr Leeper—For example, on page 7 of the national partnership agreement the benchmark is to complete the construction of 4,200 houses by 2018. We would expect to break that down in more detail on a jurisdiction by jurisdiction basis as we go through the detailed planning, and also that the repair and replacement program is completed by 2014. So there is an intermediate step immediately in the benchmark.

Senator PAYNE—For the 10 years mentioned, am I assuming that 2009-10 is the first year of the 10 years?

Mr Leeper—Some funding was provided in 2008-09—

Senator PAYNE—So 2008-09 is the first year of the 10 years?

Ms Cattermole—The other thing that I want to add is that the implementation plans are in fact for five years, even though the national partnership is for 10. That is for the reason you have identified—that is, we want to have a time period that will step out and ensure that we deliver outcomes. But rather than have the 10 years, we want to focus on the first five years to ensure that we can achieve significant outcomes in that time.

Senator PAYNE—In relation to where we are so far on some of the other housing issues, broadly speaking in the ministerial statement it indicates that since the end of 2007 some 80

houses have been completed in remote communities with funding from Indigenous housing programs with 20 expected to be completed by June 2009. Are those figures still correct?

Ms Cattermole—That is correct, Senator. Those figures are still correct.

Senator PAYNE—Is that using Commonwealth funds?

Ms Cattermole—Those figures are in relation to the Northern Territory and they are a mix of Commonwealth and Northern Territory funds through programs that are previous to the SIHIP program into which all of that work will now run.

Senator PAYNE—The preceders to SIHIP?

Ms Cattermole—That is correct.

Senator SCULLION—Dr Harmer you will recall that prior to the last set of estimates I indicated my disappointment that after 18 months at that stage there did not appear to be any houses that had been built under the intervention. It certainly appeared in the media, and I put out a media release to that effect. Ms Macklin and others gave me a bit of a slap in the media and said that I did not really have a clue. I turned up at estimates and I did ask that question and in response to the question I was told that there had in fact been 63 houses built. I should have been more forensic about the question. I remember Ms Cattermole said:

In the Northern Territory since the end of 2007, 80 houses have been completed or are nearing completion in remote communities.

I had editorialised about the media that has been on before and so I questioned that. I said:

That is from the federal intervention. So the Northern Territory would not be saying that any of those were built?

Ms Cattermole says:

Yes, some of those will have been constructed by the Northern Territory and some through the Australian government.

Now unfortunately I was perhaps having a bit of a slow day, Dr Harmer. I made the assumption that I was getting an assurance that that was in fact the joint arrangements or whatever joint arrangements were there in terms of the intervention. I am not suggesting any mischievous from your officers, of course. I know how helpful you always are.

Dr Harmer—Thank you, Senator.

Senator SCULLION—Can we have some clarification today that the intervention is very clearly the intervention funds which we now refer to as SIHIP?

Dr Harmer—Mr Leeper may intervene here. When the intervention was planned and the various elements of it were established, there was no housing component of the Northern Territory intervention.

Mr Leeper—Senator, the Commonwealth's effort in this area is based in historical programs such as the Community Housing Infrastructure Program, CHIP, which was then modified by the previous government in the 2007-08 budget to become the Australian Remote Indigenous Accommodation Program. That was announced on budget night in May 2007. Housing programs that we are pursuing, whilst related, are not driven by or are part of the

successive government's intervention and Closing the Gap strategy. They are related to but separate from those strategies. So our housing programs have longer lasting roots than that.

In the 2007 budget it was modified to become a Remote Indigenous Accommodation Program which led to a bilateral agreement with the Northern Territory government in September 2007 and it is under that head of power that we have been prosecuting the housing program through the alliancing model in the Northern Territory. With the election of the new government and the reforms to the Commonwealth-state arrangements in 2008, all of that effort and the additional financial commitments made by the Commonwealth government in November 2008 at the Council of Australian Governments meeting have all been rolled into the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing. So we have those couple of background programs, the COAG initiative and it is all now part of the remote Indigenous housing package, but it is not a part of the intervention that was announced by the previous government. It is part of the Closing the Gap strategy because of the importance of housing to those life and health indicators.

Senator SCULLION—Historically, there was no announcement at the time or around the time of the intervention for which the Commonwealth government would provide funds for housing and the maintenance of housing.

Dr Harmer—That is correct, Senator. If you recall, the intervention was on the back of the *Little children are sacred* report. The focus of the elements of the intervention was about protecting children and providing funds for them to have food and clothing, policing, government business managers and a range of others—I think probably 10 elements in total. Housing was not one because it was said to be in response to the emergency of child protection, and housing is a longer term issue which is not part of that intervention.

Mr Leeper—But just to be very careful with our evidence, Senator, the intervention funding provided by the previous government did include some staff housing. But that is not what we are talking about with the remote housing program. It also included some funding for community clean-up, but, again, that is more about community facility and safety, rather than any housing outcomes necessarily, in its own right.

Senator SCULLION—I notice from some media releases back in 2007—there were a number that came out at the same time: 'Historic 99 year town camp sub-leases agreed in Tennant Creek', 'Groote Eylandt supports 99 year township leases', and 'Historic agreement'. So they basically deal with the Tiwi Islands, Groote Eylandt and Tennant Creek. As part of those announcements, there were things like:

- 22 new houses to be built in the three townships within 2 years

All of those sorts of things happened then, but I understand that there has been a range of media releases from the current Commonwealth government and by the Northern Territory government basically saying these are about to be built. There have been some media releases from Mr Knight, the Northern Territory Minister for Housing, as well as Paul Henderson, the Chief Minister for the Northern Territory, and Ms Macklin as that has gone on.

So we have had the agreements on those three communities that were signed up 22 months ago. To meet those time lines, that gives us another eight weeks before those houses that we promised will be completed. What should we tell those communities, Dr Harmer? Should we

tell them that they are almost up? Should we say, 'Eight weeks isn't very long, but we're going to move very rapidly'? What are we going to tell them this time around?

Dr Harmer—I will get my people to answer the question. When I was talking about the Northern Territory intervention and housing components, during 2007 the then government, as you know, was very anxious to pursue land reform in parallel to the intervention. One of the key elements of the review that was undertaken of CHIP—the forerunner of the Australian Remote Indigenous Accommodation Program—was the problem of non-protection of the asset. The former minister was very keen to negotiate leases so that houses could be built with that protection. That was all part of that reform process that was going on at the time. I just want to make sure that was understood.

Senator SCULLION—I understand that. Thank you.

Mr Leeper—The housing activity has proceeded. We can talk about the housing that has been constructed in Nguiu, for example, which was underway whilst we were proceeding through the alliance and contracting process. You picked up that it was announced in May that the first three scope-of-works packages for Tiwi, Groote Eylandt and Tennant Creek have now been agreed and authority has been given for those to proceed. Early works started in those areas in April; major works started last month. That first set of three packages, across those three locations, will deliver 55 new houses over the next 18 to 20 months, and 300 refurbished, upgraded and extended houses. That is the first set.

Senator SCULLION—Mr Leeper, thank you for that. I hope you acknowledge my concern. You have just told me that they will now be delivered in the next 18 to 20 months. We are only eight weeks away from the last deadline, which was 22 months ago, and we are saying, 'We'll deliver these within the next two years.' We seem to have just reset that guideline again. We are up to 22 months later, we are eight weeks away from the deadline, and you have now told me that works began in April and major works—whatever that means—are going on now, but we will actually have them delivered in an extra 18 to 20 months. Is that correct?

Ms Edwards—Can I just make one point in relation to the beginning of your question. In relation to the finalised leases to which you referred, which was the beginning of the period, it is true that the Nguiu 99-year whole-of-township lease was entered into in August. I am looking for the dates, but unfortunately, we do not have them exactly, but it was in August 2007. As Mr Leeper has mentioned, 25 houses are basically completed there in accordance with that agreement. The Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island township lease was agreed in principle at about the same time as the Nguiu lease, but negotiations fell down under the previous government, but were then reinvigorated a couple of months into the new government, and an agreement went on to be reached. Those leases were only executed and registered—I do not have the exact dates, I will take it on notice—but late last year, perhaps November, perhaps even as late as the first week of December. So the timing is different. Also, the Tennant Creek leases, which were a very productive and ongoing arrangement for some time, were only issued—these are Northern Territory leases—in the latter half of last year. I am happy to take the exact dates on notice, but I just wanted to assure you that those lease dates were actually quite a lot after the Nguiu least.

Dr Harmer—Going back to the comment you made earlier about the significance of maintaining ownership of the asset, what Ms Edwards is saying is that the negotiation of securing the tenure and the lease over the land has been a significant issue and has only now been finalised—I think, in most of the towns, except for Nguiu, which was finalised towards the end of last year, and in a sense in the middle of the wet. We are progressing as quickly as we possibly can to deliver the number of houses. But we had to secure the leases first.

Senator SCULLION—Indeed, and I accept that.

Mr Leeper—Can I just make this very clear—because I think there is confusion here between the two programs. The answer we gave you in February, which was ‘63 houses on the way to 80’, was houses being constructed under pre-existing programs. That number remains correct, and Ms Cattermole can add to the data in a moment. That is unrelated to the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Investment Program, which has now become the National Partnership Agreement. The figures that we gave you in February were correct. They are not related to SIHIP; they relate to underlying other programs that remain.

Senator SCULLION—They were existing programs at the time. So my questions and my remarks at the time that all this new money that had been threatened, I suppose, for indigenous housing had, in fact, not come through, and those houses at the time were reflective of existing programs. Perhaps you can tell me, just for clarification: all those other programs—like IHANT, NAHS, those programs—where are they now? Are they now defunct? Are they continuing to provide?

Ms Cattermole—All of those programs are rolled into the National Partnership arrangements as they apply in the NT, which includes the SIHIP.

Senator SCULLION—When we now look at the \$672 million in the Northern Territory, that is not in fact on top of existing programs; that is rolling up all of the programs. And that is now all of the Northern Territory programs and all of the Commonwealth programs rolled up together?

Dr Harmer—I stand to be corrected by Ms Cattermole or Mr Ryan, but I believe the decision to roll up the various elements of the CHIP was made by the former government into ARIA. The ARIA program then goes into the Remote Indigenous Partnership Agreement. So that decision, the collapsing, was part of the previous government’s decision to create ARIA. I am pretty confident of that.

Senator SCULLION—Did you want to add some other information in regard to that, Ms Cattermole?

Ms Cattermole—If you would like, we can talk through the additional housing under SIHIP. You have made the comment around the perceived delay and, I think, as we have talked about before, one of the key differences with the SIHIP was the intended timetable that was going to be the preparatory work in the lead-up to what has just occurred, which is the signing of what are called the package development reports, which give the go ahead for the first three packages. It is true: that work has taken time. That has been quite intentional. It has been designed to ensure the significant community engagement work that has preceded the program.

That in turn has impacted on key decisions in relation to the new housing and refurbishment mix, which Mr Leeper referred to earlier. In addition to that, it has had significant impact on design, community layout and decision making. All of that work has been done in preparation; that was quite intentional to ensure that we could deliver the key outcomes of the program. That has ensured that we have been able to do work on employment and training to maximise the employment and workforce development outcomes that will come from SIHIP. So there has been that time lag. Those package development reports were signed last month. There has been refurbishment work already commenced in April in all three of those first package locations, and the construction will commence in the next month.

Senator PAYNE—So those PDRs were all signed and approved?

Ms Cattermole—For those three first packages, yes.

Dr Harmer—You might think that this is taking a long time, but remember that it was really critical that we secured leases over the land before we started construction. It was also really critical that in undertaking the new process, which the previous government started and which this government is continuing, we created a very robust framework for SIHIP. We are now in that position. In places where we have a lease, we can move pretty quickly. We are still working on attaining leases in the other places. That may continue to be a bit of a barrier to speed, but we are now working quite intensively on two fronts to get the leases in the areas where we are building. We are also working in parallel with the Northern Territory government and with the community on the negotiations and development for the package of housing.

Senator PAYNE—Can those PDR documents be made available to the committee?

Ms Cattermole—We would have to take that on notice.

Senator PAYNE—I would appreciate that.

Mr Leeper—They might be marked ‘commercial in confidence’.

Ms Cattermole—There are issues associated with them.

Senator PAYNE—Yes I know, but I wanted to see if you could check it for me.

Dr Harmer—We will check and we will give them to you if we can.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you.

Senator SCULLION—In terms of the PDRs, we are relying on the partnership alliance to get critical information on aspects of the developments and the rollouts that the government should be able to provide to us. If there are commercial-in-confidence reasons why you will not be able to provide these reports to us then we would need an update on exactly where we are going in each area—how many houses have been built, where we are up to and all those sorts of things.

Dr Harmer—We can certainly give you that.

Senator SCULLION—We are obviously not interested in the commercial in confidence aspects of it.

Senator PAYNE—As I understand it, the PDRs are supposed to also contain the cost of the delivery of the first package. I have asked before whether the economic climate is having any impact on those costs and associated issues, and it would be helpful to know whether the current market conditions are having an impact on estimated costs—I think we started with \$450,000, including \$100,000 in infrastructure costs. Any information on that would also be helpful.

Dr Harmer—I think it is quite likely that the current economic climate is having an impact, but we will confirm that. We will give you, by community, information on the number of houses built, the number of refurbishments done and the average costs. I am very confident we can give you that information. As to what else we can give you that is in the PDR, we will have to take that on notice.

CHAIR—Senator Payne, I want to move on to the Alice Springs situation fairly quickly. Where are you up to with your questions?

Senator PAYNE—The Alice Springs situation?

CHAIR—On the heading, there is a dot point saying ‘Alice Springs Town Camps’.

Senator PAYNE—We are talking about billions and billions of dollars of Commonwealth money, and I do have more questions on housing in this area. I have tried to keep my questions—

CHAIR—We have until 11.40 am. The time belongs to all the senators.

Senator PAYNE—I understand that, Madam Chair, but I want to finish questions on this area which also relate to questions on notice. What work is yet to commence under SIHIP?

Ms Cattermole—Refurbishments have commenced in all three package locations.

Senator PAYNE—Can you provide on notice, if not now, how many refurbishments have been started and how many houses have been completed? So there is no construction being carried out—just refurbishment?

Ms Cattermole—That is correct at this point.

Senator PAYNE—Can you indicate how many houses are intended to be constructed under each of the PDRs, how many houses are intended to be refurbished under the PDRs, the time frame for both construction and refurbishment and whether any negotiations on further packages have started?

Ms Cattermole—I can answer all of those questions now, if you would like, Senator. I could perhaps just take you through the packages that are currently being finalised. In the Tiwi Islands package it is intended that 29 new houses will be built and 155 refurbishments will be undertaken. The refurbishment work commenced on 7 April of this year. New house construction will commence in August. It is intended that the first house will be completed by March of next year and all capital works are to be finalised by the end of next year.

In relation to the Groote Eylandt package, it is intended that 26 new houses will be built and 75 refurbishments will occur. I should say each of those is at more than one location in both the Tiwi Islands and on Groote Eylandt. Refurbishment work commenced on 21 April. New house construction is intended to commence in August of this year as well. The first

house is to be completed by March of next year and capital works are to be finalised by September of next year. I should say, by the way, that there is mobilisation occurring in all of those places in the lead-up to the imminent commencement of the other construction work, in addition to the refurbishments.

Senator PAYNE—What do you mean by mobilisation?

Mr Ryan—Setting up the work camps, tendering for subcontractors and basically getting everything organised. When we say that the housing construction has not started, we are actually talking about the physical works.

Senator PAYNE—So am I.

Mr Ryan—Yes, and that is why we answered with those dates. But the alliances are working now to actually have construction commence in August.

Senator PAYNE—Yes, and the third one?

Ms Cattermole—In Tennant Creek 78 refurbishments will take place. The total number of new houses is still to be confirmed. We are just working through what the best value for money options for those will be in the town of Tennant Creek, and that goes to the question you asked about the economic circumstances. There may be different ways in which Tennant Creek can achieve the new housing outcome. Primarily, the people in Tennant Creek were very clear that their key outcome was to refurbish as many. In fact, it will be all of the houses in the town camps in Tennant Creek, as well as the associated civil works. That refurbishment work also commenced in April of this year. Any new house construction that may occur will also commence in August.

Senator PAYNE—This year?

Ms Cattermole—That will depend on the decision that is made in relation to the new housing.

Senator PAYNE—But August this year?

Ms Cattermole—It will certainly only be a very small number of new houses because the primary outcome that the people in Tennant Creek wanted was to refurbish all of the houses in the town camps.

Mr Ryan—It might be that in Tennant Creek, for instance, buying existing houses and refurbishing them is a better economic outcome. In that case, that would change the date. Until we know which option they are going with, we would have to wait for that date.

Senator PAYNE—I understand that. I want to ask a couple of questions around the employment aspects of the projects. Can you indicate how many people in total, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, will be employed as part of the SIHIP program and how many are currently employed?

Mr Leeper—I do not have any of those numbers at this point. I can indicate that under the alliance conditions that we have struck with the three companies, or the three alliance partners, a minimum target of 20 per cent of employment for Indigenous people has been set. One of the alliance partners has actually increased the bar there and said they will break even

in terms of incentive payments if they employ 30 per cent of their staff from Indigenous populations. Across those first three packages it is at least 20 per cent.

Senator PAYNE—I think that is the first time you have been able to give me that target, isn't it, Mr Leeper?

Mr Leeper—I think that is because that is the first time we have come out of the negotiation process with a target.

Senator PAYNE—I understand that. Can you tell us how many Indigenous members of the community have received training as part of the program, how many are currently receiving training and how many are in paid employment at this point?

Ms Cattermole—Certainly, Senator, in relation to the first two. I think I have an answer in relation to one of the package areas on your third element. In Tiwi there are 15 people currently participating in prevocational training and there is another eight people who will commence training shortly. On Groote Eylandt there are 20 people who are participating in a range of work readiness training. That includes things like general construction, language, literary and numeracy skills and occupational health and safety. In Tennant Creek 28 people have completed or are undertaking training, and that is primarily in mining or civil construction. We do have figures in relation to—

Senator PAYNE—Employment outcomes?

Ms Cattermole—We only have one on employment.

Mr Ryan—In relation to Tiwi, seven local Indigenous people are currently employed on the refurbishment work. I do not think we have that information, though, on other two packages.

Senator PAYNE—But you can follow that up on those for me.

Mr Ryan—We can take it on notice.

Senator SCULLION—Just on that area, when the Commonwealth is going to construct something in Canberra, there are a set of standards that apply to the building and the employment. I am assuming that those same standards, in terms of employment, will apply to the building of houses in the Northern Territory. Is that correct?

Mr Ryan—That is correct. All buildings have to comply with the Building Code of Australia standards. In addition to that there are SIHIP guidelines which have been developed by the program which are very specific to the types of design features and standards that we need in remote communities.

Senator SCULLION—I was going more to the nature of the people who work on the sites. There are a whole range of Commonwealth standards, for example, you must be able to speak English to this level. There are a whole range of things. Unfortunately, I do not have the details in front of me, but as a general question, are there any impediments to meeting the target of 20 per cent Indigenous employment and applying these sets of standards?

Mr Ryan—Certainly, the 20 per cent target is a challenging one for the alliances. When we had our PDR negotiations some of them indicated that. There are a number of support programs that they have in place through DEEWR. There will certainly be issues in literacy

and numeracy in achieving those targets. But at this stage they have agreed to the targets and they are working to achieve them. I could not be specific about whether there is particular—

Senator SCULLION—Perhaps you can just provide on notice what those actual set of standards is—what sort of people can we possibly employ and what levels of competence they have as tradespeople. I am not sure what they are and how they are being applied but you might want to take that on notice. The other issue is if you have 20 per cent Indigenous employment, does that mean 20 per cent of the hours worked in building a house will be worked by Indigenous people or will it actually be numbers? So if somebody turns up for half an hour, for example, that is one person. How have you gone about that? How is that being measured?

Mr Ryan—It is 20 per cent of the equivalent full-time employees. So half an hour would only count for half an hour of an equivalent full-time place. It will genuinely reflect the true employment on these projects.

Senator SCULLION—It may be useful if you can provide for next time the 16 communities where the houses are being constructed and the remaining communities in which maintenance and redevelopment work is happening. Alongside the 16 communities, can you put down where we are up to with the negotiations, in terms of the lease arrangements? And what is your expected time line? I know those can wobble a bit, I would accept that.

Ms Edwards—We already have lease arrangements in place, as we have already discussed this morning. In addition to Tennant Creek, because it is not included in the 16, there are the four communities of Galiwinku, Gunbalanya, Maningrida and Wadeye—which are obviously very substantial communities—that have had leases agreed in principle. That has been endorsed by the full council of the Northern Land Council. Those leases are very close to finalisation for technical boundary reasons and so on. We are expecting them to be finalised—the leases are primarily with the Northern Territory—within the next few weeks. Then that leaves—my arithmetic is bad—three in the centre where we are having productive discussions. I think that then leaves five where discussions have either just started or are moving forward over this dry season. We certainly have all the leases that are needed for a full SIHIP program in 2009 and we are confident that we will have sufficient leases also for 2010.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you very much for that. I think it would still be useful, given that Mr Harmer's explanation as to why we have not started on these buildings substantially involved the issue of the delay in the leases—

Ms Edwards—I think it is true to say that it has been a very difficult element to get started for this program but by this stage we really have caught up to the program. I think Mr Ryan would be able to confirm that. So the leases are in place for the current program and we are well and truly on track. The leases should not be a problem moving forward.

Senator SCULLION—So, as I have indicated, I just want the names of the 16 communities, some explanation of where they are up to and information about whether there are any expected delays in those areas.

Dr Harmer—We can get you that sort of general information,.

Senator SCULLION—I also want to know the number of houses that are being either maintained or built, depending on whether they are in one of the 16 communities or in other places. So there is a list of 16 communities, and then others, but I particularly want to know how many FTEs there currently are as a continual indicator at estimates so that we can have a look and see where the target of 20 per cent is really up to. I am sure that you would be able, in a non-commercial sense, to extract those from the PDR or from the alliance in some way. I think that would be very useful as a benchmark.

Dr Harmer—We will do that for you. As you would imagine, we will be doing this for the government anyway. The government is very anxious for this to occur as quickly as possible and will be constantly asking us for information about how we are going. We will be producing it for our minister and it will be a relatively simple matter to also provide it to Senate estimates.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you.

CHAIR—We will now move on to the Alice Springs town camps issue. I know that Senator Siewert and Senator Humphries have questions in this area.

Senator SIEWERT—I would like to go, first off, through the process that has been undertaken to get where we are up to now and to where the process goes from here. I understand that the day before yesterday the minister announced that the deadline for the compulsory acquisition of the town leases has been extended until 28 July. Is that correct?

Ms Edwards—The minister announced yesterday that she had revised the timetable for her consideration of a possible acquisition of the Alice Springs town camps. She did so on the basis of advice provided to her about the process required by the relevant legislation, and it meant that the time for submissions, either written or verbal, to be provided to the minister—I can explain how that is proposed to happen—will be extended to 28 July. Any submission made in that period will be taken into account as the minister considers what decision she will take. That means that a decision and hence an acquisition, were it to proceed, would not come into effect until at least 4 August.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. Could you take us through the consultation process that is planned to be undertaken, please.

Ms Edwards—Obviously, there were a large number of things happening prior to 21 May.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. Please take us through what is proposed for the consultation process in the lead-up to 28 July. I am on very limited time, so I am going to put a series of questions on notice about the process up until now; I know I will not get through them all.

Ms Edwards—Going from 21 May, which was the final day of negotiations, you would recall that the minister announced that she was considering a potential compulsory acquisition on 24 May. On that day, she wrote letters to all 15 housing associations, to Tangentyere Council and to a number of other interested parties—the Northern Territory, easement holders and that type of thing. That notice on 24 May set out the date for submissions as 29 June, with an acquisition, if it were to proceed, not happening before 6 July. That, obviously, has now been revised.

The timetable from here on will be that officers in Alice Springs—both Northern Territory and FaHCSIA officers, led by the government business manager for the Alice Springs town camps, an Indigenous education officer and a more senior coordinator—have commenced door-to-door visits to ensure that every resident of each of the town camps that may be affected has an opportunity to talk to them about it and to receive some simple and specifically targeted written material. In addition to that, it has been made very clear on that material and also in conversations with people through our offices in Alice Springs that they are welcome anytime to talk to ICC officers, including the GBM and the Indigenous engagement officer, and to provide oral comments which could then be written down by those staff and put into the submissions area.

There is also a dedicated email address to which people can send inquiries if they might be affected and to which we would then respond. Written submissions can be provided through that email address or to an address which is provided.

On 29 June, Minister Macklin and, I understand, the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory will be in Alice Springs to meet with people directly to allow them to provide their views face-to-face. There is also proposed to be an additional face-to-face meeting on 20 July. That will be convened by departmental officers, with a further opportunity for people who may be affected to speak their views. Then, as I have mentioned, the date that submissions now close is on 28 July and after that the minister would be considering all the submissions and other relevant issues before she makes a decision.

Senator SIEWERT—I refer to the legal advice that you were referring to. So the reason for the extension was provision of the legal advice? What was the hold-up—not that I am encouraging you to do this—and why did you need to change it from July to August?

Ms Edwards—The minister said, in her announcement yesterday about this, that she changed the date on the basis of legal advice recently obtained. I do not have an explanation why we were not provided with that legal advice earlier.

Dr Harmer—Senator, I think we probably should not go beyond that.

Senator SIEWERT—So you cannot provide the legal advice to the committee?

Ms Edwards—I certainly cannot provide it to you and should refer any inquiries to the minister's office on that.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay and thank you. I do actually have a lot of questions about the process up until 21 May—and I will actually put those on notice because I am short of time—but I would like to know though what is the rationale. There has been a lot of media coverage about this, I want to be really clear about what is now the bottom line for the government and what they want out of these negotiations. What are the sticking points?

Ms Edwards—I am happy to answer your question, but bear in mind that these were very complex negotiations over a whole year and many issues were raised and dealt with. But certainly the final item, which was the subject of the last lot of correspondence, had to do with tenancy management systems. I think it is fair to say that a key sticking point was the view of Tangentyere Council, which of course represents but does not speak necessarily for the individual housing associations, that they wanted to retain final control over key tenancy

management decisions, including evictions, allocations and waiting lists. There were some additional things over which they wished to keep the final decision.

Minister Macklin had made assertions and guarantees throughout the process, including when she signed an agreed work plan on 10 July last year, that there would be very meaningful and major consultative mechanisms. It is the view of both governments that those consultative mechanisms are absolutely essential to deliver Aboriginal housing well and better. There are a number of consultative mechanisms which I could describe to you now or take on notice which are entrenched in the proposed lease document and also they are subject of guarantees, but the minister's view—and this is with the full agreement of the Northern Territory government—is that the final decision must rest with government in relation to specific allocations, evictions and waiting lists and other key tenancy decisions so as to ensure a fairer, consistent tenancy management system for which government is responsible and accountable.

Senator SIEWERT—So it is evictions and waiting lists that are the two key—

Ms Edwards—Allocations, evictions and waiting lists are the key ones, as I understand the course, and I think it is a fair assessment. But there were some other bits and pieces in there that they also sought to have final control over, including one aspect which was a wish to have a control over any changes to the general remote housing policy of the Northern Territory, which is encapsulated in a document known as the *Remote Public Housing Management Framework*.

Senator SIEWERT—These are really serious issues on which the government is going to be making a decision before we have next estimates. I would appreciate it if you would take on notice, because I cannot go through it here, the evidence you have got to suggest that Tangentyere has not been managing those issues effectively. I would like to see the evidence that you have got to suggest that.

Ms Edwards—I am not sure I could take that question on notice because I do not think there is a particular issue about performance or otherwise as to the decisions Tangentyere Council makes. As you would be aware, Tangentyere Council delivers a lot of services and I am sure does so very well. The issue here is about reforming that underlying tenancy management system and the general rules that apply to all tenants regardless of who are delivering the services

Senator SIEWERT—My understanding from what you have said is the government wants to maintain control over those issues.

Ms Edwards—The government wants to ensure that the final decision on those issues remains with government.

Senator SIEWERT—Is that the same for any other community housing organisation?

Ms Edwards—It is certainly the general position in relation to the whole of the remote housing framework in the Northern Territory.

Senator SIEWERT—My understanding is that they are proposing to set up a community housing organisation. In fact, the government, as I understand it, has invested a great deal of

money in helping to set that up. Any other community housing organisation would have control over evictions, waiting lists and allocations, wouldn't they?

Ms Edwards—In accordance with general rules. The position here is that both governments are keen for Tangentyere, the Central Australia affordable housing authority or any local or other organisation that demonstrates a capacity to deliver these services very well to have a key role in delivering those services. It is a matter of in what framework they do so. The way the lease which is on offer is set up—and the government still hopes housing associations will accept it—is that for the initial three-year period tenancy management will be run by Territory Housing in accordance with their general rules. But they intend to subcontract that to local organisations. A major concession made during the negotiations was to agree that it would subcontract the delivery of those services to Tangentyere, potentially for the full three-year period, on the basis that the general rules were applied across and—

Senator SIEWERT—Then you would put that out for tender, wouldn't you?

Ms Edwards—after the three-year period—

Senator SIEWERT—NT Housing could then tender for it, couldn't it?

CHAIR—Senator, either the officer gets a chance to complete the answer or we just start again.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry, I have got very little time.

Ms Edwards—It is a complex issue, as I appreciate, Senator. There is a lot of information. As to the situation at the end of the three years, what is guaranteed in the proposed lease documents is that an open and competitive tender, one which Minister Macklin has undertaken that the Commonwealth minister will personally endorse as fair and competitive, will be run for the person who can best run those housing services in their own right; that is, following general consistent rules but not as an agent of Territory Housing after that time. Territory Housing would not tender in that process.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry, I will just have to stop you there because I am running out of time. Are you aware that Territory Housing is proposing to set up their own not-for-profit housing organisation?

Ms Edwards—That Territory Housing is?

Senator SIEWERT—Territory Housing is; yes. That was one of the reasons why—anyway, I will not go through the details of how I know.

Mr Leeper—We did not recommend to the minister or any other Northern Territory community any leasing arrangement or management model of the kind that Tangentyere was asking us to agree to. This is not about Tangentyere itself. The basic elements of the model that they were seeking to have us agree to we would not agree to in any other community either. What we were looking for was public housing style management models based on land tenure arrangements.

Senator SIEWERT—The question there is: why are you going to the public housing model when in many other areas we are moving away from public housing—

Mr Leeper—Public housing principles, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—to community housing principles?

Mr Leeper—I note the points Ms Edwards has been making about final decisions around rent policies, evictions and tenancy management behaviour being conducted under the accountability of a government. If a government chooses to have a community provider deliver that on their behalf, that is the government's issue. That was not where we got to with Tangentyere. It is not just about Tangentyere. We would not agree to this in any other community negotiation either.

Ms Edwards—I can assure you that the design of the proposed tender, which was a concession originally made at the request of Tangentyere, is to have an open and competitive process so that Tangentyere, the CHHC, any new organisation set up by the Territory or any other good provider who can show capacity is able to tender to ensure the best ongoing arrangements.

Senator SIEWERT—Including any NGO organisation that Northern Territory Housing could set up. Have you looked at Northern Territory Housing's record of providing housing for Aboriginal people in the NT?

Ms Edwards—This is something discussed often. It is true to say that public housing by Territory Housing has yet to be delivered anywhere in the Northern Territory and the new work they are doing is for the first time delivering those sorts of services to Aboriginal people. I am sure we all agree that improvement is required. The development that has gone into the Remote Public Housing Management Framework has been substantial. There is some important work going on in other communities where these sorts of arrangements are being embraced. The flexibility in the context of the housing principles that Mr Leeper refers to is innovative and unique. It allows direct input by the community through the housing reference groups. Those groups are set up at the option of the community to decide and it would have a say and be consulted upon exactly the sorts of issues we are talking about here without having the final decision.

Senator SIEWERT—So we have been blackening Tangentyere Council—in fact, I have just heard one of the other senators do that—and looking at their supposed record but not looking at NT Housing's record. When Tangentyere Council were under the Fixing Houses for Better Health Program, for critical healthy living practices they scored higher than most other providers. Then when they actually got some further money and did some further work they did even better than that, so there has been a lot of work. There has been a lot of comment in the media around Tangentyere's record but they do not have a lot of resources and they have actually been proven to provide good housing. I am not saying they are perfect but during this debate there seems to have been a lot of blackening of their name, or comment on their housing records, that just simply is not true.

Ms Edwards—I do not think there has been any aspersions on Tangentyere from either FaHCSIA or the government. What we are doing is a fundamental reform of housing and, as I have mentioned, the proposal which has been put to Tangentyere—and we have worked with them intensely for a year—specifically includes preference to Indigenous organisations, including specifically Tangentyere, to provide the services. The Northern Territory government, as part of that organisation, had agreed that so long as it was subject to a general

principled agreement, with performance measures which we would all agree were required, it could continue to deliver the services.

Senator SIEWERT—I have one last question. I am aware that there are ongoing discussions with various community housing organisations. If there could be an alternative provider, so that Territory Housing does not have to be the one that is tendering in the short term, would you be prepared to consider that?

Ms Edwards—I am not the government.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that.

Mr Leeper—To be considered, such an organisation would need to meet the conditions that we have been seeking to establish with Tangentyere. It is as simple as that.

Dr Harmer—There are some not negotiable elements of the model which—

Senator SIEWERT—And what are the not negotiable elements?

Mr Leeper—Ms Edwards has outlined those.

Dr Harmer—Ms Edwards has been through them: about the tenancy management, the allocations process being transparent—

Senator SIEWERT—In other words, you are not prepared to look at that.

Ms Edwards—In the initial three-year period only—and this is totally in line with all the work going across Australia in accordance with the national partnership—Territory Housing would assume responsibility for the stabilisation and implementation of a fair and consistent tenancy management process. Within those three years there is scope for Tangentyere, for the CAAHC and for any other community housing organisation to apply for and act as the agent of Territory Housing and deliver those services. After the three-year period, there is scope for them to do it in their own right. I am sure it is—

Senator SIEWERT—In other words, you are not prepared to consider any other option than going to Territory Housing in the first instance.

CHAIR—That is a question for government, Senator, and it can be taken up with the minister.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I want to follow up those questions to some degree. The local people around Alice Springs are the Arrernte people, I think?

Ms Edwards—I think they are the Eastern Arrernte.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What is the predominate make-up of the people who are in the town camps?

Ms Edwards—It is very variable. Some of the camps do have residents who are Eastern Arrernte. I do not have a breakdown exactly. There are some that are predominantly Eastern Arrernte people—a relatively small proportion, I think it is fair to say. Other than that there are people from various areas of central Australia, many of whom have lived in the town camps for very long times; they have not lived in a community. There are those who have come in recently or who are there visiting. They would come from a range of areas. There are

a large number of Warlpiri people, I think, living on the camps from time to time. But generally speaking it is a very big mix, and Arrernte people would be a subset of that.

Senator HUMPHRIES—They would be a minority of the residents of the town camps?

Ms Edwards—I believe so.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What tenure do any of the residents have at the moment over their properties?

Ms Edwards—The town camp areas that we are talking about—there are 18 of them within the scope of this project—are owned as perpetual leases of one sort or another. There are two different types: special purpose leases or crown lease perpetuals. Most of them are special purpose leases. They are perpetual leases issued by the Northern Territory that are held by a housing association which is, broadly speaking, an Aboriginal organisation. I do not have in my head the details of the way they are constituted but they are more or less resident organisations and they have their set-up under the Northern Territory Aboriginal Incorporations Act or that type of legislation. They own the leases issued by the Northern Territory government. These housing associations are then represented by the Tangentyere Council, which is made up, as I understand it, of the presidents of the housing association. I could take it on notice to give you exactly accurate information but that gives you a flavour of how they are made up.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The principles you want to see enforced with respect to tenancy in those camps, through Territory Housing initially, is that individuals or families are able to take tenancy arrangements over the individual houses in which they live. Have I got that right?

Ms Edwards—There are tenancy arrangements in place in various town camps already. This would be an arrangement between Territory Housing, through its agent for the first three years and, afterwards, through whoever is selected to provide the arrangements directly to each householder. This would be in accordance with the Remote Public Housing Management Framework in order to apply fair and consistent rules to each household.

Senator HUMPHRIES—It is still not clear to me quite what the evil is that is being remedied with these new arrangements. What is wrong with the present arrangements that they require the principles applied by Territory Housing be brought in to fix them?

Ms Edwards—It is a more complex arrangement. As you would know, the plan for the town camps is part of an \$125 million program across Alice Springs which involves \$100 million for the town camps specifically in housing and infrastructure upgrades. This is in line with the policy across the whole of the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory and the Australia government require secure tenure held by government in order to underpin that major investment and to ensure the asset life—repairs, maintenance and so on. It also permits for these tenancy arrangements to be entered into by Territory Housing.

Senator HUMPHRIES—But you are not proposing to take away those perpetual leases. Are they intended for removal?

Ms Edwards—The negotiation group, which has been the preferred model of the government throughout, would have subleases from each of the housing associations to the Executive Director of Township Leasing—

Senator HUMPHRIES—But the perpetual leases would not be moved.

Ms Edwards—And the perpetual leases would stay in place. Obviously, the compulsory acquisition process, which may proceed this, is separate to that.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Sure. I appreciate that. But what you want to negotiate is retention of perpetual leases—

Ms Edwards—Correct.

Senator HUMPHRIES—and the continuing allocation of individual leases to individuals or families who take particular houses in the camps.

It is still not clear. That is offered at the moment by Tangentyere Council. The housing associations have the perpetual leases and they operate individual lease holds or sublease holds to the individual householders. What is different about the arrangement you are proposing?

Ms Edwards—Two things. One is that the subleases would be held by government and, therefore, underpin the \$100 million investment, similar to the policy elsewhere. Thus, government would have control and access for the 40 years to ensure the investment could go in and be properly maintained, and, importantly, be responsible and accountable for doing that.

Dr Harmer—This is an important part of the wish of the previous government and this government to protect the asset and no longer spend millions of dollars on properties where there is no security of tenure and no ownership by the government who is spending the money.

Ms Edwards—And the second major element of it is, once there is secure tenure held by government, the government—as the final decision-maker under the tenancy management arrangement—can have direct arrangements with the tenants. So those tenants have the ordinary protections of public-housing tenants, they have access to the appeals and review mechanisms set up by the Northern Territory and they have rights and obligations with government. As I mentioned before to Senator Siewert, however, the actual delivery of that will often be done by a local organisation acting as the agent of Territory Housing or, later on, as a sublessee of government who maintains that government has an interest in the land. This ensures that it can secure its investment, it can guarantee effective public housing into the future and be responsible for the outcomes, and it can ensure that optimal tenancy-management systems can be put in place and enforced for the duration of the 40 years.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Do you think that the people in these houses at the moment understand that they have no less security of tenure over the housing occupied under the new arrangements than they would under the old arrangements?

Ms Edwards—I am not an expert on the exact arrangements that are in place through Tangentyere at the moment, so I am not able to directly compare. I think the people that live in the town camps are very aware that they have housing which is not up to the standard of

their neighbours in the rest of Alice Springs, and they are very keen to ensure they have better housing. And that is what it is about.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, there are obviously so many questions on this particular issue and I would expect a great deal on notice, if not requests for specific briefings, into the future on the issue. It is one of those issues. I am going to ask for the questions on hostels to be put on notice because of the time constraints. My apologies to the officers from hostels for your attendance this morning, since we are not calling you. I do see you down there and I do apologise for taking this time from you, but we have to move on to health.

Senator PAYNE—Before we go on to health may I ask one question of Dr Harmer?

CHAIR—Certainly.

Senator PAYNE—Dr Harmer, you and Madam Chair will recall from general discussions about housing in FaHCSIA estimates earlier in the week that I asked if you would put together a mud map—for want of a better word—which would give us a schematic representation of the volume of money that is moving around the country at the moment under a range of NPAs and other systems. Is it possible to achieve the same in the Indigenous funding and housing area? Could it give us a very clear indication of divisions between Commonwealth and state and territory money as well, and where it is combined or not combined and so on?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you.

Senator SCULLION—I just want to ask one very short question, perhaps on notice. The town camps are clearly under a lot of pressure because of extended family and relatives coming to town for medical reasons or whatever and having to stay somewhere. It is either the river bed or the town camps—that is part of the issue. I know you will recall the low-cost accommodation hostel/whatever-it-was-going-to-be holding facility that the Commonwealth was going to provide security for—whatever happened to that?

Ms Edwards—I think I can partly answer your question—I hope. I think I mentioned before, in response to a question from Senator Siewert, about the \$125 million whole plan for Alice Springs. That includes \$100 million in housing and infrastructure upgrades in the camps themselves, it includes \$25 million for expanded and improved services—alcohol management, good tenancy management process, family violence and things like that—and it also involves a commitment to additional temporary accommodation facilities in line with the ones that you have mentioned. Those will go ahead shortly in accordance with the plan.

Dr Harmer—The short answer to your question is that it is still provided for in the overall envelope of funding. The precise model which will be put in place for that temporary accommodation is not yet settled.

Ms Edwards—It is being worked out.

Senator SCULLION—Okay. I would like on notice the exact amount of money out of the \$125 million which will be for bricks and mortar for accommodation that was provided for by the previous government, and was well discussed.

Ms Edwards—The reason that exact amount of money has not been provided to date is that it is actually additional to the \$125 million. It is something that will come out through the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. At the moment there are negotiations going on between the Territory and the Commonwealth in relation to that aspect. We anticipate it will be a major commitment. I cannot tell you how much today—I need to speak to my housing colleagues—but it is in addition.

Dr Harmer—The proposal is still alive. It is in addition to the \$125 million, and at the moment that is all we can say. The precise—

Senator SCULLION—So all you can say at the moment is that it does not exist, but simply because you have not got a—

Dr Harmer—There is nothing on the ground, that is true.

Mr Leeper—Stage two of the Nation Building and Jobs Plan only operates from the second half of this calendar year. We are in discussions with all jurisdictions about where to spend that money. The Northern Territory has agreed to look at the provision of this hostel as part of its Nation Building and Jobs Plan funding, which will be available after July. We are in those discussions now.

Senator SCULLION—Again, there was an expectation from people in Alice Springs and the people in the town camps that the provision of alternative affordable accommodation would resolve some of the issues that everybody, including Tangentyere, are trying to manage. Again, there is a degree of frustration behind that but I will wait with bated breath for the specific amount of funds that will be allocated to that accommodation.

Dr Harmer—We will provide that information to you.

Ms Podesta—Just for clarity, it is important for the record to note that for Indigenous people who come to Alice Springs for medical treatment, and hospital treatment in particular, there is hostel accommodation provided, including support under the patient transport scheme.

Senator SCULLION—I acknowledge that and I would also like to put on the record that everybody in Alice Springs knows that is completely insufficient for the demand, which is why the previous government moved to provide infrastructure to make up that demand.

CHAIR—Thank you to the officers from housing, we do appreciate it and everybody has got their comments on the record. We will now move to health. We had three core issues under the expectation that we were given, and there could well be others.

Senator BOYCE—I wanted to ask one question on setting a baseline for health. The ABS in May produced data on new documents on the life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, which were significantly different from those that were used for all manner of policy up until then. Could I have the department's view on that data and, if you are accepting it, how you are intending to revise the documents?

Mr Thomann—These estimates are a change in methodology by the ABS. They reflect a change in methodology and they are a better estimation of the underlying data. They still show a substantial gap in life expectancy. From our point of view, we note the ABS's changes in estimation. We also note that there are caveats in that report about the quality of the

underlying population data and desk data and that there is more work that needs to be done to improve that data, which ABS is undertaking. I think the fundamental take home message is that there is an unacceptable gap in life expectancy and that the specific number is a lower order issue than the enormous task of closing that gap.

Senator BOYCE—I would agree that any gap is an unacceptable gap. However, given that reducing the gap was part of the current government's election promises, it would not be a particularly successful outcome if performance and statistical differences were to be blurred. It would be an unfortunate outcome if the gap were perceived to have decreased because of government policy, when in fact it had changed because of statistical analysis. That is what I am asking. How does the department intend to deal with this issue?

Mr Thomann—Certainly the department has made no claim that that change in numbers means anything other than a change in methodology by the ABS. Given that this is a key commitment of the government and a major headline indicator of improvement, going forward, in dealing with the substantial disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face, this focus by the ABS on their methods and on their data provides us with a baseline and some increased confidence that we can now look forward from that baseline to measure trends and improvement.

Senator ADAMS—Budget papers point to the availability of \$11 million over three years for dental services for Indigenous people in regional and rural areas. What measures does the government envisage for implementing the program?

Ms Podesta—This is a pilot project of \$11 million over four years for Indigenous dental services in rural and regional areas. The department will very soon engage a consultant to identify: the most suitable models of dental service delivery to priority regions; governance and funding to priority regions; and the funding. This will determine the number of communities to be assisted.

Senator ADAMS—When will we know which communities are going to be assisted?

Ms Podesta—You will appreciate that this is not one for which the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Health has lead, but we have certainly been briefed by our colleagues, so I will be very careful not to verbal them. I believe that the consultancy is meant to be a relatively short-term consultancy. They are undertaking consultation now with a number of key groups and organisations. This week we had a meeting of relevant officers within the department to identify priorities and activities. They intend to get going quickly. It is a pilot project in which they are going to test a number of measures to deliver on that commitment.

Senator ADAMS—In relation to Indigenous targeted health promotion do you have a planned long-term reporting period as to how successful these initiatives have been?

Ms Podesta—You might need to just give me a little bit more information. In referring to targeted health promotion, are you referring to commitments made under the new COAG measures in Closing the Gap?

Senator ADAMS—Sorry, I could have mentioned that.

Ms Podesta—I might just ask my colleague.

Ms Killen—There are two levels of evaluation within the health promotion elements of the chronic disease package. There is some specific evaluation that will take place as the measures unwind. That is to do with actually looking at the initial market research to inform social marketing and there will be some ongoing evaluation of that throughout the delivery of those initiatives. As well as that, one of the measures of the package is a specific monitoring and evaluation measure and that incorporates a number of elements, which I will not go into in detail, but that will also look at how we were going with the prevention elements of the package.

Senator ADAMS—When will we be able to find out whether they are successful or not?

Ms Podesta—The package does not commence until July, so we will not be in a position to provide any data about the impact of the measures for some time because we do not commence delivery until July.

Senator ADAMS—As far as Indigenous women go, do you have any statistics on low birth weight babies and foetal alcohol syndrome?

Ms Podesta—In particular, you would like to know about foetal alcohol syndrome specifically? We can give you information around low birth weight. We do not have specific data on foetal alcohol syndrome at the moment. It is not collected as part of our health performance framework.

Senator ADAMS—Why not? That is obviously a huge problem. With the evidence that has been coming up and especially with the media being right into it, I wonder why the department has not picked up on this. As we move around the Indigenous communities, especially in the North of Western Australia—in the Kimberley area—this is a huge problem which is also leading to problems with education—

Ms Podesta—We certainly recognise that within a number of communities there are unacceptable levels of risk-taking behaviour during pregnancy which have consequences for the children and the mothers. There is no question about that. The question of how data is collected to diagnose particular syndromes of Aboriginal children and families is a difficult one. We certainly do have information on the number of services that are provided in regard to alcohol services, intervention services and projects in regard to pregnancy. In regard to the Kimberley and foetal alcohol syndrome, we have certainly identified some new initiatives and interventions and we have been working with a number of the Aboriginal community controlled health organisations in the Kimberley around support for that issue. At the moment there has not been an agreed instrument for measuring foetal alcohol syndrome prevalence rates. We have certainly got it on the radar as an issue and risky level of alcohol use during pregnancies is genuinely a concern within the program.

Senator ADAMS—The Kimberley has been identified. Has the department done any investigation in any other areas where there are predominantly Indigenous communities?

Ms Podesta—This is a tricky one for us. We do not undertake research; the National Health and Medical Research Council commissions specific research. I just want to be clear that we do not undertake research. We do report regularly on data through the health performance framework, but we also do receive information from our health services with regard to the types of conditions and activities for which they are responding in their

community. Certainly in other parts of Australia there are some other communities who have indicated that excessive alcohol use during pregnancy and the consequences for children is a concern for them and a priority for them.

I know you understand this, Senator, because we have discussed it at some length. We do not prescribe to health services what they must deliver as part of their primary health care. Community controlled health services determine their priorities for activities. What they do is report back to the department through their service activity reporting the types of activities and priorities that they are working on. Through our project officers we certainly keep a very close relationship and we understand the work that they are doing, but we do not direct them that they have to for example work on, for example, foetal alcohol syndrome. We support them in terms of the initiatives and activities, and to the extent that we can—primarily through the public health medical officers that we fund with the affiliates—we provide clinical advice, education and support.

So, yes, we are aware in other parts of Australia when working with young mums and with women who are thinking about having children that excessive alcohol consumption is a significant issue around risk in pregnancy. There are certainly a number of interventions and a number of services that we fund. In addition to that there have been some particular requests from some health services around some innovative models and we have been happy to be able to support some innovative models. We are going to receive the information from them about the success of those interventions. In particular the Kimberley are trialling some of those new interventions. If you wish, I am very happy to bring our senior medical adviser to the division to talk further about it.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you.

Dr Isaac-Toua—As part of the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council, one of the recommendations that was made was to establish a virtual research centre to consider the development of tools and to monitor foetal alcohol syndrome amongst Indigenous women. That is something we will be supporting. Currently there is also a move to develop a tool to be able to identify and measure foetal alcohol syndrome. At this point there is some work being done on that.

Senator ADAMS—Regarding the Northern Territory emergency response, with paediatricians moving through the communities, have any communities within the 73 prescribed communities had this problem?

Dr Isaac-Toua—I do not currently have data that may have been identified specifically for that. I am happy to take that question on notice to find out if there was any information collected.

Ms Savage—I just want to confirm that we actually do not have data on FAS that may have been diagnosed in those communities. As Dr Isaac-Toua has indicated, we will provide that on notice.

Senator ADAMS—The reason I am pushing this is simply that it has caused so many problems through the community with the children going to school, especially for the ones who do not have the foetal alcohol features. We have had quite a lot of evidence during our inquiries with the Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport. These

children certainly are causing a lot of problems and they are not funded because they do not fit the actual guideline because they do not have those facial features.

You have grandparents trying to bring up these children that go to school because the mothers have disappeared, and there is a huge problem. I can just see that in a lot of these communities where alcohol has been available that we are just really inundated with problems, and these are just going to get worse. I am really trying to flag it. That is something that I will be pushing all the time at each estimates just to see if there is any more data or evidence and just what is going to be done, because it is not just health; it is education and causing problems for other people as well.

Ms Podesta—It is undoubtedly true that the uterine environment for children has an impact on their growth and development.

Senator ADAMS—I am a midwife, so I am fully aware of that.

Ms Podesta—It is absolutely a priority within our health services to improve the conditions. There are three things that I would draw your attention to, and I am very happy to report in more detail to you. The Indigenous early childhood development national partnership agreement specifically includes a significant increase in services to encourage young Aboriginal women and Torres Strait Islander women to receive antenatal care and services in their first trimester so that we can do something around intervention of risky behaviours during pregnancy.

Healthy for Life Service, which is our big mother and baby service, and New Directions have a priority to increase the services that are being delivered in first trimester, particularly around intervention on risky behaviours in pregnancy. The home-visiting program, which is being rolled out now, is a very intensive program to work with mothers all through their pregnancy to change behaviours during pregnancy so that we can tackle some of the both physical and social conditions around parenting to create better parenting outcomes for the children and the families. It is genuinely a priority within the Aboriginal health program, and we would be absolutely happy to share with you the additional information that we have as the impact of those programs is beginning to roll out.

We have a real commitment to looking at age of first conception. It is one of COAG's priorities to increase absolutely and dramatically increase mortality and the success of children being able to participate in school to increase the physical and social capacity for parents to bring into the world healthy children, and that includes a reduction in the number of children being born who are affected by alcohol during pregnancy.

Senator SIEWERT—In answer to some questions on notice that I asked—it was actually following the inquiry—you gave me some information on the situation at Halls Creek, and at that stage one of the service stations was closed for restoration or relocation—

Senator BOYCE—Renovation.

Senator SIEWERT—It was not working anyway. Has that reopened and what is the situation there?

Ms Saastamoinen—As far as I am aware—but I will follow up on this—they are still closed for renovations but, again, when they open they are still willing to recommence the supply of Opal fuel through their station.

Senator SIEWERT—What is the situation with the Shell station?

Ms Saastamoinen—The Shell station is still a no, but we did have a meeting with Shell Australia. Officials from the department went to Melbourne in May to talk to Shell Australia, so we have made some progress in that Shell Australia asked for that meeting and we are talking to them. Shell is doing an assessment about what would be needed for them to be able to distribute Opal fuel through their outlets. Their intention was to get back to us by the end of June after having done some internal discussions around what would actually be required to support the distribution of Opal through Shell outlets.

Senator SIEWERT—There have been some alcohol restrictions imposed in Halls Creek, and I am wondering if there has been any increase in petrol sniffing since those changes—in other words, needing to take a total substance abuse approach.

Ms Podesta—That is a good question. We have not had any reports of additional petrol sniffing. As we have discussed previously, one of the questions that was originally raised around the broader rollout of Opal was: would we see a substitution for petrol with other substances? It has been very interesting and somewhat in the nature of petrol sniffing—I hope!—that we have not seen a ready substitution. It appears—and I am always nervous about drawing any long-term conclusions—that, when young people have engaged in petrol sniffing and have stopped, we have not seen any substantial substitution for other things, in any community.

Senator SIEWERT—In both the second petrol-sniffing inquiry and the regional and remote Indigenous communities inquiry, there was some anecdotal suggestion around ganja. But I agree with you: there has not been a massive amount. I am now looking at Halls Creek, in particular, which went the other way.

Ms Podesta—We have not had any reports and we are very conscious of exactly that. As you know, Senator, we work very closely with CAYLUS in Central Australia and with other organisations that we fund around the designated regions. If there appears to be a transfer of boredom and activities, we really do try to identify other things that can be put in place to reduce that. In different periods, we have funded additional workers attached to the health services to be able to intervene if we believe that there is a group at risk. So, while certainly marijuana use is endemic in some parts of the country and episodic in others, we have not seen a big substitution effect so far.

Senator SIEWERT—The other issue that I raised with you last time was the wholesaler in Alice Springs who was still stocking sniffable fuel. I asked, ‘Are they?’ and your answer was that they were stocking sniffable fuel. I am just wondering if you are doing any work on that. You highlighted the fact that they are wholesalers, not retailers, which means members of the public cannot buy it, but obviously that means there is a supply in Alice Springs. I am interested to know: (a) are you talking to them about it and (b) where is it going?

Ms Podesta—We will have to take that on notice, I am sorry. We do not have that level of detail with us today.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could, it would be appreciated, because it is obviously a worry that there is actually a supply of sniffable fuel in Alice Springs that is going somewhere—after all the effort that you and the community have made. That would be appreciated.

Ms Podesta—There are and will continue to be suppliers, because there is still premium fuel in Alice Springs as well.

Senator SIEWERT—I know; I am going there next. The thing with the premium fuel, however, is that there are efforts being made.

Ms Podesta—And there are efforts being made for any site in the designated regions that has sniffable fuel. As I said, we will take that on notice and provide you with an update of information. What we do know is that there have not been any reports of any significant upsurge in sniffing in Alice Springs.

Senator SCULLION—On that same issue, could I interrupt for a moment, Senator. We understand that there are a small number of places that are retailers have been reluctant to change. We have made mention of and discussed at some level the possibility of ensuring that those individuals do not get access to the basics card. We did that previously, and I know that you are continuing to look at that.

It came to another committee's attention that an Outback Store is now being established at Ti Tree, which, I am sad to say, is one of the recalcitrant retail outlets. I understand that they will now be selling Opal fuel. I am happy to table this letter that I have sent to the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory government. It basically explains the situation and states that if we want people to change behaviour and make it hit the back pocket, can we ensure that all vehicles in the Northern Territory government fleet fuel up at the Outback Store, where they sell Opal fuel, and not at the other places that sell the sniffable fuel. I stated that I was sure that that would be sufficient leverage to ensure some compliance. I just thought it would be perhaps useful to pass that on to the minister, if I could. I am sure that if all the Commonwealth vehicles that are travelling around the place did the same thing—I know it is anticompetitive but, under the circumstances, we are clutching at straws—that would be very useful.

Ms Podesta—I will point out that all of the Commonwealth vehicles in the designated regions only use Opal fuel.

Senator SIEWERT—We heard, when we were in Darwin the week before last, that at Rabbit Flat there is an alternative store setting up. When you are driving that length of distance you have to stop to get fuel; you cannot pass by and that is the situation we are talking about.

Ms Podesta—Thank you, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—On that point about the BasicsCard—Senator Scullion has touched on it before—we have talked about only licensing places that are supplying Opal fuel. In answer to a question on notice, you said that the Tilmouth Well Roadhouse licence approval was pending, and I am wondering whether or not that did get approval.

Ms Podesta—We will find the answer for you, Senator, and let you know during this session.

Senator SIEWERT—My other question—we have touched on this previously—is about the reported upsurge in petrol sniffing in Arnhem Land. I think we talked about it either at the inquiry or last estimates and since then I have heard again that there have been isolated outbreaks. I am just wondering if that is an issue. Are you still getting reports on that? Are you still working to get Opal into communities up there?

Ms Saastamoinen—We are still working to get Opal into communities. There is one outlet in the Kakadu Jabiru region that is delivering it. We are still in very close consultation with five communities in that area about a further roll-out of Opal. At the hearing, I mentioned that we were keen to do that as quickly as possible but there was a caveat around sorting out the distribution issues. As in many other areas, this has been an issue in this area. In negotiations with the community, they have asked us to be a little bit careful about how we roll it out so that there is good messaging. So the communities have said, ‘Let’s do this in a careful way and not rush to do it immediately.’ The combination of the distribution issues and wanting to be responsive to the community request to manage this carefully with them means that it has not gone out beyond the one outlet in Kakadu Jabiru, but we have got officials going up there in the next month or so to continue the negotiations around that.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Ms Podesta—I have checked. We have no further information as to whether the Tilmouth Well Roadhouse has opted to become a part of the Opal program at this point.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. My question was more about the licensing. I am sorry to confuse you although I did also want to know if there had been any movement there.

Ms Saastamoinen—On my list, they have not proceeded through to the licensing as yet.

Senator SIEWERT—They have not been licensed for the BasicsCard?

Dr Harmer—The licensing of the store is it?

Senator SIEWERT—The issue that we have been canvassing in this committee is the point about whether roadhouses that are potentially licensed for the BasicsCard should not be licensed unless they are supplying Opal fuel. We know it is not government policy, but some of us have been thinking about that. Following up on my previous question on notice, the answer was that Tilmouth Well Roadhouse had applied but, at that stage, it was still pending. So I am asking whether that has happened yet.

Dr Harmer—I will take that on notice, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—I have two other questions about roll-out. One is just checking on where we are up to with Yalata. In my home state of Western Australia, we have discussed previously the issues around Laverton, Warburton et cetera and whether we can get fuel in there.

Ms Saastamoinen—With regards to Yalata, we have recently extended the time frame for the project to the end of 2010. That is in response to the work that the South Australian government has been doing with the Yalata community around developing a business plan.

That allows time for the infrastructure and any licensing arrangements that need to be put into place. They are progressing on that, but it is taking a little bit of time to sort out the infrastructure details and licensing arrangements to put a fuel outlet into Yalata.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Ms Podesta—And in regard to Laverton, Senator, there are negotiations continuing. We have not finalised an agreement with the retail outlet at this point.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay, thank you.

Ms Podesta—We tried to be Speedy Gonzales about it, Senator, and it just has not been—

CHAIR—Are there any further questions on health?

Senator CROSSIN—Ms Podesta, this will not come as any surprise to you, since I raised in the February estimates the announcement about the new ear and health initiative. Since then, have you been able to properly plan or map out exactly how those teams might be despatched to deal with trachoma?

Ms Podesta—Thanks, Senator. We have been working very closely with a number of experts in the country to finalise this process. The \$58.3 million for the new measures has been very well received. We held a roundtable for a number of experts earlier this year. There has been broad agreement to continue the existing arrangements while we finalise in detail with the jurisdictions. Professor Hugh Taylor is working closely with the department, with community controlled organisations and with public health experts to finalise how we will deliver the additional health teams in regard to trachoma.

As you are aware, in the past there had always been some controversy about how this program might be rolled out. I am really pleased to say that there is a degree of support across the sector— including from state and territory governments and with the community controlled sector—which we have not previously seen about working together. We are building on that good relationship that now exists. I think that the slow build and slow communication, the work that has been done in regard to improvement of the surveillance reporting—being able to work out precisely where there are endemic rates, where there are high-prevalence areas—have been really important in being able to get that agreement.

Senator CROSSIN—Have you been able to identify those high-prevalence areas? You might want to take that on notice and provide that to the committee. That would be useful. When do you expect the teams to start operating?

Ms Saastamoinen—At the moment, as Ms Podesta was saying, we have had consultations with the appropriate health representatives from the NT and South Australian governments and some initial discussions with WA and with the Centre for Eye Research Australia. We have got broad agreement to extend the current arrangements and we are now waiting on some proposals from the state and territory government representatives, and also from CERA, around the best way to roll out the trachoma measures, including the teams. We had a discussion with them in mid to late May and we are working very closely with those officials to make sure that we do this properly. It is a goodly amount of money, but we want to make sure that it is done in a targeted WA—that it is responsive to local needs as well. That is why

we are working very closely with the state and territory governments, to make sure that whatever we do is reflective of their local environments as well.

Ms Podesta—We have made an in-principle commitment with all of the jurisdictions and the bodies who are currently funded that we will extend those and that the new arrangements will build on those. We are basically negotiating those. As I said, all parties are working cooperatively to try to do that. For example, we are looking to get agreement on the national indicators that we will use across the program, which is a big advance, and on the guidelines. SAFE will be implemented in a consistent way across all of the jurisdictions.

As you know, we currently have agreement on three states being targeted in this program. We are also consulting more broadly with other states to see if they believe that there are areas of trachoma control that need to be addressed. I think it is important that we do that. As you know, there are some states where we have previously expressed some scepticism about. They do not report trachoma, and we find that sometimes that might not be correct. Before we designate only these three states that have identified trachoma control as being a priority, we are making sure that the public health units in the other states are very clear that they do not wish to be part of this program. I suspect we may get some interest from at least one other major state north of the border.

Senator CROSSIN—I feel that it is probably an appropriate time, at the end of our trachoma discussion, to publicly acknowledge that Professor Hugh Taylor has been awarded the Helen Keller Prize for Vision Research in America. I understand that he is the first Australian to receive such an award, so it is probably timely that we recognise such an international honour to that gentleman.

I do want to ask you, though, about asthma. You may want to take this on notice. I noticed that the Asthma Foundation Northern Territory is not funded to deliver its Asthma Friendly Schools program in remote communities. I am just wondering if you know why that might be the case. I think it is perhaps because the Asthma Friendly Schools program is only for urban areas. Has there been any assessment by the department of whether or not remote communities can or should be included in the Asthma Friendly Schools program? Senator McLucas might know the answer to that.

Senator McLucas—I am happy to take that on notice or provide you a private briefing, if you want to.

Senator CROSSIN—Just take it on notice. I really just want to know whether delivery of the program to remote schools has ever been considered. Has there been a report done about how effective and useful it would be, or about the cost? And what ideas are there about getting knowledge about asthma out to those schools?

Senator McLucas—Sure. Happy to do that for you.

Ms Podesta—It is a priority, Senator. We do not have the details about that program in particular, but we will certainly provide that information to you.

Senator CROSSIN—Probably another area of health, is it?

Ms Podesta—Checking for indicators of asthma is a key feature of the child health check program. Certainly, I know that all of the primary healthcare services accorded a very high

priority to children. The rates of asthma have increased for Indigenous children; we are aware of that. From looking through the service activity reporting, I know that asthma prevention and treatment has become a higher priority for our health services. We will check around that specific program.

Senator CROSSIN—So, in your child health checks—particularly in the Northern Territory—would you by now have, for example, a list of the top 10 major diseases that have been identified?

Ms Podesta—We do.

Senator CROSSIN—Is there a trend? Could you say, ‘Of the diseases that are in Indigenous communities amongst children, these would be the top five’?

Ms Podesta—Yes, we do. We have now published our report on the information that has come out of the very comprehensive child health check. We looked at the most common and significant conditions that came through the analysis that has been undertaken there. The most common and significant conditions are: ear disease; trachoma; oral health problems, including dental caries; skin problems, including scabies and skin sores; history of asthma or recurrent chest infection; anaemia; and measures of physical growth, such as weight. They are the most common conditions, and we are doing a further analysis of the data.

As we have discussed previously, this is the most comprehensive picture we have ever had of the condition of a large number of Aboriginal children in remote Australia, and this data is being used very seriously by our health services. The memorandum of understanding that we have with the Department of Health and Families and with AMSANT takes the analysis of those conditions very seriously. The priorities that we have set in the expanding health-service delivery in the Northern Territory very much mirrors the need to screen for and to treat all of those conditions.

Senator SIEWERT—I know I only have a very short time, so you might need to take this on notice. I presume you have seen or are aware of the comments that have been coming out of Alice Springs concerning the dialysis unit being full, and patients being sent to Adelaide, and West Australian patients being stopped from going to Alice Springs for dialysis.

Ms Podesta—I am very aware of the issues to do with the high level of demand for Flynn Drive clinic.

Senator SIEWERT—I know we have talked about it before. This issue has just come up again recently with them saying ‘We are going to be sending people down to Adelaide,’ and Western Australians will not be able to go to Alice Springs. Of course it is closer to go to Alice Springs than it is to go to Perth from where the people are coming from. Have you engaged with the NT government and service providers in Alice Springs about how to move that situation forward?

Ms Saastamoinen—We have been engaging broadly with the NT government about renal services and, in particular, rolling out the second phase of the NT renal health measures. Some of the things we have been talking to the NT government about are the capacity to improve some of the ways in which renal patients get access to dialysis and services. We are in the process of negotiating new agreements with the NT government to increase some of those

services. As to whether it is specifically in Alice Springs, some of it is in different communities so that might take a strain off Alice Springs as well.

Senator SIEWERT—That was my next question. I understand that some patients are ending up at the Western Desert—at Purple House, in fact—which only puts pressure on that service. Are you looking at how you can work in with some of the community provided services?

Ms Podesta—The Northern Territory renal plan is an evolving plan. I have to say that we have been very impressed with the work and thought that the Northern Territory government has put in and, obviously, the additional resources. There was an election commitment to increase renal services and that is being delivered by the Northern Territory government. It is a growing problem: Alice Springs being a service centre for a large number of communities does attract a number of people, as we have spoken about previously. It has an impact back in home communities. There are a number of things being put in place through the shared plan that we are working on with the Territory government; self-management in communities is an important one for those patients who are able to do so safely.

We have put in place four additional renal nurses with the primary healthcare services in the Territory to be able to better care for people within their communities. I have had discussions recently with one of the very large health services in Central Australia—not in the Northern Territory, but adjacent to it—about their difficulties in being able to put patients into Alice Springs because of the number of people there. I know they are making arrangements to move people in other parts of South Australia. It is not always people's preference; it is a difficult issue because the clinical care is the critical issue for the health service. To the extent that we can we are supporting people to be there through the hostels et cetera.

Obviously—and I will not give an advertisement—the critical thing for us through the new National Partnership Agreement is much better early diagnosis, treatment and management of diabetes and other reasons around renal failure. We genuinely do have a significant problem around renal failure. I think everyone is working very hard to increase the provision of service capacity and to reduce the number of people who require renal dialysis in Central Australia. I do not think we have got to the tipping point yet, and I think there is a lot of negotiation that takes place to make sure that the patient journey is handled well if they have to be relocated from a remote community into Alice Springs. I know that the community controlled health services put a lot of effort into going back and visiting people, making sure that people are looked after. It is a problem. We have talked about this for some time. There are a large number of people requiring dialysis, and you almost have to be Superman at the moment to manage some of those critical issues in some of the communities.

CHAIR—That ends the health section and, again, I expect a number of questions on notice. Thank you for your time. We will come back at 1 o'clock when we will go into welfare reform and CDEP.

Proceedings suspended from 12.34 pm to 1.04 pm

CHAIR—The committee will recommence. We will now go into the welfare reform and CDEP component.

Senator SIEWERT—I have some general questions and then I have some specific ones. I am interested in where we are up to with the Aboriginal employment services, the replacement for the CDEP organisations.

Mr Leeper—Do you mean the Indigenous Employment Program, the new CDEP or the community support program?

Senator SIEWERT—I mean the new process. There are two lots of processes—we got caught up with this previously. There is the non-NT remote provision of employment services and then there is the new CDEP. There is the phasing out of CDEP in non-remote areas and the NT, and I want to know about that. I also want to know about where we are up to with the new CDEP. Does that make sense?

Ms Cattermole—Can I clarify that when you say the phasing out in the non-remote areas in the NT, it is actually across the board. The new CDEP will only operate in remote areas and then there is the community support program operating in regional and urban areas and the employment services.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. As I understand it, for the areas that are phasing out CDEP, former CDEP organisations were going to be encouraged to tender under the new employment services process.

Ms Cattermole—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—We had a conversation about that during one of the committee inquiries. At that stage we did not have a clear picture clear of how many organisations had applied under that process.

Ms Board—The question about how many former CDEP organisations have become Job Services Australia providers should be directed to DEEWR.

Mr Leeper—There are some DEEWR staff here who can answer the question. Can we answer another question while they are changing over?

Senator SIEWERT—As I understand the process, for those areas that are remaining on CDEP there is still a new process there and I would like to know how we are going implementing that because that is different timing to the conversion of the CDEP to the new process.

CHAIR—Mr Carters, do you have the first question that Senator Siewert asked? Would you be able to answer that part of it? Then we will go back.

Mr Carters—I have understood the question, but we will have to take it on notice because we do not have the figures here. But to help you, from memory about 25 Indigenous specific specialist organisations will be part of Job Services Australia.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate you taking that on notice. Could you also tell me how many of those are existing CDEP organisations. I presume you know what I mean by that. They are the ones that were running CDEP and were then encouraged to apply. Please tell me how many of the 25 are in that category.

Mr Carters—Yes, we will take that on notice.

Ms Caldwell—We will take on notice the subset of the successful Indigenous organisations that have tendered for Job Services Australia who were former CDEP or are continuing CDEP providers. The second part of your question was: what was the stage of the actual arrangements for those changes to occur? They, of course, take place on 1 July, and both the department and the range of providers are very much advanced in all the planning for the changes for 1 July. We have been having ongoing contact, one on one, with each of those organisations. We have recently completed the release of all the training materials, our IT systems are in a test-and-train type stage, with the training largely created. We have also this week had a first meeting specifically for Indigenous organisations that will be providing Job Services Australia—bringing everyone together with speakers from the department and other agencies and external speakers as well—so that we could support in a practical way the preparedness for the changes, the change management process, and be able to have additional face-to-face networking opportunities and talk about how they will hit the ground running when the new services start.

Senator SIEWERT—When you give me that clarified list of the numbers of specialised Indigenous service providers, could you also tell me the location?

Ms Caldwell—Certainly.

CHAIR—Can someone have a go at the second part of Senator Siewert's question?

Ms Cattermole—In relation to the reformed CDEP, the new program commences from 1 July this year. So, in terms of where we are up to in relation to the process, there has been a competitive process for submissions, for providers who wish to be providers of the reformed CDEP, and that process is still under way. We are currently in discussions with what are called preferred providers, which is a stage in that process through to finalisation of contracts prior to the beginning of 1 July.

Senator SIEWERT—can I ask you some specific questions about the NT and go on to this conversion of CDEP places to build jobs. I do not like saying 'real' jobs, because they were real jobs in the first place; they just were not paid as real jobs. Could you tell us the numbers that have now been converted? Then I have a specific question about some child-care jobs that I thought would be included under the conversion process but do not seem to have been.

Ms Hamilton—As at 30 April, a total of 2,014 jobs in Australian government and local service delivery in the Northern Territory have been funded.

Senator SIEWERT—That is an increase from last time. When we were at the Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities in Alice Springs a couple of weeks ago we met with a number of organisations and one of those was Walcha, who provide a number of childcare services. They said they have got a number of people that are still on CDEP, and I thought that those were some of the jobs that would have been converted to proper paid jobs. Do you know where those are up to—because I understood that there was a commitment by government to convert, I thought, childcare jobs?

Ms Hamilton—I am not sure of the specifics of that case, but we can certainly look at it and give you a response on notice.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could, that would be appreciated, because I did think those would come under the definition.

Senator SCULLION—Ms Hamilton, wherever the committee goes, when we deal with child care we say, ‘Hi, anybody on CDEP?’ And 75 per cent say, ‘Me.’ We then say, ‘But aren’t you supposed to be ...’, and they say, ‘Yes, we heard that, but they have only provided two places,’ or ‘one place’, or whatever it is. It is a common theme, and perhaps we could have a question on notice that deals with all the Indigenous child care centres: how many people they employ and how many people are currently on a full Commonwealth salary, and how many people are still employed on CDEP?

Ms Hamilton—In relation to childcare positions specifically, we are looking at opportunities in both the Northern Territory and WA where we have some remaining funding from a previous 2007 budget measure. We are looking to fund up to 90 more childcare places specifically. That initiative is in the process of rolling out.

Senator SIEWERT—We will tag team here. I will just pick up from what Senator Scullion was asking about the childcare centres. As I am sure you are well aware, a lot of these services are actually travelling childcare services. There is not a childcare centre per se. If you could include that in answering the question, that would be appreciated. Thanks.

Ms Cattermole—With the current CDEP program, CDEP participants are able to be in host employment arrangements. Quite often they will be having, if you like, work experience in a childcare centre or other places.

Senator SIEWERT—I take the point. In this particular case, my understanding is that they were not hosted; they had been employed in the service for some time and were providing childcare services. I would suggest certainly from what I have heard and understand that they would have come under this initiative. I do take the point. The other question I would therefore like to ask is: how many people are now on CDEP in the NT?

Mr Leeper—We have a nationwide figure but I am not sure we have one for the Territory. Nationwide at the end of March we had 118 CDEP providers servicing 17,267 participants across Australia. We are just looking to see if we have it on a jurisdiction basis.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, that would be appreciated.

Mr Leeper—Otherwise we will provide it on notice.

Ms Cattermole—I do. There were 6,000 participants in the NT as at 31 May.

Senator SIEWERT—That was 31 May, and that is specifically in the NT?

Ms Cattermole—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—You can provide the other figures on notice, or do you have the breakdown there now?

Ms Cattermole—We do. The total figure is as, Mr Leeper said, 16,791, and the state break-up is: 6,000 in the Northern Territory; 4,819 in WA; 2,776 in Queensland; 2,160 in New South Wales; 991 in South Australia; 23 in Victoria; and 22 in Tasmania.

Senator SIEWERT—So all those CDEP places in remote areas will continue in the remote centres as CDEP places?

Ms Cattermole—Of those participants who I currently just read out, 77 per cent of those are in remote and 23 per cent are in non-remote.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. Thank you.

Ms Cattermole—Some of those then would be in the non-remote areas where CDEP might be ceasing or reducing.

Senator SIEWERT—So 23 per cent of those people would be moving over to the new process as of 1 July?

Ms Cattermole—That is correct, but of course there will not be any of those in the NT.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand that.

Ms Cattermole—I just wanted to be clear about that.

Senator SIEWERT—So that is in fact around 16,000—

Mr Leeper—Around 4,000 of the 16,000 are in non-remote areas and none of those are in the Northern Territory.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. So approximately 4,000 will come out of CDEP in the next three weeks?

Mr Leeper—Yes, by 30 June.

Senator SCULLION—Just on the CDEP generally, do you audit the process? You would be aware much of the criticism of the CDEP program was noncompliance, people not turning up and things just not happening. With the ongoing programs, do you audit the attendance, the actual hours they attend, whether they are correctly notated and whether they are completing the task that they have been allocated?

Ms Board—Our agreement managers do spot checks and monitoring on an ongoing basis.

Senator SCULLION—Are those spot checks documented? Obviously in a spot check or any random check you would want to meet a certain sample.

Ms Board—That is correct, and our agreement managers will need to document the information that they have found on our CDEP managers system.

Senator SCULLION—With your CDEP managers system, apart from dealing with the specifics, do you have some data from that that we could draw on to see how many people are now complying and what the changes have been? Rather than it being just little numbers and having it there in a database, have you actually done anything with that to make the audit mean anything?

Ms Board—It is up to the agreement managers to deal with a provider when and if there have been any breaches. That is how that is arranged.

Senator SCULLION—Would you be able to, on notice, provide me with the number of people who have been breached on CDEP?

Ms Board—That is the ‘no work, no pay’ principle.

Senator SCULLION—But, while that is the policy, I just wondered how many people have actually been breached under that policy. Would you be able to provide that to us?

Dr Harmer—You want some broad data on the number of breaches?

Senator SCULLION—I understood that there was an auditing process. Ms Board has told me that there is a process. I am just wondering if you would be able to provide some data from that process. Obviously, we do not want the little bits and pieces, but I would have thought you were gaining that data to get an audit of what is happening. That is the information I would like.

Ms Board—Yes, I think we can do that.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I return to the 4,000 people that are going to be coming out of CDEP on 1 July. You have got 25 specialist Indigenous service providers. Not all of those 4,000 people will be necessarily supported or go to the Indigenous service providers, will they?

Mr Carters—It will be depend on the location, where the specialist providers are, and it will also depend on the job seeker's choice as to which provider they do want to go to. If there is not a specialist provider in their area then it is more difficult. They can choose a specialist provider outside their area, but, equally, they may want to go to a more generalist provider. All providers have to deliver the four streams of service, including for the very disadvantaged job seekers. They have to deliver that. They will be well catered for regardless of which provider they go to.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Ms Caldwell—To add to Mr Carters's response, it is also the case that there is a heavy focus on more disadvantaged job seekers and on Indigenous Australians in the new service suite. The performance management system that was notified in the request for tender includes additional incentives to make sure that Indigenous Australians are well serviced and assisted through the new services as well. And as Mr Carters said, there is a choice available to job seekers. Whether they want to go to a specialist or a generalist, they can cross over to another area if they want to access that service.

Senator SIEWERT—I am wondering if it is possible to get figures on where the 4,000 are and where the specialised Aboriginal service providers are located. Is that possible? Then we can have look at how many people, if they choose to access the specialised services, can access those specialised services.

Ms Caldwell—Yes. In fact there has been much joint work between colleagues across agencies to ensure exactly that type of mapping—not restricted to the specialist services but to make sure that each of those 4,000 people do transition smoothly into the new services that are available to them. We are quite used to having that discourse to make sure that from the job seeker's point view it all goes well.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. The other issue that I would like to follow up is where they are going to non-specialised Aboriginal service providers, where they going to the more general service providers, and where those providers are in fact new providers, rather than established providers. If you could—

Ms Caldwell—That will, in part, depend on the job seeker choice at that point in time. They are certainly welcome in both, but we can look at that.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that, but if—I am thinking of an example; I am choosing a bad example, but it is just one that I know—they were in Mirrabooka, I know that they would be going to a new service provider. If they were in large regional centres, it would be fairly easy to pick whether or not they are new service providers.

CHAIR—Senator Boyce has some questions on Cape York.

Senator BOYCE—I am after an update on income management in the Cape York area.

Dr Harmer—Do you have a specific question, Senator? Is it on income management in Cape York?

Senator BOYCE—There have been reports of people volunteering to come into the income management scheme in Cape York and I want to hear about that. I also want some general figures on how many people are in the scheme now, please.

Mr Smith—In terms of the income management generally in Cape York, the total number of income support recipients is 1,065.

Senator BOYCE—Sorry, can you say that again?

Mr Leeper—Income management is being done in four communities: Aurukun, Hope Vale, Mossman Gorge and Coen. At the moment, the trials are affecting 1,065 income support recipients and 757 CDEP participants.

Mr Smith—There are currently 43 income management notices from the Family Responsibilities Commission, which is the commission that actually recommends to Centrelink about income management. So that means that there are currently 43 people being managed through the trial.

Senator BOYCE—Can you talk a little bit about the people who are volunteering to come into the system? Has that occurred? How do you handle those?

Mr Smith—There was a newspaper article about this the other day. You are referring to that?

Senator BOYCE—Yes.

Mr Smith—The figures in that article were correct, but the characterisation perhaps needed to be refined slightly.

Senator BOYCE—Would you like to give me your assessment?

Mr Smith—Certainly. There are two separate things: there is compulsory income management—or conditional income management, as it is described in the Cape York trial—

Dr Harmer—That is when a family is referred to Centrelink for income management from the Family Responsibilities Commission.

Mr Smith—Then there is the family income management scheme, which has been going for some years in Cape York, and that is about—

Senator BOYCE—They were the first adopters, were they not?

Mr Smith—That is right. That is what that article earlier this week was actually referring to—the number of participants in family income management.

Dr Harmer—Which is where they volunteer.

Senator BOYCE—They volunteered in the sense that they suggested and established the scheme.

Dr Harmer—That is right.

Senator BOYCE—You have not had a recent surge of people?

Mr Smith—There has been an increase recently. It is from a combination of a general greater interest in FIM, Family Income Management. About two thirds of the increase has been caused by that and about a third has been from referrals by the Family Responsibilities Commission.

Senator BOYCE—Can you quantify that two-thirds increase for me and can you tell me where those people are from? Are you talking about the people in the current communities in the management scheme?

Ms Beauchamp—In 2007-08, there were 532 people on the Family Income Management scheme.

Senator BOYCE—In Cape York?

Ms Beauchamp—In Cape York. As Mr Smith said, the number of participants in the scheme has increased to 868, and two-thirds of the growth is from the voluntary uptake.

Senator BOYCE—Is that all in those four communities?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes. One-third of the growth is the result of referrals from the commission.

Senator BOYCE—The number has spiked because of interest in the scheme. Could you characterise that for me?

Ms Beauchamp—It is primarily due to word of mouth. People understand what sort of services are available under the scheme and they voluntarily come forward.

Senator BOYCE—So it is a combination of the fact that people are seeing better outcomes in terms of purchasing power and also, as Senator Siewert pointed out earlier, the fact that they have ready access to advice and information about all manner of services. Is that a part of it as well?

Ms Beauchamp—There has been quite a big investment in the cape and, yes, it would be a combination of those things.

Senator BOYCE—Can we talk about their family responsibilities commission and the people who have come through there. Can you tell me about the process and how long it takes.

Mr Smith—There are different streams in terms of the way in which it works with the commission. There are a number of different trigger points to do with formal referrals to the commission, which are known as notifications. There are five trigger points: the person's child is absent three times in the school term without a reasonable excuse; the person's school-aged child is not enrolled in a school without a lawful excuse; the person is the subject of a child safety report; the person is convicted of an offence in the Magistrates Court; and the

person breaches his or her tenancy agreement—for example, by using the premises for an illegal purpose, by causing a nuisance or by failing to remedy rent arrears. These are the triggers that initiate the referral to the family responsibilities commission. In terms of what the commission then does, it has a number of options open to it: it can simply have a conference and take no action at that point.; it can give a warning and leave it at that; it can make a service referral; it can initiate a stronger kind of referral, which is known as ‘an order’; or it can initiate a notice to Centrelink to initiate income management.

Senator BOYCE—There are 43 people under income management. Is that in this financial year?

Mr Smith—There are currently 43 people under income management.

Senator BOYCE—Can you tell me how many people were referred to the commission and talk a little bit about the actions taken at each of those levels.

Mr Smith—As at 31 March 2009, there were 572 conferences held in response to 543 agency notifications. So there have been 572 conferences held at each point where the commission actually has a session with someone coming from a notification—

Senator BOYCE—So are we talking about one conference per family, so to speak, or multiple conferences per person?

Mr Smith—One conference per person who has actually been referred. This has been in response to 1,243 agency notifications—so there can be multiple notifications for a single person—relating to 558 community members. In some instances, there has been more than one conference with individuals.

Senator BOYCE—What evaluation of that commission process has the department got in place or has the commission itself got in place?

Mr Smith—The sum of \$1.6 million has been allocated for the evaluation of the trials, shared equally between the Australian government and the Queensland government. An evaluation working group was established in August 2008 to oversee the evaluation. Membership is made up of the Australian government, the Queensland Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Cape York Institute. That group meets fortnightly to discuss the development and progress of the evaluation.

Senator BOYCE—Are there any published reports from that evaluation group?

Mr Smith—Not as yet. It is still in its early stages. I might ask Mr James to elaborate on that.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you.

Mr James—We have actually got an RFT out around the evaluation. That was put on AusTender on 22 May. It also appeared in the *Weekend Australian*. There are two stages to the evaluation. The lodgement period for tenders extends from 22 May to 23 June.

Senator BOYCE—So this is to employ an outside—

Mr James—Yes. There will be parts to the evaluation. One of the key first parts of it will be around the FRC and its functions. Then there is an implementation—

Senator BOYCE—The FRC itself?

Mr James—Yes. Stage one is an implementation review of the Families Responsibilities Commission. The consultant will potentially be involved in doing a plan for the conduct of stage two of the evaluation, which will be an evaluation of the actual impact of the whole Cape York welfare regime. That is centred around four key questions and, in particular, around whether social norms have changed.

Senator BOYCE—Could we perhaps, on evidence, get that list of four key questions?

Mr James—Certainly.

Senator BOYCE—If it is short enough to read out now, that is fine, but otherwise—

Mr James—I have got it in another folder. I will go and get it—

Senator BOYCE—Just put it on notice. Or table it later—that would be good. I guess one of the key points that I am trying to get to there is that we have these four trip points. Are the earlier ones working or are people returning until they end up the income management stream? Will that be one of the things that you will be attempting to find out?

Mr James—Luckily, someone has brought me the four key evaluation questions. They are as follows:

Was the reform implemented as agreed by the three parties?

Are social norms and behaviours changing?

Has service provision changed in a way that supports norm and behaviour change?

Have governance arrangements supported change in service provision and social norms and behaviours?

Senator BOYCE—Is there funding allocated for those evaluations or—

Mr James—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—Are you able to—

Mr James—The overall amount that my colleague Mr Smith quoted—I think it is \$800,000—

Mr Smith—It is \$1.6 million.

Senator BOYCE—Sorry, that is between the two governments. I do apologise.

Mr Smith—In answer to your question, Senator, about people coming back, we do not know yet. We have had an initial report from the FRC and its operations, which was delivered earlier this year for its first two quarters. It was not really long enough to be able to tell what the longer patterning is. Another report for the latest quarter is due shortly, and that should start to give us a picture. As to what we do know in terms of the first two quarters, I will give you a quick breakdown of the number of notices per client, which I think will form a bit of a picture of what is going on.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, that would be good.

Mr Smith—There were 271 clients who had one notice, 84 clients who had two notices, 44 who clients had three notices, 20 clients who had four notices, 10 clients who had five

notices and eight clients who had more than five notices. So, clearly, they are a group who we might expect to see more than once over time. In the first report for the first two quarters, the commissioner talks about the fact that the purpose of the trials, of course, is not to actually move people into income management—

Senator BOYCE—No.

Mr Smith—but, rather, a range of other initiatives, if possible. And that is, of course, what it has done in the early stages. He does anticipate, however, that, as the trial moves through, there will be a group of people who had those referrals early on but come back to the attention of the commission and may well then be referred into income management. So he is expecting an increase.

Senator BOYCE—I have a final question. Mr Noel Pearson has been a significant driver in the development of this system in Cape York. He has recently announced that he will be stepping back from the institute to devote himself full time to land rights battles with the Queensland government. What is your view of the sustainability of the program going forward?

Mr Smith—Mr Pearson has only stepped down from the position as director of the Cape York Institute for three months. He is still on the project management board for the welfare reform trials and is still also on the board of the Family Responsibilities Commission. So we do not see any lessening of his commitment—

Senator BOYCE—So you do not see that he has moved back from this. The other question about sustainability—

Dr Harmer—He maintains a very strong interest and involvement in the governance arrangements around the trial, Senator.

Senator BOYCE—And the whole program could survive without his input at this juncture?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—It is mature enough now?

Mr Smith—Absolutely.

Dr Harmer—Absolutely, yes. As Mr Smith said, he is only going for three months, and the program will sustain itself. There is actually quite a significant governance infrastructure around the Cape York Institute and the various mechanisms supporting the trials.

Senator BOYCE—That is what I was hoping you would tell me, Dr Harmer. Thank you.

[1.43 pm]

CHAIR—Thank you very much. That ends that segment. Now we move on to education, and I know there are questions on that from Senator Mason, Senator Back and Senator Siewert. I think we should start with SEAM because we have actually put that on the agenda. Mr Carters, I know there are questions about SEAM.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you tell me how many locations SEAM is now operating in in the NT please?

Mr Carters—It is still operating in the same six locations with which it started.

Senator SIEWERT—Is it all underway in those six locations now?

Mr Carters—It is, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand that it has actually been rolled out in two stages. The first one is the enrolment and the second one is the attendance. Have you moved into the second phase yet?

Mr Carters—Yes, we have. Whilst the attendance measures have not been applied yet, we moved into the second phase about a month ago. What that involves is going back to the communities and advising and consulting with them on what that means. It also means working with the education authorities to identify what they see as being the attendance issues. In a sense, it is up to them to decide. It is then also up to them to report attendance to Centrelink if they feel that they have tried everything that they can to encourage the children to attend.

Having said that, there has been nobody yet reported to Centrelink, although there have been 32 inquiries to Centrelink about whether parents are in the eligible group—in other words, they are in receipt of the relevant income support payment. We are still negotiating with the education authorities in the NT about exactly how this will be played out.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to go back to the attendance area in a minute, but I would like to first finish off on the enrolment side of things, which does link into my questions on attendance obviously. Was anybody put on income management as a result of non-enrolment of children?

Mr Carters—The SEAM pilot does not, in fact, put them on income management, what it would ultimately do would be to suspend the payments.

Senator SIEWERT—Suspend it, that is what I meant.

Mr Carters—In answer to that question, no parent had their payments suspended. Just to give you a feel for it, there were 892 school aged children for whom enrolment details were provided, and there were only 27 parents who needed a warning letter to be sent to them from Centrelink. As a result of that, and work both with the education authorities and with Centrelink, nobody has needed to go to that next step.

Senator SIEWERT—Of the 892 school aged children that were involved, how many of them were enrolled for the first time and were not newly school aged children enrolling in grade one or whatever they start with in the NT? Does that make sense?

Mr Carters—It does, but we do not have that information.

Senator SIEWERT—The reason I am asking is that this was aimed at enrolling kids that were not previously enrolled, so what I am looking for is whether there were kids enrolled who were not previously enrolled. And we do not know that?

Mr Carters—No, not at the moment, but we are undertaking a fairly extensive evaluation of this measure, and obviously part of the reason that we extended the timeframe—we did not extend the locations, we extended the timeframe—was to allow us to let it run for a bit longer

and then also to undertake a better evaluation. They are the sorts of things that hopefully we will get out of that, but we do not have that information to hand.

Senator SIEWERT—Moving on to enrolments and it does actually link back obviously to attendance, how did you end up notifying the schools about parents who were on income support. We have discussed this issue before. It is the issue of information being released to schools and notification to Centrelink about parents who are on income support?

Mr Carters—What happened was that Centrelink requested enrolment details from the parents who were income support recipients and when those enrolment details were provided, it would depend on the nature of those details. If there was obviously clear evidence then that was okay; otherwise Centrelink could then match back to validate that through the NT government education authorities.

Senator SIEWERT—In the first instance it was the parents' responsibility to tell Centrelink. There was then no contact with the school; you just had to provide your enrolment—

Mr Carters—That is correct, the onus was on the parent.

Senator SIEWERT—The next step is obviously to go to attendance. What process has been put in place to check with the schools whether children are attending?

Mr Carters—The process there is that it is up to the schools to notify Centrelink of the non-attendance, it is not up to Centrelink to trigger that. As I said, we have had 32 occurrences where the schools have made an inquiry with Centrelink to see whether the parents are in that eligible group—in other words they are receiving the relevant income support payment. Then it is up to the school to undertake what is usually an attendance plan to work with the parent and with the child or children to attempt to get them to attend on a regular basis. The school/education authority can then choose to notify Centrelink of a failure to attend or a failure of this plan, and it is that last step which has not happened.

Senator SIEWERT—And it has only just started?

Mr Carters—It has, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Do the schools notify Centrelink or do they have a list of students whose parents are on income support to check against?

Mr Carters—The schools ask Centrelink whether they are an eligible parent, which means whether they are on that income support payment.

Senator SIEWERT—So they do that once they have flagged a problem? I ask because I understand that at least some schools are getting lists of parents who are on income support.

Mr Carters—I am assured that that does not happen.

Senator SIEWERT—Well, I am sorry, I have seen a list.

Mr Carters—That has gone to a school?

Senator SIEWERT—I have seen a list that a school has had, yes.

Mr Carters—And it was not one that they constructed themselves?

Senator SIEWERT—All the members of our committee have seen a list. I am trying to work out whether it was a list that they had generated themselves or whether it is a list that had gone to them.

Ms Beath—We are not sending to schools lists of students who are on income support, but schools can request to know whether someone they might be doing an attendance plan for is in the category for SEAM.

Senator SIEWERT—So then you would say, ‘yes,’ and they could generate their own list. Is that correct?

Ms Beath—They would then do their attendance plan with that family and come back to us if they need us to take action.

Senator SIEWERT—If a child is regularly truanting, would the process involve the school contacting Centrelink to ask about them?

Ms Beath—To ask whether they are at within the scope of the SEAM project, but the school has its own plans that it does with truant students.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to come to that in a minute, but the point I am trying to track down now is the process by which schools find out that the parents of the kids are on income support. Do they have to wait until the child is truanting before they contact Centrelink or could they ring up and say, ‘I want to know which parents of the kids in school are on income support’?

Ms Beath—There has been an agreement with the state education authority around the circumstances under which they would make that contact with us. It is for families where they are about to start an attendance process because their child is not attending school adequately. So it is not just for any child.

Senator SIEWERT—Are you able to provide us with a copy of that agreement?

Ms Beath—I think that is a—

Mr Carters—We have got a memorandum of understanding with the Northern Territory government Department of Education and Training and also with the Catholic Education Office, so I would assume that we could provide that to you.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could provide that, that would be useful. Just so I am really clear, the department of education in the Northern Territory is not facilitating any generation of lists, is it? Is each individual school supposed to be generating its own list?

Ms Beath—Yes, but they have been working with their state office around the appropriateness of referrals.

Senator SIEWERT—So, in fact, the department could have generated a list of students whose parents are on income support?

Ms Beath—They work with their school system to decide what the appropriate referral guidelines are for those students. We then get a referral, usually through the state department, saying that the student is someone who may in fact be in scope, depending on whether they are on income support or not.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that the second phase has only just started, but have there been any situations to date where a parent's income support has been suspended?

Mr Carters—No.

Ms Beath—No.

Senator SIEWERT—Does each of the six schools now have an attendance management plan?

Mr Carters—The attendance plans would relate to individuals who needed those plans because of attendance issues. Are you asking whether each—

Senator SIEWERT—I understood there should be two things. As I understand it through past work with the education department work, the school generally should have an overall attendance plan. Once you identify the children that are truanting, you work intensively with that child and their family to develop up their attendance strategies. Is that a correct understanding?

Ms Beath—That is my understanding of how they work. The tool that the Commonwealth is offering is just one aspect of what they might use when they are dealing with children in that situation.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand that it is a pretty big tool, so that is why I was asking about the attendance strategy for each of the schools. Does each of the schools have in place an attendance strategy that you are aware of?

Mr Carters—Yes, because part of the agreement to participate in the SEAM attendance measure was to develop attendance plans, and that is the approach, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Have you sighted those?

Mr Carters—No, not always; not all of them.

Senator SIEWERT—Have you measured yet an increase in attendance at these schools with this attendance plan?

Mr Carters—Again, it is a bit too early for that, and that is what the evaluation will do.

Senator SCULLION—On the same area, Mr Carters—you might want to take this on notice—the committee also saw a flow diagram about the triggers. If someone does not attend, the first thing is to write them a letter. If they still do not attend, they are written another letter. There were probably about 11 points. I am not sure whether that is a Commonwealth document or one for the Northern Territory, but you are turning through your pages; I hope that means that you have some information for me on that.

Mr Carters—We do. In fact, I think I have the diagram you are referring to in front of me now. That is really the process that we set out as an indicator for the approach and the steps that need to be taken. It is really a check list to demonstrate that the processes have to have been gone through so that, hopefully, we will not ultimately get to the situation where someone is actually suspended. It is really all about encouraging participation, as in attendance at school. Where there are issues, we have the parents working very closely with the school in the first instance, we have Centrelink being brought in if that is deemed to be necessary by the school and then Centrelink will have social workers and other people to

assist in that process as well. It is only if all that fails that ultimately some further action may be taken. As I said, we have not needed to go there yet.

Senator SCULLION—I know there must be some variables in there, but, as I recall the document, this happens and then the next thing happens. I know there are some variables, but do you have any idea about how long the process would take from not attending to still not attending to doing all the stuff in between to making a breaching order?

Mr Carters—It would certainly take a couple of months, and longer now because we are still setting up the processes, but once the full processes are in place, then it would still take that long because we would want to give the parents every chance to ensure that their children attend school.

Senator SCULLION—It would seem a great deal of time to be out of school, just as an observation. If somebody is obviously not attending school and has been identified as such, eight weeks seems to be an awfully long process, and during that period of time they may well continue not to attend school.

Mr Carters—We have only just started the school attendance component. The enrolment stage is first. If people had not enrolled their children, then we would have taken some action already. The attendance one, as I said, is now new and we are working through that, but it is ultimately up to the education authorities to make the call about that; it is not up to us.

Senator SCULLION—You mentioned in an earlier response that right at the end of the day the school can then choose to report them to Centrelink. Was that just the way you described it or were you simply making very clear that at the end of the day it is really up to the school whether they want to breach them?

Mr Carters—That is the point, yes. It is up to them whether or not they want to utilise the services of Centrelink to help get them to attend.

Senator SCULLION—It seems like a pretty wide opt-out, but thank you for that, Mr Carters.

Senator MASON—Mr Carters, you may remember last time there was a discussion about the fact that school attendance expressed simply as a function of enrolment is far less valuable than attendance expressed as a function of age, cohort or population. Do you remember that discussion?

Mr Carters—Yes.

Senator MASON—That is good. We need to know that so that we can better determine the effects any remedial government policies. I asked a question on notice and the department has answered that question, and I will turn to that now. It is question CA005_09—have you got that?

Mr Carters—Yes.

Senator MASON—On the second paragraph, on the second page of the answer, you say:

The Access Economics estimates for the number of non-enrolled children in the Northern Territory in 2006, taking into account adjustments such as for unfulfilled home schooling enrollments is approximately 1 900 children.

Is that right?

Mr Carters—Yes, that is correct. That is the answer that we gave.

Senator MASON—Of that 1,900, do you have a breakdown between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children?

Mr Carters—We do not, no.

Senator MASON—It would have been very useful.

Mr Carters—We are not able to break that down.

Senator MASON—You cannot break it down?

Mr Carters—No.

Senator MASON—You broke it down in your table below.

Mr Carters—That has come from a different source.

Senator MASON—I know that. So you are telling the committee that you do not have an idea of the total school-age population of Indigenous children in the Northern Territory? Is that what you are saying? You are, by implication, saying that, aren't you?

Mr Carters—We could estimate, but we do not know that figure.

Senator MASON—Okay; you do not know it. That estimate is from 2006. Do you have any updates since then?

Mr Carters—No, sorry. We do not have an update because we did need to use the census data from 2006.

Senator MASON—The committee has to make an assessment of whether the government policy is working. It cannot unless we have those statistics. Every time I ask questions at this committee I am frustrated by not having the information that enables us—the parliament that votes money to the executive—to determine policy outcomes. It is very frustrating, Mr Carters. Is there any chance of this committee getting a hold of any updated age-cohort information? When can we expect some?

Mr Carters—Censuses are not held more often—it is up to the ABS to run those—and we need the census data to be able to give the detailed split that you require.

Senator MASON—I thought the census data did include the question of whether you are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Surely that is a question on the census data?

Dr Harmer—I think what Mr Carters is saying is that the censuses are only done every five years.

Senator MASON—Hold on; that is a different question, Dr Harmer. I asked before, of the 1,900 missing kids of the age cohort, who was Aboriginal and who was non-Aboriginal. You said you could not tell me that. I know that the census asked that very question.

Mr Carters—The census would ask the question.

Senator MASON—Yes. So why can't the committee know that information?

Mr Carters—The figure that you are after is the number of non-enrolled students, and the census does not give us that. We have to do different matches to try to work through that figure, which is why Access Economics did that work for us. My understanding is that, in terms of the level of detail that you need to bring those figures together, it is not a figure that we can produce.

Senator MASON—How are we going to know whether government policy is making any difference, with Indigenous or indeed non-Indigenous kids? It would be very hard. We discussed last time that the only real measurement of attendance is as a function not of enrolment but of age cohort. We agreed on that, didn't we?

Mr Carters—Yes, we did.

Senator MASON—If we do not have that information, how are we going to progress?

Mr Carters—There is still a lot of information that is available and as I said estimates could be used to split that figure and from there you could draw the conclusion about the population of Indigenous school age children in the Northern Territory and what percentage are attending school. You would not get a precise figure, but certainly you could reach a reasonable estimate.

Senator MASON—Indeed, I think you could. Will you do your best to do that so perhaps it could be actuarially verified for next time? Could you take that on notice?

Mr Carters—We will take that on notice and do our best, yes.

Senator MASON—While you say that attendance figures cannot be shown as a function of population as equivalent data from non-government schools is not available, can you at least calculate attendance as a function of population in government schools? You could still do that.

Mr Carters—Again the issue is that the census data does not identify whether the children in the population are attending a government or a non-government school.

Senator MASON—That is not in the census data?

Mr Carters—That is my understanding; that is the problem.

Senator MASON—So can you make an estimate again? What the committee needs is some indicator so that we can make an assessment of the fruit of these policies. It is a very legitimate question and if you agree on my premise about attendance best being as a function of age cohort and not enrolment—and we agree on that—we need that information to make a proper assessment of outcomes so we need the department to do as much as they can. Can you take that on notice as well?

Mr Carters—We will take that on notice, and because it is estimates we will also need to clear that through ministers as well.

Senator MASON—I am sure the executive will want to cooperate to see whether the taxpayers' money is being well used.

Senator McLucas—Can I make this comment. In another life I was a local government councillor in the western part of Cairns and we were trying to find out how many kids were not going to school. It is a very, very hard thing to do. We actually employed a person to trace

families moving. A lot of Aboriginal communities on Cape York move from schools within the Cairns region and it was only through almost forensic detective work that we got a list of non-attending children. I do not know that your sort of global approach of comparing a census with enrolment—it will give you an indication—can be actuarially verified.

Senator MASON—Sure, I accept that, and I accept that it is difficult—that I do not dispute—but if the parliament does not have that information it cannot then properly assess the outcomes, so we need better information.

Senator McLucas—I applaud your desire to get a measure of how effective this is. I suppose I am being cautious about your methodology.

Senator MASON—Sure I understand that but it is a better methodology when at the moment we have no information and even on the education outcomes—

Senator McLucas—It is a very hard task.

Senator MASON—The way we collate educational results has changed post the intervention, so it is very hard to compare results, so we cannot compare anything at the moment. It is very, very frustrating; however, let me move on because I am running out of time. Just quickly on literacy and numeracy benchmarks the NAPLAN literacy and numeracy data for 2008 is available. I will not go into this now because there just is not the time but I am sure the committee will look at it at another stage. There is a lot of literature about a racial gap per se but you will be aware, Mr Carters, that people like Professor Helen Hughes, the distinguished economist and distinguished Australian, says that the gap is not so much a racial gap as it is a school gap. She argues that Indigenous kids going to normal schools say in New South Wales and Victoria have similar levels as non-Indigenous kids, but it is those in remote communities who have the shocking results because some of those schools are very, very poor. I just wanted to put that on the record because I suspect at some stage we are going to return to this debate but we have not got the time now sadly because I know Senator Back wants to ask questions. I do have some questions on the early childhood centres.

Senator CROSSIN—What happened during the last 10 or 11 years, Senator Mason, I wonder?

Senator MASON—The divide, Senator Crossin, is not so much a racial gap; it is a school gap. I think that is the problem. We want to work out whether in fact the Commonwealth's money is being well spent, but at every turn it is very difficult. On early childhood centres, we established last time that in February 2008, during the sorry speech, the Prime Minister committed himself to the idea that over the next five years every Indigenous child would be enrolled in and attending a proper early childhood education centre or opportunity. Then in October 2008 COAG committed \$564 million to the goal of establishing 35 early childhood centres—we discussed this last time—and by the February estimates only four out of the 35 locations had been chosen by the states. That was on page 63 of the transcript.

We have been told that a national partnership has only come into effect on 1 January this year, that the states have not been given a deadline or a timetable per se and that the Commonwealth was expecting to hear back from them, from the states, as to the other locations within the next few weeks. Back in February we only had four out of 35 locations. Now I simply want to find out how far further we have advanced. Where are we?

Ms Wall—I will ask my colleague Ms Shugg to update you on the children and family centres. But I just want to clarify again that the Prime Minister's commitment to preschool for every four-year-old Indigenous child is not being delivered specifically through the children and family centres.

Senator MASON—We had this discussion last time.

Ms Wall—That is right.

Senator MASON—We will let the people decide what the Prime Minister said; that is fine. Let me ask specific questions on this provision. Have the locations for the remaining 31 integrated child and family care centres been chosen yet?

Ms Shugg—Five sites have been announced at this stage.

Senator MASON—Five more or five in total?

Ms Shugg—Five in total.

Senator MASON—So one more since last time?

Ms Shugg—A further 24 sites are at various stages of the approvals processes.

Senator MASON—So we have one more site since February, is that right?

Ms Shugg—There has been one more site announced since February. That is correct.

Senator MASON—On how many locations has construction or renovation work been commenced?

Ms Shugg—At this stage we do not have any advice that construction has started on any of the sites. You would be aware that one of the key factors that will bode as to the success of these centres is if they are established in close consultation with the relevant community. That consultation has to happen at very early stages. For the four that have been announced first, that consultation has taken place: very detailed consultation with communities, service providers et cetera about the services that need to be provided in that community, how the community would like those—

Senator MASON—I know all that. Time is going to run out. I know all that, and thank you for that. But only one more location has been agreed upon; is that right?

Ms Shugg—Has been announced, yes.

Senator MASON—Is there a timetable in place for construction, hiring of staff et cetera?

Ms Shugg—The work plans that were agreed by COAG in November, at the same time as the national partnership was agreed, set out the timetables for the establishment of the children and family centres. Obviously, one of the issues that need to be addressed as part of the consultation with communities is timing.

Senator MASON—My timing is about up, Ms Shugg. I can see the clock ticking by and Senator Back very impatiently sitting there as I know he has many questions. But can I say this with respect to these early childhood centres: it has been 15 months since the sorry speech, eight months since the COAG announcement of the actual 35 centres, five months since the start of the national partnership and, as we were told, the states were expected to

come up with the remaining 31 locations within a few weeks of the February estimates. We have one more—one!

Ms Shugg—The timetable that was set out in the agreed action plans had the majority of locations to be agreed by the end of this financial year, and that work is well underway. There were provisions—

Senator MASON—But you have less than four weeks to come up with that. You said ‘the majority’, so we are talking about your needing to come up with another dozen in the next four weeks. Is that right?

Ms Shugg—As I mentioned, there are 24 additional sites in various stages of the approvals process.

Senator MASON—You have had one since February and you are going to have come up with 12 more in the next four weeks—that is what you are saying to the committee. Isn’t that right?

Ms Shugg—What I have said is that there are 24 additional sites in the various stages of the approvals processes.

Senator MASON—You have a majority, as you said before—

Ms Shugg—The timing set out in the national partnership is for us to have the majority of them agreed before the end of this financial year.

Senator MASON—In four weeks time?

Ms Shugg—Yes.

Senator MASON—Are you confident about that?

Ms Shugg—That is what we are working towards. We are confident that there are a number of them that are in the final stages of approval.

Senator MASON—Then I will see you in October.

Senator BACK—My question is in relation to a specific program at the senior end of the secondary program. It is called Future Footprints, a program which had its origins in 2004. I have a handout for those who are interested in it. It was an initiative of the Independent Schools Association of Western Australia for Indigenous children from the Northern Territory—partially—but particularly from Western Australia to participate in education in boarding schools in Perth. It has increased in numbers since 2004 from 76 students up to 130 and it has been funded at around \$400,000 to provide mentors to work with the 16 boarding schools and the pastoral groups to support these children. Time does not permit me to explain it further as I would have liked. Are you aware of the Future Footprints program?

Mr Baker—Yes I am aware of the program.

Senator BACK—How has it been funded in the past?

Mr Baker—I understand that in the past this program has been funded under the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000.

Senator BACK—Yes. How is it proposed that it be funded beyond the end of this financial year?

Mr Baker—In correspondence with Ms Valerie Gould we have suggested that a funding source exists from the Lindsay Cousins Memorial Trust—

Senator BACK—Which is a philanthropic trust?

Mr Baker—That is correct.

Senator BACK—Is this one that the Commonwealth government funds?

Mr Baker—No.

Senator BACK—Do you know what the limit of funding would be that is available through that source?

Mr Baker—I understand it was in the order of \$3 million.

Senator BACK—No, I understand that the maximum they could commit to would be \$50,000. Can you give us an indication of where the balance of that funding would be likely to come from to make sure this program continues?

Mr Baker—The new funding arrangements with states and territories under national partnerships would be one source.

Senator BACK—How do schools qualify for funding under that particular program? What are the criteria?

Ms Cross—There are three schools national partnerships, two of which are broadly available at the school level: the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy and the National Partnership Agreement on Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities. States and territories and the non-government sectors are deciding at the moment which schools will participate in both those national partnerships. For literacy and numeracy it is if they have a substantial proportion of students who fail to achieve the minimum standards.

Senator BACK—Right.

Ms Cross—For the low SES school communities national partnership it is based on schools with a high proportion of students from disadvantaged regions.

Senator BACK—Or Indigenous populations?

Ms Cross—A number of the Indigenous students would be from disadvantaged regions.

Senator BACK—Sure. What would the likelihood be of Perth-based boarding schools being eligible for funding under those programs?

Ms Cross—Under the low SES national partnership there is a lot of flexibility about how the government and non-government sectors choose to use the funds as long as they are for evidence based approaches to improving educational outcomes. They could use the funds to ensure that high quality teachers are brought to those schools; they could have an extended service school, where they provide youth support or counselling support for young people—they have got a lot of flexibility in terms of the best approach to helping the young people.

Senator BACK—What would your expectation be that the Independent Schools Association might be able pick up \$400,000 through that process? Would you have any hope for that?

Ms Cross—The funding provided by the Commonwealth is \$500,000 per school for an average school of 250 students. That—

Senator BACK—Which would exclude all these schools.

Ms Cross—Well the school would get half of that money from the Commonwealth and then the state or the independent sector would co-invest to bring it up to the \$500,000. Once that funding is available the school has the capacity to use that for a range of reforms that will improve outcomes for their students, so it is ready for the school and the school community to determine what will work best for them.

Senator BACK—But did you not mention they were schools of less than 200 students?

Ms Cross—No, that is just the average funding. If there are fewer students in the school then they would get a smaller amount of funding; it is calculated on \$1,000 additional funding per student enrolled.

Senator BACK—I wonder why the chief of staff of the minister's office, armed with a possible likelihood that this funding might be available, would write and suggest that they go to a philanthropic organisation to get funding?

Ms Cross—Obviously that is another source of funds, Senator. In terms of the low SES national partnership, it would depend on whether they are one of the most disadvantaged schools as to whether or not they were eligible for that funding. Similarly, for literacy and numeracy, it would depend on what proportion of students had not been achieving.

Senator BACK—And this is at the senior year 11-year12 program?

Ms Cross—Literacy and numeracy is primarily targeting primary schools as an early intervention strategy. The low SES national partnership is for both primary and secondary schools; it is really driven by which are the most disadvantaged schools across Australia.

Senator BACK—Sure. I guess it is fair to say, Ms Cross, that these schools would be absolutely nowhere near being disadvantaged schools; they are largely colleges. Where I have a concern for this program is that it looks like it is going to wind out by the end of June this year. It is a mentoring program, as I mentioned. Time does not permit me to go into the role that these mentors play, but I can assure you that the role they play is vital in retaining these students in these schools. They are from remote areas and regional areas, and while the schools themselves do a tremendous job if this program ceases as a result of \$400,000 of funding, the likelihood of those kids remaining is very, very low.

To give you an idea of its success, last year there were 19 students started in year 12. All 19 finished, all 19 graduated and all 19 are now in higher education, training or employment. It is a program by DEWR that actually was accorded best practise in 2008. I think it received an award from Woodside Petroleum and several students participated in the ministers' education first biennial forum held last year in November at Melbourne. I am very concerned that this program is going to cease. There were two mentors: one a Noongar woman who has now had to take full-time employment elsewhere—an absolutely outstanding mentor. They are now down to one, and my understanding is that the funding will wind out at the end of June. Time does not permit me to share with you some of the comments about the excellence of these students and it is a shame it does not because these are people out of the north of the

state—those whose parents and grandparents have recommended they come down to Perth to participate in this program of education because they know very well the education outcomes are hopeless compared with those schools. I wonder could you tell me in relation to these schools what sort of funding might they expect—for example, ABSTUDY and other causes—and if they are going to make an attempt to continue this.

Mr Baker—Senator, I understand there are other sources of funding that may be available to this organisation. We have gone to the market for the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program. It is a scholarship program for secondary students.

Senator BACK—What sort of funding would be available on a per capita basis for that?

Mr Baker—I understand it is approximately \$16,000 per annum, Senator.

Senator BACK—That is a very encouraging figure, given the fact that the cost of boarding in most of the schools that participate in Perth is about \$32,000 to \$34,000 a year by the time you take tuition, boarding, uniforms et cetera. At this moment these schools would be subsidising this program to the tune of about \$12,000 to \$16,000 per student per annum, which I think is a very, very fine gesture given the current economic circumstance.

Mr Baker—I understand the students would also have access to ABSTUDY.

Senator BACK—On top of that \$16,000?

Mr Baker—Yes.

Senator BACK—What sort of budget is there available for that \$16,000? Would it be likely to cover these 160 students?

Mr Carters—There would be ABSTUDY entitlements for individuals who are moving away from home to boarding schools, we just do not have the details. In fact, ABSTUDY is an individual entitlement anyway, but we could certainly give you a general feel for the sorts of extra funding that would be available through that income support payment, but we would have to take it on notice.

Senator BACK—I am aware of the sort of \$10,000 to \$12,000 of ABSTUDY, which brings me to the figure that I have just quoted. I do appreciate your gesture in taking it on notice, Mr Carters, but my fear is by the time I receive some advice on this, this program will have wound out. Do you share that fear? Am I the only person concerned about what would have to be a unique and excellent and successful program? Am I the only one worried about this, or is there generally just a malaise about it?

Mr Carters—It is definitely a concern, but all that I can offer is that we have a look at what sort of funding sources are available to see what we can do to assist, but we are limited by what funds we have available and government decisions.

Senator BACK—I do not want to go into this in huge detail, but I do appreciate your gesture. In the figures that I have been given, I have just been looking at unexpended moneys that have come through on this A3 spreadsheet up to the end of April. I have tried to extrapolate out to the end of June—this is for the enhancing education program and for the overall budget. Am I right in the sense that at the moment, for example up to the end of April in the total DEEWR budget, 52 per cent has been spent and in the enhancing education

program 18 per cent has been spent? Am I reading that correctly? If I am reading it correctly, it seems to me there are figures of somewhere around \$30-odd million unlikely to be expended by the end of the financial year and so I would make the urgent plea, Minister, through to Minister Gillard that \$400,000 could be found, at least for the coming 12 months, so that a good long look can be undertaken. Again, time does not permit me to go through some of the reports on the excellence of this program and to ask questions about what sorts of analyses at least other programs are being subjected to. Is there any hope at all?

Senator McLucas—Senator Back, I undertake to raise this matter with Minister Gillard.

Senator BACK—I do thank you. Bearing in mind that time is against us, I do want to draw attention to those comments of the Prime Minister on 13 February last year by way of hoping that you will treat this matter with extreme urgency. He spoke of closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, education, achievement and employment opportunities, and this relates directly to them. He spoke of targets for the future, and we all know what they are. He also spoke about allowing flexible, tailored, local approaches to achieve commonly agreed national objectives, and I suggest to you that we do need a local approach to solving this particular issue.

Senator McLucas—Senator, I am very happy to take it up with the minister on your behalf.

Senator BACK—Thank you very much. I urge you to do so because as far as I am concerned if we cannot get funding through the federal government in the next few weeks, then I certainly am going to go out into the world—into the corporate world and into the world of Australian families—and I am going to ask them. And for those journalists who are wondering what we do with our parliamentary electoral allowance, I will tell you what I am going to commit the increase in mine to. I am going to commit it to this process. I have calculated that 444 Western Australians paying their \$900 that they got recently back from their own money would pay the \$400,000. I am so committed to this process; I ask you please to take up this commitment. I speak from experience as a Western Australian who has spent a good deal of his life in the bush. Over time these 160 kids will go back to their communities. And not only will we be letting them down; we will be letting down the next generation. I ask you take that on board and I ask you to please consider it to ensure this process is continued.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Senator. I thank the officers. I do appreciate your time.

[2.30 pm]

CHAIR—Now we move to the last section, which is Law and Justice. I believe there are some questions on native title, alcohol management and policing. I appreciate that you have had to wait around, being the last officers for the day.

Senator SCULLION—Dr Harmer, perhaps you can direct me to who may be able to assist me with this matter. As you would be aware, as a consequence of the intervention, anecdotal and other evidence has come to us. Subsequent to the policing in those areas, particularly, there has been an increase in the number of matters that are going through the courts and that need representation. The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency has made a representation to me and to others regarding its capacity to continue funding, because it is one of the principle areas under which this occurs. I understand that funding through the Attorney-

General's Department was to be determined in May. You may be able to tell me whether or not that is the case. I understand that NAAJA has made an application for \$744,000.

It is interesting to note that, over the last five years, criminal matters have increased by 20 per cent and civil and family law matters have increased by a tad over 90 per cent. I am sorry we do not have detailed information for the last few years—these things are only really measured over that five-year time frame—but the figures are particularly impressive. I have looked at some of the anecdotal evidence about some of the workloads. In December 2008, three solicitors were sent to Borroloola to attend 142 cases. As you would know, in some of these bush courts there is very little opportunity to present your case. A magistrate will come to court and there is very little time—often less than a day—for the solicitor to be briefed by the client and to proceed with those matters. Also, culturally, it is a fairly challenging environment for many of these solicitors in this organisation. I think it is really important that, as part of the intervention—and this is sort of 'Indigenous Affairs Friday'—we recognise that, while, tragically, we have an increase in demand, in another way it is fantastic that it is a clear indicator of what is working.

The police force is doing an absolutely fantastic job. In terms of access to justice, though, it is getting harder and harder on the ground. Unless we continue to be able to provide funding for these sorts of agencies, the wheels are going to fall off somewhere, and that means that people will feel frustrated that the system is going to let them down. Could you give me an update on the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency's application?

Dr Harmer—The people from Attorney-General's are likely to have an update on that.

Ms Jones—In acknowledgment of the increased demands that are being placed on the Indigenous legal service providers and other legal service providers in the Northern Territory, the government allocated additional funding to those providers to enable them to deliver expanded services. In particular, an extra \$2.5 million has been provided the two Aboriginal legal services in the Northern Territory in this financial year in recognition of this increased demand.

Senator SCULLION—When were they informed of that?

Ms Jones—That was announced as part of the budget.

Senator SIEWERT—But have they not been informed that those grants have been successful?

Ms Jones—I believe they have been informed. I will check that, but I understand they are aware they are receiving this additional funding.

Senator SIEWERT—I am pretty certain they had not been when we were up there.

Senator SCULLION—Perhaps the break-up has not happened or something like that. Do you have an idea, in terms of forward estimates—without looking at budgets and those sorts of things—about the increase? You may make some comments on that if you have some information on that, Ms Jones. But, as one family will go through a family court matter in a way that often culturally they have not done or had access to before, what happens is that they speak to neighbours and other people who ask, 'Can you actually do that?' because they were not aware. Of course, there is suddenly the need. The demand is like a bushfire. This has been

the case, I have heard anecdotally, in a number of cases. How are you actually measuring this sort of exploding need, if you like, and do we have some sort of flexible fund for these organisations—I am sure they do not waste money—specifically like a bush court with three solicitors for 142 cases? We know there is no mischief and that it is no fault of anyone's, but we know the access to justice could have been a hell of a lot better over a very short period of time.

Ms Jones—There are a couple of things: firstly, we have very a close working relationship obviously with the two Aboriginal legal service providers and meet with them on a regular basis to get feedback on the particular demands that are arising in the Territory. We have also established a legal assistance working group which meets on a regular basis; we chair it and it involves all the Indigenous legal serviced providers as well as the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission, the community legal centres that are in the Northern Territory and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services. So with those regular meetings we are getting information and feedback from the providers on the sorts of demands. The additional funding that the government provided just recently to those providers is intended to enable them to be able to meet this increased capacity and to be able to attend bush courts and other demands that have arisen as a consequence of the intervention.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you for that. I am sure they will give us a bit of feedback, but that sounds fairly positive. In the Darwin environment, for people who are in regional outer Darwin who may receive these services—I think something like 20 per cent of this organisation's clients actually come from Palmerston, which is an outer area—rather than try to come in to Darwin it is much better if they are serviced outside. Palmerston has provided a full-time court officer to assist people through the court process but there is nowhere to put them. So we are able to get funding from local government to assist with the process. Now the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency has put to me, and I think it is a fairly compelling case, that it would obviously be very useful if they could actually have an office in Palmerston. It does make a lot of sense, but most of their applications appear to have fallen on deaf ears in doing the normal rounds of people who would normally be able to help. It is a very important area. Indigenous people particularly need some sort of consistency of where you go and wait to see someone, with the normal levels of amenity and possibly larger levels of amenity because of some of the cultural issues. Is there any scope at all within your organisation generally to be able to provide funds for buildings and offices for organisations like that, given the importance of that at this stage?

Ms Jones—I can confirm we are aware of the issue about a potential office in Palmerston. It has been raised with us and we have discussed it with NAAJA. We do in certain circumstances provide contributions for capital outlays for these organisations, whether it is office accommodation, cars or other equipment. It is really dependent on the total bucket of funding that is available. We are in discussions with NAAJA about it, but no final decision has been made at this point.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I just follow up from Senator Scullion, in terms of the increasing number of Aboriginal people being incarcerated in the Northern Territory. There is a lot of suggestion that it is tied up with the increased policing presence. I am not having a go at the increasing policing presence, because that is obviously one of the elements of the

intervention that the community really likes. Some of the criticism is that people being picked up for not paying their fines lose their licence and then get picked up for driving without a licence and end up in jail. On the surface, that is the same as happens in Western Australia, but the concern is that in Western Australia you could get a community order or something like that, but that is not available in the Northern Territory. It certainly seems from the evidence that we were presented with in Darwin that there is an increasing incarceration rate. There is an increasing number of Aboriginal people in jails, and that is not good. Have you taken this issue up with the NT government? I appreciate that you have just had discussions with NAAJA about increasing funds, but the point is that people should not be ending up in jail. We should be doing more to keep them out of jail or to actually get community orders and things. We had a long discussion with the NT government about the fact that there is no ability to do community orders at the moment. We had an example where a police officer had done it off their own bat, and that had proved successful. Is there any work being done with the NT government around dealing with that issue?

Ms Jones—We have had meetings with the NT government about a range of issues associated with the impact of the intervention from an access to justice perspective. We are aware of that issue. In terms of specifically talking with them about community service orders, we have not had specific discussions about that. I would note one thing. In addition to the additional funding that was provided to the Aboriginal legal services in recognition of the increased impact on their service delivery levels, the Attorney-General's Department provided additional funding for a welfare rights project. One of the ideas behind that was to enable advice and information to be given to clients in advance of their problem escalating to the point where they were incarcerated in relation to fines or other minor social security or welfare rights types issues. That was a bit of an acknowledgment that if the Aboriginal legal services had a capacity to assist at the early intervention stage, it could prevent people from ending up incarcerated. But the Attorney-General's Department has not specifically discussed that particular issue with the NT government.

Senator SIEWERT—Is it possible that you could actually have a discussion with the NT government about those issues and look at mechanisms you can use other than people going into the jail system?

Ms Jones—These are primarily matters for the Northern Territory government as part of their criminal justice regime, but we are obviously talking generally with them in terms of the impact on the justice system as it relates to our legal service delivery demands. That is an ongoing dialogue between the NT government and us.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. In terms of the rollout of a further police presence, are there plans for the construction of any more police stations in any other communities, or have we completed that?

Dr Harmer—I think the budget has provided for additional funding for police stations in the Northern Territory.

Senator SIEWERT—I was not sure if it was more police stations or more police officers.

Ms Moody—The budget provides for the extension of resourcing to the existing eight stations established as part of the Northern Territory emergency response. It also provides

funding over three years for the replacement of five of those temporary facilities with permanent police facilities, which include the station, the lockup, the housing and the associated things that you need in order to have a permanent presence. Three of those funded stations created as part of the Northern Territory emergency response are already in permanent facilities, including one that was opened this year.

Senator SIEWERT—There are no further plans to build stations in any new locations?

Ms Moody—No.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Senator SCULLION—Just on the subject of policing, I will cite the example of the police station where I stood next to the Northern Territory Chief Minister and Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Paul Henderson. We turned the sod, it all opened and we were all terrifically happy it was going to be in the community. However, on subsequent visits, I noticed that it was characterised by the absence of police officers, which was of interest. Outside of the intervention, when you are providing infrastructure under an agreement with a state or territory, what do you do to ensure or audit that their side of the bargain is being upheld?

Dr Harmer—Sorry, Senator, would you repeat that question?

Senator SCULLION—The Commonwealth provided a police station in Mutitjulu on the basis that the Northern Territory government would provide police officers to live and sit in it, but that clearly did not eventuate. That was an example. What I am saying is that if you are talking about now making more investments in order to change something temporary into something more permanent, what do you do to ensure that whoever is providing the staffing arrangements—the Northern Territory, in this case, or other states—is actually fulfilling their end of the bargain? These are often joint ventures, as they should be.

Dr Harmer—I will not take up the time of the committee to drag people to the table, but I should say that there is no way, now we are well down the track in the intervention, that we would be converting a temporary presence to a permanent presence without an agreement by the Northern Territory government that they were actually going to staff it.

Senator SCULLION—We have heard that before, Dr Harmer.

Dr Harmer—I will get information to confirm that, but I would be very confident that that would be the case.

Senator SCULLION—You would actually have an agreement?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Ms Moody—On the ones that are part of the Northern Territory emergency response, there will be a formal agreement between the two governments about those issues and about the resources, the policing and the milestones along the path. Senator, your question was outside of the intervention, and that is a bit harder for me to answer. In terms of the intervention, it is—

Senator SCULLION—Dr Harmer has accurately answered my question. We often rely on our partners in the Northern Territory, so I just wanted to ensure that we were going to have an agreement.

Ms Moody—Yes, Senator.

Assistant Commissioner Prendergast—In reference to Mutitjulu, I can advise the committee that the AFP has two people stationed there as we speak, as part of the intervention.

CHAIR—In the police station?

Assistant Commissioner Prendergast—I believe so.

Senator SCULLION—We were delighted to hear that. They are doing a great job too, I have to say.

CHAIR—Senator Boyce, I believe you have got some questions on native title.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, thank you. My first question is related to the recent Victorian government decision to have a direct negotiating model for settling native title claims. What input, if any, has the federal government had in that? Is it simply a watching brief or something more?

Ms Jones—In relation to that, I think the initial thing to say is that the approach that has been adopted by the Victorian government, and was just announced by the Victorian Attorney-General yesterday, is consistent with the broader approach that the Commonwealth Attorney-General has been promoting in relation to native title. This approach looks at opportunities for bringing together all the key stakeholders and negotiating outcomes, rather than pursuing litigation. In terms of the active involvement in the development of the framework, that has been done within Victoria with all the key stakeholders.

Senator BOYCE—Obviously, yes.

Ms Jones—We have not actually specifically participated in that process, though we have been aware of it, along the way, as it has been developed.

Senator BOYCE—One more question on that specific thing. I note, also, that Victoria's Attorney-General said he would be taking that to a national conference in August, hoping that it would be adopted by all states. Are you aware of this plan? Has COAG discussed this?

Ms Jones—I think the meeting the Victorian Attorney-General was referring to was the native title ministers' meeting that is currently scheduled for 28 August. That is a meeting of all of the ministers at the Commonwealth and state level with responsibilities for native title.

In terms of the Victorian model, whilst I am aware that the Victorian Attorney was proposing to discuss the model, I am not sure that it is precisely in the terms that it would be adopted by all the other states and territories at this point, because obviously they are all at slightly different stages in terms of developing their own approaches. For example, in South Australia, they have had a long process of taking a negotiated approach to native title that has involved all the key stakeholders. It is slightly different to the Victorian model, and then all the other jurisdictions have different models.

Senator BOYCE—The Victorian model is being characterised by the Victorians as a first for Australia. Is that your view?

Ms Jones—In terms of having in place a framework like that, in the specifics of the model that they have developed—

Senator BOYCE—They have formalised something that other states are doing in a less structured way. Is that what you are saying?

Ms Jones—The South Australians have been using their model for about seven or eight years now, which has involved a coordinated approach between government, native title claimants and non-government respondent parties, like mining and pastoralists. That has involved trying to negotiate Indigenous land-use agreements across a range of areas throughout the state for quite some time. I think the South Australians would probably argue that they have also been using this type of approach for some time.

Senator BOYCE—Is any other state?

Ms Jones—Not that type of model exactly, no.

Senator BOYCE—I note the Victorians also say that this will allow them to ‘clean up’ their native title claims within 10 years. Are you able to provide any framework on how many outstanding native title claims there are, on a state by state basis?

Ms Jones—I can.

Senator BOYCE—I mean state and territory, of course.

Ms Jones—Currently, there are approximately 477 claims in the system. In terms of the break-up of that between each state and territory, I would have to take that on notice.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, that is fine. I notice you have had a large increase in the budget for 2010-11 and in subsequent years for funding the native title system under the closing the gap measures. What are you expecting to achieve with 2½ times the budget that you have had up to date?

Ms Jones—The additional funding is approximately \$50 million over four years. The significant component of that is being allocated to native title representative bodies to enhance their capacity and enable them to be able to progress more claims and respond to the demands of courts and tribunals in terms of being able to mediate claims. The remaining \$4 million is being provided to the Attorney-General’s Department. The purpose of that is to enable enhanced system management for the development of policy around broader land-settlements. Also, it will look at capacity issues in the system, such as anthropologists, and examine ways that we can get more anthropologists into that system to enable the assessment of connect evidence in relation to different claims.

Senator BOYCE—Do you see this speeding up settlements of claims?

Ms Jones—Certainly. It will increase the capacity of the claimant representative bodies and enable greater numbers of claims to be progressed by both the court and the tribunal.

Senator BOYCE—Can you just give me some sort of sense of how long the longest outstanding claims currently are?

Ms Jones—I will have to take that on notice. Unfortunately there are some matters that have been—

Senator BOYCE—Perhaps if you could break it down into five-year blocks—less than five years old, less than 10 years old. I suppose we cannot go much more than 20, can we.

Senator BOYCE—Education on native title issues is something that has been raised by the Social Justice Commissioner in the past and others. Could you tell me about what programs you are funding to develop education around native title?

Ms Jones—In terms of broader education, obviously the Social Justice Commissioner himself has a significant role to play in that regard. His native title reports over the years have pointed to that, and the Social Justice Commissioner has undertaken work. I might need to defer to my colleagues in FaHCSIA just in terms of some of the things that native title rep bodies are undertaking with the claimants that they represent.

Senator BOYCE—Could you tell me how many native title bodies there are and where they are located? You could do that on notice.

Ms Moody—I will take that on notice. I cannot tell you off the top of my head. If I had to pick a number I would say it is around 20 to 25, but I will get you the actual number on notice.

Senator BOYCE—And we were just talking about education programs on the issue of native title, which obviously is another one of the things that would assist people to progress claims faster.

Ms Moody—I can take on notice that we will ask the native title rep bodies what sort of activities they might do to education within their patches, so to speak, on those issues.

Senator BOYCE—So there is no overarching educative program?

Ms Moody—There is no overarching program.

Ms Jones—I should mention that the National Native Title Tribunal also undertakes extensive work in relation to providing information and education campaigns about the native title system, targeted at different audiences in the system. That is a key element of the tribunal's activities.

Senator BOYCE—I am sorry, targeted at different audiences—being?

Ms Jones—Claimant organisations—

Senator BOYCE—Primarily claimants, though?

Ms Jones—Claimants but also non-government respondents such as pastoralists and miners. They have had different types—

Senator BOYCE—Perhaps local government?

Ms Jones—There could be some dedicated work with local government, I would have to check on that, but the education work they have been doing is quite broad.

Senator BOYCE—I am sure how you are going to respond to this but I thought it was quite interesting to see in the same week that a group in Western Australia could use native title to say that they did not want to mine in their area, at the same time that the Queensland

government is overriding native title views in Cape York to insist that the area become heritage listed. What involvement—

Senator McLucas—Senator, that is an assertion. You are saying it as fact. It is an assertion.

Senator BOYCE—What is not fact?

Senator McLucas—The second part of your sentence.

Senator BOYCE—The Queensland is not going to use heritage listing to—

Senator McLucas—It is an assertion.

Senator BOYCE—They are not intending to do that?

Senator McLucas—You are asserting that. I think there would be a different view held by the Queensland government.

Senator BOYCE—What, they are not going to use wild river legislation in Cape York? They are not going to introduce legislation—

Senator McLucas—No, you are asserting that the introduction of the wild river legislation would impinge some way on native title rights of the people of Cape York. That is an assertion.

Senator BOYCE—Okay. Let us look, then, at the assertions of some groups within Cape York that their land rights have been overridden by the Queensland government's intention to introduce wild river legislation—

Senator McLucas—That's more accurate.

Senator BOYCE—including Mr Noel Pearson from the Cape York Institute, who we were talking about earlier. What involvement does the department have in that process?

CHAIR—Ms Jones, you could take that on notice. You have got the senator's question about what involvement the department would have in any of those discussions that are happening at the state level. That would be the gist of the question on notice.

Ms Moody—Chair, can I just say that there are 14 native title rep bodies.

Senator BOYCE—Would you be able to give me a list of them on notice?

Ms Moody—I can take that on notice.

CHAIR—I want to thank the officers again for their cooperation, patience and professionalism. Naturally I want to thank Hansard. I also thank senators for their patience, with the restricted time frame we always have.

Committee adjourned at 3.00 pm