



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES

(Additional Estimates)

FRIDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2011

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SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS**LEGISLATION COMMITTEE****Friday, 25 February 2011**

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

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

Senators in attendance: Senators Adams, Boyce, Furner, McEwen, Fierravanti-Wells, Moore, Payne, Scullion and Siewert

Committee met at 9.00 am

CROSS PORTFOLIO INDIGENOUS MATTERS**In Attendance**

Senator Arbib, Minister for Sport, Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development and Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Mr Robert Griew, Associate Secretary, Department Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Ms Jo Wood, Group Manager, Strategy, Indigenous Economic Strategy

Ms Lynne Stevenson, Branch Manager, Strategy, Indigenous Economic Strategy Group

Ms Katrina Fanning, Branch Manager, Strategy, Indigenous Economic Strategy Group

Ms Brenda Love, Acting Branch Manager, Strategy, Indigenous Economic Strategy Group

Mr Derek Stiller, Branch Manager, Strategy, Income Support Group

Ms Fiona Buffinton, GM Specialist Employment Services Group

Ms Kate Hay, National Manager, Employment and Participation

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Dr Jeff Harmer, Secretary

Ms Liza Carroll, Deputy Secretary

Mr Rob Heferen, Deputy Secretary

Mr Andrew Tongue, Deputy Secretary

Mr Bruce Hunter, Deputy Secretary, Chief Operating Officer

Ms Serena Wilson, Deputy Secretary

Ms Cate McKenzie, Group Manager, Women and Children

Mr Anthony Field, Group Manager, Legal and Compliance

Mr Steve Jennaway, Group Manager, Business and Financial Services
Ms Donna Moody, Group Manager, Program Performance
Ms Cath Halbert, Group Manager, Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination
Ms Kerrie Tim, Group Manager, Indigenous Leadership and Engagement
Ms Kate Gumley, Group Manager, Office of Remote Indigenous Housing
Mr Bryan Palmer, Group Manager, Indigenous Programs and Economic Development
Mr Michael Lye, Group Manager, Families
Mr Matthew James, Branch Manager, Performance and Evaluation
Mr Joe Martin-Jard, Branch Manager, Indigenous Policy
Mr Andrew Davitt, Branch Manager, Indigenous Budget and Coordination
Mr David Fintan, Branch Manager, Commercial and Indigenous Law
Mr Simon Crowther, Branch Manager, Compliance Branch
Ms Lucy Bitmead, Branch Manager, Indigenous Housing Policy
Mr Greg Roche, Branch Manager, Indigenous Programs
Ms Allyson Essex, Branch Manager, CDEP Policy and Program Management
Ms Michelle Kinnane, Branch Manager, Remote Service Delivery
Mr Geoff Richardson, Branch Manager, Governance and Community Strategies
Ms Robyn Calder, Branch Manager, Leadership Delivery
Ms Amanda Doherty, Branch Manager, Indigenous Constitutional Recognition Secretariat
Ms Glennys McAliece, Branch Manager, Policy and Strategy
Mr Stephen O'Shea, Branch Manager, Engagement
Mr Mark Cawley, Acting Branch Manager, Budget Development
Mr Scott Dilley, Branch Manager, Business Planning and Financial Governance
Ms Helen Martin, Acting Branch Manager, Financial Accounting and Procurement
Ms Lisa Croft, Branch Manager, Indigenous Housing Delivery
Mr Gavin Matthews, Branch Manager, Indigenous Housing Programs and Services
Ms Sally Moyle, Branch Manager, Land Reform
Ms Carol Ey, Branch Manager, Research and Analysis
Mr Bruce Smith, Branch Manager, Performance Management and Modelling
Mr Robert Ryan, Branch Manager, Indigenous Economic Development
Ms Liz Hefren-Webb, Acting Branch Manager, Welfare Payments Reform
Ms Janet Stodulka, Branch Manager, Family and Child Support Policy
Ms Yvonne Korn, Branch Manager, Program Frameworks
Mr Phil Brown, Branch Manager, Indigenous Community Safety Unit
Ms Deborah Winkler, Branch Manager, Mental Health and Autism Branch

Portfolio agencies

Mr Brian Gleeson, Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services

Department of Health and Ageing**Executive**

Mr David Learmonth, Deputy Secretary, Department of Health and Ageing

Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

Ms Linda Powell, First Assistant Secretary, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

Dr Brendan Gibson, Director, Remote Health Services Development Branch

Mr Garry Fisk, Assistant Secretary, Capacity Development Branch
Ms Tarja Saastamoinen, Assistant Secretary, Policy Branch
Ms Kirrily Harrison, Director, Health System Analysis
Mr John Shevlin, Assistant Secretary, Program Support Branch
Ms Joan Corbett, Assistant Secretary, Family Health and Wellbeing Branch
Ms Alison Killen, Assistant Secretary, Better Health Care Branch

Regulatory Policy and Governance Division

Ms Teressa Ward, Assistant Secretary, Office of Hearing Services

Pharmaceutical Benefits Division

Ms Beryl Janz, Assistant Secretary, Community Pharmacy Branch

Ageing and Aged Care Division

Ms Samantha Robertson, Assistant Secretary, Residential Programs Management Branch
Mr Russell de Burgh, Acting Assistant Secretary, Office for an Ageing Australia

Health Workforce Division

Ms Bernadette Walker, Acting Assistant Secretary, Nursing, Allied and Indigenous Workforce Branch
Mr Graeme Rossiter, Director, Nursing, Allied and Indigenous Workforce Branch

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Dr Fadwa Al Yaman

Primary and Ambulatory Care Division

Mr Mark Booth, Assistant Secretary Office of Rural Health Workforce District Branch
Mr Rob Cameron, Assistant Secretary, Rural Health Services and Policy Branch

Acute Care Division

Ms Veronica Hancock, Assistant Secretary, Hospital Development, Indemnity and Dental Branch

Mental Health and Chronic Disease Division

Ms Georgie Harman, First Assistant Secretary, Mental Health and Chronic Disease Division
Mr Leo Kennedy, Assistant Secretary, Chronic Disease and Alcohol Branch
Ms Colleen Krestensen, Assistant Secretary, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Branch

Business Group

Ms Samantha Palmer, General Manager, Communication and People Strategy
Mr Adam Davey, Assistant Secretary, Communications Branch

Office of Aged Care, Quality and Compliance

Mr Iain Scott, First Assistant Secretary
Ms Lyn Murphy, Assistant Secretary, Quality Monitoring Branch
Ms Fiona Nicholls, Assistant Secretary, Aged Care Workforce and Better Practice Programs Branch

Department of Human Services

Centrelink

Mr Grant Tidswell, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Customer Service
Ms Roxanne Ramsey, General Manager, Indigenous, Regional and Remote Servicing
Mr Shane Hoffman, Portfolio Manager, Indigenous Strategies
Ms Susan Cartwright, National Manager, Income Management

CHAIR (Senator Moore)—I declare open this Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee hearing on cross-portfolio Indigenous matters. The committee is considering additional estimates on Indigenous matters that senators have indicated they wish to raise. These have been grouped on the program into themes and issues and relate to the portfolios of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Health and Ageing and Centrelink as an agency of Human Services.

This committee must report to the Senate on 22 March 2011 and has set Friday, 8 April 2011 as the date for the return of answers to questions taken on notice. Senators are reminded that any written questions on notice should be provided to the committee secretariat by the close of business Friday, 4 March 2011. Officers and senators are familiar with the rules of the Senate governing estimates hearings. If you need assistance Dr Tim Kendall or Cassimah will be more than happy to help you out.

I particularly draw attention to the Senate order of 13 May 2009 specifying the process by which a claim of public interest immunity should be raised.

The extract read as follows—

Public interest immunity claims

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).

(Extract, Senate Standing Orders, pp 124-125)

CHAIR—I welcome the minister, the Hon. Mark Arbib, officers of the portfolio departments and Dr Harmer. Dr Harmer, today is your last day so we will try to make it as pleasurable as we possibly can.

Dr Harmer—As always!

CHAIR—Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Senator Arbib—No.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Dr Harmer—No.

[9.03 am]

CHAIR—I also want to put on record again the committee's appreciation to Mr Heferen, Ms Halbert and the other officers who worked with us to make sure that the program was as tightly arranged as we could make it. There are no guarantees that we will be well behaved with that program, but at least we know the time frames and the departments to be called. Thank you very much for that effort. We will start today with Senator Siewert who is going to kick off.

Senator SIEWERT—I would like to look at Closing the Gap, which is the first thing on the agenda, but also look at the report itself. I understand that a Closing the Gap brand framework has been developed by the department; is that correct?

Ms Halbert —Our communications area, whom I do not think are here, have been working to develop a communication strategy around Closing the Gap. You referred to it as a brand framework. I am not sure whether that is the terminology. I am actually not sure whether that is the terminology we use, but certainly they have been working to develop a common communication strategy that all agencies can use.

Senator SIEWERT—You can actually find the brand and a copy of the style guide on the website.

Ms Halbert —The brand framework terminology I am not sure of, but there is a Closing the Gap logo. Is that what you are referring to?

Senator SIEWERT—I am presuming that—

Ms Halbert —They have a communications strategy. Our communications people could answer that in more detail.

Senator SIEWERT—Can you tell me how much it has cost to develop the communication strategy, the brand framework and the style guide?

Ms Halbert —I am unable to answer that.

Dr Harmer—We can certainly give you that on notice. If you have a lot of questions about the communications, I can try and get those people across here. They are not here at the moment.

Senator SIEWERT—You might be able to answer some of the questions I have and I will put the rest on notice, instead of dragging them over.

Dr Harmer—Okay.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you take on notice how much it was for the communications strategy and then specifically for developing the brand framework and style guide?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be appreciated.

Dr Harmer—I should just say in relation to that that, because there are so many departments involved that have elements of activity in Closing the Gap, we thought it was important to have some unifying logo or principle that brings it together. We have been working on that in an interdepartmental committee, but I will have to take on notice the detail of the cost.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could, that would be appreciated, thank you. Can you clarify who owns the intellectual property and any fair-use policy applied by the government to its publications, and in particular the Closing the Gap report that was released in February?

Mr Heferen—I think we will have to take that on notice, but the inside cover of the Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2011 does have copyright for the Commonwealth of Australia. I do not know, but in trying to be helpful I suspect the Commonwealth owns the copyright.

Senator SIEWERT—And have you got a fair-use policy?

Mr Heferen—I am not aware and I think we will have to take that one on notice.

Dr Harmer—Can we take that on notice, unless there is someone here who knows the answer to that. I am not seeing anyone nodding.

Senator SIEWERT—There are a lot of pictures in this document and none of the people are named. The photographers are named in the document but the people in the pictures are

not. This is a sensitive issue in Aboriginal communities and I would like to know if permission was sought and received from the people themselves or from the parents, carers or guardians of the children?

Dr Harmer—I would be very surprised if we have not. I can assure you, having been involved in Indigenous policy for a long time, that we also are very sensitive to that. We are well aware of the importance. I know, as I go around the country and visit communities, if there are any photographs taken there is permission sought et cetera. I will let Mr Davitt answer the question.

Mr Davitt—My understanding is that our communications area secures the rights to those pictures and the approvals necessary. We can follow that up for more detail about exactly how they do that, but I understand that there is permission.

Dr Harmer—I will confirm if that is the case but I, frankly, personally would be very surprised if we have not. I know it is a matter of course for department activity in communities.

Senator SIEWERT—Is there a policy of not naming people? Is that a departmental policy? What was the reason for not actually naming people who are in the photos?

Dr Harmer—In many cases where photographs are taken of actions and events we do not name the people. I am not sure of this but it may be that we indicated to them when we took the photograph that they would not be named. That is possible, but I do not know for sure. We will find that out as well.

Senator SIEWERT—There are lots of pictures in there that are not of groups; they are actually specific photos of individuals or small groups.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—There are many where the people are not named but the photographer is.

Dr Harmer—Presumably, as we produced that document, we had a broad policy about whether we would name everyone or not. It would be strange to have some photographs where we named them and others where we did not. I suspect in some cases there may have been some people who signed a form saying they did not want to be named, in which case we had a broad policy where all the photographs would have no names rather than have a mixture. Again, I will get the answer to that.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be appreciated, if you could. It may be part of the communications strategy, but that would be appreciated. I have got a lot more income management questions but I will hand over to Senator Scullion.

CHAIR—I would suggest that income management will start at 10 o'clock; I am just getting everyone's agreement on that. We will start income management at 10 because it always takes time so we allocate that time. I call Senator Scullion.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you. I would like to have just a general discussion, if I could, with regard to Closing the Gap. There are two reports. One is the Prime Minister's report that comes out at the start of parliament and there is the Coordinator-General's report

which, with respect, is probably a little bit more detailed and is intended to be so. It is a six-monthly report. Could I talk briefly about the timing of the report? It is a very symbolic and important time when all Australians look at the anniversary of the apology and at the *Closing the gap report*. I understand—and it is not a criticism—that the nature of this report may not be as detailed in that people can pick it up and say, ‘Look, the gap has closed there and it has closed there.’ Certainly, comparatively, that does not give you the information that the Coordinator-General’s report may deliver. But the fact that one comes out at the start of parliament and the other is a six-monthly report—just as an observation, and perhaps the minister can respond—one could think that it is a little frustrating to read the report. I think it would be a lot more valuable—and I have had a lot of commentary that it would be a lot more valuable—if they were coordinated, and there may be some efficiencies in that. I mean to coordinate it around the *Closing the gap Prime Minister’s report* after the apology, whether or not the Coordinator-General’s report or data from the Coordinator-General’s report could be released around the same time. I just wondered if you had considered that and whether you would think that would be more useful?

Dr Harmer—There have been some discussions about the various reports coming out. They serve slightly different purposes. I will let Mr Heferen—

Mr Heferen—Just possibly to assist in some clarification, the two reports that go hand in hand will be the Prime Minister’s update at the start of the parliamentary year and the report by the COAG Reform Council—the CRC. The CRC is the body chaired by, I think, Paul McClintock. That is the one that COAG has commissioned to get the relevant data from around the place, including data from the Productivity Commission, from the NAPLAN results—the school testing results—from various ABS surveys, from child mortality and so forth to actually give the track on how things are going in Closing the Gap. I think that report is due out in May—

Ms Halbert—In June.

Mr Heferen—In June, I beg your pardon. That is really the one. They produced their baseline report last year. We touched on it at our previous estimates and this one will be the update from that baseline. The report of the Coordinator-General for remote service delivery focuses on a different issue. I understand the coordinator may be called to have a discussion about his second report. The coordinator is reporting on progress and his office’s view on how things are going in relation to the 29 remote communities specifically selected by COAG for the intensive attention. So while the coordinator will report along the lines of the Closing the Gap targets and how communities are faring, bearing in mind that for the total population of that 29—it may be 25,000, 30,000 people—the CRC’s job is to look at how it is tracking with the entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of around 500,000. So in one sense it is useful for us to try to distinguish the Closing the Gap and the RSD, because whilst they are both about improving outcomes for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander people they are conceptually separate.

But I take your point that if we could have a CRC report out so when the PM gives the update that would fold neatly into it—I guess that would be ideal. But it is just the logistics, particularly with the NAPLAN testing which, as I understand it, has not been finalised. It has probably been finalised but it is still going through the ministerial approval process. All the

state, territory and Commonwealth education ministers have to agree for that material to come out. That has come out for the My School website and then that feeds into the CRC's deliberations.

Because of the timing of that, the CRC has to have the material in April-May and report in June, and the PM's statement is reinforcing the importance and significance of the anniversary of the apology. So it does lead to an imperfect collection of information to update. But, given the significance of both of those points, it is hard to bring them together at one point in time.

Senator SCULLION—I understand that the principal point you make is that the reporting time of the states and territories is not entirely a matter of your choosing and that can sometimes be difficult to negotiate, and I appreciate that.

You bring up an important point. When we talk about Closing the Gap, if you look at the Coordinator-General's report it is specifically about 29 communities. Those communities are not Sydney and Brisbane; they are remote communities. One would expect that in a remote community some of the service delivery is going to be less than in the city—it does not matter who you are—and I accept that.

From where I come and the issues that we face every day for Closing the Gap, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who find themselves in regional and remote Australia are significantly overrepresented in those demographics that are impacted by very low socioeconomic outcomes. Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in New South Wales and in Sydney are not necessarily as overrepresented as they are in rural and regional Australia.

We have the Coordinator-General's report, which comes out in December. The one that is closest to that is the Prime Minister's report. When we look at the Coordinator-General's report, the gap is obviously wider—and it is accepted that it is wider—and is probably narrowing more slowly. We now have another report that is about closing the gap for every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. People often look at these documents independently, and the media say, 'We have a document now.' Obviously that is the case. Principally, we have three different processes. Every time one of these reports is announced, the media say, 'Where are we up to?' with an expectation that this is an equal comparison. I think we all acknowledge that it is not.

Is there an opportunity to somehow do something off the end of the Coordinator-General's report, which is due in December if it is six-monthly—the last one was—in trying to provide some data in the *Closing the gap report*? My criticism—and I think it is reasonable criticism—of the *Closing the gap report*, and it may not have been intended to be that way, is that it speaks a lot about how much money was spent, what programs there are and what the intention is, but outside of a couple of indicators—which I have to say are pretty difficult to work out—you would not be able to say whether the gap is closing or not; it is just about what we are spending and investing. But there is an expectation that when that report is released we should be able to see where we are on a selected group of benchmarks; it may not have to be all of the benchmarks. The Prime Minister's report will have 10 indicators of where we were at the last report and where we are now.

Not only does that provide an opportunity for criticism by the media; it is an observation that people symbolically see that this is the time when we measure as a nation whether the gap is closing or not. The information that we are provided with at that time I do not think is the very best that we can do. I accept that there is no mischief in that. I just wondered if there is any capacity to include information in this report—even if it is not taken from the Coordinator-General's report, surely the information could be provided by COAG at the end of the year; it might not be the financial year—to actually give us a much better understanding of where we are up to?

Dr Harmer—I understand the desirability of perhaps more easy to understand timing of reporting. But, as Mr Heferen said, for all sorts of reasons which are beyond our control, the COAG Reform Council report is due midyear. For very important commitment reasons from the PM, the statement that she has made was related to the anniversary of the apology.

As Mr Heferen said, the Coordinator-General's report is a small subset of the Indigenous communities across Australia. The 29 are RSD sites agreed by COAG. So they are actually quite different. I understand the desirability of trying to bring as much as we can out of each report into the next one, but it is unlikely that the Coordinator-General's report at the end of the year, just reporting on the 29 communities, would give very much of a detailed picture of what is happening nationally with Closing the Gap, as you pointed out yourself.

Senator SCULLION—But the gap is so wide in that report and there is so much to be done and these are the indicators of the worst situations we have. I would have thought that if we are going to close the gap quickly, because it is so wide, that they are going to be the indicators that that is what we are doing. It is very specific, it is very prescriptive, it is in very well-known and measured populations. So I would have thought that that would have been an indicator. It might be Australia-wide, but because you are not going to measure how many millimetres to Mars we measure, or a foot, there is not going to be any movement, but we can actually see that any movement we do have is certainly going to be amplified in that report because of the nature of those measures.

Mr Heferen—Senator, I take the point. There is this difficult issue, though. As you point out, of the 29 remote communities the outcomes are often much more in variance to the population at large. But there is the case that the majority of the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as you are no doubt aware, live in urban and regional areas and there is this difficult issue about what actually drives the national gap. Is it the bigger variance in some smaller communities—in remote communities and homelands and outstations—or is it a slightly smaller variance but from a much larger population? That is something that as a department we are still grappling with the data on and what it tells us may well be different from outcome to outcome. So that is the important thing that we need to continue to examine.

The other issue with looking at the Coordinator-General's report and using that as the base to then think about having more detail in the PM's statement is that there are a couple of things to bear in mind. The current Prime Minister's report 2011 updated on a couple of the measures where there is new data. Because the CRC will report in June, it will have an update of more of the targets. So the PM's report next year will obviously have more detail and the year after even more detail as we can get a good longitudinal examination of how things are faring over time. So hopefully when we are sitting down and discussing this at the budget

estimates the CRC report may have been out but certainly in some future estimates it will have been out and there will be more substantive discussion around that. The other thing to bear in mind is that, with the Coordinator-General's report, a couple of the critical indicators, such as school results being a good one, the school results stuff will still only be available after the NAPLAN testing, ACARA, which is the body set up to make sure that we are comparing apples with apples, ministerial sign-off—all of that has to occur. So I do not think that the Coordinator-General would be able to look at outcome testing for the school results in his report.

Senator SCULLION—I guess this is part of the challenge with apples and apples. The NAPLAN testing and many of those things do not have the capacity just simply in the numbers to be a benchmark. As they say at the bottom of the report, there are just not enough kids, or whatever. As you know, some of these communities have 45 per cent of kids not going to school. They are just completely different circumstances. But again, it was a point that has been made to me often by people in the media and other commentators that it would be a lot more useful. I know even with the NAPLAN testing we have quoted, 'Reading has improved from years 3 to 5' and we get a series of graphs and it is all pretty nice, but it would be great to simply say, 'Attendance, outcome.' Has it got wider or has it got narrower? So the Closing the Gap should simply be a two-page spread.

We can have the graphs and we can struggle through the rocket science and go through it and look at the pretty pictures, but we should just simply be able to stand up and put our hand on our heart, as we promised Australians, and say we now know on this day, in each of these benchmarks that we have, whether it is life expectancy, whether it is education, whether it is attendance—whatever we are developing—clearly on one page, has it got wider, has it stayed the same or is it getting narrower. I think that is what Australians expected and I think that is reasonably what we should move towards. That is clearly not in place at the moment, but as you indicate, if we are moving to more benchmarks every year, making it more comprehensive as a consequence of those COAG things, that is—

Senator Arbib—But Senator, I do not think we disagree with you. Again, and I think Mr Heferen said this, there is a statement that is put out by the Prime Minister. That is not the main accountability mechanism. The COAG Reform Council report is the document where we measure progress and that is going to be released in early June. It is all there and they have the benchmarks and they have the trajectories—

Senator SCULLION—It is, but when Australia is looking, at this moment—it is a very symbolic moment—and I know this will surprise you, Minister, or probably it does not surprise you, but COAG and their machinations does not really capture the hearts and minds of Australia instantly. We all go to their website and have a look at it. But on this day, the day that acknowledges the apology, many people and all of the media are very much focused on this. So we can focus on it. As I said, without mischief, there is a lot of detail about what we are doing, money we are spending, but it is very light on the detail. Just reflecting what many commentators have said to me, it would be much more appropriate if we could actually have some measures to see how we are going at the time when Australia is looking at it. It is a criticism, but it is something that is reflected by a lot of commentators. I just thought I would pass that on and have a response.

Senator Arbib—Journalists have raised it with me and I say to them, ‘Well, the COAG Reform Council report is coming out in June and that has all the information you are after.’ I think it is an important point to make that the statement does not provide the targets and progress that you see in the COAG report. That is available and there will be plenty of journalists across the country, Indigenous organisations, health organisations and community organisations will be looking at it.

CHAIR—Senator, are we moving on? Mr James, you have something to add?

Mr James—I was just going to say, to add to what the minister was saying, one of the things that the COAG Reform Council will be doing in its report is looking at the so-called trajectories, that is, the pace of change required to meet the target in the time. They will be doing direct assessments of whether we are on track against that trajectory. That will be an explicit part of what they will be doing in the next report.

Senator SCULLION—I dealt with that in the last estimates, Mr James, and was saying, instead of saying in 10 years we are going to be here, and the trajectory can be arithmetic or it can be geometric and all sorts of different trajectories, so at the June COAG you will actually have the interim targets. What will be the interval of those targets?

Mr James—The way the trajectories work, they say, okay, at this point where do we think we need to be to be on track? They will do, in effect, what you are saying.

Senator SCULLION—Will that be an annual pointer of where we need to be, or biannual?

Mr James—It is an annual point where you have annual data. For example, with the NAPLAN tests, yes, there are annual points.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you. I would like to ask some questions in regard to the Coordinator-General’s report. Mr Gleeson, some progress has been made in regard to the recommendations of your last report. I will start with recommendation 2, building capacity of government officers, particularly in regard to cultural competency working in these communities. It was identified that that was a necessary process. How many of the officers have undertaken and completed these training programs?

Mr Gleeson—Thank you, Senator, for your question. Just an overview comment: in regard to the recommendations on my last report, there has been a response already to indicate that most of the recommendations have been supported, agreed to or agreed to in principle. One has been referred to the states for further consideration. In regard to your specific question, I do not have direct information—specific information—with regard to how many of the government officers working in the RSD sites have been through cultural training.

Senator SCULLION—Perhaps Mr Harmer, or one of your officers, could respond to that.

Dr Harmer—We can take that on notice. It is important that we do have a well-organised cultural appreciation program in FaHCSIA. It is only relatively new. We have had something like 700 people through it in the last 12 months to two years or so. The highest priority was certainly given to people who are having a lot of connectivity with communities, such as the government business managers and people who are travelling to communities. In terms of precisely whether all of them have been through it and how many, I would need to take that on notice.

Senator SCULLION—Just in regard to the baseline mapping again, Mr Gleeson, the recommendation said that the current baseline mapping reports were to go to the reference groups to directly inform the preparation and future refinement of the local implementation plans, which were a bit all over the place. How many of those presentations have been completed?

Mr Gleeson—Again, I will make a comment and Mr James can add to it. First of all, all the regional operational centres in the different jurisdictions have received the baseline mapping reports. It was decided that summaries should be provided because of the volume of those reports—in some cases around 200 pages. To ensure they were palatable and in a suitable form for the communities the summaries were provided, and they have been released to the different priority communities on a sort of phase basis.

Senator SCULLION—I am not sure if those summaries would normally be included in your report. I would not expect so.

Mr Gleeson—I think it is far too much detail. The thing is that, as I said, they are quite extensive in volume. I will probably look at different examples to see whether it is worth maybe drawing one or two out just to show in a public way what they look like. But I think the better solution is to probably have them accessible on the website, which is a general sort of reservoir of information for the RSD sites.

Senator SCULLION—If you can make those summaries available to the committee on notice I would appreciate that.

Mr James—We undertake to do that. The only thing we would say is that the undertaking we have made to communities on the baseline reports was that we would seek community agreement before they were more widely released. So we would at least take that step. I do not see that as an issue, but just as a courtesy we would do that.

Senator SCULLION—Okay. Perhaps you could tell us those communities that have chosen—or perhaps not the communities necessarily—some of the reasons, if there are reasons—

Mr James—If there are any.

Senator SCULLION—If there are any, indeed. I accept that. You have also indicated that the future local implementation plans should identify local infrastructure priorities. Where are we up to with the local infrastructure priority list?

Mr Gleeson—Again, I am happy to make a comment that might be supplemented by colleagues from the department. The infrastructure needs identified by the communities have been included in the local implementation plans for all the 29 sites. There have been a number of follow-up discussions with government departments, both at the state and the territory level, in regard to drawing up a time line at which those respective infrastructure needs are qualified in terms of the cost and then working out an implementation schedule. It is not a straightforward process because, obviously, a lot of the communities have identified things like roads and culverts et cetera. I think it is fair to say that the whole infrastructure challenge is quite significant, particularly in remote communities, and I do not think we should be too shy to say that it is not going to be addressed in the short term.

Senator SCULLION—I was really looking just for how each community has prioritised what they required in infrastructure rather than the actual provision of the infrastructure. Each of the communities would have completed that priority list. Again, would you be able to make that available to the committee on notice, with the same—if it is necessary.

Mr Gleeson—Yes, sure. As I said, the local implementation plans have been agreed with most of the communities and most of them are available publicly but we can provide them to the committee.

Senator SCULLION—Another one of the recommendations you dealt with was the coordination of some of the youth activities. I have obviously been to a number of communities where there are little independent cells and the recommendation was for that to be better coordinated. Can you give us some examples? Can you tell me how that recommendation has been picked up to improve the coordination or amalgamation of those programs?

Mr Gleeson—Yes. I am pleased to report that a number of the communities have already committed and agreed to have youth action plans in the communities. As a result of that, there is now a concentrated effort going through coordination with DEEWR to look at how we can work across the different jurisdictions and different stakeholders to put those plans into place. On the ground with my visits to the communities, I have seen some very positive results taking place. I do not think it is just because of my recommendation; I think there is a much more coordinated effort now between governments in regard to these important priorities. So there is evidence on the ground of progress being made.

Senator SCULLION—Perhaps on notice, can you give us an example of how that has been achieved in a community or in a more general sense? Is it through amalgamating a coordinator, working together or shared accommodation? Can you give some examples of how that has been achieved? You can take that on notice.

Mr Gleeson—In my next report there are a couple of examples of that. Before, there may have been a youth worker, a sport and recreation officer and someone working in the local council all not talking to each other. In a few communities, there are examples of where that has changed dramatically and the youth in the communities are benefiting from that. I will provide an example to you.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you. Dr Harmer might be the best person to deal with my next question. There were some concerns about an understanding of the legal responsibilities in reporting child abuse and those sorts of things, and the training for those officers working in these communities or in any community. Can you indicate how you have adopted that recommendation, because I understand you have adopted it? Has there been another round or is that a part of the cultural training? How is that being delivered and how have you adopted that recommendation?

Dr Harmer—I stand to be corrected, but I think the recommendations in relation to reporting child abuse are primarily for state community services and health departments. The department in the Northern Territory and the state departments in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales have key responsibility for child abuse

reporting et cetera. Mr Gleeson may know what has happened there but we in FaHCSIA would not necessarily know whether the states have taken up—

Senator SCULLION—I was only asking you in regard to the FaHCSIA officers, the GBMs and all these other people where you said there were 700 people who got some cultural training. Clearly, they would have an obligation.

Dr Harmer—Yes, our GBMs, as I said before. Again, I have got to be careful because I am not sure but there may have been some new ones appointed who have not yet been through their training, but most of them would have been through training. For the people attending and visiting communities, our high priority is for our cultural appreciation training.

Senator SCULLION—Perhaps you can take this on notice: I am after the number of GBMs, for example, who have done the cultural training who are out there at the moment and those ones who, you might be able to confirm as a part of that, understand their legal obligations as an officer in that regard.

Dr Harmer—Sure.

Senator SCULLION—There was another recommendation, Mr Gleeson, about increasing the training of Indigenous assistant teachers so they are able to progress towards becoming a teacher. That was a specific recommendation. How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assistant teachers have taken up that recommendation? Where are we up to with that?

Mr Gleeson—Again, in terms of numbers, I will have to take that on notice. The actual recommendation was supported by government so we would have to find out information across jurisdictions and across the agencies.

CHAIR—Are there any other questions for Mr Gleeson?

Senator ADAMS—I would like to ask some questions on national partnership agreements involved with Closing the Gap.

CHAIR—Is that a question for Mr Gleeson? I do not think so.

Senator ADAMS—I am sorry.

CHAIR—Mr Gleeson, to the best of my knowledge that is the end of your questioning this morning. Thank you very much for coming to be with us. I call Senator Adams.

Senator ADAMS—How many national partnership agreements are there for Closing the Gap? Would you be able to provide me with those or direct me to where I can find them?

Dr Harmer—We probably can give you that. There is the overarching one.

Mr Heferen—I have a map in front of me that I am happy to table. It is a schema we use to be clear about the building blocks and the national partnerships that fit into the building blocks.

Dr Harmer—It looks like that. I think it would be quite helpful for you in terms of understanding where the various departments are working with the states and territories on specific building blocks.

Senator ADAMS—If we could have that tabled, that would be helpful, thank you.

Mr Heferen—There are some Indigenous specific national partnerships. There are also the big national partnerships like the national education agreement, the national healthcare agreement and the national affordable housing agreement that, while still with the population at large, nonetheless have a big impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. What this does is articulate those which are specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and those which are for the broader community.

Senator ADAMS—It would be very valuable if we could have that. How many national partnership agreements are targeted to specific locations?

Dr Harmer—I think the only one is the remote service delivery one.

Mr Heferen—There is the national partnership on remote service delivery which is the one that sets up the RSD that Mr Gleeson reported on. There is the national partnership associated with Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory.

Dr Harmer—They are probably the only two geographically specific national partnerships. The remote service delivery one is focused on the 29 remote service delivery sites across the five states and territories and the Northern Territory one is just for the Northern Territory.

Senator ADAMS—Do all Aboriginal people have equal access to the national partnership agreements?

Ms Halbert—As Mr Heferen explained, while there are some Indigenous specific national partnerships, the bulk of the investment and effort goes into the mainstream national partnerships to which all Australians affected have access, but certainly there has been significant specific investment for Indigenous Australians that they do have access to. Depending on your circumstances, obviously some of the national partnerships pertain to education and some pertain to health. Indigenous people do have access. They may not always require the particular service provided under a particular partnership.

Mr Heferen—I may be able to help. Just to be clear, the national partnership agreement is the mechanism by which the Commonwealth provides money to state governments or territories governments.

Senator ADAMS—I am fully aware of that.

Mr Heferen—For the services that are then provided by the state or territory governments there will be indicators about success and what they need to do. They will then no doubt target the money they have together with their own money to areas of need.

Senator ADAMS—That is all on that.

CHAIR—I call Senator Scullion. At about three minutes to 10 we will go to Senator Boyce.

Senator SCULLION—I would like to ask some questions on school attendance issues. I understand that the SEAM program—the Centrelink side of that—is part of the Closing the Gap initiative. I would like to ask about FaHCSIA involvement in the process.

Dr Harmer—I will need to bring some different people to the table, Senator. Can you give a sample of the questions because they may well be better questions for officers of the

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations who are coming at 12. We will have a go.

Senator SCULLION—Perhaps that may be the case. We will just explore that, Dr Harmer. The reason I was doing it now is that the SEAM program was actually in another portfolio. That is why I thought we would catch this in Closing the Gap. Basically what I want to talk about is the process. How is Centrelink advised? What is the process? How do you lay the process out? The process for Closing the Gap is part of FaHCSIA. What is the process? How are you keeping an eye on that process? They are the questions I have. What is the actual process? Do you have a clearly articulated process? Who is responsible for the process? Is it indeed FaHCSIA or is it some other agency? That is the nature of the questions. I have some challenges in regard to the outcomes.

Ms Hefren-Webb—The SEAM initiative is actually not an Indigenous specific initiative. It operates in some urban communities in Queensland. So it is not part of Closing the Gap reporting.

Senator SCULLION—I appreciate that.

Senator Arbib—Last night we did discuss this at length with Centrelink. So there is a fair bit on the record already.

Dr Harmer—I have just been advised by our senior Centrelink person that it was discussed at some length last night. It is really a matter primarily between DEEWR and their links with the state education departments and Centrelink, who are the instrument for putting into effect the income quarantining as a result of lack of school attendance.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, I am aware of that. But the reason I actually let it flow on is that Senator Scullion's question was specifically about what FaHCSIA's role was in the program. So if we can get an answer to that then we will move on. Is that right, Senator Scullion?

Senator SCULLION—That is right. Because we are responsible for Closing the Gap and the outcomes, I also wanted to talk about the feedback. Can you explain briefly in the context of perhaps a remote community—I would like to talk about some iconic remote communities in the Northern Territory, places like Lajamanu and Yuendumu where we have seen the attendance processes—how Centrelink is advised? Is the department of education responsible? How does that happen?

CHAIR—Senator, that is actually going beyond what we agreed.

Senator SCULLION—You just have to say no.

CHAIR—I will say no. Keep going.

Senator SCULLION—Dr Harmer, we understand the process of people being breached if their children do not attend school. There is a breaching provision where they are asked first of all to demonstrate why their children were not given a chance to attend school. They are then breached if they do not comply with that. I understand that was discussed last night, and that is something that is well understood. I have just looked at some of the attendance processes for quite a number of remote schools. It is reasonable to say that attendances under 60 per cent would be generous in many of those cases. Given schools like Lajamanu, with enrolments of 161 people, attendance is 55 per cent. So we are looking at 70 students who are

enrolled but who have not turned up. I also understand that three parents somewhere in the Northern Territory—I am not sure if they are from any of these particular schools—have actually been breached.

My concern is that if we are intending to close the gap, which is your responsibility, we have breached three people in the Northern Territory, yet just at one school there are clearly 70 students who are enrolled who have not turned up at all in over a year. What is FaHCSIA doing about that? I am not verballing you but, if my interpretation of the figures and my investigation into this matter is incorrect, please tell me. If I am correct, what is FaHCSIA doing in terms of their instructions to Centrelink, given that you are responsible for Closing the Gap? How is that operating?

Dr Harmer—I am not at all trying to be unhelpful, but FaHCSIA's role in Closing the Gap is the overarching responsibility for reporting and putting information together. We in FaHCSIA, as you know, have not got responsibility for any of the six Closing the Gap targets. DEEWR have four; Health have two. Nonetheless, our minister, who is the Indigenous affairs minister, Jenny Macklin, is very active in making sure that we do our job properly and is constantly getting information and monitoring how the progress is going. She is constantly being briefed on exactly the issues you raise. What she does with our briefing and what I do is make contact with Centrelink and make contact with DEEWR and encourage them to continue to press the state education departments to provide the information through on attendance. It is a very indirect, but nonetheless an important prodding, poking role.

We understand, like you do, the critical nature of education in closing the gap. As far as I am concerned, we will not close the gap unless we can get the kids to school in those remote communities. It is absolutely and fundamentally important and there is a lot of effort going on. But specifically, the information comes from the state education department to DEEWR and DEEWR to Centrelink and Centrelink then act on that, as I understand it. Our role is, as you say, an overarching role—prodding, pushing and looking at the data. Minister Macklin frequently talks with her colleagues in the Commonwealth and the states about her concerns about school attendance. That is our role.

Senator SCULLION—Thanks for that, Dr Harmer, and the minister may wish to respond only because it is referring to the minister. I know that Jenny Macklin is very passionate and keen about this and I will acknowledge that. But she must be aware, as you are, and you are responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, that the demographic that I am specifically and directly dealing with, and it is unique in the data set, is Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. Not by and large—100 per cent in those sorts of figures of any school. These figures have been for two years, figures that are now consistent, and I have cited just one school that has 70 people who are clearly, without a shadow of a doubt, in noncompliance.

Given your response, Dr Harmer, about the importance of this, and the responsibility of this minister—I know she is having a chat to other ministers and I am not degrading that, I know that she will be sort of hassling—I would have thought that after two years, one of the principal things about Closing the Gap is that we still have not got the kids to school, and though it would appear that some other agency is supposed to be responsible, the ultimate responsibility for Closing the Gap lies with the minister. This is clearly an absolute and utter

failure. I would have thought that you would have been panicking. It is your responsibility to ensure that we close the gap on this matter. I do not know if it is widening, but it is certainly not getting any closer. Three people in the whole of the Northern Territory have been breached when at one school 70 people have not turned up and continue not to turn up.

Dr Harmer—I do not want to appear to be defensive; I am not. But as you would very well know from your background, this is not a new problem.

Senator SCULLION—No, I understand that.

Dr Harmer—We have had a problem for the last 20 years in northern Australian remote communities with children not attending school. We have finally got some levers. We are using as much as we can of the Commonwealth levers around our income support policy. We are using welfare quarantining. The government has set a target which is being measured. For the first time there is a focus on this critical element of Indigenous disadvantage. We are in the relatively early stages of applying these tools and techniques to this really important problem. I can assure you that it is of great concern to us—to DEEWR—to Centrelink and to the ministers, but it is not going to be solved quickly. It is really, really difficult. Sticks and prods have some effect in getting kids to school, but essentially we will not succeed until parents understand the value of education and send their kids to school. That is a complex issue around the level of engagement of Indigenous parents in these communities. It is much more difficult than part quarantining of their income from Centrelink. We know that and we are working on it.

Senator SCULLION—But you know historically when the announcement of the intervention was made—and part of the announcement of the across-the-board intervention was the potential for a further 50 per cent of their income to be quarantined, whether that was understood or not—we had a huge spike in attendance to the extent that the media reported that we did not have enough teachers and we did not have enough desks. That was because parents thought that being breached for non-attendance would happen. We have sent a clear signal: ‘We are not going to breach you.’ Up until last year three people had been breached. I would put it to you, Dr Harmer, that the reason there continue to be such low levels of attendance is that we are failing to breach people who are not complying.

Dr Harmer—You are now in territory that is not a FaHCSIA responsibility. They are questions best directed to Centrelink and DEEWR.

CHAIR—Mr Lye, you have a comment and then I am going to call it to a close.

Mr Lye—In Lajamanu, the community to which you refer, the SEAM trial is not taking place in that community. That community is obviously subject to income management, but the SEAM trial is not happening in Lajamanu. The breaching issue would not relate to Lajamanu because SEAM is not there.

Senator Arbib—I take on board your comments. As a minister involved in employment, I fully understand the link between childhood education and getting people jobs. Also, you know the debate that the Northern Territory government has been having and some of the limitations it has had given past governments and a lack of work and commitment on this issue. There is a massive debate going on at the moment in the Northern Territory about teaching Indigenous languages which I believe is having an effect in terms of attendance rates

as you have debates in communities about what should be taught at school and at what time—whether Indigenous language should be taught in the morning or whether English should be taught in the morning. This is a very, very complex debate.

I will say that you were in government for 11 years. The opposition leader, in his response to the Prime Minister, said, ‘Why can’t we get 100 per cent attendance rates at schools?’ He was a minister involved in that day in, day out. He understands the difficulties and obstacles in making this happen. So while I take on board your comments and fully appreciate how difficult it is, we are committed to making ground up here. Hopefully, the bipartisanship which has been in place for the last three years will continue on this one.

Senator SCULLION—It is getting wider in this regard. It was better when we got into government 11 years ago than it is today. It is an indictment on all of us, Mark.

Senator Arbib—You are talking about two or three examples and you do not have the data.

Senator SCULLION—I am sorry, across-the-board it has got worse—I am not talking about Sydney; I am talking about in remote communities—and that is a fact.

Senator Arbib—I would dispute that across the board.

Dr Harmer—We are monitoring this. In some areas there is no doubt that it has got better; it is mixed. In some areas it is getting worse, but in some areas—for example, in the north of Queensland, in Cape York, where we are doing welfare reform trials—there is clear evidence that there is a very significant improvement in school attendance on the back of the government’s activities with the Queensland government and the Cape York institute run by Noel Pearson. School attendance there is going up.

One of things we are doing is looking at where the various pilots and methods we are using are working. We have a range of pilots in this space—including the Cape York welfare reform trial—and we are looking at which ones are most effective. We know how serious it is. The minister knows how serious it is.

CHAIR—Thank you, Dr Harmer. That was a good lead-in because Senator Boyce has now got questions about Cape York.

Senator BOYCE—Just following on from what you are saying about trials, the monitoring that you are doing across-the-board, would we be able to get some data around that?

Dr Harmer—I can certainly give you some data on that because I am on the board of the Cape York welfare reform trial.

Senator BOYCE—I am going one step back. You pointed out that things are improving in some areas.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—Are we able to get data on what school attendance is like in the areas that you are mentioning—not necessarily now?

Mr Heferen—As I understand it, school attendance data is published by the relevant states and also the territory. I think Matthew James, who has come to table, has a little bit more detail on where and when.

Mr James—One of the documents I have brought with me is an annual report that the Queensland government puts out.

Senator BOYCE—I am aware of that. I suppose I was hoping that you would do the collating for us, Dr Harmer.

Dr Harmer—It would be an awfully big job for us.

Mr James—We can certainly sort out some of the data—

Senator BOYCE—I assumed you possibly did it anyway.

Mr James—We get that data. The only issue is that when you do it for every school it is a lot of data. It depends on whether you want to get every school or maybe highlight examples where it has actually increased.

Senator BOYCE—If you could give us, perhaps, the best, average and worst. That would be useful.

Dr Harmer—On a state-by-state basis, we can give it.

Senator Arbib—These are state and territory reports, so I think it is possible for us collate it on a state basis.

Senator FURNER—On this point, I support Dr Harmer's comments on the improvements in attendance in the Cape. In providing that data to Senator Boyce, can we get some idea of a window from, say, around 2009 to date? I was quite impressed with the improvements in attendance in 2009 and I would like to see how that has varied until now.

Senator BOYCE—My main questions go to the Cape York welfare reform trial, which is due to finish in December this year, and the Family Responsibilities Commission, which on the original plan would be disbanded in January next year. The evaluation that has been done on the FRC to date makes the point that progress has been slower than anticipated, which is not an issue, and that change is fragile. Could you tell me what is planned around the future of the Cape York welfare reform trial, other than chopping it off in December this year?

Dr Harmer—That will be a matter for government in the budget. As is often the case on trials and programs like this, there is a three- or four-year commitment, an evaluation, and, depending upon the evaluation and the next budget, decisions are made about whether it continues as is, whether it continues in a modified form or whether it ceases. I am not able to tell you today what the government is going to decide.

Senator BOYCE—I guess what I am asking is that you separate out the budgetary concerns from the program concerns. I appreciate that if it is not funded it cannot happen, but it would appear that in terms of program continuation a lot will be lost if this is not continued.

Dr Harmer—A lot of progress has been made. Of course the other complication in this pilot is that it is a joint arrangement between the Commonwealth government and the Queensland government, so both governments need to make decisions about funding any continuation. I cannot go beyond that.

Senator BOYCE—We have had the evaluation of the FRC, but we appear not to have had an evaluation of the welfare reform itself.

Ms Halbert —The evaluation of the overall reform is being undertaken in three stages. The first one was an implementation review. Two more reports are due. One will be a progress report on what kinds of outcomes are being achieved. The final report is the one that will look at the overall outcome of the whole pilot.

Senator BOYCE—Are we running behind time with those? I notice that the progress report was due at the end of 2010, but we do not seem to have that yet.

Ms Halbert —There was delay in releasing it for reasons beyond just our government. The other two reports are on track to be finished on time and the final report is due at the end of 2011. We are obviously accumulating information as we go.

Senator BOYCE—I suppose that is how it has to be, but it does seem unfortunate that the evaluation would come at the same time that the funding theoretically ends.

Ms Halbert —We of course will be accessing the information as it rolls in and analysing it. The actual final report is due by the end of 2011.

Senator BOYCE—The report on the evaluation of the FRC had 22 recommendations. I know some of the legislative ones—around having local commissioners and the FRC commissioner not always having to be there for the commission to meet and things—have gone through state parliament. Would you be able to report, on notice, against the 22 recommendations as to what has happened?

Ms Halbert —I believe we could. I will take that on notice, but I believe we—

Dr Harmer—We can do that.

CHAIR—Senator Siewert, we will now move on to the areas around income management.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. I realise that we have traversed some of this ground earlier, so I will try not to do that but to go on from where I have been asking questions before, bearing in mind that I know that we are in an Indigenous cross-portfolio. However, because of the nature now of income management, I apologise if I transgress. I say that upfront.

Thank you very much for the figures that you have already provided. I think I have missed asking for one particular figure, which is the breakdown in the number of recipients in the Northern Territory. Now that income management has been rolled out across the whole of the NT, what is the breakdown and the number of people on compulsory income management for both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people?

Ms Hefren-Webb—There are 15,794 on compulsory income management. These figures are as at 31 December 2010. The breakdown is 97.8 per cent Indigenous and 2.2 per cent non-Indigenous.

Senator SIEWERT—So that I can compare that, could you give me a breakdown—

Ms Hefren-Webb—Sorry, can I correct that figure; that was wrong. The figure is 94.2 Indigenous and 5.8 non-Indigenous.

Senator SIEWERT—So I can compare it, can you tell me the percentage of people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who are on income support in the Northern Territory.

Ms Hefren-Webb—I do not have those figures in front of me.

Senator SIEWERT—Can you take that on notice, please?

Ms Hefren-Webb—Absolutely.

CHAIR—Is that for income support generally, or only for the income support that is subject to income management?

Senator SIEWERT—No, I want it generally, please. I know last night we talked about the number of people who are on child protection orders in the Northern Territory—on income management, due to child protection measures. I am wondering if you could tell me how many children that covers? Can you break it down that way?

Ms Hefren-Webb—I do not have the number of children. I will just clarify: some of those orders relate to young people transitioning from the care and protection system, so it might be a 16- or 17-year-old young person. They may not have any dependent young children themselves. Some of them are parents around whom there are concerns of neglect and abuse. We can get you that figure, but—

Senator SIEWERT—If you could get it for me, that would be appreciated, thank you. I want to go to the issue of ‘vulnerable’, now; I want to ask some questions about how ‘vulnerable’ is determined. You gave me this list last night in terms of the number of people who are on it as ‘vulnerable’. I would like to know how that is determined. Is the decision made by a Centrelink staff person or is it made by a social worker?

Ms Hefren-Webb—It is made by a social worker. The principles for underpinning the decision are set out in a disallowable instrument.

Senator SIEWERT—In terms of how that classification is made, does somebody have to actually come in—and I appreciate there are visits to communities and then there are people coming in. We have been through that discussion. Does it have to be face to face?

Mr Heferen—I think we might need Centrelink to answer specific questions about how, precisely, it is done, because obviously they do it and not us.

Mr Tidswell—Senator, can you repeat your question, because we were just getting to the table.

Senator SIEWERT—When the decision is being made about people being classified as vulnerable, does that decision have to be made following a face-to-face meeting, whether it is through the travelling process or whether it is people coming in to a Centrelink office?

Mr Tidswell—Generally that is our preferred approach, but there might be times when we will do it over the phone. Ms Cartwright will provide further detail.

Ms Cartwright—Our social workers use the instrument, as Ms Hefren-Webb described. There is no specific referral to a social worker for an assessment for income management. Income management is just a tool, to use a better word, available for our Centrelink social workers to assist customers facing circumstances that would put them in a vulnerable situation. So, as Mr Tidswell said, we usually prefer to do that face to face, but there will be some circumstances where our social workers would have specific knowledge about a

customer where they may do it over the phone or make a referral to our customer service advisers to perhaps look at vulnerable income management to assist that customer.

Senator SIEWERT—How is that process initiated? I know we have been through the discussion of people moving over. How is the process triggered? Is there already a flag on someone's file? Does the social worker have some concerns? How is that triggered? Why do you start thinking that somebody may have to be classified as vulnerable?

Ms Cartwright—The social workers would have some knowledge of that customer or there are some indicators that we would look at that may make a customer vulnerable. They are things like young people who are unable to live at home because of family breakdown, customers who are fearful of taking maintenance action, customers who are experiencing difficulty with a caring role. There are other triggers around homelessness et cetera. These probably would be customers who have had social work intervention over a longer time.

Senator SIEWERT—Looking at the figures that you gave me last night, those on disability support pensions seem to be the very highest proportion of people who are classified as vulnerable—74 females and 89 males. It seems to me that those on disability support pensions seem to be the highest number.

Ms Hefren-Webb—That is not really an unexpected outcome in that the two large payment groups who were eligible to come off income management were age pensioners and disability pensioners and you might expect higher levels of mental illness, homelessness, issues managing money or financial exploitation amongst the disability population.

Senator SIEWERT—So obviously that group are the group that are flagged for looking at specifically.

Ms Hefren-Webb—There is no flag per se. It is a social worker professional judgement.

Mr Tidswell—We do this as part of normal business around Australia—looking at the customer base and people coming into our offices. Our staff will identify somebody who would be vulnerable right across the board. So our social work staff are skilled and experienced at working through what would need to occur here. In general, with the visiting teams and as people attend offices, we get a bit of a sense of who is at risk and vulnerable in that sense. So it is a well-established practice.

Senator SIEWERT—What do you do for those people who are not on income management who are classed as vulnerable?

Mr Tidswell—I think that is what we do generally. We provide, with a good level of service—

Senator SIEWERT—But you do not income-manage them.

Mr Tidswell—No, correct.

Senator SIEWERT—You find other ways of helping them.

Mr Tidswell—Yes, that could be true. That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—What else do you do for these people in the Northern Territory who have been classed as vulnerable, besides income-manage them?

Mr Tidswell—You might look at housing. You might look at support services and a range of things. So in a general sense our service offer is always broader than income management.

Senator SIEWERT—What is the number of people who have been classified as vulnerable who were transitioning from the old income management system to the new one?

Ms Cartwright—The number of vulnerable welfare payment and child protection customers in the Northern Territory who transitioned from the old income management is 189.

Senator SIEWERT—So there are 199. So there is only 10—

Ms Cartwright—189.

Senator SIEWERT—No, no, sorry. Overall there are 199, according to the list you gave me last night. So there are only, in fact, 10 new people classified as vulnerable who were not already on income management. Is that a fair assumption to make?

Mr Tidswell—As we said last night, there is a lot of data here and we might need just to cross-reference with what you have and what we have here to make sure that we are on the same page.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. I am not trying to trick you; I am trying to work out—

Mr Tidswell—We understand what you are trying to do.

Senator SIEWERT—So 189 were transferred.

Mr Tidswell—It might take us a few minutes just to double-check that figure.

CHAIR—Senator, I do not want to take any of your time, but just on that basis to Mr Tidswell, in terms of the datasets that both Centrelink and FaHCSIA maintain, can we get the basic data that you keep on these things? I know that Senator Siewert goes through in great detail about the various figures, but there must be a standard dataset that the departments have, like on the pieces of paper that you are reading from to us. It would be useful if we could have some kind of agreement as to the basic datasets that you keep to see whether that meets the needs of the ongoing issues in this committee. Then if there is a gap in that we can identify it. That is something we could do after the estimates—to actually have a discussion about what they are—but it seems to me that we are asking the same questions and it would be useful if we just had that basic set. Would that serve your needs, Senator Siewert?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, it would. Having said that, because this is a new set of data, because this is the first time—

CHAIR—Absolutely. This is where we need to have it. So if we can put that on notice, Dr Harmer, and through Centrelink as well, we will have a discussion afterwards about how we do that. Is that okay?

Dr Harmer—Very good suggestion.

Mr Tidswell—Yes.

Ms Cartwright—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. In terms of the number of Indigenous people who are vulnerable and non-Indigenous people who are vulnerable, have you got that breakdown?

Ms Cartwright—That one I would have to take on notice.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. That would be appreciated. If you have been classified as vulnerable, is that appealable?

Ms Hefren-Webb—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I know I asked last night about how many people had appealed exemptions. How many have appealed the vulnerable classification?

Ms Hefren-Webb—I do not have those figures here.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you take it on notice?

Ms Hefren-Webb—Yes, absolutely.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. That would be appreciated. I mentioned the exemptions—and I am not going to go through all the figures again, other than to ask how many of those that have been internally appealed were Indigenous applicants and how many were non-Indigenous applicants.

Ms Hefren-Webb—I do not have the appeals data broken down by Indigenous or non-Indigenous. I am not sure if Centrelink does.

Ms Cartwright—No, we do not either.

Ms Hefren-Webb—We can ask for that.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could. The reason I am asking is that we have had some discussions previously about Indigenous people being able to access the appeals system and not using it as much. So I want to know if they are under the new system accessing it more—if it is more accessible.

Mr Tidswell—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—In light of that, perhaps you could also let me know what other steps you have taken to increase the accessibility of the appeals system to Aboriginal people. We had a long discussion last night with Centrelink, and we have had it previously, about making information more accessible. Is that part of that communications package?

Mr Tidswell—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. So you are working on looking at how you can make information more accessible?

Mr Tidswell—That is right. It is always part of the process and, as last night you were informed, Ms Cartwright has commissioned some work to look at all of our product and information to make sure it is more accessible.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. If you could just take that figure on notice, that would be appreciated.

Ms Hefren-Webb—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I think that is all the information I have on the breakdown of specific figures, thank you. Can I go to the BasicsCard very quickly. I have only a few questions because I know that we have asked about that quite a bit in the past. In terms of the

expansion of the BasicsCard—and I know there is a huge list now where there is access to what I call opportunity shops; that is, the charity shops or second-hand goods stores—how many opportunity shops or second-hand shops now have access to the BasicsCard, if that information is easily accessible?

Ms Hefren-Webb—I do not have that information. I do not know if Centrelink does.

Ms Cartwright—The way the BasicsCard merchants approval framework works is that the merchant or BasicsCard provider would provide us with what their main business purpose is. One of the shops that you describe may well be clothing, for instance, so we would categorise that store as a clothing store. I will certainly take it on notice to see if we do have the data that you have specifically asked for, but it may be that they are categorised under their main source of business, and I imagine most of those would be clothing.

Senator SIEWERT—Has that issue been raised with you? It has been raised with me on many occasions—that is, people not being able to access their BasicsCard in opportunity shops.

Ms Cartwright—I know that we do have some opportunity shops in the Northern Territory; I have actually visited some myself. There are some but, as I mentioned, we will need to get that data for you or have the names of those shops located. I have activated a store myself in the Northern Territory—a Red Cross store in Katherine—so they are there.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be appreciated, thank you.

CHAIR—Are there any further questions in the first section? If not, thank you very much. Mr Tidswell wants to add something.

Mr Tidswell—I have a little bit more data for Senator Scullion's question about SEAM. Just to give you the sense of the Northern Territory, those communities that are part of the trial include Katherine, Katherine Town Camps, Hermannsburg, Wallace Rockhole, Wadeye and the Tiwi Islands. As of 1 February 2011, we have had 38 customers suspended from those communities for enrolment or attendance issues. We have had difficulties getting the data and the information from state and territory education authorities. That has been difficult to do, but we are now starting to get that in volume so I would predict that, from here on in, there will be more people we will be assessing and, as a result, unfortunately, more people will be suspended because they are not getting their children to school or enrolling their children in school.

It is important to note that it is a suspension of their income support payments and that those individuals who would be income managed in those communities would still receive their family tax benefit and other entitlements in that income-managed format.

Senator SCULLION—So when they get suspended, is that held in abeyance until they comply?

Mr Tidswell—That is the suspension of the payment.

Senator SCULLION—Okay. So what would you expect the frequency of the reporting to be now we are having an enlightened state?

Mr Tidswell—What we are getting now is a greater volume of data being supplied to us from the authorities. There has been an issue, but increasingly more information is being provided for us to do the checks and go and examine what is going on in terms of that family and how they are getting their kids to school and enrolled et cetera.

Senator SCULLION—When would I be able to reliably expect some sort of another report, if you like, or a reporting of how we are going and how we are tracking with it?

Mr Tidswell—If you give me another chance at the estimates, I might. I suspect the figures will be higher. There are 120 in total, across both Queensland and Northern Territory communities.

Senator SCULLION—Estimates is only a couple of times a year. You do not think it might be useful for some interim releases, given the concerns?

Mr Tidswell—In that sense we are the providers, we do the work on behalf of DEEWR, and you might want to ask that question of them. They are here shortly, I think.

CHAIR—I imagine it would be a question for government, Senator.

Senator SCULLION—Indeed. I might put that on notice.

CHAIR—Senator Siewert, you wanted to clarify something?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. Last night we did not break it down into what was Northern Territory and what was Queensland of that 120. Of the 120, there are 38 in the Northern Territory?

Mr Tidswell—That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—That is over the period of the trial, isn't it?

Mr Tidswell—That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I ask a follow-up question. This might be for either you or FaHCSIA. Of the families that were suspended, what is done to look at what impact it is having on them when they do not have any income?

Mr Lye—In relation to SEAM?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Mr Lye—I think that probably would be a question for DEEWR.

Ms Hay—During the period that a person is suspended under the SEAM process, we have a review at the two-, four- and 10-week stage with our social worker, and they also have ongoing interaction with the education liaison officer during that period.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you for that. When you talk about the social worker, I am thinking in terms of the fact that these families do not have any income, which is the point we were making during the debate. I am not going to go into a policy debate, because we have had that and my opinion is well known, but my concern is: what impact is this having on families when no income is coming in, in terms of how they are surviving and how they are putting food on the table? Is it leading to other social problems? Are those the things that the social workers are looking at?

Ms Hay—That is certainly a conversation that the social worker has with the family. But the primary purpose of the interaction with the social worker is to look at the reasons the children are not attending school. It is about parenting support. But that is certainly one aspect. There are times when there may be other referrals to other organisations to support that family during that period.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that this is also a DEEWR issue, but we are crossing over from DEEWR into general welfare for these families. Is there information on who has been referred to organisations? I presume here we are talking about NGOs that are coming in and supporting families. Is that what you mean?

Ms Hay—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—Do we have details on how those families are being supported and how they are putting food on the table?

Mr Tidswell—Senator, we will take that on notice to get some advice about how that is occurring. It is important to note that family tax benefit is still provided. That is not suspended; it is the income support payment. The whole goal here for our staff is to get the customer to do what needs to be done to enrol their child or get their child to school. Now, one of the things we would look at is that the parent has to do whatever is reasonably possible, but if there is a difficult adolescent or child and they have taken all reasonable steps we would accept that. In that sense, the game plan here is to try to get kids at school—get them enrolled and attending. It is not the desired effect to suspend payment. We work hard with those families to get those kids at school or enrolled at school and that really is the process we use.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand what you are intending. I disagree with it because of the approach that has been taken. I do not want to have an argument about that because we have had it, but what I am concerned about is what is happening with these families and whether it is creating more social problems.

Senator Arbib—We will get you the answers on that. I have asked Centrelink the same questions because, obviously, I have an interest in the area. My understanding is that there are welfare workers who are involved throughout the process, obviously attempting to get the children to engage in education but also looking at the welfare of the family and working in with the local school, of course, and the other agencies. So we will get you a more detailed answer on that, but we all agree that we are not just worried about the welfare of the children in terms of going to school but also their general welfare. The two matters are totally linked.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Dr Harmer—Senator, I have two quick follow-ups from questions. Senator Adams, in relation to the table I referred to earlier about the national partnerships, we have emailed that to the secretariat so it should be available.

CHAIR—I hope it is in colour, Dr Harmer.

Dr Harmer—I do not know, Senator.

CHAIR—It loses a lot of its effectiveness when it's not in colour!

Dr Harmer—In relation to the PM's statement and the photographs, permission to use the photographs was obtained from all individuals in the photographs. Acknowledging the photographer who took the photo is just standard practice in government publications. The identification of individuals that are in the photographs we determined did not serve any purpose and it meant additional permissions being sought and further discussions with the individuals. Given that it did not serve any purpose, we have not done it.

CHAIR—Thank you. That is the end of the first session.

[10.40 am]

CHAIR—We will go into the section looking at housing. I am aware that Senators Payne, Scullion, Furner and Siewert have questions in this area. We will start with Senator Payne.

Senator PAYNE—Why do we not just start with an update of where we are with construction numbers and progress.

Dr Harmer—I will ask Ms Croft to give you the numbers.

Ms Croft—We have a couple of options for numbers, but would you like the cumulative numbers since the commencement of the national partnership?

Senator PAYNE—Yes, please.

Ms Croft—There are currently 509 houses completed across the country and a further 231 underway. There are also 1,876 rebuilds and refurbishments completed and a further 419 underway.

Senator PAYNE—So there are 509 constructed and completed houses across Australia. Are they all tenanted?

Ms Croft—We can walk you through the tenancy information. The numbers I have just given you are cumulative numbers. All of the properties from 2009-10 are tenanted, with tenancy agreements in place. The numbers I am about to give you are the ones that have been completed so far this financial year.

Senator PAYNE—Does that mean they do not have tenancy agreements in place?

Ms Croft—No, I will walk you through those. Everything from 2009-10 has tenancy agreements in place. In WA we have completed 16 new houses so far this financial year. Those 16 are occupied and have tenancy agreements in place. In Queensland we have 35 completed so far this year. Some 34 of those are occupied, with 34 tenancy agreements in place. The one that does not have a tenancy agreement in place is actually undergoing some modifications for disability access. In South Australia there are 11 complete, 11 occupied and 11 with tenancy agreements in place. For New South Wales there are five completed, five occupied and five with tenancy agreements in place. In Tasmania there are two completed, occupied and with tenancy agreements in place.

Senator PAYNE—So they are the figures for calendar year 2011?

Ms Croft—They are for the financial year 2010-11. The 316 that were completed in the last financial year are occupied and have tenancy agreements in place.

Ms Gumley—The last remaining state that we have is Northern Territory. There are 121 houses complete and 75 of those have tenancy agreements in place. There was a spike in housing at the end of Christmas.

Senator PAYNE—Are they occupied as well?

Ms Gumley—They are occupied and tenancy agreements are in place. There are still some 35 to 40 houses that need to have their tenancy agreements put in place. Some of those houses do not have tenants in them, but they have suffered road washouts as a result of the heavy rains in Maningrida and Wadeye, for instance. That has made it both not suitable to put tenants in those houses just yet and also quite difficult to get the property and tenancy managers out there talking with the families and putting the arrangements in place. They will be put in place shortly. The Northern Territory government has advised us that overall, for the new houses and refurbishments, there is an average of 22 days between handover from the builders to the Northern Territory having a tenancy agreement in place.

Mr Tongue—We were talking last night about the national average, which is 29 days. So the Northern Territory is currently sitting under the national average.

Senator SCULLION—Ms Gumley, just in terms of the washout, are you talking about areas that affected the actual dwelling itself or are you talking about in the garden?

Ms Gumley—No, it is not the garden; it was largely the access road to that subdivision. So there is some work that needs to be put in place again. The roads had been—I think it was for the Galiwinku one, but I would have to double-check—washed out in December, rebuilt and then with the rain from Cyclone Carlos have been washed out again.

Senator SCULLION—So the actual properties themselves that we are talking about have not been affected; it is just that you cannot get to them at all?

Ms Gumley—That is right. The properties are ready but it is not suitable, really, to have somebody going into a house when they cannot get good access to it.

Ms Croft—It is in fact Maningrida rather than Galiwinku.

Senator PAYNE—So we have about 40 which are untenanted, with no housing and tenancy agreements in place. Is that where we are up to?

Ms Gumley—Thirty-six, I think it is.

Senator PAYNE—How long have they been vacant?

Ms Gumley—They would have been the houses completed in December.

Senator PAYNE—Is that all or part of the houses that were completed in December?

Ms Gumley—I would have to take that on notice for the specifics of each property.

Senator PAYNE—Is there a target date for completing that process of occupancy and tenancy agreements?

Ms Gumley—It will be as quickly as we can. Some of it will depend on how quickly we can get the road there and in good condition. So some of it is a little weather dependent. The Northern Territory is having, from what the NT advises us, the biggest wet in years.

Dr Harmer—I make the point, Senator—I know you are aware—that we are involved as the funding body and we are helping manage, but this of course is a Northern Territory government process of negotiating tenancy agreements and fixing roads et cetera. We are happy, because there is so much focus on this program, that we have a lot more information about this than we would normally have for a program which is under a national partnership where a state or territory government is responsible for the administration. We can go so far but, when it comes to the process of where they are at and the length of time it will take, for example, to get a tenancy agreement, we can take some of that on notice but the information will come from the Northern Territory government.

Senator PAYNE—I appreciate that point, Dr Harmer, but you might also appreciate that, given the discussions that you have had with this committee and certain members of this committee over an extensive period of time about aspects of this program, particularly its administration, it does not fill me with confidence when you tell me that these matters are necessarily in the hands of the Northern Territory government. So I am concerned to know that the Commonwealth has an eye to what is going on.

Dr Harmer—What should fill you with confidence, though, is that we are exceeding the targets.

Senator PAYNE—You often do, Dr Harmer. I appreciate that.

Dr Harmer—We have made great progress. I will not bore you with the detail of that. If you ask, we will give it to you. This program had a rocky start. We would be the first to admit that. But the action the minister took in having a review and the changes we have made since then have now got this program on track. For a program as big as this, there are always going to be little things that go wrong. But the macro picture is that we are exceeding the targets. There are people getting into these houses. We are building a couple of times more than the highest peak year ever in building in the Northern Territory for public housing. It is actually quite a good story.

Senator PAYNE—There are still, though, I am sure you would acknowledge, Dr Harmer, concerns being raised publicly from time to time about the administrative side of the program, in the Northern Territory in particular. That presents us with ongoing concerns in that area. I think towards the end of last year there were concerns raised by a former works manager who was working on the Tiwi houses about the level of costs absorbed by administrative costs. The alliance indicated that they did not agree with that. Has the Commonwealth made any investigation of that?

Dr Harmer—Yes, we have. As I said before, the macro story is particularly good now after a rocky start. Inevitably there are going to be little glitches and bits and pieces of information coming out—often from, as you would be aware, a disgruntled employee who has not done so well and leaves the workplace with some information. I am going to let Ms Gumley or Ms Croft talk about that because, naturally, every time even something small—in the macro scheme of things, in terms of the good picture of the SIHIP's achievements—comes out, we have an embedded team in the Northern Territory. We have had it there since Minister Macklin commissioned the review to make sure that we keep the program running as well as we can, although we can never guarantee against small glitches. The good news on the

administration side is that we are running, as we committed to earlier, an eight per cent administration for the program against earlier figures, which were much higher than that. That is across the board. That is the picture. I will let Ms Gumley report on the incident you referred to.

Senator PAYNE—I think the concerns raised and reported on were about the houses under construction differing significantly from the original plans that were in place, that employees in the teams were being pressured to present information on the projects which was favourable, whether the deadline would be met and about one-third of the cost of the home being taken up in administrative costs. They were some of the issues that were raised.

Dr Harmer—Sure. We will deal with that.

Ms Gumley—Senator, it is incorrect that 30 per cent are actually in overheads. In the cost that you are seeing, program management is capped at eight per cent. With the alliances, it is a very large program we are running but they are reasonable costs that we are incurring. They are the same sorts of costs that we would incur in any large construction program. The sorts of costs go to things like the pace and scale of works. We have to bring workers into remote locations. We are looking at design planning approvals, site clearance, occupational health and safety assurances on such a multifaceted site. For instance, in Wadeye at the moment there are 235 sites active between the refurbishments, the rebuilds and the new house constructions. So there is a substantial amount that is involved in managing such a large site and in making sure that the necessary assurances and the good quality product come up at the end.

Senator PAYNE—So you differ from the observations made in the report about administrative costs; I take that as noted. What about the other concerns: the differences between the original planning of the houses and what is being constructed, whether it is going to meet its deadline, whether employees are being pressured to provide favourable information when they are being asked about the project?

Ms Gumley—In relation to the size of the houses—the original houses that were built in the early days of SIHIP, for instance on Tiwi—there were some very large properties.

Senator PAYNE—What is ‘very large’?

Ms Gumley—There are probably five- or six-bedroom homes, some quite large homes. What we have done with states and territories, through the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, is move to a public housing model. Public housing across Australia provides a modest dwelling where tenants can manage the amenity of the dwelling they have. The amount of rent paid contributes to supporting the cost of supporting the tenant, as well as a repairs and maintenance program.

It is fair to say that, following the review that Minister Macklin commissioned in August 2009, the size of the houses was re-examined. Part of that was really around the notion that large houses were contributing to overcrowding, because you would actually have several family groups living in one house. What we have put in place is an arrangement now that, instead of having several families in one dwelling, we will have several families living in close proximity to each other in modest dwellings. For instance, in the Northern Territory and across the national partnership at least 50 per cent will be built with three bedrooms—over the

life of the national partnership—but the housing mix will reflect the diversity of the population in that community. There will be older pensioners, couples et cetera.

Dr Harmer—And in some respects this is a result of some of our more intensive consultation. If you remember the early period in SIHIP, there were some issues with it. One of the issues was the consultation that was being undertaken with the community. It was being done by the contractors rather than the departments. In those consultations it became quite clear that many, particularly the women in the community, liked the idea of relatively modest sized houses, because it is much easier to control people coming and going and more manageable for them. So it is in a sense an overcrowding issue. It is also a safety issue, we believe, that the houses reflect the public housing mix and the mix of the family sizes.

Ms Gumley—Having said that, they are not small houses. So a two-bedroom house is around 100 square metres, which is a good size home, and the houses are robust. They are designed as a 30-year-life asset. In the national partnership we actually expect states to move from a seven-year asset life to 30 years. So the particular model that is being used in the Northern Territory is designed for very harsh climates. It is designed out of a core filled concrete product. So it is designed for a long term in very harsh climates.

Senator PAYNE—Can you explain to me how we began this program with houses of the nature you have described on the Tiwi—the five- and six-bedroom houses—being built? It sounds to me like you were saying that it was not until there was a crisis in terms of the concerns over administration and things like that that anyone even noticed—assuming your implication is that this is a bad thing—that you did not want the six-bedroom houses.

Dr Harmer—I think the Tiwi Island arrangement was at a different time—very early in the process.

Ms Gumley—And it would be fair to say, I think, that at that point, where the Northern Territory did not have the same direct level of control over the project, there was perhaps less government control over the notion of the cost in the project. I think if you go to the August 2009 review that was actually found. So the stage 1 houses were large in size, and not just in the number of bedrooms; they have very large verandas and very large family room areas. It is not necessarily that they all had a very large number of bedrooms, but the actual size of the house was quite big. Now, what we have scaled to is much more similar to what we would have in town.

Senator SCULLION—There is a notion that 750 houses were to be built and you started building the houses. As you say, some of them had five and six bedrooms. Many of them were not; they were three-bedroom houses. I hope you can acknowledge that.

Ms Gumley—Yes.

Senator SCULLION—Given that the new process is to build more moderate houses than originally anticipated, how many extra houses beyond 750 do you anticipate building, given the savings that you would obviously have from now building, instead of three- or four-bedroom houses, two- and one-bedroom homes?

Ms Gumley—I think those early houses that were larger were not meeting the cap costs. That is one of the reasons the review found that we actually needed to cap the cost at 450. So

some of those earlier larger homes on Tiwi, for instance, were more expensive than 450. So in order to be able to deliver on the targets, government set clear caps around what was required.

Senator SCULLION—So is it reasonable, then, to say that not only is it from feedback from the communities that this is a better deal—having a more moderate home—

Ms Gumley—Yes.

Senator SCULLION—But the other motive and driver of this is that you can only build a moderate home with the cap that you have now provided? So it is also financially driven with whatever the budget will now entail to get the 750 houses?

Ms Gumley—I think it is fair to say that, in going in to having discussions with housing reference groups, we set it out clearly in terms of the best outcome we could get for this community. To reduce the pressure on overcrowding the view has been—and I think it has been shared by communities as well as the Northern Territory government, who is the asset holder—that it is better that more families are housed in modest dwellings than that some families are housed in much larger dwellings and other families are left in very overcrowded conditions.

Senator SCULLION—It has been put to me by experts—and I am sure you have dealt with the same individuals—that if we are going to deal with overcrowding, it is not about a house, because a dwelling can be all sorts of descriptors, as you have indicated, but it is actually normally on the number of bedrooms, which provides independence for people within the family. So a five-bedroom home would provide for, let us say, two people in five bedrooms, so that is 10 people. Obviously in a two-bedroom home we are expecting that perhaps, at best, two people would be living in each bedroom. So it is really down to the number. To deal with overcrowding, the premise that you are putting to me is that by building more modest homes somehow it is a better way to deal with overcrowding than large numbers of bedrooms in the one home.

I just wonder if you can explain to me how making each dwelling with a smaller number of bedrooms somehow provides less overcrowding. I would have thought a bedroom is a bedroom, whether there are five bedrooms in a house or there are two bedrooms in a house. Why would building only two-bedroom homes be better in terms of overcrowding than a four-bedroom home?

Mr Tongue—Could I dive in there with some expert advice we have. There are a couple of elements that we have to contemplate with the Northern Territory and the other jurisdictions. Whilst there is quite a high birthrate in some of these remote communities—which I know you are aware of—we are also seeing population ageing and the emergence of single older people or older couples. Because of the life of the stock that we are trying to create to leave some sort of a legacy, we have to contemplate both the large family with a lot of young children and people who might want to live on their own.

In terms of overcrowding, one of the issues we are conscious of—and this is one of the advantages of smaller stock—is the safety of women and children. The advice we get is that building larger properties with a number of families living in them is more likely to create a less secure environment for women and children than if we build, say, a three-bedroom home that better suits the needs of the population. Whilst it is true that bedrooms are an aggregate

measure of addressing overcrowding, it is not true that it is the only measure. In trying to think about the life of a 10-year national partnership and all the refurbishments and construction that we are doing, we do have to try to accommodate the population dynamic and try to address not just the macro numbers but also some of the family and personal dynamics going on. In working with the Northern Territory and the other jurisdictions, we are trying to find a balance, if you like, around some of these issues.

Dr Harmer—What I was going to say related to that. It makes intuitive sense to me that houses that fit the family and which might be a little smaller may actually be quite a sensible thing in terms of dealing with overcrowding. The bigger the house and the bigger the perception of the room and the space in the house, the more family and friends are likely to say, ‘They’ve got room for me.’ Also, the more bedrooms and the bigger the house, the further away some of the bedrooms are from the parents who are able to supervise.

Intuitively, as long as we are not cramming huge families into two- or three-bedroom houses, there are quite good reasons for having smaller houses, in addition to the sensible long-term investment. As Mr Tongue said, there are some good things about the new arrangements. If you remember, previously we had no rents being collected, no maintenance being done, virtually no employment, houses lasting seven years—a whole range of things. This has been replaced by this new method whereby we now have rents being collected, houses being built to last, money being spent on maintenance and significant employment outcomes. This is a massive transformation of a system which was very poor.

Ms Gumley—Can I just give you some information about the number of houses by number of bedrooms in the Northern Territory. That might help to put it into context. At the moment in the Northern Territory, in terms of the number of houses built since the beginning of NPARIH for the Northern Territory, there are two one-bedroom homes, 79 two-bedroom homes, 103 three-bedroom homes, three four-bedroom homes and one five-bedroom home.

Senator PAYNE—What about the six-bedroom home you referred to earlier?

Ms Gumley—Sorry, not the six-bedroom home.

Senator PAYNE—There isn’t a six-bedroom home? Is that right?

Ms Gumley—There is no six-bedroom home, sorry.

Senator PAYNE—But you did say that to me earlier.

Ms Gumley—They were larger. Ms Croft corrected me earlier—it was actually that they were larger across the total floor as opposed to the number of bedrooms. There is a single men’s quarters in that as well, which is out at Wadeye.

Senator SCULLION—Just to get that right, there are only four homes that have over four bedrooms in the Northern Territory?

Ms Gumley—That is correct.

Senator SCULLION—So these are percentages that I could expect over the remainder of the program? Would you expect the trend to be for fewer three-bedroom homes and a lot more one- and two-bedroom homes, or do you expect these trends to remain?

Ms Gumley—Fifty per cent of the homes built will be three-bedroom homes.

Senator PAYNE—Can you explain to me how building the same number of homes with fewer bedrooms is going to address overcrowding?

Ms Gumley—Sorry, Senator, could you repeat that?

Senator PAYNE—You have not changed the number of homes you are going to build but you have made, as I see it, a decision in the program to build the same number of homes with fewer bedrooms. Explain to me how that addresses overcrowding. I simply do not understand your logic.

Ms Gumley—I mentioned earlier that we actually had larger homes. In fact, the majority of those were actually four-bedroom homes, and that was the most bedrooms that any one of them had.

Senator PAYNE—You said there were three four-bedroom homes.

Ms Gumley—Yes, there were three four-bedroom homes. So the homes that we had in Tiwi were really based around the floor size. Rather than now being 100 square metres, the homes on Tiwi that are larger are still three-bedroom homes but they were much larger than 100 square metres.

Senator PAYNE—But there is no more than three of them anyway. It is not like you are talking about hundreds; is that right?

Ms Gumley—So what I am saying is that we are not doing an awful lot different from the early days in terms of the number of bedrooms, but we are building more modest dwellings.

Senator PAYNE—So you always planned to build 80—give or take—two-bedroom homes? That was always the plan?

Ms Gumley—We always planned to build 50 per cent as three-bedrooms and the rest a mix of that—

Senator PAYNE—I am not sure that is an answer to my question, Ms Gumley. That is very frustrating. Did you always plan to build about 80 two-bedroom homes?

Dr Harmer—I do not think we have an annual target for numbers of bedrooms; we have a broad target for the program.

Senator PAYNE—Can you tell me the nature of the consultation which has brought you to this point? How do you actually do the community consultation? Who has the input? Who says, ‘What I want here is a modest two-bedroom home that will not lead to overcrowding’? People who have been commenting, publicly at least, and certainly those with some experience in the area, like Alison Anderson, do not think this is a good idea. So I am interested in how it has come to this point.

Ms Gumley—With each community there is a community engagement plan that the alliances need to put in place. There is a housing reference group which is made up of representatives of the communities.

Senator PAYNE—Who chooses the representatives of the communities?

Ms Gumley—The community.

Senator PAYNE—Is it an elders arrangement?

Ms Gumley—No, it would be a mix—not all elders—of community representatives. So the community nominates who is involved. That housing reference group starts much earlier than the actual building and construction does so that we can talk to them around the leasing arrangement and also around what happens with housing and what the style would be. The community has an understanding of the amount of funding that is available. We then look at how we make that funding go as far as possible and improve the facilities and amenity in town.

Senator SCULLION—How do you communicate with this reference group? Do they report back to you?

Ms Gumley—No, we have staff from the Australian government and the Northern Territory government who go out with the alliances and meet with the housing reference group. Those housing reference group meetings are minuted and those minutes distributed. They meet on a very regular basis from the very early scoping work stage right through to the end of the project.

Senator SCULLION—I might ask for some of those minutes on notice, but I obviously do not want them all. I will see whether I can get a section later. In terms of the contrary, Ms Gumley—and you can all have the opportunity to respond—you have identified some reasons we are now not building what we all thought would be three-bedroom houses.

Ms Gumley—Yes.

Senator SCULLION—You have identified everything from child safety, for some reason a footprint to vague family amenity. Many of the commentators are actually saying that you have blown the budget so badly in the first half of this process. Dr Harmer, you acknowledged many times that it was not perfect. What is happening now is that to meet the target of 750 houses we can only build one- and two-bedroom houses for what remains.

That may be a cynical approach, but I can tell you that most commentators see that as a real issue. In the early days there was significant input in terms of what people would see as waste and mismanagement and now we are having to pay for it by building one- and two-bedroom homes. Frankly, the rationale about family safety and all those sorts of things, if you put it in the context of these sorts of programs, is important but it does not mean everybody has to have a choice of a one- or two-bedroom house in the second part of the program.

Dr Harmer—We need to put some of those in context. First of all, the early period—and we admit that it was a pretty rocky start and we were not as involved then; we are heavily involved now—was not a large proportion of the 10-year program money. While it was not good that we were spending in some areas much more on overheads than we are now, it did not do huge damage to our ability to build the 750 houses.

The other comment I would make is that there are lots of people, as you would know, with an interest in this program—some of them expert, some of them not so expert, some of them with very vested interests in commenting because of the profile of this program and its history. Many builders who benefited greatly under the previous regime, who could build buildings that were not necessarily going to last 30 years and were making pretty good money building houses that were not built to the needs of the community, and who are not part of the

arrangement would have a great deal of interest in continually pointing out things that are wrong. I mean, we are—

Senator PAYNE—Are you saying there is an active campaign to undermine the program?

Dr Harmer—No, no, no.

Senator PAYNE—Because that is what it sounds like you just said to me.

Dr Harmer—Not at all. But I am saying that there are lots of people, including the person you referred to earlier, Senator, who I think was dismissed from one of the building companies. You know around the country sometimes when there is a disgruntled employee dismissed they find documents that were draft or hadn't made—and raise them with the press.

This is a program which is under intense scrutiny. We are well aware of it. There are a lot of people commenting on it, but what we are saying to you is that we are pretty confident that the program overall will build its 750 houses. We are doing it now in much better consultation with the community in terms of the houses fitting what they want; there is rent being collected, there are tenancy agreements and the results on employment are extremely good. So the picture is actually pretty good. Small bits of information from experts on particular examples should not be seen to override the massive improvement that this program is bringing to the housing conditions in the Northern Territory.

Senator PAYNE—Which is exactly why we are taking the opportunity to talk about it today, Dr Harmer, so that you and your officers are in a position to address those specifics which have been raised.

Ms Gumley—Senator Payne, can I just clarify a point that Senator Scullion made earlier that we are only building one- and two-bedroom houses. That is not the case. There are only two one-bedroom homes that have been built so far, 79 two-bedroom and 103 three-bedroom.

Senator SCULLION—So how many two-bedroom and one-bedroom houses are projected to be built between now and the close of the program?

Ms Gumley—There are no set numbers. House design and the number of bedrooms per house have always been developed in conjunction with the housing reference group for each community to enable us to accommodate the population diversity across different communities. There is an overarching cap that requires the program to deliver at least 50 per cent three-bedroom homes.

Senator SCULLION—Indeed. That is the requirement, but the whole motive for this, Ms Gumley, as I know you can recall, was to deal with the issue of overcrowding. I hope you understand why there is a fair bit of cynicism in the wider Australian community about how a one- or two-bedroom home will, in fact, resolve the issue of overcrowding. Some of the expert advice that has been provided—you do not need to be an expert—is that there is a certain amount of efficiency. If you build one four-bedroom house it is going to be significantly cheaper than two two-bedroom houses—not only the land footprint but the cost and efficiencies of working on a site.

Ms Gumley—Not necessarily, if you have a four-bedroom home that actually has to have two families in it to make it worthwhile having such a large asset. We generate the same amount of rent for a four-bedroom home as for a two-bedroom home, so the matter then

becomes how that four-bedroom home is filled. Not all families have six kids that need to be in those bedrooms.

Senator SCULLION—No, but many do. In these communities—I know them well, Ms Gumley—many do, and many were used to visiting and looking at and having larger houses. The example of Wudapuli and Nama, where there are eight-bedroom houses working very, very well, I am not sure is really consistent with the information that you are providing.

Ms Gumley—We would be happy to provide some information about the Wudapuli and Nama homes in terms of the level that are actually being tenanted and occupied at the moment.

Mr Tongue—We were talking to Senator Payne last night about the stimulus spend. The logical extension of the price efficiency argument is that all public housing would be built with lots of bedrooms because we have a long public housing waiting list and we need to jam lots of people in. All public housing operators in Australia will build a mix of dwelling types.

Senator PAYNE—We are not contending that at all. All we are trying to understand with some clarity is the purposes for which the significant number of two-bedroom homes have been chosen to be constructed and what the plan is into the future for construction levels in terms of the number of houses. We have been told we cannot be told that. No-one is suggesting that there is a one-size-fits-all solution here in social housing, public housing or affordable housing or Indigenous housing.

Senator Arbib—But the most important thing coming out of all this is that the communities are being consulted and that the building arrangements and the planning arrangements are flexible enough to meet the individual needs of those communities. I would have thought that is the most important aspect—empowering local communities to tell the government, to tell departments, what they need.

Senator PAYNE—That is true, Minister. But if you think about it in the light of the information and the historical analysis that is available on this issue—the issue of overcrowding in Indigenous homes—the reality of a two-bedroom house is that essentially, reasonably, it accommodates a couple and one other person or two children. So when you think about the picture that has been drawn over a period of time, both by this government and previously, of issues of overcrowding, that is not the picture that pops into your mind as a matter of course. So we are trying to reconcile and understand the approach the government is taking in this construction program, with 79 two-bedroom homes to this point and 103 three-bedroom homes to this point.

Senator Arbib—I accept that it is intuitive to think to just build more bedrooms and therefore solve overcrowding. I think, as you have heard today, it is a lot more complex than that.

Senator PAYNE—It is.

Senator Arbib—Also, the best way to work out the appropriate mix of housing and bedrooms is to work it out at the local level with the community who understand what the needs are of the families and the people who are actually going to be living there.

Senator PAYNE—If you were building more homes with fewer bedrooms, as opposed to exactly the same number of homes with fewer bedrooms, then intuitively I think I would be more comfortable. But I understand the point that the officers have made.

Senator Arbib—We will agree to disagree.

Senator SCULLION—Given the decision that was made at the beginning of the program that half of the homes would have three bedrooms, I think that predates any community discussions of any substance. So it would seem that that would have been laid out in any event. Perhaps it would help if you could give us the average cost of the 79 two-bedroom homes and the average cost of the 103 three-bedroom homes. You can take that on notice.

Dr Harmer—We will take that on notice. I will make one more comment. Because it is a very big program and there are many dimensions to it—and there is no doubt that the aim, as it was of the previous government who designed the scheme, is to deal with overcrowding—the 750 houses will be built and they will make a significant contribution on overcrowding in parts of the Northern Territory like Wadeye, for example, where we are going to build over 100 houses. Remember the other element of this program, and that is the refurbishments—spending money on houses which are already there but unoccupiable or safely occupied in some cases. That element of the program will also help address overcrowding in addition to the 750 houses. Having said that, I do not think anyone—either the opposition when they designed the program or the government as they are currently running it—ever committed that this program would solve overcrowding in the Northern Territory. To totally solve overcrowding in the Northern Territory, as Senator Scullion would well know, you would need vastly more money than has been available under previous governments or this government.

Senator PAYNE—Can I just ask a question about the refurbishments and the rebuilds. I think you said there were 1,876 of those completed and 419 underway. When they are completed are they then tenanted to the same tenants as previously or are they retented under new tenancy agreements?

Ms Gumley—They are usually retented to the same family but under improved rents and with more stringent tenancy agreements.

Senator PAYNE—So the same sorts of obligations that apply to the new homes?

Ms Gumley—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—And is that a standard tenancy agreement across the whole SIHIP program across all state and territories, or are they exclusive to each state and territory?

Ms Gumley—They are exclusive to each state and territory. Copies of the tenancy agreements were provided in the recent answers to questions on notice.

Senator PAYNE—In terms of rental return, how does the rent differ between the five-bedroom, the four-bedroom, the three, the two and the one?

Ms Croft—The specifics we would have to take on notice. You are talking about how the specific rents would play out?

Senator PAYNE—Yes.

Ms Croft—I think it is important to acknowledge that across the national partnership the rents are actually income based but with a maximum rent cap. So we could provide you with perhaps some maximum rent caps for those sized houses, but the predominant factor is the income of the family in the house.

Senator PAYNE—Sorry, I might be incorrect, but I thought I heard Ms Gumley say earlier that the same amount of rent was generated for a four-bedroom as a two-bedroom home, which is what piqued my interest.

Ms Gumley—Often depending on the income of the client. So, if you have people who have a very low income, that cap will cut off in the same way as it does for other public housing.

Senator PAYNE—Just a breakdown on that then, please.

Ms Gumley—We could give a couple of modellings, if you like, showing families on different incomes.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you very much.

Senator SCULLION—I wonder if you would be able to provide the value of the SIHIP package—what you have actually released to date on each package—broken down package by package. Would you have those to hand?

Ms Croft—Senator, we provide our funding under the national partnership to the Northern Territory government. The Northern Territory government then would release that funding to, for example, alliance partners. So we do not directly administer that expenditure.

Senator SCULLION—So you would have no knowledge about package 2—how much the Northern Territory government provided to the alliance partners? Is that what you are telling us?

Ms Croft—I am not sure if we would have it at that level.

Senator SCULLION—It is a pretty basic level. It is a package. How much money do they provide to Wadeye package 6, for example?

Dr Harmer—If you give us some specific questions, we will do our best to find out for you. I suspect the officers will not have that information at hand.

Senator SCULLION—I would be interested to know particularly how much in funds has been allocated to package 6, but if you would like to take the remainder on notice—package by package, how much funding you have released to date.

Dr Harmer—Has been released up until now?

Senator SCULLION—Yes.

Dr Harmer—Okay.

Ms Croft—Certainly.

Senator SCULLION—I turn to the relationship you have with the alliance partners—and I acknowledge that the Northern Territory government is in here somewhere. Each alliance has a budget for a package. In package 6 there is a budget for Wadeye. As you know, there has

been some discussion in the media about that over the last little while. Does somebody get to approve an alliance budget?

Ms Gumley—The package costs are agreed between the government and the alliances. The Australian government is there as part of the embedded team, but it is a Northern Territory government contractual arrangement with the alliances and they also are the holder of the funds.

Dr Harmer—And we are there now as a result of the review, which recommended that we play a more significant part in that. While we have not taken over the pen to sign the contract, as I have mentioned to you before we have a number of officers in the Northern Territory working with the Northern Territory housing department watching this and helping.

Senator SCULLION—So what criteria or comparisons do you use to ensure there is value for money in the alliance budget? You are looking at the budget for that reason, I take it.

Ms Gumley—Yes, certainly. The packages all have some specifications that are put to the alliances. They then come back with proposals. We then spend quite a bit of time working that through in terms of bringing that down to the lowest possible cost. All of the detail of each package goes to an independent cost estimator—a quantity surveyor—who then checks that that is in line with market prices and that there is not anything that is out of line in that. If there are matters then we go back and we work that through again. It might be that there needs to be a different solution put into place or it might be that it can be handled a little differently. Then that package is agreed between the alliances and government and they proceed on that basis.

Senator SCULLION—On the statement by the Commonwealth government that there is an eight per cent management fee, as we heard a little earlier: but also when you looked at the cost of administration, those sort of things, and the actual direct cost of housing, you would be, at that time, ensuring that the cost of the administration did not go above your assertions to us that it was eight per cent and the Northern Territory government were managing it, and that was that?

Ms Gumley—The Northern Territory government fee is the eight per cent.

Senator SCULLION—Yes.

Ms Gumley—In working with the alliances, there is careful scrutiny about making sure what costs are actually identified in that. So there are costs for—in the same way that other builders do—site clearance, design planning and approvals, occupational health and safety requirements, workers compensation and the cost of bringing workers in, housing them and feeding them.

Senator SCULLION—That is non-building costs. There are administration costs as well as that.

Ms Gumley—Yes, there are.

Senator SCULLION—Do you get to some sort of a level and say, ‘We’re going to have to cap this at that,’ and that is what you are looking at when you look at the contracts? How much would you say, with non-direct housing, non-output, the process is—so the cost of

administering the companies, those sorts of things? How much do you think the industry might be allowed—

Mr Tongue—Senator, we cannot build a house if we do not have the workers' camp. I think a characterisation of direct and non-direct—yes, you may characterise them as overheads, but because we are working in so many remote locations, some of the costs—

Senator SCULLION—What about a project engineer, Mr Tongue? He does something once—

Mr Tongue—One of the misnomers about SIHIP is that it is just about building houses. We have to build infrastructure to connect houses, too. It is also partly an employment program. We have to worry about the environmental outcomes. There are a range of overheads associated with just building a house. For example, in the stimulus spend, we are not building workers' camps for 100 workers in a remote location. The packages have to absorb some of that cost.

Senator SCULLION—But how much of the spending would be what you think reasonable?

Mr Tongue—I think it varies.

Senator SCULLION—We have 100 per cent and we decide to go and build 750 houses. There is 100 per cent. How much of that 100 per cent do you think reasonable or what do you guys think about how much should be actually in bricks and mortar and building the houses, the labour and those people directly associated with it?

Dr Harmer—I do not think Mr Tongue is—and he might disagree—terribly well qualified to give you that estimate. What I would say is that, going to your question, we certainly are involved, and would expect the Northern Territory to be heavily involved, in scrutinising the proposals from the alliance partners about particular packages. Now, they vary from place to place according to the size of the package, how many houses are built. But we would look very carefully, and we would expect the Northern Territory to as well, at the proposal about land clearing, at the proposal about the establishment of the accommodation for the workers—all those elements we would be looking at. I wanted to make sure we did not leave you with the impression that we would just let that go. We scrutinise, as we have to because we are determined to get value for money, all the elements of the proposal on each package.

Senator SCULLION—I actually have one of those documents in front of me. Just in package 6 in Wadeye—and remember this is a community that had its own housing company with supervisors and inspectors before we thought about SIHIP—we have a package manager, and over two years he gets \$894,000. That is just for Wadeye. We have another site superintendent; there is another \$586,000. But I will come down off the site engineers because you can probably justify them. We have a contracts administrator; he is Darwin based, and he is on \$471,000 that has been allocated to Wadeye, to package 6. Then obviously we need two contracts administrators. He is on only \$471,000. These are direct costs that are not being spent on building houses. Civil supervisor, safety supervisor—we need a safety supervisor. He is another half a million dollars. Contract clerk—there is \$295,000. Graduate engineer—another \$235,000. If you are checking the numbers on these things, in terms of ensuring that we are getting value for money, we also note that on this package there is an

allocation of \$25,000 for three months for a vocation student. We are assuming that is work experience. That is 100 grand a year. We have had a look at this. We have a work experience student on \$25,000 for three months. I can go on and on. These are appalling.

Dr Harmer—Senator, I am not aware of the document you are reading from.

Senator SCULLION—This is the budget—

Dr Harmer—It is not easy. As you run through it like that, you can make it sound as if we have not looked at it. I can assure you that we have.

Senator SCULLION—I am sure you have seen it because this is the package 6 preliminary contract that your government would have seen.

Dr Harmer—Without knowing the detail of the document you are reading from, it would be impossible for us to respond to every one of those. I think there are a couple of issues that you raised that we could respond to to put them into context, such as the market for supervisors in the north. The contractors have to pay the market rate for supervisors, and in remote Northern Australia, where there is a lot of mining building going on et cetera, as you would know the rates are pretty high. The choice for the alliance partner is either they pay the market rate or they go slow on the building program until they can get someone in to do it. We are pushing them and, rightfully, the estimates committee and certainly the minister are pushing everyone to get the houses built. We are pressing the contractors to get the houses built and if they are going to have supervisors they need to pay the market rate. We would like the market rate for supervisors to be lower, but in the north of Australia in most cases it is not.

Senator SCULLION—The indications from this package are that, give or take a few per cent, it is still 31 per cent in non-direct housing costs—in administrative costs and all those other administrative arrangements. So it is 31 per cent of the budget to build those homes, out of the \$65 million-odd. Maybe that is the industry benchmark, I am not sure, but do you think that is a fair—

Mr Tongue—We cannot build houses without paying people to build them.

Senator SCULLION—So you are saying that you think the 31 per cent is a—

Senator Arbib—We reject the 31 per cent figure that you have provided, and we also reject some of the statements you have made and some of the evidence you have provided to the newspapers. We do not agree with that. You have just talked about wages and salaries. We have not got the document in front of us, so we cannot chase that off at this point.

What I will say is that you understand that in the Northern Territory at the moment there is a great deal of economic activity going on and there are some major projects taking place, but the economy is extremely strong—

Senator SCULLION—The biggest project taking place is SIHIP.

Senator Arbib—Unemployment in the Northern Territory is at one of the lowest levels in the country, so finding skilled and very skilled workers to go into remote communities is always going to be difficult and it is always going to be expensive. When you put targets in place in terms of construction and delivery, it is going to further increase the cost. We come here to this committee and you say to us, ‘Are you meeting your time lines or are you going to

miss the time lines?’ That is fine, and we are working as a government to meet those time lines, but when you put those time lines on workers in remote areas then there will always be an impost in terms of costs in terms of salaries. That is just a fact of life.

Senator SCULLION—So the blow-out is down to you keeping a time line, Minister?

Senator Arbib—No, Senator. I have just given you an answer in terms of the Northern Territory economy and the cost of working in a remote area. It is always going to cost you more to work in a remote area. Also, when you put in place time lines in an area like that, then, yes, there will be an increase in the salaries. Remember, we are working in a marketplace. This is a marketplace for engineers, a marketplace for supervisors, and there are only so many out there.

CHAIR—Senator Scullion, you have actually put the document up; it is on notice now. Dr Harmer, will you take that document on notice and give Senator Scullion some response to it?

Dr Harmer—Certainly. Ms Gumley has some information in relation to some of it.

CHAIR—We will take Ms Gumley’s response now briefly. I will just let the committee know that in the next half-hour we will have questions from Senator Siewert, Senator Furner and Senator Adams.

Dr Harmer—We will be brief. As I pass over to Ms Gumley, I want to make a comment about Senator Scullion’s comment about the ‘blow-out’. We will build 750 houses, as originally intended within the funding envelope. With great respect, it is not at all fair at this stage of the program to call it a blow-out.

Ms Gumley—I do not have the document that you have in front of you, but I certainly do review the package costs and have seen some of those. The way the alliances present their salaries is that they include their superannuation, their salary overhead costs, including workers compensation, for what is a very high-risk occupation in a very high-risk location. So the premiums involved in that, which are loaded into that, are high cost.

Senator SCULLION—Contracts administrators? I do not know how high-risk they are.

CHAIR—Senator, it would be easier if you let the officer complete her answer.

Ms Gumley—Certainly there are high costs for those staff who are out there. Those staff who are in Darwin are part of the building team. They are there designing the houses, putting through the planning and building requirements and managing the technical works with us about scoping the houses and the works to be done. They are definitely part of the construction effort and they are definitely part of the direct costs of building those houses.

Senator PAYNE—Could you please indicate how a contract administrator role is a high-risk occupation?

Ms Gumley—The builders out in remote communities I was speaking about in that matter.

Senator PAYNE—I thought you were talking about Darwin based people in your answer?

Ms Gumley—There are two. For instance, in Wadeye those supervisors have big jobs. It is one supervisor to 29 workers.

Senator PAYNE—And it is high risk in what regard? How do you define that?

Ms Gumley—If you look at the workers compensation premiums for those people you find that they are dealing with power tools, they are dealing with sites and they are dealing with supervising unqualified staff.

Senator PAYNE—How is that different from any other building site?

Ms Gumley—Building sites across the country have high workers compensation costs.

Senator PAYNE—I understand that.

Dr Harmer—Wadeye—as Senator Scullion would well know and you may have been there as well—is very hot, it is remote and the services and facilities are not what you would expect to find in a town of 3½ thousand people. It is a difficult environment.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, may I request that in the response you provide to Senator Scullion's question there is some focus on the definition of high risk. Can the justification of that be one of the key components of your answer.

Senator SCULLION—Perhaps Dr Harmer can just deal with the two Darwin based contract administrators who, with all due respect, do not deal with power tools and have taken \$700,000 of what had been completely allocated to this one program.

Dr Harmer—I do not know the detail of that—

Mr Tongue—They would not be the only well-paid people working in Darwin at the moment. Certainly across a range of Commonwealth contracts, I imagine Darwin salaries and Darwin public sector salaries—

Senator SCULLION—I am not arguing about getting the right pay. What I am saying is that if in the Wadeye situation 31 per cent of the housing budget is not in building houses then that is a real concern.

Mr Tongue—I think you have been to Wadeye and seen the significant construction camp—I think it has over 100 workers; I stand to be corrected—that has been built to enable us to roll out the housing program. My understanding is that at the end of the program the construction will probably be made available to the community for visitor officer accommodation and maybe a bit of tourist accommodation. So, yes, it presents in numbers that we have not seen perhaps as an overhead, but actually at the end of the program there will be an asset for the community. We are repeating that across the community.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to ask about HOIL. Is it appropriate to ask that here?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I wanted to ask about it in relation to the ANAO report. I want to follow up on some of the issues it raised. I want to ask about the unspent funds that have been committed to the program. If I understand it correctly, they have been transferred into the urban Home Ownership Program to address the waiting list there.

Ms Gumley—That is correct. The HOIL capital funding for the loans was into HOP. That reflects the fact that land tenure from state and territory government reforms is taking a little longer, but those funds will actually sit there and be replenished back into homeownership on Indigenous land. So when we have demand stepping up there will be sufficient to meet it.

Senator SIEWERT—I would like to go to that issue of demand stepping up. I am not going to revisit some of the policy issues behind this. At the time the program was started there was some contention around whether it was just land tenure that was the issue and the barrier to homeownership. There were a whole range of other issues that were identified. I am just wondering whether you have had a rethink—in terms of the ANAO report and the issues that have come up through the program—about whether you still believe it is just land tenure that is the issue or whether you are addressing some of the other barriers that have been identified?

Ms Gumley—The government had a homeownership discussion paper out and submissions closed just before Christmas. We expect those submissions will be loaded shortly. It is fair to say that it is still considering all of the issues. Land tenure is a really important part of that, though. Certainly where land tenure has been resolved on Tiwi we have seen some demand there. It is true, though, that it is a matter of making sure that people have the opportunity to exercise a choice around homeownership but also that they understand the impact that will have: what is the difference between renting a home and owning a home and do people have the financial literacy to be able to manage that? There are a number of other components of the homeownership program, such as the money management aspect and the support that IBA provides, that go to that, but I think it would be reasonable to say that those things will come under continual review in looking at how effective they are and what they are doing.

Senator SIEWERT—If there are going to be changes or modifications to the program, what is the time line for those?

Ms Gumley—I think they would be considered in the context of the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy.

Senator SIEWERT—Can you remind me what the time line for that is?

Mr Tongue—Senator, it is a little bit up to the government and we are working broadly around midyear.

Senator SIEWERT—I am sorry I am quoting from a report, but I am pretty certain you will be familiar with the ANAO report. It states:

In hindsight, the program's performance targets have been overly ambitious. IBA and FaHCSIA were faced with the difficulty of establishing strategies to meet a target of 460 loans where there had been little opportunity to assess actual demand in the selected communities. FaHCSIA and IBA were unaware how many people living at selected HOIL sites were willing and able to purchase their own home ...

Then it goes on to talk about the legislative reform which we have just talked about. Are you planning to address that issue of assessing the level of demand at all?

Ms Gumley—There are a number of steps, I think, in order to take someone from a rental arrangement and move them into homeownership. Some of them actually are things that the governments need to be doing around land tenure, but there are also some practical things such as the survey and the subdividing of blocks. Certainly, having people on normalised tenancy arrangements is a really important step—a building block towards homeownership—because people are making regular provision for bills, managing their responsibilities and

taking care of the property. So that is an important transition towards homeownership. Building the capacity of the individuals and the local councils is certainly a really important part. And that money management component is in there.

I think it is probably fair to say that where land tenure has not been resolved we would not know the finite numbers of individuals who would want to take it up in all of the communities across Australia, but there are certainly a number of communities that we have been doing some work with, in particular in Queensland. The Queensland government has made some good headway on starting some of those land tenure reforms and the arrangements for subdividing et cetera. We have got some work going on which is to identify individuals, work with them over time, make sure we are working with the councils et cetera, making sure that the tenancy arrangements are in place and that people have a good understanding about what homeownership means.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to go back to this issue of where you have been going with land tenure but then I want to go on to demand and level of aspiration. You mention land tenure a lot, and it goes back to my original question of the other barriers to homeownership. What are you using as the evidence that land tenure is the main barrier? I am not going to go into quoting documents because then I will have to table them, but you will know the debate that was had and continues to be had that maintains that land tenure is not the only barrier to homeownership. There is a whole range of other barriers, including the fact of resale value for a start in communities, people's low family income, issues about poor credit histories, level of savings, high construction costs et cetera. So, again, I come back to what level of work you have done—and evidence rather than a belief—to determine that land tenure is the barrier to individual homeownership.

Mr Tongue—Senator, I recall a report by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute on Indigenous homeownership which I am happy to, on notice, dig up and provide.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be great.

Mr Tongue—My memory of that report around some of the evidence base here is about homeownership. The motivations of Indigenous Australians in some instances may not look like an urban Australian property investor negatively geared. The motivation appears to be much more about leaving something for family and for children, attachment to country or wanting to normalise in the sense of the rest of the wider community. So the motivations around homeownership might be slightly different. We are conscious of the question: in promoting homeownership, are we promoting people into an asset that might have a limited value? But limited value is in the eye of the beholder. I have done a lot of work with states and territories around valuation issues to do with what the value of the asset is. At one level it is what the taxpayer paid for the asset in the case of a public house that might be put into homeownership. At another level it is the strict valuation—what the true value of an asset is in a remote location. So we are working through all of those issues.

In terms of providing the asset base—the underlying land assets that drive homeownership in the rest of the economy—it is pretty critical to moving forward. If we cannot find a way to work with traditional owners and communities about how to do that in a way that respects attachment to country and community title but at the same time creates the basis for the

aspiration of the individual and the family, we will not get there. But we think we are on track now. We think we have found a way to explain to traditional communities what we are on about. We are working through that around the country but particularly in Queensland.

Dr Harmer—You are right. It is not the only barrier, but it is one of those cases where it is necessary but not sufficient. If you do not secure a lease which is available to be passed on and there is distinct and separate ownership, everything else falls apart. But in just securing the lease, if there is welfare income primarily and no market et cetera, there are other barriers. There is no doubt about that. But securing a lease is quite critical.

Ms Gumley—At the moment we are taking the submissions from the discussion paper that we have received and looking at those again. Certainly land tenure is a necessary precondition. But, as you say, there are many other components. So we are doing what we might call a pipeline analysis now—looking at all of the things along the way. There is the underlying tenure, so we need to get some long-term leasing around that. But there is also the subdivisions. There is also the capacity of the local councils and the capacity of the individuals. So at the moment we are working through those and identifying what works now and do we actually think that is sufficient. I suppose we are in that evidence-gathering stage, looking again at what people have told us with new information.

Senator SIEWERT—That leads me to the next question. During that work, are you looking at the level of aspiration in communities around homeownership and then housing? There are differences in aspiration for homeownership. I realise that many people do have that aspiration. But more often than not people say to me that it is about getting a roof over their heads, and that is the issue we have just been talking about.

Ms Gumley—Yes. So we are, as part of that, making certain that we have a good understanding on a community by community basis. It will not be a blanket arrangement; we will work with some targeted communities where the tenure is resolved. Their concept of homeownership might be, as you say, quite different from what we would have—rather than having a mortgage, they might be just after a good rental property where there is not the same overcrowding that they are currently facing. So we are going through that, and broadly that would be termed what the audit has identified in terms of making sure people have an informed choice. Do they actually understand the choices they are making? If it is that their preference would be for a rental property, then we need to look at how that might be addressed.

Senator SIEWERT—This is the last question, but I have a lot more that I will put on notice. I just wanted to ask about the 45 houses that were built that no-one wanted to buy and were transferred, I understand, to the NT government's—

Ms Gumley—That is correct, as social housing stock.

Senator SIEWERT—Of course, I am not disputing that that was a good outcome in terms of the 45 houses, but how was the decision made to build them?

Ms Gumley—Senator, those houses at Wudapuli and Nama came about—and I think I would refer to an earlier question on notice that the department has provided—because essentially there were a mix of a couple of circumstances going on at the time. There was a lot of overcrowding and violence in Wadeye. Wudapuli and Nama is an outstation where

traditional owners wanted to pursue homeownership and also wanted people to live there permanently. So the houses were built there, and they were built there to pursue a rent-buy model. As it eventuated, there were probably some mixed ideas around, 'Is it homeownership or is it social housing that I want?' My understanding is that not a lot of those houses at the moment—I have early data from May and June 2009, and I could get more data, from the Northern Territory—have permanent residents in them and that a significant number of people are actually living there only 50 per cent of the time or even less. I think it is the reality of the services being in Wadeye and the reality of living on an outstation during the wet season. Sometimes roads are cut; sometimes families need to be able to access health services. They might have health conditions that are not necessarily convenient to manage on an outstation. So, at the moment, they are managed as public housing stock.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Senator FURNER—It might help if I hand up a document, because I will be referring to it. It is a media document from the *National Indigenous Times* dated 3 February 2011. Firstly, the media document claims that Senator Scullion has stated that the government has only managed to build 38 houses a year. I think you have already dismissed that in earlier responses to both Senator Scullion and Senator Payne—do you have any further information to add to that particular response?

Ms Gumley—It is incorrect that we built 38 houses a year. Sixty-seven new houses were built in 2009-10 and 188 new houses have been delivered since the commencement of SIHIP.

Senator FURNER—Thank you. Also the document indicates—this is a quote directly from Senator Scullion:

It's no surprise that corners are being cut when half the funds set aside to construct and renovate houses in Wadeye are going towards administration and company costs ... When you include the budget allocation of \$18,000 for tea and coffee for the managers and supervisors it is no longer a mystery as to why only one-bedroom houses and limited maintenance is all that can be delivered to the residents of Wadeye.

I know Senator Scullion said initially that he knows his constituents well. Is that the case—that there are only one-bedroom homes being built in Wadeye?

Ms Gumley—No, it is not the case that one-bedroom homes are being built at Wadeye. In total, 105 houses will be built at Wadeye over a two-year period. Fifty two are three-bedroom houses, 52 are two-bedroom houses and one is a five-bedroom house, which is quarters for single men. Sixty-one houses have been completed to date, and it will increase the number of houses in Wadeye from 171 to 276.

Senator FURNER—What about this comment about the allocation of \$18,000 including tea and coffee? Did that also include drinking water? I imagine that, up in those parts of the north of the continent, which I have been in myself, drinking water would naturally be a provision that any reasonable company would provide to their workers. I make the point that it would be only reasonable to provide that. Is it unreasonable, in your view, that they provide those sorts of amenities to workers in those locations?

Ms Gumley—The \$18,000 cost does include drinking water. It is a very difficult tropical environment. It is important also to note that those workers are living on site so they will be consuming breakfast, lunch, dinner and usually two other snacks during the day.

Mr Tongue—So, Senator, the pen picture is of a mining-style camp with dongas and a sort of central workroom-cafeteria arrangement for workers. It is a remote location. Whilst on the map Wadeye looks close to Darwin, it is very hard to get to. A lot of the materials come in by barge, not by road. That is another thing that adds costs to the program—the logistics. People are living there and they have to be fed and they have to have water in that environment.

Senator FURNER—How do they get their supplies during the wet season, which we are in currently up there?

Mr Tongue—Mostly by barge. Their first truck might have got into Wadeye in April last year for the construction period over the dry. Once we are in the wet, it has to come in by barge, so those big bulka bags and the sorts of things you might see on TV that have materials in all help, of course, to drive up the cost.

Senator FURNER—What about the statement in the article indicating:

Minister Macklin's ongoing deception is dangerous ... a lack of transparency means Aboriginal people are not getting the houses they need in a timely fashion ...

Is that a correct statement to make in a media document like this?

Dr Harmer—I would rather not comment on that question. What I would repeat is that the commitment of the government to the housing funding for 10 years will deliver 750 houses and a number of refurbishments, and I cannot remember that number precisely. I would say that the SIHIP program had problems, as I mentioned before, in the early stages; there is no doubt about that. They were highlighted by the media, by Senator Scullion and by others. Minister Macklin and the government moved very quickly to address those and we are now on track to build the number of houses recommended. Minister Macklin, I can assure you, is constantly getting updated on the information. So the information she puts in the press is backed up by evidence that we provide to her from our dealings with the Northern Territory, given we are now embedded with them in this program.

Senator FURNER—So it is not a fair reflection on Minister Macklin. It is an observation that I am making that, nationally the—

Dr Harmer—I would not disagree with that.

CHAIR—Senator Furner, the officer could not respond to such a question.

Senator FURNER—That is fair enough. Certainly an observation I would make, though, is that the article appears to be riddled with inconsistencies and certainly misinformation. In particular, the headline is disgusting. It reads 'Macklin's housing deception'.

Senator SCULLION—It is only an observation, Senator.

Senator FURNER—I am making that point, Senator. It is reported that Minister Macklin is being deceptive, and that is purely an observation that should be made to the opposition at this time.

Senator ADAMS—I would like to ask some questions about the costs with the environmental standards. When I went out to Blackstone in Western Australia and had a look out there, I was horrified to see that, because of the changes with the environmental standards, they have now put gyprock on the internal walls, so we are really and truly back to the old problem. Can anyone comment on that?

Mr Tongue—I cannot comment directly. Certainly Western Australia has exceeded all of its construction targets and has been building in accordance with the Indigenous housing manual that we have circulated to the states and territories. I am happy to take on notice that particular issue and see what I can find. We certainly have to build these houses to a star rating—

Senator ADAMS—That is the problem. It had been changed, I gather, and they had substituted gyprock, which really is taking us right back to the problem with damage we had before.

Mr Tongue—We are building to a quite high energy efficiency standard consistent with stimulus programs—

Senator ADAMS—Can you take on notice the cost—this would be the case for all the houses—to implement those environmental standards and the changes that have happened? To me, that is taking us backwards and the damage problem is going to be far more severe.

Mr Tongue—I am happy to take that on notice and talk to our state colleagues.

CHAIR—Thank you very much to the officers who came for our segment on Indigenous housing. We will now move to the segment on employment and economic development.

[12.00 pm]

Senator PAYNE—Dr Harmer, there may be some issues which are employment related but are embedded in SIHIP, as it were. Is it possible to ask those now as well? It is about the targets and so on.

Dr Harmer—Yes, you can. It may mean a bit of to-ing and fro-ing with people at the table, but we will do our best.

Senator PAYNE—Given the limited time, I can at least place some of those on notice if it is easier for you and your officers. I wanted to pursue some questions about the payments for Indigenous workers on SIHIP and reports about them being paid on the BasicsCard. Is that a question I can ask now or would you rather have that put on notice?

Senator SIEWERT—Can I suggest we wait until the minister comes back because, if you recall, I asked questions around this in the chamber and the minister undertook to look into it for us. It might be an idea if we ask that when the minister comes back.

Senator PAYNE—He is right behind us so he is not very far away. I guess that gives you a heads-up, Dr Harmer.

Dr Harmer—Looking around my colleagues, I think it is probably one I need to take on notice.

Senator PAYNE—Notwithstanding what Senator Siewert said—the minister may know?

Dr Harmer—I am not seeing anyone who is nodding and looking helpful. It does not seem anyone knows the answer to that.

Senator PAYNE—I reference a recent report in the *Koori Mail* about so-called—I am using the *Koori Mail's* headline; they are the subbies, not us—exploitation of SIHIP workers. I know that Senator Scullion has some questions in this area as well. There is another report today, and the minister has previously made reference in media statements to the 20 per cent employment target of local Indigenous people for SIHIP. There is an indication that that has been exceeded. While I am happy to acknowledge that that is a very important accomplishment and achievement, we do not have a lot of detail around how that is counted, how that is assessed, how many people work where and for how long—whether they are 12-week, 26-week, 52-week placements and so on. We would like to pursue some issues in that area.

Dr Harmer—I suspect we will not be able to answer all of the elements of that here, but we will be able to give you some information. I should say while the officers are getting ready that it is one of the particularly pleasing aspects of the SIHIP and is a large break from what was the case before in terms of not only jobs but also training et cetera.

Ms Croft—As we have talked about in this forum previously, the Indigenous employees currently make up over 30 per cent of the SIHIP workforce. The types of work that they are currently engaged in include things such as work on the new refurbished and rebuilt houses but also a considerable amount of training, including things such as certificate I, II and III in construction, transport and logistics, brick and block laying, and carpentry. To date they have undertaken over 2,000 such courses or units of competency.

Senator PAYNE—How many people count towards 2,000 courses?

Ms Gumley—They are individual units, so within your certificate I, II or III there might be individual—

Senator PAYNE—How many individuals?

Ms Croft—We currently have 296 Indigenous employees out of a total workforce of 975 currently working on SIHIP.

Senator SCULLION—Of that total number that you have, does that include the administration and the civil engineering and those sorts of people I was talking about? Does it include the entire workforce?

Ms Croft—I believe that is correct.

Senator SCULLION—If it is not, perhaps you would be able to—

Dr Harmer—We will check that, but I think the numbers, from my memory, probably include all of the workforce.

Ms Croft—I will try to come back to you before the end of the session if that is not the case, but I believe it is. Of those 296 Indigenous employees, we currently have 83 Indigenous employees who are training for certificate II accreditation. We have another 21 who have already received their certificate II accreditation. We have a further 23 who are currently

training for certificate III accreditation and we have 25 who have already completed their certificate III.

Senator SCULLION—Are they actually conducting all this as a competency based assessment on-site, on building sites, or are they also attending the notional block where, as part of the certificate process, there is an academic stream to that?

Ms Gumley—Yes, there is. They would all meet the Australian Qualifications Framework requirement for those courses. There will be a mix. Depending on where they are working, some might be done in a regional centre; some may also be done on-site. But there would be a registered training organisation with them.

Ms Croft—Senator Payne, I think you also asked about the length of time. We also know that, over the life of SIHIP, of those Indigenous employees 109 have been retained for 26 weeks or more and 175 in total have worked for over 13 weeks.

Senator BOYCE—And you have not measured that any further, or you will be?

Ms Gumley—I think what that relates to is the normal milestones. Mr Griew might be able to comment on that, but they are the normal milestones that DEEWR uses for long-term and sustained outcomes. For SIHIP we would be looking at longer term retention, but I suppose what we use is the DEEWR milestones of 13 and 26 weeks to help us in comparing with—

Senator BOYCE—But how will you know if you have longer term retention if you are not measuring at, say, 52 weeks or whatever?

Ms Gumley—We would have that information with the Northern Territory government.

Dr Harmer—We would continually monitor that, yes.

Ms Gumley—So the Northern Territory government would have that information. It is part of the requirement and reporting arrangements with the alliances that they need to be able to meet their 20 per cent target, and they provide the details of that to the employment team within the Northern Territory government office in Darwin.

Senator Arbib—Senator, just in response to that, because it is an important point: it is not just how long they stay with that company in that area, because those companies are moving around. What it is providing is an opportunity for actual work and training in a community—skills development for Indigenous people who otherwise would not get it. And those skills then will help for future employment.

Senator BOYCE—I agree with you totally, Minister, but I am asking how we measure the sustainability of this training and work.

Senator Arbib—Yes, but more than likely it will not be with that company. Some will be with a different company.

Senator PAYNE—So the next question to Mr Griew is about what linkages there are between the engagement of these people who may be with the SIHIP program for 13 weeks or 26 weeks and where they progress next, whether they are using the qualifications they are achieving to remain in paid employment or whether they revert back to government support.

Mr Griew—The 13- and 26-week benchmarks are the benchmarks that are standard in employment service administration and therefore in administrative data. So the FaHCSIA

officials are absolutely right. That would be the benchmark against which one could assess. We would probably not have individual linked record data to track individual employers who have gone through a SIHIP employee to another employee. However, their support through Job Services or through particular IEP projects that might have been funded with either SIHIP employers or other employers might enable us to obtain for you some cohort-by-cohort analysis which we could take on notice, unless Ms Wood has anything to add now.

Ms Wood—No, we do not have any details of that. The employment services through Job Services Australia and the Indigenous Employment Program are working with SIHIP employers to assist people into employment. If they succeed in employment and then move on to other employment in the industry, they are probably unlikely to come back to a service. So there is probably no data from when they left that employment and moved into other employment. There might be some data if they do come back into unemployment before they move into employment.

Senator PAYNE—That is what we are interested to know. What we are interested to know is the sustainability of the experience that is being achieved through the SIHIP program. That is to say, if the program has had someone in place for 13 weeks or for 26 weeks and they have achieved the sorts of training outcomes that Ms Croft gave us in some detail, how sustainable is that? What proportion of the 175 who were there 13-plus weeks and the 109 who were there 26-plus plus have been able to sustain the use of those skills and qualifications to stay in paid employment? The answer has to be derived, I understand it, by your telling us how many you think have come back into your system.

Mr Griew—There is one other avenue we could explore which we would be happy to do because it would give an interesting insight into what we could do to help link training and employment pathways, and that would be to ask our state office to go out and speak to some of the providers who handled these clients before they went down this pathway and possibly through any funded projects we had to support their progress through training and employment. It is not based in administrative data, which is the distinction we have been making. But it would give an interesting insight to all of us, I suspect, into what the sustainable pathway is. It is an area that Mr Tongue and I talk about regularly—how we link participation programs like CDEP into training programs and if there is a pathway through to employment and then sustaining that employment. We would be happy to explore that. Perhaps you would like, if the minister is comfortable, a briefing prior to the next estimates or before then.

Senator PAYNE—If you would take that sort of material and question on notice, Mr Griew, that would be very helpful. I cannot speak for the whole committee, but there is nodding on this side, Dr Harmer. Certainly members of the committee would be very interested.

Dr Harmer—It would be an interesting exercise and I think that is a good offer.

Ms Gumley—On the ground, the CDEP providers, the Job Services Australia providers and our employment team from the SIHIP team are all connected so that we put together some brokered assistance. It is the same sort of assistance other employers can access, but it means that that is there on the ground. You might also be interested to note that there are 13

Indigenous organisations that are enterprises that are contracted to either Territory Alliance or New Future Alliance. I could take you through some examples of those in a couple of communities if you want me to.

Senator PAYNE—Is that done through—and I am not going to recall the acronym for the business agglomeration.

Ms Wood—Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you, Ms Wood. You were at the dinner; I knew you would remember the name. Is it done through that?

Ms Gumley—I could not determine whether they are part of that organisation. For instance, on Groote Eylandt it is GEBIE—Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island Enterprises. They have formed a civil and construction arm. In Wadeye, the Thamarrurr Development Corporation was already in existence and already had a tilt-up factory but significantly ramped up in their capacity. So they have made a very substantial increase in what they have. Thamarrurr employs 20 local people; 12 of those are trainees. On Groote Eylandt, GEBIE Civil and Construction has entered into a civil alliance and they are going to complete all of the rebuild and refurbishment works on the two islands. They will complete 50 rebuilds and 25 refurbishments over the next 12 months and they employ 12 workers. Thamarrurr has been employed to build 49 new houses.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you. My last question on this area—and Senator Scullion may have some more—is in terms of the numbers you are assessing for SIHIP as Indigenous employees and meeting those targets. Are you able to identify what proportion of those are local to the communities in which the construction is being done and what proportion have to be brought in, as it were?

Ms Gumley—I would have to check the level of detail with what is required in their contract with the Northern Territory government.

Senator PAYNE—Could you take that on notice, please?

Ms Gumley—Yes, certainly. I do have the definition of ‘hours’ and how that works with FTE, if you are interested.

Senator PAYNE—Yes, please.

Ms Gumley—For a worker employed between one and 10 hours it is regarded as 0.25 of an FTE; 11 to 26 hours is 0.5 of an FTE; 27 to 37 hours is 0.75 of a full-time equivalent; and 38 hours is regarded as a full-time equivalent. It is important to note that the percentage that the program is achieving is based on the full-time equivalent and not on the actual numbers. You might also note that the Northern Territory government advises that it has delivered more Indigenous employment than of any of their other major works programs, as far as they are aware, including the Alice to Darwin railway.

Senator PAYNE—Interesting. Dr Harmer may tell me that this is not a question for here, but how does that sit with the ANAO audit of the HOIL program which said that plans to use CDEP participants to provide training and employment opportunities were not implemented in the construction of those houses, effectively due to priority being given to constructing the houses in a timely manner?

Ms Gumley—I think that relates to the 25 houses that were constructed at the Wudapuli Nama outstation. Those houses were under contract from the Northern Territory government, I think, with BlueScope Steel. There may well have been pressures with the wet et cetera, so we are happy to go back and get some detail on that for you.

Senator PAYNE—There is a reference to that in the ANAO report on page 18.

Ms Gumley—I think the difference comes in that the construction of those 25 houses in that particular instance was a single large construction with a particular firm as opposed to the SIHIP program, which has actually got specific employment targets and an employment and community development team within the Northern Territory government that works with the Australian government team. We actively plug in the DEEWR programs and services to make sure they are brought together on the ground.

Senator PAYNE—But I assume the ideal outcome in any of these processes is to maximise Indigenous employment and training.

Ms Gumley—Absolutely.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you.

Senator SCULLION—I would like some clarification. Do you have any details on both levels—the 109 that are greater than 26 weeks and the 175 that are greater than 10 weeks? It may be useful in the future. Obviously, there were only 12 people who did not make it—that is very, very good and I have to congratulate you on that—but the reason for disengagement after that is obviously of importance. So could you take that on notice because I do not expect you to have those sorts of details at hand. Do you have some statistics on Aboriginal people who have been recruited from interstate or intrastate and who have been counted in that employment statistic? You have given us some for Thamarrurr. A breakdown would be useful.

Ms Gumley—Local Indigenous employment versus out-of-area employees?

Senator SCULLION—Yes, but interstate and intrastate would be useful too, because I know what is actually in the Territory.

Ms Gumley—I am not sure if the Northern Territory government collects that data but I will check that for you. Can I also make a correction for the record: I did say that the Northern Territory government delivered those 25 houses out at the Wudapuli Nama outstation. I have just been advised that it was actually a contract with Indigenous Business Australia, not the Northern Territory government.

Senator SIEWERT—Senator Scullion, if you have finished that line of questioning, can I go back to this issue about workers being paid on BasicsCard and the SIHIP and CDEP issues I raised in the Senate a while ago. Minister, as I understand it, there was an investigation going on to look into the issue and I am wondering—

CHAIR—Senator, the BasicsCard people have gone.

Senator SIEWERT—I know, but it relates to employment.

Mr Tongue—Senator, are you referring to Kalkarindji and the store voucher issue?

Senator SIEWERT—No. There are issues around Santa Teresa and I cannot remember the other communities. The issues there were about how much workers were being paid, whether

there were workers on CDEP working alongside workers who were getting paid differently and workers were not getting time sheets. There were a whole range of issues, including claims that people were working full time and receiving their wages on BasicsCard.

Mr Tongue—It is quite complex on the ground and I think one of the areas we could do better with communities is in explaining the interaction—so somebody on CDEP and, if you like, getting a pre-employment skill element through CDEP in SIHIP, or those people who are in SIHIP having got the pre-employment skills and being paid wages. I think one of the things that happens in communities is on the one hand you will have somebody on CDEP doing preskills but there could be somebody in the same community who has been through that and is being paid wages. I think one of the things we have not done well in community is explain the difference.

Senator SIEWERT—The issue that was raised with us was that workers were doing exactly the same thing and working the same hours but were getting paid vastly different amounts of money. There were a whole range of issues.

CHAIR—Senator Payne has the name.

Senator PAYNE—It is Amooinguna. It is a refurb program, I think.

Senator SIEWERT—There are two issues going on there. There are houses being refurbished and there is the old clinic. I understand there is a great deal of confusion and there are issues going on there.

Senator Arbib—I am advised that the claim was they were working for their Centrelink payment or on the BasicsCard and that is incorrect. That is what I have been advised.

Senator SIEWERT—So they were not getting paid on the BasicsCard?

Senator Arbib—That is what I am advised, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I have a range of quite detailed questions that I will put on notice because I appreciate it will take too long to follow that up here.

Senator PAYNE—I will not bother any more of the officers in relation to the SIHIP employment issues. There are a couple of issues around CDEP that I wanted to follow up from the last estimates. I had some questions at the time in relation to indexation and the impact that that would potentially have. I think we were told then that any reduction in CDEP funds due to a change in indexation would not have any effect on the actual delivery of the program as it was believed that delivery organisations would not feel any discernible impact. I know we also advised at the time that this was being monitored. Can I ask whether that monitoring has resulted in any feedback from any organisations about those funding arrangements and the indexation impact?

Mr Palmer—I do not think we have any concerns from providers in respect of the indexation arrangements.

Senator PAYNE—Have we asked any organisations for feedback specifically to ensure that the program is being run effectively.

Mr Palmer—I wrote to all service providers in December seeking feedback in respect of the direction of the program and giving them a wide opportunity to comment and no-one in response commented on that.

Senator PAYNE—We would regard that as a good thing?

Mr Palmer—I was a little disappointed. I was expecting more feedback than I got.

Senator PAYNE—More than none, I am not surprised. If you have not received any negative feedback and if it is apparently the case that this reduction has resulted in no practical impact on the program, can you indicate in what ways the program may have been run less efficiently previously and now is not and if it can continue to operate at the same level with these diminished funds?

Mr Palmer—My recollection was that there was a change in wage cost indexes that the department of finance uses to index the appropriation for the entire program. When it comes to the providers it becomes quite a small difference between the two variables. I suspect that both we and the providers know there is little scope to argue those indexation arrangements that are set for us.

Senator PAYNE—What do you regard as small in that case so I have a better idea of quantum?

Mr Palmer—My recollection is across the size of the program less than a per cent difference but I will check that. I will get back to you with the specific change.

Senator PAYNE—Can I just check, I was not in the room this morning but I did hear some discussion about breaches around the CDEP program and Centrelink issues. Were they discussed this morning with Senator Scullion and should I revisit the *Hansard* before I try to pursue questions?

Dr Harmer—They were in relation to the SEAM trials.

Senator PAYNE—I heard breaching and thought maybe it was that sort of breaching.

Senator Arbib—Centrelink have provided us with figures in terms of compliance that you may be interested in.

Senator PAYNE—Let us start with those.

Mr Griew—We have from Centrelink some updated data on compliance activity in the prescribed communities. That is six month data from 2010-11 up to 31 December compared to 12 month data from 2009-10. You have to bear in mind that one is a six-month and one is a 12-month period. Basically what that shows in those communities in the Northern Territory is a substantial increase in compliance activities and in the application rate and absolute number of penalties applied for non-compliance. This is a substantial increase in activation policy.

To take a couple of examples, connection penalties applied increased from the 12-month period 2009-10 of 347—an application rate of 18 per cent; in other words, 18 per cent of reports completed led to a penalty being applied—to 939 applications in the second six months of 2010, which is an application rate of 37 per cent.

Reconnection penalties increased from 23 over a year to 115 over six months, ‘no-show, no-pay’ penalties from 45 to 243, and comprehensive compliance assessments from nought to

19. So that is a substantial increase in the application of penalties, which is reflected therefore in an increase—nearly a doubling—in the rate of referrals. One of the pieces of feedback that we get from providers is that, to go to the effort and relationship effort of making a referral, they have been looking for a stronger rate of follow-through, and they are getting that.

Senator PAYNE—There has been some anecdotal reporting and discussion in the industry of providers being frustrated that Centrelink, in the majority of cases they are dealing with, are refusing to uphold participation reports for the more serious breaches. They are very frustrated that it does not help them in trying to do their job and that it runs the risk of basically regressing, of not achieving the goals that the government has set, when people are just exempted willy-nilly and not really required to perform.

Senator Arbib—I think we have had this discussion before, but the government is serious about compliance across the board—not just for Indigenous but also for non-Indigenous job seekers. We take it seriously. A great deal of work has taken place between the departments, particularly my department, DEEWR, and Centrelink, and there has been a great deal of focus on how to improve compliance and also information sharing. As Mr Griew has shown, there has been a big increase in compliance activities over the past six months, which is welcome.

Senator PAYNE—And I want to look at those numbers from the *Hansard* report.

Senator Arbib—No problem. We are happy to provide those—which is a very good result. The other thing that was discussed at the last Senate estimates was the desire to ensure that in remote areas Centrelink officials and job service providers would attend simultaneously so they could work together with job seekers, particularly in compliance but also in terms of pathways.

Senator PAYNE—How much is that happening?

Senator Arbib—My understanding is that there are nine sites where that is either being trialled or in the process of being trialled. It is an area in which we think there is great potential to improve service delivery.

Mr Griew—If I can add to what the minister just said, the feedback we get—and FaHCSIA gets the same, I understand—is that this is a significant frustration for providers. It is also for leaders in a number of communities. Mr Tongue and I were recently in a series of meetings with senior people from the Ngaanyatjarra country in Western Australia who were very concerned that if compliance activity were not strong people would be drifting away from activities and it would be bad for the community. So this is, as the minister says, a regular point of discussion between Centrelink and both our departments.

As well as these visits there has also been discussion about how our front-line staff in Centrelink and the service providers might work with communities to negotiate clear understandings to go on to people's employment pathway plans, which are their compliance obligations, which are simple and well understood community by community, for example. So this is the scenario where increasingly we are all on the same page but also actually finding ways to start to implement stronger measures.

Senator PAYNE—Is there any difference in how people are treated in the compliance regime between people on CDEP and those who move out of CDEP and onto an income support alternative?

Ms Wood—There are two groups of people on CDEP. There are people whose CDEP wages have been grandfathered. So they were on wages at the point of the reforms and they have continued on wages as long as they have stayed in the program. They are subject to the CDEP compliance regime, which is a no-work, no-pay policy. Our FaHCSIA colleagues can talk more about that, but that is a deduction of a day's pay for any day the participant does not attend. CDEP participants who joined after the reforms are on income support, so they are under the same income support compliance regime as other job seekers on income support.

Mr Palmer—If I could add to that by way of explanation, if someone who is on grandfathered wages does not attend for a day at work, their wages would be docked for that day on a no-work, no-pay basis. For someone who is on income support being supported by the CDEP, the CDEP provider would notify the Job Services Australia provider that the person did not participate and that would set in train the breaching arrangements or notification arrangements that DEEWR and Centrelink are responsible for.

Senator PAYNE—But they are not as onerous as the CDEP ones, are they?

Mr Griew—The category of CDEP participants who are still on CDEP wages have essentially an employment relationship. If they do not turn up, there is a day's pay docked. The intention—and increasingly we have seen the results—for the other CDEP participants, who are essentially JSA clients, should be the same as for other JSA clients.

Senator PAYNE—Is there a latent attractiveness then, if you are not inclined to work, to shift from CDEP per se to income support because you will be less harshly penalised if you do not comply?

Mr Griew—The intention of the work that we have done across the three agencies for a year now has been to—

Senator PAYNE—Move people off CDEP.

Mr Griew—remove any such anomaly, which would be entirely unintended.

Senator PAYNE—I think there are a few providers, from what I hear anecdotally, who are also expressing these concerns. I am not clear that that is as effective as we might hope.

Mr Griew—I think we have been quite frank that we have had some of the same feedback, which has led to very frank conversations between the three agencies to do the best we can. There is a difference between a wage relationship and an income support relationship. Of course, a part of the legislative infrastructure that surrounds the income support relationship involves also the protection of income support clients with specific vulnerabilities which are found in these communities. With that said, as I said, I think we are all on the same page in terms of the community and health-promoting benefits of the activity required through the participation requirements and, as I said, the communities and the service providers thereto. This is not easy work, but the results are showing that we are starting to get some traction.

Senator PAYNE—Thanks very much, Mr Griew. The chair has given me 1½ minutes' notice to finish. If I can just go to a couple of other questions, I want to follow up on

questions I asked on the last occasion about the numbers in categories. It was indicated to me by Ms Wood on the last occasion how many participants remained engaged in CDEP projects nationally as at the current date.

Mr Palmer—That would have been Ms Board on the last occasion.

Senator PAYNE—It was Ms Board; you are quite right.

Mr Palmer—On 22 February there were 10,467 participants in CDEP.

Senator SIEWERT—Can we just check how many of those were grandfathered?

Ms Essex—We would need to take that on notice, but we would have the information available.

Senator PAYNE—Can we also have an update on the number of previous CDEP participants who are now on the DSP? Do you have that information? We discussed that on the last occasion.

Ms Wood—I have the number of former CDEP participants who are now on income support.

Senator PAYNE—Who are now on income support, did you say?

Ms Wood—Yes. But I think FaHCSIA may be able to be specific about the numbers on DSP; no?

Mr Tongue—We would have to take that on notice.

Senator PAYNE—Would you please?

Mr Tongue—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—At the supplementary estimates, the department indicated there were 696 former CDEP participants who were not on income support, and 260 who were on income support but not registered. Is that being monitored now to ensure that people are not falling through any gap?

Ms Wood—Yes. We are monitoring all of the former CDEP participants, so I can update that information. Of the 1,964 people affected by the closure of CDEP, at 31 December 2010 621 were not on income support, which compares to the 696 we reported at the last estimates. The people in this category may have a number of reasons for not being on income support. They may not seek income support because of eligibility issues around partner earnings, parental income tests or other assets. Some of them may have some employment; it may not be long-term employment, but they might be in employment. And there might be a range of other reasons why people have not applied. Obviously, we can monitor people who are connected with the system, but it is not really possible to track people who are not.

Senator PAYNE—Who are not?

Mr Tongue—In receipt of a payment.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you. I was not sure where the end of that sentence was going.

Ms Wood—Sorry! What I can say, of the 621 who were not on income support, 38 were registered with Job Services Australia, so they are people who volunteered to participate in employment services.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you. I will take the Chair's admonition and finish there and put other questions on notice. Thank you and the officers for your assistance.

Senator FURNER—Certainly, the minister would be aware of this: recently there was a football game on the Gold Coast in that famous game of NRL. The game was with the All Stars. The game was badged by 'Learn. Earn. Legend!,' for a youth summit for Indigenous young people. I am wondering whether you could explain a bit about the program and, also, what kind of activities it supports and what it is designed to achieve, please?

Mr Griew—'Learn. Earn. Legend!' is the branding that has been given to a range of activities that engage the sporting codes in mentoring and other activities with Indigenous young people to promote the benefits of a transition to active engagement through the end of school, finish of school and into adulthood through training or working. This trades on, I guess, the high credibility of sports people from these particular codes in the Indigenous community and the high proportion of Indigenous role models in all of the sporting codes.

The event you referred to is a Rugby League event. There has been a lot of this activity in Queensland, based around their Former Origin Greats group and the Titans, but also a partnership between our department and Education Queensland that has seen football clubs across Queensland signing up year 12 Indigenous students—a cohort of about 2,000 of them I believe—into a kind of personalised mentoring, promoting the virtue of finishing school and engaging in something constructive post school—training or employment. Similarly, with the AFL, that is a longstanding engagement through Dreamtime at the G. There is a series of games now around that and the active engagement of a lot of the AFL clubs at a community level with Indigenous kids. That same set of activities is through a number of the other codes—cricket, football in other states and soccer. Of course, that strongly parallels our engagement through the Sporting Chance Program with the academies across Western Australia and the AFL-playing states.

Senator Arbib—It is important, and something that Senator Siewert talked about before in getting kids to school, getting them active in school and making them want to stay in school. We are working with the codes to actually do that. That is what it is targeted at: keeping kids in school—school retention. It is saying, 'Learn; go to school and get an education so you can earn and get a job and become a legend or a role model in your community.' We are seeing that some of the clubs like the Brisbane Broncos, the Titans and the Newcastle Knights are not only in the schools mentoring but also providing traineeships in their own organisations so that kids are encouraged to stay on and complete their schooling. They know that they are getting schooled and at the same time they are also getting vocational training and on-the-job training in those organisations.

One of the issues we have had with the program is that it has been very targeted at young men—if you are going through AFL or NRL—but of course we need to expand that out to as many young Indigenous women as possible. Recently, we went into a 'Learn. Earn. Legend!' partnership with Evonne Goolagong Cawley and Tennis Australia where we provided, I think,

\$350,000 and Tennis Australia matched us with \$350,000 for a 'Learn. Earn. Legend!' program.

I visited the program she had been running, and she had had remarkable success in terms of getting young Indigenous children into tennis and at the same time mentoring them weekly and fortnightly so that they stayed on at school. A huge number of them are going on to higher education, so now the government is partnering up on that and expanding it out for young women so they get access to the programs. We are also in discussions with Netball Australia because we want to make sure that young Indigenous women have the same opportunities as the young men. It is something that is working extremely well and it is getting a great deal of publicity. It is something we would like to develop further over the coming 12 months.

Mr Griew—It might be worth Ms Wood explaining how we structure the program.

Senator FURNER—Can I also get some indication of where they are being drawn from—what locations throughout Queensland?

Ms Wood—To take up Mr Griew's first point about how we structure the events under the 'Learn. Earn. Legend!' initiative, it is important that they are events which might attract young people because they are about their rugby league heroes, their AFL heroes or, hopefully in the future, their tennis heroes. But they are also structured elements that actually are about helping young people to set their own goals, to think about their careers and to broaden their horizons about what opportunities might be available to them.

For example, the Gold Coast event connected with the Indigenous All Stars game had a number of elements. It included an Indigenous youth leadership summit that was a partnership between DEEWR, the NRL and the Stronger Smarter Institute, which is headed by Chris Sarra. There were 119 participants in that who were students in year 9 to year 11. They were exposed to a range of guest presenters, facilitators and workshops that really talked about their own leadership. They also heard stories from some people who had achieved high levels in sport and in the arts. They were exposed to public and private sector employers and learnt how you might overcome some of your personal barriers that might seem insurmountable to get into employment, and they heard how some other people had done that.

It was also connected with an Indigenous employment and careers expo that brought together a range of employers who had a commitment to Indigenous employment and who, importantly, had vacancies. So there were opportunities for young people who were on the cusp of leaving school to be connected directly. That involved major employers in hospitality like the InterContinental Hotels Group, Accor, Woolworths, ANZ and some of the big public sector employers such as AFP and Defence. So there were a range of elements that helped reinforce the messages and gave people practical support.

For that particular one, students were drawn from beyond Queensland, so some students came from different parts of Queensland and also some students came from the Northern Territory. There is a strategy to use the relationships that some of the sporting codes already have with a range of schools, so we are drawing children and students in from a range of different parts of the country and trying to get some broader coverage there.

Senator FURNER—Thanks for that.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to quickly ask about that follow-up initiative I asked about last time—that is, the number of jobs in the Northern Territory. We had a discussion last time about the number of jobs that had been transitioned in the Northern Territory—full-time jobs. At the time you told me the number, which was a significant number, and I was then subsequently told that the Northern Territory had only guaranteed the money up to the end of the financial year. You undertook to check that. The reply that you gave me was still not clear, so I want to know if that money is there after the end of the financial year 2010-11.

Mr Ryan—The arrangements that were in place to transition from where CDEP was, funding a whole range of activities, finished up in June 2010 and the payments were made to the Northern Territory government over 2½ years for that period. The Northern Territory government provided a proposal to the Australian government for our consideration, which we have approved, to continue up to 500 jobs in shires. Their estimates are that approximately 250 of those jobs are for what you would probably call core shire services and approximately 250 are related to the support of housing, which the shires do on behalf of the Northern Territory government in remote Indigenous housing. So it is up to 500 jobs, with the Northern Territory government working with the shires as to which particular service those positions would deliver.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to be really clear about this. That funding is committed after the end of the financial year that ends in June this year?

Mr Ryan—There is funding available after the end of that financial year. That is absolutely right. So some of that funding is coming from the Northern Territory government in relation to the shire services and some of the funding is coming from the housing side, which draws its income from a mix of national partnership and remote Indigenous housing money from the Australian government but also from the rental payments which are used for housing maintenance as well.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. Thank you. I want to, if I can please, go on to the Australian Employment Covenant that we were talking about the last time. I understand from their website that at the moment the pledges are 27,061 jobs. That is as at 23 February. That is pledges, which is different from jobs. How many jobs have now eventuated from the AEC?

Mr Griew—As at the end of December 2010—so that is a slightly different time frame—

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, that is fine.

Mr Griew—Fourteen hundred and six placements are known to have been filled through the AEC, but it is certainly an undercount, because several of those will have come directly through the JSA system rather than through the AEC. But the number as at 31 December was 1,406.

Senator SIEWERT—When you say ‘undercount’—

Mr Griew—It is just that some of the employers who made a pledge through the covenant process would then have gone and filled those jobs through a standard employment service without necessarily either telling the AEC or the AEC then reporting that to us.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. For a breakdown for that, do we know how many of those have remained for the usual 13 and 26 weeks?

Mr Griew—Do we have 13-week—

Ms Wood—No, we do not have 13-week data.

Mr Griew—I have 26-week data, which is 282.

Senator SIEWERT—And you do not have the 13 weeks?

Mr Griew—I am sorry. We can get that for you.

Senator SIEWERT—Maybe you could take that on notice. Thank you. Of the 1,406, there is a small proportion that has stayed through 26 weeks. Are those jobs permanent full-time jobs or are some of those jobs temporary?

Mr Griew—Let me just clarify first that the 282 that are the six-month outcomes will, of course, only be relevant for those who started more than six months before—that is, the first half of last year.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, you are right. I take that on board.

Mr Griew—The nature of the job we will not necessarily know in terms of whether it is part time, permanent or a contract with an expiry date. That would not necessarily be recorded in our system.

Senator SIEWERT—Are the nature of the jobs such that the requirements for the jobs are a post-secondary, tertiary or some other qualification? Because I have noticed when I have been looking that a lot of those jobs seem to require a significant level of education. I am wondering whether you have looked at what qualifications are required for those jobs.

Ms Wood—Senator, we do not have a breakdown of the types of jobs and what kinds of qualification levels, but one thing I would say about the information on the AEC's website is that in terms of that mix it might be a little bit misleading because of the way that different employers use it. Some employers post specific jobs and they are the ones that have the specific skills. There are some other employers who basically just maintain a single vacancy. Some large employers who have a lot of entry level positions maintain a single vacancy on the list so there is always a job there if someone goes to it, but they do not list them all separately.

Senator Arbib—The other thing, Senator, is I am not sure how many jobs actually have life now in terms of offering. Last time I remember it was around maybe 2,500 approximately that were only available now. So they have got 27,000 commitments but only 2,500 available now. What happens with the commitments is they will go and see one of the corporations, they will say, 'Yes, we would like to commit 500 employees', but it is going to be over the next two, three, four, five years. So it is going to take a long period of time to fill the jobs and they come on and off the database, obviously depending on the time lines.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. Can I go to some funding?

Mr Palmer—If I could jump in, I do have an answer to the earlier question on CDEP numbers.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Mr Palmer—As of today there are 10,498 participants. Of that 5,822 are grandfathered and 4,676 are new participants.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. I want to ask some questions about funding for the AEC. Can you tell me how much in total the AEC has had in funding including affiliated organisations such as Leaping Joeys, Australian Children's Trust, GenerationOne et cetera? How much in total have those organisations received?

Ms Wood—Senator, the funding that we have provided to the AEC directly is in the order of \$5.2 million in total. That is made up of an initial establishment payment when we had an interim contract at the very beginning of \$725,000, an establishment payment when we moved on to the longer term contract of \$3.3 million and \$1.2 million in outcome payments for job commitments. At this point we have only paid for job commitments, we have not paid for any employment placements, and our funding agreement is only with the Australian Employment Covenant.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry?

Ms Wood—We have only provided funding to the Australian Employment Covenant not to GenerationOne.

Senator SIEWERT—Have any of the other programs that are affiliated with that been funded—received any funding from the government?

Ms Wood—No.

Senator Arbib—Hang on. We can only talk from our department, DEEWR.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, point taken. Thank you. You said you had not paid any money yet for—was that job placements?

Ms Wood—Job placements, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—How long have you got a contract with AEC for?

Ms Wood—Senator, we have a contract until 30 June 2011. There is a period beyond that where the 26-week outcomes can be claimed. I think the contract formally ends in March 2012.

Senator SIEWERT—The period between June and March is for picking up the 26 week—

Ms Wood—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Or, in fact, any—

Senator Arbib—Outcomes.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, any outcomes?

Ms Wood—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I know I am skating on thin ice, but is consideration being given to further negotiation of other contracts with AEC?

Ms Wood—That will be a matter for government as to whether they want to continue that relationship.

Senator SIEWERT—What is the assessment process that you will be carrying out as to whether it has met its contract obligations? Because this is a different process, it is not just about meeting its contract obligations, although of course that has to be assessed. But because this is a different way of doing things, have you got an evaluation process where you will be looking at that?

Mr Griew—We look at the data continuously. There is a clear set of results that are fairly transparent. It is a very high profile activity. The corporate sector engagement with the process—the number of significant corporates who have signed up and made these covenant commitments—is a very substantial part of what the AEC project was setting out to achieve. The contract is geared strongly around that, thus the payments that have been made to date. The consideration that the government will give and no doubt the AEC sponsors will give to the continuation of the project is fairly apparent to all of us.

Senator Arbib—Can I add to that as well. I think 27,000 commitments is a very good effort from corporate Australia. That is a very good start. It is going to take time. We are not going to get them filled between now and March next year. I need to think as the minister responsible, but the government and cabinet need to think, about what processes need to be put in place to fulfil the obligations to those corporations because they have gone out and they have made a commitment to employ large numbers of Indigenous people. We need to ensure we have in place processes to make that happen.

It is very hard to judge the success of the program just on the basis of the outcomes, because the number of corporations that are now involved in this cause is large. While many of them are in the covenant, a large number of them have been inspired because of the work of the covenant, and also Andrew Forrest, and are now working with different government programs or working in with not-for-profits to achieve Indigenous targets. Reconciliation Australia is one which has had a big boost over the past two or three years. Obviously a great deal of effort has been made. We will need to look at the ways to channel this into the future.

Senator SIEWERT—While not at all casting aspersions on any of the companies that have signed up, it is one thing to make pledges and it is another thing to then turn them into real jobs. I have seen examples before where companies will sign up to something and—as I said, I am not casting aspersions on any of the companies that have signed up now—not carry through on their commitments. It looks good to be able to do it. That is why I am asking about evaluation and what processes are in place to make sure that they carry through with their pledges.

Senator Arbib—All the companies I have dealt with that have pledged positions are upholding their commitments but, again, it is going to take years to fill the positions because we try to work on covenant action plans where we set out what is going to be the target over a period. No company is saying, ‘We will take 500 or 100 employees right now.’ They are saying that they will do it over two years, three years, four years or five years because that is the only way to achieve it. As you know, you need a great deal of pre-employment training but at the same time you need training on the job and then mentoring, counselling and guidance. It is a big task.

Senator SIEWERT—In terms of training in the JSA process, do you have any numbers on how many of the people who are being employed are then getting their training through JSA?

Ms Wood—We have looked at that data from time to time and we could go back and have another look at it. It relies on the JSA flagging that it is an AEC job when they put their information in the system and, to be honest, that has been a bit patchy. So we have some information, but we think it undercounts the connection between JSA and the people getting jobs through the AEC.

Mr Griew—It is worth stressing that we have very substantial flow-through of Indigenous clients through JSAs who are getting job placements. A very substantial number of those are hooked into training, either prevocational or vocational. In addition to that, the IEP is aimed specifically at filling the gaps where they exist. So large employers, some I know are associated with the AEC, I know are involved in quite substantial projects in order to boost their Indigenous employment. Linfox is one. I just happened to be in a meeting recently where they were trying to work out exactly what they would do to their training programs and their in-house mentoring programs to make good employing a substantial number of Indigenous people—dozens—in different sites. We were able to help broker their relationship with IEP providers and through IEP, for example.

The question about whether all of this activity that flows from the AEC process is then taken back to the AEC or is just part of the up-swell of corporate engagement in these programs is a bit hard to answer, but it is significant—57,000 JSA Indigenous job placements until the end of last year. It is an unanswerable question exactly how many of those are a result of the AEC or a result of the work of the JSAs or, in a significant number of cases, the partnership of a large JSA with a large corporate.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. That ends the section on employment and economic development. We will now take a break then we will come back for the last session on health issues.

Dr Harmer—As we close off, could I just make one point. Senator Scullion read from a document earlier which I have not got yet.

CHAIR—Is that the Wadey document, Dr Harmer?

Dr Harmer—Yes. Ms Gumley has just advised me that the 800,000 figure that Senator Scullion mentioned was a two-year figure.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 1.07 pm to 2.03 pm

CHAIR—We will reconvene. We have the minister, the secretary and some senators, and that is enough to get going. We are going into the discussion on health issues. Thank you very much to the officers from Health. Senator Furner, you have a question?

Senator FURNER—Yes, I do have just a couple. This is related to a GP superclinic in the seat of Dickson, where they have employed an Indigenous registered nurse by the name of Annette Houston. It appears that she has generated a lot of interest and gained a lot of support in the community, with a number of clients now regularly visiting the super clinic—some 300, it appears. In comparison to Indigenous health workers, as an example of what is happening

around the countryside, are there similar comparisons, whether they be registered nurses or people in the health profession, that are engaging Indigenous people to be employed in that profession?

Ms Powell—I am not sure if this is going to the heart of your question, but we fund a range of different types of health workers—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outreach workers, practice managers, registered nurses, allied health workers, and smoking support officers—through both Aboriginal medical services and other GP arrangements through divisions of general practice through the Indigenous chronic disease package. We also have a large number of deliverers of primary health care that would engage both Aboriginal health workers and staff who specialise in providing services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Senator FURNER—Do you have a breakdown in respect of the areas, or the actual profession, in terms of those Indigenous employees?

Ms Powell—For Indigenous employees?

Senator FURNER—That is correct.

Ms Powell—I do not think we have data on whether or not the employees are Indigenous, other than for Aboriginal health workers. I can give you details of the additional positions that have been funded under the Indigenous chronic disease package.

Senator FURNER—Okay.

Ms Powell—We have funded 268 positions so far through that package. We currently have on the ground 127.5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders outreach workers, so obviously there is some part-time arrangements going on there, 95 Indigenous project officers, 41 healthy lifestyle workers, 21 tobacco action workers, 20 tobacco action coordinators, 12 practice managers and 14 additional health professionals of other types.

Senator FURNER—What are the tobacco action workers and those people in that field? What is their primary role?

Ms Powell—I might just allow my colleagues who work on smoking to answer that.

Ms Harman—The smoking tobacco action workers are part of a multidisciplinary team that are specifically being put in place under the tackling smoking and healthy lifestyle working measures of the Closing the Gap item. We have a national smoking workforce that we are rolling out currently, led by Dr Tom Calma, who is the national coordinator for tackling Indigenous smoking. Dr Calma will be leading a team that we are rolling out now. There will be regional coordinators, healthy lifestyle workers and tobacco action workers as part of this multidisciplinary team that I was talking about earlier. We are actually rolling that workforce out now in the first 20 regions of the 57 regions that have been identified for the measure. The tobacco action workers, specifically, will be doing things like working directly with communities through health services to tackle smoking, to educate people about the harms of smoking and to help them quit. They will also be rolling out local communication type activities and community awareness type activities. Basically they are people on the ground that will help people to quit, and stop them from taking up smoking in the first place.

Senator FURNER—What sort of training and qualifications do they receive to enable them to do that?

Ms Harman—In terms of the regional tobacco coordinators, they are required to have, or be working towards a certificate for qualification in a relevant discipline, including tobacco control and smoking cessation units. Some of the regional coordinators will have higher qualifications than those, but that is the minimum standard. The tobacco action workers are required to have, or be working towards, a certificate III qualification in a relevant discipline, including tobacco control or smoking cessation. We are also doing some national induction training, which has already started. The first of those happened in Canberra in December last year.

Senator SIEWERT—Can we start on the issue of dialysis? I understand the report into the delivery of treatment for kidney disease among Indigenous people in remote communities in Central Australia has been completed?

Ms Powell—That is not quite correct. We have been working closely with the consultants hoping to finalise the report. We have received draft reports, but they are not complete. We have been working closely, including meeting with the George Institute for Global Health this week, to talk about things that they need to do in order to finalise the report so that it fully addresses the terms of reference.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you have an expectation about when that will be available?

Ms Powell—The George Institute for Global Health will be providing us on Monday with a time frame for how they are going to address all of the outstanding matters in the report, so we will have a firm idea after that.

Senator SIEWERT—I know the answer I am going to get, but I have to ask: is there an expectation that that will be released publicly?

Ms Powell—That would be the call of the minister, but it is a report that has been done in close consultation with communities. Many people have seen drafts of the report. It has been done closely with members of the joint steering committee from the three states. I imagine the other ministers will also want to have a view on that.

Senator SIEWERT—Presumably the final report will be circulated to each of the stakeholder states?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—What is the process from there? Have you thought of what the process is from there to start considering the recommendations, and hopefully implementing the recommendations?

Ms Powell—The report covers a very broad range of issues, ranging from social issues to do with service provision and accommodation to quite technical ones about what the projected demands are, and things like that. A lot of those issues are already being discussed. There is a lot of activity going on looking at those already. For example, we see lots of dialysis patients now being treated in Alice Springs whereas previously they were going to Adelaide and Port Augusta. All of the states are very aware that they will need to be responding to the recommendations of the report and are turning their heads to that.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand from some feedback I have had from community members, from the stakeholder discussions et cetera that there is a strong preference for Alice Springs to be a hub for dialysis.

Ms Powell—The report has a whole lot of recommendations around modalities and what services should ideally be located in what locations. That is actually one of the areas that they are still tightening up. They will be providing different models which will hopefully enable us to make better and more informed judgements about what kind of dialysis services should be provided where, under what circumstances, and when they should not be provided in certain places.

Senator SIEWERT—I will obviously be asking more questions about that in May. Hopefully the report will have been released by then. I do still want to talk about dialysis in Alice Springs, though. I understand the lodge in Alice Springs is now open—the new 35-bed facility?

Ms Powell—The Bath Street lodge?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Ms Powell—It was about to be opened a few weeks ago. I cannot confirm if it is open, but that sounds feasible.

Mr Learmonth—Ms Powell and I actually visited that facility a few weeks ago, and it seemed complete to us. It seemed ready to open, so I would not be surprised if it had.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you double-check that for me?

Mr Learmonth—Certainly.

Senator SIEWERT—Just let me know if it is, and when it did open. I understand there are 35 new beds. Are these solely for the use of renal patients or is it accommodation for other uses as well?

Ms Powell—All of the rooms that I saw had specific dialysis facilities in the room. Renal dialysis patients are a focus of it. I cannot be sure if they are excluding anyone else. It certainly is a facility that has been built for those on dialysis. It is being run by the Northern Territory government and they would be better placed to provide that information, but I can certainly follow up.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be appreciated. Is there any further funding that the Australian government has allocated towards accommodation for dialysis patients in Alice Springs?

Ms Powell—There is none that I am aware of, but that is normally funded by state governments. I am pretty sure the Bath Street lodge to which you referred was funded by the Commonwealth. We provided the funding to the Northern Territory government, but generally accommodation and all services associated with dialysis are funded by state governments.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that, and we have had this discussion many times. I have also had it with the government in the chamber. There is a high degree of homelessness of dialysis patients in Alice Springs. Is that therefore being considered as part of the study?

Ms Powell—Absolutely the study is looking at that. It is quantifying that. It provides detailed information on what the need is for accommodation, not just for dialysis patients but for their families and carers. It is quantifying it, and that is what will enable states to better plan for those accommodation requirements into the future.

Senator SIEWERT—I just want to go back and clarify something. As I understand it, the report is doing some of the medium-term and long-term needs. That is correct, is it not?

Ms Powell—That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—So it will be addressing how you deal with some of the medium-term issues: for example, the increasing numbers of people requiring dialysis between now and—what is being called medium term?

Ms Powell—I cannot remember off the top of my head. I think it might be five- and 10-year projections, but I am sorry; I am not positive about that answer.

Senator SIEWERT—My other questions were to do with the report if it had been released, but you obviously cannot answer them if the report has not been released.

Senator FURNER—I have just one question, dealing with organ donations. Do you have any details of any strategies of ATSI communities in respect to organ donors at all?

Ms Powell—I do not think we do. I do know that those on dialysis, or with renal disease, have a much lower rate of organ donation. They have a lower success rate for recipients, but I do not think we have any particular programs. The agency DonateLife may have some.

Senator FURNER—They may have some?

Ms Powell—I am not aware of it.

Senator FURNER—Okay, thank you.

CHAIR—We have finished dialysis and we will move to smoking.

Senator SCULLION—In 2008, the rate of smoking for Indigenous Australians was 44.8 per cent. At the time of delivering the most recent report, *Closing the gap—Prime Minister's report 2010*, what was the current smoking rate of Indigenous Australians?

Ms Harman—The figure I have is the data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2008. It has shown an improvement in smoking rates for Indigenous Australians down from 51 per cent in 2002 to 47 per cent in 2008. Obviously that is still alarmingly high. We know that smoking prevalence is higher in remote areas.

Senator SCULLION—I was informed that the rate of smoking was actually 44.8 per cent, but you say that is higher?

Ms Harman—The figure I have is 47 per cent.

Senator SCULLION—I am sure that is more accurate than mine. What are the target benchmarks the government is proposing to use to measure the progress, success or otherwise—and over what time frames?

Ms Harman—That is enshrined in the National Healthcare Agreement with states and territories. The goal is to reduce the national daily smoking rate for the general population to

10 per cent by 2018, and halve the smoking rate for Indigenous Australians by that date as well.

Senator SCULLION—I understood that was the process, but could you indicate the target benchmarks that were discussed earlier? We have 2018, but we do not want to get to 2018 and say, ‘Oops.’ We want to know in 2012 that our target at 2012 is a reduction to a certain point. I understood that the *Closing the gap* report in that regard was going to try to target. Have you already established a target between now and 2018—a series of targets which you believe we can meet?

Ms Harman—I do not believe that there are targets set for that intervening period. I can take that on notice and double check though.

Senator SCULLION—I would appreciate that. Obviously the point behind the question, as for many of these questions, is that it is good to have a trend over a period of time. We have already established interim targets, and the government has agreed they are very important in these matters. Of the 20 regions that you have already funded through the Indigenous Tobacco Control Initiative, how many have actually had appointed a regional tobacco coordinator and tobacco action workers?

Ms Harman—I do not have that information in my brief. I am happy to take that on notice. I have the aggregate figures and the regions in which they are being placed.

Senator SCULLION—All right. Also, we asked this at the previous estimates and you took it on notice, but I am looking for an update. Since Dr Calma was appointed as national coordinator, how many of the 57 regional tobacco coordinators and up to 171 tobacco action workers have been employed? If you have the answer now, I am happy to take it, but I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Ms Harman—I do. The organisations that are funded to recruit these action workers have recruitment processes ongoing. To date, and I believe this is a figure from 23 February, they have recruited 12 regional tobacco coordinators, 12 tobacco action workers and 22 healthy lifestyle workers, who are part of that multidisciplinary team that I was talking about earlier. These have actually been engaged. We may have the answer to that other question; we will just see if we can find the right information.

Senator SCULLION—Again, one would have thought that this was a central element of achieving the reduction to 10 per cent by 2018. If we have a target of 57 regional tobacco coordinators, and we have 12, do you see that as being on track? Are you having some difficulty in recruiting?

Ms Harman—I believe there have been some areas where there has been difficulty recruiting, but that is an ongoing recruitment process. I know that the organisations that we funded are very actively recruiting. I would say that is a reasonable achievement at this point. They started recruiting towards the end of last year.

Senator SCULLION—Would one of the requirements be that they were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

Ms Harman—I would have to take that on notice.

Senator SCULLION—I am assuming that a requirement would be that they are non-smokers?

Ms Harman—What I can say around that is the organisations that we have funded are required to introduce smoke-free workplace policies and actually implement them by 30 June this year.

Senator SCULLION—I was just looking for the answer as to perhaps why it was difficult to recruit in a community where 47 per cent of them smoke cigarettes. We are trying to get a non-smoker, and I thought that might be part of the issue. Have you got anything else you can add to that, as to why we seem to have such low numbers?

Ms Harman—Again, I believe those recruitment processes are actively ongoing. Obviously the organisations that we fund are actually running those processes so I cannot really comment in detail at this stage. However, I can say that they are actively doing that and, as I said, we have already started to train the workers that are on board. There was a very successful workshop held in Canberra last December. They are actually going out into the field now, so that is good.

Ms Killen—If you want the information on recruitment by region, I have it by organisation. It takes me through the entire workforce.

Senator SCULLION—Perhaps we could just take that on notice.

Ms Killen—That might be an easier and more efficient process.

Senator SCULLION—I acknowledge your comment in regard to the fact that these are other people who are organising this for you. However, it is still your position that the positions will all be filled by 2012-13, so I am assuming that is about 30 June 2013. That is a line in the sand. Given that they are not high numbers, do you have a plan to ensure that those positions are filled by that date?

Ms Harman—We have contracts in place with the funded organisations that require them to meet certain obligations, and our job is to closely monitor those contracts to ensure they are on track. I do not have any further detail on that at the moment. I can provide that on notice.

Senator SCULLION—If you could, I would appreciate that. Perhaps it would be useful to put you on notice that at the next set of estimates I will be asking the same question, just so we can see how you are tracking.

Ms Harman—Of course. Thank you.

Senator SCULLION—Are you aware of the results of the developmental research for social marketing activities to prevent smoking undertaken by Ipsos-Eureka Social Research Institute and Winangali Pty Ltd in 2009? If you do not know what I am talking about, I can try to pronounce it differently.

Ms Palmer—We are just finding the relevant section of our folder. We have done quite a large and very comprehensive piece of research with Ipsos-Winangali.

Senator SCULLION—I was nowhere near the pronunciation!

Ms Palmer—What specifically would you like to know?

Senator SCULLION—Could you tell me what the cost of the research was?

Ms Palmer—Sure. Sorry, it is just taking me a while.

Senator SCULLION—It is okay. I know there must be a number, and I am sure that somebody must be able to provide it shortly. Perhaps you would be better prepared to provide me in a general sense what the results of that research were and how you intend to implement some of those results?

Ms Palmer—Certainly. We did quite a broad piece of research around a number of our programs in the Indigenous chronic disease package. The research involved a great number of focus groups in remote, regional and urban locations to make sure that we covered the Indigenous population appropriately. The research was to ensure that we understood how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people understood chronic disease, understood their current use of exercise and activity, and how they engaged with health services.

It also looked at what kinds of barriers they had when engaging with health services, what kinds of barriers they felt either attitudinally, operationally or logistically around accessing more healthy exercise or nutrition in their location. It was a piece of developmental research covering off all of the activity that we could do to support reducing the amount of smoking in the Indigenous populations, but also to support how we roll out local community campaigns, which is a significant measure as part of our chronic disease package.

We also have an Indigenous program in communication as part of our Measure Up campaign generally across the country, and for Indigenous people that was undertaken in the last few years under the banner of Tomorrow People. In this research, we were also talking to indigenous people about understanding those materials and seeing how they had played out in the community.

That material came together in quite a large report which we have released on our website. We will be promulgating it across Indigenous researchers, the health community, other people who work across state and territories, and in the industry in this area to ensure that communication developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is completely based on what is their understanding, what are their needs and what are their preferences. Then we can build communication campaigns that will be as successful as we can possibly make them.

Senator SCULLION—I am not sure if you can answer some of the questions, but—

Ms Palmer—I am sorry, yes, we will find the number for you.

Senator SCULLION—I understand that under the Indigenous chronic disease package you mentioned funding for the health workers under the tackling smoking initiatives. I am not sure if it was actually mentioned before because I had three answers, not the two that I required. How many of the 42 positions have been funded and trained this year as per the intergovernmental agreement target?

Ms Harman—Can I just clarify: is this healthy lifestyle workers or tobacco action workers?

Senator SCULLION—Under the chronic disease package I understood we had health workers under the tackling initiatives. There were supposed to be 42 positions, I understand,

as part of an intergovernmental agreement; that was the target. Now, because there is some currency around those three items, I am not sure if you can assist me there.

Ms Powell—The figures that I gave earlier on—for example, 41 healthy lifestyle workers—are the ones that are actually trained and on the ground.

Senator SCULLION—So 41 out of the 42 positions have been funded?

Ms Harman—If I can just clarify: we are rolling these teams out incrementally. In the first 12 months, in the first 20 regions plus the ACT, so that is 20 plus one, we are actually looking for the teams to initially have four members: one regional tobacco coordinator, one tobacco action worker and two healthy lifestyle workers. Under the current contract, when we talk about the numbers that are recruited, there are 21 tobacco action workers, 20 regional tobacco coordinators and 41 healthy lifestyle workers that are already on the ground, employed.

Ms Powell—I have to correct a previous answer because I have been misreading my table. In fact, I gave you incorrect numbers before; I was providing the numbers that were funded. The numbers that are actually on the ground, if I may do that again with my apologies—

Senator SCULLION—Yes, indeed, certainly.

Ms Powell—For the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outreach workers there are 95.6 people actually working. We are funded for: 95 Indigenous health project officers, of which we have 90.6 people on the ground; 41 healthy lifestyle workers, of which 22 are recruited,— I think that is the number I just most recently misled you on; 21 tobacco action workers, of which we have 12 on the ground, as Ms Harman said; 20 tobacco action coordinators with 12 recruited; 19 practice managers, of which 17 have started; and 14 other health professionals, of which eight are on the ground. My apologies for that.

Senator SCULLION—Let us say you have 12 that have been recruited and 20 are on the ground, then I am assuming that 20 are in the system, but there is some training involved?

Ms Powell—It is a bit of a mix. In the previous figures we had some higher ones. Some people have actually started, been doing the job for some time and have moved on. There is a little bit of fluidity but, broadly, organisations are still recruiting.

Senator SIEWERT—Could we see that table that you have been reading from?

Ms Powell—It is quite messy. I would prefer to provide you the information.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, I do not want that one necessarily, but the table would be good.

Ms Powell—That would be fine.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay, thank you.

Ms Palmer—I do have some of that information about that contract if you wish me to provide it. I have found some more, if you would like it.

Senator SCULLION—If you could provide that on notice, that would be fine. What are the results of the evaluations via the framework of the Indigenous chronic disease package of the COAG tackling smoking measure? Have there been any evaluations, and if there have not been any, when will they begin?

Ms Powell—We have agreed on a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Indigenous chronic disease package as a whole. That has been finalised, and we are about to start a tender to actually do the monitoring and evaluation work.

Ms Killen—If I could add a little bit to that, there are a number of elements that are part of the monitoring and evaluation. The first step was to develop a framework that acts as a plan for the monitoring and evaluation over the four years of the funding. That has been finalised and is up on our website. In addition, we have a sentinel sites program, which is providing us with place based monitoring and evaluation across 24 sites; eight of them are in place, and we will have 24 of them established by the end of this financial year.

Also, as Ms Powell noted, there is currently a tender process in place to appoint a national evaluator who will do annual reports, and then the final evaluation in year 4. However, as well as that, because of the significance of the smoking measure, there is a specific evaluation that is being conducted for smoking that links with the broader evaluation of the package. If you want more information about that, Ms Harman will provide that.

Senator SCULLION—You say it is done annually; have you got an appreciation of when you would expect the first assessment to be completed?

Ms Killen—For the package as a whole?

Senator SCULLION—Yes, the package.

Ms Killen—The sentinel sites report will give the most frequent understanding of that. The sentinel sites are being managed by the Menzies School of Health Research, and they are providing six monthly reports. We have just received the first of those six monthly reports, and we are looking at it in the department. We have only just got it. In this first report there was not as much data and information as we will have for future reports. However, it looks like it will be providing us with really interesting information about barriers and enablers, innovation, and things that are actually happening on the ground to use as a continuous quality tool, in a sense, and improve the ongoing implementation of the package.

Senator SCULLION—I think the approach in terms of trying to find out how we actually communicate with a particular demographic will hopefully inform us in a number of other ways as well. In terms of communication, I think it is very useful. In that vein, have all state's and territories' Quitline services received funding to provide the more culturally sensitive service?

Ms Harman—We have currently got all state and territories, with the exception of Tasmania with whom we are currently finalising negotiations, under contract to do that work.

Senator SCULLION—Do you have a bit of an understanding and a scope of what ways this funding is going to be utilised in actually providing a better service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in that regard?

Ms Harman—I might have to take that on notice. At a high level they will be working to ensure that the materials, and the way in which Quitline actually assists Indigenous people, are culturally sensitive. That will be reviewing those materials and updating them appropriately.

Senator SCULLION—I would have assumed that the research you have been speaking of would inform that report. The research you have had done—the unpronounceable research we were speaking of earlier—that talks about communication and how we deal with those sorts of issues, I am assuming would be something that would inform the training of Quitline services.

Ms Harman—There are a number of activities that are going on that we will take a summative look at, and make sure that all those learnings are brought together.

Senator SCULLION—In the answer to that question on notice, could you deal with some of the motives, and what your intention was?

Ms Harman—Sure.

Senator SCULLION—Just one quick last one. Has the \$100,000 per region from the regional campaign smoking fund been dispersed to all 57 regions for 2010-11?

Ms Harman—I believe that business cases are being submitted as part of the regional action plans of the regional tobacco action workers. They will be putting in business cases to Dr Calma, who is the national coordinator. Dr Calma will be assessing those, and then funding will flow from that.

Senator SCULLION—I can take from your answer that there has not been any of that \$100,000 allocation to any of the 57 regions? If you have more time to make sure that—

Ms Harman—I will just check with my colleague and come back to you on that one.

Senator SCULLION—I also have a supplementary question; can we just have a list of the ones that have been provided that funding?

Ms Harman—We will see if we can come back to you in session. If not, we will take that on notice.

CHAIR—We will go to another issue. I thought we might go to Senators Boyce and Adams on foetal alcohol syndrome. You may have come in on that as well.

Senator BOYCE—I have some questions regarding foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, FASD. Before I start could I just get some sense of the linkages. I know foetal alcohol spectrum disorder is considered to be a health issue, not a disability issue, but what are the linkages between Health and FaHCSIA around the issue of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder?

Ms Powell—We work with FaHCSIA on a range of things to do with alcohol and substance abuse in general. We are jointly funding a very large project in Fitzroy Crossing.

Senator BOYCE—That was going to be my next series of questions.

Ms Powell—We are funding that together, both contributing and being involved in the management and outcomes.

Senator BOYCE—Whilst alcohol and other drug abuse is a cause, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder is in itself a health and disability issue. I am not so much asking what you are doing about alcohol and other drugs, but what you are doing about foetal alcohol spectrum disorder? What activities other than this trial are there in the Indigenous area?

Ms Harman—My colleague Simon Cotterell gave the committee an update back in June, but I have some further progress that I can report back to the committee. In terms of the Marulu Lililwan project in the Kimberley, the Department of Health and Ageing and FaHCSIA are providing joint funding, as you said, of \$1.05 million to the George Institute. That is a community driven project due for completion by 30 June 2013, and that is attempting to measure the prevalence of FASD in the Fitzroy Crossing valley, and is expected to identify screening, diagnosis and management strategies.

Senator BOYCE—Have there been any preliminary reports out of that?

Ms Harman—Not that I am aware of, but we are hoping that those will then be transferable, both nationally, and possibly regionally as well. In terms of prevention, we have developed and disseminated brochures and posters for pregnant women advising them of the 2009 NHMRC alcohol guidelines. They are available on the alcohol.gov.au website. We are also providing funding of \$768,852 over two years to the National Drug Research Institute for the National Indigenous FASD Resource Project.

Senator BOYCE—Resources being information?

Ms Harman—Exactly, communication materials that basically will help health professionals in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare settings to address these very issues. They are obviously going to be national materials, and they will provide a platform for us to develop more targeted campaign communication materials for specific at-risk communities. We are hoping that those materials will be available in December this year. There is some good progress there.

We are also providing \$33,000 to the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute for them to examine and help the development of screening tools for alcohol use during pregnancy. The final report from that project is actually available on the alcohol.gov.au website.

Senator BOYCE—Whilst I would like to get the information about prevention, I am more interested in people who actually have foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. What is being done to assist people who have the disorder?

Ms Harman—That is a more complicated question, and one that will involve FaHCSIA as well as Health, because as you are aware, it is broader than just a health treatment issue. There are many manifestations for this—

Senator BOYCE—Perhaps what I should be doing is putting that question on notice then, should I, to ask for a succinct response across the board?

Dr Harmer—I think that would be best, because the people from FaHCSIA who would link with the Health people on this are not here. They would have been here yesterday. I think we will do that jointly on notice.

Ms Harman—Senator, there may be another project that you might be interested in with respect to the question, which is about diagnosis, which is obviously one of the things that we need.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, I would be very interested in that one.

Ms Harman—We have engaged the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, who are working on behalf of the University of Sydney and the Australian FASD collaboration to develop a diagnostic instrument. That is obviously something that is going to be very important to clinicians, to help them diagnose babies and children affected by FASD. That project is due to be completed by 30 June this year.

Senator BOYCE—June 30 this year, that sounds good. It has been put to me that diagnosing FASD is hard enough any old time, but sometimes even more difficult in Aboriginal communities.

Ms Harman—I believe that is true, yes.

Senator BOYCE—Will this project take into account that extra degree of difficulty?

Ms Harman—I would have to take the specifics of that question on notice and come back to you.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you, Ms Harman.

Ms Powell—I can add that the work that the George Institute is doing in Fitzroy Crossing is also specifically looking at diagnostic issues, and they will be doing that in the Indigenous context.

Ms Harman—Lastly, if I can beg your indulgence, we know that just finding out the prevalence of FASD is another problem that we are keen to improve performance on. We have also engaged the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to do a scoping study to actually improve the national data.

Senator BOYCE—When is that due to be completed?

Ms Harman—That is due to be completed on 30 June this year. There are number of projects that are coming together.

Senator BOYCE—Ms Powell, is there more detail you can put around the Fitzroy Crossing project?

Ms Powell—There is not much more that I can add. It is looking at screening, ways to screen and developing instruments for that, as well as management strategies, but I cannot provide much more detail than that.

Senator BOYCE—How many on the ground staff are there undertaking that project?

Ms Powell—Sorry, we do not know.

Senator BOYCE—If you could again provide that information, and what their professional backgrounds are, et cetera?

Ms Powell—There would be a multidisciplinary team that would be conducting it, and the numbers would vary because people would come in and out. It is a multistage project over a number of years, so obviously the types of skills required at certain times of that project will be very fluid. We will get you as much detail as we can.

Senator BOYCE—If you can give me some information that will perhaps give me a picture of what their operations on the ground look like across the past 12 months or something, that would be good.

Ms Powell—Sure.

Senator ADAMS—Just to carry on from there, when we were visiting Fitzroy one of the biggest issues was any assistance at school for these children, and of course the fact that they had not been diagnosed properly. Can you tell us if there is some support in there from the education side, that they have assistants working with them?

Ms Powell—I would not like to answer on behalf of DEWR. I am not familiar with Fitzroy Crossing in enough detail.

Senator ADAMS—I will check that one out, thanks.

Senator SCULLION—Just a comment of caution, I suppose. Many people on this particular committee are pretty interested in FASD, and I have always been a bit distressed about the fact that Australia is not as engaged as other countries. We have FASD month in Canada, and I and others have visited places like the Asante Centre, Vancouver Island, and been part of these multidisciplinary teams. They have some fantastic, in fact without a doubt the best in the world, diagnostic tools. I just hope that we are not reinventing the wheel, and I acknowledge that most people would have some starting points there. The reason they are so excellent is because I think that some reasonable comparisons can be made about the demographic of the Inuit, and some of the challenges we find in some of our own remote communities.

The other point I would like to make is that it has come to the attention of the members of the committee—this is probably for the minister, and perhaps I can give you some details later—that there is a FASD network in Australia, and it is an independent FASD network. They have come to a point where they can no longer financially survive, and they have been lobbying us to highlight that as an issue. Whilst it is not an issue for estimates, I just thought I would take the opportunity. I know someone else will remind me, but I can get the details to the minister, and commend you very much to their cause.

CHAIR—Minister, I will follow up in terms of the process with the committee. I think it is timely that we have another briefing from both Health and FaHCSIA of the current status of the FASD response. We will put that formally through the process, but by stating it in estimates it actually gets it ticking over.

Senator Arbib—Thank you, Chair.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I move to the Indigenous suicide prevention strategy please? We talked about this at the last estimates.

Ms Powell—Senator, perhaps while officers are shuffling I could go back to a question you asked before on the renal matter because I have more information. You were asking about the accommodation The Lodge in Bath Street, Alice Springs. It is actually not open. It is ready but it is waiting for its certificate of occupancy. We expect that to be soon and it is in fact accommodating renal patients only in the first instance.

Senator SIEWERT—How soon is soon?

Ms Powell—As soon as the certificate of occupancy is issued we would expect that it would begin taking residents.

Senator SIEWERT—I presume that is a Northern Territory government thing. Are we talking days, weeks?

Ms Powell—Sorry, I do not have that.

Senator SIEWERT—I might try and chase that up with the Northern Territory government. In terms of ‘in the first instance’, what does that mean?

Ms Powell—It is designed for renal patients. My guess is that if they do not have enough they will probably offer the rooms to other people also needing accommodation.

Senator SIEWERT—I cannot imagine that they would not have enough renal patients given the homeless rate.

Ms Powell—The door is open if the beds are not being used. They will always be able to be used.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. Can we turn to the development of the strategy please. Has any progress been made? The government made a commitment in response to this committee’s report on suicide. One of our recommendations, as you know, was the development of a specific Indigenous suicide prevention strategy, and the government committed its response to do that. Firstly, where we are at with that?

Ms Harman—That is something that is very much on our work plan at the moment as a priority. We are meeting with the Australian Suicide Prevention Advisory Council next week and that is one item that is very much on the agenda for discussion. Clearly, this is a strategy that is going to need to be driven by extensive community and expert consultation.

So the ASPAC meeting next week will be an important start of that process. There is also a joint National Advisory Council on Mental Health—NACMH—and National Indigenous Health Equality Council—NIHEC—forum that is going to focus on Indigenous youth mental health issues: social and emotional wellbeing issues. That is scheduled, I believe, and confirmed for 15 March in Canberra. It is bringing together NACMH and NIHEC to Canberra with a number of other experts.

Senator SIEWERT—To specifically talk about?

Ms Harman—To specifically talk about social and emotional Indigenous issues with a focus on youth. This is something that Minister Snowden has been interested in and has asked to be done, so that is another very important consultation forum where suicide will again be on the agenda. That is happening in March. One of the things that we will be seeking advice on from both of those bodies is what that further consultation process should look like.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you have a time line: (a) for when you expect to have it ready by and (b) mapped out in terms of when you expect to develop a draft and then presumably have it go out for public consultation?

Ms Harman—Those are matters that we will have to consult ministers on. We are at the very start of the process. We need to take that advice, and then we will form a kind of project plan from there, if you like. So, no, I do not have those specific details right now.

Senator SIEWERT—I will follow up in May.

Ms Harman—Of course.

Senator SIEWERT—Last time we were here we talked about some suicides in the Kimberley and unfortunately there have been some more, to the point where people over there are calling it a crisis. What action is the department and the Commonwealth taking to assist Western Australia to get some more resources on the ground to deal with this specific issue now?

Ms Harman—I will take this one and then hand this over to my colleague, Ms Krestensen. There is the immediate response and the things that we are doing currently on the ground, working very closely with the WA government, and then there is obviously the need for the Commonwealth to play a role in terms of the longer term response and gathering the kind of research and evidence to help us to deal more effectively with these things in the future. A couple of comments from me: the department funds, as you know, the StandBy Suicide Bereavement Response Service. The StandBy coordinators in the East Kimberley and West Kimberley regions have actually been a central point of coordination for the current response, and that, as I understand it, has been at the request of or with the endorsement of community elders and council leaders. That Commonwealth funded service has actually been pretty instrumental in responding to communities, to this tragedy at the moment.

Looking at the longer-term, bigger-picture stuff, an Indigenous suicide strategy will obviously be an important framework going forward. We are also looking at ways to fast-track funding from the \$274-million tackling suicide package specifically at the request of Minister Butler. There are probably two elements of that that we are going to be focusing on: the \$22.6 million community fund that is going to be targeting community responses at specific at-risk groups, including Indigenous people; and the national rollouts of the Access to Allied Psychological Services or ATAPS suicide pilot which is \$23.5 million starting next financial year.

What we are going to be looking at there is whether we can fast-track some of that and indeed develop an Indigenous-specific response building on the very successful pilot. My colleague, I understand, has started talking to the Kimberley division about that and they are pretty interested. I might hand over to my colleague now.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Ms Krestensen—Ms Harman has given us a comprehensive answer, but just to add to that I will mention that we have been in discussions with the StandBy service. As Ms Harman said, that has been the central coordinating point for a lot of the activity. The actual coordinators that they employ through the StandBy service are being used to draw together and to work with a whole range of local services including Burdekin youth headspace, which has a local presence; the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Council; state government mental health services in the area; the Western Australian Aboriginal health service; the Aboriginal health services in the Fitzroy Valley; the men's outreach service and WA police and ambulance. They are all working very closely with the Commonwealth funded StandBy service.

We are working very closely with our state office in Perth about this issue and they are working, in turn, with the local FaHCSIA services and the local state health services. As Ms Harman said, we have been in discussion with the service we fund there. In addition to

StandBy we have also got the Yiriman Project which works in the local area. Also, we have recently funded Billard Aboriginal Corporation for a stand up for life suicide prevention project which is building on the network successes of the Billard blank page summit to look at developing a further summit, and to really work with community members and key stakeholders to set in place a form of community based network or safety net to work upstream.

We have had discussions with the Kimberley Division of General Practice, as Ms Harman said, to explore the possibility of looking at a culturally appropriate form of the ATAPS suicide prevention project which works through divisions of general practice to provide specially trained allied health workers with the capacity to provide intensive support to individuals who are identified as being suicidal, at risk of suicide or who have self-harmed or attempted suicide. We are thinking through its applicability, not only to Kimberley but also to other areas where there might be a spike, so to speak.

In general our response to these kinds of things is twofold: firstly, it is about ensuring that there is some sort of form of bereavement support available either through a service we fund or to explore whether the state government is funding such a service; and secondly, just to ensure that there are the mental health services in place to provide support to families, to members and to other young people who might be impacted by the event.

Senator SIEWERT—I really appreciate that comprehensive run down and I really appreciate that you are looking at fast-tracking some of that \$274 million because it really is needed. I will ask two more questions following up: there was the Billard blank page summit and you talked about another summit—is that the Balgo one?

Ms Krestensen—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—So you are actively considering funding for that?

Ms Krestensen—We provided funding of \$199,800 to the Billard Aboriginal Corporation for the project I mentioned which is going to be running a series of discussions and field visits with a lead-up to the actual summit itself in June.

Senator SIEWERT—That project is an extremely worthwhile project. I understand elders are meeting in the Kimberley on Saturday or early next week. I could have it wrong; it could be early next week. I suspect there may be some more suggestions coming out from the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, KALACC, following that meeting and I am wondering whether you are able to engage in some discussions. I do not know obviously what they are going to come up with but is there a possibility of being able to engage with them further in terms of suggestions that they may make?

Ms Harman—Our WA state office is feet on the ground, if you like, and they have been working extremely closely with the communities affected and with all the service providers. I am very confident they are aware of this impending meeting and I am sure they are probably connected to it as well.

Ms Powell—I can probably add to that. I know our state manager and a number of OATSIH staff have been talking to all of the health service providers affected in the region, to make it clear that we want to talk to them about what kind of response services they might

need programmatically, but also to support the staff that work there because they are also very traumatised. The messages they are getting are that they are a little bit overwhelmed right now but very soon they will want to talk about those things. I am quite confident that they will be involved.

Senator SIEWERT—That is why I was asking because that is the feedback I have had as well. That is why they are having the meeting and they will obviously want to discuss with you the community driven approaches. The community health services are obviously community driven but I know that they are thinking about some more community driven projects. Thank you. I really appreciate the run down, thank you.

CHAIR—Petrol sniffing?

Senator SIEWERT—Can we just have a quick update of where Yalata is up to? You knew that was coming, didn't you?

Ms Powell—I can tell you that there has now been agreement to land in Yalata and we have been talking to the local community about how we might structure a funding agreement to enable an Opal fuel facility to go ahead there. So there has been massive progress since we last spoke.

Senator SIEWERT—That is very good news. Do you have a time line yet when you think we can get some action there?

Ms Powell—We have currently got the first draft of a proposal from them. It will take a bit of time to get the time lines right and agreed and to sort out the costs, but we are hoping that the facility will be operational towards the end of this year.

Senator SIEWERT—Fantastic. The funding has already been committed for that project, hasn't it?

Ms Powell—That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—How much was that again, sorry?

Ms Corbett—We have not finalised an amount but we are in negotiations with them about the amount. We have indicated that we will certainly have some capacity within our Opal roll-out project to support them and we will work as hard as we can to meet the costs of that.

Senator SIEWERT—I would like to ask about the further roll-out plans around Kalgoorlie. I understand that BP has said that they can supply Opal fuel there by 31 March?

Ms Corbett—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—They are on track for that?

Ms Corbett—They are on track for that.

Senator SIEWERT—That is very good news. The Rabbit Flat Roadhouse is closed, I understand it?

Ms Powell—It closed on 31 December.

Senator SIEWERT—Excellent. Have the other two changed their minds yet?

Ms Corbett—We actually still have a number of stations that have refused, but in this area we are working on them and we have a few sticking points. We are working closely with BP. We have appealed to BP, who are very sympathetic, and it may be that BP can ensure that there is no longer a delivery of regular unleaded fuel in the area. So that will be, we hope, an additional lever to get the outcome we have been looking for.

Senator SIEWERT—Do we have a time line for that?

Ms Corbett—No, we do not have a time line but we will continue to work on it.

Senator SIEWERT—How are we going with the progress of the roll-out in the northern areas of the Northern Territory and West Arnhem? I understand there were some difficulties in some locations. Have they been dealt with?

Ms Powell—In terms of Kakadu, we have currently got three stations completely committed, two of which are already supplying Opal, and the third one will supply Opal as soon as their current storage tanks are low enough to be able to fill up with Opal. We are working closely with the remaining four suppliers in the area, who have a positive disposition but have not completely committed. They are watching what happens but they are positive about it.

Senator SIEWERT—Again, do we have time lines for that?

Ms Corbett—For the four fuel retail sites outside the park, we do not have firm time line commitments but we are regularly in touch with them and an officer will be visiting them again within the next fortnight. The three that are committed have always been the lead three, and the other four have given us in the past indications that once the stations inside the park are all delivering Opal, they will come on board. We will be following up with them and expecting them to stick to those commitments.

Senator SIEWERT—Where we are up to with the Opal roll-out in Kimberley, Western Australia?

Ms Corbett—I have fewer details there. We have three Indigenous communities in the south and one in the north that are designated regions and are receiving Opal. We have some distribution issues because of the distance between the production point and the Kimberley. There are still currently no sites receiving Opal in Halls Creek or Fitzroy Crossing, which is a shame, but we are continuing to work on that. Our current budget allocation allows us to establish storage facilities for Opal in Darwin and we are proceeding with negotiations around that. There is some procurement activity underway at the moment and we hope to be able to give clearer responses about time lines by the time the committee next meets.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you; that is good. I am glad you can do that. As you said, there has been money allocated for the new storage facilities in Darwin, hasn't there?

Ms Corbett—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Will that carry over into next year's budget if not expended this budget?

Ms Corbett—Because it is tied up with the procurements it is best I not be too clear about that. We will have capacity to work into the next financial year however, if that is the assurance that you are seeking?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. Do I understand then that we cannot resolve the Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing issue until that issue is resolved?

Ms Corbett—That is our current understanding, unfortunately, which means that we cannot move on those locations in the shorter term.

Senator SIEWERT—Are there plans or an ability to be able to roll out Opal in the major centres in the Kimberley?

Ms Corbett—Not at this point. It would require road-train transport from South Australia and that is not feasible at this point we have been told.

Senator SIEWERT—I mean, once we have got the storage facilities?

Ms Corbett—Once the storage facilities are in, yes, then certainly we can extend the roll-out to other locations in the Kimberley.

Senator SIEWERT—Is funding available to do that?

Ms Corbett—How far our funding will go will also be tied up with the success of our current procurement activities.

Ms Powell—There is funding for the fuel subsidy in the East Kimberleys.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, I am aware of that. I am thinking of some of the bigger towns in the Kimberley so we can do what we have been doing in Central Australia in terms of getting everybody to be supplying non-sniffable fuel.

Senator SCULLION—I have got a number of questions but I will start with my priority one, I guess, in regard to the Katungal Aboriginal Corporation Community and Medical Services. In 2007, I understand, a capital works scoping project was commissioned by the Department of Health and Ageing, and was completed. It found a number of issues in terms of non-compliance with the Building Code of Australia at the premises being used at that stage for the Katungal Bega clinic. I have been to the site myself and have had a look at them. It appears there is some confusion about why the project was commissioned because it appears now there is no funds available to address the issues that were identified. Could you perhaps try to provide to me some rationale about why you would commission a work to identify faults when there were no funds prepared to ameliorate the faults when found?

Ms Powell—The purpose of a scoping study is to analyse the health infrastructure structure requirements of an organisation to determine what needs to be done, with what sense of urgency and with what degree of priority. It informs us as to when we need to ensure that funds are available and it allows us to make judgments around relative priorities. It is not a guarantee of funding. I think it is probably fair to say that all organisations who participate in scoping studies would be aware of that. Nevertheless, coming out of this scoping study capital works funding was made available. In fact there have been a number of ongoing capital works funding put into the Bega clinic since that time, particularly addressing health and safety

issues. Funding was provided in 2007-08, again in 2008-09 and 2009-10 to address immediate health and safety issues.

Senator SCULLION—Can you give me an indication of what those works were and the cost of those?

Ms Powell—In 2007-08, \$46,970 was funded for a range of health and safety issues, including asbestos removal. In 2008-09, it was \$82,500; in 2009-10 it was \$74,470 and in 2010-11 we have provided a further \$17,710 to remove the remaining asbestos and obtain a clearance certificate for occupation. In terms of the Narooma, clinic which is also operated by Katungal and which was included in the scoping study, in fact the Commonwealth has agreed to fund a new building. We have put in \$2 million for that. New South Wales Health has also put in \$2 million for the construction of a new purpose-built primary healthcare centre. We are expecting that Katungal will put in \$1 million as well to that project. Do you want to add anything to that, Mr Fisk?

Mr Fisk—The funds have been provided over a number of years. As Ms Powell said, when we undertake these scoping studies it is to determine what level of works are required and what level of funding we have available. Certainly when we identify issues of occupational health and safety, those are the issues that we address immediately as soon as funds become available; in these cases, as soon as the notification has been made, to ensure the premises are safe for all the staff to work within.

We do not have a dedicated program of funding through the budget for our capital works. So we are working within a limited amount of funding each year, and not all of our requests for funding can be addressed.

Ms Powell—Just to summarise, the outcome of that capital works scoping study was that \$221,650 has been provided for upgrades at the Bega clinic and \$4 million, jointly with New South Wales Health, for a new clinic at Narooma.

Senator SCULLION—As you would understand, as we move around the countryside we visit and look at things and it is just useful to validate what we hear and also to see where we are up to. Perhaps Mr Fisk or Ms Powell, you would be able to give me some information about—I suppose lawfulness is a difficult and perhaps not the right term—whether or not the Bega clinic, given the investments that you have made, now complies with occupational health and safety and access? Are you aware of any reasons why the continual conducting of their business from the clinic would perhaps be unlawful, or is there a problem with it at all?

Ms Powell—In relation to the legal standing of the Bega clinic, under planning and environmental laws the local council has responsibility for issuing certificates on the suitability of buildings. Katungal has raised these issues with us. As a result, we contacted the Bega Shire Council who advised us that there are no orders that have been issued on the building that houses the Bega clinic. The department has further asked Katungal to provide us a copy of any notices that they may have which may be behind their concerns but they have not been able to produce any such notice to date.

Senator SCULLION—So it is your belief that the Katungal clinic is currently lawful?

Ms Powell—That is our belief.

Senator SCULLION—There is no reason for them to consider it noncompliant?

Ms Powell—That is right, and we have invited Katungal on a number of occasions to provide us with evidence to support the concerns so that we can properly understand what the issues are because, obviously, if it were unlawful we would want to do something about that.

Mr Fisk—If I could just follow up on that as well, we have made a number of attempts to discuss with the building consultants the works on that clinic to ensure that it is compliant. We spoke to the building consultants in early September, which was not long after that report came out, to determine the exact nature of the immediate issues that might be affecting occupancy of the building. The consultant confirmed that asbestos was the only primary issue that needed to be addressed, and we provided funds within a matter of a week or two to address that matter. We have also since then tried to, on a number of occasions, have contact with the building consultant so that we can determine the level of works that are required there and so that we can understand the works that need to be undertaken and whether or not they would be feasible.

You may have visited the clinic; it is an old house, and we have to look at the economic feasibility of putting a lot of money into that building. The initial quote was \$497,500. We have to look at that to see whether it is economically feasible and whether it is an effective and efficient use of Commonwealth resources or whether we should be looking at another property or leasing a property instead. We have attempted to discuss further with the building consultants on that matter and we met with the CEO of Katungal and one of the board members back in October. Two other senior officers and I actually visited Bega, and at that meeting, among a number of issues, was the discussion on the Bega clinic. I advised them at the time that it would be preferable for us to meet with the building consultants. That would seem to be agreed. I followed that up with a letter to the organisation on 22 October asking to set up the meeting and the chairperson responded quite quickly. I got a response on 27 October advising that Katungal would set up that meeting but despite a follow up from the department on 23 November, we still have not had any response to that request.

Senator SCULLION—I will be sure to pass those circumstances back to them, and hopefully we can resolve that.

Mr Fisk—Part of that, too, is that we have been trying to have a meeting with the full board to discuss some of their concerns with regards to the building and other matters, and that has also proved to be quite difficult. As I say, three senior officers visited the organisation on 6 October with an understanding we would be meeting with the board. The CEO and one board member attended that meeting and that board member unfortunately was not able to stay for the entire meeting. We have attempted on a number of occasions to have a meeting with the board so we can work through those and make ourselves available after hours if required, but again there has not been any response.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you for that. Just quickly, in the same vein, I understand that the federal government announced a \$380,000 mobile dental clinic to operate between Ulladulla and the Victorian border. It has been put to me that after this announcement was made that the Katungal board, who were supposed to be operating it, were not aware of that. You might just want to make some comment or some clarification in that regard?

Ms Hancock—The funding to which you are referring was made pursuant to the program Closing the gap—Indigenous dental services in rural and regional areas. That was announced in the budget in May 2009. There are currently three projects that have received funding under that program. The projects are in sites which were identified through a consultancy that took place through 2009 and early 2010 and which identified a number of prospective suitable pilot sites across Australia for funding under the program. It is \$11 million over four years.

The first three projects funded received funding in July 2010. One of those projects was funding provided to the New South Wales state government for a dental van to be based in Narooma. The funding agreement is with the New South Wales government. The negotiations that took place in the lead up to that implementation plan were primarily between the New South Wales public dental service, the relevant agencies within the New South Wales government and the Commonwealth department. The New South Wales public dental service has taken responsibility for making provision for arrangement for services to actually be delivered. The Commonwealth part is simply funding the purchase of a dental van.

Senator SCULLION—Should I be putting my questions to the New South Wales dental service?

Ms Hancock—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I am following up again on the Personal Helpers and Mentors program (PHaMs) questions I asked previously for the APY, or Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara, lands. Who were the providers for the APY lands? Is it just CatholicCare NT or are there others as well?

Ms Winkler—I am just checking. I just need to find my table as it has got my list of service providers. CatholicCare NT is the provider for APY lands.

Senator SIEWERT—They are the sole provider?

Ms Winkler—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—How many people do they deliver support for?

Ms Winkler—I do not have the numbers for each individual remote site but we could provide that to you.

Senator SIEWERT—It would be appreciated if you could tell me which communities they support. I suspect you probably should not tell me the breakdown of the number of people in each community but if you could tell me which communities they support, the number of people on the lands, and also the funding that is available for those services for 2010-11, that would be good. Also, are the same provisions being made for the next financial year or will funding be increased?

Ms Winkler—Some of those sites are funded out to 2013. Some of them are in different funding cycles currently.

Senator SIEWERT—Can you provide that information?

Ms Winkler—We can do the site, the service provider, the funding and then we can do a separate table. The remote sites are serviced in a slightly different way to our other PHaMs

providers in that they do a lot more community and group development kind of activity. It takes a much longer lead time to develop the support arrangements.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could then articulate that in that table, the community work that is done in each community, that would be appreciated.

Dr Harmer—Are you talking about just each community in the APY lands?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. We have had a discussion before about the gaps in PHaMs around Australia. How much further have you progressed in that gap analysis for Aboriginal communities? How far are we going now in terms of providing comprehensive support in Aboriginal communities in Australia?

Ms Winkler—We have progressed in doing mapping work and it was not just in relation to Indigenous communities, it was to look at the service coverage across Australia. One of the things that we found in that exercise was that we have got quite broad coverage in terms of the areas that the services are meant to cover. However, there are capacity issues in a number of those locations in terms of the potential population of people to be serviced versus available services.

We also know that there are some areas where we do not have PHaMs services because currently we have got 174 sites across the country and 10 of them are remote Indigenous sites. There is a site proposed for Alice Springs/Papunya. We are still in the negotiation phase in relation to that but we are hoping that we will have a service up and running before the end of the financial year.

Senator SIEWERT—You said 10 were remote?

Ms Winkler—There will be 11 remote once Alice Springs is up.

Senator SIEWERT—So you are counting Alice as remote?

Ms Winkler—It is Alice Springs/Papunya. Originally it was going to just be a Papunya site and then we got some additional transformation plan funding so it was extended to be both an Alice Springs and Papunya site.

Senator SIEWERT—In terms of addressing some of the needs in other remote communities, do you have plans and/or resources for other sites?

Ms Winkler—Currently all the funding within the targeted community care program is committed. In terms of moving into the next funding cycle, to maintain the level of service that is currently on the ground actually takes the quantum of dollars that will be available within the program.

Senator SIEWERT—When you give me the other list could you also provide us with the 10 remote sites as well as the funding that has been allocated for those 10?

Ms Winkler—Yes. We already have most of that information.

Senator ADAMS—My questions are probably more overall and should have been asked earlier. Thank you very much for that flow chart. How is the government addressing the social determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health performance measures? I would like an update on that if I could, please.

Ms Powell—As you obviously know, a very significant proportion of disease is caused by the social determinants of health. Employment, housing and education are all key drivers behind the social determinants. I am not sure exactly what you mean in terms of those areas.

Senator ADAMS—I want to know the outcomes and how we are going with that because I did not have the chart before so it was really difficult to be able to pinpoint what I was after. Also, have they improved? You can take this on notice, if you wish, because it is quite a large question. I am very interested to know just how the agencies are coordinating the approaches in addressing Indigenous disadvantage at the community level and how you are working together on that—getting down a bit into the grass roots area.

Ms Powell—It is a big question.

Senator ADAMS—I know it is. It can go on notice, if need be.

Ms Powell—I was just clarifying what it was that you had a copy of.

Dr Harmer—We can take that on notice.

CHAIR—I think so, because we have only got health officers here and that would be unfair.

Dr Harmer—It is a chart that FaHCSIA provided and I think you have got it but I do not think the health department has it.

CHAIR—It is an important question but I think it is best to put it on notice.

Senator ADAMS—Seeing that chart has just given me lots of ideas.

Dr Harmer—It will be very helpful for you in May, Senator.

Senator ADAMS—This one probably goes back to the health area. Could someone give me some information on how the Medicare and local hospital networks will impinge upon the Aboriginal community controlled health area.

Ms Powell—I might allow my colleague who specialises in this to answer the question.

Ms Morris—I will not pretend to be able to talk in detail about local hospital networks but for Medicare Locals, we would expect that in areas where community controlled health organisations are on the ground and active they may bid to run a Medicare Local either on their own or in a consortium with other groups, and that would be encouraged. In relation to individual services, as discussed the other day in the Health and Ageing portfolio, Medicare locals are not going to be direct service providers to individual patients. They are looking at whole of community issues, not individual patient issues.

There is meant to be a strong and productive working relationship between Medicare Locals and local hospital networks, preferably with cross-membership of boards. That was in the COAG agreement from last year and is in the Medicare Local guidelines that were issued on Tuesday. Ultimately both organisations are meant to work to ensure that there is an appropriate mix of services for the health needs of the local community.

Ms Powell—In fact, Medicare Locals will be providing a range of services that will be enormously valuable to Aboriginal medical services. They will be looking at areas of need, driven by the local population and demography. They will be looking at numbers of people

within their areas with particular health needs such as the prevalence of obesity, diabetes and chronic disease, which are a very important issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They are going to be looking at access to health services, such as the number and availabilities of GPs and nurses and allied health workers, opening hours for health services and the availability of bulk billing services.

All of that is very important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We would hope and expect that Medicare locals would be working with the Aboriginal medical service in their area. In fact, we have been talking to service providers for some time about how they might ensure that that happens and how they might contribute to the process. As Ms Morris said, a number of them are looking at possibly putting in joint proposals to become Medicare Locals.

Senator ADAMS—It is just that local thing again of course and looking at remote communities, just how it is all going to fit together to ensure people are not going to miss out with both mainstream and the Aboriginal community controlled health service working together. That is the idea—that they will be working together and working out which providers are going to be the best ones to service whichever areas?

Ms Powell—The idea is that it would be, in fact, resulting in a better service for everybody.

Senator ADAMS—It will be ‘Watch this space’ on those I think. Regarding aged care in Indigenous communities, how many Aboriginal people are currently in residential aged care facilities? This can be taken on notice too if you have not got the information here.

Ms Robertson—We rely on self-identification in terms of counting proportions of Indigenous people in aged care homes. We know that we have 29 flexible aged care services where there are quite a proportion of Indigenous people within those homes. We have a number of other homes that we regard as having a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders based on whether or not that level is above 20 per cent. We cannot tell you in total what that number is because, obviously, we rely on that self-identification, which people do not often do.

Senator ADAMS—As Aboriginal people age, is there an increase in dementia in the Indigenous population?

Ms Robertson—I do not know if we have any research on that. I would have to take that on notice.

Senator ADAMS—Senator Fierravanti-Wells will be putting some questions on notice on aged care and also on mental health issues.

CHAIR—We can go to the officers from hearing health.

Senator ADAMS—I have just received a conference report from the inaugural Australian otitis media group. Are there any research dollars looking at otitis media and the problems it concerns? Could you go through the programs that are applicable to that particular thing?

Ms Killen—There are two things that I am aware of. One is the recommendations for guidelines on the management of otitis media. They were initially produced, I think, in 2001. As part of the eyes and ears measure that was funded in the 2009 budget, we have funded the

Menzies School of Health Research to update those guidelines. We expect they will be finalised in the next few weeks. As well as that, I am aware that there was recently an National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grant awarded. I need to find the right spot in my notes.

Ms Ward—While my colleague is doing that, I would add that we have funded the Menzies School of Health Research as well for a broader study, building on the one that looked at the guidelines, to look at preventative health actions that can be taken with children zero to 13 in Indigenous children. They are using health messaging on mobile phones with those children to send proactive messages and exchange information with health workers. It is part of a bigger study and concludes later this calendar year. Another study that we funded is for Flinders University. It is a longitudinal study on the effects of swimming pools on children in remote communities and tested those children with audiometry to see the effects of the swimming pool. There was a shorter study funded by OATSIH. This is a longer one and concludes in 2011-2012.

There are also two other studies; one is by the National Acoustic Laboratories, which is for educating children aged four to five on the potential risks of hearing damage. More specifically to do with ear disease, we funded a study with Phoenix Consulting, which is to train early childhood workers to instigate early treatment of children who appear to be having hearing problems, to send them for screening and then treatment. All of those are funded under the Hearing Loss Prevention Program.

Senator ADAMS—You can give me that on notice, rather than have to go through it.

Senator SIEWERT—Are you aware of the research from the Telethon Speech and Hearing Treatment Centre in Western Australia of the women prisoners in Bandyup prison? Have you received a copy of that report? It was released mid-December or very late November last year.

Ms Ward—I have not seen it.

Senator SIEWERT—The results show that a very high proportion of the Aboriginal prisoners have some form of hearing impairment compared to the non-Indigenous prisoners. If you have not received it, I will send you a copy. Is it appropriate that I send it and you can take questions on notice about it or maybe I could ask at the estimates about it? In the past we have not had that much evidence around hearing impairment in our correctional systems; we have relied on some pretty old data, but this is current data that highlights the issue. My question is then: what do we do about it?

Dr Harmer—If you send it to the health people and then perhaps ask questions about it in May, that would be a better process.

Senator SIEWERT—I thought you would have been sent it by now, but I will make sure that it gets sent to you.

Senator SCULLION—I just have a question to ask more generally on National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, NACCHOs.

CHAIR—I think we are finished with the health officers. Thank you very much. There will be questions on notice, though.

Senator SCULLION—Given that the government has repeatedly heard that Aboriginal people have got to be given a heightened role in governance of health programs that will impact on them, particularly in the planning and decision-making processes, why is it that NACCHO is not included in the assessment panel in the distribution of funds to Aboriginal medical services under the National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program?

Mr Cameron—The National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program is not a targeted Indigenous program; it is a targeted rural health program. The national assessment panel comprises a number of members external to the department and, obviously, members internal to the department. The external members include the Australian General Practice Network, the Australian Local Government Association, and Rural Health Workforce Australia. The internal representatives from the department include primary care division, acute care division and OATSIH. Where there is advice required for that panel on the merits or otherwise of applications from any Indigenous organisation, we rely on OATSIH to provide them.

Senator SCULLION—I acknowledge that. It seemed quite reasonable. That being the case, is the NACCHO actually formally consulted by OATSIH to provide some of their advice in their particular area?

Mr Cameron—Not to my knowledge, but I might need to check with my OATSIH colleagues. I do not think so.

Ms Powell—I would not expect so; that would be unusual.

Senator SCULLION—I have some questions on AMSs but they are the sorts of questions that can be put on notice if I require. So if you have some of those other quirky ones, you are probably better off asking them.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I ask about funding for Ilpurla Aboriginal Corporation and the residential rehabilitation facility that they support? What level of funding does it receive?

Ms Corbett—I do not know that I have that here. I was not expecting a specific question but I will quickly check and see if I have a breakdown at that level.

CHAIR—Ms Corbett, that is the kind of thing that could easily go on notice. If we go with the supplementary questions then the general one on funding can come back.

Ms Corbett—I have a list of the organisations, but not with their individual funding by them, I am sorry.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand that there has been, variously, a number of consultants that have been engaged for or by Ilpurla to look at its operations and help its operations; is that correct? Could you tell me how much? The reason I am asking this is because I understand that they have a very heavy workload. They have a 20-bed residential facility. Have you done an analysis of what its funding should be compared to the services that are provided by others?

Mr Fisk—Yes, there have been number of analyses trying to determine the level of funding required for Ilpurla. If I go back a little way, Ilpurla have suffered a number of difficulties, primarily as a result of their lack of business management skills. That is where we have been trying to give them a lot of assistance. The service model that they have got,

certainly anecdotally, is an extremely good one; a lot of good cases have come out of there. It has really been very difficult for the Abbott family to be able to manage the funds and get the level of funding that they require. One of the things that we have been looking at is whether the services really require not just Commonwealth funding but funding from the NT in particular. We have been encouraging them to access additional funds. We are still assessing the level of funding for the organisation. We have had recent reports provided to us. There will be an increase in the level of funding for the organisation, I believe, to enable them to deliver the services that they require. The final decision on that level of funding would not be too far away.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you mean it is too far away for the next financial year?

Mr Fisk—It would be for the next financial year.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you take on notice the increase in the level of funding? My understanding is they also support Aboriginal patients from Western Australia as well, not just Northern Territory; is that correct?

Mr Fisk—Barry Abbott is willing to take clients from just about anywhere where he feels that he can assist. He is a very welcoming man and is trying to do the very best that he can for the youth who are suffering from the afflictions that they have. He finds it very difficult to say no. He should not be saying no, but he finds it a difficult thing to follow up and get the level of funding from the different areas that he should. That is where we have been trying to encourage him. We have actually recently funded a business manager to work with the organisation to ensure that they get all the levels of funding from the different areas, including NT, from the magistrates funds and also from Centrelink.

Senator SIEWERT—I am just pre-empting the issue that we have been dealing with over dialysis and the Northern Territory government not wanting to fund services. You will be fully aware of the episode where people were banned from going over the border from Western Australia. I am wondering if that is an issue that is going to come up again and whether there has been an approach to the Western Australia government as well, given that there are Western Australians that use the service as well.

Mr Fisk—As I say, a business manager has been engaged and has tried to source funds from wherever those clients come from to assist in the funding to enable them to get the services they require.

Senator SIEWERT—I just did not want to see another dialysis episode coming down the road.

Mr Fisk—No.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you for giving me that information, it is much appreciated.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, with the agreement of the committee, we are going to finish early. That is something I have always wanted to be able to say and have not been able to do that before.

Senator SCULLION—I do not have a question for anybody but I have not had an opportunity to note that this is Dr Harmer's last appearance before estimates. I have had not had the personal opportunity to say, 'Thanks a lot, mate.' You have made a huge contribution

in public office. I particularly thank you for your assistance to me as a former minister, as a very green and sometimes awful minister. Personally and professionally, you were a great help. Parliament will be all the poorer for you departing.

Dr Harmer—Thank you for your generous comments.

CHAIR—Mr Learmonth, did I cut you off?

Mr Learmonth—Mr Davey has the answer to Senator Scullion's question on the Ipsos and others. I am not going to chance my hand either.

CHAIR—Mr Davey, you may as well give it to us while you are waiting there.

Mr Davey—The contract with Ipsos-Winangali for research involved 111 focus groups and 660 people. It was done across 23 locations and, in addition, 30 in-depth interviews were undertaken. This was between December 2009 and March 2010. Breaking down the costs into three components for the research: it was \$185,731 for the tobacco component; \$232,351 for the local community campaigns component; and \$187,531 for the Measure Up/Tomorrow People campaign component.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you very much.

Senator Arbib—Yesterday I made some comments regarding Dr Harmer. I will not embarrass him again, but just on behalf of the government, thank you for everything and good luck in the future.

CHAIR—Thank you to the officers.

Dr Harmer—We have got one answer.

CHAIR—Ms Harman, have you got an answer for us as well?

Ms Harman—Senator, you asked a question about whether or not any of the \$100,000 grants under the regional campaign smoking fund had been distributed as yet. The answer to that is no, not yet. We have some good ideas that are starting to come in that are being assessed by Dr Calma and we hope that that funding will start to flow very soon.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you Hansard, thank you to all the officers, thank you to Dr Harmer, of course. Good luck, Dr Harmer. I also want to acknowledge Dr Kendall and Ms McKay, who have just completed their first full estimates in their position. I want to thank them and congratulate them.

Committee adjourned at 3.51 pm