

Chapter 2

Addressing petrol sniffing

2.1 Much has happened to address petrol sniffing in Indigenous communities in central Australia since the committee reported to the Senate in 2006. Progress has been made under the Eight Point Plan, structures have been put in place to improve intelligence gathering, data collection and reporting of petrol sniffing, the roll out of Opal fuel has had a distinct effect on decreasing supply and additional funding has been allocated to youth programs.

2.2 In this chapter the committee reviews some of the key developments that have happened since the committee last reported in 2006.

Declines in petrol sniffing

2.3 While there is a lack of verifiable data on the number of people engaging in petrol sniffing, there is consistent evidence provided to the committee that, overall, petrol sniffing has declined significantly in central Australia over the last two years.

2.4 In 2006 an estimated 600 Aboriginal people in the Central Desert region of the Northern Territory were sniffing regularly.¹ Estimates of the number of people now sniffing regularly vary. In their submission, the four Commonwealth government departments implementing the Petrol Sniffing Strategy (PSS) compiled information from a range of sources on the current extent of petrol sniffing. Some of the findings presented to the committee include:

- A July 2007 study estimated that there were 244 petrol sniffers in the central Australian area of the Northern Territory;
- In July 2008 the CAPSSU (drawing on advice from service providers) estimated that there were approximately 85 people currently, or recently, sniffing petrol in the central Australian area of the Northern Territory;
- Survey results showed the number of petrol sniffers in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY Lands) in South Australia had fallen from around 178 people in 2005 to 70 people in 2006 and anecdotal reports indicated that petrol sniffing has been very limited or non-existent in the six months to August 2008; and

1 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*, June 2006, p. 3.

- Anecdotal reports indicated that petrol sniffing in the portion of the Central Australia Petrol Sniffing Strategy Zone in the Ngaayatjarra Lands in Western Australia now only occurs sporadically.²

2.5 Further declines in petrol sniffing in the APY Lands were also confirmed in the November 2008 *Survey of prevalence of petrol sniffing on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands* undertaken by the Nganampa Health Council. The survey found that:

...there was a further significant reduction of 47% in the incidence of petrol sniffing across the APY Lands in the last eighteen months, adding to the 54% reduction estimated in 2007 and the 60% reduction found between 2005 and October 2006...

... The informants in all communities also stated that sniffing was no longer an activity that took place in public but occurred inside houses or in house yards.³

2.6 Although there has been a decline in petrol sniffing on the APY Lands, the survey found that in 2008 22 people or 1.2% of the population aged between ten and forty years of age were recorded as having sniffed petrol. These people were located in the communities of Mimili, Pukatja (Ernabella) and Indulkana. The incidence of petrol sniffing also varied across these communities with Mimili recording an increase in occasional sniffing since 2007 and Indulkana and Pukatja both recording an overall reduction in the level of sniffing.⁴

2.7 The Commonwealth government's submission, compiled by the four departments responsible for the implementation of the PSS, noted that instances of petrol sniffing are not only limited to central Australia. Reports of outbreaks in other areas in the six months to August 2008 included:

- Tennant Creek (2 sniffers/1 community);
- Katherine (5 communities—1 large group; 4 smaller outbreaks);
- Nhulunbuy (major outbreak in one community—an increase from 1 or 2 to 24 people involved of which 14 are under 12 years old);
- Darwin (reports of a few minor incidents);
- Ceduna (described as a 'new generation of sniffers' with 4 chronic sniffers and a number of recreational users in the 14-18 year age group, 24 recent

2 The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), and the Attorney-General's Department (AGD), *Submission 14*, p. 9.

3 Nganampa Health Council, *Survey of prevalence of petrol sniffing on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands*, November 2008, p. 4.

4 Nganampa Health Council, *Survey of prevalence of petrol sniffing on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands*, November 2008, p. 14.

arrests for sniffing, bullying to coerce other young people to sniff is prevalent);

- Kununurra (small outbreaks in Kununurra and Kalumburu by a person from Balgo, where there is a group of adult sniffers);
- Cape York (2 northern communities, possible result of migrating Northern Territory families and individuals since NTER alcohol restrictions);
- Mt Isa (Doomadgee and Mornington Island, significant increase); and
- Brisbane (Cherbourg community, 35 people between the ages of 7-16).⁵

2.8 Many community members and staff working in communities also provided the committee with anecdotal evidence about the decline in petrol sniffing and the dramatic change this has had in communities. At the public hearing in Alice Springs, Blair McFarland from the Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS), described the change:

There used to be hundreds and hundreds of sniffers in the remote communities. When you went to Papunya, people there were talking about when there were 100 petrol sniffers in that community, and now there is zero. That is very consistently the story through the remote communities we work with. By a combination of Opal and community action, the number has been reduced to zero in pretty much all the communities we work with.⁶

2.9 These remaining outbreaks of petrol sniffing are inconsistent across the different communities in the area, and the episodic and opportunistic nature of petrol sniffing means that the number of sniffers constantly fluctuates. Other factors such as the availability of alcohol and movement of people between communities can also increase or decrease the likelihood of an outbreak of petrol sniffing in a community.

2.10 However, it is evident that overall there has been a significant reduction in petrol sniffing since the roll out of Opal fuel and the implementation of the PSS. The significant reduction must be commended and is testament to the strength and resilience of Indigenous communities that have unrelentingly pressed for action and taken a strong stand against petrol sniffing. In addition, the efforts of private sector organisations, non-government organisations and state, territory and Commonwealth government agencies must also be recognised.

It needs to be recognised that the role of community-based advocacy and desire for change was a very strong driver for reducing petrol sniffing and ensuring better policy outcomes...The role of the corporate sector, in particular BP with the development and distribution of Opal fuel, and other fuel companies in Central Australia has been central to the success of the

5 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 10.

6 Mr Blair McFarland, CAYLUS, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2008, p. 13.

strategy. Commercial interests have not stood in the way of rolling out the non-sniffable fuel.⁷

The rollout of Opal fuel

2.11 Opal fuel is an unleaded, low aromatic and non-intoxicating fuel developed by BP Australia Pty Ltd in conjunction with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) and the Australian Institute of Petroleum specifically for supply to Indigenous communities as a replacement for standard petrol.⁸ As Opal fuel is more expensive to produce and distribute than regular unleaded petrol, the Commonwealth government subsidises Opal production and distribution to approved communities.⁹

2.12 Opal fuel was officially launched in February 2005 and BP began supplying Opal to 37 remote communities in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia. While BP is the only company that produces Opal fuel, BP makes Opal available to other fuel suppliers. Opal is produced at BP's Kwinana refinery in Western Australia and shipped to the Largs North Terminal in Adelaide. From there other oil companies and distributors collect Opal for delivery to individual service station sites and retailers.¹⁰

2.13 Opal fuel is suitable for use in any engine that would normally run on unleaded petrol and is covered by BP Australia's fuel guarantee which means that:

... products will meet Australian standards or greater, and they will be fit for purpose in their application. In the early days, we did a lot of testing with Toyota in Melbourne. We ran it through Toyota, Holden and Ford engines. We also ran it through a 10 year old carburettor engine and two- and four-stroke motors. To date, we have not had one claim against our fuels guarantee for Opal fuel where the outcome has been fuel quality. The outcomes in all cases have been poor maintenance of engines in vehicles.¹¹

2.14 At 1 July 2008 there were 117 sites supplying Opal fuel: 82 communities, 32 service stations/roadhouses and 3 pastoral properties. Of these sites, 72 were in the Northern Territory, 20 in Western Australia, 18 in South Australia and 7 in Queensland.¹² In terms of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy Zones, 65 sites selling Opal are

7 The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), *Case-Study: Intersectoral Action to Reduce Petrol Sniffing in Remote Communities of Central Australia*, Crossing Sectors-Dialogue on Intersectoral Action conference, June 10-11 2007, Vancouver, Canada, p. 15.

8 Opal was developed to replace Avgas (aviation fuel), which was subsidised for distribution to Indigenous Communities through the Comgas Scheme that commenced in 1998. BP Australia Pty Ltd, *Submission 9*; Urbis, *Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy, June 2008*, pp. 1 and 20.

9 See FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, pp. 17–18.

10 BP Australia Pty Ltd, *Submission 9*, p. 2.

11 Mr Chris McKenzie, BP Australia Pty Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2009, p. 32.

12 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 18.

in the Central Desert and Expanded Central Desert Zones, 5 sites are in the East Kimberley Zone and 3 sites in the Queensland Zone.¹³ In the APY Lands in South Australia all Indigenous communities now only have diesel and Opal fuel available for retail sale.¹⁴ In evidence given to the committee in March 2009, Ms Lesley Podesta stated that 'there are approximately 120 communities and outlets providing Opal fuel across Australia in communities that service Aboriginal people'.¹⁵

2.15 In Queensland Opal fuel now attracts a subsidy under the Queensland Fuel Subsidy Scheme in line with other standard retail fuel products, as recommended by the committee in its 2006 report.¹⁶ This is an initiative of the Queensland government.

2.16 There is now an increased production and therefore increased supply of Opal fuel. This increased supply has allowed more communities and regions to have access to Opal fuel. BP noted that production of Opal at its Kwinana refinery has increased from 1 million litres in 2005 to current production levels of 18 million litres per annum.¹⁷ There is capacity to produce up to 40 million litres of Opal per annum at the Kwinana refinery.¹⁸

2.17 In their submission the Commonwealth government noted that the supply of Opal to more areas is planned, including Tennant Creek, Katherine and Kakadu in the Northern Territory, the Nullarbor in South Australia and the Gulf and Cape York regions in Queensland.¹⁹ At its Adelaide hearing, the committee was informed by BP Australia that Opal is now being transported to Gove for supply to Nhulunbuy.²⁰

2.18 The committee understands that there are two ways communities get Opal: if they are within a particular zone, as is the case of communities in designated PSS zones, or if they voluntarily request Opal they can be assisted by the Commonwealth. Ms Lesley Podesta explained this in the following way:

It is one of those issues where, if the communities come to us and we approve it, it is relatively straightforward and it will not be a problem. The issue will be if they come to us and there are either logistics issues or management and safety and security of fuel supply issues that then need to be worked through. Without knowing what the conditions are in each one of those communities, if they are in a position to have secure fuel, they have community support and they apply, it is pretty quick. That is

13 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 19.

14 South Australian government, *Submission 15*, p. 5.

15 Ms Lesley Podesta, *Committee Hansard*, 12 March 2009, p. 3.

16 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*, June 2006, p.113.

17 BP Australia Pty Ltd, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

18 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, pp 18–19.

19 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 20.

20 Mr Chris McKenzie, BP Australia Pty Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2009, p.28.

the way the program has run out all the way through the country, except that when we made a decision we would designate an area and then go forward and try to win hearts and minds to come onto the program, which was a little different. But where there is a voluntary wish to take up the program, we and the Indigenous Coordination Centres help to resolve logistics, security and management issues, and we—as a health department—help with fuel distribution issues, and the supply issue is relatively straightforward.²¹

2.19 At the Canberra hearing the Commonwealth government provided information about the process for providing Opal fuel in certain communities and gave a status report of plans for wider availability of Opal fuel in certain locations.

Tennant Creek

2.20 The committee heard that fuel distribution to Tennant Creek is a significant logistical challenge because the fuel is stored in bulk at Largs North in South Australia and it is difficult to transport it to Tennant Creek. The committee understands that the Commonwealth is working with the fuel industry to overcome some of the problems and have undertaken consultation with service stations and local government in Tennant Creek however until 'that fuel distribution issue is resolved in regard to Tennant Creek, we are not able to supply Tennant Creek'.²²

Katherine

2.21 The community of Bulman, approximately 300 kilometres from Katherine, has been approved for the supply of Opal fuel and received its first delivery of Opal in June 2008. There is one bowser supplying Opal fuel in Katherine but consultation has been undertaken with stakeholders for the rollout of Opal in all locations in Katherine, Mataranka and Timber Creek, including roadhouses and communities. If fuel distribution issues can be resolved the Commonwealth expects 'rollout to be completed by the end of this year'.²³

Kakadu

2.22 There is one site receiving Opal fuel in Kakadu at the moment with four more sites having been identified for supply: Jabiru, Bark Hut, South Alligator and Coinda. The Commonwealth advised that distribution was a problem that had to be resolved before Opal could be supplied however if these issues could be resolved, supply could begin by July 2009.²⁴

21 Ms Lesley Podesta, DoHA, *Committee Hansard*, 12 March 2009, p. 14.

22 Ms Lesley Podesta, DoHA, *Committee Hansard*, 12 March 2009, p. 10.

23 Ms Tarja Saastamoinen, DoHA, *Committee Hansard*, 12 March 2009, p. 11.

24 Ms Tarja Saastamoinen, DoHA, *Committee Hansard*, 12 March 2009, p. 11.

Gulf region and Cape York, Queensland

2.23 The committee heard that there were three sites in the Gulf region of Queensland receiving Opal fuel and one in Cape York.²⁵

2.24 While the committee notes the progress that is being made to expand and offer Opal in more locations, it is concerned with the process of communicating the availability of Opal to Indigenous people and communities. The committee was very pleased to hear that Opal could be supplied to communities that request it,²⁶ however little evidence was presented to the committee about how communities found out about this option, apart from having officers in communities who could mention it to community members.²⁷

2.25 Given the difficulties many Indigenous people and communities experience understanding the services that are available to them, and the problems that government agencies and others have in making information accessible, the committee is keen to ensure that this option is promoted widely in an effective and accessible way. On this basis the committee recommends that the Department of Health and Ageing promote this service to communities through an explicit and comprehensive communication and engagement strategy. As the Commonwealth has provided evidence that the revised communication strategy is still under development²⁸ the committee considers that this provides an ideal opportunity to include information about how communities can request and be supplied with Opal fuel.

Recommendation 1

2.26 Given that the Department of Health and Ageing provides assistance with the supply of Opal fuel to any community that requests it, and that there was no evidence given to the committee to indicate that communities were aware of this, the committee recommends that the department actively promote this option in a way that is accessible and well understood by Indigenous people and their communities.

Health risks of Opal fuel

2.27 Although Opal fuel is low aromatic and does not give a 'high' when it is sniffed, it is nevertheless a volatile substance which can have serious health effects if inhaled.²⁹ In April 2007 an Indigenous boy died from accidental suffocation secondary

25 Ms Lesley Podesta, DoHA, *Committee Hansard*, 12 March 2009, p. 12.

26 Ms Lesley Podesta, DoHA, *Committee Hansard*, 12 March 2009, p. 14.

27 Ms Donna Moody, FaHCSIA, *Committee Hansard*, 12 March 2009, p. 29.

28 Ms Tarja Saastamoinen, DoHA, *Committee Hansard*, 12 March 2009, p. 8.

29 BP Australia Pty Ltd, *Submission 9*, p. 2.

to the inhalation of vapour from Opal fuel.³⁰ The Coroner investigating the death recommended:

That the Northern Territory Government, the Commonwealth Government and BP Australia ensure that any promotion in relation to Opal does not give the impression that it is a harmless substance or that it cannot cause death if ingested or sniffed.³¹

2.28 BP has subsequently ensured that the term 'non-sniffable' is not used in its marketing of Opal fuel to help avoid any impression that Opal is in anyway safe to sniff.³² The committee notes that the government's communication strategy for Opal was suspended in late 2007 as a result of the coroner's findings. The Commonwealth government departments advised that they are currently working with BP Australia—as recommended by the committee in its previous report—and communication experts to review the Opal fuel communication strategy and develop a suitable campaign.³³

Opal fuel rollout in Alice Springs

2.29 A number of submitters, as well as the Urbis Review, drew attention to the troubled roll out of Opal fuel in Alice Springs.

2.30 The first attempt to introduce Opal in Alice Springs in 2006 was not accompanied by a comprehensive communication strategy and as a result false information regarding Opal fuel, primarily its negative effect on car engines, circulated throughout the community. As noted in the Urbis Review and the submission from the Commonwealth government, the backlash led to many service stations ceasing their supply of Opal.³⁴

2.31 The Alice Springs Town Council noted:

The rumour and misinformation spread as to the damaging effect of Opal on vehicles was widespread and had currency with many. An official campaign to address this was generally conceded to be unsuccessful, and it took a concerted campaign by the tourism industry amongst others, using research by a respected "independent" motoring organisation, (the RAA, who tracked down every rumoured breakdown attributed to the use of Opal and showed the lack of veracity to these claims) to bring acceptance to the use of Opal.³⁵

30 Inquest into the death of Kenny Malthouse [2008] NTMC 026, p. 3.

31 Inquest into the death of Kenny Malthouse [2008] NTMC 026, p. 10.

32 BP Australia Pty Ltd, *Submission 9*, p.5.

33 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 22.

34 Urbis, *Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy*, June 2008, p. 24; FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 21.

35 Alice Springs Town Council, *Submission 16*, p. 3.

2.32 Following research by DoHA which highlighted a 'major lack of accurate and factual information about Opal in the Alice Springs community', a communication campaign was developed and implemented at the same time as the second roll out of Opal in February-March 2007. DoHA noted that:

The campaign materials were thoroughly developed based on extensive consumer research into attitudes surrounding *Opal* fuel and were thoroughly market tested in Alice Springs to ensure they met the information needs of Alice Springs consumers.³⁶

2.33 However, the Urbis Review and other submitters highlighted issues about timing and appropriateness of the communication campaign accompanying the second roll out in 2007. The Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS) stated:

Government information campaigns on Opal have been poorly timed and targeted and there has been a growth in Premium unleaded usage in the region from 10% prior to Opal to 50% currently...

... We hope the campaign significantly improves, this strategy is crucial to keeping the community informed and committed to Opal, especially as it is a voluntary program that could be discontinued at any time by the retailers in Alice Springs.³⁷

2.34 The Urbis Review also noted concerns from DoHA and other stakeholders that as the communications campaign was launched at the same time the rollout began it did not sufficiently prepare people to accept the switch to Opal fuel. This again contributed to 'some "backlash" from locals, although less severe than with the initial (aborted) rollout of Opal in mid-2006'.³⁸ In light of the experience in Alice Springs the Review recommended that in any future rollout of Opal fuel there should be 'an appropriate communications strategy in operation a few weeks in advance'.³⁹

2.35 The Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council was primarily concerned with the content and appropriateness of the communications campaign, noting that DoHA opted for standard newspaper advertisements which NPY believed was not as effective as an alternative campaign that had been developed, using radio as well as print advertising, and which featured well-known personalities such as Lee Kernaghan. NPY Women's Council stated:

The communication strategies in relation to Opal have unfortunately fallen far short of the mark...

36 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 21.

37 Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS), *Submission 10*, p. 6.

38 Urbis, *Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy*, June 2008, p. 25.

39 Urbis, *Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy*, June 2008, p. 47.

...We remain very concerned that the adverse affects of the early bad publicity have not been overcome, and are considering designing and running our own campaign.⁴⁰

2.36 Although there have been issues with the rollout of Opal fuel in Alice Springs, the four Commonwealth departments reported that since March 2007 all 11 service stations in Alice Springs have completely replaced regular unleaded petrol with Opal fuel.⁴¹ CAYLUS noted that the voluntary replacement of standard unleaded fuel with Opal by all retailers in Alice Springs is a remarkable achievement that has made an enormous difference.⁴²

2.37 Although Opal is has now replaced standard unleaded petrol the committee is concerned by the anecdotal evidence and reports from Alice Springs of an abnormal increase in sales of premium unleaded fuel since Opal was introduced—CAYLUS suggests it has increased from 10 per cent to 50 per cent of sales—which may indicate that there are some lingering suspicions about Opal fuel within the community.⁴³

2.38 The rollout of Opal fuel in Alice Springs demonstrates the importance of an advanced targeted communications campaign which should be considered before the rollout of Opal fuel in similar areas.

Recommendation 2

2.39 That any future rollout of Opal fuel be accompanied by an appropriate communications strategy that is implemented well in advance of the rollout. As such, the committee urges the government as a matter of priority to finalise the revised communications strategy before the next phase of the rollout of Opal fuel. The committee does not consider that this should cause any delay to the further rollout of Opal fuel.

The success of Opal fuel

2.40 The supply of Opal fuel has been a resounding success in helping to reduce petrol sniffing. Whilst visiting communities the committee heard about the difference that Opal fuel is making. Community members in Papunya described Opal fuel as a 'helping hand' that was said to have brought 'smiling back in the community'. In Mutitjulu Opal fuel was described as having completely changed the face of communities.

2.41 The Department of Health and Ageing recently conducted an impact evaluation of Opal fuel to assess the impact of the roll-out on the prevalence of petrol

40 Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, *Submission 11*, p. 11.

41 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 21.

42 CAYLUS, *Submission 10*, p. 6.

43 CAYLUS, *Submission 10*, p. 6; see also Urbis, *Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy*, June 2008, p. 25.

sniffing. The evaluation was released in October 2008 and found that in 17 of the 20 communities studied, petrol sniffing had declined with an overall decrease of 70 per cent across all communities included in the study. Central Australia and the APY Lands were the areas that recorded the largest decreases of 94 per cent and 93 per cent respectively. The evaluation also found that:

- there is a statistically significant relationship between the distance from each community to the nearest ULP outlet, and the size of the decrease in the prevalence of sniffing at each community, which indicates that the use of Opal fuel has had a significant role in the decrease in the prevalence of sniffing; and
- qualitative feedback indicates that most residents of the communities who have experienced a decline in sniffing attribute the cause of that decline, at least in part, to the introduction of Opal fuel.⁴⁴

2.42 Many submissions also accredited much of the reduction in sniffing to Opal fuel, as Brian McCoy noted:

The roll out of Opal fuel has made a significant difference in its ability to limit access by young people to sniffable fuel. Most sniffers are young and with limited access to income as also vehicles. They remain dependent on what they can access within their own communities.⁴⁵

2.43 The submission from Maggie Kavanagh noted that in Balgo in Western Australia there is:

...agreement in the community that Opal has had a positive impact in Balgo. One comment in particular sums up many people's view about Opal:

*Finally with Opal in the community the issue was addressed and something concrete was being done about petrol sniffing in Balgo. We stopped wasting endless time asking why, what can we do. Opal was something that was preventing sniffing. It is a good strategy. We have to be separate from petrol here.*⁴⁶

2.44 At the Alice Springs hearing the committee heard evidence from community members about the changes that Opal fuel and the reduction in petrol sniffing have made to various communities. Janet Inyaka, Vice-Chairperson of the NPY Women's Council, from Amata in the APY Lands said:

All our communities have good petrol...there is no sniffing of petrol in the communities. We are having good peaceful sleeps at night and the young people have youth activities. There is no petrol sniffing and we do not want them to go back to the old ways.⁴⁷

44 Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Peter d'Abbs and Gillian Shaw, *Executive Summary of the Evaluation of the Impact of Opal Fuel*, October 2008, p. 2.

45 Mr Brian McCoy, *Submission 7*, pp. 2-3.

46 Maggie Kavanagh, *Submission 18*, p. 1.

47 Janet Inyaka, NPY Women's Council, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2008, pp. 40 and 42.

2.45 The committee also heard that as a direct result of the introduction of Opal fuel some of the associated problems with petrol sniffing, such as burglary by young people in search of petrol, have also ceased. In Alpurrurulam one community member told the committee that the school's lawn mowers can now be left outside as everyone knows they are run on Opal fuel and as such they are no longer a target for theft by sniffers.

2.46 The committee notes that the overall reduction in petrol sniffing across many communities provides a real window of opportunity to address the issue of substance abuse and increase the community and service providers' capacity to case manage the remaining individuals who are still sniffing petrol. For example, the committee heard that in Mutitjulu any outbreaks of petrol sniffing can now be monitored and managed by the elders as previously the sniffers were too numerous and powerful within the community.

Opal is only part of the solution

2.47 Although Opal has been extremely successful in reducing the incidence of petrol sniffing, there were consistent calls in submissions and in oral evidence for the recognition that long term benefits to communities will only come from a comprehensive response to address the underlying causes of petrol sniffing and substance abuse. Opal fuel, while fundamentally important in helping to address the supply side of petrol sniffing, is not in itself the solution. As the South Australian government notes, the reduction in petrol sniffing so far is the likely result of 'the combination of supply, demand and harm reduction measures'.⁴⁸

2.48 While the committee was in Papunya, members of the community outlined the key aspects they believe have enabled them to stop petrol sniffing in the community, which included having good communication, strong leaders, family groups and ties, having support and assistance from organisations such as the Tangentyere Council and CAYLUS and a sports program for young people.

2.49 The Commonwealth government's submission noted reports from communities where Opal fuel has been introduced that some sniffers were substituting petrol for other substances such as glue, paint, marijuana, alcohol and mouthwash. This highlights 'that supply reduction strategies such as Opal fuel, although effective, are only one element in addressing substance use'.⁴⁹

2.50 Without a long-term comprehensive response to petrol sniffing and substance abuse it is inevitable that many young people will substitute petrol sniffing for other forms of substance abuse for which there is no Opal fuel panacea. And while the dysfunctional and destructive affects of petrol sniffing have for the most part subsided, it is critical to use this opportunity to support sustainable long-term

48 South Australian government, *Submission 15*, p. 8.

49 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 23.

programs that address the underlying causes of substance abuse in order to build stronger communities for the future. As BP Australia observed:

Opal can only ever be one part of a more comprehensive effort to address the underlying causes and devastating impact of petrol sniffing.⁵⁰

Northern Territory Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act

2.51 The roll out of Opal fuel has so far been on a voluntary basis. There is no law mandating that only Opal be supplied in Petrol Sniffing Zone areas and as such regular fuel is still accessible within or in close proximity to many communities.

2.52 Since the committee last reported there has been progress towards creating a legislative framework that would ban regular unleaded fuel in communities in the Northern Territory. Under the *Northern Territory Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act 2005*, individual communities can put in place a community management plan banning and/or controlling the supply and sale of petrol and other volatile substances in a community council area. This is an area defined as either a shire council under the *Northern Territory Local Government Act 2008* or an Aboriginal corporation as defined under the *Commonwealth Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976*.⁵¹ The community management plans are then subject to Northern Territory ministerial approval.⁵²

2.53 The community of Papunya was the first to put in place such a management plan banning petrol sniffing and allowing contractors and others to be fined if they bring intoxicating fuel within the community boundary. The committee heard in Papunya that although it took some time for the community management plan to have official legal status, the community decided that petrol sniffing would be illegal and enforced this law themselves before the official enactment of the management plan on 1 May 2007. The committee observed that this option—which was promoted to the community by CAYLUS—assisted in empowering them to take control of their own community and the fight against petrol sniffing. Papunya's message now to other communities with a petrol sniffing problem is that 'communities have to be strong, to stand on their own two feet and be proud of their kids'.

2.54 The Northern Territory Member for MacDonnell, Alison Anderson, who assisted with the development of the Management Plan in Papunya stated:

It's great to see the community come together to celebrate the new Management Plan that will assist the fight against the scourge of petrol sniffing...

50 BP Australia Pty Ltd, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

51 This act was repealed and replaced by the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006*.

52 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 22.

...The supply of petrol and other volatile substances within the Papunya community is now punishable under Territory law.

There is also the capacity for mandatory treatment orders...

...The Territory approach has already attracted interest from around the world with a group of Canadian health workers visiting Papunya today to see how Government measures and Opal Fuel have reduced sniffing.⁵³

2.55 CAYLUS noted that it has been working with the Northern Territory government to implement the Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act in communities. CAYLUS stated that:

The original promise of the legislation proved hard to realize, with numerous bureaucratic obstacles to its effectiveness. It is currently under review, and we hope it will become more streamlined in its application. It is still the best hope for protecting the community from inhalant addicts, whilst not criminalizing these people for their addictions.⁵⁴

2.56 The Commonwealth government indicated in their submission that a number of other communities in the Northern Territory are working to establish similar bans however it was not aware of any equivalent legislation enabling community bans in other jurisdictions outside of the Northern Territory.⁵⁵

Recommendation 3

2.57 That Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland provide similar mechanisms to those in place in the Northern Territory which empower individual communities to ban the importation, supply and sale of regular petrol and other volatile substances in a designated local council or shire area.

Services available for young people

2.58 Another fundamental strategy included in the Eight Point Plan and a central element in reducing substance abuse is the availability of alternative activities for young people. As the committee has observed throughout both of its inquiries, community based youth services are fundamental to effectively address petrol sniffing and substance abuse. Well resourced youth programs with strong community engagement and support are essential in order to tackle the complex causes of petrol sniffing, such as a lack of educational opportunities, high unemployment, low self esteem and boredom and as well as the general lack of basic resources and opportunities for young people that would be available to them if they lived in urban communities.

53 Ms Alison Anderson, Member for MacDonnell, 'Papunya Celebrates New Laws To Combat Sniffing', Media Release, 22 May 2007.

54 CAYLUS, *Submission 10*, p. 12

55 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 23.

2.59 Organisations that currently provide services for young people in central Australia include:

- CAYLUS;
- YouthTraX Local Community Partnership;
- BushMob Inc.;
- Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation;
- Alice Springs Youth Accommodation and Support Services Inc.;
- Mission Australia;
- The Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council; and
- The Mt Theo Program⁵⁶

2.60 Submitters were adamant that a 'one size fits all' approach does not work for youth programs in remote Indigenous communities, with providers needing to harness local knowledge, skills and networks as well as consult with communities to develop local solutions that meet the community's needs and priorities.

One size fits all does not work in Aboriginal Communities...services ...need to be designed and implemented in consultation with the community. For a service or a program to work effectively in an Aboriginal community, it is important for the community to have ownership over the program.⁵⁷

Northern Territory Integrated Youth Service

2.61 The Northern Territory Integrated Youth Services Project (NTIYSP) was the key youth program funded under the PSS. The program operates in the four communities of Mutitjulu, Aputula (Finke), Kaltukatjara (Docker River) and Imanpa.⁵⁸ The NTIYSP is targeted to young people aged between 5 and 25 years of age and addresses several key elements of the Eight Point Plan including providing alternative activities for young people, education and strengthening communities.

2.62 The services delivered through the NTIYSP were outlined in the submission from the Commonwealth government. These include:

- Youth activities, including sport, cultural, recreational, and other diversionary activities;
- Linking to more specialised case management services to provide support for at-risk individuals at the local level (including assistance to remain connected to family);

56 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, pp. 26–27.

57 Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, *Submission 8*, p. [3].

58 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 6.

- Assistance to remain connected to or engage with education, training and employment; and
- Links to community health and education initiatives.⁵⁹

2.63 Mission Australia was awarded the contract for the NTIYSP following a tender process and was allocated funding of \$8 million over a three year period as well as an additional \$4 million for infrastructure such as construction and upgrades of recreation halls and youth worker accommodation.⁶⁰ Mission Australia stated:

In setting up the NTIYS, the federal government acknowledged that an innovative and comprehensive service delivery model was needed to provide more effective services for youth. Rather than repeating the mistakes of the past by setting up ad hoc, poorly resourced and understaffed youth services, the NTIYS recognised that effective services needed a number of things, such as adequate staffing. That includes staff who have the necessary skills, maturity, experience and the motivation to do the job. We also need infrastructure, including housing for workers, recreation halls and vehicles.⁶¹

2.64 Through the NTIYSP Mission Australia provides a range of activities, including:

- working to re-engage young people with education;
- sport and recreation activities such as football, basketball, softball, band practice and recording, rollerblading, BMX riding;
- nutrition/cooking, pizza and camel stew nights;
- hygiene and hair care;
- cultural activities such as visiting sacred sites with community elders;
- school pick-up services; and
- lunch time activities to help encourage school attendance.⁶²

2.65 Mission Australia reported that in the month of June 2008, 4 125 children and young adults participated in activities run under the NTIYSP, with the largest total participation rate over the four communities being boys aged between 10 and 14 years. Mission Australia's data also shows that although the NTIYSP is targeted at young people between 5 and 25 years there were over 300 children under the age of 5

59 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 27.

60 Funding is provided through FaHCSIA, AGD and DEEWR see FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 27.

61 Mr Paul Phyland, Mission Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2008, p. 62.

62 Mission Australia, *Submission 5*, p. [2].

participating over the same month in NTIYSP activities which is around 8 per cent of the total.⁶³ The reason given for this is that:

Older children may be left to look after their younger brothers and sisters. Our youth workers will not separate the younger children from their older siblings as doing so could mean leaving the younger ones unattended or the older ones not participating in activities.⁶⁴

2.66 During this inquiry the committee visited Mutitjulu and spoke with youth workers from Mission Australia as well as other community members. The committee visited the youth facilities which included a computing room, a band practice room, a recreational hall with pool tables, a play station and an arts and craft room. There was also a separate room with gym equipment for the older males. The committee was advised that the hardest group to engage with was young women between 15-25 years of age as many of the facilities were mainly used by the men, and due to their child care responsibilities. The committee was pleased to learn of the successful collaboration between the youth service and the Voyages Ayers Rock Resort 20 kilometres from Mutitjulu which allows the community to use the swimming pool in the afternoons.

2.67 Although the NTIYSP is regarded as successful, Mission Australia notes there were some issues with its initial implementation. The committee was advised that 'from the outset we [Mission Australia] have acknowledged in our submission and in our opening statement that the early days of the program were difficult'.⁶⁵ Some of the difficulties outlined by Mission Australia include:

- a prior lack of presence in the region, including lack of networks and relationships on which to build the service and ensure community ownership;
- difficulties associated with establishing services in remote areas;
- inappropriate initial staffing structures, with inadequate decision making authority among staff located in communities; and
- lack of clear direction and control from management and lack of support for community-based staff resulting in high staff turnover and inadequate reporting and monitoring.⁶⁶

2.68 Similar concerns regarding the implementation of the NTIYSP were also expressed to the committee during its inquiry. CAYLUS submitted that there:

63 Mission Australia, *Submission 5*, Attachment 1.

64 Mission Australia, *Submission 5*, p. [2].

65 Mr Phillip Leslie, Mission Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2008, p. 64.

66 Mission Australia, *Submission 5*, pp. [3–6].

...appeared to be great confusion about how to undertake the work and unrealistic demands both from government and from Mission Australia management placed upon local workers...

These unrealistic expectations appear to be the result of several factors. One being that Mission Australia were inexperienced and over committed in their tender...Another factor appears to have been that the multiple government departments that funded the initiative didn't collate their expectations, so the workers were expected to be running youth activities by one dept whilst being truancy officers for another and research officers for yet another.

Another ongoing pressure has been that CAPSSU did not deliver suitable staff accommodation.⁶⁷

2.69 Some of the lessons learnt from the implementation of the NTIYSP were outlined by Mission Australia and include the need for:

- the provision of appropriate service structures and management to enable clear decision-making processes;
- establishing local networks to assist in information sharing, coordinated responses and better relationships with the local community and organisations; and
- accountability and clear direction and control from management.⁶⁸

2.70 The *Urbis Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy* also reported several broader stakeholder concerns about the NTIYSP, including that:

- it covered only four communities;
- progress has been slow due to a range of factors such as turnover of youth workers, delays in upgrading accommodation and community facilities and suspicion arising out of the NTER; and
- there was a need to focus more on developing young people's knowledge and skills.⁶⁹

2.71 For further discussion of issues surrounding the tender process for youth services see paragraphs 4.40 to 4.47 in chapter 4.

South Australian programs

2.72 In addition to the PSS Eight Point Plan the South Australian government and other stakeholders in the region developed an action plan for the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands to focus on five priority areas required to improve

67 CAYLUS, *Submission 10*, p. 8.

68 Mission Australia, *Submission 5*, pp. [5-6].

69 Urbis, *Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy*, June 2008, p. 43.

living conditions. The reduction of petrol sniffing and improvement of youth programs were a key element of the second identified priority, which is community safety.

2.73 The South Australian government's submission outlined various youth engagement strategies and programs that have been developed and implemented either in conjunction with the Commonwealth government or run by the state Department for Families and Communities. These strategies are designed to improve youth programs and to divert young people from substance abuse. During the committee's visit to Amata, the committee met with staff from the South Australian Department of Families and Communities and was impressed with the efforts staff were making, as well as the range of activities and the thought that had been put in to providing services.

2.74 The main youth activities provided include:

- sports and recreation activities;
- renovation of community buildings into Youth Centres;
- learning and playing instruments;
- horse breaking programs;
- meals programs;
- bicycle maintenance programs;
- holiday recreation programs; and
- dirt bike (motor cross) programs.⁷⁰

2.75 Some of the main programs and strategies implemented in the APY lands so far include:

- The APY Lands Sport, Multi Sport and Youth Recreation program which has provided funding to the South Australian National Football League (SANFL) to coordinate and manage sporting competitions on the APY Lands along with an after school multi skills youth program. There are also training opportunities being provided for future work in sport, youth work or in pool management.⁷¹ The primary goal of the project is to address the research finding that petrol sniffing is often related to boredom;⁷²
- The APY Youth Engagement Strategy which has so far created a database of young people between 12 and 20 years who are not attending school or other training or work, has run a Pastoral Industry Training program, a trial

70 South Australian government, *Submission 15*, p. 9.

71 South Australian government, *Submission 15*, p. 9.

72 Urbis, *Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy*, June 2008, p.30.

construction program at Ernabella School offering training and accreditation opportunities and a trial Bush Mechanics program;⁷³

- The training of youth workers through Relationships Australia which has been contracted by the Department of Families and Communities in South Australia to provide formal training sessions which have covered key topics including program planning, crisis management, sports and recreational skills, mental health first aid (depression, suicide, and psychosis), youth development and applying for funding. Since July 2007 twenty two youth workers have attended the training;⁷⁴ and
- A Specialist Intervention Support service that engages an Intensive Support Service Practitioner to provide counselling and support/ response service for people with violent/aggressive and challenging anti-social behaviours and incorporates support for family and other members of the APY Lands communities.⁷⁵

2.76 The Urbis Review stated that it was too early to provide a comprehensive report on the outcomes of these initiatives in the APY Lands. However it noted there was some anecdotal evidence suggesting that the initiatives will have positive effects. For example the SANFL program has:

...reportedly been "very well received by the community and very well-supported", as evidenced by the high numbers of participants, and the fact that the project has engaged not only young people but also a range of other community members as well (eg as trainers, preparing food at football matches, and getting involved in fund-raising). Similarly there is anecdotal evidence that the...project has helped increase the level of participation in sport and recreation activities across the APY Lands.⁷⁶

2.77 In addition, when the committee visited the community of Amata in the APY Lands the manager of youth services advised that the AFL competition has been extremely popular with the young men in the community, with parallel softball matches organised for young women. In addition to AFL, young men have also been able to access motorcycle training and licensing in the community through the support of Motorcycle Australia who visited the community in order to prepare them to enter the Finke Desert Race which is an off road, multi terrain two-day race through the desert from Alice Springs to Aputula (Finke). This has been a great success with one of the young men chosen for a professional team.

73 South Australian government, *Submission 15*, pp. 8-9.

74 South Australian government, *Submission 15*, p. 10.

75 South Australian government, *Submission 15*, p. 12.

76 Urbis, *Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy*, June 2008, p.30.

Western Australian programs

2.78 Both the NPY Women's Council and the Urbis review of the petrol sniffing strategy noted that the provision of youth services under the petrol sniffing strategy in Western Australia has been slower than in other jurisdictions.⁷⁷

A Ngaanyatjarra Lands (WA) Youth Substance Abuse Strategy was prepared for CAPSSU by the Ngaanyatjarra Council and Shire and includes a consultation report, mapping exercise and implementation plans. NPYWC and many other agencies working in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands were involved in the preparation. This Strategy was submitted to Kalgoorlie ICC in June 06 and until very recently there had been no action on substance abuse prevention and intervention in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.⁷⁸

2.79 Although progress has been slow there are some youth services and infrastructure projects under way in both the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and the East Kimberley zones. The Western Australian government notes that the Ngaanyatjarraku Shire is currently working to establish Youth Treatment Camps to provide education and connection to country for young people in the area. In conjunction, Juvenile Offender Camps are also being initiated for 12-16 year olds to treat alcohol and other drug dependencies together with family and community involvement and sport and recreational activities.⁷⁹ There has also been a considerable investment in youth worker accommodation in the Ngaanyatjarraku Shire area with the Commonwealth government providing over \$2 million.

2.80 In addition, the NPY Women's Council advised that it is funded by the Commonwealth government to employ a full-time youth development worker based at Warakurna, and occasionally engages casual or part-time staff when funds are available.

School holiday programs

2.81 Providing young people with activities during the school holidays is extremely important as there is a greater possibility that young people will sniff petrol during the long breaks especially where school may otherwise provide the only daily activity within the community. As Pauline Fietz noted in her paper *A Good Practice Model for Youth Program Development in Southern Central Australia*:

Regular and consistent activities are of particular importance for young people during the school holidays, periods known to induce high levels of boredom and potentially outbreaks of petrol sniffing.⁸⁰

77 Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, *Submission 11*, p. 9; Urbis, *Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy*, June 2008, p.31.

78 Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, *Submission 11*, p. 9.

79 Western Australian government, *Submission 12*, p. [2].

80 Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, *Submission 11d*, p. 4.

2.82 CAYLUS have also noted that these programs are particularly useful in communities without a fulltime youth program.⁸¹

2.83 Since December 2007, the South Australian government has—in conjunction with NPY Women’s Council—run specific targeted school holiday programs in each of the communities in the APY Lands. Activities have included:

- hip hop dance and arts activities;
- music workshops and recordings, bush trips, and film and multi-media programs;
- Circosis—circus skills that include hula hoops, juggling and acrobatics; and
- Ngapartji Ngapartji: Film making and theatre games program.⁸²

2.84 The NPY Women's Council also runs school holiday programs in Western Australia in Warakurna and Kiwirrkurra—the most remote school in Western Australia—but noted it no longer ran programs in the Northern Territory as that is now the role of Mission Australia under the Northern Territory Integrated Youth Services Project (NTIYSP).

2.85 CAYLUS also highlighted the success of a school holiday program run in Balgo over the last summer break. The directors of Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation (WAC) provided half the funds and asked CAYLUS to assist in jointly running the program with funding from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. The activities targeted a range of age groups and involved a range of organisations in the community including the police, church, school, WAC, the local store and Palyalatju Marpanpa Health Committee. CAYLUS reported that local residents noticed a 'substantial reduction in the levels of breakins which often [were] perpetrated by hungry and bored kids in the community at this time of the year'.⁸³ The success of the program has led the directors of WAC to seek support from the Attorney General's Department for its continuation over the upcoming school holidays.

2.86 CAYLUS also provided as an attachment a detailed costing of how these school holiday programs could operate on an individual community level through already existing local youth programs.

Other non-government services

2.87 BP Australia and Yirara College in Alice Springs provided information about a 'return to school program' developed with Teen Challenge for Indigenous youth

81 CAYLUS, *Submission 10*, p. 9.

82 South Australian government, *Submission 15*, p. 11.

83 CAYLUS, *Submission 10a*, p. 3.

from remote communities such as Hermannsburg and Papunya to support students at risk to return to studies.⁸⁴ Some of the activities included holiday camps, supporting students at court, visiting communities and a 'Sand Play' therapy program.

2.88 The communities of Balgo, Mulan and Bililuna in Western Australia have a youth service run by the Palyalatju Marpanpa Health Committee funded mainly by non-government sources including St. John of God Subiaco hospital campus and CARITAS. The youth service provides case management, counselling and support, discos and 'family nights', photography projects, digital filmmaking courses and employment and training for young people to work with Palyalatju.⁸⁵

Levels of policing

2.89 Policing levels in remote Indigenous communities within the PSS zone have increased since the committee reported in 2006. This is in large part due to the measures within the Northern Territory Emergency Response which has seen the establishment of a permanent police presence in many Northern Territory communities. The Commonwealth government's submission notes that in the central desert region there are new or additional police in Haasts Bluff, Imanpa, Mutitjulu, Nyirripi, Santa Teresa and Willowra.⁸⁶

2.90 This is an important development as the NPY Women's Council notes:

A suitable level of policing, based in communities, is pivotal to the success of Opal in the battle to eradicate sniffing...[and] In order to prevent the substitution of liquor and illicit drugs for sniffable fuel, there must be diligent and comprehensive policing.⁸⁷

Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk

2.91 The Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk (SAID) was established in January 2006 and operates out of Alice Springs. The SAID is a coordinated effort of the Northern Territory, Western Australian and South Australian police forces to 'achieve consistent policing strategies in the cross border region in central Australia'. The Commonwealth government's submission commented on the success of the SAID:

It has been notably successful in limiting the trafficking of illicit substances, has seized sizeable quantities of drugs, guns, and money, and led to significant arrests.⁸⁸

2.92 For example, between January 2006 and March 2008 the SAID:

84 BP Australia Pty Ltd, *Submission 9*, p. 3; Yirara College, *Submission 6*, p. [1].

85 Maggie Kavanagh, *Submission 18*, p. 2.

86 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 6.

87 Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, *Submission 11*, p. 5.

88 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 6.

- laid 1 206 drug related charges;
- had 177 police interventions related to incidences of petrol sniffing;
- seized 17.9 litres of petrol;
- seized 33.104 kilograms of cannabis;
- seized 16 firearms;
- seized \$87 300 cash; and
- seized 1 178.45 litres of alcohol.⁸⁹

2.93 A second Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk was opened in Katherine in June 2008 as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response.⁹⁰

Developments on the APY Lands

2.94 Prior to 2008 there were eight police officers stationed in the administrative centres of Umuwa and Murputja on the APY Lands. The South Australian Commission of Inquiry into Children on the APY Lands in 2008 found that additional police stations and police officers were required within the major communities as response times to reported incidents were too slow. The report recommended that:

...fully operational police stations with an adequate number of personnel be established at all of the main communities on the Lands, namely Pipalyatjara or Kalka, Amata, Pukatja (Ernabella), Kaltjiti (Fregon), Mimili and Iwantja (Indulkana)...

...That the police stations be established as a matter of urgency.⁹¹

2.95 In response to the Commissioner's recommendations the South Australian Police (SAPOL) have provided four additional police with a long-term commitment to provide 19 permanent officers.⁹² The South Australian government's submission also noted that three new police stations and accommodation facilities will be built at Amata, Pukatja and Mimili with the first station at Amata due to be completed in August 2009.

Treatment and rehabilitation services

2.96 Since the committee last reported additional rehabilitation facilities have been built in the PSS zones. These are important developments, as the committee noted in its previous report:

89 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 14.

90 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 14.

91 Commissioner the Hon E Mullighan QC, Commission of Inquiry Report, *Children on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands*, April 2008, p. 245.

92 South Australian government, *Submission 15*, p. 4.

The ability to provide high level care and early rehabilitation intervention is imperative for communities suffering from the effects of petrol sniffing.⁹³

2.97 The Commonwealth government's submission noted that in 2006 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), in 'recognition of the importance of tackling the debilitating effect of substance abuse on Indigenous Australians', agreed to work to fund and administer measures to compliment the petrol sniffing strategy in order to address substance abuse in central Australia.⁹⁴ COAG funding for treatment and rehabilitation services provided since 2006 is outlined in detail in the Commonwealth government's submission.⁹⁵

2.98 Organisations for which COAG has provided funding for residential and non-residential rehabilitation services in the Northern Territory, South Australian and Western Australian areas of central Australia, include:

- Mt Theo/Yuendumu Substance Misuse Aboriginal Corporation;
- Drug and Alcohol Services Association Alice Springs Incorporated;
- Nganampa Health Council Incorporated;
- Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Community Incorporated;
- Ilpurla Aboriginal Corporation; and
- Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Programs Unit.⁹⁶

Substance Misuse Facility in Amata

2.99 The committee's previous report noted that funds had been allocated by the Commonwealth and South Australian governments for a rehabilitation facility in the APY Lands.⁹⁷ The Substance Misuse Facility, as it is known, has since been built in Amata and was officially opened in August 2008. The facility is managed by Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia (DASSA) and provides residential rehabilitation services for people with substance abuse problems. The facility also operates a mobile outreach service—which has been in operation since 2006—and has to date has assisted more than 110 people⁹⁸ by providing:

93 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*, June 2006, p. 88.

94 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 32.

95 See FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, pp. 32-36.

96 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 33.

97 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*, June 2006, p. 89.

98 South Australian government, *Submission 15*, p. 5.

...assessment, counselling and drug education in communities...and supports family members of people affected by petrol sniffing and substance abuse.⁹⁹

2.100 The committee was very pleased to be able to visit this facility in Amata which was built in consultation with the local community who advised on its location as well as the facilities that should be available. For example, the beds are at ground level and there is a covered breezeway as many of the Indigenous residents prefer some access to fresh air rather than air conditioning.

2.101 Janet Inyaka from Amata described the community's positive reaction to the new facility during evidence given to the committee in Alice Springs:

The treatment centre was there and we were very happy. The ones who used to sniff before are now damaged. They cannot think and they are sick. They have a lovely place at Amata where they can go and sit down and that is for other people as well to come and stay.¹⁰⁰

2.102 The opening of this facility on the APY Lands is a crucial step in implementing the Eight Point Plan as well as complying with recommendation 17 made by this committee and recommendations by the South Australian coroner in 2002 and 2005.¹⁰¹ However, although the facility is now operational, the delays in its construction has been an issue which was discussed at length during the previous inquiry and again raised by the NPY Women's Council during this inquiry.

2.103 An additional concern raised by the NPY Women's Council was in relation to possible difficulties in staffing the remote facility:

NPYWC has expressed serious concern as to whether the SA Department for Families and Communities will be able to attract and keep suitable staff in this location.¹⁰²

Bushmob House in Alice Springs

2.104 Also noted in the committee's previous report was the Northern Territory government's commitment to provide funds to build a new treatment and rehabilitation

99 The Hon. Jenny Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Jay Weatherill MP, South Australian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation, 'APY Lands Substance Misuse Facility officially opened', Joint press release, 12 August 2008.

100 Janet Inyaka, NPY Women's Council, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2008, p. 40.

101 See Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*, June 2006, p. 97; South Australian State Coroner, Wayne Chivell, 'Inquest into the deaths of Kunmanara Ken, Kunmanara Hunt and Kunmanara Thompson', Number 11 of 2002, 6 September 2002; South Australian State Coroner, Wayne Chivell, 'Inquest into the deaths of Kunmanara Ward, Kunmanara Ken, Kunmanara Ryan and Kunmanara Cooper', Number 17, 18, 19 and 20 of 2004, 14 March 2005.

102 Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, *Submission 11*, p. 27.

facility in Alice Springs.¹⁰³ The new facility, Bushmob House, began operating in April 2008 and is a dedicated volatile substance abuse, alcohol and other drugs residential treatment service for young people between 12 and 18 years of age. It provides safe accommodation, counselling services, drug and alcohol detoxification and rehabilitation and life skill development programs. Young people admitted to the program are supported by a comprehensive assessment and care plan and may stay anywhere up to three months depending on their circumstances.¹⁰⁴

2.105 Bushmob House is currently funded for five beds but has around 65 clients staying regularly and has accepted clients as young as 10 years old as well as referrals from interstate. Bushmob House assisted 47 petrol sniffers throughout 2008 and there have been an additional three users accessing the service so far in 2009.¹⁰⁵

Adult rehabilitation facility in Alice Springs

2.106 In August 2007 the Drug and Alcohol Services Association (DASA)—with Northern Territory government funding allocated through COAG—funded an additional ten beds in the newly opened residential facility to offer rehabilitation and case management services for adult sniffers of petrol and other inhalants in and around Alice Springs.

Review of Indigenous Coordination Centres

2.107 In the committee's previous report it recommended that the government evaluate the effectiveness of Indigenous Coordination Centres' (ICCs) implementation of the whole-of-government policy with a view to improving coordination of government programs.¹⁰⁶

2.108 The evaluation was undertaken in July 2007 with the final report released publicly in February 2009. The evaluation assessed the progress of ICCs against:

- working in partnership with Indigenous communities;
- whole-of-government leadership;
- flexibility and responsiveness;
- whole-of-government collaboration; and
- ICC capacity and governance.

103 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*, June 2006, p. 89.

104 Bushmob Inc, *Submission 19*, p. [3].

105 Bushmob Inc, *Submission 19*, p. [1].

106 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*, June 2006, p. 54.

2.109 The committee noted previously that evidence it had gathered suggested that whole-of-government coordination was not working effectively. This was supported by the findings of the evaluation which found that:

Overall, the implementation of whole-of-government collaboration in ICCs is an area requiring significant improvement. Many of the issues that impede whole-of-government collaboration are structural and have little to do with ICC staff and management's willingness to collaborate.¹⁰⁷

2.110 Whole-of-government collaboration within ICCs was found to require significant improvement particularly in the areas of:

- information sharing;
- developing flexible funding solutions; and
- co-location of the appropriate line agency staff.¹⁰⁸

2.111 The committee encourages the government to continuously monitor the progress and implementation of the ICC model in order to maximise the coordination of government programs to ensure that quality service delivery and support is available to communities.

National Inhalants Information Service

2.112 In June 2008 the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA) launched the National Inhalants Information Service (NIIS) which is a clearinghouse of information on inhalants abuse. According to the ADCA:

The NIIS has filled a vital missing information gap on inhalant abuse, and will help to increase knowledge and awareness of this issue across Australia. The new website and service also aims to enhance the ability for people to respond to inhalant abuse in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities...

...ADCA believes the new NIIS website and support service will significantly assist with addressing the effectiveness and adequacy of resources currently provided on petrol sniffing and substance abuse in central Australia.¹⁰⁹

2.113 The committee considers this to be a very comprehensive information service. The committee also notes that while mainstream programs have been successful in reducing the harmful impacts of substance use and misuse on the general population, they have failed to effectively reach Indigenous people and communities. The committee hopes that this service will address this problem and deliver more appropriate information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences.

107 FaHCSIA, *Evaluation of Indigenous Coordination Centres*, Final Report, July 2007, p. 27.

108 FaHCSIA, *Evaluation of Indigenous Coordination Centres*, Final Report, July 2007, p. vii.

109 Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia, *Submission 3*, pp. [1-2].

Levels of other substance abuse

2.114 Petrol sniffing is not the only substance abuse issue of concern in central Australia. Throughout this inquiry the committee consistently heard that marijuana use has been on the increase and has generally been the substance used in substitution for petrol.

2.115 Many submissions expressed concern about the increase in use of substances other than petrol. UnitingCare Adelaide reported in its submission that some leaders on the APY Lands had recently expressed:

...their concern that the abuse of other substances – particularly marijuana - has increased in the wake of the roll-out of Opal fuel.¹¹⁰

2.116 The committee asked CAYLUS whether they were aware if marijuana use has increased in some communities where petrol sniffing had decreased. CAYLUS advised that marijuana:

...is an issue. There was marijuana use before and people would smoke marijuana when they could get it, and when they ran out, they would sniff petrol. There is marijuana getting into the communities. Some people say there is more and others say that it is just more obvious now. Because people are not sniffing petrol all the time, it is a bit more obvious that they are stoned.¹¹¹

2.117 Daisy Ward, an NPY Women's Council worker from Warburton in Western Australia, advised the committee that young people in her community are using:

...things like petrol, drinking grog, smoking marijuana and what is the other thing—sniffing glue when the builders come in and they renovate the house. They forget, the glues are there, and then they break in and steal glue and sniff all that.¹¹²

2.118 At the committee's hearing in Adelaide many of the witnesses also agreed that marijuana was a large and increasing problem. The South Australian government noted that:

Anecdotal evidence and evidence from the police probably supports the notion that people substitute one drug for another. When they cannot get petrol, they have substituted cannabis. From the local sources of information that we have, we think that cannabis use in some communities has been on the rise. However, SAPOL have been working really hard to stop supply into those communities. That is the benefit of having Operation Midrealm and extra policing on the lands—certainly for Mutitjulu and other

110 UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide, *Submission 13*, p. 4.

111 Mr Blair McFarland, CAYLUS, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2008, p. 22.

112 Ms Daisy Ward, NPY Women's Council, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2008, p. 29.

communities adjacent to it. They can stop or reduce the supply of cannabis coming into the lands.¹¹³

2.119 The Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council of South Australia (ADAC) also told the committee that:

Mr Perry—Yes, cannabis is a big problem.

Senator BOYCE—And increasing?

Mr Perry—Yes. Also, other solvents are increasing, with paint and glue in the communities—and that is not just remote but also regional communities. In places like Port Augusta they are having problems with paint at the moment.¹¹⁴

2.120 ADAC also noted that as well as there being an increase in the use and availability of marijuana both its price and potency had increased. This is exacerbating mental health problems in the communities as well as leaving less money for food and clothing 'so we are finding that the children are missing out more and more.'¹¹⁵

2.121 The Nganampa Health Council's *Survey of prevalence of petrol sniffing on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands* recorded incidents of occasional glue and paint sniffing but noted that:

All informants stated that marihuana was the main drug of choice on the Lands, and, that petrol was only sniffed by past sniffers when they were unable to obtain marihuana.¹¹⁶

2.122 The Commonwealth government's submission provided a summary of the current situation observed by staff in Indigenous Coordination Centres:

ICC Managers report that in general, petrol sniffing is associated with remote areas, and that the inhalant drug of choice in urban settings tends to be paint (chroming).

Marijuana is a widespread problem in both urban and non-urban areas. Anecdotally, in some instances, where petrol sniffing has decreased, marijuana use has increased (for example, Darwin region, APY Lands).

Alcohol is a widespread problem where it is available (and often also where it is restricted). Anecdotally, petrol sniffing has increased in some places where alcohol has been banned. The ICCs report that petrol sniffing appears to have 'migrated' into some communities (such as a few in Cape York and the East Kimberley, as well as Katherine in the Northern Territory) as a result of alcohol bans in the Northern Territory. This

113 Ms Kim Petersen, South Australian government, *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2009, p. 43.

114 Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council, *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2009, p. 20.

115 Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council, *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2009, p. 21.

116 Nganampa Health Council, *Survey of prevalence of petrol sniffing on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands*, November 2008, p. 4.

appears to sometimes occur when a family moves, with the older people looking for access to alcohol and the younger people using petrol.

Other drugs, such as amphetamines, appear to be more of a problem in urban areas (where presumably they are more freely available). However, there are reports of growing use of methamphetamines (including Ice) in the north west of Western Australia.¹¹⁷

2.123 A recent media report also outlined an incident in the Goldfields town of Leonora in Western Australia in which a group of teenagers allegedly stole more than 30 cans of paint from a visiting contractor's vehicle.¹¹⁸

2.124 The continuing presence and effects of substance abuse in Indigenous communities in central Australia, along with sporadic outbreaks of petrol sniffing, highlight that although there has been an overall reduction in petrol sniffing, substance misuse and alcohol still remains a serious concern. It is important that governments, communities and non-government sectors do not become complacent.

The restriction of access to sniffable fuel has been an important factor to limit sniffing within this region. At the same time, the memory of past sniffing and a historical cycle of intermittent sniffing suggest that young people may in the future return to sniff petrol or will seek access to other forms of inhalants.¹¹⁹

2.125 The next chapter considers what more needs to be done to effectively address petrol sniffing and other substance abuse issues for the long term.

117 FaHCSIA, DoHA, DEEWR and AGD, *Submission 14*, p. 10.

118 ABC News Online 'Goldfields visitors urged to keep solvents locked away', 2 January 2009. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/01/02/2458130.htm>

119 Mr Brian McCoy, *Submission 7*, p. 2.

