



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Estimates

FRIDAY, 6 MARCH 2020

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SENATE

FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Friday, 6 March 2020

Members in attendance: Senators Ayres, Dodson, McCarthy, O'Sullivan, Paterson, Scarr, Siewert.

CROSS-PORTFOLIO INDIGENOUS MATTERS**In Attendance**

Senator Ruston, Minister for Families and Social Services

National Indigenous Australians Agency**Overview**

Mr Ray Griggs AO CSC, Chief Executive Officer

Ms Letitia Hope, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Operations and Delivery

Professor Ian Anderson AO, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Policy and Programs

Ms Justine Fievez, Executive Officer

Corporate Group

Ms Rachael Jackson, Chief Operating Officer

Ms Toni Williams, Branch Manager, Program Compliance and Fraud

Mr Brendan Jacomb, Chief Lawyer, Legal Services

Mr Samuel Volker, Branch Manager, Chief Financial Officer and IT Strategy Branch

Organisation and Performance Change

Mr Vance Khan, Group Manager

Ms Sarah Clough, Branch Manager, Organisational Performance

Social Policy and Programs Group

Mr Blair Exell, Group Manager

Ms Jessica Foote, Branch Manager, Health and Wellbeing

Ms Andrea Kelly, Branch Manager, Culture and Heritage

Ms Carita Davis, Branch Manager, Families and Safety

Mr Paul Denny, Branch Manager, Education and Youth Policy

Strategic Policy Group

Mr Jamie Fox, Group Manager

Ms Maya Stuart-Fox, Branch Manager, Closing the Gap

Ms Jessica Hartman, Branch Manager, Policy Analysis & Evaluation

Mr Ben Burdon, Branch Manager, Strategic Policy

Mr Robert Ryan, Branch Manager, Recognition and Empowerment

Economic Policy and Programs Group

Mr Ryan Bulman, Group Manager

Ms Chloe Bird, Branch Manager, Community Development Program Strategy

Ms Deborah Fulton, Branch Manager, Employment

Ms Jane Christie, Branch Manager, Housing

Mr Neil Williams, Business and Economic Policy

Mr Wayne Beswick, Branch Manager, Land

Mr Craig Dunkeld, Acting Branch Manager, Community Development Program Operations

Northern Australia Development

Ms Anne-Marie Roberts, Group Manager, Northern Australia Development

Program Performance Delivery Group

Ms Jennifer Collard, Group Manager

Dr John Walker, Branch Manager, Select, Support and Report

Mr Andrew Huey, Branch Manager, Grant Design

West and South Group

Mr Kevin Brahim, Group Manager

Central Group

Mr Sam Jeffries, Group Manager

Eastern Group

Mr Robert Willmet, Group Manager

Ms Marnie Wettenhall, Branch Manager, Gulf and North Queensland

Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation

Mr Leo Bator, Group Chief Executive Officer

Ms Tricia Stroud, Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Mr Trevor Edmond, General Counsel

Mr David Silcock, Chief Financial Officer

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

Mr Michael Ramalli, Acting Chief Executive Officer

Mr John Gibbs, Project Lead, The National Resting Place

Indigenous Business Australia

Mr Rajiv Viswanathan, Chief Executive Officer

Mr Tom Hure, Chief Financial Officer

Ms Jasmin Onus, Senior Advisor, Policy, Advocacy and Strategic Projects

Department of Health

Ms Tania Rishniw, Acting Deputy Secretary, Health Systems Policy and Primary Care

Mr Gavin Matthews, First Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Health Division

Dr Lucas De Toca, Assistant Secretary, Health Plan, Early Years and Engagement Branch, Indigenous Health Division

Ms Meredith Taylor, Assistant Secretary, Chronic Disease, Infrastructure and Program Support Branch, Indigenous Health Division

Ms Kate Thomann, Assistant Secretary, Primary Health, Data and Evidence Branch, Indigenous Health Division

Ms Joanna Da Rocha, Assistant Secretary, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Policy Branch, Mental Health Division

Ms Sharon Appleyard, First Assistant Secretary, Population Health and Sport Division

Mr Jack Quinane, Acting Assistant Secretary, Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Branch,
Population Health and Sport Division

Committee met at 09:00

CHAIR (Senator Paterson): I declare open this meeting of the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee. Today the committee will continue examination of the Additional Budget Estimates for 2019-20 with the cross-portfolio hearing on Indigenous matters. The committee may examine the annual reports of the departments and agencies appearing before it. The committee has fixed 17 April, 2020 as the date for the return of answers to questions taken on notice. The committee will begin with examination of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Indigenous portfolio agencies as listed on the program, including the National Indigenous Australians Agency. The committee will then move on to examination of Indigenous health issues, with representatives of the Department of Health joining officers of the NIAA at the table. Given the committee's interest in health issues and recent events, we would like health officials to join the agency after the lunch break so we can examine health issues in conjunction with the agency.

Under standing order 26, the committee must take all evidence in public session; this includes answers to questions on notice. I remind all witnesses that, in giving evidence to the committee, they are protected by parliamentary privilege. It is unlawful for anyone to threaten or disadvantage a witness on account of evidence given to a committee and such action may be treated by the Senate as a contempt. It is also a contempt to give false or misleading evidence to a committee.

The Senate, by resolution in 1999, endorsed the following test of relevance for questions at estimates hearings. Any questions going to the operations or financial positions of the departments and agencies which are seeking funds in the estimates are relevant questions for the purpose of estimates hearings. I remind officers that the Senate has resolved that there are no areas in connection with the expenditure of public funds where any person has a discretion to withhold details or explanations from the parliament or its committees unless the parliament has expressly provided otherwise. I particularly draw the attention of witnesses to an order of the Senate of 13 May 2009 specifying the process by which a claim of public interest immunity should be raised.

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).

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

(13 May 2009 J.1941)

(Extract, Senate Standing Orders)

CHAIR: Witnesses are specifically reminded that a statement that information or a document is confidential or consists of advice to government is not a statement that meets the requirements of the 2009 order. Instead, witnesses are required to provide some specific indication of the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or the documents.

The Senate has resolved also that an officer of a department of the Commonwealth shall not be asked to give opinions on matters of policy and shall be given reasonable opportunity to refer questions asked of the officer to superior officers or to a minister. This resolution

prohibits only questions asking for opinions on matters of policy and does not preclude questions asking for explanations of policies or factual questions about when and how policies were adopted. An officer called to answer a question for the first time should state their full name and the capacity in which they appear and witnesses should speak clearly and into the microphones to assist Hansard to record proceedings. I ask everyone in the hearing room to switch off or turn to silent their mobile phones and devices. Officers are requested to keep opening statements brief or to seek to incorporate longer statements into the *Hansard*.

Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation

[09:03]

CHAIR: I welcome Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston, Minister for Families and Social Services, representing the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, and Mr Ray Griggs, Chief Executive Officer of the National Indigenous Australians Agency. We also call the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation, Mr Leo Bator, Chief Executive Officer of the ILSC, and other officers. Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Senator Ruston: No.

CHAIR: Mr Griggs, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr Griggs: I will when we get to the NIAA.

CHAIR: Mr Bator, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr Bator: Yes. Thank you for this opportunity. As I look across the ILSC group, and particularly at some of our subsidiaries, I'd like to make a couple of comments. The NCIE, the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence, in Redfern, Sydney, continues to provide highly valued cultural training, development, lifestyle and employment opportunities to Indigenous people in Redfern. More recently, the ILSC board has asked the NCIE to develop social and economic impact measurement tools which will allow us as a group to understand more of the impact of the ILSC on the life and economic development of Indigenous Australians. I look forward to reporting on that in the future to the committee and to parliament. Work is shortly to commence at the NCIE to understand the wishes of the Redfern community in terms of future investment of the NCIE. Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia has delivered outstanding results, both financially and on the employment training front over recent years and has consistently achieved very high visitor satisfaction levels.

Voyages ARR is, of course, not exempt from the downturn in the tourism industry, and occupancy rates are falling. It is therefore difficult for us to project what the outcome of the current situation will be, although the board and management are working hard with trade partners to mitigate the impact. We thank those trade partners, and the visitors who continue to enjoy the Ayres Rock Resort and their stay there.

Through good management at Voyages and ILSC, the organisations have paid down loans many years earlier than required. This is a saving in interest payments and shows their good financial management. Voyages is also undertaking the opportunity to revamp their flagship Sails in the Desert Hotel, which will be enjoyed in the future by patrons. The ILSC board has recently established a new subsidiary, the Yamaha subsidiary, to explore opportunities in the Murray Basin area for better and faster approaches to development of Indigenous land and to get private sector investment into that. We look forward to those new work practices and the future of that pilot.

In January this year, the ILSC established the bushfire emergency response grant; six groups have received assistance so far. The ILSC continues to acquire land and water assets on behalf of Indigenous Australians. I believe we will achieve our 2019-20 objectives. The ILSC is currently undertaking a structural and efficiency review. Expected outcomes of that work are the development of new processes and approaches to land acquisition and development with access to greater private sector funding. In the meantime, we are delivering, and our staff are following board-approved processes and procedures. I support them in that.

Senator DODSON: Thanks, Mr Bator. Are you able to table that report for us?

Mr Bator: I can barely read my own writing, but I will have it typed.

Senator DODSON: Thank you; we'd appreciate it. Some matters in there indicate you're going in a new direction—

Mr Bator: Correct.

Senator DODSON: We want to know about that. Some of my questions may relate to the issues you've indicated. I'm conscious that the land and sea components have been amalgamated in the way the old ILC used to be. How many applications relating to sea country have been progressed?

Mr Bator: About six have been progressed so far, with pipis being the outstanding one in Victor Harbor. I can go through that detail. The total value is \$7.2 million. We have pipi enterprise investment in South Australia, a cherabin project in Derby, Western Australia and another seafood endeavour in Western Australia. We also have some commercial fishing strategies in South Australia. We also understand more about the way New Zealand Maoris are taking advantage of their sea rights and working through a process to improve our own procedures and processes on that.

Senator DODSON: How many applications—

Mr Bator: Two additional projects are underway, valued at \$1.5 million.

Senator DODSON: In relation to freshwater country, the Derby thing, the cherabin, is on the Fitzroy River; is that right?

Ms Stroud: The cherabin one is freshwater prawns. The bulk of them are saltwater fishing enterprise opportunities and inquiries from clients.

Senator DODSON: At some stage—take it on notice—could you give us the detail around both of those?

Ms Stroud: Yes.

Senator DODSON: How are you supporting traditional owners getting into the fishing industry? You've made some comments about Maori fishing matters. Are you aware of the Blue Mud Bay decision in the Northern Territory?

Ms Stroud: We kick-started our work with traditional owners in opening up opportunities for them in the fisheries industry. We took nine groups to New Zealand for the Maori fisheries conference, where they had the opportunity to meet with significant stakeholders that have had huge successes in their interests in and opportunities out of fisheries. We are looking at, in the next couple of months, a reverse trip. We are bringing over a couple of significant stakeholders to do some follow-up exploration opportunities, learning and sharing with some of the groups that have now been stood up by the ILSC. We are advertising and promoting

widely our desire to be in freshwater and saltwater activities, open and alive to any opportunities that traditional owners have. We have had a team of people up in the Northern Territory who have met a couple of times around what opportunities might arise out of Blue Mud Bay. I'd have to take on notice the specifics of what we're exploring with them.

Senator DODSON: Sure. Is the spread of the interest national, or concentrated?

Ms Stroud: The opportunities that have jumped up immediately have been largely in South Australia and Western Australia; that means we're ramping up the promotion of our water remit and opportunities in the other states.

Senator DODSON: How many businesses have been promoted to date? I'm trying to get an understanding between your remit and Supply Nation. Do you collaborate or don't you collaborate? Also, are there matters that slip through the net here?

Mr Bator: We work with Indigenous Business Australia and Supply Nation and so forth to try to make sure that, to the greatest extent possible, all of the opportunities available through these sister organisations present themselves to potential new businesses. Our remit is particularly around the acquisition and development of land and water. The businesses that stand up on that either flow from that opportunity or are further supported by Indigenous Business Australia.

Senator DODSON: Do you have details on where you're interfacing with the Supply Nation activities?

Mr Bator: Not specifically with Supply Nation, no.

Senator DODSON: That may be a useful thing at some stage, given that we're trying to see how all of these independent agencies collaborate.

Mr Bator: Absolutely; I understand.

Senator DODSON: In light of the government's intended hope or aspiration to extend the cashless debit card, particularly in the Northern Territory, what's the ILSC doing to enhance First Nation's economic independence in those regions? It seems that a job component of the cashless debit card gets lost, so what are enterprises like yours doing to create a market or opportunities in these spaces where there's probably no labour market?

Mr Bator: As you probably know, when an opportunity comes up in terms of land utilisation, the ILSC works with both traditional owners and capability partners to better understand exactly what that land opportunity is and, therefore, what training and development of skills are needed and what infrastructure needs to be put in. The direction we're taking is to see whether these land assets can be positioned in a way that can attract private sector investment, which we see as the great shot in the arm in terms of developing forward. So the land is there. We see an opportunity, whether it's carbon, energy production, solar arrays and the like, cattle, agriculture or aquaculture. We work with communities to see whether they're interested in utilisation of the land, what skills and programs we can put in place to help them develop those skills and that understanding and then to pass those successful businesses on. In order to inject that further forward we need to get the right kind of investment in there. For example, in NAIF, we work to understand whether infrastructure assistance can be provided or with the private sector in capability or investment. I guess that's the schema of what we are trying to achieve.

Senator DODSON: In relation to the NAIF, do you work closely with the Indigenous reference group, and are you familiar with the memorandum that they've entered into with governments?

Mr Bator: I've had a number of meetings with the Indigenous reference group and have been to a number of their sessions to understand what their objectives are and where they see the development of the north being. We've had recent meetings with NAIF in terms of how the ILSC and IBA can work more closely with NAIF as an agent, in a sense, to try to understand what the broader opportunities across northern Australia in infrastructure development are and how we can work collaboratively together.

Senator DODSON: I was looking for some specifics around the recommendations that the Indigenous reference group have made to NAIF. One of those is about an economic hub. Are you involved with that?

Mr Bator: No, we're not involved but I'm aware of it.

Senator DODSON: I have two more questions. How many divestments of ILSC assets have you undertaken since we last met? Have you given things back to the people or are you just aggregating them?

Mr Bator: Certainly, a clear intent of the board is that we acquire to divest, and we're working very hard to do that. As you know, there are some which require a fair bit more effort in terms of divestment because we do want them to be viable beyond that. That is probably the biggest challenge, particularly with assets gifted to us. Since the last time we met—

Ms Stroud: I'll have to take on notice the exact timing since the last hearing. This financial year, we've divested four properties. We anticipate that there will be another three or four divested before the end of the financial year. That's on the trajectory in terms of marrying up with land acquisitions and the newer approach of the ILSC to acquire and grant simultaneously or as closely as possible. When we look at land acquisitions we have in the pipeline that are ones that are likely to be divested at the same time, we envisage that there'll be at least another three divestments this financial year.

Senator DODSON: Have you purchased any further lands?

Ms Stroud: Yes. This financial year we have acquired three; they have been acquired and settled. We have a further four where the acquisitions have been approved but are yet to settle. That brings the total to \$8.9 million worth of land purchased so far this financial year.

Senator SIEWERT: Just following up on the divestment issue that we were talking about last time, my recollection is that you're going through a process of looking at all of the properties and having divestment plans; is that correct?

Ms Stroud: I can confirm that, of the 48 properties currently held by the ILSC, all but seven have active divestment plans in place and, of those seven, six are properties that have been recently acquired and weren't ones that could be acquired and divested simultaneously.

Senator SIEWERT: Could you say that again?

Ms Stroud: Three of those are properties that were acquired recently. The other three properties, unfortunately, had to be returned to the ILSC—rescued, if you like—because the title-holding body has fallen over. Divestment plans haven't been done for those yet. Of the 48 properties still held, there are six to be done.

Senator SIEWERT: For those three, what's the process? If the divestment body has fallen over, how do you address that particular scenario?

Ms Stroud: In instances where it was a representative group of traditional owners and there is then an obligation on the ILSC to return that asset to the traditional owners, we restart the journey with the traditional owners in terms of setting up an alternative model. For properties that weren't purchased for cultural reasons—for a traditional owner, it might have been for a social reason—we have, again, the process of stepping through finding an alternative traditional title-holding body that has a need and an opportunity for the asset and whose services would be able to sustain the property.

Senator SIEWERT: Do you have a list of requests for property purchase? Where organisations or traditional owners have identified properties or the need for acquisition of some land for cultural purposes, do you have a list?

Ms Stroud: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: How long is it?

Ms Stroud: At the moment we've got five active requests on our books that are in the pipeline totalling \$5.9 million worth of land acquisition.

Senator SIEWERT: For how long have you had those five active requests?

Ms Stroud: I'd have to take the time lines on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: Okay, if you could.

Ms Stroud: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: How quickly do you expect that you can address those five?

Ms Stroud: Relatively quickly. We undertook an analysis of our conversion rates from inquiry through to application and assistance provided probably about four to six months ago. That revealed that, with the land acquisitions, we have at least halved the time from inquiry through to end of due diligence and a decision to buy property.

Senator SIEWERT: I know that you've taken, for those five, the time line on notice, but what is your average time? What was it and what is it now?

Ms Stroud: At the moment we are averaging 12 weeks from the moment someone calls up, but I'll take on notice the further detail. We've got that at hand and we can provide it to you. From memory, from the moment a client picks up the phone to due diligence, the delegation process and an approval granted, it is 12 weeks.

Senator SIEWERT: Are all of those requests for specific properties?

Ms Stroud: No. We often have groups that have a land need—

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, that's what I want to find out about.

Ms Stroud: They want us to buy a property. In that instance part of our due diligence and assessment process is to work with the group to find a property that meets their land need and meets all of the criteria expected regarding acquisition and divestment of property.

Senator SIEWERT: Of that current five, how many fall into that category?

Ms Stroud: None that I can think of.

Senator SIEWERT: That answers another question that I was going to ask. Can I go to the issue of Voyages?

Mr Bator: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: You made a comment about falling occupancy.

Mr Bator: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Could you expand on that? I remember that, last time we had a conversation, which was in October, the situation looked pretty good.

Mr Bator: It did. Obviously, in October, the world was a different place regarding a range of different things.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, I appreciate that.

Mr Bator: At that point the occupancy rates were in the mid-80s or higher. Currently, we have had some cancellations. We're still projecting an annual occupancy rate of around 74 per cent. That will still see us in a good, strong financial position this year. But that is a projection on our current bookings and bookings can be cancelled.

Senator SIEWERT: The point there is that the occupancy process at the moment is reflecting the current global situation. It's not a long-term projection; you are not projecting that the occupancy for the resort is going to drop in the long term. It is more about flagging that there will be some shorter term impacts?

Mr Bator: Correct.

Senator SIEWERT: Is that a correct statement?

Mr Bator: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Long term, you are still optimistic that you've built up Voyages now to being in a much more stable financial position than some time ago; is that a correct understanding?

Mr Bator: Correct. A lot of work has been done on the quality of the asset. We've done a lot of work with Tourism Australia and others. It's an iconic destination. Obviously, we're looking at additional and new attractions to keep people there for more than one night; that's the current occupancy rate. If we can get people to stay for another night, that is a real bonus for us. But, as we currently see it, forgetting the current coronavirus et cetera, we would have been projecting some pretty strong results going forward. This is an unknown. The current projection that I've provided in terms of what we expect the occupancy rate to be by the end of the year is based on current bookings, but people can cancel.

CHAIR: Are there any further questions for the ILSC? If not, I thank you very much for your attendance and your evidence here this morning.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

[09:26]

CHAIR: The committee will now move to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. I welcome Mr Michael Ramalli, Acting Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and Mr John Gibbs, project lead for the National Resting Place. Mr Ramalli, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr Ramalli: I do, thank you. To begin, I would like to acknowledge and pay respects to the Ngunnawal people and their elders, past and present. Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement. It has been some time since the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies has appeared before this committee. I'd like to use the opportunity to highlight the role that AIATSIS plays in government and identify some of the important work that our institute is undertaking.

AIATSIS sits at a unique nexus of government, Indigenous communities and academic and cultural expertise. We are seen as a trusted adviser by government but at the same time we're trusted by community to speak with authority about Indigenous cultures, society, policy and rights. AIATSIS provides an independent voice based on research and evidence by enabling a forum for dialogue and bringing people together to share perspectives, interrogate issues and seek solutions.

We are Australia's only national institution focused exclusively on the diverse history, cultures and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. We house the world's most important and extensive collection of cultural information and material and we provide leadership and publish and promote greater understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We create opportunities for people the world over to engage with and be transformed by that knowledge, the culture and the story of Australia's Indigenous peoples. We are Australia's national institution for leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.

We care for a priceless collection, including films, photographs, videos, audio recordings and the world's largest collection of printed and other resource materials for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. We undertake and encourage scholarly, ethical, community-based research in a variety of sectors, including health, native title, languages and education. Our publishing house, Aboriginal Studies Press, regularly publishes outstanding writing that promotes Australian Indigenous cultures. Our activities affirm and raise awareness of the richness and diversities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories.

Our functions are established under the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Act. Our mission is to tell the story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia, to create opportunities for people to encounter, engage with and be transformed by that story, to support and facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural resurgence, and to shape our national narrative.

One of the unique projects that we currently have underway which demonstrates the AIATSIS functions and strategic objectives, delivering practical outcomes, is the Return of Cultural Heritage Project. Through this project AIATSIS has partnered with Indigenous communities throughout Australia to return Aboriginal cultural heritage material to its traditional owners and communities. Over the past 12 months this project has successfully secured the repatriation of 85 objects, including secret sacred objects and secular objects, from the Illinois State Museum and the Manchester Museum to five nations: the Aranda, Bardi Jawi, Nyamal, Gangalidda Garawa and Yawuru. This project has supported the restoration of culture and strengthened communities, as well as assisting in the building of healthy relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Some of the other important work this institute is currently undertaking includes participating in the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages to help promote and

protect Indigenous languages and improve the lives of those who speak them, and leading the development of an initial business case for a national resting place—a centrally located and culturally appropriate place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains. This initial planning and scoping has been provided to the National Indigenous Australians Agency, which is coordinating responses by government to the recommendation of the joint select committee on constitutional recognition. We are the only national institution with an exclusive focus on the first story of this nation—an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander story that is 65,000 years old.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to provide this statement and I'm happy to take any questions.

CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Gibbs, do you have an opening statement?

Mr Gibbs: No.

CHAIR: Who's seeking the call? Senator Dodson.

Senator DODSON: Would it be possible to have your statement tabled?

Mr Ramalli: Yes.

Senator DODSON: Thank you. Thank you for that report, because there are some questions that I have in mind with some of the matters that you've covered. In the first instance, the project for the return of cultural heritage, how many international returns—I think you mentioned three or maybe four—have taken place this year?

Mr Ramalli: This financial year?

Senator DODSON: Since the project began.

Mr Ramalli: Since the project began, three have occurred. The last tranche is happening next week from Manchester Museum and that includes Aranda and Yawuru material.

Senator DODSON: What's the cost of these projects?

Mr Ramalli: The entire cost of repatriation?

Senator DODSON: Yes. I know that it would be variable amongst groups.

Mr Ramalli: The material, to return? I'd probably have to take that on notice.

Senator DODSON: How cooperative have these foreign institutions been? Have you approached some that you know that have cultural materials housed there but have been knocked back? The ones that you've mentioned seem collaborative.

Mr Ramalli: We've approached over 200 overseas collecting institutions. About 150 have responded to our requests for information, 123 have expressed a willingness to share that information with us and about 50 have indicated a willingness to consider a return of that material.

Senator DODSON: What's involved in having the materials returned? Can you just describe the typical kinds of protocols and expectations?

Mr Ramalli: Sure. We would approach the institution, get an understanding from them about their willingness or otherwise to return material, obtain a list of what that material is and then we have an ask-first principle where we'd go to the communities to talk to them about the material. If they want that material returned and it's their material, then we would start the process about repatriating. Obviously the institute has its own processes and we'd

need to have that approved. Once that's done, then it's relatively simple in terms of freighting the material, often taking senior men over to those institutions, and having a return ceremony and then an on-country ceremony when back in the country.

Senator DODSON: In what way are the materials, once they are returned to the community, cared for in the community?

Mr Ramalli: The more secular items are usually kept in keeping places but the secret sacred objects are cared for by either the men or the women, depending on what those objects are.

Senator DODSON: Do the people have the infrastructure to accommodate that?

Mr Ramalli: So far, they have.

Senator DODSON: How has this process impacted upon the academic sector? Usually people are reluctant to give these things back because they've been studying them for years to find the missing link or something. So how is the academic sector impacted by this process?

Mr Ramalli: There's been great interest in the project. I think it's fair to say it was a pilot project to prove the concept that material could be repatriated from international collecting institutions and returned to country, back to traditional owners. We've been successful in doing that and to show that the process does work. There has been, since the returns have happened, great interest in the project, as I've said, and it has created a great deal of conversation about those materials that institutions hold and the returning of those to traditional owners.

Senator DODSON: It's not just written materials; it's often human remains and other kinds of—

Mr Ramalli: This isn't about ancestral remains; it is more about secular items.

Senator DODSON: But you do help in the return of human remains, don't you?

Mr Ramalli: The National Resting Place project is about ancestral remains. The policy and responsibility for international ancestral remains return sits with the Office for the Arts in the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications. Unprovenanced ancestral remains and those that aren't able to be returned are cared for through the National Museum of Australia.

Senator DODSON: Is there collaboration between yourselves and those other two agencies?

Mr Ramalli: In terms of the National Resting Place project, yes, there is.

Senator DODSON: But not in terms of the day-to-day activities?

Mr Ramalli: Not of the return of cultural heritage project.

Senator DODSON: Just coming to the National Resting Place, the government promised, I think, \$5 million towards this project. Has that been deposited in your account?

Mr Ramalli: We created a memorandum of understanding with NIAA, and the government committed up to \$5 million for the National Resting Place project. On the first stages of this project, we've expended about \$1.5 million and we've had \$3 million of that money so far deposited.

Senator DODSON: Has there been a site agreed to for this national resting place?

Mr Ramalli: No, there hasn't been a site agreed to. There are options for sites along with options about functions and things like that included in that initial planning and scoping, but that's a decision for the government.

Senator DODSON: Just give me some idea of when these sorts of decisions are required or would need to be made so that progress on this matter could be bedded down.

Mr Ramalli: When a decision by the government would be—

Senator DODSON: On a site particularly, yes.

Mr Griggs: That's probably an NIAA question. They've got the lead on the process. We can either come to that later or—

Senator DODSON: We'll come to that later in the day then in the hope you've got the answer.

Mr Griggs: We can give you an indication.

Senator DODSON: Very good. We'll leave the site for the time being. Are you undertaking consultations? Obviously there are a lot of sensitivities about this. I'm aware these are unknown remains of peoples that were taken away and best efforts by yourselves and others have not been able to locate where they've come from; so it's an attempt to create some dignity for these people rather than just leave them in warehouses around the place. I understand all of that. What's the breadth of your consultation in relation to this?

Mr Ramalli: Within the initial phases we established an independent Indigenous advisory committee. We undertook some engagement with people with backgrounds in the particular areas that we're talking about. Going forward to develop the detailed business case, there will be a more fulsome consultation process developed.

Senator AYRES: Just in the interests of efficiency, Mr Griggs, if you're in a position now to answer Senator Dodson's questions or give him some indication of the timetables, it might be more efficient to do it now rather than open the line of questioning again later this afternoon.

Mr Griggs: Fine. I don't have the officials here but I can give it in the broad and, if that's not sufficient, you can—

Senator AYRES: Then we can come back; thank you.

Mr Griggs: The broad time frame would be that we would analyse the initial business case that AIATSIS have done and we'll be in a position to take that to government sometime around the middle of the year.

Senator DODSON: The middle of next year?

Mr Griggs: The middle of this year.

Senator DODSON: We're getting close to the middle of the year.

Mr Griggs: We only received the business case about two weeks ago.

Senator DODSON: I understand.

Mr Griggs: It's a 500-page document and it's going to take a while.

Senator DODSON: Are there additional resources you need to get this project moved along?

Mr Ramalli: The initial business case identifies potential resources required but we believe that it will sit within the \$5 million cap.

Senator DODSON: So once that's expended and you've done what you're supposed to do, then it's in the hands of the agency and the minister to assess it, determine a site and then look towards, I suppose, the build component of this. Is that where it's going?

Mr Ramalli: Correct.

Senator DODSON: We look forward to some further progress reports in relation to this. You mentioned the International Year of Indigenous Languages. How many First Nations have you helped with their language restoration, promotion or promulgation in any way, shape or form?

Mr Ramalli: AIATSIS?

Senator DODSON: Yes.

Mr Ramalli: This year AIATSIS is publishing 21 Indigenous language dictionaries. That was a project again funded through the NIAA. We've so far published six and another 15 will be published this year and, as you know, through the International Year of Indigenous Languages we assisted a number of communities in particular language projects, one called Paper and Talk, which we'll continue to roll out. But the exact numbers I don't have with me at the moment.

Senator DODSON: When you say that you're publishing this, is this also in digital form and not just print form? We're in this modern age now where we can get things on line; you can get apps and you can get all sorts of things. Are you covering the suite of possibilities?

Mr Ramalli: Not all of the dictionaries are published by our publishing arm. Those that are, I understand, will be available online.

Senator DODSON: Again this is a resource question: do have the capacity to do this or do you have to contract out for that?

Mr Ramalli: We have capacity to do it internally.

Senator DODSON: How many languages would you describe as living languages?

Mr Ramalli: I'd have to take that on notice. The National Indigenous Languages Report that AIATSIS is working with the ANU—and apologies; I don't—

Senator DODSON: That's fine; take it on notice. With that, can you take on notice how many we've lost since 1788?

Mr Ramalli: Sure.

Senator DODSON: Also how many are actually being retrieved through language centres or in other ways?

Mr Ramalli: Yes, we'll take that on notice.

Senator DODSON: Unless you know that at the moment?

Mr Ramalli: No.

Senator DODSON: Do you know what resources there are available to groups to record, retrieve and promote their languages in these communities?

Mr Ramalli: Again I think that's probably a question for the Office of the Arts that funds Indigenous languages centres throughout Australia.

Senator DODSON: The other question is: how many language centres are there across Australia?

Mr Ramalli: Again, that's probably a question for the Office of the Arts.

Senator DODSON: And their funding is dependent upon coming through that same agency, the Office of the Arts?

Mr Ramalli: So I would assume.

Senator DODSON: Do you know which, if any, languages are being taught in the primary schools across Australia?

Mr Ramalli: That's not information that I have.

Senator DODSON: I notice that the government, I think, has allocated \$2 million towards the family history unit. Can you update us on the work that's going on in the family history unit?

Mr Ramalli: The family history unit is a unit, obviously, within the institute connected to information contained within the collection. The family history unit works with families, obviously, to access that material and return that material back to families. There's an allocation per family per year, I guess, in terms of the time and access requirements that they're able to utilise within the organisation.

Senator DODSON: This allocation isn't to help deal with the challenge of truth telling that came from the Uluru statement?

Mr Ramalli: No. This unit has been established in AIATSIS for some time.

Senator DODSON: Aimed at family histories.

Mr Ramalli: Yes.

Senator DODSON: Do you have any role or function in relation to developing truth telling frameworks or schemas?

Mr Ramalli: No.

Mr Griggs: There is every intention to involve AIATSIS in that process in terms of the development of the truth telling framework.

Senator DODSON: When does the intention become concretised?

Mr Griggs: When the government agrees on the approach to truth telling.

Senator DODSON: So you've got a submission to government, to the minister?

Mr Griggs: We will be taking one shortly.

Senator DODSON: Okay. We'll look forward to the answer to that. Thank you, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: Senator Siewert, are you seeking the call with this witness?

Senator SIEWERT: No, I'm not.

CHAIR: If there are no further questions for AIATSIS, I thank you very much for your attendance and your evidence here this morning.

Indigenous Business Australia

[09:47]

CHAIR: The committee will now move to Indigenous Business Australia. Welcome back, Mr Viswanathan. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr Viswanathan: Yes, I do.

CHAIR: Please do.

Mr Viswanathan: To begin, I'd like to acknowledge the Ngunawal people as the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and acknowledge all elders, past, present and those who are emerging. 2020 marks 30 years since IBA was first established in 1990 initially as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commercial Development Corporation. We remain committed to our mandate to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, businesses, organisations and communities to pursue their aspirations for economic independence by owning their own homes, starting or growing businesses and making investments.

Whilst remaining focused on our purpose, the past three years has been a period of substantial change for IBA, as we've charted a new strategic direction, launched a range of new products and solutions and significantly increased our levels of lending and investment, all whilst continuing to achieve strong results across our program areas. I've shared in previous hearings of the committee our results and the increased levels of productivity that have substantially exceeded what IBA was able to achieve annually in prior periods. As a demonstration of this uplift, since 1 July 2016, IBA has deployed over \$1 billion of capital through our investment and lending activity, which is over nine times the level of government funding provided to IBA by way of capital during that period. This demonstrates that IBA is largely a self-funded organisation with the vast majority of our funding coming from the returns on our loan and investment portfolios.

As we also operate with about 15 per cent fewer staff than we had just a few years ago, our results reflect a significant increase not just in demand but also in the productivity of IBA and our investment in new ways of working and technology to meet the needs of our customers. We're a relatively small agency by number of staff but generate a significant impact for our customers through the strategic deployment of this capital. We have a national footprint and service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all of urban, regional and remote Australia; a substantial proportion of our work, indeed, is in remote and regional areas.

Housing, and in particular home ownership, is a key determinant of health, education and safety, but IBA has finite capital available to deploy to our prospective home loan customers and, at current funding levels, our waiting list is growing. We're working very hard to develop an innovative funding solution to allow us to increase lending volumes to meet demand. Our goals are to enable IBA to support more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who are excluded from accessing mainstream lenders to enjoy the significant social and economic benefits of home ownership. A recent study by Deloitte Access Economics we released showed that, since its establishment, the Indigenous Home Ownership Program has generated more than \$900 million in social and economic benefits through economic and construction activity, savings in Commonwealth rental assistance and avoided cost of homelessness. Our lending activity is consistently to lower income customers and first home buyers. Our results

this year are no different, with over 95 per cent of our lending to first home buyers. Underscoring our ability to reach underserved community members, despite our size, over 70 per cent of this activity has been in regional and remote areas.

In our business solutions division, the past three years have seen us significantly reframe our approach to supporting and financing Indigenous small businesses. Whereas we previously offered a standard business loan only, we've launched several new products, such as start-up packages, new cash flow finance solutions and performance bonds and film financing for Indigenous-made films which generate employment outcomes. These products are being utilised across Australia, with a total portfolio value of IBA's business finance products now being over \$130 million, which is an increase of over 80 per cent since June 2017.

Some of our most exciting small business clients harness Indigenous knowledge and concepts to drive innovation, as have recently been featured on the SBS *Small Business Secrets* series. This includes a Kimberley-based business which turns boab nuts into tea and oils, an eco-retreat off the coast of Arnhem Land and a talented young woman producing swimwear from recycled plastics; she's had hundreds of thousands of views since the story ran and is now getting attention from global purchasers.

In addition to our small business financing, we've played a strong role activating networks for the benefit of entrepreneurs. We've recently commenced the third iteration of our accelerator program—Accelerate with IBA—with participants selected using the strong pipeline established through our customer base. In 2019, we're proud to have launched the Futures Forum, which involves a network of talented young Indigenous entrepreneurs under 30. We've recently partnered with Melbourne Business School and others to deliver the Futures Forum entrepreneurship boot camp. With this youth network, we've co-designed the program and, over the next 12 months, will focus on investing in their capability and development of their business ideas.

As International Women's Day approaches on Monday, we're also presently in the final stages of planning for the 2020 Strong Women Strong Business Conference, which will be held in Darwin at the end of April. This will build on the success of the inaugural conference in 2018 and builds on the network that we've established with over 1,700 Indigenous business women participating. The conference will see up to 350 women in attendance, all female entrepreneurs and business owners often working against the odds to deliver results. It will focus on capacity building, innovation, financial literacy and access to markets. It will showcase the determination, ingenuity and innovation of so many women in the Indigenous business sector.

These are just some of the examples of the work that we do and the ways that we're supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, groups and communities to achieve their economic goals. As we do, we believe that it's important also to look forward to new economies and industries and to reimagine what's possible. One example of this through our investments division is a satellite ground station that we're financing on land owned by the Aboriginal organisation Centre for Appropriate Technology based in Alice Springs. The facility will be leased out to a global communications company and will deliver financial returns to our partner. Indigenous businesses are also undertaking some of the construction

works and will have an ongoing facilities management role. We expect more of these projects across Northern Australia.

Finally, we've been working hard to support our customers through the recent tragic bushfire crisis. In early January, we announced a support package for affected customers, comprising a grant for emergency expenses, suspension of loan repayments and assistance with making insurance claims. Affected customers can also invoke our hardship provisions to seek additional support. I visited the South Coast of New South Wales just this week and heard firsthand about the devastating impact of the fires and the trauma that people experienced. We'll continue to monitor the recovery efforts closely to ensure that our customers are appropriately supported. We're also excited to be working alongside Indigenous organisations with expertise in fire management to engage corporate Australia in understanding the opportunity for Indigenous businesses and knowledge in the recovery effort and in future land management and prevention initiatives. Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

CHAIR: Thank you for another positive update, Mr Viswanathan. Who's seeking the call? Senator Dodson.

Senator DODSON: Thank you for that report. Maybe you could table that as well, so that members can have a look at it.

CHAIR: We can.

Senator DODSON: I understand that you have a CEO in common; is that right?

Mr Viswanathan: No; it's the chair.

Senator DODSON: The chair is in common and not the CEO.

Mr Viswanathan: Correct.

Senator DODSON: How is that working?

Mr Viswanathan: Our board operates in its own right. We have really strong governance. We are answerable to our own board and our chair happens to also be the chair of the ILSC.

Senator DODSON: I asked a question previously of the ILSC Corporation, which you may have heard sitting in the back stalls there. This intrigues me. Potentially, 24,000 people in the Northern Territory are likely to go and enter management or cashless debit card management. It just intrigues me that unilaterally the government can do this. With the expertise, competence and the positive things that you're doing, what is it that you're doing, or do you have any focus in these areas where potentially this is going to impact on many First Nations individuals and communities?

Mr Viswanathan: We haven't specifically targeted the locations where the cashless debit card is being introduced in that regard; however, we do a lot of work across remote Australia, as I outlined, and we've done a lot of hard work over the last couple of years to reframe our approach. So we certainly are seeing people with business ideas coming through and participating in those networks I spoke about in the accelerator program and we've also tried to tailor some new products to remote participants. One example would be a start-up package that we developed, which was funded for the Northern Territory, which was a mix of a 50 per cent grant and loan.

Senator DODSON: I understand that. It just baffles me that there's no connectivity between the targeted locations that the government has got for income management and a correlation between an entity like yours to create opportunities, jobs and businesses.

Senator Ruston: Chair, through you: Senator Dodson, we need to be clear that the Northern Territory currently has income management. The proposal before us is merely a technology upgrade from the BasicsCard to the cashless debit card. It needs to be made clear that this is not new income management. Income management already exists.

Senator DODSON: Yes, but there will be no choice; there's no choice involved.

Senator Ruston: Being very clear here, you made the comment about introducing income management. It needs to be very clearly recorded that income management currently exists in the Northern Territory.

Senator DODSON: Okay; I may have been a bit loose with that. But you are not giving people a choice. My concern is: why isn't an entity like the IBA, which is about promoting businesses and employment opportunities, in some way aligned to the opportunities that may arise? I never get an answer about the jobs which people are meant to go to off income support, because there's very little. It seems to me that the connectivity between the policies of the government around this is lacking.

Senator Ruston: You're making the immediate assumption that income management is around employment. Whilst I acknowledge that in communities one of the most important things that we can be delivering—

Senator SIEWERT: You can't wangle your way out of it.

Senator DODSON: How do you get out of there?

Senator Ruston: I just draw to your attention that you're conflating two issues, albeit they are both extremely important.

Senator DODSON: It affects a common group of individuals, so it may be a conflation, but this is about people's lives.

Senator Ruston: Absolutely; I understand that entirely.

Senator DODSON: The niceties of it aren't reflected out in the communities, Minister. I'm just trying to get some clarity about the good things this institution does. Why isn't it being reflected in these other locations in order to give people the quality of life they're intending to deliver by way of their activities? There's no focus here. No-one is focused in this area.

Mr Viswanathan: I can provide on notice the activities we have in those locations. I would imagine that we would have activity in those locations through all the other work we're already doing. I'm happy to take it on notice to provide more examples of that. But certainly we're working across remote Australia, and that would include those locations—

Senator DODSON: That would be very useful—and also your nexus with the Supply Nation activities in these locations.

Mr Viswanathan: I can speak to that. We have a very good relationship with Supply Nation. Although it's a non-government body, I meet regularly with my counterpart there. Their work is largely about promoting Indigenous business to large corporates and enabling their Indigenous business members to access procurement opportunities. We're always

looking for ways to work together. In the coming months—I spoke about the women's initiative—at the Supply Nation Connect conference, which is held every year, and which is a fantastic event, we will be showcasing some of the Indigenous businesswomen we have been working with. They'll also be having a collaborative role in the conference we're running at the end of April. That's just one example. We work closely with them and with the other Indigenous business bodies at the federal, state and territory level.

Senator DODSON: What efforts or activities do you undertake to assist people to access the IAS funding or to help prepare people to enter into businesses? This is as opposed to someone coming to you and saying, 'I've got the idea here,' and you then picking the low-hanging fruit. Where are the hard yards getting done here?

Mr Viswanathan: There are two broad areas. One is in our business solutions area, which deals with smaller businesses. We offer what's called business support. Business support is funding that can be made available to an entrepreneur to get specialist advice on their marketing plan. It might be in another area that's specific to their industry. It might be a valuation on their business. So business support is one way. That's very much tailored to the individual customer.

We also run a range of different workshops for aspiring entrepreneurs. We've broadened that suite of workshops in the last few years. It covers stages of the business life cycle, advice on joint venturing—a whole range of things. The new thing we've launched is the accelerator programs. That is where someone has an idea and wants direct access to mentoring. They're put through their paces, helped to refine their idea over a four- to six-month period, including in residential blocks. We're doing a lot of work to build up that capability and, when the business is ready to be financed, we have this suite of products that we can bring to bear.

Mr Griggs: More broadly, the agency, and particularly our regional presence staff, work very closely, and when they can spot opportunities through their normal engagement in community they refer back to the IBA, if it's an IBA opportunity. I think IBA now has a person in Broome—

Mr Viswanathan: We've got two senior people in Broome.

Mr Griggs: co-located with our team, so that's an example of the work we do together to address the issue you're talking about.

Mr Viswanathan: With the larger investments we will very much work alongside Indigenous organisations to build up feasibility and the idea, and ideally get it to a point where it can be invested in.

Senator DODSON: Can you tell me about your housing strategy?

Mr Viswanathan: Sure. We are lending money to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are typically buying their first homes, often not just for themselves but the first home in their family. We provide a low-deposit loan which starts at a concessional interest rate. As they're preparing to get into the loan we run 'getting ready for home ownership' workshops, which are about building financial literacy and an understanding of budgeting and saving. The way the product is structured is that, once the customer gets the loan, we provide a lot of ongoing support—far more support than you'd get if you were with a bank. Then, gradually over a long period of time the interest rate ratchets up. The idea of the program is that our customer should be able to build a credit history and the discipline of repaying a loan

and then ultimately be able to refinance with a mainstream bank. Every year, about eight per cent of our customers do refinance with a mainstream bank. So we are effectively a pipeline into the mainstream banking system for our customers.

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you for your presentation this morning. Regarding the recent bushfire crisis, you say in your opening statement that you've announced a support package for affected customers comprising a grant for emergency expenses, suspension of loan repayments and support to make insurance claims. Can you give us more detail on that? How many people are we talking about? How much have you suspended in terms of dollars?

Mr Viswanathan: When the events first occurred we estimated that we had about 200 customers in the directly affected areas. So far the take-up hasn't been as high as we've expected. I think at last count about 26 customers have accessed the package. I think part of that is because people have been dealing with much more major events in their life and, as things settle down for them and they're able to get to a point of stability, we're receiving those phone calls and then we're able to move quickly to get them that assistance. I went down to the south coast this week and met with some of the organisations and customers that have been affected, so got a good sense of where things are at.

Senator McCARTHY: So you haven't suspended loan repayments?

Mr Viswanathan: We have for those customers that are affected. They receive a \$2,000 grant, which is intended to cover emergency expenses.

Senator McCARTHY: How many customers did that go to?

Mr Viswanathan: So far 26, but we're getting calls consistently. It will gradually increase, I expect, over the coming weeks.

Senator McCARTHY: And support to make insurance claims?

Mr Viswanathan: Yes, we established a panel of insurance experts, brokers essentially, and we have funded them. If a customer needs help to complete their paperwork and liaise with the insurance company, they can use one of the parties we've engaged.

Senator McCARTHY: How much did you pay the panel of insurance brokers?

Mr Viswanathan: I don't have the figure with me today.

Senator McCARTHY: How many insurance brokers would that have been?

Mr Viswanathan: I think it was roughly five we've arranged.

Senator McCARTHY: Okay. Would you be able to provide that on notice?

Mr Viswanathan: Sure.

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you.

Senator SCARR: Thanks for coming along today and thanks for the quality of your presentation. I have a few questions. You spoke about relief provided in the context of the bushfires. The corona virus is having a substantial impact on a number of industries, including tourism. Are you discerning any impact on the small businesses you've been supporting in that space?

Mr Viswanathan: We are starting to see that. The best example is that some of our tourism investments rely heavily on Chinese visitation. There is one in Cairns, for example, that does. So certainly in the latest monthly results there's been a drop-off in revenue because

of corona virus. We'll keep a close eye on the situation. At this stage it's not changing our approach, but we have available hardship support for our business finance customers. If they get into difficulty meeting their repayments because of the impact of the virus, we can invoke those procedures to work with them on restructuring their repayments, et cetera.

Senator SCARR: I was going to ask you about the potential impact on, in particular, your tourism investments. In that context there's pressure potentially, from your perspective as the chief executive officer, on your revenue side in terms of your investments and also on the side of your clients, customers, and stakeholders who need assistance. How might that affect your activities over the forthcoming year?

Mr Viswanathan: We're very diversified with our investments. So whilst we do have tourism investments, we have concentration risk limits that we've established in our portfolio, and it's exactly for these types of reasons. So I don't expect a material impact on our cash flows from the tourism assets. Our customers who are involved in the tourism industry may be impacted and, as I said, if it comes to that, they can speak with us about restructuring their repayments and invoking our hardship processes.

Senator SCARR: I'm a relatively new member of this committee but I am really impressed by the work you and your staff do as an organisation. When you provide support services to, say, a small business in the start-up phase, do you track over the years how that business goes so you can make an assessment over the medium to longer term in relation to the success of certain programs—where you should be deploying resources because that worked well, but another program didn't work so well so maybe resources should be diverted between programs?

Mr Viswanathan: Yes, we do. To start off with, you'd see in our annual report the business survivability statistics. For our customers the survivability rates at year 2 and year 3 compared to the ABS averages are very, very strong. I believe that's because of the support we're providing. So we have the metrics that we report on in our annual report. Separately, we also have a new impact framework that we've developed and we're taking to our board in the coming months, and that's about looking at the broader social and economic benefit from the work we do. That will help to inform our capital allocation decisions. We have a high touch model. We work very closely with our customers and so we have a good sense of how their businesses are going, what's working and what's not. We're continuing to look at how we can leverage that information in terms of where we focus into the future.

Senator SCARR: Those survivability statistics are very impressive and compare very well to general statistics. What about in terms of providing support to a micro business or a very small business when it wants to make the next step up to become medium-sized, to expand?

Mr Viswanathan: We do offer that. We don't do microfinance; there's another organisation, Many Rivers Microfinance, that focuses on microfinance. The smallest loans we give would be around \$20,000. But certainly when customers need to grow we're available to provide that additional capital. The goal is, though, at the point where they're ready to go to the mainstream market we expect them to do that.

Senator SCARR: Thank you.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: I also am very impressed with the presentation. The work you're doing is to be commended. Recently we've seen significant investment in infrastructure. We've got the city deals. There's lots of money going out into important infrastructure projects around the country. Then layering on top of that you've got the Indigenous procurement policy. Is this enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and businesses to really get ahead and start to take advantage of these opportunities?

Mr Viswanathan: I think so, yes. It's been widely reported the significant increase in the Indigenous business sector over the last few years, including following the launch of the IPP. One of our biggest industries in terms of businesses we support is civil works, construction etcetera. Some of those businesses are winning jobs on some of these big projects. We've been able to reframe our product suite to support them to do that as well. So we are seeing that.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: Have you got any research that you're doing or anything that shows that economic uplift across those businesses? I'm particularly interested in employment.

Mr Viswanathan: In our business finance portfolio, 900-odd Indigenous jobs are supported by the businesses we provide finance to and there are another 200 Indigenous employees or thereabouts in our investment portfolio entity—so over 1,000 jobs. More widely, we are completing a piece of work at the moment with the ANU which is looking at the contribution of our business clients to the wider economy using a technique called the blade technique, which I'll take on notice to provide more detail on. We should release that report in the coming weeks. It shows a very significant contribution in terms of the revenue that's being generated by the Indigenous business sector and particularly our clients. Ms Onus may want to add a little bit more about that.

Ms Onus: The report will show the impacts that Indigenous businesses that we interact with at IBA have in the wider community as well as within their own communities. We will undertake to provide some of those results when that is delivered.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: Excellent; I'm looking forward to seeing that. You spoke in your presentation about some new products that you have on offer—the start-up packages, new cash flow finance solutions, performance bonds and the film financing. With the first one in particular, the new cash flow finance solutions, can you provide a little bit of detail on that?

Mr Viswanathan: Sure. A lot of feedback from our clients was that a particular challenge for small and medium businesses is cash flow. I think that's widely known. Whereas previously IBA was only able to offer a regular term loan, the way that product works is called invoice finance. If someone has delivered a piece of work and they're waiting to be paid by the end customer, they may be waiting for 45 days or 60 days—sometimes, unfortunately, even for 90 days. We can provide finance to that business in that interim period and we will get repaid once they're repaid by their end customer, and we have a small margin.

The banks used to offer that product. They still do, but less and less so to smaller businesses and certainly not to our client base. Our idea was to take that same technology and be able to make it available to our client base, and it's been taken up quite actively.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: You'll be pleased to know we actually have some legislation that will provide some transparency—requiring businesses to publish their payment terms online

to ensure that small businesses aren't caught up in having such extended payment terms. I think that will help some of the people that you're working with. What about the performance bonds?

Mr Viswanathan: That's particularly targeted at businesses that are winning construction and civil-type work. Again, to win a job, a business has to put up a bank guarantee or a bond. To get a bank guarantee, a bank will typically ask for dollar-for-dollar collateral. For a business to have to put up a million-dollar bond, they'd need to put a million dollars of cash with the bank to then issue the guarantee. That was a particular challenge for our customer base. With our performance bond product, which we worked jointly with the NIAA to develop, we can put up the bond for the customer and we only require typically 20 per cent as collateral, and we're effectively financing that balance for the customer. It frees up cash flow for the business to be able to invest in their staff and get ready for the contract. A lot of those, interestingly, have been taken up in regional areas, and particularly in the northern part of Australia.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: When it comes to start-ups, are you seeing increased demand on you to provide advice to businesses as well—more than just the financing component, general advice on starting up a business? Are you resourced to do that?

Mr Viswanathan: We do have, as I outlined, business support, so we've always done that to some extent. The last few years have seen us trying to tailor that much more, to be relevant to the business, in whatever stage of its life cycle it's at. People respond positively to the workshops. The feedback has been very strong, and we're able to fund that tailored business support. Where we can provide the support internally, we will, but if it's specialised we tend to outsource it to external parties.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: And you partner with other organisations?

Mr Viswanathan: Correct.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: You mentioned Many Rivers. The government has just set up an Indigenous business hub in Perth.

Mr Viswanathan: Yes.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: I believe there's one in Western Sydney as well. Do you work in with that?

Mr Viswanathan: Correct.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: There's a pipeline for people?

Mr Viswanathan: With the hub in Perth, our team in Perth is in close contact and is looking at how we can offer our products and solutions in tandem with the hub. With the hub in Western Sydney, we were able to send staff periodically, to be able to meet customers and understand whether we could offer them additional support. Yes, we do collaborate.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: Excellent; good work.

CHAIR: Are there any further questions for IBA? If not, I thank you very much for your attendance and your evidence here this morning. We will have a morning tea break, and we'll return with the agency.

Proceedings suspended from 10:19 to 10:36

National Indigenous Australians Agency

CHAIR: The committee will now resume, and I welcome the minister and Mr Griggs back in this capacity. Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement at this point?

Senator Ruston: No, thank you.

CHAIR: Mr Griggs, I think you do have an opening statement at this point?

Mr Griggs: Yes, I do, thank you.

CHAIR: Please.

Mr Griggs: Good morning, chair and senators. [Indigenous language not transcribed] This is Ngunawal country and today we are all meeting together on Ngunawal country, and I'd like to acknowledge and pay respects to elders. Can I also extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander senators and colleagues present this morning.

Thanks for the opportunity to make a brief opening statement. Since our last appearance the National Indigenous Australians Agency has continued to bed down the work in the establishment of the agency to develop, implement and deliver medical programs to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We've continued with our organisational reform journey to ensure alignment with our purpose.

On 1 December last year our agency's new structure came into effect and we established a new deputy CEO position in charge of operations and delivery and Ms Letitia Hope was promoted to that role and is now the senior Indigenous woman in the Commonwealth Public Service. She will lead our three new regional groups and the program performance and delivery group. We've consolidated our policies divisions and established a small group to specifically focus on the Northern Australian development agenda and another small team to focus on organisational performance and change.

Following Ms Hope's and other recent senior appointments we are proud of the fact that now more than half of our senior executive at band 2 and above identify as Indigenous. This is a significant achievement, I think, for our agency.

The three new regional groups are already proving to be beneficial, with enhanced regional senior stakeholder engagement and greater senior level support to our 12 regional managers and their engagement across the country.

Our processes and practices are maturing as we evolve as an executive agency and we look forward to positioning ourselves as a reliable and trusted partner, building our influence and fostering the relationships that will enable us to effectively and efficiently deliver the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

2020 has, of course, started with a range of challenges for Indigenous Australians with the cyclone activity in the north and the west, civil unrest in Aurukun and bushfires across the country. We have worked closely with the other portfolio bodies such as the three who appeared this morning in lending our efforts to the whole-of-government response in supporting Indigenous communities affected by the bushfires and enabling them to access services and start their progress towards recovery.

Agency staff, including other senior staff and me, have collectively made 68 visits to 28 fire-affected communities since January and have worked alongside our colleagues from other

departments and agencies and taken advantage of our regional footprint to offer additional specialised, on-the-ground assistance to Indigenous people impacted by the fires.

We've provided additional staff on the New South Wales South Coast to ensure our small Bateman Bay team were able to manage a significantly increased workload and provided staff into Bairnsdale in Victoria to support Indigenous communities and organisations in the Gippsland area.

We've seconded staff to the National Bushfire Recovery Agency as well as embedding a liaison officer to ensure Indigenous perspectives inform their work and their response in recovery activities. We've been an active participant in the broader government mechanisms to ensure our work complements the wider Commonwealth response to this tragic bushfire season. And we will shortly second an officer to Commissioner Binskin in his important task in the bushfire royal commission.

I thank the committee for this opportunity and welcome questions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Griggs.

Mr Griggs: I have the response to Senator Ayres's letter and am happy to table it.

CHAIR: Please, if you could do that now that would be helpful.

Mr Griggs: I will also table our new organisational chart so that you can see the new organisational structure that I talked about.

CHAIR: That would be helpful as well. Before I give you the call, Senator McCarthy, just to flag, as far as possible it would be good if we could go through the program sequentially, starting with jobs, land and economy and flowing through the program. But we will not dismiss any officials even as we move through the program; it's just so that we can keep track of where we're up to. Senator McCarthy.

Senator McCARTHY: Could we ask for the statement as well, Mr Griggs?

Mr Griggs: I have had copies of that already made.

Senator McCARTHY: I'd like to go to the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, Mr Griggs, if you've got the right people at the table with you?

Mr Griggs: Which particular part?

Senator McCARTHY: Let's go through it and see how we go.

Mr Griggs: No worries.

Senator McCARTHY: Just in relation to some of the answers that you provided from the previous—

Mr Griggs: From the questions on notice?

Senator McCARTHY: October, yes. Can I just go through: what is the process for determining applications to the Indigenous Advancement Strategy?

Ms Collard: You asked for the process of the application?

Senator McCARTHY: Yes, please.

Ms Collard: First of all we have IAS guidelines and they're in line with the broader government guidelines. And those guidelines are specifically outlining how we assess, what we want to purchase out of the IAS, how we select and how we go to market and even the

outcomes. Through that process then we've got three ways of going out to the market. One way is through—

Senator McCARTHY: The guidelines are on the actual application form?

Ms Collard: Yes. So on our web you can click onto the IAS guidelines and all that is outlined in the guidelines. And basically that's what we follow through.

Ms Hope: If I can help, I could walk through the milestones of the process, if you like. We have an initial process of proposal that works up applications with our regional presence staff and community organisations. From that they will fill out an application form, as Ms Collard said, which is on the web.

Senator McCARTHY: Sorry, congratulations to you, Ms Hope.

Ms Hope: Thank you.

Senator McCARTHY: Can I just go through it maybe a little step by step?

Ms Hope: Sure.

Senator McCARTHY: For example, if someone in Santa Teresa wants to apply for funding, they'd go to your regional office in Alice Springs to sort of work on that?

Ms Hope: Yes. As you know, we have a broad regional presence across the nation. I think we have about 70 locations and they work closely with communities. So what will happen is: because we have that stakeholder management relationship model and our staff work very closely with communities, they'll work up an initial proposal with the community. They might talk through the feasibility of that need, what's happening in that community, what is the unique priority for that community. From that point they will actually work up the application form, which is the format—

Senator McCARTHY: So your staff in Alice Springs, if we're sticking with this Santa Teresa example, will assist?

Ms Hope: The organisation would fill out the application form. Sorry, I'll be a bit tighter with my language.

Senator McCARTHY: No, that's fine.

Ms Hope: They'll fill out the paperwork and they will then submit that paperwork electronically through to the system. From that we do a range of assessment processes, so we check the eligibility—so basic eligibility, ABN, solvency of the organisation et cetera. They're the kinds of compliance checks that we run, and we do that, of course, internally in the organisation. Then we start a process of assessments. In the guidelines, as Ms Collard suggested, there are four criteria, and those criteria are based on needs, quality, efficiency and effectiveness. What I would say is that for some programs that are unique we may have an additional set of criteria. They would also be posted for that round, so, for example, NAIDOC—

Senator McCARTHY: How would you define 'unique'?

Ms Hope: Something like NAIDOC is a very specific need. It's a \$1.4 million program for a particular point in time. It might have some additional things that it's looking for. It will use the broad criteria from the IAS and it might have a couple of extra things within it. That is very clear in the application kit that is actually posted online. So if somebody is looking for a

NAIDOC grant it will have that entire process in there. There's no smoke and mirrors to it. It's very clear what the criteria are for that unique program. We'll have a process of assessment whereby a regional office staff member, who knows the place and the community, and a policy officer in Canberra, who knows the broad policy intent of the IAS, will do a dual assessment and that will come together at a point in time where it will have a senior officer overview in the regional presence, and then that will go to a senior officer in the policy space to make sure that it is within the guidelines, with the intent of the IAS, for that program of money.

Senator McCARTHY: What about in terms of how much funding that particular regional office can provide, or do you also guide them in maybe not being too expectant of a certain funding?

Ms Hope: Sure.

Senator McCARTHY: How does that work?

Ms Hope: The IAS funding buckets are managed nationally with the policy owners, and we can go through the detail of what that looks like. The regional managers or the regional network do have a small flexible bucket to meet responsive need called the regional management fund.

Senator McCARTHY: How much is that?

Ms Hope: Six million dollars per annum.

Senator McCARTHY: So the regional managers have the regional management fund at a total of \$6 million nationally?

Ms Hope: Yes.

Mr Griggs: It's equally divided amongst the 12 regions. As Ms Hope said, it's to allow a regional manager to react quickly to a relatively small-scale need in a community. That's its purpose.

Senator McCARTHY: Okay. So each of the 12 regions has a share of that \$6 million and it's an equal amount across all of those 12 regions?

Mr Griggs: As a starting point for the financial year. As the year progresses and as others are not spending, then Ms Hope will move that around to meet the need that's being articulated.

Senator McCARTHY: So that would come under you.

Senator SIEWERT: Six mil per year?

Ms Hope: Yes. The IAS is managed within a national portfolio across six programs. Those programs are jobs, land and economy, children and schooling, safety and wellbeing, culture and capability, remote Australia strategies and research and evaluation, which was added in 2017. That assessment process is taken and a funding brief will be prepared so that the policy owner can look at the quantum of ask across their policy program. They will record that decision in writing. Then the decision will be actioned and we will go back out to the particular organisation and advise them of the applicant. In cases where it's unsuccessful, where it's an unsuccessful application, we would talk to that provider and give them feedback about why it was unsuccessful. In cases where it is successful we would then go to executing a funding agreement.

Senator McCARTHY: If we're looking at these 12 regions, you would have a team of people in each of the 12 regions who will be assisting and guiding the development of the IAS application to the senior person in Canberra?

Ms Hope: Yes.

Senator McCARTHY: Who makes the decision about whether something is successful or not successful?

Ms Hope: The policy owners make that decision.

Senator McCARTHY: The policy owners in the regional base or the ones in Canberra?

Ms Hope: In Canberra. They are the responsible delegates for the bucket of money under the IAS.

Senator McCARTHY: So the Canberra policy officers determine whether the application has been successful or not, and they'll be guided by the people in the regional office?

Ms Hope: Yes. That advice—the regional office is unique to place—and what's happening within that location comes through that funding submission. It is then met with an equal assessment of process around a policy officer in Canberra to make sure that it's within the intent of the program. They come together as a package, two parts of the conversation.

Mr Griggs: Just for precision: they make a recommendation; they don't determine whether it's successful or not.

Ms Hope: Thank you.

Senator McCARTHY: So the regional officers make a recommendation?

Mr Griggs: And the policy person. I think Ms Hope used the term that they decided whether it's successful or not. They don't; they make a recommendation to the decision-maker or the delegate.

Senator McCARTHY: Which is in Canberra?

Mr Griggs: Which is in Canberra, yes.

Senator McCARTHY: I go back to the Santa Teresa example. If that particular project has gone through the regional office, as it should, according to your guidelines, and your team in Alice Springs think it's a good project and it should go ahead, they'd make the recommendation to Canberra that Canberra should fund it?

Ms Hope: That's correct.

Senator McCARTHY: Can Canberra overrule that?

Ms Hope: What quite often happens is that where there is a disparate view about the project we'll have a moderation approach where the policy officer and the regional presence officer will have a conversation about what is it about that that is disparate. It is ultimately the senior policy owner's responsibility to make the recommendation though.

Senator McCARTHY: Under the guidelines the agency can invite applications. Can this be open or closely targeted applications?

Ms Hope: Yes. There's a range of ways that we have applications. I can walk you through what that looks like.

Ms Collard: I can answer that. There are three ways an application can happen. We can have the agency invites and that can be about rounds. NAIDOC is an example of that one. It is a merit process and it is advertised across the nation and opens and closes. Then we've also got an agency direct—

Senator McCARTHY: Sorry, Ms Collard; I just want to go through this a bit slower. I'd like a little bit of detail. NAIDOC is a round. What are some of the other rounds?

Ms Collard: Sorry, what's—

Senator McCARTHY: You said that you invite applications—

Ms Collard: It's advertising.

Senator McCARTHY: by having rounds. You've said NAIDOC is a round. Do you have any other particular—

Ms Collard: We've had previously the Aboriginals Benefit Account, which is specifically for the Northern Territory.

Mr Griggs: Which, again, just to be precise, is obviously not IAS; it's a separate account.

Senator McCARTHY: Alright. But NAIDOC is IAS, isn't it?

Mr Griggs: NAIDOC is IAS; that's correct.

Senator McCARTHY: That's why I was a bit surprised to hear the benefits one in there. Keep going.

Ms Collard: Do you want me to continue on the other ways?

Senator McCARTHY: Just the rounds, yes.

Ms Collard: Just the rounds. Specifically it's NAIDOC and CDP.

Senator McCARTHY: You've said there are three ways of doing it; one of them is a round. So what comes under the rounds?

Ms Collard: What it covers in the rounds?

Senator McCARTHY: Yes.

Ms Collard: NAIDOC is probably a small activity. It is time limited and we have it opened and closed at set times. Basically, it's a national program—recommendations, simpler criteria of the IAS, which is the full criteria, again, which is need, quality, efficiency and effectiveness. Again, the regional office know their local community so they will assess based on their regions. That will come up to the process again in Canberra. Mind you, Canberra based a lot of their NAIDOC particular decisions from the regions; they know their community. As to the processes involved, it's a merit-based approach in that selection, and then once decisions are made organisations are advised.

Senator McCARTHY: Would you say, just with this particular formula in terms of applying for a NAIDOC round, each of those 12 regions would have sufficient funding to cover their particular areas? Obviously NAIDOC would have a lot.

Ms Collard: It's actually a national project.

Mr Exell: Can I jump in? Under the NAIDOC grants, the 2019 application kit gave an indication of the geographical allocations. We looked at a per capita base for those allocations. It's approximately 1.4 per annum for the total grant round. They gave an

indication in that kit of that spread and then applications were received on that basis. So there is a merit basis, which is spelt out in that kit, but there is also a lens that looks at spread distribution to make sure to support NAIDOC events around Australia. Again, that's spelt out in the application kit with those allocations across the areas and regions.

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you. So NAIDOC is one way, one round. Were there any others? You did mention ABA, but that's a different thing.

Ms Hope: Through the IAS we use a range of grant approaches to deliver the IAS. They are community-led approaches, and they are open at any time. So a community organisation—

Senator McCARTHY: No, sorry, Ms Hope; Ms Collard said that there were three ways of applying for the IAS. One of them was rounds. Are there any other rounds that can be open—

Mr Griggs: The other routine round is the CDP.

Ms Hope: Sorry; yes.

Mr Griggs: They're the two recurring rounds.

Senator McCARTHY: And when do they occur, Mr Griggs?

Mr Griggs: At the end of the contract. We did it at the end of 2018. Then from time to time we may do targeted rounds. I think we've done a targeted VTEC.

Senator McCARTHY: Is that for providers to apply to the CDP rounds?

Mr Griggs: Yes. It's done as a round in the sense that it's a time-bound application because the contracts all finish at the same time.

Senator SIEWERT: And that's out of IAS funding?

Mr Griggs: Yes. CDP has always been out of IAS.

Senator McCARTHY: How much do you set aside in the CDP rounds from IAS?

Mr Griggs: I'll get Mr Bulman to come up here. He'll have that information.

Mr Bulman: We open a round, so we have four-year contracts for CDP. Over that period of contracts around \$900 million is allocated towards CDP.

Senator McCARTHY: Per year or—

Mr Bulman: No; in total and across all regions. But, noting that, it's a demand-driven program, so the actual numbers of expenditure depend on the number of jobseekers that come in and out of the service over those years, which is related to those people signing up to Newstart allowance et cetera.

Senator McCARTHY: So that's almost \$250,000 a year?

Mr Bulman: It's around \$300 million a year.

Senator McCARTHY: Million, sorry.

Mr Bulman: Yes, \$300 million.

Senator McCARTHY: It's \$250 million a year?

Mr Bulman: That's correct.

Senator McCARTHY: For how many providers?

Mr Bulman: That covers 60 regions, which are our CDP regions around the country. Within those 60 regions there are 47 providers, so 47 different organisations.

Mr Griggs: At present.

Mr Bulman: Currently.

Mr Griggs: So there could theoretically be 60, but obviously some organisations have won the grant for more than one area.

Senator McCARTHY: Thanks, Mr Bulman. I'll probably come back to that later.

Mr Bulman: Yes, absolutely.

Senator McCARTHY: So they're two round examples. What other rounds do you have? Are they the two main ones?

Mr Griggs: They're the two main recurring rounds.

Senator McCARTHY: NAIDOC and CDP?

Mr Griggs: As I said—and Mr Bulman can probably put some detail on it—we have had targeted rounds in the past around the VTEC program.

Senator McCARTHY: Sure. But VTEC is separate again, yes?

Mr Griggs: It's separate again, and that was a specific targeted round. VTEC normally operates as an open—you can make an application for VTEC at any time.

Senator McCARTHY: So that could be just in the normal run of the mill applying to IAS?

Mr Griggs: I'm just trying to be accurate with you that we have had a targeted round for VTEC.

Senator McCARTHY: Ms Collard, that is one way. You said there were three ways to apply to IAS. What are the other two ways?

Ms Collard: The other two are the agency is the direct. That approach is where there might be a gap in the community or maybe we need a kind of emergency response. That's a good opportunity to go in there and identify a specialist service that might need to go in there. That's the direct approach.

Senator McCARTHY: So who defines that? Would that be the regional workers in the regional office who think the community needs a bus or something?

Ms Collard: It's a response from the community. The benefit of having our regional presence out there is to advise us on those gaps. Also, there might be something in the community that we can respond to quickly. That's why there's a direct approach—to have the opportunity to choose that.

Senator McCARTHY: How much would be available for that in each of the regional offices?

Ms Collard: It's part of the whole funding pool of IAS.

Senator McCARTHY: So it's still part of the \$6 million, divided by 12?

Mr Griggs: No, that is separate.

Senator McCARTHY: Okay.

Mr Griggs: This is for bigger activities than the regional managers fund we talked about earlier.

Senator McCARTHY: What's bigger?

Mr Griggs: What Ms Collard is talking about is more substantial grants for more substantial projects that are identified by our regional presence staff as being a community opportunity to be pursued.

Senator McCARTHY: So that wouldn't come out of the \$6 million?

Mr Griggs: No.

Senator McCARTHY: What would that come out of?

Mr Griggs: That comes out of the broader allocation of the IAS.

Senator McCARTHY: What's that allocation?

Mr Griggs: It will depend on the nature of the proposal. It could be jobs or land, it could be social, it could be community safety—

Senator McCARTHY: Mr Griggs, I may not have made myself clear. You've provided evidence saying that there is \$6 million for the regional offices to tap into, but this process of applying through the agency direct comes from another bucket of IAS. I'm trying to understand what bucket that is.

Mr Griggs: It is drawn from the IAS generally.

Senator McCARTHY: And how much is that?

Mr Griggs: It depends on what's available.

Senator McCARTHY: No—how much is that bucket?

Mr Griggs: It is \$1.274 billion this financial year.

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you. So that's what the agency direct application can come from—the \$1.274 billion?

Mr Griggs: Yes.

Senator McCARTHY: So what's the third way, Ms Collard?

Ms Collard: The third one is the community-linked one. If the community working with the regional office identifies a gap in their own community, they might wish to put an application in. That's the third option.

Senator McCARTHY: Does that come under the \$6 million, or where would that application come from? Does that come from the \$1.274 billion as well?

Mr Griggs: Yes, that's right.

Ms Collard: They're the three processes available for the whole of the IAS for us to use as required, depending on the project or need.

Senator AYRES: So one amount—three pathways?

Ms Collard: Correct.

Senator McCARTHY: But then you've got the regional ones.

Mr Griggs: To clarify, the \$6 million is part of the \$1.274 billion. It is a part of the overall—

Senator McCARTHY: Yes, I get that.

Mr Griggs: That has been quarantined for local—

Senator McCARTHY: But isn't that a fourth option for accessing the IAS?

Mr Griggs: Yes, you could classify it as a fourth way, but in essence it is one of the other three, generally.

Senator SIEWERT: How do you classify it? You said there are three processes, but you've already articulated the regional one. So where does it fit?

Mr Griggs: The regional one is a regional version of the other three. It's the regional manager identifying an opportunity or a need and responding to it. That's why I don't classify it as a fourth way—because it's actually part of the other three.

Ms Collard: The processes would be the same.

Mr Griggs: The processes are the same; it's just that it's designed to be quicker and more agile for smaller amounts of money to make quicker access.

Senator McCARTHY: So there is a minimum and maximum then, Mr Griggs? So if you're applying for the \$6 million—I'll call it the \$6 million just for the sake of the differences—in a community or in a small organisation would you know to apply for it—

Mr Griggs: No, that's not how it operates. If the community specifies a need, they will talk to the regional manager. The regional manager would decide whether it fits with the regional fund or goes back up to Canberra.

Senator McCARTHY: So it's like a regional fund and a national fund?

Mr Griggs: It's a regional component of the overall \$1.274 billion.

Ms Collard: I'm trying to understand who's making the decision. It is important for us to clarify.

Mr Griggs: I understand.

Ms Collard: So can the minister's office initiate a funding application?

Mr Griggs: If the minister visits a community he will often have representations made to him by community when he's there. He will often ask us to go and have a look at that. Often the regional manager is with him, so the regional manager will then have a look at what has been proposed.

Senator McCARTHY: So yes?

Mr Griggs: Yes, it's possible.

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you for that; it's helpful to understand as best we can. For a family or an individual or an organisation on the ground it would be about going to the website and saying, 'This is what I want to apply for.' Then your staff would work out how the processes work.

Ms Collard: Correct.

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you for that. Who has the final sign-off on the funding for an application?

Mr Griggs: That depends on the monetary value of the grant and the assessed risk of the grant.

Senator McCARTHY: What are the differences? Can you walk me through what you mean by that?

Mr Griggs: Yes, I can. Have you got the table of delegations there?

Ms Collard: The department of the agency has delegations under \$10 million with risk ratings up to high. Anything over \$10 million and anything that's extreme will go to the minister. Everything else is decided by the agency, and we've got different delegations depending on our roles.

Senator McCARTHY: We might have a look at that because, again, I appreciate the answers you gave me from the last estimates. I might go through a few more questions before I get to that point. In an answer to a question during October estimates it was revealed that from March to caretaker on 11 April—a period of six weeks—240 activities worth \$567 million were decided. Were these approved by the minister at the time?

Mr Griggs: At that time the minister held all the delegations, so yes.

Senator McCARTHY: All delegations?

Mr Griggs: With the exception of one particular organisation that I held the delegation for.

Senator McCARTHY: Alright; let's go through that. So prior to May 2019 the minister had every delegation—is that correct?

Mr Griggs: With the exception of the one I mentioned and also NAIDOC grants under \$5,000; they were delegated to the department.

Senator AYRES: So in answer to a question earlier about delegations, that was an outline of what the delegation policy is now. When was there a different delegation framework?

Mr Griggs: When Minister Wyatt assumed the role, one of the first discussions I had with him was around delegations. We agreed that returning delegations to the then department was what he wanted to do. That was agreed in early June, but it came into effect on 1 July. Up until that time the minister held all delegations—

Senator AYRES: One hundred per cent of the delegations.

Mr Griggs: except for NAIDOC, under \$5,000. Minister Wyatt did not make a funding decision between taking on the role and 1 July.

Senator McCARTHY: That's helpful. Thank you, Mr Griggs. We might walk through this. Were all of these successful grants initiated by the applicant? I'm talking about the period March to caretaker on 11 April.

Mr Griggs: I would have to check that in detail, but my instinct is that there was a range of mechanisms used.

Senator McCARTHY: Can you take that question on notice? Also, Mr Griggs, was this before the caretaker period, during those six weeks from March?

Mr Griggs: The only two decisions taken in caretaker were by me because from the commencement of caretaker I assumed all the minister's delegations. I made two new decisions during the caretaker period.

Senator McCARTHY: What were they, Mr Griggs?

Mr Griggs: I've got those somewhere: on 14 May, funding for up to \$37,667 to the Country Women's Association of New South Wales to continue to deliver the Coraki preschool parenting and support project, and on 16 May funding of up to \$150,000 to the National Native Title Council for an urgent research infrastructure project to inform advice on native title compensation.

Senator McCARTHY: So who was that \$150,000 to?

Mr Griggs: Up to \$150,000 to the National Native Title Council.

Senator McCARTHY: What was that for?

Mr Griggs: An urgent research infrastructure project to inform advice on the native title compensation. That was post the Timber Creek decision. It was doing some urgent research post that decision. That's my understanding.

Senator McCARTHY: So prior to the conversation and the change of ministers, it's fair to say that the previous minister could just say, 'I want this project funded', whatever the project may be, because he had the delegation?

Mr Griggs: He had the delegation, but we still had to go through our process and apply the PGPA principles to that.

Senator McCARTHY: Was your process prior to the change in July the same as what you've just outlined now?

Mr Griggs: Yes.

Senator McCARTHY: So you had your regional areas come to Canberra and then you made a recommendation?

Ms Collard: Correct—the ones that are outlined in the IAS guidelines.

Senator McCARTHY: But you'd still make a recommendation that went directly to the minister as to whether it would be funded or not?

Mr Griggs: Definitely.

Ms Collard: Yes.

Senator McCARTHY: So did you make recommendations that were not accepted?

Mr Griggs: Yes.

Ms Hope: Yes.

Senator McCARTHY: Would you be able to provide some information on that?

Ms Hope: From 1 January 2019 to April—

Mr Griggs: Sorry, we've aligned with the time frame that's in Senator Ayres's letter.

Ms Hope: the minister made 641 decisions. Of those, 601 decisions agreed with the recommendation from the department, so that's 94 per cent of those decisions. In 28 of those decisions where the department recommended to fund, the minister decided not to fund, and in 12 of those decisions where the department recommended not to fund the minister decided to fund.

Senator McCARTHY: Would you be able to provide the details of those decisions? The 12 that you asked not to be funded—would you be able to identify—

Mr Griggs: So they are in the—

Senator McCARTHY: Yes, they're in the pack.

Senator AYRES: There is a lot of detail in the pack. There are the categories that you've described, one level, and then there's the delegation which was referred to, I think, in one of the lines. It might assist if it were colour-coded to help us reach a conclusion about the allocation process. There's quite some material to work through there. I appreciate you've provided it in bulk. Is there any way you can assist Senator McCarthy now with the 28 recommendations that weren't funded and the 12 decisions to fund proposals that were not recommended? You must have anticipated that these would be the subject of some questions this morning.

Senator McCARTHY: Can I hold these up, Senator Ayres? These are the documents you've provided. Would you be able to identify those 12 on these documents? I've got the organisation, activity title and amount approved—or are they separate?

Dr Walker: You're reading from a response to one of our QONs; is that the document you're referring to?

Senator AYRES: Let's do it this way. Let's start with the 12 projects that the minister decided to fund that the department did not recommend should be funded. What were they?

Ms Hope: What was the question again?

Senator AYRES: In the period leading up to caretaker, from 1 January, there were 12 projects that the agency did not recommend should be funded but the minister subsequently approved them. What were those projects, what was their value and when were they approved by the minister?

Ms Collard: The first one was a health service—

Senator AYRES: Ms Collard, if you've got a document there that you can read from, are you in a position to provide that to the committee and arrange for copies? It might be better than making you go through the exercise of reading it out.

Ms Collard: Yes, I am happy to do that.

Senator AYRES: If you can do that, we might come back to those.

Ms Hope: Is it the total decisions that I suggested or just the 12?

Senator AYRES: I would like to see the 12.

Ms Hope: Yes.

Senator AYRES: And I would like to see the 28 that weren't funded.

Ms Hope: Yes.

Senator AYRES: The balance of the material, the spreadsheet that you provided to us 20 minutes or so ago.

Ms Hope: Thank you.

Senator McCARTHY: While we're waiting for that, Mr Griggs, any applications decided by the agency after 8.30 am on 11 April were the two that you did?

Mr Griggs: They were two new decisions.

Senator McCARTHY: Two new decisions.

Mr Griggs: I did execute 36 or 32 pre-existing decisions through the caretaker period because of the nature of those particular grants.

Senator McCARTHY: They'd already been agreed to?

Mr Griggs: They'd been approved prior to caretaker.

Senator McCARTHY: And you just finalised it?

Mr Griggs: We finalised them because of the nature of those, to ensure continuity of service in community safety or whatever. I went through every one of those decisions that you talked about earlier and assessed, over the course of several weeks during caretaker, what should be executed under the caretaker convention and what should wait until after the election.

Senator McCARTHY: Are these documents that I have here part of those 32 grants executed? These are the ones with the questions on notice. These are the ones where we've got the organisation, activity, title, approved amount—or are they separate?

Mr Griggs: No, I think they'll be separate. I will get you a list of those.

Senator McCARTHY: Okay.

Mr Griggs: I think it was 32 or 36. I'll get you a list of those.

Senator McCARTHY: I might hand over to Senator O'Sullivan and come back.

Senator AYRES: When are we likely to be in a position to have copies?

Ms Hope: The team is doing that now.

Senator AYRES: For efficiency, we're about to be provided with this material. I'd like an indication of when Labor senators will be able to come back to this.

CHAIR: I'm not willing to commit to a particular time, particularly given that Labor senators have had about 90 per cent of the time this morning.

Senator AYRES: It is an opposition forum.

CHAIR: But even given that, 90 per cent is pretty generous, Senator Ayres.

Senator SIEWERT: It's a members of parliament forum.

CHAIR: I will go to Senator O'Sullivan and Senator Siewert; then I'll return the call to you.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: I want to go back to your regional structure. As I understand it, you've got the second line, the boxes in the blue with the different regions. With that delegation, when you say the decision comes back to Canberra, is that that second line or is that the line above that, Ms Hope?

Ms Hope: Senator, I'm unaware of the document that you're referring to.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: The organisational chart.

Ms Hope: When we say 'coming back to Canberra', what we're talking about is the strategic policy line of the organisation—or the policy line, sorry.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: I can give you an example of a project that might be considered. Let's say there was an employer or maybe even a group of employers in the Pilbara or the Kimberley, in my home state of Western Australia, that wanted to work together to recruit people to provide some training to ensure that those individuals have the skills, both the

vocational skills and the soft skills. There was an employment program, an idea, that was required that they saw as necessary to supplement the CDP program that already exists. What would they do? Would they go to their regional manager first? Can you talk me through how someone would get up a project proposal?

Ms Hope: It would depend on the program. If it was an employment program and they were doing a targeted response—and my colleague Mr Bulman can talk you through that particular example—we would go out and look for that.

Mr Griggs: I think Senator O'Sullivan's question was pretty clear: if there is a group that wants to do something, how do they go about it? Is it through the regional manager or is it through Canberra? The answer is that it can be either, depending on the nature of the project. More often than not there would be contact with the regional manager in the first instance—not exclusively.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: Are there some guidelines that they're given? Are they provided with something? If someone's got the idea, 'I've got 50 jobs that we can fill and I need some assistance to be able to fill those jobs,' are they then given some guidelines so that they can put together a proposal?

Mr Bulman: Yes, that's correct. I might walk through that example, because it's quite a good one. In the Kimberley an Aboriginal organisation contacted us. They already have a good relationship with our regional presence. We have staff in the Kimberley—in Kununurra, for example. There was a very similar case that actually happened. They identified, 'Look, you've got CDP in this area. You might have some other areas. But we've got a unique proposal where we're going to work with jobseekers and with regional businesses to drive 100 jobs.'

They sat down with our regional staff, who then worked along with them on their proposal. They identified online and said, 'We've got an IAS application kit which has all of these broad criteria.' They said, 'Under the IAS the program stream you're talking about that's most relevant would be program 1—jobs, land economy program.' In that case they even brought in some national office policy staff, their local intelligence and the community organisation. We worked together on a direct approach or a community-led approach where the community organisation worked up their proposal along with us. They submitted it in that case and then started the process that Ms Hope and Ms Collard walked through. We assessed it at the region, understanding the need, moving through against the criteria in the IAS guidelines which are published and signed off, and made their assessments of value for money, quality and need in the region.

The national office policy stream, for example, from my area, would have done a similar assessment, worked it up, we had a joint approach and proceeded to passing our recommendation to the delegate. That's an example of a community-led application under the IAS guidelines.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: Have you got a definition around 'community'—what that means? Does that include employers? Does it include various—

Mr Bulman: There's no definition as in eligibility of community. It's the sense that it is driven at any point in time, not from—

Senator O'SULLIVAN: As opposed to being from the department or the minister?

Mr Bulman: That's correct.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: You would then assess the application based on that criteria.

Mr Bulman: That's correct.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: Do you look at things like whether there's a duplication of existing services? If we're already maybe investing heavily in other programs, do you look at trying to maximise the efficiency of these programs that are being run?

Mr Bulman: In understanding need in a region, our staff will understand all of the other services, not only in our department and our government but in other jurisdictions. In considering whether there are gaps or additional need, they'll work through that with the proponent. In the case of, say, duplication, they'll understand whether there's a need to augment existing programs, such as a mainstream program, where you may need some targeted Indigenous service to add some extra grunt to the mainstream. They'll work that up and that comes through in the proposal. That's why, with the IAS, the way they're using grants and the way that we've got the guidelines structured enables that element of responsiveness as well as iteration with proponents to ensure that we target needs specifically.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: As an example of that, if anyone's familiar with the recently stood-up program in Perth run by the Wirrpanda Foundation—the Indigenous business hub, I think it might be called—it's providing complementary services to the existing range of things that are out there to enable Indigenous businesses and employment. It's a bit of a one-stop shop, as a way of maximising the efficiency of the range of services in not only the Indigenous-specific programs that are delivered through this agency but also through the department of employment, for example. Have I got that concept right?

Mr Bulman: Yes.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: Is that the point of those sort of programs?

Mr Bulman: That's correct. The Indigenous business hub in Western Australia—and there's one in Western Sydney as well—is a part of the government's Indigenous business sector policy. You'll recall that through a range of our other policies, like the Indigenous procurement policy, there's been this great demand growing. Mr Rajiv Viswanathan from IBA spoke about that this morning. We're building support for that supply side, looking at how you build the capability of the Indigenous business sector.

These hubs will bring in existing programs like IBA, and Many Rivers Microfinance that we spoke about, which is a microfinancing company. It will provide other services, even like office space and some practical solutions inside their venue, where a new Indigenous business can work or contract. It will also bring in other services such as business advice, procurement advice and networking opportunities, which is really valuable as well for new and old Indigenous businesses. That's going to build that sector up further, and it links really well into our Indigenous procurement policy.

Mr Griggs: The other thing is: with the establishment of the agency in the Governor-General's order that set up the agency, there's a specific line for us to coordinate our Indigenous portfolio bodies. So we were trying to use that. It goes to Senator Dodson's question earlier, I think, during the IBA session about making sure that the work we're doing is linked with the work that ISLC and IBA are doing, because I think it is fair to say over the

years that coordination probably wasn't as tight. We're certainly working very hard at making sure that we take a one-team approach to these issues.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: That's very good. That's excellent. That has definitely been a need for quite some time. I'm quite interested in understanding whether there's any work done around maximising the benefit of the mainstream programs for Indigenous people. Let's say it's in jobactive or other NEIS programs and other programs that are there that are supporting, particularly in the urban areas where we know that 75 per cent or thereabouts of the Indigenous population actually live within the major urban areas. So a lot of those programs are run for the general population. Is the agency working on trying to maximise the benefits out of those as well so that we're not just duplicating?

Mr Bulman: Yes. There are a few elements to that. We work really closely with our other Commonwealth colleagues, particularly the department of employment that delivers the jobactive program, and they're going through a series of getting ready for their next area of bringing in the new employment service where we've been working with them from a policy perspective.

Senator SIEWERT: Which new employment service?

Mr Bulman: The mainstream—after the jobactive contract, the current one, expires, they'll roll out the next iteration. That's from a policy perspective day to day. But today what we're doing is: in all areas you have your mainstream employment services, jobactive or CDP in remote areas, and over the top of it, where there's a targeted need, we use things like the vocational training and employment centres—really targeted, Indigenous-specific service providers that work with, for example, jobactive, augmented, not duplicated, not just work in partnership—and identify a select job, train the individual solely for that job and then support them into it. And they've been very successful to date. That's just one example but we also have a range of other policies that draw from, say, the NEIS program or jobactive or others.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: You raised the VTEC program. How many VTECs are running now around the country?

Mr Bulman: Around the country there are 24 VTECs. I'll just check my notes on VTECs.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: Can I get a list of those? I'm happy for you to take that on notice.

Mr Bulman: Yes, we can provide that.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: All of the locations?

Mr Bulman: Yes.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: And if you can tell us the provider who's running them?

Mr Bulman: Yes.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: I'm very familiar with the program. I just want to see how it has progressed. And can I also get—I'm happy for you to take this on notice—just the latest outcome figures for the VTEC? I'm keen to understand the number of people that commenced with the VTEC maybe in the last 12 months, if that's possible.

Mr Bulman: I can answer at the moment. Across the 24 providers in 2018-19, to give you a full year, there were 2,050 participants entered into VTEC. Of them, 1,314 reached a 26-week milestone. So that's an important one from our perspective. You have a participant come in, the service provider backs around them with support in the job, and we find that once

they've been in the job for 26 weeks—six months—they're off and flying. So we've got 1,300 participants in 2018-19 that reached that.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: The 2,050, what's that figure? Is that commencing in employment or commenced with the VTEC? They've registered with the VTEC, walked through the front door?

Mr Bulman: The 2,050 is participants in VTEC which have commenced—

Senator O'SULLIVAN: Because there could be a portion of those people that you're still working with that could be in training, they could be addressing barriers to employment, that sort of thing?

Mr Bulman: That's right. And there's obviously a bit of a count thing here because they might have started at the end of December but they've just walked through the door, signed up, but, for the provider, it might be the next financial year that they've actually entered into the job. So they're those that have signed up with the provider.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: Just on notice—I'm probably going to keep asking this question every time I'm here—if we could get a rolling update for each estimates? I'm particularly keen to understand the numbers that walk through the door of the VTEC, because there's a whole bunch of people that just need support. For them that journey between when they first walk through the door to actually getting a job, some of them, could be six months. It can take some time, particularly if some of them have significant and multiple barriers to employment. The number that walk through the door, the number that actually commence in a job, then the number that reach a 26-week milestone, as in employment, and then the number that actually left employment? You can provide that now or on notice, but I'll keep asking that every time estimates come.

Mr Bulman: We can definitely provide that on notice. I've given you some data for 2018-19. Those that actually commence in the job as opposed to sign up, I'll take on notice for you, and I'll see what I can do about after 26 weeks what happens, those that stay and those that go.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: And without going into the absolute specifics because it might be commercial negotiations that you have with the organisations, but is it still the case that the funding is weighted towards employment outcomes? We don't pay for training? We don't pay for commencements—people walking through the door, as I've been putting it? We pay when people are actually sustained in employment, is that correct?

Mr Bulman: All our funding is more heavily weighted towards the 26-week outcome. That's across the majority of our programs. We're really trying to incentivise that component. In the case of VTEC, Ms Fulton here might be able to step through the different milestones.

Ms Fulton: The VTECs can provide a range of training, and we expect that they will. But the payment is for them reaching four, 13 and 26 weeks of employment.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: So we're not funding commencements and filling out resumes and updating certificates?

Mr Bulman: No.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: The VTEC has provided funding when the person reaches sustained employment measured at four weeks, 12 weeks and 26 weeks?

Mr Bulman: Yes, and more heavily weighted towards the 26 weeks. We moved away from payments as you sign up and pushed out towards 26 weeks with a four and a 13-week category.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: It's good to see it's still progressing. Thank you.

Mr Bulman: Thank you.

Senator SCARR: Can I just ask—

CHAIR: Yes, just a quick clarifying—

Senator SIEWERT: Sorry, I have—

CHAIR: I did promise I'd go to Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT: I have been waiting a considerable period.

CHAIR: Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. Can I please ask; of the grants going back to the start of IAS, how many which have been made were minister initiated? Do you have that figure?

Mr Griggs: Back to 2013?

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, please.

Mr Griggs: I do not have that figure.

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

Mr Griggs: I can take it on notice and I'll assess—

Senator SIEWERT: How many of these grants that you have provided for 2019-20 were minister initiated? Reading this, they're all obviously under the organisations. How many were minister initiated?

Mr Griggs: I don't have that detail. I can see if we can get that for you.

Senator SIEWERT: Could you get that? Is it possible to get it today?

Mr Griggs: I doubt it but we'll try.

Senator SIEWERT: And then for year to date for this year, how many have been minister initiated, please?

CHAIR: Sorry, just to briefly jump in, that document that you were endeavouring to provide to the committee, is that coming?

Mr Griggs: It's being printed at the moment.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you.

Mr Griggs: I'm not being pedantic. Can you define 'minister initiated'? As I said, if he goes into a community and someone says, 'Hey, what about this,' and then the minister turns to the regional manager and says, 'We should have a look at that,' is that minister initiated from your perspective? I'm not trying to be smart; I am really trying to understand—

Senator SIEWERT: I'm also trying to understand what influence ministers have had over this program. So I'd like to know how many in that instance, for example? Are you able to define where somebody from the community said, 'We want to do this'? Are you able to define where the minister said, 'Can you look at that?' And then I'd like to know which ones, if there are ones, where the minister has come and been negotiating with somebody, whether

it's individuals or NGOs, for example, and then asked you to take on a program to have a look at it and assess it.

Mr Griggs: We'll endeavour to answer that question. It's a significant body of work going back to 2013.

Senator SIEWERT: I want to get an idea, over the extent of the program but particularly for these projects, which ones of these were minister initiated. You used the term. The term was used as well when we were discussing this earlier. I'm trying to get an understanding of how many are coming straight from the community and how many are going through that approach of minister-initiated projects.

Mr Griggs: We'll attempt to get you an answer.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. Can I ask: for projects that have been undertaken and have been completed, what's the assessment process? What's the evaluation process of those projects and how does the broader community find out about that?

Mr Griggs: I'll get Professor Anderson to talk about the evaluation approach.

Prof. Anderson: There are two elements of the process. Each project has a set of performance indicators which are reported on through the life of the project. Then through the evaluation strategy which sits on top of that, additional to that, we have a process where we are working through a series of program and project valuations. We are shifting more towards the program evaluation in order to get a broader understanding of outcomes.

Senator SIEWERT: Did you say 'program'?

Prof. Anderson: Program evaluation—project and program evaluation.

Senator SIEWERT: When you say 'program' you mean jobs, land and economy; children and—

Prof. Anderson: Yes, variously defined.

Senator SIEWERT: Okay.

Prof. Anderson: So a program evaluation is a suite of projects.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, I understand.

Prof. Anderson: And that process, which Ms Hartman will talk through, comes in under our evaluation team—two different processes.

Senator SIEWERT: But you said you are now leaning towards performance of the program.

Prof. Anderson: Performance of projects and measurement of projects, then an evaluation strategy that's looking at both our projects and programs.

Senator SIEWERT: So you're feeding up from the projects to the program?

Prof. Anderson: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Where are we up to with that process?

Ms Hartman: In terms of our progress with evaluations to date we've, since establishment of the IAS, done about 49 evaluations and reviews, and 44 of those were published. And we've got 17 evaluations currently being progressed at the moment.

Senator SIEWERT: That's of projects?

Ms Hartman: That is of projects. And as Professor Anderson said, we are moving more towards looking at these evaluations at the whole-of-program level.

Senator SIEWERT: You've done 49 of—remind me how many?—49 over what period, before I jump to conclusions?

Ms Hartman: Since mid-2014.

Senator SIEWERT: Since 2014?

Ms Hartman: Completed 49 and we're currently undertaking 17.

Senator SIEWERT: Of projects?

Ms Hartman: Of projects.

Senator SIEWERT: How many have you funded over that period?

Ms Hartman: How many programs or projects?

Senator SIEWERT: No, how many projects have been funded?

Ms Hartman: I would have to ask someone else to answer that question.

Prof. Anderson: We'll take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: There are lots, aren't there?

Prof. Anderson: Projects we've funded, yes, absolutely.

Senator SIEWERT: And you've undertaken evaluation of 49?

Prof. Anderson: Yes. Obviously we're collecting performance data on all the other projects.

Senator SIEWERT: It's now 2020, so six years. How do we know what's performing and what's not over the expenditure of this program when we've only done evaluation of 49?

Ms Hartman: We look at trying to prioritise those evaluations for projects which are high priority, which have a certain impact and which may be ceasing and coming up for another round of funding. We actually try and prioritise the programs that we are currently evaluating.

Senator SIEWERT: What have been your findings from the evaluation to date of the 49?

Ms Hartman: The findings have been mixed. For some of the evaluations we've found that the programs have performed well. For other evaluations—and I would have to take it on notice to give you the exact details of which ones—of other programs, when we do an evaluation we have somebody independent from the agency undertake the evaluation. For some of the projects the evaluations have come back and indicated that there are actually some changes that need to be made to those projects to improve their effectiveness.

Mr Exell: Was your question how can we support programs and make recommendations if we only have 49 evaluations? The other part is, of course, we draw on lots of evidence from across the Commonwealth and a range of other independent or international evaluations. When we make these decisions we actually look at an evidence base. There is more than just that. Obviously we have some specific evaluations that look at implementation and the policy frame that we work in, but we draw on a whole source of work. In fact, when we talk about the role between regional managers' offices in Canberra from a policy office, that is one of the points where we have in my team a social positive, and that is looking carefully at the

evidence, what are we learning, what's happening and how we bring that into the programs that we're supporting.

Senator SIEWERT: How can you be doing that with all the projects that have been applied for and the limited number of evaluations that have been done?

Mr Exell: We do the best we can to bring them together. I look after programs 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4, so that's children—schooling, safety and wellbeing. For example, we have 60, approximately, link-up programs supporting members of the stolen generation. We can walk across a range of those programs and draw on a body of evidence to think, 'Are they working against that?' We then work with the regional managers and think, 'What are we seeing from that evidence?' Another example is suicide prevention work, which is quite an important focus for the government right now. There is a lot of work going on. The Productivity Commission has done the mental health review. Christine Morgan has done a report. We look at all of that. We have a group within the agency that meets on a regular basis to look at all of that evidence and bring it to bear on the programs on the ground.

Senator SIEWERT: Is that done outside the 49?

Ms Hartman: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: That's done outside—

Ms Hartman: That's part of building the broader evidence base.

Senator SIEWERT: Sorry, Professor Anderson; I cut you off.

Prof. Anderson: I'm not sure of the point I was going to make. There is a much broader evidence base that we need to bring into our decision-making. There are some gaps in that evidence base. There are also some areas where evidence is well established. That is one of the reasons why we want to shift to a program-wide approach. The actual process of evaluation requires a deep look. For most projects it will take 18 months at a minimum to get a good evaluation in place. So we need to lift up and look more at a program level at the evidence base rather than each individual project.

Senator SIEWERT: The problem is that there are lots of projects being funded, and we can see some more here. I appreciate what you're saying—and, Mr Exell, I appreciate what you've just said—but the fact is: are projects performing against what they said they would do?

Prof. Anderson: That's a question with all our performance indicators.

Senator SIEWERT: When you are funding them, are you checking performance indicators?

Prof. Anderson: Yes. Our performance indicators are set with the grant. We can tell, based on the performance indicators, whether they are performing against what they said they would do. Evaluation adds a deeper level of understanding about their effectiveness and efficiency.

Senator SIEWERT: In terms of monitoring, how many projects have met their performance indicators and how many haven't?

Ms Collard: Basically, we put KPIs and datasets within each contract of activity. The whole assurance process through the contract management is making sure that those KPIs and datasets are actually being addressed. Twice a year the organisation will sit down with the

contract manager and have a look at those and have a bit of a conversation. In relation to the last report we identify, because basically the agreement managers put in a system, they said that 90 per cent said they performed well.

Senator SIEWERT: They said that. That's different to it actually happening. What percentage do you then go and verify? I'm sure a lot of the projects are doing well, but we're spending a lot of money here.

Ms Collard: What the system says, and what our contract managers, working closely to the ground with our organisations, are saying is that 90 per cent are functioning well with the activities that we fund.

Mr Huey: I can probably add a little bit more context for you. Twice a year each activity essentially receives a performance assessment report. That's actually completed by the provider. That provides us with a range of information around both the quantity of services that are being delivered and some views around the quality of the service that's being delivered and also some questions around outcomes. That information comes back into the agency and that's then reviewed by those people out with the regional presence. So those offices review that information that comes in. They also have some contact with the organisations, as Ms Collard said, and will also have broader discussions with the community et cetera. Then they make an assessment of how that activity is progressing at six-monthly intervals. The figure that Ms Collard referenced there of 90 per cent was where the agreement manager has assessed the performance of the activity as advised based on their assessment and the reported information that the activity is performing well.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you.

Senator AYRES: Chair, sorry—if I can just interrupt. About half an hour ago we asked for a photocopy of the short document that Ms Collard was reading from.

CHAIR: I expect that might just have been handed to the secretariat.

Senator AYRES: Is it available now? Thank you.

Mr Exell: Senator, can I answer the question?

Senator SIEWERT: Yes.

Mr Exell: It's a really important question, and I just want to add a lens to it. Not only do we look hard at the individual performance and activity and how it's going in meeting the indicators it's been set but also we look at the cumulative impact of a number of activities in a region. We have what's called grant activity reviews that look at an area and say, 'There are a range of programs going on; what difference are we seeing?' A third tier is that we look at a sum-of-the-parts investment. As I said, we have 60 link-up services or we have a range of preschool or early childhood and we try and look at that national impact as well. So there are layers of how we think about performance that starts at that individual activity and kind of groups up.

We talk a lot about national targets and we talk about program and specific targets. So we're constantly thinking, 'How do we have a story that stretches across those things?' That's a work in progress, to be honest. We're getting better at that. But we're really thinking that feeds back into the questions you were asking before about the applications process. I'm one of the, I guess, program managers or policy owners, so when I look at a funding decision within my

delegation I'm looking at how does it fit within a place-based approach and I'm looking at how does it fit within a national approach, given we've got a limited bucket of funds as well. We get more applications than there are programs, so we're constantly having to make trade-offs about where we'll see the best return or an early impact. That's not an easy thing. But that's the lens we bring to it.

Senator SIEWERT: I know. That's why I'm asking. Thank you for that. The 10 per cent that aren't meeting their performance indicators or KPIs—what happens in that instance?

Mr Huey: Various approaches are taken. Because we have a regional presence, people working in the regional areas will be working fairly closely with those providers on the issues. Sometimes it may not be something that, as you'd understand, is quite so straightforward as just a performance issue. There may be some other things going on in the community et cetera. We'd expect those staff on the ground to be working with those providers and the communities to look at how we can support those organisations to reach the level that we're expecting in terms of their performance.

Senator SIEWERT: I appreciate that working with organisations to be able to deliver the project is a good thing, but are there any that you've had to pull the pin on and say, 'Look, this just isn't working'?

Mr Huey: There are instances. There's a small number of cases each year which are referred through the compliance process up to our serious compliance team. They work very, very intensely with the organisation. We'll go in and review the activity, so the governance and financial management arrangements, and take a fairly holistic view of the organisation. Following the end of that process there'll be a decision or a recommendation made about whether or not funding should be continued or a service may be novated to another service provider et cetera.

Senator SIEWERT: Do you have the number now of how many grants have been transferred to another provider? I ask that in terms of because of unsatisfactory performance, not because of the other process where you've been transferring from non-Aboriginal organisations to Aboriginal organisations—those where grants have been transferred but also where they have been cancelled?

Mr Huey: We are happy to take the question on notice and provide that to you.

Senator SIEWERT: I'm aware that I'm just about to run out of time, but I do want to ask one or two questions around when the decision was made to transfer decision-making under 10 million to the agency.

Mr Griggs: In early June.

Senator SIEWERT: Last year?

Mr Griggs: Last year.

Senator SIEWERT: 2019.

Mr Griggs: After Minister Wyatt was sworn in we had an initial discussion on the matter. We put a submission to him in early June. He agreed, effective from 1 July.

Senator AYRES: Sorry to interrupt, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT: That's okay; I do it to others.

Senator AYRES: Was that an initiative of the minister or was that a recommendation from the department?

Mr Griggs: I would say that it was genuinely mutually agreed that it was the best way.

Senator AYRES: Following a discussion about recent funding decisions?

Mr Griggs: No, it was about what his preferences were and how he wanted to operate as a minister.

Senator SIEWERT: How did you arrive at that figure of 10 million?

Mr Griggs: We were looking at making sure that he had clear visibility of the more significant grants and the best way to do that. It could have been eight, it could have been 10, it could have been 12.

Senator SIEWERT: That's why I'm asking. Was there a magic thing about 10?

Mr Griggs: No, it was an arbitrary decision based on the volume of grants and looking at the overall program and risk. The 10 million wasn't about risk.

Senator SIEWERT: You talk about extreme risk.

Mr Griggs: There's risk. I was talking about value because that was the question. But there was also a risk dimension as well.

Senator SIEWERT: That goes with the 10?

Mr Griggs: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: And over that.

Mr Griggs: Well, it can. It might; it might not.

Senator SIEWERT: Right.

Mr Griggs: We can have \$2 million grants with extreme risk.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. I had to pop out of the room, so this may have been asked: how many times has the department made a recommendation to the minister that has been overturned one way or the other?

Mr Griggs: Which minister?

Senator SIEWERT: Both. Can we take it over—

Mr Griggs: I can give you the period in this data that we've given you.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, this will be—

Mr Griggs: From 1 January 2019 through till the end of January this year. In terms of Minister Scullion there were 40 occasions where it went either way.

Senator AYRES: The 12 plus the 28?

Mr Griggs: The 12 plus the 28. I'm just checking the math.

Senator AYRES: I can count 50 per cent plus.

Mr Griggs: And Minister Wyatt, zero.

Senator SIEWERT: Sorry?

Mr Griggs: Minister Wyatt, zero.

Senator SIEWERT: In terms of previous grant rounds, can we go back—I'm reluctant to say go back to 2014, but the minister did—

Mr Griggs: I'd be reluctant for you to say that too, Senator. You may, of course.

Senator SIEWERT: All right. In this instance I'll ask for the last three years.

Mr Griggs: Of that rate of disagreement between recommendation and ministerial decision?

Senator SIEWERT: Yes.

Mr Griggs: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you.

Senator AYRES: Chair, I've got a series of questions that I want to work through quite quickly, if I may, and ask for assistance from the department, from the agency, to do that because I'm conscious that there are a series of other issues and questions that need to be traversed between now and three o'clock. There does seem to me to be, following the questions earlier this morning and Senator Siewert's questions, a significant difference between the governance practice that Minister Wyatt has agreed with the agency and the governance practice that there was before in terms of delegations and sign-off. I'm interested in how that changeover happened. We'll come to that in a moment. But it does seem that there is a significant amount of expenditure in the period between—on the basis of what I've been able to work through in the big spreadsheet that you've taken us through or that you've provided to us—and the commencement of the caretaker period. So, without the pejorative for these, I would be interested in knowing, on notice, in addition to the information that you've provided to us, whether—sorry, I'll come back to this. Can I just understand the process? Prior to June, when the decision was made to change the delegation process, 100 per cent of grants were signed off by the minister. Or is there a subset that were departmental calls—

Mr Griggs: With NAIDOC under \$5,000.

Senator AYRES: Yes.

Mr Griggs: And the one other instance that I—

Senator AYRES: Which were in caretaker that you—

Mr Griggs: No, there was one other case where I had the delegation.

Senator AYRES: What was that?

Mr Griggs: That was in relation to NARMCO in the Northern Territory, which had the president of the CLP, Mr Ron Kelly.

Senator AYRES: I see. So a decision was made to delegate that to you.

Mr Griggs: When that was announced, I spoke to Minister Scullion and said that I should take that from him. He agreed with that and that's what we did.

Senator AYRES: So let's take the period 1 January to caretaker. Were all the applications provided to the department assessed on the basis of criteria and then recommended or not recommended to the minister's office? Is that a reasonable, shorthand way of describing the process?

Mr Griggs: Our standard process was followed through that period. The only thing that changed was the decision-making delegation.

Senator AYRES: At the end, yes.

Mr Griggs: Yes.

Senator AYRES: But were they all applications that were made to the department by their proponents, or did some originate in the minister's office?

Mr Griggs: As I said to Senator Siewert, I don't have that level of detail. I suspect there was a mixture, but I think the preponderance will be those that were in the system.

Senator AYRES: Could you provide me with a list today of the subset of those that were applications prepared in the minister's office?

Mr Griggs: I will attempt to.

Senator AYRES: If not, take it on notice, but it would be helpful to get some clarity around these issues. There were assessment criterion?

Mr Griggs: Can I just go back?

Senator AYRES: Yes, Mr Griggs.

Mr Griggs: None of the applications are prepared in the minister's office. I'm assuming we're using Senator Siewert's 'minister initiated'?

Senator AYRES: Yes. I took it that, when you said 'minister initiated', that's quite a different thing: the minister in his travels meets somebody and says, 'We can answer that question with an application to this program,' and they subsequently make an application. That makes perfect sense.

Mr Griggs: Yes.

Senator AYRES: I'm more interested in—

Mr Griggs: Where the agency was given direction to prepare an application.

Senator AYRES: Yes. Any instances of that happening?

Mr Griggs: Yes.

Senator AYRES: Can you provide me with a list of those?

Mr Griggs: As I said, I'll attempt to do that.

Senator AYRES: If not, take it on notice, but it would assist us if it were provided today. Were there assessment criteria that the department applied?

Mr Griggs: The standard criteria for the type of grant that it was, in accordance with the—

Senator AYRES: So there were streams. The criteria might be different depending upon the stream?

Mr Griggs: In accordance with the program-specific guidelines.

Senator AYRES: When the department assessed them—I saw there was a score on the sheet you handed out. Was it a score out of 20?

Mr Griggs: It depends. The NAIDOC score is out of 20, and the ABA score is out of 15. They're specific for the round. They're the two merit based rounds that were run.

Senator AYRES: Were there eligibility criteria? There's a merit assessment, but were some projects deemed not eligible?

Mr Griggs: Some.

Ms Collard: There would have been. Under the Commonwealth rules and guidelines there are particular types of entities that we can fund. So those entities would have to comply with those rules and guidelines.

Senator AYRES: Were any projects funded that were not eligible?

Mr Griggs: Not to my knowledge.

Senator AYRES: So the recommendation would go from the department to the minister. Did you lose visibility of what happened until it came back to you?

Mr Griggs: We were not involved in the process within the minister's office.

Senator AYRES: So there's no visibility for the agency? I keep saying 'the department'—I'm sorry, I'm just old-fashioned.

Mr Griggs: At that time you're correct—it was the department.

Senator AYRES: Well, I'm right on it, then. So you didn't have then, and you don't have now, any visibility about whether or not, for instance, the minister engaged with the Prime Minister's office prior to making decisions?

Mr Griggs: No.

Senator AYRES: I'm flicking through it and looking at areas of New South Wales that I know a bit about. Who proposed applications G211 and G219 to G222? They were on the south coast of New South Wales. Were they ones that the minister identified to the department—

Mr Griggs: I couldn't tell you that now.

Senator AYRES: I would like you to provide on notice more information than you've provided in this. The information you've provided is what we asked for and it's comprehensive in those terms. But I would like to know for each of those applications what electorate they were in, whether or not they were applications made by organisations who are the beneficiaries of the applications or whether they were applications that the minister's office asked the then department to work up with the organisation. There may be some other categories where you've actually seen a need in a community and the department then just did it. I appreciate that might be the case. I also want to know, in regard to those applications that were approved—so we're talking about 1 January to caretaker—how many of those applications were the subject of announcements by members of parliament or candidates in the election during the campaign. Could you provide that on notice for us?

Mr Griggs: I can attempt to do that.

Senator AYRES: I have no further questions on this subject matter.

Senator McCARTHY: In an answer to a question in writing, 977, it was revealed that 307 funding decisions were made between 1 July 2019 and 31 October 2019. Of these, seven decisions were made by the Minister for Indigenous Australians. Can you tell me the value of those seven funding decisions made by the current minister?

Ms Hope: Yes. Can you give me the dates again?

Senator McCARTHY: Sure. This was an answer to a question in writing. It was document 977, if that assists you. It was revealed that 307 funding decisions were made

between 1 July 2019 and 31 October 2019. Of these, seven decisions were made by the current minister. Could you tell me the value of the funding decisions of those seven?

Mr Griggs: It was \$32,228,655.

Senator McCARTHY: What percentage are those decisions of the total funding decisions of \$209 million?

Senator Ruston: Give me the numbers and I'll put it in the calculator. What were the exact numbers? What was the total?

Mr Griggs: It would be \$32.2 million. What was your other number, Senator?

Senator McCARTHY: So \$32 million as a percentage of the \$209 million—

Mr Griggs: Fifteen per cent.

Senator McCARTHY: What advice did the minister take on these seven grants? It was advice, through the process, on whether they're recommended or not.

Mr Griggs: Yes, it went through the process and, instead of going to an agency decision-maker, it went to the minister because of the delegations table that we have for the \$10 million, or the risk. On each occasion he accepted the agency's advice.

Senator McCARTHY: So the authority the minister was relying on to sign off on these grants was the fact that he now has the process and he can sign off on the grants after having gone through the process where you've recommended or not recommended?

Mr Griggs: That's right.

Senator McCARTHY: Okay. I'm just trying to make sure we've got it really clear. Mr Griggs, you said earlier that prior to the election, even though the previous minister had delegation, except for NAIDOC grants under five grand—you had that—

Mr Griggs: The department had it, yes.

Senator McCARTHY: The department. How many NAIDOC grants were provided over five grand and where were they allocated?

Mr Griggs: I'll see if we can get someone to come forward with that.

Mr Exell: We can take that on notice. I'll see if I have the total number of grants that were provided, bearing in mind that this is a program of \$1.4 million.

Senator McCARTHY: By all means, Mr Exell, you can take that question on notice. I just want to understand how many. Clearly, the department only had the delegation for those under five grand. I'm interested to know that anything above five grand would have been the decision by the minister.

Mr Exell: That's correct.

Senator McCARTHY: Could you take it on notice. I don't need it right now.

Mr Exell: On notice, absolutely.

Senator McCARTHY: In the interests of time, can I go to the document you provided—I appreciate that; thank you—about the 12 decisions approved. I take you to the Redtails Central Australia Football Club Right Tracks program. There's an approval of \$300,000 for funding, yet you didn't approve it; you didn't recommend it. Can you give a reason as to why you didn't recommend it, yet the minister decided to recommend it?

Mr Exell: I'm just trying to find the specific program. From my notes I understand this was an application that was put forward for a different organisation, which I don't have with me, but I will take that on notice.

Senator McCARTHY: So it wasn't for Redtails?

Mr Exell: Correct.

Senator McCARTHY: Right Tracks, Central Australia?

Mr Exell: The minister indicated on that decision brief that that was who he wanted to support for that activity.

Senator McCARTHY: So they hadn't applied?

Mr Exell: Correct. So, under the process that we've talked about before—the CEO talked about ensuring we apply with the PGPA Act—that, therefore, means that we had to go through the process of contacting that organisation, getting an application, assessing that application and processing it on that basis.

Senator McCARTHY: Had they applied for \$300,000 or had they applied for more than that?

Mr Exell: I don't have the specifics. I can check that.

Senator McCARTHY: If you could.

Mr Exell: Yes. The issue for this funding was that it was for a time-limited period. It was to use underspends within that financial year. The agency undertook efforts to contact those organisations and seek those applications. That did not happen within the financial year. Obviously, we're in the caretaker period and also trying to reach those organisations before the end of the financial year.

Senator McCARTHY: Can I confirm that the Redtails Right Tracks Central Australia football club had not applied for \$300,000; that the decision came from the minister, requesting the department to go to the Redtails Right Tracks Central Australia football club and encourage them to put in an application, which is what the department did?

Mr Exell: I'd like to double-check this one, so let me check during the break, but that is my understanding. On the second point, if the minister at that time indicated that he would like to see it funded or supported, the requirement is back on the agency to reach out to those organisations. It is not the minister that goes directly to those orgs to then go through the process that my colleagues have described earlier, to make sure it's compliant with the PGPA act, that there is an application and that it meets those tests. We go through that process.

Senator McCARTHY: Do you know when a public announcement was made for the—

Mr Exell: I'd have to take that on notice.

Senator McCARTHY: Okay. My understanding is that it was made in May for \$500,000 by the minister and the candidate for Lingiari. Could you, in your answers to questions on notice, please confirm or make clear for me what the process was for their application and how much was provided and agreed to? Did the department recommend it and, if it did, on what basis? If it did not, why not?

Mr Exell: Yes.

CHAIR: Before we move on to another subject area, how much money is left in this? How much money was spent over this period and what is left to spend for these purposes?

Mr Griggs: In this financial year we have \$1.279—whatever the number was that I gave you earlier. I'll get the CFO to come up. He'll be able to tell you where we're at, at the moment.

CHAIR: I want to know how much of that allocation is left, and then we'll move on to—

Mr Griggs: Given that we're at this time in the financial year, obviously, it's less.

CHAIR: 'Not much' may be the answer.

Mr Griggs: What you're after is what has been legally permitted and—

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Volker: To date there's been 90 per cent of the \$1.274 billion committed.

CHAIR: Thanks; that's all I need.

Mr Griggs: Chair, can I read an answer to Senator McCarthy?

CHAIR: You may.

Mr Griggs: She asked about the number of decisions that Minister Scullion made on NAIDOC above—

Senator McCARTHY: You've got that?

Mr Griggs: There were 983 applications for the 2019 NAIDOC round; 603 activities were funded. Minister Scullion made decisions on 103.

Senator McCARTHY: 103 NAIDOC—

Mr Griggs: Of the 603 that were funded, Minister Scullion made decisions on 103.

Senator McCARTHY: Yes, but I was—

Senator AYRES: Is there anything to that round number, the 500? The department originally decided to make 500?

Mr Griggs: No.

Senator SCARR: I want to ask some questions about the Custody Notification Service. For the information of the other senators on the committee, these will be the only questions that I ask in the course of the afternoon, so if I could be given some indulgence, I'd appreciate it. The Custody Notification Service, as I understand it, was introduced in New South Wales and the ACT following the royal commission. There's legislation in those jurisdictions mandating the provision of that service. Firstly, I want to know what other jurisdictions it applies in and which jurisdictions it doesn't apply in, where the service isn't being provided.

Mr Exell: Thank you for your question. As you're aware, it's essentially jurisdiction based. New South Wales and the ACT are picked up in that catchment service that you've indicated. In previous committee hearings we've talked a bit about the work that's been done in other jurisdictions. I think we talked about this at the last hearing; the Northern Territory has also taken up the offer from the Commonwealth to seek financial support, and put in arrangements for—

Senator SCARR: With respect to the Northern Territory, they're going to mandate it through legislation as well?

Ms Davis: The Northern Territory government have indicated that they will legislate. They haven't yet.

Mr Exell: Western Australia has also taken up the offer for support for the Custody Notification Service and has commenced operations. I'll check whether my colleague has the specifics around the legislation. We'll quickly look for that. We're also working with the Victorian legal service, with our regional office, to look at whether Victoria will take on a CNS. Similarly, Tasmania has also expressed interest. We recently met with Tasmanian government officials, in December, to look at whether they will also stand up the Custody Notification Service.

Ms Davis: I'll just need to check whether Western Australia has legislated.

Senator SCARR: You can take it on notice. In my home state of Queensland, as I understand it—and this is my paraphrase as to how I understand their position—the minister for police has said they have a program in place other than the CNS program which effectively, they assert, is doing the same thing, or something approximating it. Can I ask for your views with respect to the Queensland program and how closely it approximates to—or what are the differences between the Queensland program and, say, the program in New South Wales?

Ms Davis: I would have to take that on notice.

Mr Exell: I don't have enough detail to specifically compare at this point. We're very happy to take that on notice. We do continue to discuss the offer with the Queensland government. As you say, they have consistently advised us that their systems are sufficient in ensuring that those custody notifications are occurring. We'll come back to you on the specific points of difference, if you like.

Senator SCARR: Okay. If I can extrapolate this—I suspect you're going to have to take all of this on notice—I'm very interested in the system they currently have, what record you have of that, any correspondence between the department and the Queensland government with respect to the offer to provide them with funding for the Custody Notification Service and any responses to those offers; and any data you have with respect to the success of the system in some jurisdictions compared to any data you have with respect to the success or otherwise of the Queensland system.

Ms Davis: I don't think that we would have any data for Queensland. I can tell you that Minister Wyatt wrote to the Queensland Attorney-General in October 2019 and the Attorney-General replied to Minister Wyatt on 26 November 2019 declining the offer. I don't think we would have data on the Queensland system as it's a jurisdictional matter.

Mr Exell: We do have data, for example, for the other states, and we can give a sense of the take-up and the use. We'll seek to answer what we can.

Senator SCARR: If there's a discussion with the Queensland government about, 'We're giving you this offer to implement the Custody Notification Service,' my understanding is that it has been quite successful in New South Wales. I would have thought that, in those discussions, the onus would have been put on the Queensland government. If it's saying, 'We've got a system that does the same thing and it works,' part of the discussion would have been: 'Queensland government, can you tell us what your data is to support that proposition so that we can continue this discussion?'

Mr Exell: That's exactly right. I think the point we were making was that we couldn't independently provide data that's separate for Queensland. We're relying on them for the data they bring forward. We're very happy to look at—

Ms Davis: We've offered to fund a system and they've declined that offer.

Senator SCARR: To be fair to them, as I understand it, the offer to fund is for the first three years.

Mr Exell: Correct.

Senator SCARR: Then they would have to take it up.

Mr Exell: That's right.

Senator SCARR: I think you understand the documents and information I'm after?

Mr Exell: Yes, I understand what you want.

Senator SCARR: Thank you.

Senator McCARTHY: I want to go to water. How many remote communities around Australia are facing critical water securities such as running out of water or issues with accessing potable water? Do you have a list of those communities?

Mr Bulman: I don't have a list of communities. Water is predominantly a matter for states and territories, but we do work closely in the remote context.

Senator McCARTHY: What investigations, though, is the federal government conducting into remote water supplies?

Mr Bulman: I'm not sure—

Senator McCARTHY: Take it on notice.

Mr Bulman: I will take on notice whether other departments are working through the department of agriculture and water. In our context, for example, in the Northern Territory, we're working closely with the Northern Territory government, the Northern Territory land councils and the power and water company to look at some of the Northern Territory government data on water security in Indigenous communities. That's a unique circumstance in the Northern Territory. I'll take on notice other departments' roles.

Senator Ruston: Senator McCarthy, for your information, there is currently a whole-of-government water committee, so you may bounce off there.

Senator McCARTHY: It's just that we get pushed around and told that everything goes back to the Indigenous space. You might be able to help me with that one, minister.

Senator Ruston: Indeed.

Senator McCARTHY: Mr Bulman, can I put these questions to you, and you can take them on notice. What investment is the federal government making into water projects in remote regions—sourcing, treatment and water re-use projects? Also, what water projects have been funded under the homelands project—amount of investments, whether these are one-offs or there is no money for maintenance et cetera? Minister, I will put a question to you: what role do you see your government playing in the future sustainability of remote First Nations communities, given the concerns with water across the country?

Senator Ruston: Obviously, with the specific details of that question, I'm more than happy to get Minister Wyatt to respond in some detail. Clearly, this government has a very strong focus on drought proofing our country and has made significant investments in various water projects—not just water infrastructure but water projects, delivery projects, sustainability projects, dams et cetera. In relation to the specifics around Indigenous-specific communities, I would be keen to ask Minister Wyatt to respond directly to that for you.

Senator McCARTHY: Do you agree that access to safe drinking water is a right for all Australians and it shouldn't be dependent on where they live?

Senator Ruston: Obviously, access to clean, potable water for all Australians is absolutely essential, yes.

Senator McCARTHY: I put that question to you given some comments by Senator Sam McMahon. In looking at water in our communities, she said:

... if it gets to that stage then it may well come to a choice of can we continue to service these people properly or do we need to say, look, if you want all these services, you're going to have to move.

It's important to understand where the government is coming from in terms of where First Nations people live, given much of the regions—in particular, if I reflect on where I come from, it's about the relationship to country and traditional links to country. I think it's important that the federal government puts on the record what its position is on First Nations people and where they live.

Senator Ruston: Certainly, I understand clearly what you're asking for but obviously the position of the government is the position of the executive government and comments of backbenchers are their personal opinion. I can assure you that the government is absolutely respectful of the rights and the connection to community of our First Australians. But I'm happy to get you a very detailed response from Minister Wyatt because I understand the significance of your question.

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you.

CHAIR: And we're right on schedule for our break. We'll return at 1.30 with the Department of Health and the agency.

Proceedings suspended from 12:32 to 13:30

Department of Health

CHAIR: The committee will now resume. As foreshadowed before the break, we are now joined by the Department of Health—in particular Ms Tania Rishniw, Acting Deputy Secretary, Health Systems Policy and Primary Care Group for the Department of Health. Ms Rishniw, do you have an opening statement you'd like to make at this time?

Ms Rishniw: Thank you, Chair; thank you, Committee. I would like to acknowledge that we meet today on Ngunawal country and pay my respects to elders, past, present and emerging. I wonder whether the committee would appreciate an update, particularly on suicide prevention activities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?

CHAIR: We would. We might come back to that, though. I know there are a lot of questions as well, but we would appreciate an update on that. Mr Griggs, I think you also flagged you might have some updates from questions?

Mr Griggs: Just a clarification and correction, Chair. Over the lunch break I checked to make sure that my description was correct around who had what delegations prior to Minister Wyatt being appointed. The department also held delegations on the Tailored Assistance Employment Grants scheme of less than \$100,000. Anything above \$100,000 Minister Scullion held. The department had, for a long time, held the delegations in the native title sector for the funding of the native title representative bodies. The correction is on the two lists that we gave you. National Congress of Australia's First Peoples is on the first list. That should be on the other list. It's not 12 and 28.

Senator McCARTHY: Yes, it's zero for National Congress of Australia's First Peoples.

Mr Griggs: Yes. It's 11 and 29. We just need to move that one from that list to the other.

Senator McCARTHY: So it's not 12. It was 11.

Mr Griggs: It was 11 and 29 rather than 12 and 28.

Senator McCARTHY: Okay.

Mr Griggs: Thanks, Chair.

CHAIR: I will kick off and I will offer the call to Labor senators. There's been a lot of commentary in recent days about the impact of coronavirus on Indigenous communities, or the potential impact, I should say, noting that isolated communities, particularly those that have limited access to health care, are particularly vulnerable. I would be interested to know what preparations either the agency or the department has made in anticipation of this possible challenge.

Ms Rishniw: As many of the senators on the committee heard on Wednesday at the Health estimates, Health has been doing a lot of work. The Chief Medical Officer gave a fairly comprehensive review of what's happening across the country around the response to COVID-19. We've been doing some direct work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector Aboriginal community controlled health organisations' experts in the area. I wonder whether Dr De Toca, who has been leading that work, could give you an update on exactly what's been happening, because it's been a busy few days.

CHAIR: Yes, that would be very helpful.

Dr De Toca: As Ms Rishniw pointed out, there has been a considerable amount of work to date on preparing and including considerations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities as we have activated the Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). The plan and learning from some of the lessons from the pandemic in 2009 for H1N1 has several references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities as priority populations for action and includes very clear advice on engagement with the Aboriginal health sector, particularly the community controlled sector, as led by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, as key aspects for action.

Following that plan there have been considerations of impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in all stages of the response to date. The Communicable Diseases Network Australia, which is a technical group that advises the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, has a standing agenda item on impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, having invited an expert such as Professor James Ward to join its

meetings. He has been very actively providing advice. There is a series of national guidelines for public health units that the CDNA publishes. The one on COVID-19 includes a specific section on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander considerations that we have today ready for tabling, if the committee wishes to see it.

CHAIR: Yes, please. That would be very helpful.

Dr De Toca: We will provide it. On top of that, there has been ongoing and very clear communication with the sector throughout all stages of the response. Any communication mechanism that has been effected to the primary health care sector and the health system more broadly has included specific considerations and has been sent to the Aboriginal community controlled health sector. The department, particularly in the last two weeks, has had daily communications with NACCHO, who have been maintaining also daily information channels with their member services.

As part of that increasing response of preparing for the next phases of that response, the national emergency plan contemplated the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clinical advisory group, which is the task force Professor Murphy was referring to on Wednesday. That group has been activated with a broader remit than the original exclusively clinical one, so that there is a broader focus on holistic issues that might impact the response—broader social determinants as well as other very important aspects of culturally appropriate communication.

As I said, that group has been established. It includes representatives from the sector, from all eight state and territory Aboriginal community controlled health service peak bodies. There is significant representation from NACCHO, the jurisdiction of public health authorities, the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, Indigenous infectious disease and communications experts like Professor James Ward or Kristy Crooks, as well as representatives from the department, of course, and the National Indigenous Australians Agency. So there is full coordination across the Indigenous Australian sector in their response.

The first meeting of that group was yesterday. It was a very productive one with a commitment of developing a management plan that will complement the action that is happening in the different sectors, but it will have a specific focus on activities that are needed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities—not exclusively remote, but of course we are focused on remote because of the particular challenges that that location entails. There is our communique from the advisory group that we are also happy to table, if the committee wishes us to.

CHAIR: Yes, please.

Mr Matthews: What we are trying to do at the early stage, as all the planning builds for this, is to ensure that we have it very much located at the centre of what we are doing as we develop all of that work and ensure that it's connected not only into the work we're doing with states and territories but also very much grounded with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts and, obviously, the community controlled health sector to make sure that we have got a very robust framework as that stands up.

Senator McCARTHY: Excuse me, Chair. Could we also have tabled the names that Dr De Toca spoke of? Would you have that list?

Ms Rishniw: Certainly, Senator. We have got the advisory group list.

Senator McCARTHY: Great. Thank you.

Ms Rishniw: It includes a range of representatives, experts and state and territory representatives as well. I can read them out, but we will table it, just for speed.

Senator McCARTHY: No, I think it's probably best just to table it.

Ms Rishniw: Certainly.

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you.

Mr Matthews: There will be flexibility to adjust that as needed as well on the way through. As I said, we pulled this together and had the first meeting yesterday. I think the next meeting is on Tuesday. So it has been working through—

Senator McCARTHY: So it will be a regular weekly meeting or every couple of days?

Dr De Toca: At this stage we have been flexible and there will be a decision on it at the Tuesday meeting. We are scheduled to meet at least weekly, but probably at the beginning it will be more often than that as we want to make sure that we are prompt in our response. The whole framework for this approach has been shared decision-making and co-design. We want to make sure that the steps that are taken are needed and timely but are also the right ones, and we cannot do that without the relevant voices around the room.

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you.

Mr Matthews: I should probably add just for the record that the working group is also co-chaired by Dr Dawn Casey from NACCHO.

Senator McCARTHY: Sorry; can you just repeat that?

CHAIR: Senator McCarthy, we will offer you the call permanently in a moment. I just want to finish this line of questioning first and then I will offer the call to you. I am also interested in the decision by the APY Lands overnight to restrict travel. Did the health department or the agency have any visibility or involvement in that decision?

Mr Griggs: We certainly had visibility that the APY Lands community wanted to do that. Of course, as you know, it is a permit area. They are able to restrict access and, in fact, what they have done is just tighten up on the permit process.

CHAIR: And from Health?

Dr De Toca: Not pre-empting the outcome of the discussions in the group, one of the areas that have been flagged very early on for consideration is looking at the particular strengths but also risks in remote communities, which include mobility, both for people who live in the community but also the fly-in fly-out workforce, visitors and tourism. Part of that will be establishing the appropriate tools, protocols and mechanisms for communities to then assess what decisions they want to take in terms of protecting themselves or establishing mechanisms. The APY Lands, as Mr Griggs pointed out, made that decision within the remit, and we are in communications with the health service in that area. John Singer, the chief executive officer of the Nganampa Health Council, which is the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service in the APY Lands, is a member of the committee.

Ms Rishniw: I am not aware of the department having any communications or issuing any advice to that community. That was a decision taken by the community.

Mr Matthews: It was not a recommendation from the department.

CHAIR: Thank you. Senator McCarthy.

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you, Chair. Can I just follow on? You've obviously set up the Indigenous Advisory Committee to respond. Just going back to your meetings, you had your first meeting yesterday. You have your next one next week. What was your answer in terms of ongoing meetings? Is it a regular every couple of days or once a week? What have you established?

Dr De Toca: The current terms of reference contemplate that the committee will meet at least weekly, but depending on their—

Senator McCARTHY: That's via phone?

Dr De Toca: Yes, teleconference. The next meeting is hosted by NACCHO. It will be at the NACCHO office and teleconference. It will be in a few days, so more often than weekly. And then we will decide when the next meeting will be.

Senator McCARTHY: Mr Matthews, you said it was Dawn Casey. Who is the other co-chair?

Mr Matthews: Dr De Toca.

Dr De Toca: I am the other co-chair.

Senator McCARTHY: I note that the Rural Doctors Association of Australia has joined the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners in backing calls for new Medicare rebates for emergency telehealth consultations. Is this also under consideration?

Ms Rishniw: There's been a range of matters raised, as you would appreciate, including telehealth video conferencing items, looking at how we respond from the primary care sector and the Aboriginal community controlled sector. All of those issues are on the table, but they're decisions for government and haven't been made yet.

Senator McCARTHY: Given the already stretched resources, obviously, that you're having to deal with as well, what contingency plans have you got in place if this virus does break out in remote communities?

Ms Rishniw: That's exactly the nature of the discussion that Dr De Toca is leading, but it is also very much front and centre in the mind of the department and the Chief Medical Officer. In the first instance, we are trying to make sure that the disease doesn't get into remote communities and looking at screening and protocols and working with communities to try and avoid the disease even entering into a remote community. There are contingency plans that are underway in terms of working with states and territories and, once again, the ACCHO sector in terms of: if we need to set up clinics, look at primary care and ACCHO responses in those communities and any removal of people who become ill. But in the first instance what we're trying to do is prevent the spread of corona into remote communities.

Senator McCARTHY: If you've had your first teleconference yesterday, what discussions have taken place around that in terms of preventative measures?

Dr De Toca: The group discussed a range of potential preventative measures—including what we alluded to before in terms of protocols for screening and engagement with visiting providers, fly-in fly-out workers and tourists—that communities could enact or for providers to undertake before travelling to community. But it's early in that discussion. We want to

make sure that we don't go to the table with a pre-set approach that is a one-size-fits-all and is rigid in how it's implemented. We want to make sure that the measures that we take, particularly if we're talking about sensitive things like mobility into communities et cetera, are consistent with what we are being advised by the group, acknowledging that, regardless of this process, there are existing mechanisms in place to respond to cases as per local public health guidelines, state-led responses and the overall response to the outbreak that is occurring at a national level. It's not the case that nothing would happen until we have the specific plan in place. The general response that is already underway across the country would still be applied and would still be available in remote communities. We are simply strengthening our preparations for if that were to occur and ensuring that the way that we are doing it is culturally safe, empowering and building on the strength of the community controlled health sector.

Senator McCARTHY: Clearly, you have come together. We've had coronavirus in the news since January, so it's not new. What decision did you make, from that first teleconference, for members to go off and start to alert regional communities and organisations?

Dr De Toca: Decisions were made on some of the work that needs to be undertaken before Tuesday in terms of our drafting potential and approaches to the plan. In terms of providing input into our communication materials, there was a lot of discussion, as with any other sector, on the importance of appropriate communication: the different languages, consistent, simple and effective messaging, not duplicating multiple channels but providing enough flexibility for local communities to adapt or adjust, tailoring to local languages. It was the first meeting, so part of it was ensuring that we have the right membership and the right approach to work, and that we explore what issues this group needs to tackle. That's why it was decided to meet immediately after, on the Tuesday, and not wait a full week for the second meeting.

Mr Matthews: In the meantime, the series on national guidance, which Dr De Toca mentioned before, and which I think we will table, has messaging in it. In the short term it has been trying to get messaging through the Aboriginal community-controlled health service and the state governments, so that there is some messaging happening at the moment. There's a lot more work to be done on that. Back on the other point around mobility and community, we are also conscious that, in doing this in a co-designed way with the sector, we work through the issues about the right messaging and how we do it. Out of things like today we don't want a message that there is already a decision made that there are limits on mobility or things like that. That is what the group is working through. We are trying not to presuppose or get messages out there that aren't true, until we have worked that through with the sector.

Dr De Toca: On that, a very important message that the group agreed on, and that Professor Ward was particularly vocal about, appropriately, was the importance of proportionality, which is a key aspect of the national emergency response plan. It means that we need to be ready to take the appropriate measures when we need to take them but also we need to balance the situation, so as not to generate undue panic.

Senator McCARTHY: I am sure this was discussed: has the lack of adequate housing and overcrowding contributed to the vulnerabilities of First Nations people across the regions?

Ms Rishniw: We are trying to make sure that the virus doesn't enter communities. A range of issues go to potential vulnerability and spread in communities, including housing, food and sanitation. But predominantly we are trying to stop the disease getting into the communities.

Senator McCARTHY: What conversations have taken place around how to self-isolate in remote communities?

Dr De Toca: That is one of the aspects that has been discussed in their response. The current text of their Series of National Guidelines, their SoNGs, that we have tabled, includes these considerations. It identifies a number of situations that may contribute to an increased risk of transmission and severity in Aboriginal communities, based on what we know. Mobility is one of them; overcrowding in some areas is another. Barriers to access due to location, and lack of cultural safety are another, but also understanding the burden of disease that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experience, particularly in remote locations.

The SoNGs contain information and potential strategies for tailoring advice so that the same requirements for quarantine and self-isolation happen, but so that cultural obligations are maintained. For instance, the SoNGs include succinct advice on the importance of having conversations with families and health professionals about what quarantine measures could be implemented so that they are aware that there are other ways families can maintain contact and satisfy the need to establish rapport with relatives while still respecting isolation and quarantine. They explicitly talk about online communications such as video calling, to put it in the front of mind of public health units and clinicians that, while the standards for quarantine and isolation have to be the same for health protection, there need to be conversations about what mechanisms can maintain those standards but still allow the satisfaction of cultural obligations.

Senator McCARTHY: Thanks, Dr De Toca. First Nations is one sector that is vulnerable, but we are also aware that right across the country it's the elderly. Given our concerns in relation to the aged-care sector out in these regions, what are the thoughts in relation to remote aged care receiving special training and understanding around how to prevent this disease getting there?

Ms Rishniw: Senator, you are aware how quickly the COVID-19 issues are emerging and we're responding as quickly as we can. Aged care is an area of concern, as are a range of vulnerable populations. So we're looking at measures that have an adequate and responsive primary care response but that take into account vulnerable populations and communities across Australia. Some measures are in terms of messaging, screening for, and immunisation against, flu for workers in aged-care settings. Some of the measures we have around making sure we have the right infection control information going out are currently live and active. So it is definitely part and parcel of the planning to look at how we restrict and protect the most vulnerable from unnecessary and undue exposure and get the right information out to aged care facilities and communities with the appropriate means.

Senator SIEWERT: Can I continue on the aged-care issue? Earlier, when we were talking to the minister for aged care in estimates, he was talking about a surge workforce. They may have finished their meeting—they were meeting today. Is the need for a surge workforce for aged care in regional and remote areas also being included in that process?

Ms Rishniw: Certainly, and you are absolutely right—we had a primary care roundtable this morning. An aged care roundtable is due to finish at three o'clock. So it is happening back in the department. We're looking at a surge workforce across the board. You might be aware that the Prime Minister earlier today made an announcement around working with states and territories, and cost-sharing arrangements with them. We're working very actively with them, with the nursing sector, with the rural workforce agencies, with the AMA, the RACGP and a whole range of stakeholders, in looking at how we build surge capacity to protect the workforce from exposure. The work Dr De Toca has been doing, and feeding into that, is looking at surge workforce in remote areas and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, but also in urban areas, to make sure that any arrangements we set up are culturally appropriate.

Senator SIEWERT: That's where I was going next.

Ms Rishniw: We are considering how we work with the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector to ensure that we have some of their Aboriginal health workers perhaps working in respiratory clinics or in urban arrangements so that we can provide culturally appropriate care.

Senator SIEWERT: I think the regional and remote aged-care facilities are all not-for-profit organisations.

Ms Rishniw: I don't have that detail in front of me.

Senator SIEWERT: If not all, it's the vast majority—and they're struggling with viability. I'm not focused on keeping them viable, but I'm saying they have little leeway to play with. So what extra resources will be put in place to make sure that residents are able to be supported in the circumstances they may find themselves in?

Ms Rishniw: We are very aware of the issues in urban and rural and regional and remote communities. We are trying to mobilise a national response that can be responsive to the particular circumstances in regional and rural communities. All I can say at this point is that it's a live consideration and it's happening right now. We are looking at how we supplement and allow for surge workforce and how we consolidate, but also protect the workers that are there.

Senator SIEWERT: It's protecting the workers—I totally accept that. It is also providing the type of protective gear, et cetera, that will be necessary in the worst case scenario, or even in a medium case scenario, that will be needed for residents, and supplying other resources that perhaps other residential aged-care facilities could provide but that regional and remote ones can't.

Ms Rishniw: Yes.

Mr Matthews: It would also be about maximising the existing workforce in whatever way we can. In the remote and regional context, particularly remote, where people are less well, there will also need to be arrangements to get people out of that into hospital facilities. So it won't all be about what happens in the facility in some cases; it will also be about mobility of assisting to get people to the care they need.

Senator SIEWERT: I take your point, which may either be regional hospital facilities or metro. I presume Royal Flying Doctor Service is involved in this group?

Mr Matthews: No.

Ms Rishniw: They're not involved in the specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group. I am sure they would have been invited to today's session, but I would need to confirm that. So let me take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. I would have thought that would be necessary for patient movement out of remote communities.

Mr Matthews: As we move through the planning phase and into operationalising, organisations like the RFDS will be heavily involved in those types of discussions, as we would expect.

Dr De Toca: A range of providers provide retrieval or medical evacuation services, et cetera. Most of them are engaged through state and territory arrangements. We have jurisdiction over representation in the advisory group. That's one of the liaison roles, when we arrive at that stage of the planning, which Mr Matthews alluded to. They can make that liaison with a different aeromedical retrieval arrangement that different states and territories have in place.

Senator SIEWERT: I have one more health question that I will ask on notice, and one more question here in terms of access to other things that are going to be needed in remote communities; adequate supplies of food in particular, in cases where self-isolation is in place. I presume that you are looking at that as well; is that a safe assumption? It's precarious enough as it is in remote communities. It is expensive—in fact, I am putting questions on notice about that. There's obviously going to need to be a role above and beyond normal circumstances in the worst-case scenario.

Mr Matthews: The short answer is yes; it will be one of the matters we would look through in the plan. We would obviously need to work closely with NIAA as well, the agency around that, which has levers around things like Outback Stores and some of those arrangements. But yes, if it gets to that stage, those issues will need to be looked at. But it will come up in the planning. It would be expected.

Dr De Toca: It has been brought up at the meeting. When senators have a look at the list of members that has been provided, they will be reassured that all of these issues were very prominently brought up.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, I haven't had time to look through it properly.

Dr De Toca: That's one of the reasons why it's important to have the National Indigenous Australians Agency as an active member of that group. We also acknowledge that we want to be very strategic in how we use this group in order to have all of the relevant information and think of all of the different connections that we have.

This plan will complement a number of responses that are happening, and there are some aspects of it that will be more whole-of-government and outside the Health portfolio. This plan cannot be an answer to everything, but this group will definitely help us to uncover these issues and refer them to the appropriate—

Mr Matthews: I think that the focus on trying to do what we can to stop the disease coming in and taking hold hopefully will help us to avoid disruptions to supply lines.

Obviously, it is one of the benefits. If we can get that part reasonably effective, it will help from the point of view of those other impacts, such as access to food et cetera.

Mr Griggs: We spoke to Outback Stores yesterday. In their case they are doing contingency planning for these sorts of eventualities.

Senator SIEWERT: In terms of the worst-case scenario, where it gets into a community, I am presuming that the same things will apply in terms of discussions we've had over the last couple of days—and I am looking at the agency and the minister in particular—regarding people's mutual obligations under CDP—as it would be in this case, if it's a remote community, and in terms of relaxing their mutual obligations. We know that they are actually stricter with CDP. Would that be the case as well?

Senator Ruston: I will confirm that, but my understanding is that the 14-day period is automatically instigated on somebody identifying as having had to go into quarantine. That 14-day period doesn't require any evidence; it's only required at the end of that 14-day period. Other officers here might be able to confirm that it applies equally to CDP. I'd be very surprised if it didn't but I'm happy if you can confirm that.

Mr Bulman: It does, Senator. If a jobseeker falls ill, they can contact the DHS and immediately get an exemption for 14 days. That's in the case of an individual jobseeker. If there was a broader issue in a community, it is the same as with any, say, natural disaster issue; we can take decisions about putting more wholesale contingency arrangements in place.

Senator SIEWERT: You are foreseeing my next question: if it does get, to a substantial degree, into a remote community, has consideration been given to suspending the whole program?

Mr Bulman: There are mechanisms, where there are natural disasters or other disasters, where you are able to put in contingency arrangements which pause mutual obligation for a period—similar to, say, bushfires.

Senator SIEWERT: I am talking about the whole of the CDP program for the period of time when the community, if it's isolating, for example—

Mr Griggs: A good example is what's just happened in Aurukun due to the troubles there. That's been instigated in the CDP case there.

Senator SIEWERT: I've got one question about petrol sniffing that I will put on notice. Given the time constraints, can I ask on notice for an update on the rollout of non-sniffable fuel, whether there've been any recent outbreaks and, if so, where?

Ms Rishniw: That's one for the agency.

Mr Griggs: We can answer it now or I can take it on notice.

CHAIR: On notice might be easier, given the time.

Mr Griggs: There is a contemporary issue that we know about in the Gulf Country at the moment. We will get you the details on that.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could get me the details on that, that would be appreciated.

Senator McCARTHY: I have a question for you, Dr De Toca, having regard to your experience in the Northern Territory. I've had queries from people in relation to this: if there's a lack of primary-care capacity in places like, for example, Docker River, where would people

have to be relocated to? Would it be Alice Springs? Are you looking at general hubs in those conversations that you're having?

Dr De Toca: Yes, that is certainly a concern that has been expressed to the group, and that will be heavily featured as part of the conversation—the right balance between in-community responses, early evacuation of people or use of regional hubs to deal with confirmed cases or even suspected cases. That is a very live issue. It's an issue that needs to be dealt with sensitively and in partnership with the territory government and the community-controlled health services. That's certainly something that members such as AMSANT or the NT government have brought up in the discussion. We are considering what the options are.

One of the key aspects of the response in any community—remote or urban—and across this plan is that we want to preserve as much as possible in the context the normal continuation of primary healthcare services. Mechanisms may be put in place to differentiate care for people potentially affected by COVID versus people receiving normal care for their business-as-usual type of health care. That is one of the options that we are looking into.

We understand that in communities where often the ACCHO, the government-run clinic or the other type of Aboriginal medical service is the sole provider of care, maintaining the integrity of that service so that everyone else can receive the health care that they need, especially in communities with high burdens of disease, is capital, and it cannot be cannibalised by the actions taken to control the outbreak.

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you, Dr De Toca; and thank you to you, Dawn Casey and the team working on this. Obviously, there's a bit of a road ahead, and we certainly appreciate that you are there and involved with it.

CHAIR: Just before we dismiss Health officials and return to the agency, Ms Rishniw, do you want to go back to the suicides issue?

Ms Rishniw: In terms of an update—I know that we gave an update to the committee when we appeared in October—I want to mention the fact that on 30 January Minister Hunt announced another investment of \$64 million in suicide prevention and mental health initiatives as an early response to the initial advice from the Prime Minister's national suicide prevention adviser.

Part of that announcement was an additional year of funding for the national suicide prevention trials, and each trial site is receiving an additional \$1 million to support activity in the 2020-21 financial year. A number of senators would be aware that those trials in the Kimberley and Darwin regions in particular are Aboriginal people focused, but all of the other trial sites—five other trial sites—have a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, being western New South Wales, Brisbane north, country South Australia, Central Queensland and mid-west WA.

I have a couple of updates, particularly on activities underway in the Kimberley. We've had a Kimberley cultural mapping project that looks at a reference for investment in community-led solutions and delivering culturally based services and programs to maintain Indigenous culture in the Kimberley. We've had gatekeeper training offered across the Kimberley, particularly through the Kimberley Empowerment Healing and Leadership Program in Broome, Kununurra, Derby and a range of other locations. We've had an empowered young leaders forum. Young leaders have been establishing a peer-to-peer network, promoting and

accessing gatekeeper training and participating in youth leadership exchanges with New Zealand Maori people. There's the Wot Na Wot Kine campaign to promote social and emotional wellbeing. The Yawarta Liyan program, which is an equine therapy program, has been established. The Kimberley Postvention Service, which is a partnership with the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service, Anglicare WA, United Synergies and Thirrili, have been co-ordinating support for family and community affected in the aftermath of suicide, and community projects across nine community sites are continuing, including family camps, yarnning circles, art, music and sports events, traditional and cultural healing programs, and school and youth programs.

In Darwin we've had Indigenous delivery of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer suicide prevention awareness training for young people. The Balunu Foundation will deliver a series of five-day cultural healing and wellness camps in the near future, and Anglicare NT is in partnership with AFL Northern Territory to deliver a wellbeing championships program in this AFL season.

The other important news is that we've had Gayaa Dhuwi, a national independent and inclusive Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing mental health and suicide prevention leadership body, established. They are designed to deliver a national plan for culturally appropriate care and make suicide prevention services available and accessible to First Nations people.

Senators would know that the Prime Minister's suicide prevention adviser has delivered her first initial findings. She's done a range of consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It's a key feature of her consultation and her initial findings.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. If there are no further questions for the Department of Health, you are dismissed, with our thanks. We'll return now to questions for the agency.

National Indigenous Australians Agency

[14:11]

Senator DODSON: I've got some questions in relation to Indigenous housing. Is it correct that Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia each had a 10-year funding agreement for remote housing with the Commonwealth under the national partnership agreement on remote housing and that that expired in June 2018?

Mr Bulman: Yes, that's correct.

Senator DODSON: Is it also correct that after tense negotiations the government agreed to allocate a one-off funding contribution to these states?

Mr Bulman: Yes, we've made one-off funding contributions to the Western Australian government and the South Australian government, and we've made an offer to the Queensland government. In the Northern Territory we've entered into a five-year partnership agreement with the Northern Territory government worth \$550 million.

Senator DODSON: We are halfway through that, are we?

Mr Bulman: We're at the start of it.

Senator DODSON: Is it also correct that the government will no longer implement ongoing, long-term funding support for these states, apart from the Northern Territory, and that's not a state?

Mr Bulman: No, the Australian government provides continued funding for housing through the national homelessness and housing agreement with state jurisdictions and the Northern Territory. Separate to that, as I mentioned earlier, in the Northern Territory we have a targeted remote housing national partnership agreement over five years for \$550 million.

Senator DODSON: Can you tell me what advice the department provided to the assistant minister—to him or to his office—about the decision to walk away from the ongoing long-term funding support for remote housing in these states?

Mr Bulman: The assistant minister? Which minister?

Senator DODSON: Whoever assists the minister responsible for housing.

Senator Ruston: There are a number of ministers that are sworn in to the housing portfolio.

Senator DODSON: Any one of them; if they are all there, give me the advice that was given to them.

Senator Ruston: The Minister for Housing is Minister Sukkar.

Mr Bulman: The remote housing partnership agreement sits in the portfolio of the Indigenous affairs minister. At the end of the partnership agreement we provide a broad range of advice over a period of time about the next steps following the agreement. I must say this was a 10-year multijurisdictional partnership agreement which always had an end date and a quantum of money providing additional support to jurisdictions to meet overcrowding. It was quite a targeted, singular investment.

Senator DODSON: It also had a review that said that many good things were being done and that a bit more commitment may have got it over the hurdle. I understand that.

Mr Bulman: Yes.

Senator DODSON: But what was the advice given at the time to the assistant minister about terminating this long-term agreement?

Mr Bulman: Our agency, or the department at the time, which was the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, didn't provide advice directly to the assistant minister for housing. And I can't comment on what that minister's department provided him.

Senator DODSON: Did you provide any advice to any assistant minister on the termination of the long-term housing?

Mr Bulman: No. Our advice would have been to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs on housing.

Senator DODSON: There were no assistant ministers that you gave advice to?

Mr Bulman: No, not in our portfolio.

Senator DODSON: During the election there was a commitment given in North Queensland of \$105 million directly, I think it was, to local councils to do with housing. Has that commitment been honoured?

Mr Bulman: What we have done with that commitment—we have worked with the local councils there that cover remote areas of Queensland, around 17 of them, as well as the Queensland government, and we've all sat in a room jointly, together, to work through the best way to administer the \$105 million commitment. The approach that we've all agreed is

the Commonwealth will make an offer of that funding to the Queensland government so that it can work in coordination with their investment. They're providing additional money on top of that. That funding will then flow through to local government who will be able to build houses in their regions.

Senator DODSON: Local governments—are these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander—

Mr Bulman: Yes, they are Aboriginal shire councils across Queensland.

Mr Griggs: They had the meeting that Mr Bulman was talking about. They, between themselves, agreed on an apportionment model for the \$105 million between the various councils and the different needs that they have.

Senator DODSON: Were there any other one-off commitments like this in other jurisdictions?

Mr Bulman: Yes, Western Australia and South Australia. It's the same style of commitment. In Western Australia we provided one-off funding to the Western Australian government of \$121 million, and in South Australia of \$37.5 million. The mechanism is the same and the offer will be the same. The difference is, as our CEO pointed out, in this circumstance we are sitting down with the Aboriginal shire councils in Queensland and the Queensland government to determine need, allocation and the best mechanism of delivery. That builds on a historic sort of arrangement where, for the last five years of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, the Aboriginal shire councils have played a large role in delivery throughout their region. So we've brought them into the tent as well as the two governments.

Senator DODSON: I just wanted to get clear that this was an agreement that was outside the NPARIH arrangements, the \$105 million. The Western Australian commitments were within the NPARIH arrangements, weren't they?

Mr Bulman: Just so I am absolutely clear, at the end of NPARIH, 10 years, we offered the Western Australian government \$121 million, the Queensland government \$105 million, and the South Australian government \$37.5 million. And we've settled with Western Australia and South Australia. We're just resolving the last mechanics of the \$105 million. So it's in addition to all of those circumstances. And that's the same with the Northern Territory, but that has a unique circumstance in the funding.

Senator DODSON: Why was the \$105 million only announced in one electorate?

Mr Bulman: We have before—

Senator DODSON: During the election?

Mr Bulman: We had resolved with the Western Australian government that—

Senator DODSON: No, I am talking about Queensland.

Mr Bulman: The reason only Queensland was announced at that point in time was that we had already settled with the other governments. The negotiations, you may recall, had been somewhat protracted with the Queensland government and an announcement was made. But there have been announcements on Western Australia and South Australia equally, and the Northern Territory government.

Senator DODSON: So where did the \$105 million come from? Out of the IAS funds?

Mr Bulman: No. The government will, through their normal budget processes, present the allocation of the fund. But it wasn't out of the IAS fund. Sorry, I should be absolutely clear: \$5 million is from within the IAS. That will be a contribution.

Senator DODSON: So \$5 million came out of there?

Mr Bulman: That's correct.

Senator DODSON: Where was that going to?

Mr Bulman: That's still part of that \$105 million that will flow through to the local Aboriginal shire councils and will help them with their delivery of housing.

Senator DODSON: Does this also involve the Torres Strait?

Mr Bulman: Yes, that's correct, the Torres Strait Regional Council and the Torres Shire Council—the two.

Senator DODSON: Thank you. That's all I have on that section.

CHAIR: Senator, do you have further questions for the agency?

Senator SIEWERT: I do.

CHAIR: I will go to Senator Siewert and I'll come back to you, Senator Dodson.

Senator SIEWERT: I have some quick ones. Can I go to the issues around some of the previous questions I've been asking, and that is just an update of where things are with the issue around the flag.

Mr Griggs: I would prefer if we didn't traverse this issue too far, and I'll explain why. I said at the last session that we would be exploring the 'art of the possible'. I think they were my exact words. We have been continuing to do that. The parties that we are exploring the art of the possible with—we are doing so on the basis that that remains confidential. I would suggest that, if you would accept that as an explanation, that would be greatly appreciated.

Senator SIEWERT: I hear what you are saying. I'm taking it from what you have said that ongoing work is happening.

Mr Griggs: Correct.

Senator SIEWERT: That's what I am seeking reassurance of.

Mr Griggs: Correct.

Senator SIEWERT: You are still committed to finding a resolution?

Mr Griggs: Absolutely.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. I do understand the issues around confidentiality. We have had some pretty traumatic evidence this week around the impact of climate change and the possibility of climate change and temperatures rising by up to 3.4 degrees, if not higher. What is the agency doing in terms of planning for the impact of climate change, given that First Nations peoples' communities are likely to be or will be in many instances one of the first communities that are hit and substantially hit by the rising in temperatures? We've already seeing reports of the impact of a rise in temperatures and sustained higher temperatures on Aboriginal communities, and also including, of course, natural disasters that result. There's the natural disaster side of things, but there's the ongoing sustained increase in temperatures and the impact on day-to-day living.

Mr Bulman: That's just a broad question, I am gathering. There's a range of areas where we are working. I mentioned before that we are starting to work across jurisdictions on water security and availability. In some areas we take some targeted investments. Another significant piece that you may have noticed was announced recently is a contribution of \$20 million to the Torres Strait Regional Authority for further work on seawalls.

Senator SIEWERT: It was \$20 million they were asking for?

Mr Bulman: Sorry, yes. That is what they were requesting.

Senator SIEWERT: The amount that they were asking for?

Mr Bulman: The Queensland government also contributed \$20 million.

Senator SIEWERT: I thought it was higher. It was matched.

Mr Bulman: Yes, sorry. They were matched. Both contributions go to the Torres Strait Regional Authority and into a major infrastructure project bucket; so that enables them to deliver locally. And alongside that \$20 million we also provided funding for upgrading jetties and access to the islands, which was really useful—and a ferry. That is another \$5 million in total that will go through that infrastructure project.

Senator SIEWERT: Have you done any mapping work on understanding the impacts on communities—and I am thinking particularly of remote communities, the frontline communities, how it is going to impact them? I have already heard reports of communities saying that they're going to have to move because of the impacts of climate change, escalating heat in particular, longer summers.

Mr Bulman: I am not aware of a report specifically looking into—

Senator SIEWERT: There are reports. We also had some reports just last week of individuals from communities talking about the impact of longer summers already and the higher temperatures.

Mr Bulman: I am happy to give it on notice. We work closely with the department of environment and, as I mentioned before, the department of agriculture and water. I'm happy to do a bit of a look around and provide on notice if there is something available on that. Across the three agencies and more broadly, yes, we fund a range of programs which work really deeply with environment. It does burning and management of environmental issues, which you will be aware. I can provide—

Senator SIEWERT: I am looking for contingency planning, which communities. Are you already reaching out to communities to see what their needs are going to be, putting in place contingency planning? I am aware that Senator McCarthy was asking questions about water earlier. That's going to be an ongoing, long-term issue around water security.

Mr Griggs: In the context of the territory, for example next week we had our bilateral meeting with the Northern Territory government. This is clearly one of the issues that will be discussed in our meeting next week.

Senator SIEWERT: In the NT. It is going to hit all states.

Mr Griggs: Yes, I know. But I am just giving you a practical example of how we're trying to engage. There are a mix of responsibilities here. So we are trying to work with our jurisdictional colleagues on these sorts of issues.

Senator SIEWERT: Do you have it as major project area?

Mr Griggs: No, I'd say we don't at the moment.

Mr Bulman: No, and the difference being that the jurisdictions lead on this work; we provide support. In the Northern Territory there is a more unique context where around 50 per cent of the land is under the Commonwealth Aboriginal land rights act. So we have a closer working relationship, noting that they do lead on contingency planning for a range of things on individual communities—the states and the Northern Territory.

Senator SIEWERT: I take your point. But you also have a large bucket of money, for a start, and you also provide a number of other services into—

Mr Bulman: Indeed. And we work closely with all our partners.

Senator SIEWERT: Aged care being an example. You've just had a conversation with Senator Dodson about housing and other infrastructure matters.

Mr Bulman: Yes, I get your point. On notice, I will have a look around and see what we can provide on this fund.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. I am aware of time so I will hand over. At what point does the agency make a decision that this is a significant issue that has to be a major area in and of itself?

Mr Griggs: It is a major issue.

Senator SIEWERT: You just said it is not a major focus area for you.

Mr Griggs: No. You said have we got a project area on it. No, we don't have a project area. We work through the land area, through the other departments that have primary responsibility across government for it.

Senator SIEWERT: But at what point does it then become that major focus area with a focus, in and of itself, given the scenarios and the impact on First Nations communities?

Mr Griggs: I would say it already has a focus. It already has a focus.

Senator SIEWERT: If you take what I've asked on notice and I'll come back next estimates, having seen what you are currently doing.

Mr Griggs: We will show you what we are doing, yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Senator Siewert. Senator Dodson.

Senator DODSON: These questions are in relation to the process that the minister has got afoot dealing with the voice to parliament co-design and matters associated with it. I'm not sure who that is relevant to. Is it you, Mr Fox, that I address questions to?

Mr Fox: Any of us, Senator.

Mr Griggs: There are four of us.

Senator DODSON: Can you explain to me how many committees the minister has currently set up to deal with the question of co-design and the voice?

Mr Fox: The minister has set up three groups. There's a senior advisory group, a co-design group looking at national areas and one focusing on local and regional voices.

Senator DODSON: Can you explain to me what criteria the minister used in the selection of these people?

Mr Fox: We provided—

Senator DODSON: I presume they're all different.

Mr Fox: The membership is different, yes; that's correct. We provided some advice to the minister. He took some advice from the co-chairs of the senior advisory group—Marcia Langton and Tom Calma—and then he made some decisions on the membership of those groups.

Senator DODSON: Do you know if the minister consulted more widely than yourselves?

Mr Fox: Yes. As I mentioned, he also spoke to the senior advisory group co-chairs. He would, I think, have—

Senator DODSON: He'd already selected them.

Mr Griggs: Yes, but you will recall, Senator, the first parliamentarians working group. He also asked for members of the parliamentarians working group to provide suggestions as well. He spoke to other people. I don't know exactly who we spoke to, but he did consult widely.

Senator DODSON: We could be here for a while if I want to get down to the detail of each of the three groups. I don't intend to do that. The questions will be generic across them. I understand they've different focuses. Can you explain, in the broadest terms, what the role is for these groups and what are they meant to deliver and in what time frames?

Mr Ryan: Broadly, the senior advisory group has an oversight role to provide advice to each of the co-design groups as they undertake their work in co-designing the specific elements of a voice—one for national and one for local regional—but also to provide advice through to the minister as well. They have that fairly high-level advisory role both to the minister and down into the groups. They also have a role really in terms of speaking out on the process. You might have seen that the co-chairs of the senior advisory group, Marcia Langton and Tom Calma, have put out a number of well-read pieces. So they take the lead on speaking and informing outwards into the community about what is happening with that process.

The national group is tasked with coming up with options for a national voice—a number of options—which would then be considered by government before going out for consultation. The local regional group is looking at a similar thing for local and regional voices and providing options for government, again before that goes out for consultation in the latter half of the year. The time frame for stage 1 is hopefully by the middle of the year that we have completed that, and then for consultation to occur after that in the second half of the year.

Senator DODSON: I understand—you might have a different take on this than I—that in the terms of reference there is an out-of-scope clause that really doesn't do some of the things that you say it may do, or that these groups are meant to do. It seems as though the out-of-scope clause is about making recommendations through co-design processes on constitutional recognition, including determining the referendum question or when a referendum should be held. So they've got no mandate on that out-of-scope clause to deal with constitutional recognition, including determining a referendum question, or when the referendum should

take place. Secondly, they are not to make recommendations through the co-design process on the establishment of a Makarrata commission. That was the term coined by the Uluru statement—an agreement making, treaty or truth telling. So we seem to be at cross-purposes here. We've got the Uluru statement which talks about specific things, and you have a fairly large body of people in the three categories who send mixed messages to us as to what it is their scope is and their function is. I'm just trying to get it clear that that in fact is the situation, because you don't want to fool the public.

Mr Ryan: Just regarding the terms of reference, the intention is that the terms of reference for all groups will be made public. The reason it hasn't been made public yet is we want each of the groups to consider the terms of reference and provide their feedback. The last group, the local regional group, will be meeting next week and considering their terms of reference. Because there are linkages between the groups we have found that changes to the terms of reference may flow through to the others. Once we've got acceptance on the terms of reference from the final group, the local regional group, then the intention is that the terms of reference for each group will be made public and be available.

Senator DODSON: Are you saying that potentially the out-of-scope content of the draft—it is a draft set of references now, is it?

Mr Ryan: The terms of reference for each group were discussed with each group. The senior advisory group has had an opportunity to provide its comment on its terms of reference, as has the national group, which met last week. We are now giving the opportunity for the last group to also provide its comment. We may do some revisions to that. But in relation to the out-of-scope, the functions of these groups are very much around co-design of a voice: what are the options that government can consider. What are the options, firstly, that we take to consult more broadly, to actually give the detail of a voice coming out of the joint select committee that you co-chaired, Senator, to put the detail around a voice and provide options to government to consider. It doesn't go beyond that—so you're correct—but certainly it does have scope to do the co-design of the voice at the national level and to do the co-design of the voice at the regional level for government to consider.

Senator DODSON: That's the question of the voice at the national level being a voice to the government, not a voice to the parliament. Is that correct?

Mr Ryan: The terms of reference go to considering what a national voice would be and what a local and regional voice would be and what the detail is. Certainly there are things there that they're considering which would go to both a voice to government and a voice to parliament. That's really for the co-design group to make its determination on what it believes are the best options to be considered, to be tested with the public.

Senator DODSON: You can understand why I get a bit confused because of the literal reading of this, and you taught me something today that this is in transit anyway. I thought this was the terms of reference that people had been signed up to. Now they're going to negotiate the out-of-scope clause. That's a very interesting proposition, having signed up to something to then negotiate it—

Mr Ryan: Just to clarify—

Senator DODSON: and say, 'Hang on; we want to go back here,' and the government has taken a position on it.

Mr Ryan: That's not the case.

Senator DODSON: What's going on?

Mr Griggs: The out-of-scope section is purely there to make sure that in the limited time that the groups have available they focus on the work that the government wants done. The out-of-scope section is not up for debate. It is—

Senator DODSON: He said it was up for debate.

Mr Griggs: No, he didn't. He was talking about the broader terms of reference. And, quite rightly—

Senator DODSON: Mr Ryan, I'm sorry—

Mr Griggs: No, he didn't, Senator. Quite rightly—

Senator DODSON: He said there would be a negotiation over it.

Mr Griggs: He was talking about the broader terms of reference.

Senator DODSON: No, he didn't. We can play the thing back and see.

Mr Griggs: I am just telling you that the out-of-scope section—

Senator DODSON: I'm telling you as well—

CHAIR: Order! Senator Dodson, please allow Mr Griggs the opportunity to clarify.

Senator DODSON: Yes. Well, he ought to listen to my clarification as well.

CHAIR: I think you've both had an opportunity. Mr Griggs, if you want to conclude that answer. Senator Dodson, you can follow up, if need be.

Mr Griggs: The point that Mr Ryan was making was that we were not going to just slap down a set of terms of reference to three groups of eminent people and say, 'Here you go.' But it's been very clear from the outset that the out-of-scope part—and we've explained this to two of the three groups so far—is about making sure that the focus of the work in the time available stays within the boundary of what the government wants to achieve. What the minister has said to two of the three groups so far—and he will say the same, I am sure, next week—is that he wants people to go wide. He doesn't want people to be constrained in their discussions, but here are the terms of reference, here's the scope of the work that he wants them to achieve.

Senator DODSON: I'm afraid it's not the way that the public is perceiving this. There are mixed messages coming. I understand the government's position. Whatever the minister's aspirations are or his leanings or his tendencies might be, the government's position has ruled out a voice to the parliament and ruled out the entrenchment in the Constitution of a voice. Minister, is that the position?

Senator Ruston: I'll take that on notice because I want to be very careful of my words here. I will ask Minister Wyatt to confirm that.

Senator DODSON: Thank you, Minister. I can appreciate it if you're just as confused as I am because it's a moving feast. We don't know what we're dealing with.

Senator Ruston: Senator Dodson, that's not what I said. What I said is that I understand that the nomenclature here is very, very important, and so I will seek to get a clear response for you from the minister.

Senator DODSON: Well, a clear response in relation to the government's position, as opposed to a draft set of words that has got no cement in it at moment—it's a bit fluid—that further discussions, if not negotiations, are going to take place on it.

Mr Ryan: I wouldn't describe the terms of reference as 'fluid'. We are trying to deal respectfully, as our CEO has said, with a group of eminent people on the nomenclature.

Senator DODSON: Why have a clause in a contract or in a terms of reference if you're not going to take it seriously?

Mr Ryan: We do take the terms of reference seriously, but it is a broad terms of reference. There's an out-of-scope section, but there are a number of other sections which go to how the groups will operate and how they will engage with each other. We give the groups an opportunity to comment on that. We have made revisions to some of those sections as each group has met. We may well make revisions to those other general sections from this group. Then that will be finalised and the groups will actually agree to the terms of reference and they will be put on the website and be made public.

Senator DODSON: So you have made some adjustments to the—

Mr Ryan: Some small changes.

Senator DODSON: Small changes—nothing to the out-of-scope section? You should know if you've made changes to that clause.

Mr Ryan: I don't recall changes to the out-of-scope.

Senator DODSON: There are no changes to the out-of-scope clause.

Senator Ruston: Senator Dodson—

Senator DODSON: Why I'm raising this, Minister, is that \$7.3 million is going into this; \$7.3 million is going into this and we haven't got clarity on what these groups are meant to do.

Senator Ruston: Senator Dodson, maybe I can add a little bit more information to my previous answer. That is, I just want to be clear that the government have not ruled out a voice to parliament, whereas you seem to be suggesting that we have. Quite clearly, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Indigenous Australians have said that there needs to be more work done around the model for the referendum and what a voice to parliament might look like. I think one of the things that have been very clear in the commentary that I've heard from the Prime Minister and from Minister Wyatt has been making sure that part of this process ensures that when anything is taken to the Australian people—whether it be constitutional recognition or whether it be a voice—we need to make sure that we have got the best possible chance of success. I don't think anybody wants to fail.

Senator DODSON: Oh, look, you've no argument with me about that.

Senator Ruston: So part of that process—

Senator DODSON: If you can give me the evidence of the government's position that rules in the voice to parliament I'd be very pleased.

Senator Ruston: I have just been very clear about the fact that we believe there is further work to be done to determine what it is that will be taken to the Australian people and that the government has not ruled it out, whereas you made a comment before that we have, and we haven't. I would reiterate the need for this to be successful.

Senator DODSON: I agree with you, Minister.

Senator McCARTHY: Minister, can I just clarify that, because in 2017 the then Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, rejected a voice to parliament, which was then continued on when Prime Minister Morrison took on the position to reject a voice to parliament, claiming that it was a third chamber to the parliament. And, more recently, Minister Wyatt has spoken of aspirations for a voice to the government. So clearly, if we look at that time line, there is a view across the country that the Morrison government does not support a voice to the parliament. Are you now saying that that is not the position and that Prime Minister Morrison supports a voice to the parliament?

Senator Ruston: What we have ruled out is enshrining the voice in the Constitution.

Senator McCARTHY: But we're talking about a voice to the parliament?

Senator Ruston: As I said in my first comment, what the voice looks like is yet to be designed. That's what this process is about.

Senator McCARTHY: So you're saying that the government has ruled out any enshrinement of a voice to the parliament—

Senator Ruston: In the Constitution.

Senator McCARTHY: but has left open a voice to the parliament in any other format.

Senator Ruston: It has left open what that voice might look like, yes.

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you.

Senator DODSON: So that aspect of the scoping clause stands, I presume, Mr Ryan: not to consider the constitutional question?

Mr Ryan: That's right.

Senator DODSON: I'm glad we got some agreement today.

Mr Fox: Senator, perhaps I can also refer you to the comments that were made at estimates last time around about how the focus at this stage, as Mr Griggs pointed out, was on designing voices. Then, when that had been decided, we could look at options for referendum and/or constitutional recognition, which is partly why the focus of the task of these groups is on voices rather than on constitutional recognition.

Senator DODSON: I can understand the procedural ways of going about things, but there are principles that either have to be agreed or not agreed. You don't mislead people on the basis that you're dallying up some principle here and you're really not going to honour it. That's what I'm trying to ascertain. There is about a \$7.3 million commitment to this. It's not small money. We do want to get a result. I do want to see its success in the way the minister has spoken about. As you said, a referendum will be held once a model has been settled. There's been an allocation on allotment of \$160 million in the budget reserve remaining for this referendum. Is that still there?

Mr Fox: That has been allocated to the Australian Electoral Commission.

Senator DODSON: So it's secure; it's not going to get sideswiped in the efforts to rejig the budget, is it?

Mr Ryan: It's secure.

Senator DODSON: I'll wait and see.

CHAIR: Are there any further questions for the agency?

Senator SIEWERT: Yes. Can I clarify the position of funding the National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum?

Mr Griggs: We will gladly talk to that issue.

Mr Exell: Thank you for the question. I am glad we have some time for this because there has been some miscommunication around this issue. The government has been very clear on the issue of funding for providers of important organisations under the FVPLS Forum. The government increased the funding over a three-year period and announced that in November last year. The funding went from \$72 million over three years to \$75 million over three years, an increase. Also, last year in December, the government confirmed its ongoing support for the national forum, including support for the national secretariat, from the period beyond 1 July next year. There has been quite a bit of media and commentary that funding had been cut. That is not the case at all.

Senator SIEWERT: Does that mean that they are going to get the \$244,000?

Mr Exell: Yes. The minister put out a press release in December that indicated that funding would be provided to the tune of \$244,000, which is the funding used to support the secretariat.

Senator SIEWERT: Directly to the organisation?

Mr Exell: There has been some discussion around funding arrangements, which we communicated very early on to the national forum and the national secretariat. The findings of the evaluation—that you will recall we discussed before—were that it was worth having a conversation about those arrangements. The evaluation recommended a joint process to talk with the forum. Some concern was raised—if you read the evaluation—about the overall services and whether there were different ways of operating. The government wanted to have a conversation with the forum about what those arrangements could look like. So we had a conversation with the forum about that, indicating that government was firm in its continued support for the voice of the forum and for ongoing funding. So, yes, there was a discussion about the type of funding arrangements; however, there was a firm commitment to ongoing support.

When there was some communication around the fact that funding had been cut, the government and minister were clear they wanted to get it on the record that the funding was not cut; the funding was fully provided. It was felt that the best way to do that was to provide that funding to all the members of the national forum for them to determine how best they wanted to fund the secretariat.

Senator SIEWERT: Has that been finalised now?

Mr Exell: The funding is meant to start on 1 July, so it is being worked through. We are having ongoing discussions with the national forum, but the commitment is there to do it.

Senator SIEWERT: So you have said to the individual services, 'We are giving you money'—

Mr Exell: Correct; yes—or the commitment for money.

Senator SIEWERT: I beg your pardon—a commitment for ongoing funding?

Mr Exell: Correct.

Senator SIEWERT: Did you specifically say 'and part of that is for the national forum'?

Mr Exell: Correct. Yes. We have communicated that directly to the forum members. We have communicated that directly to the national secretariat. We said, 'It's up to you to choose how you want to allocate this funding and to look at the best way to set that up—

Senator SIEWERT: Are you or the minister playing a role in helping to ensure that that process is resolved as a matter of urgency?

Mr Exell: We have offered support. Just last week I met with the convener. On a number of occasions we have had phone calls and have twice met in person to try to support the process. We continue to make that offer. Conversations are happening now, so we hope we can move forward.

Senator SIEWERT: Do you have a date for when you anticipate this will be resolved?

Mr Exell: The funding is in place with the current arrangement through to the end of the year, 30 June. Arrangements have to be in place for 1 July, but a commitment is there. We have been talking about making sure of certainty for staff and for arrangements. We are talking about the best contractual arrangements to provide that support.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. I'll look forward to that being resolved. We will have more questions in May if it is not resolved. I have one more question. I understand there were power outages affecting the Groote archipelago—Groote Eylandt and other communities?

Mr Griggs: There was a significant one in north-east Arnhem Land and Groote, I think, has had a couple of major ones.

CHAIR: Minister, I understand that you have an important portfolio commitment you need to attend.

Senator Ruston: Yes.

CHAIR: I am sure the committee can continue for the final five minutes if you need to get away.

Senator Ruston: I apologise for leaving early, but we have a national women's safety ministers' meeting in response to how all of us as governments are going to respond more vigorously after the events of a couple of weeks ago with Hannah Clarke and her children. So I hope you all can excuse me for that reason.

CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Senator SIEWERT: Mr Griggs, you are aware of the power outage?

Mr Griggs: I will get Mr Jeffries, who is our general manager for central region.

Senator SIEWERT: Mr Jeffries, how soon did you become aware of the situation?

Mr Jeffries: We became aware not long after it happened via satellite phone, because all communications were down. The message was that they were unsure how long they would be out for. There was some difficulty getting access to the software that had defaulted due to water lying around where the tower was, and getting helicopter service in there. We were kept abreast of issues that were happening at the time by our GEC on the island, the government engagement coordinator. We had a contact in Telstra who was giving us information about where they were up to in regard to getting the repairs done.

Senator SIEWERT: How long was it out for?

Mr Jeffries: I think it was four days.

Senator SIEWERT: Have you had a report back about how people managed during that time—for example, with the BasicsCard? How did people access food? There are reports that they had trouble accessing food, fuel, and other essentials.

Mr Jeffries: We received verbal reports that there was no access to money to buy food. There was some unrest in the community about not being able to access food—

Senator SIEWERT: It is not unreasonable for people to be getting upset if they can't access food.

Mr Jeffries: That's true. Again, we were working with the telecommunications mob as quickly as we could to resolve those issues, along with Northern Territory police.

Senator SIEWERT: What did people do for food?

Mr Jeffries: I'm not sure. We did hear reports that there were break-and-enters into houses by people who were looking for food. People who had excess food were sharing food with members on the island. But again, these were just verbal reports we were receiving daily.

Senator SIEWERT: So the agency hasn't formally investigated what happened—the fact that people were going without food; those with the BasicsCard were unable to access cash to buy food; how people managed for four days?

Mr Jeffries: No.

Mr Griggs: We are still getting the picture.

Senator SIEWERT: Have you got somebody up there getting the picture?

Mr Griggs: We have staff there—

Senator SIEWERT: But you can't tell me how people survived or what they did for food. Mr Jeffries, I appreciate that you have just said a few things, but you are unable to report exactly what happened.

Mr Jeffries: We haven't had the details clarified yet.

Senator SIEWERT: When do you expect to get that?

Mr Jeffries: I'm not sure at this stage. I'll take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: Have you considered what you will do in the future if this happens? This isn't the first time they've had outages. I put some questions on notice through another committee about power outages—not just telecommunications outages. Have you put in place contingencies, or thought about what you should do if this happens again?

Mr Jeffries: I have had some discussions with my Groote Eylandt manager, Mr Mudaliar, about this. In the middle of next week we will have discussions with his senior staff around what we plan to do in the event that this happens again. To work through a contingency plan when incidents like this happen anywhere in the Territory is what we—

Senator SIEWERT: That was going to be my next question. It is not only potentially here, because we know of other communities where power has been out. We know of other circumstances where people haven't been able to access cash.

Mr Jeffries: Yes.

Senator AYRES: Sorry to interrupt. I appreciate that Senator Siewert has asked for some information on notice and that there is still a bit of information gathering going on at the moment, but for our purposes could we get an outline of what has happened in this instance and the response—so dealing with some of the issues Senator Siewert raised? I would also be interested in whether there have been similar incidents over the last 12 months.

Senator SIEWERT: It might be better to ask it now. I was doing it through Community Affairs, but this is broader. I was asking in the context of the cashless debit card, for example, across communities. But if we do it there and here—

Mr Jeffries: Yes, of course.

Mr Griggs: We've got your thrust.

Senator AYRES: Okay. I will leave that with you.

CHAIR: There is time for one last question.

Senator SIEWERT: When do you expect to finalise that contingency process? And when will you be able to share it?

Mr Jeffries: I am unsure of the time line on that just yet. But as soon as we have completed it, which we want to do as quickly as possible—

Mr Griggs: I alluded to forthcoming bilateral discussions with the Northern Territory government. This is another issue that we will obviously need to work through with the Northern Territory government. It's not just an agency issue.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you.

CHAIR: On that note, the committee has reached the time limit for our estimates today. That concludes our cross-portfolio hearing on Indigenous matters. I thank the minister and the officers who have given evidence to the committee today. I also thank Hansard, Broadcasting and the secretariat for their assistance. I declare this meeting of the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee adjourned.

Committee adjourned at 15:00