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Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities**

TUESDAY, 5 AUGUST 2003

PERTH

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**

**Tuesday, 5 August 2003**

**Members:** Mr Wakelin (*Chair*), Mr John Cobb, Mrs Draper, Ms Gillard, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Dr Lawrence, Mr Lloyd, Mr Snowdon and Mr Tollner.

**Members in attendance:** Mr John Cobb, Mr Haase, Dr Lawrence and Mr Wakelin

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

Strategies to assist Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders better manage the delivery of services within their communities. In particular, the committee will consider building the capacities of:

- (a) community members to better support families, community organisations and representative councils so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities;
- (b) Indigenous organisations to better deliver and influence the delivery of services in the most effective, efficient and accountable way; and
- (c) government agencies so that policy direction and management structures will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people.

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**Committee met at 9.13 a.m.**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into capacity building in Indigenous communities. We are delighted to be here in Western Australia. Mr Cobb, who is from drought-stricken New South Wales is delighted with all the rain.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—No, I am not. I wish it—

**CHAIR**—He has rebutted me already. We are delighted to be here.

**BOYLE, Mr Shawn, Director, Social Policy Unit, Department of the Premier and Cabinet**

**CATTALINI, Ms Benita Marie, Senior Policy Officer, Department of Indigenous Affairs**

**COLLARD, Mrs Jennifer Margaret, Acting Executive Director, Indigenous Policy Directorate, Department for Community Development**

**EGAN, Mr Patrick, Special Initiatives Development Officer, Department of Housing and Works**

**GEORGE, Ms Kate, Director, Aboriginal Policy and Services, Department of Justice**

**TANN, Mr Trevor Neil, Assistant Director, Policy and Equity, Department of Indigenous Affairs**

**CHAIR**—Would you like to make a short opening statement before we proceed to questions?

**Mr Boyle**—Yes. My colleagues may emphasise some points I make. Here are some pictures, which I thought would be better than words. In the two months since we put in our submission—and the Western Australian submission was essentially a collection of submissions, reflecting the views and perspectives of various departments on capacity building—quite a lot has moved ahead. The two things that perhaps reflect a lot of the more evolutionary thinking within Western Australia have been the government's very comprehensive response to the Gordon inquiry and the government's commitment to engage with ATSIC in a formal process—the statement of commitment to work collaboratively.

You have before you a diagram from the Gordon response. It essentially says that, while the inquiry initially came about as a response to a specific instance of child abuse, as the inquiry magistrate, Justice Gordon, and her team looked through the issues, they drilled down to the more complex and intractable issues facing a range of Aboriginal communities. In a sense, if you start at the top looking at a justice or juvenile crime issue, you will probably drill down to much the same sorts of core issues, looking at the whole community approach—their governance, economic capacity and sustainability. In a sense, there is a clear recognition of the high level of interconnectedness of structural and specific social family issues.

Looking at the box on the right, the other significant thing is that the response looked at the key enablers. One of the key things that occurs in any discussion of capacity building is that

there is a confusion of means and ends. In many ways, capacity building and joined up whole-of-government approaches are means to ends. Quite often, I think, various people and authorities see the coming together or the process as the end in itself, rather than seeing that this is about getting our processes right to work towards outcomes for communities—whether those are safety outcomes, health outcomes or future sustainability outcomes. Quite often, a lot of the people thinking in jargon think that the coming together is the goal and that is it. So we are very conscious that the enablers, the collaborative and joined up partnerships and the need to build capacity from the ground up are strategies and processes to get us to a goal.

The next diagram shows that we have a very specific program within the Gordon list of responses—and that was a \$75 million response over four years. One was about building the capacity of communities, trying to address the more long-term structural issues and seeing what practical responses could be made to assist in that change. The key things that we are trying to tease out and puzzle over are, in terms of direction, where these resources should be going and how they are best used—be it for a community development worker or a place manager. A lot of this jargon gets used interchangeably, so I have put a circle there, labelled ‘capacity building resource’, because one person’s definition is not someone else’s.

We are trying to engage with ATSIC through the regions and we are trying to get the state government and its agencies together to meet with the local elected arms of ATSIC to give us some broad direction on where we are putting our resources. But there is still another link down to local communities, and there is an understanding that the elected arm of ATSIC has both strengths and weaknesses. In some areas, they are very cognisant of the fact that they need to be more representative of the people within their region. In other areas, they perhaps lack that link down to the grassroots. Again, the engagement process is about coming together to drill down to the people rather than coming together as an end in itself.

We have found that we have tensions regarding who the employers of the resource are, in terms of governance issues, finding the correct employer and determining who the contract managers are. Another key thing is that we think that we need system change agents to go in this whole direction of building capacity and trying to tackle the intractable problems. We cannot lump it all on workers on the ground and say, ‘When you go into a community, your role is also: to coordinate government services; to somehow build the capacity of the community to respond; and to get government to act.’ We are saying that you need change on two levels—at the grassroots level and at the higher systemic level. So that is the sort of thinking that has moved on.

The last page is about the COAG trial site, which used to be called Tjurabalan but is now without a name, for all sorts of reasons. We have tried to bring that thinking into how we are going to work in that Commonwealth-state locality where we are trying to bring together better service delivery and resources to build the capacity of communities in an integrated site, looking at all the issues, from justice to child abuse. I do not want to go on for too long, but it shows that we have started the synthesis of the issues that we raise in the submissions to you. I will hand over to my colleague.

**Mr Tann**—From the point of view of the Department of Indigenous Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to be able to make a submission. We have welcomed it is an opportunity to highlight some of the Indigenous Affairs issues that have been impediments to sustainable progress for a



long time. Our involvement as an agency probably goes back to the mid- to late-nineties, particularly in response to the environmental health issues that we were very much involved with at the time. Surveys of environmental health in remote communities in particular were showing the same communities continually coming up as 'high need'. There were impediments to sustainable improvements in those communities, no matter how much in the way of resources was going in, so a lot of our submission to the inquiry and some of the issues I will outline today focus on some of the remote discrete community issues and come from my background, which is more in the environmental health area.

I know there has been a report made available to the committee. That is the report we commissioned in 2000 from the North Australia Research Unit on capacity building in WA Aboriginal communities. That has informed a lot of the work that we have done since that time and has been very much involved with other agencies, both at a state and Commonwealth level. The phrase 'capacity building', as Shawn has outlined, has been bandied around. It has certainly filtered into the rhetoric of government at all levels, but I think there is still no clear understanding of what it is or what it can be—or of what it is not in some cases. As an agency, we have tackled the issue at a couple of levels. One is the capacity of government—again consistent with what Shawn has just outlined—in terms of government coming together and being able to deal with and engage Aboriginal people appropriately and provide equitable services. It is also at the level of the community, in terms of community capacity and the capacity of individuals to actually undertake and meet their obligations to engage with government, to provide leadership and to solve problems at that level. I think both of those issues are very much consistent with the inquiry's terms of reference.

Our submission to the inquiry outlined how, over the past 30 years or so, policies of self-determination and self-management had not actually been supported by the transfer of skills and resources necessary to satisfactorily achieve those aims. It also outlined some of the unrealistic expectations that have been thrust on communities to run what in effect are small towns without the supports that are provided to mainstream local governments. It is a very complex environment. It is a very complex administrative, political and cultural imperative that the communities are having to deal with on a day-to-day basis. That has been the focus of a lot of our work in trying to tackle some of those systemic issues. I have outlined five factors impacting on the community capacity. These are in our submission. They are the effectiveness of community leadership and governance; the degree of social and cultural cohesion within communities; internal staffing levels, expertise and continuity; individual skills, experience and motivation; and the level of services and support from government and other sources.

It is important to look at not only some of the problems but also some of the strengths in communities. Some communities cope better than others. Sometimes that can be based on the presence or absence of particular individuals, whether they be strong community leaders or staff. As I mentioned before, environmental health surveys have sometimes identified a cycle of dysfunction within communities, where the same communities can have high staff turnover, low asset life, high repair costs and cycles of dysfunction that reflect the comings and goings within that community. There are real systemic problems in keeping communities on track, and the lack of resources and the lack of recurrent investment in those communities has been a problem. Interventions in the past from agencies such as ATSIC and the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations have tended to take a fairly short-term approach, largely based on the protection of the investment of the funds that have invested in those communities rather than on

a long-term and recurrent commitment to rebuilding those communities and to putting in place systemic and long-term strategies to ensure that they stay on track—not just the traditional bandaid approach, if you like.

I will finish by summarising the opportunities the inquiry could highlight. There is a need for an approach to capacity building that is, as I have said, long term and provides a sustained commitment from all levels of government. There is an approach, which supports physical development with adequate justice, welfare, education and governance support—these are some of the issues that the recent Gordon inquiry highlighted. There is a need for support for specific initiatives, which are outlined in our submission—things like the proposed institute for indigenous governance that has been discussed, issues of staff recruitment services and the need for targeted and more appropriate support for governance.

There is also a need for the application of policies and principles that provide equitable access to services. That underpins a lot of the problems in communities in the levels of services available to these places and the expectations for them to manage in a very complex environment. My last point is that it would be lovely to have bipartisan support so that we were not reinventing the wheel every three to four years and so that the sustained approach that is needed in Indigenous affairs could be supported from both sides.

**CHAIR**—My electorate covers over 90 per cent of South Australia and it has a significant Indigenous population. In fact, last Friday I was in the Centre, seeing the good, the bad and the ugly, if you like. It is something pretty much present in my everyday working environment. I have many memories of coming to Western Australia and of one visit in particular—I may not get my place names right—to the Swan Valley-Lockridge community. It was 1993 and it was one of the first times I had participated in this committee, and the colourful phrases that were used to describe us, those of our ilk and ATSIIC have lingered with me until this day. So I remember that and the clarity of the views that were given to us 10 years ago, and I have been back many times. I am not unfamiliar with medical inquiries or with health issues in Indigenous communities. I have chaired that inquiry and I have also started the substance abuse inquiry, so Western Australia is quite familiar to me.

I want to conclude by thanking you for the very comprehensive work that is in this document. You stand out very clearly as participating in this issue, which—as you were suggesting—needs bipartisan support and needs a national, state, regional and local approach to give us the best outcomes. Thank you to everybody who is responsible for the effort that has gone into it. It is appreciated.

**Mr HAASE**—I am the federal member for Kalgoorlie. About 14 per cent of my constituency is Aboriginal. My electorate contains 91 per cent of the West Australian landmass and includes it most of the regional and remote Aboriginal population. It is not something that I have come to appreciate simply since entering federal politics in 1998. I went to primary school in Shackleton, so I very much interacted with my classmates, many Indigenous, at that stage. So it is an interest I have maintained, an understanding I have developed and a knowledge I have nurtured over too many years I sometimes think when I look in the mirror. So, yes, I have an understanding.

I will launch right into the area that I would like to flesh out a little more and on which I would like to get the benefit of your collective knowledge and experience—and positions of

influence, more importantly. The very first thing that you commented on, Shawn, that caught me was the question of Tjurabalan—the name, the angst, the indecision et cetera. I suspect that that very issue goes right to the heart of problems of leadership in Aboriginal communities. That is extremely unhelpful and unfortunate. All aspects of the decision making process at grassroots level are caught up with the angst of leadership jealousies, representation jealousies and the difficulty of moving progressively towards an end point where solutions can be found because of the hurdles of family et cetera along the way. Do not take me as indicating that it is any more or any less than that which occurs elsewhere in other cultures, including our own—I hasten to say that. But it is a problem. It gets in the way.

When I see this inquiry in progress and the very good submissions and evidence that are placed before us, I cannot help reflecting with a sense of *deja vu* that it has all been done before. It has been done by people who are just as learned, just as committed and just as influential. In decades before, they have come up with solutions that are appropriate for the time, and they have failed. They have failed for a multitude of reasons. That is where I would like to focus: why has the past failed? What are we doing today that is better and more practical, not just for this time but for all time? And I know we cannot be expected to hold crystal balls. Is enough consideration given to what has been seen to be the perfect solution in the past, applied and failed? I do not think it is just a generational thing. I do not think it is simply new people coming up with their ideas and reinventing the wheel. I think it is deeper than that and I do not think we have yet scratched through the scab of the problem to find out what the solution is.

Many things come to my mind. Is Pearson right? If he is right, how right is he? How much is welfare a problem? How much does welfare drive the perceived lack of motivation and self-esteem that we suspect might be a problem? How much of the problem is that there is a very well resourced, very skilful group of people making decisions? Should we invert the pyramid—put all the very skilful, knowledgeable, well-paid decision makers in the communities and be talking around the table with people who have been brought in? Should we only be going to communities and talking to the very grassroots people? I pose those questions to you generally. I would love to hear what you have to say.

**Ms George**—I would like to have a go, Mr Haase. First, I would like to make the point that people on Tjurabalan, along with a number of Aboriginal communities throughout this country, remain impacted on by historical considerations of removal, where people have been moved off their land and onto someone else's. That is a big problem for people having to deal with it on the ground, particularly when you have had a number of generations elapsing from the initial removal.

You have suggested that there be a transfer of skilled people who provide advice to government and occupy the positions that we occupy. Those of us who are Aboriginal occupy 50D positions in the department. I would dearly love to have the opportunity to go back and work in our communities. That is a deficit. In a number of submissions and writings on capacity building the notion of mentoring has been raised. It would not hurt for us to explore that further, particularly for people who occupy 50D positions. Why don't we have an opportunity to go back and work in our communities and make the contributions that we are able to make from the experience that we have had in government and in the process learn from the community so that we are better able to do our jobs in government?

The last point I would like to make is on the Noel Pearson question you asked: are we talking about welfare dependency? I would say yes, but I would also talk about the poverty trap that most Aboriginal people are locked into. It is very difficult for people in middle Australia to really comprehend what it is like to be trapped in poverty with minimal options in your life and everyone basically struggling to survive on a day-to-day basis. There is not the luxury or the opportunity to be thinking and planning for the future. It is very difficult for people in communities, and I am not just talking about remote communities, I am talking about the towns that would be in your electorate. It is almost an impossibility for any Aboriginal person living in those communities to ever get ahead while remaining a member of the community. I speak from direct experience on that. You are expected to share. There are family and kinship obligations and there is simply the response of a human being to another one who does not have.

For the Noel Pearson model to work here, in my personal opinion we would have to sit down and do some serious talking with the communities, individually. If they were minded to go down this path it would really mean having a preparedness to trade-off some tangibles. If people in the communities want people to become prosperous or if they are going to allow them to become prosperous then that will mean some trade-offs. Children getting to final year high school and getting tertiary educations leave the community. For them to go back and add value to the community there need to be trade-offs from the community and acceptance that this is what they want to happen. No kid is going to want to go back into an environment where you have the deprivation and lack of opportunity that currently exists.

**Mr Egan**—On poverty, I visited a couple of communities in your electorate. We were doing a program called ‘Fixing houses for better health’. In that particular program we were assessing all the houses inside and out to see the power and water and what else was inside. Of 22 houses that we assessed, there were hardly any beds, there was hardly any furniture in the kitchens and bathrooms and there were hardly any cooking utensils. Talk about poverty: this was extreme in terms of all the communities I have visited anywhere. Some of the shops have three microwave ovens sitting at the front of the shop. Because they do not have utensils to cook or whatever they warm it up in a microwave and eat it. That is the extreme in terms of poverty. Our people have nothing to look forward to in terms of employment. As Kate was saying, if we do not have that and we do not change that, and if we do not have good governance and good management in our communities they are all going to come to town and then we will have to do something about them living in the towns.

Poverty is a very important issue. Somebody once said that there is a community at Cue, for example, that gets \$2 million to manage the Shire of Cue. Our communities get \$300,000 to \$400,000 to manage the same size. Where is the equity in that? How do our people have the opportunity to grow and to be a part of it?

**Mr Boyle**—From a Premier and Cabinet point of view—and I was in government 10 years ago; this is my second stint—I do see policy progress. Our analysis is a lot richer and deeper. We have a triple bottom line approach to understanding community issues rather than considering them just as welfare policy issues. We need to get the economic side and everyone else involved. The other understanding is that we need to get the system to change. It is not just the Aboriginal people who need to change and get their act together; it is about government getting its act together. That is where you have your biggest hurdle. The spirit is willing; the bureaucracy is quite stuck in its ways, at both the federal and state levels. It is playing itself out in a bilateral

that we have with the Commonwealth on child abuse and family violence where we are trying to get various departments to put their resources to the areas that Gordon has put resources to.

We have said to the Commonwealth agencies, 'We are not asking you to create new money for new programs, but let us try to complement the effort of your existing programs,' so that the bilateral full of nice words of collaboration translates into practical action. What I have been told is that the spirit is willing at the Commonwealth level and at the state branch level but that when it gets back to Canberra the authority structure does not quite come down to make it happen. At the state level we need to do that. That is why we are thinking of state change agents. If the bureaucracy gets into its natural mode of risk management and everything else you need people at the central level pushing the envelope so that the change does happen. Even if you have the analysis right and have quite a rich and deep understanding of the multiple layers of actions you need to take, you need to be continually on the back of our systems to make them work.

**CHAIR**—There are a couple of excellent points in that. I will come back to some of them later.

**Mr HAASE**—There is just one point that I had not mentioned, and I throw it to you. I know that in the deliberations of all those who would influence better outcomes of leadership and capacity building they are always most conscious of the role of traditional life and culture—lore. How appropriate do you think it is for groups like us with influence creating policy to say that lore and tradition are vitally important to these people rather than to say that the future is important for these people? That may be more healthy, more financially successful and independent with less of our imposition of consideration of lore. I would like your comment on that.

**Ms Cattalini**—I am assuming that you are talking about the cultural match that needs to exist that has been highlighted by the Harvard research. You are calling for the accountability of that traditional governance back into the community as being a requirement that needs to sit side by side with the accountability that the governance structure has to mainstream society in the way that it administers its funding. You can see that with the ATSIC review at the moment, talking about that overarching structure having the same question posed of it. This whole idea of legitimacy and accountability to the mainstream community as well is one of the most important issues about getting governance right.

I think that what has been highlighted this morning by all the other speakers who have presented to you, in terms of the ways in which we do that, is the need for us to build strong relationships and address the issue of distrust with the Indigenous community that has developed out of the process of colonisation. It is very much about removing the gatekeepers in the community who are sometimes using an inappropriate form of governance in the Indigenous community. There are gatekeepers and we need to develop systems and structures that can address that gatekeeping attitude.

Also I do not think we can ignore that we have the same gatekeeping systems in our own systems of government and that disallows the flexibility that is required and it disallows long-term funding to be given. The only way that I can see forward from that, in the work that we have done in our department, is to devolve that decision making to appropriate forms of governance: identify them and devolve the decision making, the funding and the leadership to

the people and the organisations that can govern effectively. That is not traditional or cultural; that is very much a regional development strategy. Whilst we need to be mindful of the appropriateness of the governance and the accountability to the community, I think we need to strengthen that.

**Mr HAASE**—Do your colleagues agree with you? I would love to hear from Trevor, for instance.

**Mr Tann**—Yes, certainly. As Benita said, we have been doing a lot of work in recent years: a lot of research and a lot of looking at what has happened in other jurisdictions and internationally, I guess. I am always very cautious about looking at what happens in Canada and trying to transplant that here because, even within Western Australia, each community is a different situation. Certainly there are some principles, in terms of looking at the strengths of particular communities. There are strong people in communities and they are not always on the governing council; they are often the head of various committees or they might be just some of the individual women and men within that community. When we talk about appropriate governance, it is ensuring that the people who do have skills and do have leadership attributes are actually allowed to percolate to the top, if you like, and are able to influence what happens in our community. They are the ones who are negotiating with government about service delivery.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—I have just a couple of questions. Thank you very much, by the way, because the submissions were really comprehensive. In many ways, without boasting about Western Australia, I think they were an advance on what we have had from other state governments. You have touched on a couple of the questions I wanted to ask. The question of cooperation between the Commonwealth and the state governments is, as you know, a perennial problem, but it seems to me that in Indigenous affairs it reaches its peak of horribleness, if I can put it that way—it certainly has in the past. What role do you see for the Commonwealth in the provision of services in the area of governance, capacity building and related questions? I think we are all a bit inclined to accept the status quo, but maybe revolution needs to be talked about here.

The second question is with regard to your touching on the capacity of government agencies and personnel to really understand and deal with the issues that they confront. It strikes me that when we talk about capacity building we often place the spotlight on the Indigenous communities when we should, at least as often, place the spotlight on the capacity of the wider community and its representatives to deal with the issues that they confront. I wonder if you have any suggestions about dealing with those two questions. How do we better inform public servants and lobby groups—everyone who deals with the Indigenous community—and skill them to deal with the issues that they confront? Can we professionalise, if you like, the people who deal with Aboriginal communities—remote and urban—to a much great extent?

Secondly, the wider community obviously represents a significant problem here because of attitudes of discrimination, hostility and disrespect, which Indigenous people confront every day. In capacity building, obviously part of what we are doing is trying to improve the ability of the wider community to respond to and work with Indigenous members of the community. I was very disappointed, for example, to see in the recent meeting between Indigenous leaders and the Prime Minister that it was presented as if the Indigenous community had to solve all its problems by itself and the government would come in behind, rather than giving citizenship rights to

Indigenous people as a matter of common agreement. If you would not mind just touching on those questions, I would be very grateful.

**Mr Egan**—In my opinion, over the last four years a lot of progress has happened within governance—with the management within remote communities, for example. A lot of time and effort have been put into funding, managing, and putting in systems that will allow the community to manage their own affairs, but the same hurdle keeps coming up time and again. It would make a difference to our communities if the Grants Commission could change the way that it distributes funding, for example. That is an absolutely crucial point in our people's existence in terms of where we go.

I go back to the example of the Shire of Cue getting \$2 million to run the shire while Jigalong or Balgo get \$350,000 to run towns of similar size. There is a vast difference between what they have, what they are able to do, and what they can look forward to. Our communities do not have that. We see the Grants Commission as a possible avenue to improve the source of funding being made available to our communities.

**Ms Collard**—I agree with some of the points that you have made. Sometimes when we are talking about Indigenous communities we tend to talk about the remote areas. The majority of Aboriginal people tend to live in a town or in the metro areas, and they are sometimes forgotten about in terms of their community capacity. I work for the Department for Community Development and, since we changed in 2001, the greatest emphasis has been on building capacity and engaging partnerships, and that has changed the way our agency has worked. We have done a couple of successful programs based on working with the community rather than to the community, which government has done in the past.

That has been a major shift for our department and particularly for others. We have had to change the wording and the way we have operated. We have Aboriginal staff within our agencies so they can work with non-Aboriginal people in our agencies to build their skills up. We have a number of very good non-Aboriginal people that work alongside Aboriginal people in Aboriginal communities to build that partnership and to build their capacity to work with Aboriginal people.

We have sat down and talked with communities and worked out what services they need and what those services look like. That has been a major shift in our department and the capacity of the particular community in the way that it is receiving services. A lot of our services are town based services where the non-Aboriginal people identify a lot of the issues; for example, where kids are running around and they want to get rid of the problem. Our agency has come in and has provided a lead role in trying to engage the community and organisations to organise particular activities to make success stories for our youth. There has been an example recently in Hedland, which we could give you more details on later if you are interested.

**Mr Boyle**—In terms of what the Commonwealth can do, one thing to definitely avoid is the three-year program that dies. Someone has to pick up the tab. That is not long-term sustainability, especially in this area. We need to avoid that. We need flexibility down the food chain so that even within programs and within government priorities the various agencies have the flexibility to target resources in a collaborative way. If we can get flexibility happening at the local level, who knows what sorts of outcomes you can get.

In terms of broader community education, it comes to the courage of governments to pick up issues of reconciliation or the broader community education as part of the business. It is not an either/or debate of symbolic issues versus substance issues. It is a bit of both; they go hand-in-hand. As well as doing the grassroots stuff we need to deal with the bigger structural issues and we need to do the broader education. Within the state government at least we have an anti-racism strategy developed by the premier and chaired by him. That is about to go to the next phase and go out to the community. So we are tackling things on many levels.

**Ms George**—Dr Lawrence, I agree with you that there is a tendency when we use the term ‘capacity building’ to be thinking that the community needs improvement, that it needs help. I think there was a good report on child abuse chaired by Jenny’s predecessor in the DCD, Danny Ford. It reported to the IAAC at the end of last year. One of the areas that it looked at was the need for public sector reform, which picked up this issue of the need for an enhanced capacity by government when dealing with Aboriginal communities. The issue is being looked at in the Department of Justice. We recognise that, as well as government agencies, as a department we have to do things better before we can do things differently. Doing things differently is having a better ability to engage with communities, not just having the phrases.

I think that Mr Haase is right in that we seem to be moving along this spectrum and the catchwords are now ‘capacity building’, ‘engagement’ et cetera, but I think all of us have to start to understand what they mean. If I can give an example: I spent a year in East Timor a couple of years ago and watched what the UN were doing there. I observed some of their activities with a degree of dismay, but one of the things they did was to have their own officials in the administration. They were then obliged to recruit and place Timorese into those positions and act as coaches and mentors for a year. If you look at East Timor, when the Indonesians left they took the whole of the management capacity out of the country. So in some ways it was not a dissimilar situation from what we are talking about in terms of the ability of the community to pick up and start from scratch, basically.

I think what we talked about previously just touched on the need for inclusive and broadly based leadership, particularly when it comes to women and young people. I am really very concerned that young people are not being given the attention they deserve, given that they are an increasingly large part of the Aboriginal population. We can look at the example in the Northern Territory that may have already been given to you of Ali Curang and Lagumarnu and the law and justice committees that have been established there. It started at Ali Curang and on the initiative of the women. The reason they decided to take action—and I think this is an important key to what we are talking about: the degree of readiness of a community, an indication from them that they want to initiate something and how we then support it—was that 50 per cent of the under 25-year-old males in that community were in prison. The women wanted to do something, and the government came in with all the best intentions and put in a resource to assist with the development of a committee. Then it was realised that the women were not being included, so two resources, the equivalent of case managers, were put in. But the lead time for that was five years, ultimately, before they actually got things together. So that is really what we are talking about, and that has implications then for funding and for the preparedness of government to stick with it.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—I have a small postscript to that. It struck me that, if you look at a lot of Indigenous communities even today, the white administrators, in many cases, are not people who



have necessarily been trained, screened or monitored, and some of the problems that communities face are: one, rapid turnover, because people burn out; two, inadequate skills; and, three, sometimes straight out criminal behaviour in the community that leaves victims of that poor administration. Do you see any mechanisms at Commonwealth and state levels to improve that outcome? I know it is not necessarily universal, but sometimes the problems are of the making of the administrators, the white fellas who come in and really mess up communities.

**Mr Egan**—We are trying to deal with that. We have been trying to do that for the last four years, in terms of the nine largest communities that the Department of Housing and Works have been working with and DIA as well. Yes, we acknowledge that there were not skilful people out there. Yes, there were no salary packages that were attractive enough for good people to go and work in our communities. We have to do a whole range of things for a recruiting process. We would like this Commonwealth government to be on board with us, to actually set up recruitment processes to recruit good, skilful, qualified people to go and work in our communities. Yes, we would like Indigenous people to be a part of that. Again I say that money is an issue. You do not have a lot of money to employ two people—one as a trainee and one as a CEO, for example. If that was made much easier for us to get access to, all of our communities throughout the state of Western Australia would improve. We do not have the resources. Like I said, if the grants commission, for example, would change the way they provide funding to Indigenous communities, that would make an enormous difference to our communities, and we would be in a better position to employ good people.

**Ms Cattalini**—We have a very specific initiative that picks up that issue here in WA. In the last two years we have worked closely with the Department of Housing and Works and four other agencies. In the regions we have been through a process of consultation with Aboriginal people about those sorts of issues and how they impact. We have developed a comprehensive recruitment and workplace relations service proposal, which has just been approved by our state supply commission. The issue that we have is the same issue that turns up all the time—flexibility in funding and accessing long-term funding. We have actually managed to secure three-quarters of the funding for four years, which is pretty remarkable, but we still have a little way to go. That has five different aspects. The most important is the last one, but I will bring it up first: the development of partnerships of Indigenous organisations with people in the regions. That way, the service can subcontract and transfer skills so that the region will build its capacity to itself pick up the service.

Recruitment is only the first role or function of the service. Comprehensive cultural awareness at the regional level is also required, so that before they even get into a database those people are screened adequately. And we need to ensure that those people have a genuine commitment to the kinds of outcomes of that region or that community. Then, also, there is ongoing support in terms of advocacy and workplace relations advice. There is a bit of difficulty in the Crown Solicitor's office, but we have managed to iron out the issues. Providing advice to the employee as well as to the employer can sometimes be difficult—but there are ways around that and we have managed to address those. We are very close to launching that as an initiative here in Western Australia. We have partnered with other agencies, and we are seeking to partner with ATSIC at the moment for them to adopt this as a national initiative.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—My seat is called Parkes. It covers about a third of New South Wales and certainly takes in most of the remote areas of New South Wales. Our Aboriginal or Indigenous

population is probably around 8½ to nine per cent. Dubbo, the main city, I think has the second biggest concentration of Aboriginal people outside of Sydney. It is probably very different to your situation, in that in New South Wales there are very few isolated Aboriginal communities that are not integrated to some extent in towns et cetera. Certainly that is one of the things I am interested in seeing here. The issue of tribes in New South Wales, in my experience, is in more of a regional than factual sense. We talk about tribal areas but in actual fact there are not tribes, in my experience. There are those who would disagree. I think people are really referring to regions rather than people when they talk about tribes.

But what is very strong is the family thing. I also think, as strong as the family thing might be to Aboriginal people within their communities, it also seems to be one of the things that make it hard for systems within those communities to work. I would like to ask you about whether the tribal issue here in Western Australia is bigger than it is in New South Wales—for good or ill. But what I am really asking is: how do you deal with the fact that families tend not to trust one another when you try to get communities to run things on their own? In my experience they do not, and it causes enormous trouble in getting communities to run systems or programs—be they health centres or whatever they might be. I am asking: in your experience, how do you deal with that here? You may say it is not a problem here. I would say it certainly is in my part of the world.

**Mr Boyle**—I will just make a few comments and then I will pass it on to my colleagues. In our discourse, we do tend to head towards the remote communities and the most intractable ones when we have a whole continuum of issues and communities. I think there is a strong truth in what you are saying in that kinship ties—which is probably how we would say it—especially in the metropolitan areas and the regional and urban areas, are very strong. I think the overlay of our white management structures does not necessarily fit nicely with the various kinship structures. They are some of the things we are struggling with. I know the Department of Community Development has an Indigenous family program which is trying to deal with the issue that most traditional, not-for-profit incorporated structures tend to get dominated by one kinship structure or another. So, in order to get to everyone, we need to start thinking a bit more creatively about accountability structures which are still flexible, to get to the various family groups. I might pass the question on to other people.

**Mr Egan**—Our tribal systems are important. So is our culture and so is everything else that we stand for. People down here in the south-west are no different from people in the north-west or in the desert area. We may have fairer skin; they may have blacker skin. But we are no different in terms of what we think and how we react. Yes, family is important and most people have a family leader within their family. One of the things that we have picked up in our work with remote communities, for example—and I can only speak of remote communities because that is where we do most of our work—is that, yes, we had to change the constitution of a lot of those communities to cater for the individual families. We were finding at the time that certain family groups were being left out of the process of decision making, so we had to change the constitution. The process to go through and try to do that was very difficult. But we are no different in terms of our cultural links and our families. There are people in Koori land and Murris and whoever else there may be. We are no different. We have strong links back to our tribal and cultural history and everything else.

**Mr Tann**—I am not sure how many thousands of separately incorporated groups there are around the country.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—We have been given numbers. They certainly go into the thousands. I think there is about one for every 50 Aboriginal people.

**Mr Tann**—There tends to be a natural fission of organisations as organisations get set up for a particular purpose. If that group is not seen as representative or there are splits within factions and other groups get incorporated and they are competing for resources, obviously there is a potential to rationalise and to try to make best use of the resource that is there in terms of their capacity rather than competing against each other.

In terms of some of the issues in the south-west—where there have been a lot of problems with the dynamics between families, family feuding and things like that—there is an initiative that a number of us have been involved with, which is community action groups. They are set up from the community end in response to that issue in places like Brookton and Katanning in the south-west, where it was recognised that the incorporated organisations were often dominated by particular families. They really set up a structure so that all families in a particular region had a say and so there was not a structure of dominant and submissive families; there was equal say at the table. Every family group was represented.

That has been quite successful in some cases. It has been very useful. I know some of the service providers finally have an organisation they feel they can talk to without getting into trouble about having spoken to only one part of the community and not the rest. There are proposals to try to expand that approach to other places in the south-west and the wheat belt. The success of it is very much dependent on it being community driven and responding to individual community needs. It is not something you can necessarily transplant to other places.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—Where I am, it does not seem to make that much difference whether it is a city the size of Dubbo which has 40,000 people or is a town like Wilcannia, which is almost although not quite entirely Aboriginal, of 700 people. The family thing still seems to be a bar to getting that community to work. You are quite right: if you miss one family out then you have a real problem. But getting them to trust one another and work together seems to me a very hard thing to do. It does not seem to matter whether it is an isolated or a city community.

**Ms Collard**—I do not know if I have the solution, but in the Department for Community Development, when we are looking at getting services to be funded by non-government organisations, if it is a town base such as our South West, we firstly go out and do a lot of consultation to see what services the community needs. Then we hold community meetings about where we are going to locate the service. In some situations they might want the service in a non-Aboriginal organisation because that way all families get access to it. We work with that non-Aboriginal organisation to ensure that they are going to engage and work with Aboriginal people appropriately. Sometimes that is a decision by the majority of the Aboriginal community that that particular service is in that non-Aboriginal organisation.

Some of our Aboriginal organisations do not have the capacity to run some of the services that we offer and we are not going to set them up either because sometimes there might be family support or child abuse issues and confidentiality is an issue for communities. The community at

large help us make some of those decisions in our procurement processes; that assists that process. I do not know if we will ever solve that because Aboriginal communities are based on family. The family is their strength; it also can be a hindrance but that is part of our culture. I do not know if we will ever get away from that.

**Ms George**—I would like to pick up on what Trevor touched on and the issue of family feuding. But before I say that, I would like to point out, Mr Cobb, that when you talk about tribes, we would be talking about language groups now. I do not think we use the word ‘tribes’ any longer. Recognising also that the family unit is our strength but it can also throw up some conflicts and difficulties, one of the services that the Department of Justice runs is the Aboriginal Alternative Dispute Resolution Service, AADRS. Recommendation 101 of the Gordon inquiry recommended that that service be extended right across government. One of the key areas in which it is increasingly involved is intervening in or assisting with family feuding. It is not only in the South West that we are seeing evidence; it is really right throughout the state. There are multiple causes of it but it is an issue that is of concern, particularly in small towns or regions where it is more evident to everyone.

**Ms Cattalini**—I think too, Mr Cobb, you are pointing to the issues that have been raised previously this morning about having accountability for the community and the appropriate governance structures. Trevor has highlighted a model of family representation that is very adequate in terms of consultation but then, when it comes to addressing that, it is important not to incorporate that group and use it as a replacement, as a representative group that is governing that community. As Jenny has highlighted, the issue of self-management or true self-determination is when people have a choice about whether they want to manage those services or whether they want to just flick their light switch in the same way that you or I do and expect that that service is delivered to them. These are very important questions and are the reason that family groups should be consulted, but that is not necessarily where the decision should be made on how that is implemented in terms of policy application.

**CHAIR**—I need to touch on a few issues before concluding. From my experience in my own electorate, there is still a strong emphasis on tribal linkages. I had to really think about it, because it is not something we clearly say. But every time we say, ‘He is an Adnyamadhanha man, he is a Pitjantjatjara man, he is Diyari and he is Bungala,’ it is very clear the way the people in my electorate see themselves, and they know who can speak for each other in country and those sorts of issues. It is really quite interesting, and it is a real discipline to remind myself. I just offer that.

I want to run through about five or six points in a quick snapshot, and then we will try and wrap it up. In terms of delivering services and developing relationships, and picking up the point that it is equally a government agency issue as well as a community issue—the committee accept that and it is clearly one of our key terms of reference—can we get an understanding of the difference in delivery style between the delivery of rural, regional, urban and remote services? Western Australia would be a classic. Mr Haase has 90 per cent of Western Australia, and I have 90 per cent of South Australia. Mine is just a postage stamp in size by comparison, even though it is one million square kilometres almost. Can we have a quick oversight of where you see the difference in delivery between, say, urban and remote services, how you physically do it and how you relate to the communities?

**Ms Collard**—I have a comment on relating. You have to identify the particular community you are going to work with and you have to engage them and spend time getting to know them before you can actually work out the delivery style. I think that is the key: getting to know them, engaging them, working with them and asking them what they actually want. I think that, previously, in government agencies—I have been with government for a while—we made all these assumptions and we did not believe there were strengths in the areas to which we provided services. I think things are changing in government in Western Australia whereby we are working with communities and asking them what they want. That is the start for that first bit; the others might have some further suggestions.

**CHAIR**—In response, can I pick up the issue of the reality of this: you, of all Australians, have this issue of distance.

**Ms Collard**—Yes, it is a problem.

**CHAIR**—You just accept it, like I do. I do 100,000 kilometres a year in a car and think nothing of it, except about midnight when you are trying to get home. In regard to the sheer size and practicality of it, can you bring that into the discussion too.

**Mr Boyle**—The game plan is actually to have regional, local and centrally coordinated structures. At the central level, we are creating a human services director-generals' group. All the director-generals around the human services departments meet monthly. We have a cabinet standing committee on social policy. They are the two top ones. There is still the issue of director-generals talking to the economic directors and all that, but we will worry about that another time. The bit that is a work in progress is that we are trying to bring together regional managers. In the Kimberley, DIA has been particularly successful in bringing together all the regional managers of state government agencies in a Kimberley agreement. There is still the need for the local structures, but we need those regional managers because, in reality, that is how state resources are organised. They will need to be able to drill down to the next level so, whether it is Balgo or Kalumburu, we have the more local departmental people being able to liaise with that community. In some of these areas, this is where we are saying that we will put in a community resource, whether we call it a community billet or a place manager, that will be the interaction point between those state agencies and between any government agencies. But if they see issues and problems, they need to be able to feed all the way down the food chain. What we have done in the past is that good individuals with great conceptual understanding and great relationship skills do that locally but hit the brick walls further up the food chain. We are trying to do that in our social policy on the whole, and Indigenous policy has another dimension of engaging with ATSI within that regional level as well.

**CHAIR**—Are you satisfied that you are making progress? You made the point earlier that there are positives, and I see quite positive and exciting opportunities for change. It is looking difficult in terms of the public's perception at the moment in certain areas, but I see great opportunity in it as well. You offered some optimism earlier about where we are going and I feel some optimism, although it is yet to be realised.

**Ms George**—I think that a few things have come out of the Gordon inquiry—or are aligned with it—such as the multifunction police stations. The police have done a very good paper on remote policing. A good paper has also been done on the delivery of services to remote

communities. That report was to the director-generals task force with the Gordon inquiry. Another initiative that I think you would be interested in is the tri-state discussions we have been having, which look at the delivery of services across the three jurisdictions. I think that has been important in terms of not just ultimately providing a better service delivery model for those three jurisdictions but making the bureaucrats, and particularly the CEOs, much more conscious of the difficulties that are faced in those remote locations. In turn, that makes them—especially my director-general—much more cognisant of the difficulties in providing services on the ground. In a situation like Kalumburu, which we visited a couple of weeks ago, there is no government presence, and, even if you put somebody out there, there are no infrastructure facilities to enable them to do things at the moment. Those are the very practical issues that we are addressing in the course of the Gordon implementation.

**CHAIR**—Could I make a comment about the Gordon report. In terms of being a catalyst nationally, it has certainly been part of that, and you share my view. Did the community have some linkage with the Swan Valley?

**Mr Egan**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—That 10 years sort of crystallised in my mind!

**Ms George**—You got the Western Australian welcome.

**CHAIR**—Yes, and, as I said, it is still there. It has acted as that catalyst. To offer a slight encouragement—although obviously there is work to be done in terms of the Commonwealth; state managers might be willing, but knocking through the ceiling in Canberra is difficult—we all share the frustration. In terms of evidence from one of the departmental people a couple of months ago, we specifically targeted what should be the Commonwealth's relationship with the states. Rather than getting into some cost-shifting argument and argy-bargy in a political sense, I thought we did get a more enlightened response on seeing the expenditure being done differently. It was not about extra dollars; it was about actually doing it differently. Sometimes it is about extra dollars. As you probably know, that has a long way to go, but it seems to me that there are opportunities from the Gordon inquiry—which has been the catalyst—and of course the meeting with the Prime Minister the other day and a lot of other things. There is an opportunity to see things differently, and Western Australia has very much been part of that. On COAG, the Halls Creek project—and obviously I am not that familiar with it—is struggling a bit at the moment, isn't it?

**Mr Boyle**—No, I think the ex-Tjurabalan project is getting its act together. That was the third diagram that I handed out to you.

**CHAIR**—Yes, I have it in front of me.

**Mr Boyle**—They developed the various management structures to help move it on and tried to devolve it a lot more locally, because at the central level we can all go to lots of meetings and talk a lot, but that might not change much.

**CHAIR**—We have seen a number of them in Wadeye, Pitjantjatjara, Burke, Murdi Paaki and Shepparton, so we have some experience. I am interested in particular comments about the issue from a Commonwealth perspective. Is it not quite happening?

**Mr Egan**—Could I make a comment in terms of capacity building. It goes right back to the ground, where our people are. Throughout the last four years we have been asked to reintroduce a program called the Homemaker program to assist people to live in a house, for example. Out of that you will get benefits such as good health for the family and children—the whole box and dice. I go back to an example I gave, where there is no furniture, no cooking utensils—nothing.

We have two generations of people who do not know how to live in a house: they do not know what it is like to clean up, to have detergents and to have all the sorts of things that we take for granted and have in our own houses in Perth and other towns. Building the capacity of mothers, fathers and everybody else to understand what it is like is something that has not happened in remote communities or town based communities, for example. We do that on a very limited budget of \$500,000 a year. How do you address those sorts of capacity building issues within our families—with the mothers and the children—and everything else that goes with them, based on \$500,000 a year? People have been living in poverty—living in scrap heaps, rubbish and everything else. The situation is never going to change. If there was something that the Commonwealth government could help us with, that is one program that would have an enormous impact on all the people living throughout the remotes parts of Western Australia.

**CHAIR**—Do you mean the work in terms of the Grants Commission?

**Mr Egan**—I mean the Commonwealth government in general just providing a grant and saying, ‘There is a grant to work with families.’ Does it have to be called the Homemaker program? We actually developed a program with the department of community services and implemented it. It is not called the Homemaker program.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—For the information of members, it was a very effective program. It was in operation 20-odd years ago and, for reasons I am not entirely clear about now, it was dropped. Unfortunately nothing was brought in to replace it. I think it has considerable potential.

**Ms Collard**—We just have two services. They are called in-house practical support. There is one out in the metro area down in Rockingham and there is one out in Geraldton.

**Mr Egan**—And Mandogalup.

**Ms Collard**—They are funded by only a little bit of money.

**CHAIR**—Do you know whether anyone accessed the stronger families program for any of that time?

**Ms Collard**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—It endeavoured to or it did?

**Ms Collard**—There was some work around a partnership, but it is also sometimes difficult to get a partnership with the Commonwealth. We contract services out, but we give ongoing support. Sometimes it is difficult with the Commonwealth to get a partnership because they will not give us the money. They want to give directly to the—

**CHAIR**—That is a very important point because of the direct income to the agency.

**Ms Collard**—They fund direct to the agency, but they do not necessarily provide follow-up support.

**CHAIR**—No, there would be a huge sensitivity on the part of the Commonwealth about a state agency doing that. You get into the whole cost-shifting debate from that point. It is something we have to address. Can I selfishly come back to the issue of Halls Creek—the X project. What I am really interested in from the Commonwealth perspective—you can be slightly critical of the Commonwealth or grossly critical of the Commonwealth, but I am deeply interested in those processes—is that in a strategic sense there is some high expectation. That high expectation is very long term. We need to know why this has not quite worked as somebody had expected it to work. We need to know that, and we would like it on the public record what your view about it is—or I would, anyway.

**Mr Egan**—One of the comments that people make about Tjurabalan is that when the native title was determined everyone wanted to know what native title meant and everybody was looking for resources and moneys. And at the end of the day there was no money and there were no resources as such. They are still trying to deal with that and how they deal with native title and land and everything else.

**CHAIR**—Kate, I think you want to say something.

**Ms George**—No, I was just waiting for Trevor to say something. I have been a bit of a bit player in this, but now that you have invited me, I will have my say. The Department of Justice has had a very peripheral role in this. This was part of the difficulty. I preface this remark by saying I have only been in this job for 15 months. Prior to that I worked in the communities, so I am really still seeing things very much from the perspective of my own mob. My fundamental issue with Tjurabalan, apart from the difficulty that was inherent in it, in that we were only dealing with the Tjurabalan land claim in the first instance, was that there were two categories of people, essentially—the Tjurabalan native title holders and Balgo and its associated out-station—so there was the risk of Balkanising the situation. That was my criticism of the approach that the Commonwealth government took. There were very good public servants and everything, but I really felt that they were acting like Father Christmas—coming in and, with all the goodwill in the world, dealing with things in a superficial way that was going to end up with big problems at the end, particularly when it came to people and what was essentially devolving into two categories of people.

**CHAIR**—I am smiling. I love the comment.

**Ms George**—Well, anyway, I will stop there.



**Mr Tann**—To add to what Kate has said, whether it is Tjurabalan or any other place, announcing it as a pilot project in Perth or COAG trial in Canberra does not necessarily make everything fall into place. Patience is an issue.

**CHAIR**—Some might say a virtue.

**Mr Tann**—Yes. Previous experience in dealing with some communities shows that there is a stage that you have to go through before you can start talking about what you are going to spend the money on. We are talking about capacity building: the work that needs to be done at the community level to deal with some of the issues that Kate identified involving the relationship between native title holders and residents in those communities. We need to work through that by building up the ability and willingness among those people to negotiate with government about what service issues are a priority and what the fundamental needs are in that area. There is a tendency to say, ‘We need to do something. We need to report back to the next COAG meeting. We need to have some runs on the board.’ There is probably a need on both sides to see something happening, but to come up with a shopping list and then to try to target and zoom in on all the programs in this area is not dealing with the fundamental systemic issues that we are trying to grapple with.

**CHAIR**—Do you want to add anything, Mr Haase?

**Mr HAASE**—You are a very brave man, Mr Chair! Yes, I have been fairly close to it. One of the things that have surprised me out of all this discussion is that you have not mentioned the role of local government. In Halls Creek, especially, local government is very much involved. I was up there in the period that the Deputy Prime Minister was there, and it was worth the comment that it was the first time that there really had been a tripartite arrangement of local, state and federal governments. I am well aware that that is not working as smoothly as it ought. But I am very conscious of why patience is important, resource is important and realistic expectations from the individuals at all levels are important. That is perhaps one of the major reasons for perceived shortcomings at this time.

We ought to have the tenacity to work through that. The great Homemaker program—or a program of a similar name—was dropped, but we ought not to drop this program. Because of the isolated nature of a particular program—a marvellous program—we ought not to walk away and ditch it; we ought to keep going with that and find reasons why it is not working and bring those layers on. I can understand why the Homemaker program did not work. You cannot espouse the theory in a situation where none of the building blocks of those things that you need to put on a Homemaker program are there. I know exactly what Patrick is talking about, but people like me say, ‘Why aren’t there basic cooking facilities and basic furniture in order to apply a Homemaker program, when the resource—and the resource first to mind is the money resource by way of welfare—has been paid out?’ Some of the amounts are substantial, especially when status of family leadership, child support systems and so forth are taken into consideration. The cash resource is hugely substantial in some situations, but the ability to manage that resource is not there. Therefore, the basic facilities of domestic living are not there and there is no meshing between the very highly funded and well-meaning programs in teaching for the future.

**CHAIR**—I draw your attention, Mr Haase, to the COAG and your concern—I do not want to put words in your mouth—about the COAG. This is what I really want to challenge the

Commonwealth and anyone else on. I think your view concerns ignoring success, not rewarding success.

**Mr HAASE**—I know where you are coming from.

**CHAIR**—I am interested in this issue of targeting one group from the Commonwealth perspective and acting like Father Christmas. Benita, I would really welcome your, and anyone else's, comments on this. I really want to talk about—and then I will need to wrap this section up—the appropriate relationship between the Commonwealth, state and local governments, but in this case the relationship particularly between the Commonwealth and state governments, as they are slightly the heavier hitters, if you like. What is the proper relationship of respect? If the Commonwealth is seen as Big Brother or Father Christmas, that is not going to give us the best outcome. Clearly, the state—this state as much as any state, as Dr Lawrence has said—is a pioneer in the work that it is doing. It is indicative of your commitment to this issue. The relationship between the Commonwealth and the states is critical, so I just want to try to get that on a level which gives us the best shot.

**Mr HAASE**—The chair has referred to a comment I made some time ago that government intervention so often rewards failure. Regardless of the light in which you view this latest COAG arrangement, if you extrapolate the pilot project it can be seen to be rewarding failure. So what we are saying to the Balgo group is: 'You're selected as a pilot because we think you are at rock bottom and something has to be done.' I do not know how you explain away that interpretation at a local level.

**CHAIR**—That is a summing up.

**Mr Egan**—I think you asked a question about local governance.

**CHAIR**—Yes. Can we go to Benita, then to Kate and then to Patrick, and Shawn might like to sum up at the end.

**Ms Cattalini**—I will be really brief. I think all the debate around that is happening anyway, but I think the most important thing is that the COAG pilot is an action learning process. It is not a program, and we should stop looking at it as a way forward as though this is something we are going to duplicate everywhere. That would not be what it is. It is designed to inform a broader application of policy and a broader set of initiatives that is more equitable in the way that it delivers a service. So the relationship between the Commonwealth and the state is very important. I think it would be very exciting to see the Commonwealth shift its perspective to be more responsive and less proactive. I know that sounds really bizarre, but it would be beneficial if it stepped back and waited and was able to respond and put the community in the driving seat to outline how it wanted the government to respond—and that is the same for our own state government as well. This action learning research is about empowering that community, and it was chosen because there was a land determination that was passed down. Prior to that, there was already a massive state project to work with the Balgo community, and that was action learning research in itself. That preceded the Tjurabalan land determination. We need to recognise that it is learning. It is not an initiative and it is not a way forward; it is learning.

**CHAIR**—Excellent.

**Ms George**—I have a couple of things to say about the Kimberley and the point that you made, Mr Chairman. We were very mindful of the possible danger of identifying one community, given that the Department of Justice had just completed a fairly comprehensive piece of work in the Kimberley. And, picking up on the point that was made, if certain communities were selected, we were mindful of the same issues that resulted from the Gordon inquiry; we did not want these to be targeted as the child-abusing places. So that has to be dealt with very sensitively. Our concern with this potential to Balkanise Balgo, which, as you would be aware, has the majority of the population in that area, was the downstream effect on the Department of Justice, because we already have major issues in that area. To finish off—and this is just a general comment, and it relates a little to homemakers—the cost of living is a very serious issue in regional and remote areas. This is a factor that really impacts not only on people's incomes but particularly on that disposable income and the food dollar.

**Mr Boyle**—My summary point goes back to one of my introductory points. We confuse the bottom-up action with the top-down action. We need to act on both levels. The COAG site presents an opportunity for governments to get their act together in the top-down fashion. I think the difference might be that in Western Australia we are trying to get some of that top-down change as part of the lifeblood of the public service. I hope we will have plenty of sites similar to COAG where we will not spend \$400,000 on a consultant to go and find out what the community wants. We are actually making it the lifeblood of the people to work together in local communities and regional areas, but we still need to do the bottom-up stuff in listening and in engaging and in all that sort of thing. I think why the Commonwealth is not working is that it is seen as a site; it is not seen as the lifeblood of government agencies.

**CHAIR**—What is it seen as?

**Mr Boyle**—As a site where we are going to experiment with how we work together. As one of my colleagues said, an issue like telecommunications infrastructure is a key issue that is not happening as a matter of course, as part of everyday living—

**Dr LAWRENCE**—The rights of citizens.

**Mr Boyle**—Yes. So the danger from the Commonwealth's perspective is saying, 'Okay, in this site we will try to collaborate,' but, if you are not doing all that structural work to your bureaucracy, trying to get people to do that at the local level is going to keep failing.

**Mr Egan**—Why we never talked about local government is that they do not do anything for nothing. They are always expecting money to be paid to them if they are going to provide a service to Indigenous communities. They get funding but our communities do not see that funding. They say, 'We build toilets and football ovals and other things you can utilise,' but that does not help our communities out there in the remote parts of Western Australia. If there was one thing the Commonwealth government could do it would be to change the way local government views Indigenous affairs and community organisations. We cannot even get them to repair and maintain roads, for example.

**CHAIR**—We have local government with us today. They will be on later, and we will put that to them. They will no doubt respond with great vigour! Thank you, representatives of the WA government. We genuinely appreciate the content of your submissions.

[10.46 a.m.]

**LEWIS, Ms Jan, Chairperson, Kimberley Community Management Services**

**NEWBIGIN, Mr Mike, Executive Officer, Community Housing Coalition of WA**

**CHAIR**—I welcome representatives of the Kimberley Community Management Services and the Committee Housing Coalition of Western Australia to this public hearing. These proceedings are regarded as proceedings of the parliament, and we would ask that they be treated accordingly. Do you have any opening remarks?

**Mr Newbigin**—Our interest in this project is that we are what is known as the lead agency for the Kimberley Community Management Services, which is an unincorporated group that is undertaking, as an advisory committee in the Kimberleys, to look at capacity building of community organisations. Instead of the organisation incorporating as a separate body, it went out to seek another agency which could take up the role of receiving and dispensing funds and administering the overall program for it. I was also involved in the original feasibility study prior to my current position with the community housing coalition.

**Ms Lewis**—I actually live in Broome, so I am a Kimberley person who happens to be in Perth today. I work for two government departments, but I am not appearing in that capacity today. I am appearing as chair of the advisory committee for Kimberley Community Management Services, which is a government and community partnership in the Kimberley that, as Mike said, is not incorporated but has an advisory committee and will become incorporated over time.

**CHAIR**—Would the Western Australians like to start the questioning?

**Mr HAASE**—Thank you, Chair. I am familiar with the people and places but, frankly, not the role. I know that you have been privy to some of the evidence given at the last committee hearing. I wonder whether either of you would like to comment on the question of taking government programs into communities, families and environments, and explain some of the historical mismatching that has gone on, as well as the failure of programs that has occurred. Could you enlighten us as to why you think that mismatch has occurred?

**Ms Lewis**—This is probably the starting point for the formation of the Kimberley Community Management Services. As a government worker with a lot of colleagues—because I am employed to work throughout the region, and I spend a lot of time talking to other people in the region—we all notice that the funding that comes to remote communities for service delivery is about service delivery; it rarely has a component which allows a community organisation to set up an effective management structure to deliver that service. We also notice that the tendency for government departments is to wait until there is a crisis and then try a bandaid solution—a quick fix—which nearly always involves an external consultant coming in and producing a policy manual or a plan or something that shortly afterwards becomes a document that just sits on a dusty shelf.

**CHAIR**—May I suggest that it would probably lie there for a while and then the problem would raise its head within 12 months anyway, and then they are back in there again.

**Ms Lewis**—Indeed, so the whole inception for Kimberley Community Management Services was to try to find a strategic response—instead of more bandaiding—and also a home-grown response that would suit the region and that would be supported by the region.

**Mr HAASE**—So what you are talking about is developing, within the environment you are trying to assist, a solution that will have practical application because it is of that environment. It will not involve somebody who has all of the theory but who lives remote from the environment and believes that they have the solution without any real life skills of the environment. You have said a mouthful—I think it is marvellous. Mike, do you have any comment on that?

**Mr Newbigin**—Having been involved in the initial feasibility study, it was very apparent that organisations lurch from one crisis to another, and there are a number of reasons for that. There are 11 recommendations relating to where the report found various weaknesses in management structures of organisations. One of the problems is that the programs tend to be—

**Mr HAASE**—May I interrupt you, because you have just said something that really rang a bell. You said you identified weaknesses, and that is an interesting observation. Could it be that what you observed was the reality of the situation, and to refer to it as a weakness in itself is making a condemnation? Could it be that the environment that you suggest is weak is the natural environment? Unless we can develop strategies and skills that take that natural environment, be it observed to be weak or otherwise, into consideration, our externally imposed solutions are never going to work because we do not even fully understand how to describe the existing situation. We describe it as ‘weak’; it is the situation. It is like saying, ‘My God, we can’t go out on the mangrove flats because there is no bitumen.’ There never will be, there never ought to be; we simply need to develop a system that gets us out onto the mangrove flats.

**Mr Newbigin**—In a sense that is right, and some of the management problems are not a result of problems within a community. To some extent it is the way that services are delivered. By way of example, there are some 300 incorporated associations in the Kimberley—it is hard to get an exact number of them—but if you take that and work out that the population of the Kimberley is 28,000, you are looking at a community organisation for every 90-odd people. Consider the requirements in terms of delivering services and the way that services are funded. I visited one particular community that has 12 incorporated bodies in it. It has 300 people in the community and it needs to run 12 committees—for education, the health service, the housing service, the CDEP and for the out-stations. Each of those requires an annual general meeting, each of those requires a committee, each of those requires an audit. There is no coordinator funded to run all of those services so it generally falls to the CDEP coordinator, who tends to pick up all of those kinds of responsibilities.

It was a problem that funding agencies would only fund a community if they could see an incorporated body that had that as its role, rather than funding a community to deliver the services. That results in a huge range of problems—such things as there is a limited number of auditors in the Kimberley so it would take, potentially, a year or 18 months before an organisation could get an audit and have an annual general meeting. Auditors do not tend to stay; they tend to be quick—in and out. Some of them charge enormous amounts of money to have

the audits done in Perth. All those sorts of problems are things that take resources out of the Kimberley and do not leave a benefit behind. That is a structural problem with the way that funding is delivered. While we are not proposing any solutions, there at least needs to be some examination of the legal structures through which organisations are funded and of the strategies by which government wishes to fund a particular service but not fund the whole community.

**CHAIR**—Aren't you a little harsh on yourself by saying that you are not finding solutions? Haven't you actually made recommendations for solutions, and aren't you actually involved in the process, perhaps in a modest way, of delivering solutions? Aren't you a little harsh on yourself?

**Ms Lewis**—One of the things we wanted to talk to you about today was actually the challenges in setting up a service to deliver those solutions. We listened to the group before, which are Perth based, with a Perth perspective on things. One of the biggest challenges that we found is that a regional initiative, without necessarily any runs on the board, with a lot of home-grown support but not necessarily the access to the people down here, has found it very challenging.

**CHAIR**—In other words, you might say of Perth what Perth says of Canberra.

**Ms Lewis**—Indeed. We probably would.

**CHAIR**—But I wanted to pick up that point. My understanding is that you are actually doing it.

**Ms Lewis**—We are trying to.

**CHAIR**—What you are saying is that the scale could be much greater, much more significant and much more regionally relevant. Back to you, Mr Haase.

**Mr HAASE**—I think we evolve as time goes by. Discussion goes around and around. I know that a lot of your proposals are in your submission. I wonder if there are any specifics of your proposal that you would like to verbalise here and perhaps give us a better understanding of.

**Ms Lewis**—I think the first thing that we probably want to say is that, when we did the feasibility study, it revealed a commonality of issues that most community organisations themselves were not aware of. They felt that they were struggling away on their own and that they were keeping their problems secret because they did not want people to know. It was only when they read the report afterwards that they said, 'Oh, everybody else has the same problem as we have.' They actually started to realise that some of the problems are structural rather than their own perceived failings.

We then had a challenge to find how to deliver support where one of the key issues is about building trust with people. The fly-in consultant may have credibility everywhere else but, if he is not perceived to have the understanding about the regional realities, people are not going to listen. In an ideal world you would have a mentor or support person in every single small town and every community that people could refer to. But that is obviously unsustainable over the long term and in the bigger picture, because those people would have to be there for a long time.

So our challenge was to find a model that would be feasible to make up and put on the ground. What we came up with was the sense that people need things and there are people around who can deliver them, but what was lacking was the bit in the middle that was putting those two groups in touch with each other.

**CHAIR**—That leads to basic awareness.

**Ms Lewis**—Yes. It would be a brokerage role. In the same way as an insurance broker or somebody like that finds you the best policy, what we were looking for was the middle person to help them find the best solution. In some cases, it might only be, ‘Here are the names of 10 people who can do these things for you,’ but in others it might be, ‘Let us work on your problems and identify what they really are and then help you find the solutions for them.’

**CHAIR**—Of course, you would develop some understanding of the capacity of those groups and individuals as well. That in itself is a lot of strength in terms of avoiding a lot of mishaps along the way.

**Ms Lewis**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Mr Haase, I have cut across you again. Do you want to press on?

**Mr HAASE**—I think it is all very informative. I would like to hear some real specifics.

**Ms Lewis**—About our challenges or our successes?

**Mr HAASE**—About the solutions proposed which, from a local perspective, you believe would work and which you have not been able to get through the ceiling at this stage, so to speak. Is there any particular aspect of your aspirations that you would like to elaborate on?

**Ms Lewis**—One of the things that was surprisingly wished for was a web site. Most people say: ‘Technology and Indigenous communities or remote communities? Don’t bother. Don’t touch it. It’s a big hassle.’ But people were very keen to have a web site where they can find standard forms, standard job descriptions, standard information on how to do this or that, so they are not learning and reinventing the wheel all the time. We are in the process of setting that up. Already that has had a large number of hits and is proving successful. Finding the funding to do that has been a challenge.

The other thing that we think will be really successful is that we have got all the community organisations that want the services and we have got the database of people who want to provide those services—we have done our work there and we have got it set up—but we have been unable to find funding for the person to sit in the middle and answer the telephone, take the inquiries and do the linking. The reasons for that are, firstly, that it does not fit into standard government programs. You can have a one shoe fits all approach, but this is a new approach—it has not been tried before—so you are cutting through barriers and people say, ‘Where’s your credibility? Where are your runs on the board?’ We are trying something new so we have not yet got that credibility. How do you get a break? That is our first challenge.

The second challenge has been that the ideology of regional development in the Kimberleys has been much more about economic development than it has been about understanding that, unless you have a strong community sector supporting your region—if the child-care centres do not work, if the health clinics do not work, if there is not the old person's home, if there is not the sport and recreation club—economic development will not attract the right people into your region to make that region grow. We have not been very successful making that argument with people who have got regional development buckets.

For example, if I am going to name a name, the Kimberley Sustainable Regions Development Program had \$12 million, but we could not get one dollar out of that program because the priorities were more economically driven. Despite the community sector being the biggest employer in the Kimberley and also the place where most Indigenous people get their first job chance—as a secretary, gardener or whatever—we could not seem to make the argument stick that community development was as important as economic development and therefore we should have access to that program. That was one challenge that we wanted to raise, and we have not yet found a solution to that one. That one is ongoing.

The other thing that has been a challenge is that the answer that seems to have come from Perth and Canberra about community management problems is that it is a training issue: if you provided people with more training, a lot of these problems would not happen. Before I started my current employment, I worked for TAFE in the Kimberley teaching community management for three years in the remote communities that were named earlier. I know it is not a training issue. I, with the best will in the world, delivered the training that people said they wanted, and that was in the area of community governments—what your committee does, what their role is, how to be a treasurer, what the chair does, let us practise, let us role model. When people go to meetings, another set of dynamics comes into play, which is sometimes about people's own personal self-esteem, the internalisation of oppression and all the rest of it. Some of it is about other family dynamics that are going on in that room. Some of it is about the external environment—for example, you as a committee may have to make a decision that impacts on how you live in the small town or small community where you live. It is really hard to fire your bookkeeper, for example, who happens to also work in the local store where you get your book up so you can pay your bills for your food every week. It is not a training issue that stops you. You might know what the right thing to do is, but there are lots of other things that impact on it.

**CHAIR**—Training is the last thing that stops it.

**Ms Lewis**—Yet more and more stuff is about training. There has been another big Canberra push for more training. You get a tender for the whole state so a community organisation like ours in one region cannot access that funding and has not yet developed the right partners maybe with the people in Perth who we might be able to steer. It is one of many solutions, but we certainly think that any training must have a mentoring component so that, when you walk away from your half-day workshop and go back to your ordinary life, there is somebody at your next meeting to remind you of the training and to support you and help you. That is the sort of model that we would like to push but we have not yet found any funding that wants to talk about that.

We are a little vulnerable to people saying: 'You're a government worker. Isn't this a top down approach?' I am, luckily, employed as a regional coordinator who is supposed to nurture things like that through. I was probably the only person who had time. It took a year to get enough



money to do the feasibility study to persuade five different government departments to depart with \$10,000. That is chickenfeed on the scale of things, but it took me a year to persuade people to give enough money for a feasibility study even to look at what we needed to do and then to nurture the thing to the next stage. Most people are so busy in community organisations—surviving the next crisis quite often—that they have not got the time that it takes to think outside their immediate day to the strategic response about how we can take things further.

Then there is that sense of partnership. Although there is all the rhetoric in government at the moment about forming partnerships, when it comes to it, everybody is still in their silos about thinking how to do things. Everybody says, 'I'll commit some money if somebody else will,' but how do you get the first \$10,000 out of somebody so that the other ones can then latch on to it? They are some of the realities that have taken us to being in year 5 of this process and still very much at the establishment phase. People are scared to give money for an earlier establishment phase unless they are committed forever, but they ask you about sustainability. They want to give that first money and see a big result so that they can show that they have done something about the situation. But they do not want to commit for year 2 or year 3 because they do not know what their own budgets are going to be.

It is a really interesting and challenging time with the regional dynamics of keeping everybody who was interested involved, because they say, 'We told you that four years ago. Why haven't you managed to do something about it?'; keeping the advisory committee, who are all busy people, involved so that they keep on coping with the failures of, 'This is another funding body which we thought we could match but we do not match'; and keeping the idea alive. People are still emailing us, the web site gets a lot of hits, we have a quarterly newsletter that people still respond to, we have got people waiting to sign up to join our organisation and we have had some success with networking.

We thought we needed to break that sense of isolation where people thought: 'This is me. This is my problem. My day is terrible,' and help people talk to each other. So we have trialled a network in a town to try to get community organisations together. We are trialling a network of like organisations which have all got a similar interest to try to link them together. In Halls Creek we are trialling a network of young people who are the future leaders of their community and who want to learn leadership skills. Some of those things are going quite well. They have all got 12-month funding. It takes you a few months to get it going, and then it happens and the energy gets going, but what happens at the end of the 12 months? How do you keep the thing going afterwards? It is not because there is no will but because people are busy and the money is stretched. They do not have that spare capacity for somebody to go to a network meeting if they do not necessarily get something useful for that day out of it. They have not got time to think about the year ahead; they are still thinking about tomorrow.

**CHAIR**—I will need to—

**Ms Lewis**—Slow me down.

**CHAIR**—No, that is excellent. You have put it very well, but because time will beat us, we need to ask questions.

**Mr HAASE**—I will defer.

**CHAIR**—Dr Lawrence, would you like to ask some questions?

**Dr LAWRENCE**—Thanks very much, and thanks for giving us a copy of your report which identifies the all too familiar problems. As you say, you are obviously searching for an appropriate funding security to enable you to get this up and going, and I certainly commend you for that. You have touched on this issue really, but why do you think nobody at state or Commonwealth level—ATSIC or the major government departments—can see the potential benefit of this, particularly since you have obviously consulted pretty widely within the Kimberley? What is it that is stopping them? Is it the short-term thinking about the proliferation of small programs? I understand all of that, but there must be something going wrong here that you are not getting the response.

**Mr Newbigin**—At one level I think so many of the funds are tied to programs. The second thing I would say is that it seems from the outside, from the community sector, that most government departments want to do the capacity building and have joined up government themselves, so you end up with joined up government happening in a silo kind of environment.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—So paradoxically repeating the same problem.

**Mr Newbigin**—Yes, paradoxically. So you do not end up with any access into programs, for example. Making approaches to government departments that were, in theory, funding regional development capacity building projects is more complex since they decided to internalise those projects within themselves and to develop their own strategies to deal in the regions. That brings into the joined up government thing another player you need to deal with to keep the communication going between the government departments. For a community organisation of our size, where you are always endeavouring to find opportunities for funding and partnership, it means that you have an ever increasing number of agencies you need to deal with to find out what they are doing on a regional level. I do not really know what the answer is. It seems that it is a programmatic approach and it also seems that government departments like to have their own involvement within capacity building. Maybe they do not see doing this sort of thing as a community sector role.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—Which would be a paradox. The thing you and everyone who talks to us identifies is the proliferation of programs. It is not just that you have all these incorporated bodies, each of them dealing with a program from somewhere—whether it is health, education, housing or whatever—but within that you have also got a whole series of little buckets of money that have to be accounted for. An exercise this committee might usefully undertake at some stage is to look at how much of each dollar that goes to services to Indigenous communities actually gets chewed up in administration and accountability requirements.

Because of your experience, rather than your particular submission to the committee, I would ask what you see as being the way forward in this area of proliferating programs and in a whole range of areas of separate responsibility leading to all these committee meetings and incorporated bodies. Is there a model we should be looking at—not an inflexible one but a general approach to government funding; and that obviously includes the Commonwealth—which cuts back on the amount of money that is flowing into all these different channels and enables it to flow more flexibly and without as many constraints, while maintaining accountability?

**Mr Newbigin**—From the point of view of a community organisation, one of the things that would be really useful would be for government departments to be willing at least to accept the same report and the same reporting format. For instance, we have one grant which is worth \$15,500 that has the same reporting requirements as one that is worth over \$100,000 or even more. So you are talking about providing quarterly reports to an organisation to get a cheque of about \$4000-odd.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—It is ridiculous.

**Mr Newbigin**—Similarly with the managing of the contracts in that process, you have different reporting dates, depending on the starting dates, and you have different reporting formats. Even in terms of financial statements, each government department has its own requirements, which you have to meet. So one of the issues that you find in community organisations is that there is no such thing as a standard chart of accounts which can be transferred across organisations so that there is much more capacity to exchange skills in community organisations and so that, for instance, a bookkeeper in this environment knows that if they move into a different environment there is going to be a similar—

**Dr LAWRENCE**—Whole set of things.

**Mr Newbigin**—Yes. So there is so much reinvention of the wheel, because there is no standardisation. Which funding body has been overseeing it is dependent on where you have come from. Simple things like that would be useful to look at, and in terms of funding we could use a little more flexibility about what is being required. Once you had that, money you could actually achieve some quite good things if you could say, ‘The priority has slightly shifted,’ without necessarily needing to go back and negotiate every budgetary line item change.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—Do you think there is justification for thinking about pooling these funds so that you do not have all these separate silos—so that you really think of the community’s needs more generally? Given that you need service delivery in areas like health and education, I think those funds should be absolutely quarantined from any suggestion of discretionary funding, if you like. Having said that, a model that is a bit more like local government could be useful, where you can decide whether you need to put a bit more into resurfacing your roads this year or improving your waste disposal or whatever it may be. It seems to me that we tie the hands of communities, whether they are urban, town based or anywhere else, by saying, ‘You can only spend it on this for three years and then forget it.’ There is a rigidity from the government’s side, both Commonwealth and state, which I must say is distressing. I have been watching it for 10 years and I do not think it has improved one little bit.

**Ms Lewis**—And there has been very little regional decision making, as well. The decision making is in Perth; the programs emanate from Perth. I am not asking for a slush fund in the region but something where the region gets to decide what the regional priorities are, be they in management support or capacity building more generally. Hardly any government departments in the Kimberley now have any discretionary money whatsoever, so you are always coming to Perth. There is a program where they want to do something for regional Australia, but they tend to want to do the same thing in each region, whereas it may not be the same thing that is always appropriate. Building that flexibility into their programs has a resource implication for them, obviously, but I think it is the answer. We know that one shoe does not fit all, and that has been

proven for years and years. Regional initiatives have a much better chance of survival and success if they are owned by that region and people have a vested interest in supporting and sustaining them.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—My electorate is in western New South Wales. From my reading of what you have put here—and I need one of you to confirm or deny this—you are saying that programs, be they capacity building or whatever, need to be developed locally but that the actual application and management of them should be separated out from the policy of them. Is that what you are saying?

**Mr Newbigin**—One of the things that came out from the feasibility study was that there was a definite tension between becoming an advocacy body and becoming a capacity building management support body. So there was a very clear decision made not to follow a policy line at that broader level but to endeavour to capture the best practice or the leading practice within the region in terms of management of community organisations. Because of the potential divisiveness of it, its role was not to pursue policy or advocacy lines.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—Are you saying that they should be separated?

**Mr Newbigin**—Yes, they should be separated.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—In other words, even if you came up with a scheme, a plan or whatever it might be, with all the local bodies contributing to it, you would look to have it actually administered separately, away from those bodies?

**Ms Lewis**—I am sorry, I have not understood. In general, there is a tension—I am thinking of my own personal work experience—if you are the support person in an organisation and also the accountability person. If people need help and you are the policeman they are not necessarily going to tell you what their problems are; they are going to hide them and gloss over them and pretend that everything is all right. That has happened where government departments have tended to try to have a project officer who is not only supposed to be the accountability officer but also the developmental officer. I do not think that works, if that is the separation you are talking about. I think the same department or the same organisation can still do it all, but they possibly need different people in those roles.

**CHAIR**—You need to look at the definition of the role, to be fair to both—and to be fair to the program and the outcome.

**Ms Lewis**—If you were asking about our organisation, could you clarify your question, please, because I have not understood how it would relate to the Kimberley region.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—Your organisation, as I understand it, has been trying to come up with capacity building projects, or whatever it might be, within the Kimberley region?

**Ms Lewis**—Yes, that is right.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—To do that, I take it that you sit down with all the families and the different communities and so on, and you try between you to come up with the best project solutions or whatever?

**Ms Lewis**—We want to focus on the organisation of those communities—if they have councils or committees or whatever. We are not interested in building their infrastructure—their sports fields or anything like that. We want to provide services that will help their actual governance arrangements work better. If they want skills which will help them write submissions which will get sports fields, then that is okay. But our aim, per se, is not to get them sports fields; it is to help them do the things they need to do to deliver the services better in their particular communities. If they say that they want help in how to plan for those, we see our role as helping them get that support to do their planning better—but our role is not to do it for them and certainly not to run it for them.

**Mr Newbigin**—Also, the decision to base it in the Kimberley and then to do a survey of the businesses was part of an endeavour to build linkages on an economic basis—to create a more sustainable business community in the Kimberley and to get away from the fly in, fly out mentality that has been very much a part of the criticism of consultants and the way that business is done in the communities.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—We are probably not quite on the same wavelength. What I am really saying is that, if that community comes up with ideas, it is certainly very hard for that community to then administer the finances of it. It surprised me to find out that, by and large, in most of the communities we have gone to recently most of the Aboriginal organisations agree that where they come up with a policy it is then very hard for them to determine where the money goes within it.

**Mr Newbigin**—There certainly are other structures in the Kimberley to do that and it is not our intention to cross across those. It is certainly up to individual communities to determine how they wish to manage their finances. At one level there is a push to outsource those finances to maintain that arms-length distance from it, but there is also the sense that that may lead to a disempowerment of the community, where it does not feel like it has control over its finances any more. So clearly there has to be a balancing of those two agendas. It was not our intention to be an organisation that manages funds. Our intention is to connect communities up with organisations that do—for example, KAA and those kinds of accounting firms.

**Ms Lewis**—The role is much more about helping people to understand what the options are: ‘You can do it this way, and this will be the good and the bad. Or you can do it this way, and this will be the good and bad. And we will put you in touch with the people who can do that for you, if that is the path that you choose.’ It is much more about broking the information and the support, but not about direct service provision.

**CHAIR**—This is probably just going over old ground, but it is an issue that interests me as well. I will try to word it slightly differently and ask you to step away from your role as it is and as you have presented it today. In terms of a general principle, in terms of separation of powers, in terms of the great difficulty of being judge and jury at the same time, the great criticism of Aboriginal organisations at times has been that inability to operate at arms length. Therefore, the political influence on decision making is what concerns many people. Of course, the government

has taken that action in the last few months about separation of power, and we now have ATSSIS and ATSSIC. That is trying to explain how I see it, anyway, in terms of that separation. I know it is not what you are about, but people have observed it on the ground for a long time. Basically, do you think it is a good idea to have that separation of powers?

**Mr JOHN COBB**—That is what I was trying to get you to answer.

**Ms Lewis**—I think the Kimberley history is littered with shonky accountants and bookkeepers who happened to be white and from outside, who also have problems with doing things properly, so it will not necessarily give you the right solution.

**CHAIR**—Yes, that is what I am interested in—

**Ms Lewis**—I think it is a resource issue.

**CHAIR**—because that is a common perception across Australia. It is a reality that I think Dr Lawrence touched on in earlier questions with the Western Australia government. There is the competency, the capacity and the damn shonks. That is a government issue, clearly. That is what we were talking about.

**Ms Lewis**—In underresourced community organisations what you get is an incompetent administration which is struggling to do the right thing.

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Ms Lewis**—And then they have not got time to have an informed management structure as well, and then there is the tendency for rorts to happen. We have seen many administrators who say, ‘I work so hard, I must be worth more. I’ll just catch the chairperson in the corridor and ask him to sign 20 things, and one of them will be my pay rise.’ That is a reality as well. Separating it will not necessarily resolve that either.

**CHAIR**—And quadruple dipping in various funds et cetera.

**Ms Lewis**—Yes, all those things. There have been some interesting structures in the Kimberley, though. There are some peak bodies now. In the Aboriginal medical service world, there is a peak body that looks after the funds for all the Aboriginal medical services. There is a group CDEP organisation that does that. But in the end it still needs some sort of management body, so there may still be the challenges. I think the real challenge is raising the understanding of people about what their role is.

**CHAIR**—In conclusion, in these things there is a great advantage in coming in after listening to colleagues and their responses. To deal with that issue—particularly Dr Lawrence’s—of why you are not accessing funds in terms of fulfilling your aspirations, a couple of things occur to me, and I will go to the first point, or just build into it. You were funded initially by a number of state agencies—I think they were exclusively state agencies.

**Ms Lewis**—And Commonwealth.

**CHAIR**—So there was some Commonwealth funding in there?

**Ms Lewis**—More Commonwealth.

**CHAIR**—More Commonwealth?

**Ms Lewis**—Yes, and that is probably because I work for the Commonwealth and could pull a few strings.

**CHAIR**—I will just name those agencies. There was the Department of Health and Aged Care—that has got a new name—

**Ms Lewis**—It is a Commonwealth body; it is now called the Department of Health and Ageing.

**CHAIR**—There is the Department of Family and Community Services.

**Ms Lewis**—That is a Commonwealth department.

**CHAIR**—There is the Aboriginal Affairs Department.

**Ms Lewis**—That is a state body.

**CHAIR**—There is the Department of Family and Children's Services, which would be a state body.

**Ms Lewis**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—There is the Kimberly Development Commission.

**Ms Lewis**—That is a statutory authority.

**CHAIR**—But probably a state body.

**Ms Lewis**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—And then there is the WA Department of Training and Employment, which of course is a state body. What sort of money did you get?

**Ms Lewis**—It was \$50,000 in total.

**CHAIR**—And who provided the most there, roughly?

**Ms Lewis**—The Commonwealth, because I work for those departments.

**CHAIR**—What did you say to the Commonwealth that finally convinced them? Did they get sick of you?

**Ms Lewis**—I had the confidence of my state managers, I think, who decided that I might be able to pull this off and recognised that it would be valuable if it happened.

**CHAIR**—My next question, therefore, is: why haven't we then seen them go on to influence a situation which actually builds the sorts of services which you think you can offer to your region? If I have read what you are saying correctly, you have an aspiration for regional development, haven't you, in terms of some consultancy along with fostering local knowledge and creating something which will strengthen your region?

**Ms Lewis**—It is not the core business of the Department of Health and Ageing. They have a management support program specifically for Aboriginal medical services—

**CHAIR**—So they would have been stretching to go any further.

**Ms Lewis**—Yes. The other body, the Department of Family and Community Services, did fund us. They have provided some of the first funding for developing the web site and for some of the networking. But most of the funding from the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy is time limited, and West Australia's budget is finished.

**CHAIR**—Therefore, I would like to pose the question that the reason you are not going any further is that you are actually going to end up competing with and to a degree exposing the weaknesses of a number of these agencies, aren't you?

**Ms Lewis**—Possibly.

**CHAIR**—Aren't you going to be pointing out, 'Hey, this is where you're going wrong, people'?

**Ms Lewis**—Yes, and saying, 'This is what you should be doing.'

**CHAIR**—Aren't you, in a sense, really challenging some of these people?

**Ms Lewis**—Yes, and they do not necessarily like it.

**CHAIR**—Are they getting a bit nervous about all this? They probably would not tell you to your face.

**Ms Lewis**—Remember that we are doing it part-time.

**CHAIR**—I am just a naturally suspicious sod. It seems to me that you have done some unique work here. You have highlighted a lot of aspects of our inquiry for us. We will be able to read it in about an hour and we will have done our inquiry; you have highlighted a lot of the issues that are of concern to us. I am trying to ask you why, picking up on Dr Lawrence's point. I am offering one idea, which is that you are actually challenging the status quo and highlighting those things which agencies should really be looking at more. You have mentioned the Perth factor, and Perth has a Canberra factor; I am from South Australia, and everybody there has an Adelaide factor.



**Ms Lewis**—That is some of it, as well as the rigidity and inflexibility of the funding; because everybody is under scrutiny about accountability they are not necessarily prepared to take a risk, and a new organisation is always a risk.

**CHAIR**—Let us sum up: what would be your dream? What would be your three dot points? You want to achieve something, and if you two were queen and king for a day what would you do? How much money would you need and who and what would you change?

**Mr Newbigin**—I guess the three dot points would be the following: firstly, to be able to secure funding beyond a 12-month period, and enough to sustain—

**CHAIR**—I wish you had not said that. You are immediately talking about funding, you see. I want to know what you would do for the Kimberley. Talk about funding at some point, but not as the first dot point.

**Ms Lewis**—Some people are visionaries and some are realists: I would claim to be more of a realist. I dream of creating a strong organisation that is owned by the Kimberley and managed in the Kimberley that will address some of the issues for community organisations in the Kimberley. I am not going to say that we will solve the problems of the world with this thing, because it is an evolving process that will obviously not always win.

**CHAIR**—So you feel acutely that the distance is limiting.

**Ms Lewis**—It is huge.

**CHAIR**—You made that point right at the beginning: when you go into a room it is not training that is the problem, it is the relationships and a whole lot of things that are happening in that room which no-one is dealing with, and they are restricting the whole thing going forward.

**Ms Lewis**—Every time someone comes from Perth to the Kimberley the air fare is in excess of \$1,000 for a start, so half of whatever grant you get to support an organisation is eaten up in air fares—and then travel allowance and all the rest of it.

**CHAIR**—Certainly the administrative costs are important.

**Ms Lewis**—Yes, so I am dreaming of a home grown solution based in the Kimberley. If it were funded to a level where it did not have to spend all its energy looking for funding then it could spend the energy that it has on providing the best services.

**CHAIR**—What have you done for the community? I have not heard what you have done for the community.

**Mr Newbigin**—I would say that people in the Kimberley can access the information that they need to make their jobs as managers of organisations easier. They can go to a central place and find a home grown product that is, for example—

**CHAIR**—Could I interrupt. Quite frankly, I am a tough, mean sod. I am not interested in making life easier for the Kimberley.

**Ms Lewis**—It is not the services—

**CHAIR**—And picking on public servants—I am not interested in that. I am interested in making life better for the population—

**Ms Lewis**—The outcome will be better service delivery.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. I am not putting words in your mouth.

**Mr Newbigin**—That is exactly what it is.

**Ms Lewis**—Our aim is to get better services delivered on the ground which will better meet the needs of the people. Sorry, that was the given.

**CHAIR**—I am a bit slow; I need to pick it up. Summing up, what do we want to try and achieve?

**Mr Newbigin**—There is good practice in the Aboriginal community. It is a matter of highlighting and promoting it and making organisations look at the practices in a way that means they can say, 'It can be done. We can look at practices that can cooperate and we can look to people who are locally grown to do the jobs that need to be done in the community.' It doesn't have to be a crisis driven arrangement; it can, in fact, work in the long run. Community organisations can deliver good services, but they need some structure that allows them to operate within a more consistent framework.

**CHAIR**—And yet that would facilitate a greater dependence, with greater transparency and greater confidence for everybody, on outcomes that would minimise the shonks and deliver the better outcome.

**Mr Newbigin**—Yes, and it can be far more cost effective. I think there is an incredible amount of money that is being wasted.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much.

[11.33 a.m.]

**GEAR, Mr Arthur Alfred, Director, Port Hedland Indigenous Media Aboriginal Corporation**

**NEVILLE, Councillor Robert David, Deputy Mayor, Town of Port Hedland and Manager, Bloodwood Tree Association**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. These are seen as proceedings of the parliament and, accordingly, legally so.

**Councillor Neville**—Thank you for the invitation.

**CHAIR**—You are here in Perth for your local government association gathering, I understand.

**Councillor Neville**—For Local Government Week—that is right. I am here with my learned colleague Arthur and we are here to learn a bit more about local government, so that we can apply it. I put in a submission through the Pilbara Regional Council, which is part of the town of Port Hedland—which is part of that as well—and in my capacity as a manager of the Bloodwood Tree Association, which is an Aboriginal organisation in South Hedland, which is a part of Port Hedland.

**Mr Geer**—I am the Director of Port Hedland Indigenous Media, which runs a community based radio station in Port Hedland called Mulba radio. I am also an ATSIC regional councillor of the Ngarda Ngarli Yarndu Regional Council and I am on the Port Hedland Town Council, but I am only appearing in my capacity as a representative from Port Hedland Indigenous Media. I do not know too much about the separation of powers because I have only just got in.

**CHAIR**—That is fine. That is pretty new too, so we are all learning about that. Let me be very clear about who you represent. This is the Shire of Port Hedland—

**Councillor Neville**—The town of Port Hedland.

**CHAIR**—That is the town itself, so there is clearly a local government involvement here.

**Councillor Neville**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Do you want to make a short opening statement about how you see it, where it is at and all the rest of it? Then we will have a yarn and I will go straight to Mr Haase again for questions.

**Councillor Neville**—It was interesting to hear the previous speakers. We have some commonalities there obviously. Having worked for an Aboriginal organisation for some eight years now in South Hedland, I can see where a lot of the issues and problems come from. They were talking about government funding—be it state or federal government funding—and there are also those common areas between the two about the pitfalls.

We have agencies in South Hedland which deliver services either in South Hedland and/or to other parts of the Pilbara. They deliver training and employment services, family violence services, which are included in the victim support services, perpetrator services, emergency relief services, drug and alcohol counselling, youth services, aged services, relationship services and even tenancy services. They all get their funding through either the state government or the federal government.

One of the very hard parts about it is the tendering out of those services. In eight years, one thing I have learnt is that that does not work. The tendering out of services does not work well in remote areas. I have beaten my head about with the state government in the last two years, where they have actually changed the policy of services in regional and remote areas. However, I am having to battle with them now because they have just tendered out two human services—the victim support service and the re-entry coordination programs for people going from prison back into the community and into work. Those are issues that need to be taken on board.

Even this weekend in Local Government Week, we have been talking quite a bit about social capital, as they call it. One of the instances they gave us was the local government tendering out Meals on Wheels. They were supplying the same food for a greatly decreased cost to the ratepayer; however, they found that the health of the aged persons was going down. The reason for that health decline was that, when they were delivering the food, they were not talking to the people about how the grandson or the family was and about the pictures on the wall et cetera. That is all about tendering out services—where you will get somebody going in there and doing, say, the victim support service. Somebody from Perth could actually get that service and they could fly in and fly out and deliver that service into town at a lower price than somebody living in town, because of the cost factor within those remote areas. So we have a false economy, if you like, in most of the towns in the Pilbara where the housing prices, the rental housing prices and the costs of things are just way above everywhere else.

The other area I have had a look at is the government agencies and the personnel. The town of Port Hedland is going to be very proud—and you may hear some more about that next week—about the partnerships we have got and have had with other government agencies. It has taken us two years in the area of safety and security to actually get partnerships with those government agencies.

When you have a look at the structure and how government agencies, including federal government agencies, operate, they put somebody in a very important position to help some of those communities and service agencies deliver services but we do not get the continuity of that person. It is very difficult in remote areas to keep anybody for longer than two or maybe three years, particularly in government circles. They are all looking to get the higher job, the next job up or even a transfer to Broome, which seems a popular spot to go to, rather than Port Hedland or Karratha. I personally have made the suggestion that what we should be looking at for some of those top positions is contracts of a minimum of three years plus two—sometimes up to five years—but we also need to be seen to be giving those people the proper resources to do the job, including housing. If they are coming from Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney or Perth, they have to have their proper four by two nice house, which is not cheap in a place like Port Hedland—or anywhere in the Pilbara in actual fact.

**CHAIR**—Can I interrupt briefly on this issue. You say that specific capital investment in a house—a four by two, as you call it— is not cheap, but if that officer is doing their job effectively, there could be millions of dollars of value adding to a community.

**Councillor Neville**—Most definitely.

**CHAIR**—That is the argument that we sometimes miss. I do not know what your percentages are, but you might be paying 50 per cent to 100 per cent more in Hedland for a house of that type?

**Councillor Neville**—One hundred per cent to 150 per cent. To give you an idea, to build a house in Port Hedland the builder would go in and work out the square metreage and whatever it costs in Perth they double it—and that is just to build it. Rents in Port Hedland depend where you are: in South Hedland you may be able to get a beat-up fibro house for \$150 a week, but if you go to Pretty Pool it will cost you \$700 or \$800 a week. I am talking about Pretty Pool areas where you would need to put your executive directors of government agencies, so it is not cheap.

**CHAIR**—They are just the building costs; land prices are significantly different, are they not?

**Councillor Neville**—Yes. South Hedland land prices are probably \$25,000 or \$30,000 a block, but in Pretty Pool they are \$150,000 a block.

**CHAIR**—I just make the point how cheap they are.

**Councillor Neville**—Going on from that, the federal government agency that we are lacking at the moment is a regional coordinator for health and ageing. I have spoken to that department. They in fact rang me about that. The suggestion that I made to them is that we need that position. It is not there at the moment for the region, and it has been a very important position in the past. In fact, health and ageing is one of the government agencies that fund my agency for substance misuse services. In my submission, when talking about government agencies and Aboriginal communities, access roads are very important.

I was at the national road forum and Mr Haase was there as well. It seems to me that Aboriginal access roads do not seem to count in anyone's mind. But if you are going to have a service agency deliver a service out to an Aboriginal community and you can only do it for six to eight months of the year because of the problems with the roads then you have got even bigger problems—you are isolating the community, and you are isolating the people themselves as well. I found that access roads are a big issue. We have been told there is going to be a reduction in funding by the state to access roads and also to Aboriginal roads by some million dollars. There is not much goes into that, but it is an important part and it is a lifeline, as we know. Roads are a lifeline for all of our communities; they are also a lifeline for the Aboriginal communities. You will have to excuse my voice—being in Kalgoorlie for a week and now Perth for a week, I get colds. It is just too cold down here.

I suppose that is it, all wrapped in there. After eight years working for the Bloodwood Tree Association—I do not whether I can find the right word for it—I find it very sad that we, in 2000, cannot deliver those services to the Aboriginal people within their communities and we cannot seem to go out and empower them to be able to do the job that needs to be done. From

what I see in South Hedland, the violence, even the killings, the family problems, the unemployment et cetera, I think: where are we and where are we coming from? We are certainly not doing it right and we need to do it a lot better than we are.

**CHAIR**—Over the last 20 years or even eight years—over a given period—you are not seeing improvement, are you?

**Councillor Neville**—No, I am not seeing any improvement. My first job in contact with the Aboriginal community was when I worked for a member of parliament, Mr Tom Helm, 15 years ago. I then worked for Homeswest department of housing, working with the people on the ground there. Now I work for an Aboriginal community. I can clearly say that if there has been an improvement it has been very minimal. But for the life of the Aboriginal people in those remote communities, there has been no improvement.

**Mr HAASE**—Bob, I know that you are extremely well informed through our past personal interaction, so I thought you would have been a classic witness for this particular committee. I have said before that one of the great hurdles to the veracity of these inquiries is the political correctness that we often engage in that refuses to call a spade a spade, and I thought you would be one who would be an exceptional witness in that regard.

**Councillor Neville**—I think Mr Costello hit on it: I work for a charitable organisation.

**Mr HAASE**—We have not drawn the line as yet. I would have thought, as you wear many caps in the Hedland community, that you would be able to put the finger on a few problems. I know the problems of South Hedland, for instance. I do not know the answers, and I have a personal abhorrence of outsiders that come up with solutions for communities. I know that you struggle as a council to have the resources to solve the problems. Tomorrow we are going to Strelley. You know the McLeod mob background. That was a philosophy that was overtaken by the government. I think many would agree that the aspirations of Don McLeod were destroyed by his own process to achieve them. Could you comment on some of the local conditions and how different treatment by outside funding agencies, research agencies or community philosophy-shaping agencies might hold a better future for the area of South Hedland. It is common from the goldfields to the Kimberley and then east to the Pacific Ocean; it is not unique.

**Councillor Neville**—It is not, and in my submission I said that the agency is very protective of their own little patch, what they do and what they fund. That is probably because it is governed by single family Aboriginal groups. I know that my organisation is governed by a single family Aboriginal group. Therein lies the issue.

**Mr HAASE**—What quantum leap is required of the base philosophy of our Indigenous people to overcome that condition?

**Councillor Neville**—I think what you were talking about before about the separation of powers is certainly an option that needs to be looked at. I think—again, going up the tree and putting my hat on—from the ground level, going up to local government and even to regional government, that probably the regional council would be better placed to be able to help with the administration of those services which can be delivered by the people themselves on the ground.

The regional council can certainly help with that capacity building process. It is well positioned. It represents all four shires and the 500,000-odd kilometres et cetera—it is there. We can get out of the situation we are in now whereby we have so many different not-for-profit charitable organisations vying for the dollar, and under the taxation laws virtually becoming a business. Yet when you look at them to find out who is the human resource officer, who is the IT officer and who is the risk management officer, that is me.

**Mr HAASE**—Why can local government be trusted to carry out the role for which we developed a whole organisation to carry out—that is, the role of leading Aboriginal and Indigenous governments? We seem to be generally conceding that it is not working as it ought? Why should local government be any better at doing that job in the long term? Could you talk about some of the individual tiles that might make up such a mosaic?

**Councillor Neville**—When you are talking about the separation of powers, you are talking about the administration of the dollars. There is certainly an option there for the regional councils. I have no hesitation in saying that the Aboriginal communities themselves should be doing their own capacity building within, but you have to give them the tools to do that.

**Mr HAASE**—Does that mean money?

**Councillor Neville**—It is more resources than money. The money pays for the resources, and it is the resources that they need in there. The lady from Broome was talking to the committee about training. It is not so much training that is required, it is mentoring that is required in there. I wish the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health would come into my office sometime and say: ‘These are our procedures, now how are you going with the financial system there under MYOB? How can we help? What do you need to ensure that, at the end of year, we are going to get out those financial reports that we require to be able to acquit those funds?’

**Mr HAASE**—Do you believe that local government officers and resources generally would be able to assist communities that were taking funds and spending those funds on services and that they might be able to offer mentoring if satisfactorily resourced?

**Councillor Neville**—If that were satisfactorily resourced, yes, I believe it could.

**Mr HAASE**—How would you then see a future where that additional resource was coming into local government? How would local government present itself to state or federal government assuring them that it would not fall apart the way there is a perception that ATSIIC has fallen apart today? How do we know that we are not going to be simply passing the problem elsewhere?

**Councillor Neville**—With local government you have got that separation of powers anyway, the same way as now happens with ATSIIC and ATSIIC.

**Mr HAASE**—Then without hesitation you say no, you can trust local government because local government has got a track record and it is transparent and it is okay.

**Councillor Neville**—Some people might say that you cannot use trust and government in the same sentence.

**Mr HAASE**—I agree with you.

**Mr Gear**—I am a person on both sides of this, so to speak. I have sat in on three regional council meetings now and in quite a few local government meetings, and the policies that are in place for the local government and the procedures and everything are structured properly, I feel. It is a lot better than what I found in my short time in ATSIC. A four-day meeting to make three decisions is not very workable at all. Their voting system is unrealistic. For a person to be able to be elected to a position and to sit up at a table and abstain at a meeting and not vote at all and not participate in it is very unworkable and unrealistic in this day and age when people are trying to progress themselves. I think the separation of powers, if we are able to work with it and not just be flogged on it and if we can structure ourselves in a similar way to local government, would be a good system of operations. That is what I have been finding in my short term as a regional councillor in the Ngarda Ngarli Yarndu region, and I think that local government has a lot of good things in place that can help ATSIC along the way. I have started trying to develop a relationship between the two and to get the town of Port Hedland to work with our regional council to try to incorporate some of the policies and governance stuff.

Through the corporation the other thing that I have been trying to do is to bring in a different governance structure whereby we set up directorships where our Aboriginal people are more accountable for their actions and for their positions. I think that the Aboriginal Corporations Act is failing us right across the board. It is too open-ended. There are not enough guidelines and the wording in it is too open-ended—you can get anything out of anything. For example, it is really difficult to try to work out what a quorum really is sometimes in some of the constitutions. It is really difficult.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—It is just not defined.

**Mr Gear**—It is not defined. A percentage of so many people—well, what is the quorum? We are working on a structure from what is called AICA, the Aboriginal Islander Communications Authority, which is a national body. Some people are hoping that it will take over from the one that was disbanded in Brisbane—NIMA, the National Indigenous Media Association. They now need another national body so they have set that up. There is a directorship and there are responsibilities for people in those positions. It also allows for non-Aboriginal people to be in the directorships through merit based selection, maybe through a minister or someone else.

**Mr HAASE**—So you are suggesting that efficiencies and transparent process are perhaps replacing a system that gave much more latitude to the group being Indigenous in origin, and now you are tending to discount the consideration of the traditional? Is that where you are heading? I have been talking about this with other groups this morning.

**Mr Gear**—We started realising it about two years ago. It was probably actually before that, but it is only since then that people have started to talk about it seriously in relation to the constitutions of Aboriginal corporations being unworkable for trying to get proper governance. As the regional council we have been looking at another model. I bought the model back from Canberra when I went over in November for a national conference held there, and I gave it to Barry Taylor, who is our state chair as well as our regional council chair, and we are looking at adopting a lot of the stuff in that.



**Mr HAASE**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—That was excellent. We are getting a picture. I will come back after I go to Dr Lawrence in half a tick, but first I would like to paraphrase as accurately as I can a previous witness, from the state government department, who said that local government does nothing for nothing. In other words, there is a perception about local government—this is not new; it is all across Australia and it is a response I have had for at least seven or eight years now in other inquiries. I could suggest a whole lot of reasons for that perception—I do not actually understand why there is this reaction to local government. But I want to share that perception with you and I will invite some comments later on about this antagonism to local government, particularly from Aboriginal communities, groups and spokesmen and spokeswomen.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—I have a couple of points. You said fairly bluntly that none of this effort has produced any improvement in the Pilbara. That is a pretty damning conclusion, and I guess the question is: ‘Why haven’t the programs worked?’ In a way that is what we are trying to get at, but in your local experience what is it that has gone wrong or has not been done effectively?

**Councillor Neville**—It is not a matter of accountability; it is about the favourite government jargon of ‘outcomes’ or results. They do get results: you get people in and you treat them then you get people in and you treat them again, and you have a sobering-up centre where they come in and have a shower and get clean clothes and go back out again and come in the next day et cetera. We have not taken it further. We have not gone on with the treatment. We have not got serious about the true issues—

**Dr LAWRENCE**—Which are?

**Councillor Neville**—Alcohol, drugs and unemployment.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—What comes under ‘alcohol and drugs’? They are symptoms, too, aren’t they?

**Councillor Neville**—Yes, but it is something we gave them, isn’t it? We allowed it to happen. Barry would know, for example, that we allowed it in South Hedland. For all the rights activists who say, ‘It is my right to go into a pub and buy two four-litre casks of wine and then go and drink it,’ that is fine, but you are impacting on other people, whether it is other families or other parts of the community or whatever, and that is shown right throughout the Aboriginal community. The health level of Aboriginal people is still the same, and you have seen in your own federal government reports that it is not improving. Alcohol is big part of that.

In our own town, working for a substance misuse organisation, I have taken that fight up. I suppose that at a personal level it is much to some people’s distaste that that has occurred. We have had some successes, such as the fact that we have had the Director of Liquor Licensing come in and say he is going to put restrictions on Port Hedland. Because of an accord those restrictions are on—for example, we do not have four-litre casks of wine anymore. We have developed partnerships with the police that say that it is illegal to drink in public and, because it is, that it will not happen. Because of that it is not happening, and it does not happen in South Hedland anymore. Five years ago you would find the town awash with drunks and awash with empty four-litre casks. Those problems were going back out to the communities because these

were people coming in from the communities and doing what we all do—if you are working in a mining town and you come down to Perth for a four-day break you go out and paint the town red, and that is what they were doing. But there were no facilities there and nobody really cared. That was the crux of the whole thing.

Employment is a big issue, especially unemployment with Aboriginal people. People talk about that, and federal government figures say that our unemployment rate is not high. But have a look at CDEP—those people are unemployed. If we put CDEP figures out there our unemployment rate would be, I think, 45 per cent of Aboriginal people. But have a look at the ABS figures: they do not show that because CDEP counts as employment.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—Some of them are employed, but they are underpaid.

**Councillor Neville**—That is right.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—They are doing real jobs but they are getting paid peanuts.

**Councillor Neville**—In my view, they are unemployed. It has taken us a long time to get the Job Network agency to finally turn around and say that you should not be delivering funds to a private organisation to deliver training, because that does not happen and it never has happened. They have now isolated those training dollars under the intensive assistance for people to say it can only be spent on training for those people. That has taken a lot of years and a lot of hard lobbying, if I can use that word, to the federal government to say that it is not working. It certainly does not work as far as the Aboriginal people are concerned, but now at least we have that option to do it. The governments, whether they be local, state or federal, need to work together in partnerships, and that is one thing that I do notice. Our local government will work in partnership with the state government and we will work in partnership with the federal government, but it is very, very difficult to get the federal government and the state government to work in partnership and that is something that state governments and federal governments espouse about partnerships.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—Sometimes you need fewer partners. Maybe some people should butt out altogether. Do you want to add anything to that, Arthur?

**Mr Gear**—If I may. In my short time working in and around Aboriginal corporations and Commonwealth and state government agencies, I have dealt with some of the programs that have been put in place. I will refer to one program introduced by the state government, which was called the MSP, the Management Support Program. I have not seen one single outcome from that program, mainly because of the way that the training was conducted and because of the way it was watered down simply because they were Aboriginal people. I just felt it was like a parent leading their kid to kindergarten. There was no real serious training involved, there was no real serious outlook on it and they went in there as a patch-up job or something to try to do a quick solution to a lot of badly degraded housing structures in Aboriginal communities. I have never seen any outcomes whatsoever out of that—not an apprenticeship, not a tradesperson, nothing.

I think a lot of the programs fail because there is too much overarching—people go in there with all good intentions, but they are not strict or stringent enough on the actual Aboriginal people providing their own self-discipline so that they get themselves out of bed in the morning,

clock on and things like that. There was some of that in place, but when you get a change of coordinator the whole things goes by. There are a lot of different factors varied in.

As an example, we had a community in town in Port Hedland called Tjalka Boorda, and then we had one out of town called Tjalku Wara. Tjalka Boorda was not eligible for MSP yet Tjalku Wara was. Tjalka Boorda got some kind donations from I think BHP through the Aboriginal liaison section which donated a bit of money so they could actually employ a builder. They had to go out and bid for dollars to get contracts and that to sustain their little work group, yet Tjalku Wara had all the money thrown in there. They got everything, the whole kit and caboodle—new shoes, new everything—but these other guys had to work and earn it and pay it off. That was a very successful program because there was more onus on them actually getting up and going to work and putting in a hard day's work. They all became responsible within their own team. When a fellow called Jim Martin left the team, they had \$100,000 in the bank as backup, whereas Tjalku Wara is a huge problem for us now because everything has gone. The houses have deteriorated and there is no real governance of the community at all. They are just two examples where one group had to actually work and earn it and think and do everything that you would do as a contractor or a person running your own business, whereas the other group was overarched and seen by a government agency and nurtured through everything yet they ended up with nothing.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—I will make one last point. You mentioned the problem with contracting out and tendering of services, which is one of the current fashions of governments, even though, as you indicated, there are often some intangibles—very important ones—that come with a predictable service being delivered out of a local government or community organisation that is based in the community. Meals on Wheels was the example you gave. The Commonwealth is moving increasingly towards contracting out services, training being the classic example—other examples are employment and so on. Through the notion of contestability a lot of the community based services are being put out there. In my community I have already seen—and I will be frank that I have a bias about this—community based organisations disappear and get replaced by the big corporate charities, who are bureaucracies as big as any the government has ever established. I will not name them, but a handful of them come to mind. As you said, they very often have to bring people in from outside because they do not have any local roots.

I am interested in what you think the government should be doing in regional areas. As you said, that is a model that might work in the city—I do not think it does, actually; it does not work in Fremantle—but it certainly has its limitations in regional Australia where you put all this investment into a community organisation, then three years down the track you say, 'We're going to give this contract to someone else,' and it is completely obliterated. All that investment in training, personnel, capital and so on is completely wiped out with the stroke of a pen, and, as you say, there is no proper assessment in any case of the long-term benefits to the community of having the services delivered by people who are there and are likely to continue to identify with the community and its needs.

**Councillor Neville**—It comes back to what I said about the mentoring of non-government organisations by the government agencies. They should have on their books what their standards are, what services they deliver and how they do their accounting. I said to the state government: 'You need to come up here and say, "This is a service that needs to be delivered to the community. What is the best way to deliver that service? Let's go around to all the agencies and

find out if there is an agency out there that does a like service.” There may be two or three agencies that can get partnerships going so that they can deliver that service together. If the state government finds there are four different agencies that could deliver that service and have the capability and the capacity to deliver the service and to apply for a tender—you have seen tender documents—then, fair enough, they may have to go out and ask them to put in an expression of interest to see whether they really want to provide the service. The bottom line, particularly in human services like victim support services and re-entry coordination programs where you are dealing with people, comes down to the fact that you want the community to deliver that service and nobody else and you want to make sure you have the right people there. I know you have your national competition policy et cetera, but I think you can put that one aside in remote regional areas.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—It was never meant to apply to these services, by the way. It is a real perversion of the initial concept.

**Councillor Neville**—Exactly, and I have made the statement in my own council that I will not see that in there. The government should be able to install that service into that agency to ensure that it can be delivered. If there needs to be some capacity building of an agency to make sure that it happens, then do so. That is the way it has got to be. You have to know what you are doing to write a tender. I do not know whether you have written a tender yourself, Dr Lawrence.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—No, I have never tried.

**Councillor Neville**—It is a horrendous task to write a tender. I have written many tenders and had success with some of them, but they are horrendous, and you do not want to do them. You need to set aside a week of your time—turn the phone off, say to your staff, ‘Sorry, your manager is not available now; I am shutting the door because we’ve got to do this tender,’ et cetera. They are absolutely horrendous to do. Also, they have just changed the rules. Tenders are in Saturday’s paper now. On Saturday I do not go to work and I am not getting the paper and reading it—nobody does. That is one of the other issues, but they have sorted that out and by putting the tenders in Wednesday’s paper. It is not hard to say to a government agency, ‘If there is a service there that is needed, go out and find the best agency to deliver that service and install it.’ That is the best way to do it. There is nothing about competition policy, particularly in remote areas. If you go through the records of the federal government you will find that in the past you would be lucky to get more than two applications on any one of those tenders.

I have just had a visit in Port Hedland from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations considering the other 40 per cent of the Job Network, which is the service delivery to all those areas outside the major towns, including service delivery to the Aboriginal communities. They invited 11 agencies, I think it was, from Port Hedland to turn up there. Two agencies turned up—one was my agency and the other was the Pilbara Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce. I told DEWR that we are funded by the department of education and training to deliver employability services to people—in particular Aboriginal people; we are an Aboriginal agency—and we have all this funding to do this and then you come along saying you have more funding to do the same out there. To me it would make sense—and, yes, I have my own Bloodwood hat on—to come and install it with us and we will just carry on and go and do what we are doing with the town based people out in the communities. But they have gone out to

tender. I am not interested in going out and writing out a 48-page tender document, nor is anybody else. It becomes very hard.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—Maybe you should organise a strike, a withdrawal of labour: ‘We are not going to write any more tender documents’!

**Councillor Neville**—I was going to talk to Peter Coppin about that because he knows all about strikes.

**CHAIR**—I would like to acknowledge Larry Graham, MP for Pilbara. Welcome.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—I would like to ask Mr Gear to explain his job to us. It is not one I have seen before and I am fascinated.

**Mr Gear**—I am the director of a corporate body that sits above what will hopefully be a multimedia group that will be like an umbrella agency over the whole Pilbara. We are hoping to set up town based community radio stations and also BRACs stations—Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities—throughout the Pilbara.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—A bit like Impaja?

**Mr Gear**—Yes, and a bit like CAAMA in Alice Springs and Goolarri in the Kimberley.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—So who put it together? Is it something that has been done locally? Under whose auspice was it put together?

**Mr Gear**—Under ATSIK’s.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—Was it?

**Mr Gear**—Yes. The previous regional council chairperson, Mr Adrian Brahim, and a lady from WADOT, Fiona Grierson, and I sat down and did the main work to get ourselves incorporated and then we applied for funding. All the funding we have so got so far is through ATSIK. It has been hard to get state funding—but it is good because we actually do not fit the criteria at this stage. We are working on it.

**CHAIR**—We are coming to an end if you have any closing statements, gentleman. Thank you for the comments about tendering. It is really that the market conditions are totally different to what the definition of pure market ideology might be.

**Councillor Neville**—We do not have a market in the Pilbara.

**CHAIR**—No. We need to be very strong in stating that and getting reality into the world as best we can. But I want to come back to local government and the comment earlier—and it is not an uncommon comment, as I said —about local government. It troubles me because that has not been my experience. All right, so local government and local councils see things from a local view—quite legitimately. But it surprises me there is this level of—I was going to say contempt,

but that is a bit strong; it is a level of lack of regard where I would have thought there would, as Arthur was saying, be some natural collaboration.

Can we talk a little about your experiences of local governments, particularly in relation to Aboriginal organisations. You would know of examples in other territories and states where there is a land council, an ATSIC council and a local government council all trying to do the same kind of thing. That is well documented. Can you give us a bit of a feel for how you see local government, its role and its leadership role as an important level of government in this whole capacity issue and also its own capacity to participate.

**Councillor Neville**—I agree with you about the past. I think someone made the statement today that we have to get out of the short pants, and that certainly has to happen. I am going to be biased here, being Deputy Mayor of the Town of Port Hedland and vice chair of the Pilbara Regional Council. I believe the Town of Port Hedland is leading the way. The Pilbara Regional Council and regional councils are leading the way as well. I make no bones about that because I believe we are, and I believe there is a bigger and better role we can play throughout the whole community. Yes, there has been that level of distrust, the same as there is within the Aboriginal communities that level of distrust of the state and federal government agencies. We have been breaking down those barriers.

The Town of Port Hedland had the first national native title agreement with the local Karriyarra people, recognising that they are the traditional owners of that land and have been for over 40,000 years. We have an agreement with the local Karriyarra people about native title. That agreement is working well. We have developed that understanding and put a list of priorities to the whole of the community. Within the Town of Port Hedland we have an Aboriginal population of 16 or 17 per cent, so we can see it as a win-win situation where everybody can benefit. In the Town of Port Hedland we have a very proactive CEO as well, and that is also driven by councillors like Councillor Gear and me.

We say that local government is the first tier of government—that it is down at the grass roots—but we are under that and we are the ones who get our hands dirty with the local community and the local people. We can work up from down at the bottom. I believe local government can have the capacity and can be given the capacity to assist and help Aboriginal communities. They have to get that level of trust. I know our CEO and our town have that level of trust with a number of Aboriginal communities, even outside our own districts. One Aboriginal community, Yandeeyarra, is in the Shire of East Pilbara—which is the largest shire in the world—but it is just across the border. The Yandeeyarra want to come under the Town of Port Hedland. We have a good rapport with the Chairperson, Willy Jumbo, and they want to be part of Port Hedland because it is only 140 clicks down the track and that is their home base.

We are developing the partnerships with not just the Aboriginal communities but also the state government agencies. We are sometimes the filter for the state government agencies to the Aboriginal communities, because the Aboriginal communities have a lot more trust in our local government as we are seen to be delivering services out to those communities. However, if we then go on to the dollar side of things for those Aboriginal communities, we certainly have to have a look at that and at land tenure and the payment of rates et cetera if we need to deliver those same services, and that is a federal government issue. I believe some six years ago we were the first ones again with respect to this. Under the normalisation of the communities one of

our town based communities does not pay rates, but we deliver a rubbish collection service, a road service—some sweeping—and a range of other services to them. We do not get paid any extra from the federal government to do that. I believe that is something we can do through working together. If there is going to be an ex gratia payment of rates equivalent, if you like, so service delivery can take place then that is the way to go. There are obviously different models.

The Town of Port Hedland is only one of the shires—there are four—in the Pilbara. As I said, I believe we are the most proactive. The other three shires are coming on board under the Pilbara Regional Council banner—which again is a very proactive regional council. I believe that can be a good vehicle for assisting in service delivery to the Aboriginal communities and making them part and parcel of the Pilbara community.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. What efforts have gone into submissions to the Grants Commission for financial assistance grants to promote this? You know the sort of general debate and dialogue there has been over the years. Has it been promoted?

**Councillor Neville**—You can start me on FAGs! We have just been informed that we are dropping \$160,000 this year. It is amazing that it comes from this federal government under FAGs and it is controlled by the state government. A general valuer from the state government came up and did a valuation five to six years ago, and that is what I was talking about earlier. There is no economy, if you like, in the Town of Port Hedland. Five years ago there was a big boom with the hot briquette plant. You remember the \$2.9 million?

**CHAIR**—I remember it well. Most Australians remember it.

**Councillor Neville**—Yes, they lost \$2.9 million. We as a community lost even more. The house prices doubled and tripled, rents went through the roof et cetera. So with the valuer-general using the five-year rolling equation, which is something that came out of the Ark, we are now going to have our FAGs drop by some \$160,000 this year, so we have to make some hard decisions. We do get paid the extra FAGs because of the Aboriginal population we have in our community in the Town of Port Hedland, but there is no recognition of the fact that there are outlying communities and that Port Hedland is a base. In the old days, I am told, it was the walking track for those communities to come to Port Hedland. That is where the service delivery is. They come to Port Hedland for their services, whether it is their banking, their shopping or whatever, but there is no recognition of that as far as FAGs is concerned.

FAGs could be a vehicle, but at the moment it is a vehicle with only three wheels. It is a little bit broken down and it needs to be modified. It could be used as a vehicle for the rates equivalent payment for Aboriginal communities, but it would certainly need some remodelling. The Town of Port Hedland was proactive when we put the motion up at the Australian Local Government Association about equalisation. Some of the metropolitan shires get the minimum grant, which they do not really need, and they use it to go on fact finding tours over to the United States of America and things like that. We can just afford to get ourselves from Port Hedland to Perth for local government meetings. But there are a number of ways that that can occur, for sure.

**CHAIR**—Coming from South Australia, I know there does appear to be an open-mindedness that I have not seen before about this regional-urban mix. I do not say it is not a tough fight, but I would say there is an openness that may offer some opportunities in the future. I will go to a

concluding question and a concluding comment. Regarding the issue about Commonwealth policy generally, it seems to me in my own experience that quite often the Commonwealth offers grand plans—appropriately, taken from a welfare perspective. I particularly think of Hedland and South Hedland because as a committee we did meet in the TAFE about a decade ago and I will never forget the Aboriginal person, straight of back and clear of eye, giving us a real pasting, saying, ‘You do all these things, you deliver this welfare, and then you create this issue to a large degree.’ I must say, it stayed with me. To me it cut right to the chase. I therefore make this comment: the Commonwealth delivers these grand plans and grand programs, but it is not there to deliver some remedial action when they are not exactly working—you might say ‘unintended consequences’ to be polite. Could you make comment about the relationship with the Commonwealth and where the Commonwealth, in its wisdom, does not always get it right.

**Councillor Neville**—It does not. The one thing that we do learn in local government is the word ‘consultation’. Governments are not very good at the higher level—I would say levels 2 and 3, which are the state and federal levels—at consulting with the local governments and the people about how they should deliver those services. They are not very good at it at all. With regard to the relationship with the Commonwealth government, are you talking about the local government perspective or the community and NGO perspective?

**CHAIR**—That is one level of this general relationship with agencies, but mine is at a policy level, with decisions made 20 years ago, which I believe we are still reaping the consequences of—particularly in the regions—but the Commonwealth will not recognise that and does not like to recognise that. That is why I talk about the dependency approach in welfare, in terms of the alcohol issue that you are dealing with. That is but one example. The Commonwealth policy has done a lot of this stuff, with all the best intentions in the world. That is one level. Of course, there is the interagency level, which is very important on a day-to-day basis. I am just looking at something which I suspect we have an inkling about but we never talk about very much because it is almost a given and is hardly worth talking about.

**Councillor Neville**—The Commonwealth are very distant as far as we are concerned in Port Hedland—they are extremely distant to us. It is as though the Commonwealth government are the fairies at the bottom of the garden—if you are lucky, you can go down there and they will give you a gold coin. The state government are obviously a little bit closer. I have always said to myself, ‘Let’s get rid of the state government and let’s just get the federals to give us the money and we’ll deliver the services et cetera.’ Ideally, I think that is the model you need to work on in the end.

The Commonwealth government are very distant, as far as we are concerned, in places like Port Hedland. I believe that I personally have a very good relationship with the Aboriginal people and the Aboriginal communities. I know that my local government has that same very good relationship. We are forging those relationships with the state government. Our next aim will be to forge those relationships with the Commonwealth government and their agencies as well. I think that is going to be a lot harder. Canberra is half a world away, as far as we are concerned; it is almost half a world away in distance as well.

**CHAIR**—Wilson Tuckey told me that he came from a family that believed in secession and that WA should never have gone into the Federation. I am a neighbour of Kalgoorlie, and I used to say to Graeme Campbell, ‘Maybe we should form our own nation,’ but we will not dwell on



that. We need to keep working at those issues and we have a way to go. Do you have any concluding comments just to wrap it up?

**Councillor Neville**—Just to wrap it up, my target, my dream, my goal—I used to be a soccer player a long time ago—or now, as I play baseball, my home run would be to see Aboriginal communities become a part of our community; become normalised, and be able to have their people work within the Pilbara community and become a part of the whole, just as one people. When I arrived in Australia in 1969, the Aboriginal people were over there and the white fellas were over here. It still happens; it is still there. It has not changed. My dream is to see that happen.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much and all the best with the rest of your conference. We are in Port Hedland this afternoon; we will beat you there.

**Councillor Neville**—You probably will! Thank you.

[12.29 p.m.]

**BRAHIM, Mr Norman, Coordinator, Aboriginal Student Support Team, Student Support Section, Catholic Education Office of Western Australia**

**GIGLIA, Mr Anthony, Assistant Director, Planning and Resources Section, Catholic Education Office of Western Australia**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. I remind you that these are legal proceedings of the parliament and need to be treated accordingly. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr Brahim**—I coordinate the Aboriginal Student Support Team at the Catholic Education Office. We are a team of four people and we provide support in Aboriginal education to schools and regional offices.

**Mr Giglia**—I am one of the assistant directors at the Catholic Education Office. One of my major tasks is the coordination of planning and resources for our 157 schools across the state. That means involvement, in large part, in a range of programs to do with Aboriginal education.

**CHAIR**—Can you give us a brief overview of what you see as relevant to our inquiry?

**Mr Brahim**—Within Catholic education in Western Australia we have three dioceses and the Perth archdiocese. We have the Kimberley diocese, the Geraldton diocese and the Bunbury diocese. In each of those dioceses we have a regional office that provides support out there. We have about 2,400 Aboriginal students in our system and about two-thirds of those are in the Kimberley region. We are the sole provider of education in eight out of our 13 Kimberley communities. Most of those communities are in pretty remote areas.

In our schools, our focus is to try and develop community through the development of children. In that whole process, we engage in lots of activities which try to empower families and Aboriginal people within the community to help us in that task. That is reflected in a lot of our employment practices and some of the initiatives that we have for adult education. I will go through some of the major initiatives within our system, and the list is reasonably substantial—you can cut us off if you need to.

**CHAIR**—Do not let me deter you, but could I suggest that you talk about three or four key initiatives relating to our terms of reference—namely, capacity to deliver service—and just focus on those, if you have anything there. Then in response to the questions you might include others.

**Mr Brahim**—So you mean the ones that relate to capacity to deliver service?

**CHAIR**—Yes, on our terms of reference. It may help us a little. I want to set the scene. Clearly, your parent attendance trusts are of great interest to us. Where you are the sole provider of the service, what particular difficulties does that create for you? How does the Commonwealth system of governance inhibit, prohibit or develop your capacity to do it?

**Mr Brahim**—I will talk about the parent attendance trust first. That is part of the attendance initiative that we have taken carriage of under NIELNS, the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, which is a Commonwealth government program. Through that trust, we have a consultant who works within Catholic, independent and department of education schools to try and get schools to develop school attendance action plans. Those plans are developed within the communities to improve the attendance rates of Aboriginal students. In that process, as much as we can, we want to try to have parents and community people own these plans. It is through that process that these trusts are developed. When a school is developing its plan, the schools will often do the groundwork themselves or our consultant will help them out. We go through a consultation process with parents and that could involve visiting parents individually, having meetings with parents or using structures on the ground to ask questions of parents about what is happening, what we can do to improve attendance and what support is required.

**CHAIR**—What sorts of outcomes do you get? Are you able to measure or give an indication of what it actually means in terms of the key issues? We are all aware of the key issues of attendance, literacy and numeracy and they trouble all of those who have been in the parliament for any time at all. You would be aware of the Collins report on the Territory. There has been a whole lot of data in recent years to show those issues are fundamental to employment and capacity. What are your outcomes like? How is it going?

**Mr Brahim**—Attendance has been on the table for a few years under our IESIP agreement, so that has been one of the focus areas anyway. When NIELNS started up, this tried to speed up the process. After one year of collecting data, it has not changed significantly.

**CHAIR**—You would not expect it to, would you? But you are confident that the mechanisms are—

**Mr Brahim**—Yes. The biggest thing is the fact that there is greater awareness of the impact of non-attendance at school amongst people who are working in schools, in the first instance. I think, unless that is put in people's faces, it is not recognised enough because people are going through their own daily grind of delivering education how they think it should be done. Secondly, with parents and community people, the consultant we have has been working with people within communities, making a big song and dance about this, presenting statistics and saying what the impact of non-attendance is, and that has raised awareness. That is probably the biggest outcome, but it is not quite measurable at this stage. But in terms of statistics for improvement, that has not changed significantly as yet.

**CHAIR**—In all fairness, I would not expect it to, but I am interested in the structure and what your aspiration might be.

**Mr Giglia**—I would like to add to a couple of comments that Norman has made there. The first and, I think, probably critical thing for us is that we have also attempted, with the Aboriginal people in those communities, to focus on the fact that there are a number of students there who do have very successful attendance patterns, to acknowledge that and to say that, while we have some challenges in front of us, we need to honour and acknowledge the fact that a number of those students have very successful patterns and that translates into reasonable academic achievement. In one of the other programs that we are looking at, the ESL-ILLS

program, there is a direct correlation between the number of days that students attend and the achievement. There is a direct correlation; you just cannot escape that.

The second thing that has been critical to us in the work of the consultant that we have, as Norman has said, is to involve the Aboriginal people themselves in actually signing off on the plans. They are involved in the construction—the compilation—of the plan and they are involved in signing off. So what we are trying to achieve is (a) a growing sense of awareness of the issue and (b) a sense of ownership in being involved as a partner in actually putting the whole thing together. I think our gains, we would have to say, at best have been a modest improvement, but there has been some improvement.

The other area that we have concentrated on with attendance, while it does not directly come under the attendance initiative, has to do with the IESIP program and the monitoring of benchmark testing, which no doubt you have all heard a fair bit about over time. One of the other things that we noticed is a spin-off from collecting the data. We knew what the attendance pattern was across the system for first semester. When we had a look at the percentage of students who were actually sitting the benchmark tests, we saw that there was a 20 per cent difference between the normal attendance pattern of those students and the actual sitting of the benchmark testing. You can guess that a lot of them were not sitting the test. We have been able to use that data to go back to the communities and say, 'If you really want to know, if you want a snapshot of how your children are faring against everybody else—and the challenge is to close the gap—you have to make sure that you get your kids to actually sit these benchmark tests.' So it has been a useful spin-off from the exercise.

**CHAIR**—Yes, so you really cannot base it on almost a false premise; you have to get down to basics. I will go to Dr Lawrence briefly now because I know she has to leave.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—Yes, I apologise for that. Obviously, in a very fundamental sense, education is what is required for building capacity, however broadly you define that, so I will not get too picky about the precise links with the terms of reference. One thing I would like your opinion on is something that has been drawn to my attention in other places, since we are talking about attendance. That is: typically in schools, of all colours and stripes, what happens is that everyone, in a sense, gets the education program that the least able in the class is able to manage, if I can put it that way. When you have kids who are not attending regularly, their literacy and numeracy skills are obviously not as well developed, as you have said; they require a different kind of teaching to that of the ones you commend, who come every day or quite frequently.

The best programs I have seen are the ones that separate those two groups. There is a step-up arrangement so that the more you attend, the more you are likely to get the comprehensive, focused teaching. You are not punishing the ones who do not come regularly; you are just recognising that you need a very different strategy in teaching them because otherwise the average performance goes down: the kids who are already well past certain concepts and strategies are not building on that in their educational program. I wonder if that is something that you have looked at. I know it is not widespread in the education system, but there are some interesting experiments happening all over the country.

Secondly, do you think it is a problem that the kids who do attend get pulled down by the ones who do not because of the need of the teacher to keep order sometimes? Sometimes, it is just a matter of discipline, let alone learning, when kids are not regular attendees.

**Mr Brahim**—Separation of classes has not been articulated as a reason, but we do have a school where students have been streamed because of their literacy needs as they do not use standard Australian English as much as other kids in the school. So they have been placed in classes and, once they do develop the skills to be engaged in the class where standard Australian English is spoken, they can move up to that class. A characteristic of the kids that are in the second class, as I will call it, is that their attendance and intransigency is greater than that of the kids and students in the other classrooms. We only have one school that engages in that type of activity officially.

Teaching to the lowest common denominator may be a characteristic of lots of classes around the place. All we can do is work with teachers in endeavouring to get them to teach to all groups within a classroom. That is one of the philosophies we are trying to teach all teachers—that they must cater to all different students in the classroom.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—It is tough, as you know, when you have kids who are not paying attention and are mucking up. It tends to pull everyone back.

**Mr Giglia**—That is not so much a problem for us in the communities where our numbers are relatively small and our adult-student ratio would be pretty small. We staff them initially at one to 15 in primary school and then on top of that we have a number of Aboriginal teaching assistants and other teaching assistants who provide support services. As much as we can, we tend to adopt a developmental approach that really looks at trying to tailor to individual needs. That is just another way of accepting the challenge. I know time is short—

**CHAIR**—You are fine.

**Mr Giglia**—Okay. If I may, the only other comment that I wanted to add to our initial comment is to give—this probably does not happen very often—the Commonwealth a pat on the back.

**CHAIR**—It happens all the time!

**Mr Giglia**—It would not seem that way from the media. I would have to say that, if it were not for the support that we get through programs like IESIP and NIELNS, these programs just would not happen. There is a message I would like you to take back from just a pure resource point of view. I know that at times the terminology that is used from the Commonwealth department is that this is supplementary funding. Can I assure you that, from the Catholic system's point of view, this is anything but supplementary funding. It really is core funding. Without it, we would not be going into parents attendance trusts in the way that we are at the present time. We would not be looking at benchmark testing in the way and to the depth that we have. It just would not be possible. That is one thing I do want to get across.

**CHAIR**—As someone who intensively grilled the department here a few weeks ago about outcomes and where it is at, I am encouraged by that.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—But all your funding would come from the Commonwealth, wouldn't it?

**Mr Giglia**—For IESIP?

**Dr LAWRENCE**—For everything.

**Mr Giglia**—We have our state funding—per capita funding—that we also get.

**Dr LAWRENCE**—But that is relatively modest compared with the amount from the Commonwealth, given the respective responsibilities of the state and the Commonwealth.

**Mr Giglia**—The other thing I have to say about the Kimberley is that all our schools are what we would term 'co-responsibility schools' and that the rest of the system supplements their funding. We distribute our funding on a needs basis. There would be much more funding going into the Kimberley than they would generate on a per capita basis.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. Perhaps we will go back to developing your thesis. I just wanted to fit in Carmen, knowing her time lines. You had some points that you wanted to make. Feel free to do that and take two or three minutes, or whatever you need, to go through any highlights that you want to.

**Mr Giglia**—If we are talking about capacity building particularly, I think there are two points of emphasis where we are concerned. There is no doubt in our minds that where we think we would be doing the best job in the delivery of education is where the community itself has asked for us to be there and where they value education. They have approached the bishop—this is going way back; Dr Lawrence; you would know this from your time in Western Australia. There was the establishment of new schools at places like Ringer's Soak. They wanted us to be there. They value education and they continue to be committed in the life of the school. They also benefit from being involved in the life of the school.

We have rolled out what we call the Catholic education communication network—a broadbanding capacity to every one of our 157 schools in the state—and the community also benefits from that. The community is involved in a real way in the selection of staff. They benefit from the training that we provide to sit on selection panels, to actually make judgments in those sorts of decisions. They get involved in a very real way in the selection of principals in those communities. They are exposed to the processes and the training that goes with that. They are involved in monitoring processes and the like for those staff members. That sort of feeds them into the process.

The other significant program is the employment of Aboriginal training assistants. We employ in excess of 120 Aboriginal teaching assistants across the state, predominantly in the Kimberley, and they are provided with professional development and training—Norman's work in large part involves that—where we are also hoping to build the capacity of people within those communities. Lastly—and I think this is one that we are utterly committed to—is the training of Aboriginal teachers to go back and work in those communities. We have had limited success in that area, but we have had some success. At the moment, for example, in Beagle Bay we have two Aboriginal teachers who come from that community, who have done their training and are

now contributing to that community in a real and significant way. If you are talking about capacity building, I cannot think of better examples.

**CHAIR**—Excellent. Thank you very much. Norman, for the 120 assistants who are predominantly in the Kimberley, what is the main blockage to their skill development? Is it literacy and numeracy; is it cultural acceptance; is it resistance within the community and within their own family? What are some of the barriers and what are some of the challenges for you? I presume you have a great input into their employment. Can you describe for the committee what the challenges are for you with these 120 assistants?

**Mr Brahim**—The group of 120 assistants is quite diverse. There are people who are in urban settings and who have had long contact with education because their families have been involved in missions and things like that. That is one category of people. In our quite remote locations, where people probably have not had a history of education, the challenges are probably literacy and numeracy and their whole engagement with education as a process. Connected with that is an understanding and commitment to what I call, when I am working with these people, professionalism—the expectations that we work with, not just within our own Aboriginal community but with the people that we send to a lot of our remote schools. I have worked in the government system and in the Catholic system. Sometimes we have difficulties with low expectations within our own community and when non-Aboriginal people come into our communities. We talk to people about that and work through that and get people to acknowledge that that is an issue with us. Once we get those understandings, a lot of our staff do respond.

**CHAIR**—I will go to you, Tony, in terms of the two teachers that you mentioned and the difficulties and challenges. My electorate includes the Pitjantjatjara lands, and we have a program there called AnTEP, which is a particular Aboriginal teacher program which has run for the last 20 years. The estimation is of literally millions of dollars—a heap of that would be Commonwealth money—and we have an outcome of maybe two or three teachers. Millions of dollars; two, three or four—I am not exactly sure at any given time—teachers. The challenges are family relationships, full-time salaries, the impact on the whole family unit and all the rest of it. These, I understand, have been the difficulties over 20 years. What I am going to ask you of the West Australian experience is: do you strike similar challenges? Is there a different investment that you would make in terms of commitment? What are some of the challenges for your Aboriginal teachers?

**Mr Giglia**—If you do not mind, I might get Norman to answer because he is directly involved in working with people.

**CHAIR**—That is fine.

**Mr Brahim**—The people that we are training to be teachers have been Aboriginal teaching assistants in our schools. They have usually been there for a while, because they have to apply and we go through a selection process. They have been working in our schools already. We have 10 people on the go at a time training to be teachers. So far we have about eight people who have graduated from that program and are working in our schools. Do you know when it would have started, Tony? It started before I got there about six or seven years ago.

**Mr Giglia**—About eight years ago.

**Mr Brahim**—That is how much we have got out of that. We will have another one graduating this year, and we will have another one graduating next year. We have got that many going. Each year we spend about \$250,000 or just over a quarter of a million to get these people through.

**Mr Giglia**—I think the challenges would lie predominantly with actually getting them across the line at the end of the day to complete the training, not to fall out halfway through because of either personal or family problems. Being away from home is a significant challenge.

**Mr Brahim**—One of the requirements we have is that our students do it through Notre Dame University, either in Fremantle or in Broome. A lot of them do it externally—for example, Beagle Bay is very successful. Why is that? Because they have a study centre at Beagle Bay. The people who are studying go there and get supervised by a sister who works there, and she assists them. These students are all eligible for the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme, ATAS, through the university but, unfortunately, they do not get enough of that and the supervision is not close enough. For example, some students in Derby study at home. That has been very unsuccessful. If they study at home, they do not pass—

**CHAIR**—That is an excellent comment on the challenges of the various models.

**Mr Brahim**—because, if you are at home, you look after your kids.

**CHAIR**—My last question is on the issue of those who start and those who get through. You probably do not record it but, anecdotally, would 10 per cent or 20 per cent get through? Who goes in and who goes out? How difficult is it?

**Mr Brahim**—I would say half of them get through.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—When you said it was singularly unsuccessful at home, is that because they are not getting any outside input? Is it that they cannot study at home? What is it?

**Mr Brahim**—You cannot study at home. I can call on my own experience, growing up in a household like that. You cannot study at home. You look after your kids; you look after whoever else is in the house. You get distracted. You cannot do it at home.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—You meant actually in the home rather than out at school.

**Mr Brahim**—Yes, in their house. If they could get out of the house and go down to the library, they would be successful, but the call of family means that they stay there.

**Mr HAASE**—We are really pursuing a sombre note here. I wonder why it is that we modify our training systems and even modify our expectations on the basis of race. Why do we continue to do that? Why don't we say, 'There are these jobs for good teachers in Aboriginal communities. We have some money to train good teachers to take these positions. We want that money to be as cost-effective as possible and we want as many children taught with good teachers in communities as possible. Members of the public, please make an application for these funds. We will train you, and the payback for that training will be that you spend X years in a location.' Why do we say, on the other hand, 'This money is for the training of Aboriginal teachers'? Then we go through all of this effort, as Mr Giglia has said, in getting these people



across the line finally. We have to put so many resources into making sure they do not drop out and we have to nurture them to their final examinations to qualify et cetera. Why do we continually do that, instead of saying, 'This is the target, this is what you have to do to hit it, and the funding is available to those who will put the effort in'?

**Mr Giglia**—We will both have a go at that one. We actually talked about it a fair bit.

**Mr HAASE**—I hope I fired you up! Get into it.

**Mr Brahim**—When I qualified to be a teacher, of my whole extended family I was the first person to go through to TE. Since then about 12 other people have followed me. That is what it is with teachers—if you get an Aboriginal teacher into a school, it does not just teach the kids in front of them; it has a tremendous effect on their family, their extended families and the whole school. That is basically the reason. From my point of view, that is the most important program that I do.

**Mr Giglia**—Mr Haase, one of the reasons that I think we actually do it is that in Western Australia—and my understanding is that the state government department has similar sorts of challenges—we actually recruit the majority of our teachers for the Kimberley from the Eastern States. We cannot get our own people in Western Australia to go and teach in the Kimberley. It is just mind-blowing. Anecdotally, throwing money at it is not necessarily the answer. So, while our remote area package—to talk purely from a conditions of employment point of view—is not as good as the education department's, it does not seem that money has necessarily solved the problem. But our commitment to the Aboriginal people, as part of our reconciliation process and as a system, is to try and do exactly what this inquiry is looking into: actually build the capacity of those communities. The best way that we can think of is to enhance the dignity, the professionalism and the capacity of the people who come from those communities and to get them back to be role models in those communities. That is why we have got the emphasis on that program. If we could solve the mystery of why we cannot get our own people within Western Australia to actually go up there, I would be delighted.

**Mr HAASE**—We could debate that issue. I think it is to do with expectations of individuals about their individual worth. When they give up their time to go and do good deeds in an environment where it seems not to be appreciated at any depth, they tend not to do it for a sustained period. That is my philosophy. You have attempted to answer my question well, but I do not think I have fired you up enough yet. Why do we make apologies or excuses or lower the bar for or be less demanding of some people on the basis of race? I hear what you say about role models and all of that—I know—but, given that you have a realisation that those role models are so important, why is there not a general appreciation that education is important? Why do we have people staying away from schools and formal schooling at the drop of almost any distraction?

I know we have talked at length here today about the desirability of beneficial outcomes and the significance of the consideration of culture and all it means in that process. Why are we so considerate and compassionate about maintaining culture when what we are here for is to develop capacity and improve outcomes? We are constantly coming up against this hurdle where we accept that there will be more absenteeism of Aboriginal people from employment and that Aboriginal people will not want to travel to a new area to gain employment, education or any

other very positive outcome. We accept these things as though they are an absolute given and I do not think enough people ask why or really address that issue.

**Mr Brahim**—I acknowledge what you are saying; it is my job to stop people accepting that, especially within an Aboriginal community. For example, less than three weeks ago we had an Aboriginal teaching assistant seminar. We started this at the beginning of this year and that was our third one. We are calling it capacity building. We go through this problem based learning strategy where we get Aboriginal teaching assistants to go and develop a strategy to solve a problem within their school.

The whole discussion about that—and we are all Aboriginal people doing this—is about professionalism. A lot of the people who go there are Nyoongar people. If they are late, they say ‘Nyoongar time.’ I tell them that this is an excuse that we use which goes against professionalism. Nyoongar time is right for social occasions but not for our formal occasions. If you talk up front with people and if it comes out of an Aboriginal person’s mouth then 90 per cent of the group there will take it on. That is the process we are going through. I acknowledge what you are saying—that there is an air of lower expectations amongst some people. That is what our society has presented me with to work against.

**Mr Giglia**—On the other hand, one of the processes that we have in place as well is that we have a standing committee of the commission called the Catholic Education Aboriginal Committee. That also has a number of regional committees. It is made up of Aboriginal people from each of the regions who are involved in a consultative process and who then make recommendations to the standing committee and the commission. The standing committee has reported back to each of those groups each year on the results of benchmark testing, attendance and the like, and we are actually going on with a range of initiatives. That group makes absolutely no bones about putting us on the mat in saying, ‘Why aren’t we closing the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students?’ Norman actually works with that committee directly; I attend those meetings from time to time for specific purposes. They are not shy at all about saying to us, ‘We receive this money from government and we have these goals and these performance indicators. Why have we not been able to more successfully close the gap?’

I do acknowledge what you are saying, but there are other messages that I have had given directly to me. I will tell you about one other experience. Last year I visited a remote Aboriginal school where there were a number of difficulties and issues that needed to be addressed, and I had a meeting with the local community. They were very clear in saying to me, ‘You need to fix this problem, otherwise we will pull our children out of the school. We want them to be educated and educated properly. It is not happening at the present time, do something about it.’ What you are saying is absolutely right; that is a challenge we face. But I do not believe it is universal—Norman might want to comment on CEAC, but I think it is turning in a number of instances. It is still a huge frustration.

**Mr HAASE**—I have one final word before Cobby has a go. I have written it all down and have not asked you anything of what I wrote down, frankly. But there is one thing there: language. From feedback from your school communities, how important is the teaching of local language versus good English in schools, general acceptability et cetera?

**Mr Brahim**—They are both significantly important. The teaching of Aboriginal language—particularly in places where language is still retained—is really strong. People do want their language taught in schools, so we do that; we provide resources for that to happen. In terms of learning English, people who feel more empowered and can express this a bit clearer are very clear about that, to the point where, when we provide information to them about acknowledgement of other forms of English—like Aboriginal English and kids using creole—and keep fostering that by teaching code switch, some of the Aboriginal community feel a bit uncomfortable talking about that because they want their kids to learn English. They really want their kids to learn English and they think that the maintenance of those other dialects of English—Aboriginal English—or of creole is going to interfere with the standard of Australian English development. So we have to teach that, no, it does not interfere. Our communities think that they are each equally important.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—Firstly, let me say that I am a Presbyterian, but I think that, without the Catholic school system—certainly, in my state and, I suspect, in this one—education would collapse. It is a great system. You mentioned broadband, Mr Giglia. Who put that in your Catholic schools?

**Mr Giglia**—It was the Catholic education network.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—They did it themselves? You funded it yourselves, did you?

**Mr Giglia**—It has come from two sources. The state government here gave us a grant of \$1.5 million to assist with the capital costs of that. We then received some other funds through a coresponsibility building fund. We needed about \$3 million just to roll out the capital side of it. The schools themselves now contribute to the running costs of it.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—That is two-way satellite, is it?

**Mr Giglia**—Some of it is satellite. In the remote communities it is certainly satellite.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—How many of your schools would be pretty much totally Aboriginal?

**Mr Giglia**—Nine would be totally Aboriginal; eight are in the Kimberley, and one is in the Pilbara.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—You mentioned the language thing. Did you find that your attendances went up when you taught the local dialect?

**Mr Brahim**—No. Language has been taught in those particular schools ever since I have been in this job.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—If you can take my meaning, was it not something that helped?

**Mr Brahim**—No. I do not think that that has been an issue.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—I know nothing about Western Australia, but in my country my gut instinct is that, when I was a kid, literacy was probably better than it is now. Would you say that the same was true here?

**Mr Brahim**—I come from Port Hedland and I was educated in Port Hedland in a Catholic school. There were lots of kids in my class who had literacy difficulties, but there were probably fewer than there are in a mainstream classroom now. The reason I say that is that there are a lot of kids, who have come in from communities around Port Hedland, who were not English speakers; they spoke the vernacular. So when they came in their English literacy skills were weaker. I see more of those kids now.

**Mr Giglia**—I will just add one comment about that. My instinct would be that literacy standards are probably at least as good now as they have been in the past because we now require students to be literate across a range of perspectives of literacy. There are a range of interactive media and the like that we require students to be familiar with and to use in context.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—You are using a broader definition.

**Mr Giglia**—Yes. If you want to look at a very narrow definition of literacy, I think the jury is out and there would be a range of philosophical debates around the place that we would not solve here.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—I was very interested to hear you mention that a community asked you to put a school in place. Was that an Aboriginal community or a mixed community?

**Mr Giglia**—It was Aboriginal.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—Has that happened in recent times?

**Mr Giglia**—The last one would be Ringer's Soak, I think, south of Balgo. That school has not been there any longer than 15 years, I would think.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—Was there a government school there?

**Mr Giglia**—No, there was no school at all. They approached the bishop of the diocese to establish a school there. Balgo has gone from being a Catholic school to a government school and then back to being a Catholic school.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—Although obviously you have to fit the state requirements, does being able to run your own schools in Indigenous communities make you more successful than state schools?

**Mr Giglia**—Like Norman, I could not say. Like Norman, I started my career in government schools. They would also be the sole providers in some communities in the Kimberley. They do a lot of things exceptionally well and we learn from each other in those places. I could not say. I would have to acknowledge that they do an outstanding job in a range of those places in very difficult circumstances—as I think we do.

**Mr JOHN COBB**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—I have three or four quick questions. I think the issues have been covered but I want to reinforce them. The first issue is the value of education. Norman, you were saying that engaging with communities is very much part of your life. How do you feel that is going in terms of emphasising the value of education? It is probably repeating something you said earlier, but I want to see if we could draw something out there. It seems to me that there is a huge issue about: ‘Why should I turn up today? Why should I bother?’

**Mr Brahim**—I think Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people have had parallel lives in lots of respects and I think it is emphasised in schools. I believe that we will really value education when we Aboriginal people control some of the schooling, in terms of having teachers, principals and things. Unfortunately, too many of our people do not have the success that is required. If you are not successful in something, you cannot see the point in it. I think we have to be part of education.

I will use my own family as an example. My family were missionised early, so they had a lot of advantages from having an education, but once the assimilation period finished, we rejected a lot of the structures of Catholicism and stuff and went out of it. However, because some of my generation started to get educated, our extended family and our kids have started to succeed. That is because I am in education and other members of my family have started to join in education. I see it with lots of other Aboriginal families. You go to Beagle Bay and you see those two teachers who are there now. Those kids do not just aspire to go through school; their aspiration is to study when they finish school. It is a reality you see that you did not see before. I think our valuing of education is growing where we have got good exposure, but I think we have to do better for people in some of our remote communities.

**CHAIR**—It is an unreasonable expectation in terms of doing better. With government and Catholic education, we are all doing better. It seems to me there is this whole issue relating to individuals wanting to do better. That seems to be a stronger catalyst than us wanting people to do better, if you see what I mean. That is why the trust interested us as a committee—the negotiations and how you create the atmosphere. That is the aspiration of all of us: to get to a point where as many as possible can, in their own minds, see a value. We have a way to go until we are 100 per cent there. As you say, in our broad society there are a number of people who will not see the value of school. There is that challenge with some of those ingredients, and the things you have acknowledged we are starting to do from a Commonwealth perspective.

**Mr Giglia**—The other challenge that goes hand in glove with that—if you look at a community like Balgo—is to have some relevance at the end of the day from being involved. If there is nowhere for them to go and nothing for them to go to with respect to meaningful work of some sort it is a huge challenge. I think society and government at large need to acknowledge that as well.

**CHAIR**—You were invited into the communities. What are a couple of the key factors when you go to an original community and negotiate? For example, Cape York has got a lot of corporate interest at the moment; the corporate sector is, in a philanthropic and—they would say—low-key way, negotiating to strengthen communities, and that would be a challenge for the

Catholic education system too, I would presume. There are some similar principles in negotiations with communities.

**Mr Brahim**—The challenges being?

**CHAIR**—Negotiating with the community, the Aboriginal council, the elders; you would negotiate and keep close relationships.

**Mr Brahim**—I think being Aboriginal is helpful. I communicate through people I know within the community, and having those sorts of relationships you can then engage others. If you can engage people in meaningful ways, rather than just for the sake of engagement, it helps. I go down there to talk about things that are beneficial for both parties or say, ‘I need you to help me to do this’—that is the basis that we work on.

**CHAIR**—I think we agree that attendance levels are a central issue—as essential as anything. Therefore, all the issues about how you encourage people to turn up are crucial. I can think of some really creative ways of doing that. In my mind, there is no difference in the capacity to get to a standard, whatever our racial background—there is no doubt in my mind. Do you agree with that? There are a whole of a lot of other blockages in different areas, but if you can get people—

**Mr Brahim**—I totally agree with that. This is the message I give to the Aboriginal staff I work with: if you want our kids to do that, you have to do that as well. That is a big shock when people hear that. When they reflect on that they realise that if they are expecting the kids to attend they have to attend too. And it is working with a lot of our staff.

**CHAIR**—I apologise for the slightly challenging beginning but I do thank you for much. I understand that we have sought you out and invited you to be with us and we really appreciate your time today.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Haase**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 1.20 p.m.**