



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
communities**

TUESDAY, 21 JULY 2009

JILKMINGGAN

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

Tuesday, 21 July 2009

Members: Mr Debus (*Chair*), Mr Laming (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Abbott, Ms Campbell, Mr Debus, Mr Katter, Ms Rea, Mr Kelvin Thomson, Mr Trevor, Mr Turnour and Mrs Vale

Members in attendance: Mr Laming, Ms Rea and Mrs Vale

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The operation of local community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with a particular focus on:

- food supply, quality, cost and competition issues;
- the effectiveness of the Outback Stores model, and other private, public and community store models; and
- the impact of these factors on the health and economic outcomes of communities.

WITNESSES

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Committee met at 2.26 pm

CONWAY, Ms Sheila, Community Elder

FISHER, Ms Irene, Chief Executive Officer, Sunrise Health Services

GODDEN, Ms Anna, Private capacity

LARDY, Ms Cheryl, Private capacity

MCDONALD, Ms Theresa, Private capacity

RASHEED, Mrs Jenny, Dungalan Store Manager

RASHEED, Mr Nabeel, Dungalan Store Manager

ROBERTS, Ms Jessie, Private capacity

SMILER, Mr Robert, Chairman, Store Committee

ACTING CHAIR (Mr Laming)—I declare open the public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into remote community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting and pay our respects to the elders both of the past, the present and the future. The committee acknowledges all Aboriginal people who now live in this area. Committee members are thankful to the Mangarayi people for receiving us and allowing us to conduct this public hearing here today.

These meetings are formal proceedings of the parliament and everything that is said has to be factual and honest. It is a serious matter to attempt to mislead the committee. This inquiry is about remote community stores and how we can keep communities healthy and strong through the stores. I invite you to make any comments that you think will help us, with the intention of making improvements to the current government administration of the stores. At the conclusion of this hearing, there will be an open forum and we would like to hear from any of you in the audience who would like to speak on the operation of remote community stores. This is a public hearing. The transcript of all the things that are said will be placed on a website. First, Robert will welcome the committee and then we will start the discussion.

Mr Smiler—Good afternoon. I open this meeting.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. My colleagues will now introduce themselves.

Ms REA—I am the member for Bonner, which covers the south-east suburbs of Brisbane in Queensland. It is a way from here. My seat covers the lands of the Jagara and Turrbal people. I am very proud to represent the seat that was named after the first Indigenous politician, Neville Bonner, who was a senator.

Mrs VALE—I am the federal member for Hughes, which is in southern Sydney. It takes in the Sutherland Shire and Botany Bay and goes across to the Liverpool area. The people of my area are the Gundungurra and the Dharawal people. It is a real privilege to be here today to hear your stories and to see what the government can do to ensure good nutrition for our families.

CHAIR—We are all saltwater people. I am from Stradbroke Island and Moreton Bay of Brisbane, next to Kerry. The Quandamooka people on Stradbroke Island live in my area. I now invite anyone to start the discussion about community stores.

Ms Roberts—Before, we were moving around and we would just sit around in the grass and the bush. Now we are all coming and meeting each other, family to family. The way we are now, we have got good health and we have got everything good. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, Jessie. Unless someone would like to speak, we might give a summary of some of the areas we have looked at already to give you some idea about what we have heard from other communities. We might break it up into three parts. I will start with issues to do with freight to the stores, then Kerry will talk about the running of the stores, and then Danna will talk about the public health message for healthy foods at home.

The first part of our inquiry is looking at the best way to get the food into the stores. The freight costs are a big problem. We are looking for ways to bring down the prices of the food in the store so that you are not paying more in the community than you would pay in Katherine. We want to work out what the difference is and how to get it so that it is the same. Freight is a big problem, and power and the electricity cost is a big problem. The management of the stores is a very expensive part of running the store, and I know that Kerry will talk more about how to run the store.

Ms REA—From the many discussions we have had and from the people who have come to give their submissions to this committee, what has become very clear to us is how important the managing of the community store is. It is important for not only the good running of the store but also the overall health and wellbeing of the community that that store is in. It is clear that the best stores are those that are owned by the community and those that the community has some level of management and responsibility over. Even if the person who is the manager does come from the community, it is important that community leaders are involved in managing that store. We are very keen to hear from you about the things that have changed and how you have made your store more effective. We want to hear about the difficulties you have in supplying that store and about managing the store so that it runs efficiently, sells good products, can support the community and is sustainable.

Mrs VALE—A lot of the things we have heard from many, many communities have been about the difficulty in getting fresh, wholesome, nutritional food into the communities. When the government is looking at closing the gap it actually starts with very young children and making sure that the children and the mothers have the very best access to good, nutritional, wholesome, fresh fruit and vegetables at a very reasonable price. We have found that in many of our community stores the cost of fresh fruit and vegetables has been exorbitant. Also, the supply and the security of having fresh fruit and vegetables has been very intermittent, to say the least.

We would like to hear from you about the quality and quantity of food and the reliability of you being able to go to your stores and getting a good supply of fresh fruit and vegetables for your children. We are also interested in how families, mothers and grandmothers prepare that food within their own homes and what kinds of facilities you think you need in your kitchens, how they are maintained and how they are supplied. It is a very important part of the wholesome, nutritional food that you can give to your children.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, Danna. Would Anna like to kick off, and then maybe the team from Sunrise Health will say a few words.

Ms Godden—Thank you for coming and listening to our story. About 10 years ago, we moved back to the community. My mother was born here but she was taken away later. Her two sisters and her brother were here, so we moved back to help them. When my husband and I moved back 10 years ago, the shop had very bad management, and you could see the health of the community went downhill.

The only thing that keeps our mob a bit healthy is that they are still really good at going out hunting and fishing. Just about every weekend you come here there is hardly anyone around because they are all down there hunting and fishing. They are really good at that and good at bush medicine too. They still collect that and use that.

I guess the biggest problem we had before was the legal problem we had with the last management mob. Even though the shop committee kept requesting them to get healthy foods and to do a bit of an upgrade on the shop, the people here, the shop committee, were never listened to. I tried to help my aunties. We asked a lot of departments for help but it was pretty hard. Then when the government came in with the intervention the first thing our GBM did was to get onto it. I gave her the report, saying how this bad shop management was really affecting our whole community.

Bad things were happening. For example, over the big holidays a lot of families' income goes down because quite a few work at the school. We worked out that that income actually brings in nearly \$10,000 a month from the school, so over the big six-week holiday a lot of families struggle. Once I noticed that the kids were not playing and I asked what was wrong. They were weak because there was not enough food in the houses. They were that weak that they could not even go hunting or fishing—

Mrs VALE—Could I ask you about why the families weren't paid? Do they work at the school when the school is operating? Don't they get any holiday pay?

Ms Godden—Most workers there are casual. It is only now since I have written up reports that they are pushing for people to get holiday pay. Now there are four, I think, that get holiday pay. My husband is an assistant teacher so he gets holiday pay and there are a couple of others too that get holiday pay, so that is really good.

But since the stores have come in, and the government put in \$100,000, I think, to upgrade the shop, it is so good that you can actually go there and get lettuce and a few other vegetables and things like that. It is really good—except for the prices. My sister went to get something the other day and said it was too pricey and so she did not get it. But at least it is there and available,

and it was not before. Before, there was no fruit or anything like that. The shop was actually the lowest on availability of fruit and veg and all that.

Mrs VALE—Anna, is there any tradition of growing market gardens or community gardens or home gardens here where vegies or fruit can be grown?

Ms Godden—We have got a seasonal vegie garden up there and a poultry farm. But, as I say, it is seasonal so you will have heaps sometimes. One time we were inundated with squash, and there is only so much soup that you can make. Because of the state the shop was in, I actually helped to start up three food and nutrition programs. Our school has a food and nutrition program, the crèche, and at another time we even had a food and nutrition program for the men that worked on CDEP. When that was running it was really good, because the blokes that do a bit of work would come and have their smoko and then they had the strength to keep working. We had people working right up to the afternoon time so that was a good thing too.

Mrs VALE—Anna, you do not have any refrigeration facilities, so if you did have a bumper crop of squash and you made soup you could not freeze any of it for future use.

Ms Godden—Yes, that is another problem—storage. Even where we live, I have just got two shelves to store all my groceries, because we are just in a little house. Everywhere else there is a lack of storage. We are really happy now because the school is getting a brand-new kitchen. You can drive past and have a look at it if you want to. Before it was a little, pokey thing. All up, the school was doing something like 1,200 meals a day, because they do breakfasts, a bit of smoko and lunch too. That little, pokey room made it really hard. There is not really good storage for fresh things. We are hoping that, with the new kitchen, which will have a big cooler room, we will be able to give our kids more soups loaded with vegies.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, Anna. We will come back to you and ask you more about that kitchen. Can I also ask the Sunrise Health representatives if they want to make an introductory statement?

Ms Fisher—I have a few pages here that I wanted to read from. Is that all right?

ACTING CHAIR—If you could just speak to it, because we will take that copy. It is more important that you make the key points verbally now and then we will get to the other community members.

Ms Fisher—I would prefer if I could just read it out; it is only a couple of pages. I cannot just pull out bits, because it all kind of flows.

ACTING CHAIR—Have a think about it and we might come back to you if you wish to make some key points, because we take that document as a written submission. I would like to ask the other ladies about their experiences with the store. Lorraine was telling me that she is a keen shopper at the store.

Ms McDonald—I am a TO like Jessie and Sheila. We all look at the shop for vegies for old people. I am on dialysis. I always go to the shop to ask Bill if there are any vegies there for me and all the women and kids. The kids that go to the clinic have low iron. We tell all the mothers

to take care of their kids and buy good food. Our shop is getting good but it is small when you go in. We always nearly bump ourselves because it is too small. When we have run out of vegies or chicken or steak we tell Bill to order some. The shop is coming good. A lot of stuff comes from down south or from Darwin every Tuesday morning or Thursday. One of my girls, my last daughter, Leonie McDonald, is working at the shop. She works with Bill and Lorraine. He has done a good job at the shop. I talk to Jessie, Sheila and Robert. They need a couple of young people to help them at the shop. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, Theresa. What you were saying was that the store is a bit crowded at busy times and you are worried that some of the young kids are still not getting good nutrition and that they have low iron levels.

Ms McDonald—My sister daughter was taken to the clinic on Monday morning for a check-up. She needs good food because she has low iron. I talk to my family about buying good food at the shop.

Ms REA—Is good food expensive at the shop?

Ms McDonald—The veggies are sometimes \$7 or \$10. I buy myself good veggies because I am on dialysis. I come every morning. On pay day week it is too crowded and we have to wait outside. Some younger people do shopping and the older people wait outside.

Mrs VALE—How many pieces of fruit do the children get a day?

Ms McDonald—Their mothers get every Tuesday and some women get Thursday and all the pensioners get Thursday—we buy a lot of fruit here. When the fruit runs out, we tell Nabeel to order some more.

Mrs VALE—Do you just buy enough fruit for your family for a day or for two days and then go back to the store to buy more?

Ms McDonald—I normally just buy on Tuesdays. When Leonie gets his pay he buys some more for the kids and I buy some more for them and for myself.

ACTING CHAIR—Is that because the deliveries are on Tuesdays and Thursdays?

Ms McDonald—No. There is still a lot of fruit inside there. There are bananas, oranges, apples and grapes here. We buy them. We do not spend our money in Mataranka; we spend our money here.

Ms Fisher—I can give some data on the last market basket survey in 2008. It was \$721 for Jilkminggan and the availability was at 57 per cent. This was \$180 more than the costs of the same market basket in Katherine town, where the availability is 100 per cent. So not only do you have high prices but you do not always have the stock.

ACTING CHAIR—When was that taken?

Ms Fisher—In May 2008.

ACTING CHAIR—Before or after Outback Stores?

Ms Fisher—Just prior to Outback Stores coming in. They came in in July I believe.

ACTING CHAIR—Can that survey be repeated in the next few months?

Ms Fisher—Yes, they will be doing another survey.

ACTING CHAIR—Who is ‘they’?

Ms Fisher—It is done for the Territory government, but our nutritionists do it in our region.

Ms REA—How many nutritionists do you have?

Ms Fisher—We did have three, but we are now down to two. We are just advertising for a third one.

Ms REA—That covers what region?

Ms Fisher—Out to Bulman and Nooka, which is 112,000 square kilometres. There are 10 remote communities that we service.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you want to make some other points?

Ms Fisher—I am very disappointed. I spent a long time working on this.

Ms REA—We have to make sure that we see the store.

Ms Fisher—As was stated at the start, nutrition is fundamental to good health, to the growth and development of children and in the older years. We know how high mortality rates are in our regions and the high level of chronic disease and the impact we just heard about of people with kidney disease. Whilst it has been pleasing to see Outback Stores have brought improvements to communities, there are still issues of concern to us, and one is about the cost of food and the variety. You touched on the importance of freight subsidies for the supply of good food. I think we also need to investigate a bit more the food packaging.

ACTING CHAIR—In what way?

Ms Fisher—To reduce the costs of food.

ACTING CHAIR—What do you mean by that?

Ms Fisher—The more you package a food, the more expensive it is. The competitive prices with regional centres continue to pull people away from the store. If you increased culturally appropriate marketing to encourage local shopping, that would be really important. Also, you could expand the concept of what a store is. What we have at the moment is a mainstream, western idea of the supermarket. It is a focal point of business enterprise in communities. There

are other avenues to link in with cultural activities that you promote in the community, whether you have a market or you sell art. It is a focal point for social development. It is a gathering place. One thing we would recommend is chairs and tables to become a real social place, a focal point, within the community. You could do health promotion activities, have community meetings and do fun things too. We still have high rates of anaemia in our community. I said it was great that we had outback stores. It is a start. It has not impacted on the health status yet, despite what people might say. It looks good, but it has not impacted on health yet.

Mrs VALE—Irene, how long would you think—from your organisation's point of view—it would take for the health impact to be observable within communities?

Ms Fisher—I certainly would hope to see a reduction in anaemia rates within six months. It is a bit hard to measure those things. As a health service you artificially intervene and give iron injections, so you are not really measuring the underlying problems of lack of access to good nutrition. There was another point.

Mrs VALE—Is anaemia very prevalent in this community?

Ms Fisher—Yes. It is in the low 60 per cent area.

Mrs VALE—Is that because of the lack of availability of red meat?

Ms Fisher—There are a number of causes of anaemia. One is about intake of iron-rich foods. The other is that drinking a lot of tea with foods affects absorption of iron.

ACTING CHAIR—Infestation of worms?

Ms Fisher—There are hookworm infestations. I was going to say another one but it has gone out of my head. Children's anaemia rates are a really sensitive indicator for the health of the community. When things are going wrong, you start seeing it in children. I think the other issue of concern is the licensing of stores for five years. It has come under the Northern Territory emergency response legislation. What happens after the five years? What happens to outback stores? Do they go further outback? I do not know where they go.

Mrs VALE—I think governments of both persuasions will be keeping a very close eye on how that eventuates.

Ms Fisher—It is good that we have improved stuff. It has taken away from business enterprise and ownership for the community in itself. It is the only private business enterprise in this community. If we are talking about closing the gap and getting people to own their own homes and have real jobs, we have to start having real businesses that the community participate in and own.

Mrs VALE—Irene, might I just say that one thing we have observed—and Indigenous communities have come back to government on this—is that, when community stores are not run appropriately, they do not do those things for the people.

Ms Fisher—I fully agree that there have been massive problems of governance of community stores. There has been nepotism.

Mrs VALE—It has been appalling.

Ms Fisher—Yes, awful. We have worked in partnership for many years with the Fred Hollows Foundation to try and overcome those barriers. We know the barriers that were there in communities. But it is a business enterprise.

Mrs VALE—Absolutely.

ACTING CHAIR—Thanks, Irene. Could we hear from the store managers now? Thank you. We will be tabling that document, Irene, if you are happy. It will be tabled as a submission.

Ms Fisher—Yes.

Mr Rasheed—I am one of the store managers. My wife, Jenny, and I manage the store. We came here just before Christmas, just prior to the store opening after the redevelopment. We arrived about two days before the official opening. We really had not seen what the store was like before until today. The difference in the store now is unbelievable and you people will see that when you have a look. As far as nutrition is concerned, in the last nine weeks our fruit and veg sales have doubled. We had a week when fruit and veg were featured. We had demonstrations which Sunrise did with us. We greatly appreciated that. Since then, sales have improved greatly. I have noticed that I have to order extras all the time. I think that is great.

We have bananas and things like that displayed on the counters, and the children are eating more bananas and that than they were. I started off buying two cases of bananas a week and now I am up to three cases, and I am starting to run out having bought three. Sales are building. It depends on the quality of the fruit and on the season. At the moment, citrus is in season and we are selling a lot of citrus. As far as the store goes, we find it is a great focus point. We have found there is harmony in the community from the store. It is terrific. It is a meeting place for them. There is a real good social atmosphere in the store. I can see they like coming into the store. They are a happy mob.

ACTING CHAIR—Can we join you at the store in about 10 minutes?

Mr Rasheed—No worries.

ACTING CHAIR—We will meet you over there after we finish off with a few more questions with the community.

Mr Rasheed—We will see you there.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you for your submission.

Ms REA—The committee has discovered how important the communities' involvement is in the running and the management of the stores. I want to find out what happens here. How involved are the leaders of the community in what is purchased for the store and how the store is

run. Can somebody tell me that? How much is the community involved in the management of the store? The committee has heard previously that there are differing levels of involvement. I want to know what happens here.

Mrs Rasheed—There is a lot of variation in the involvement. For instance, there is a money story held every three months when Outback Stores come here. They engage with the community, particularly the leaders in the community, about what has been happening in the three-month period in regard to sales—fruit and veg sales and the percentages, and tobacco sales and the percentages. That involves the community and of course the staff working in the store. Is that the angle you were wanting?

Ms REA—Yes.

Mrs Rasheed—We have had the same staff for a while. We have had Leonie and Lorraine, who are sitting behind me, for nearly the last seven months. The community also are involved by just coming up to me and saying, ‘Jenny, can you please get this in’ or ‘Can you order this in.’ Those requests are followed up.

ACTING CHAIR—Robert, could you say something as well about the community involvement.

Mr Smiler—About Outback Stores? They used to come out every 18 months to our committee meeting; that is when they would come down. As we are now, our Outback Store is running really well. That is what they come for: really for the money story. We had to wait 18 months.

ACTING CHAIR—Is it working well? Are you happy with that?

Mr Smiler—Yes, it is working really well. Everybody has to do all the shopping, and that is really good. I am happy myself as well.

Mrs VALE—I wonder if I could ask Jenny something. Jenny, if any of the mothers and grandmothers have any requests for particular fruit or vegetables or any particular lines, are they able to come to you and have a discussion about what they would perhaps like to see on your shelves?

Mrs Rasheed—Yes, sure.

Mrs VALE—What I am saying is: is there any sort of community consultation process you have when it comes to the ordering and what you provide on the shelves?

Mrs Rasheed—It is usually done on an individual request basis, because they approach me individually. It is not generally done in a group situation, because the running of the store is quite a job, as you can well imagine. It is basically hands on all the time, and there is not a lot of time to actually engage in meetings often. But we are very approachable and people will come up if they have requests, whether they be grandmothers or mothers.

Mrs VALE—As long as the community feels it is getting access to have its needs heard and registered.

Mrs Rasheed—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much. We might just ask some more questions of the locals, so can we meet you over at the store.

Mr Rasheed—Yes, we will go over there now. No worries.

ACTING CHAIR—We will see you over there in a second. I am sure we have some finishing questions, everyone, but I will ask Robert and the ladies here in particular some questions about how they think the store is going. Let me start with one, but I will wait till you guys have gone.

Ms REA—I just want to know what happens at the school. Anna, maybe you can tell me. You said that they do breakfast, smoko and lunch. Do the parents provide that at school? How does that work? Who pays for it?

Ms Godden—The parents, every time they get their Centrelink money—when the Centrepay comes out. I forget the price. I pay \$100 a fortnight for my two children. It is a bit more if you have two or more children. Also, I am pretty sure you guys put some in, didn't you? I think we got a bit of money from the government mob too—some department—just to top it up at one point.

Ms REA—Who makes it?

Ms Godden—We have three staff there at the moment. There is Karla, the coordinator, and she has two helpers, Sandra and Josephine. That is it. Anything else?

Ms REA—No, that is it.

Mrs VALE—Anna, do you feel that you can have any of your needs expressed to the store managers? If you have a particular line of fruit or vegetable or a particular grocery product that you need, do you feel that you can have dialogue—that it is okay?

Ms Godden—Definitely, with Jenny and Nabeel. They are the best managers we have had for 10 years. They are really good. The only problem is the space. I put a request in to Outback Stores for larger quantities, because we have large families. With the Nutri-Grain, they just have the little 500-gram packets, and my son will finish that in one hit! It is just the room; there is no room there.

Mrs VALE—It is the storage problem, is it? It is very limited?

Ms Godden—Yes. As Theresa was saying it is very small. One day I had to wait one hour because there were so many people there. That is all right if you do not work, but if you are working then it is really hard. At the school you only get 20 minutes smoko and 20 minutes lunch. When I was working, we had to work afterwards too, so then we would miss the shop and say, 'Oh, we will try and get there tomorrow.'

ACTING CHAIR—There is no-one here from the store now. So this is your opportunity to talk frankly because there is no one here from the store to listen. I want to start with some very short questions. Is anyone complaining at the moment that the store is running out of the things that you need? Are you happy that when you go to the store the things that you need are on the shelves? Are there any problems with that?

Ms McDonald—No.

ACTING CHAIR—You have all told us that the price is still a problem. It is still very expensive. Is it still a problem?

Mr Smiler—The problem we have is the pricing. It depends what sort of freight comes in. There is not a problem with that in Darwin.

ACTING CHAIR—Does anyone still do a lot of shopping in Katherine to save money?

Mr Smiler—No. We do all our shopping here.

Ms Fisher—People still do come up to Katherine.

ACTING CHAIR—We will explore that further. I need to go through these very quickly to get them on the record. Is anyone here wanting to see Indigenous food or some of the hunting products sold in the store if it was possible? Would you like to have local bush tucker in the store or do you just get that yourselves and you do not need it in the store?

Mr Smiler—The only thing we have in the store is kangaroo tail.

ACTING CHAIR—You would like to see more of that.

Mr Smiler—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you want to have more jobs in the store for the young ladies or do you think the young ladies do not want to do the job?

Mr Smiler—I think we need more young ladies.

Ms Conway—We would like to see young ladies working there. That bloke in the shop does everything.

ACTING CHAIR—Do the young people want to do the job or are they not interested?

Ms Fisher—They need the training. One of the things we were going to suggest in the paper was that they need to put a second till in the Jilkminggan store. The current workload of Indigenous staff there is just operating the tills. I appreciate it has only been 12 months and they are still settling in, but we need people trained up not just to serve on the tills but to learn how to do the marketing, health promotion and management of the stores.

Ms Lardy—It is really good to see that there are a couple of girls working in the shop but, because Outback Stores have taken a cut, they do not have enough money to pay those people, so they have been put on to part-time work. I am sure that they would like to be working in the store more often because it does affect their family in the long run.

ACTING CHAIR—Can I ask a question of the mums here? Are you just cooking up stews at home or are you sometimes making a salad or something different? Is it all going in the pot or are you cooking with frypans? How are you using the vegetables?

Ms McDonald—We always cook soup in the pot.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you ever make a salad and eat lettuce?

Ms McDonald—My daughter makes a salad every lunchtime. When she knocks off from the office, she comes home and makes the salad for all the kids and me.

ACTING CHAIR—Are many families doing that or is it just your family?

Ms McDonald—It is my daughter. I have two daughters.

Ms Godden—It is hard sometimes for families. One young girl was telling me they bought three pots one time and another mob came along and borrowed them. Another family might come over and say, 'I'll borrow this,' and—zip!—it goes off to another community. That is why a shop that has that available is a dream of ours. It could have the hot food thing for soup, curries and rice. Families do try. They buy their pots and everything, but when they are looking for a knife there is nothing to cut up the vegies and stuff.

Mrs VALE—If there was a community kitchen facility with not just one stove but maybe two or three stoves within the environs of the shop where everybody could go, do you think that would be a help?

ACTING CHAIR—Or would you get humbugged and have to share it?

Ms Godden—My vision was to have it as part of the shop so that you could sell it there for \$5 or whatever.

Mrs VALE—I also mean to have access to those kinds of facilities within the environs of the shop because it is such a hub.

Ms REA—It could be like a school kitchen. If you are getting a new kitchen at the school, could the community use that to cook stuff up?

Ms Godden—You mean for fundraising or just for their own personal use?

Mrs VALE—Just to provide food. One of the things we have learnt is how difficult it is for individual mothers and individual homes to actually have the proper cooking facilities—pots and utensils, and not just the stove but the hot plates—where they can do this. We have also learnt how meagre the internal structures of homes are. Sunrise has raised how important the shop is as

the hub of the community. I wonder whether or not there could be a facility like a big school kitchen, a community kitchen, where all the mothers could go at different times if they wanted to use that facility. Would there be any call for that?

Ms McDonald—I am not quite sure, because a lot of these mobs get a little bit shamed. When I was supervisor at the creche I would be like, ‘Come in,’ but they were really shameful. Because the kitchen would not be their thing, they probably would not go in. So I do not know how it would run. Personally, I would find it a bit of a humbug if I had to take my gear up the road to cut up the vegies. You would have to go round and ask people if they would use something like this.

Ms Fisher—I can understand the appeal of the idea, but in reality there could be hygiene issues with people not cleaning up and then arguments and all that kind of stuff.

Mrs VALE—We thought about it being under the auspices of the store so there could be oversight of the cleanliness. Maybe the community has a solution. I believe that all communities have their own solutions about how to provide opportunities for mothers to prepare food. It is one thing having food available within the store, but it is another thing for the mothers to be able to prepare that food. It seems that there is a disadvantage.

Ms Fisher—You could have some girls going in and cooking up huge pots of stew and curry and selling them in containers, rather than having individuals coming in. You could provide low-cost meals that way.

Mrs VALE—So that would be more acceptable culturally to the community.

Ms Godden—I see where you are coming from—it is so that they learn.

Mrs VALE—Yes.

Ms Godden—We have had all of these food and nutrition courses, so they know how to do it. Actually, like Nabeel was saying, if the fruit is no good this mob will not eat it. I call my daughter a connoisseur. We go to restaurants in Katherine and she will say, ‘The fish’s a bit sour,’ or, ‘The fruit’s a bit doughy.’ So this mob are real connoisseurs. When they make a salad they throw in not just the basics. If they have it available, they will throw in sliced black olives, cucumber, capsicum, tinned corn and all that. They are quite clued up, really. Like I was saying, oftentimes they do not have a pot, a knife and other basic things.

Mrs VALE—That has been the hardest thing, hasn’t it? Anna, you have been doing something similar in your own way, haven’t you? You have been responding to the need in your own particular way. If you ruled the world, Anna, what would you like the government to do for you?

Ms Godden—Simply, a house—no, I like my house. It is good and small. It only takes me one hour to clean. Nabeel said a funny thing. Do you know what the shop sells the most of? Cleaning products, so our mob are really conscious of trying to keep their houses clean.

Mrs VALE—Coming into this community we saw that it was very clean and tidy. It looked quite lovely. It really did. Congratulations.

ACTING CHAIR—It is a credit to the community.

Ms Godden—At this time of year it is a bit hard with the dust and everything.

Mrs VALE—You are doing a very good job, Anna.

Ms Fisher—On one of the points that you picked up—that they will order in whatever they want—I think the range they can offer would be fairly restricted by where Outback Stores get their supplies from. I do not know about whitegoods. I think some of the Outback Stores are bringing them in. Whitegoods and the storage of food are really important in that chain.

Ms Conway—Everybody is talking about the shop today and everything is running really good. It is not like it was in the beginning. It was broke. I went in the shop and found that bloke was all right. We buy things. People come from up and down—Nooka, Beswick, Eva Valley or wherever—to play football on this oval. I told him to make a lot of sandwiches and take good drinks and water. When people are kicking the ball, if they want a drink or something they can run up and buy it. It makes more money for the shop. That is what I told them.

ACTING CHAIR—Are you happy with the store at the moment?

Ms Godden—Yes, we are happy. We are happy to always be down at the oval every Sunday.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. It sounds like you are the community of the connoisseurs.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Rea**):

That this committee authorises publication of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 3.18 pm