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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Indigenous employment

TUESDAY, 12 JULY 2005

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Tuesday, 12 July 2005

Members: Mr Wakelin *(Chair)*, Dr Lawrence *(Deputy Chair)*, Ms Annette Ellis, Mr Garrett, Mr Robb, Mr Slipper, Mr Snowdon, Dr Southcott, Mr Tuckey and Mrs Vale

Members in attendance: Ms Annette Ellis, Mr Robb, Mr Snowdon, Mrs Vale and Mr Wakelin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Positive factors and examples amongst Indigenous communities and individuals, which have improved employment outcomes in both the public and private sectors; and

1. recommend to the government ways this can inform future policy development; and
2. assess what significant factors have contributed to those positive outcomes identified, including what contribution practical reconciliation* has made.

*The Committee has defined 'practical reconciliation' in this context to include all government services.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 9.59 am

SHAW, Mrs Eileen, Director, Institute for Aboriginal Development

CHAIR (Mr Wakelin)—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into Indigenous employment. I welcome everyone here today, particularly the local member, who has just left his office and is joining us as part of our committee. I also particularly welcome Eileen Shaw, from the Institute for Aboriginal Development. May you recover from the flu a little quicker than I did! Would you like to say a few opening words describing your organisation and then we will have a chat about how you are going?

Mrs Shaw—The paper we have presented, which I can provide for you at a later date typed up, was compiled by the various staff across IAD—and that is senior and middle-management staff. We value our staff's previous experiences. Although we are in education, we see that as very closely linked with employment. Some of our backgrounds are in that area—as an example, mine. I spent 23 years with the Department of Employment, Education and Training, so a lot of my background has been in Aboriginal education, employment and training across the board.

CHAIR—Is there anything in particular that you want to highlight in summarising your submission?

Mrs Shaw—The issue we want to highlight the most is that people who come to IAD to complete their education are those for whom, for some reason or other, the mainstream education system did not satisfy their needs. We give those people credit for the fact that they have come back to an educational institute at a later age when their children are grown. Some of them still have young children at home that they are trying to juggle with all the other parts of their lives. Employment may not be the main focus of the reason why they are back there and we do not see that as a problem, because if they reach the stage where they are not going to go into employment they are going to encourage their children and their grandchildren to continue in employment because they are going to see the value of it. Education gave them the skills to run their own life. If full-time employment as society sees it is not their goal then we can still assist them towards their own individual goals.

CHAIR—You mentioned some reasons why mainstream education is not attractive for many people. Could you explore a little why you think that is? I can think of a lot of reasons, but I would like to hear your views on that, if you could share that with us.

Mrs Shaw—The Institute for Aboriginal Development is an adult educational institution, so we have people who have been through the mainstream system rather than the youth that we may talk about who are already in there now. The biggest disadvantage these people have is the lack of cultural appropriateness. Aboriginal people already have an education and a lifestyle system in their culture and they are very strong on their commitment to their responsibilities, so when you are talking about educating an Aboriginal person who lives a cultural lifestyle you have to acknowledge that their relationship with their kin and their responsibilities to culture come first. In the 23 years I worked for the Department of Employment, Education and Training we travelled out bush a lot and we acknowledged that attendance would be different—not

necessarily wrong, but different. It is not a mainstream employment scene, and therefore it is not a mainstream living scene. Warren will vouch for that, I am sure.

CHAIR—The challenge of having a job does require basic literacy and numeracy. I suppose what I was driving at to a degree was whether or not there are alternative delivery methods which might get people to a point of literacy and numeracy which would allow them to have a greater opportunity of employment. It might help to define those specific cultural differences which could help us all understand. In your experience, are there particular things that worked a little better than others in getting basic literacy and numeracy for the younger generation and for adult people, for that matter?

Mrs Shaw—In talking through our presentation to you we acknowledge that we had to divide it up into youth, adults, urban and rural, because in a way they are four totally different things. You have to match your education to those people's identified needs, and they all differ. In relation to IAD presenting and providing a course—our courses involve literacy and numeracy as well—we have to do it according to a recognised curriculum, which is on our scope of registration. If we fail to do that we could lose our registered trading authority status. So we cannot change what is already in the curriculum.

But in the way we present it we can make it culturally appropriate. We can use all of the kinship groups within a classroom to assist each other. We ensure that there is no discomfort for males and females in the same classroom. There have been cases where we have had to split a class to provide a comfortable learning situation or environment. But there are other classes, when you walk into IAD, where there are a whole range of ages and the two genders together, and it does not affect them in a negative manner. We give them credit for and show that we value the life experiences that they use in regard to their learning styles and assignments. Also, there is the RPL system, which allows us to give them credit for things they have done in other positions. They can demonstrate that they know something already and we can take that out of their course as a component already satisfied.

CHAIR—You mentioned the curriculum in terms of losing your registration. Perhaps there is a challenge for all of us to see whether or not the curriculum should be adapted more, without the fear of loss of registration, and without that meaning it loses its discipline or effectiveness. Have you got any thoughts on how the curriculum might need to change?

Mrs Shaw—We are fairly well dictated to at the moment in that we must use the particular curriculum for the course. There was a time when IAD wrote up its own courses, curriculum included. That seems to not be the case now; we have to use the packaged ones.

CHAIR—Where do the packaged ones come from?

Mrs Shaw—They come from the education department. That does not mean we do not present them in a way that is culturally appropriate. If a curriculum says that you have to go out and plant an orchard we try to make it appropriate to the scene here—we could possibly do some of that at Amoonguna because they have the old orchards there. But you would try to put it into the perspective of the client group.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—It is lovely to meet you, Eileen. I want to talk about this in a slightly different direction. This is the first briefing I have had from IAD so I hope I am getting this right. The papers I have here talk in part about the cross-cultural education that IAD undertakes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Part of the issue that we are hearing about in relation to the employment of Indigenous people is a suspicion or a perception of non-Indigenous employers of the difficulties in employing Indigenous Australians. There is this problem, as you would be aware. Can you tell me about your cross-cultural programs. Are they aimed at helping the employer base that I am referring to better understand the cultural issues so that we can improve employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians? Does that come into anything that IAD does?

Mrs Shaw—Yes, we do have an Aboriginal cultural awareness course, which is supposed to be a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. All of my staff, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, attend that. We have various employers who come along and send their staff. The comments have always been positive: there is more understanding of Aboriginal culture than before they came to the course. Some government departments do this already, but perhaps it should be compulsory to send staff along to an Aboriginal cultural awareness course if the majority of their clients are Aboriginal, such as at Centrelink. If you went to Bali you would look at their culture so you would not offend them or do the wrong thing. Aboriginal people deserve that same respect. People should know a bit about their culture so as they can interact without fear or uninformed judgment.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Can you elaborate a bit for me. Can you then see the use of such a course or such an approach, even if it has to be modified to some degree, to try and break down some of the perceptions that non-Indigenous employers may have towards the employment of Indigenous Australians? Do you do any of that directly—and, if you do not, can you see a role for that?

Mrs Shaw—We do not focus on that, because the course is so broad. It takes into consideration that people are informed about what they particularly want to know. There is a lesson plan for the course, but then we deviate from that according to who is in the group and we allow for interaction with the coordinator of the course so they can ask their own questions. I recognise the big differences between employing bodies, being a government department—whether state, territory or federal—or a private employer. A person in private industry has concerns of income, expenditure, profit margins and all of that. Therefore, an absent Aboriginal person is possibly going to worry them more—understanding that if a person has had a relative of their extended family, not their core family, pass away, they have to go bush. I am not saying that the employer can cope with that and continue to employ the Aboriginal person under circumstances where those responsibilities have to be adhered to and there is no 'shall I, shan't I?'

I have had a situation in IAD—although our bereavement leave is in our certified agreement and it is as culturally appropriate as we can make it and the amount of time that can be taken off in a 12-month period is not capped—where I have had to discuss with certain parties who live a traditional lifestyle the fact that it is their responsibility to decide which bereavement issues they have to attend to fulfil their responsibilities. I am not going to make the decision for them although, as the director, I am the only one who can officially approve paid bereavement leave. They have handled it very well. It has been my experience that when I hand it back to the

Aboriginal people they have made the decision themselves and I have not interfered with their responsibilities.

Mrs VALE—I have some empathy with what you are doing. I left school at 14 and went back as a mature-age student. My father actually said that education was the only salvation for being born a woman. I think it is the only salvation for all of us, to be honest. I am interested in how you measure the success of your students in your program. Do they have to do an exam or is there another way that you assess their knowledge? Or do you see it as their getting employment or a measure that they themselves place on what they have learnt?

Mrs Shaw—It is particularly their satisfaction of achievement in themselves. We offer a certificate accrediting them for the components of the course that they have done. If they want to do it in modules or if they want to do the whole of the course, their certificate will reflect that. Employment is another way of measuring outcomes. We take a lot of our clients from the Alice Springs town camps and they return home, so we sometimes lose contact with them when they leave unless our coordinator out bush meets up with them again or they are furthering their pathway of education towards employment and are in another course that is the next level up. We sometimes hear that previous students have got employment out bush, and that is a credit to them.

In town people tend to go to the Aboriginal organisations for employment as a first preference. Those organisations are limited in the positions that they can offer depending on their budgets. I know that tourism is always put up there, but it takes a lot of work to get Aboriginal people to feel comfortable in front-line tourism, with people asking questions that you sometimes might not have the right or the knowledge to answer. It can put you in a difficult position. I was behind the counter selling ice cream in my younger days. Some of the questions people asked me I would not know the answer to. Aboriginal culture is a living, breathing culture and your education is there all the way through, depending upon whether you are living a rural, urban or semi-traditional lifestyle. So there are many ways that we test what our success has been.

Mrs VALE—Are there ways that you identify certain attributes of some of your students that show that they are going to be a success to start with? Are there any motivators to say that this person is going to do well and they do? What I am trying to ask is: is there any way that we can actually encourage that initial spark? Is there anything that governments can do to get people in a mindset that they are going to actually take on a course and achieve from it what they seek to achieve?

Mrs Shaw—We mentor internally and we do it rather well. Do any of you know of the old Training for Aboriginals Program or TAP—no?

Mrs VALE—No.

Mrs Shaw—There were particular programs in DEET—20 for Aboriginal people and 23 for non-Indigenous people. We used to get two pieces of the pie—we would put people into either of those. The Training for Aboriginals Program was built particularly for the needs of Aboriginal people. There was on-the-job training where you paid a subsidy to the employer because the Aboriginal person they had taken on required mentoring and therefore it was time out for another person to teach them. They mentored them in other ways as well, such as in living skills

and feeling comfortable in the workplace. There was work experience, which I used quite a bit at the high schools, to allow students to experience different areas of employment they were thinking of when they came out of school—that was paid employment. That was very successful. There are people around town who are now adults and who still say to me: 'That was good. I made up my mind what sort of job I wanted because I experienced two or three while I was at school during the school holidays.'

Mrs VALE—Is that still available?

Mrs Shaw—Not to my knowledge, but I think it should be.

Mrs VALE—You saw value in that and you saw some good results?

Mrs Shaw—Definitely, if you put aside the fact that you do not really know at 14 and 15 what you want to do. People say, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' I have three sons and none of them has told me that where they are now is where they had wanted to be. They experienced jobs and they made their own pathway from those.

Mrs VALE—You would realise that our mothers could probably say the same thing about us right now.

Mrs Shaw—Yes. When I was that age I had no idea what I wanted to be.

Mrs VALE—It is a progress. It is a journey.

Mrs Shaw—It is a progress through life. If you have an education—

Mrs VALE—that starts you on the journey.

Mrs Shaw—Yes, if it is sufficient as to literacy and numeracy and you have the strength and the power to make those choices. That is Aboriginal self-management. I do not do my own tax return. I pay someone to do it. That is Aboriginal self-management. We have on our banners the slogan 'Education is the key'. We strongly believe that. I used to wonder why they taught me about Shakespeare and 'the quality of mercy' but I feel comfortable watching Shakespeare on TV. I am not outside of it; it is within my life in some place where I can pick and choose to use it or not use it. That is what education does: it gives you the strength of choice, and that choice is in respect of employment, health, housing and your living skills—to be able to not leave your bankbook with the bank because you are taking care of it and you are managing your own life. That is why we think very strongly that employment itself has to be looked at from a holistic viewpoint, not in isolation from health, housing, culture and education, because all of those things, as we all know, play a part in where we get in the future and what our career path, or occupational path, might be.

Mr ROBB—I can understand from what you have been saying the sorts of programs involved. But I have no feel for how many people you are dealing with, what their age groups are and how many are from remote or urban or regional backgrounds. Could you give me some sense of the numbers, the ages of the groups that you are dealing with and their backgrounds?

Mrs Shaw—I do not have exact numbers at the moment.

Mr ROBB—Just roughly would do.

Mrs Shaw—Winter time affects our intake, because nobody wants to get up and work without any hot breakfast. If we are talking about the town leases, there is the possibility of not having a hot breakfast. We have talked about the level of participation of children in the classroom when they have not been primed and fed and clothed sufficiently to be able to concentrate. Adults are the same, so our numbers necessarily drop in winter. Our numbers drop when there is a bereavement that affects a large family group. We do not have only our campus in Alice Springs. We have an outsourced campus down at the Gap Youth Centre, we have a campus in Tennant Creek and then we have all of the bush communities that we are servicing at the time. Counting heads—which we really do not do; we count as to ASH and FTE, which is what our funding is attuned to—we should have around 120 at the moment with another 60 sign-ups happening while I am speaking.

Mr ROBB—What ages would those groups typically be?

Mrs Shaw—We can take from 15 to whatever. As I have said, we have had people whose goal was not to get employment. In fact, their age would have restricted that. They were coming for their own benefit, to get more skills to manage their life. What happens is that they are of value to the organisation in another way: they encourage those younger than them to come along and take up education.

I am like you. I walked onto the Curtin University campus in my late 30s, after my children had grown up, and took up education again. I had gone to matriculation in South Australia. That was hard because you just did not feel comfortable. But IAD is a campus where it does not matter which clan group you belong to. It could be Pitjantjatjara, Luritja, Arrernte or whatever; it is neutral ground. People from all clan groups go there. Also, the elders on some communities prefer that education and training happen on the community so that their people do not have to deal with the problems of being in town and so we deliver out there; we send a lecturer to them.

Mr ROBB—So overwhelmingly they would be people from remote backgrounds?

Mrs Shaw—Our concentration this year is on the remote areas, and there are a couple of reasons for that. Our competition in town are Batchelor college, Charles Darwin University and the new Desert People's Centre. The Northern Territory government has put a lot of funding towards those three, which I am very jealous of, but IAD has to continuously fight to prove itself a worthy body to be funded and needed by the Aboriginal people who use it. So we have to go remote—not that we would not do that anyway, because those people send messages in to us that they want a course on such and such. We believe that we are community driven. We are certainly community managed, because all our board members are Aboriginal people.

Mr ROBB—In response to questions before, you were talking about some of the complications because of traditional bereavement practices or other traditional Aboriginal practices, and the difficulty that perhaps can create for people to be shop assistants or to work in light industrial areas. Do you think those traditional practices can be accommodated in those sorts of work situations?

Mrs Shaw—Are we talking urban or rural?

Mr ROBB—In the urban areas. In the main you just do not see Aboriginal people doing typical jobs such as selling stuff in shops. I can understand to some extent the difficulties, as you explained before, but do you think they can be accommodated, even though they retain a lot of those traditional practices, through special workplace agreements that would accommodate that?

Mrs Shaw—In some cases people living an urban lifestyle do not have the same responsibility put on them as definitely as out bush. Using myself as an example, I would not have as many responsibilities as somebody living a traditionally cultural lifestyle. When I was working for DEET I found that it was the isolation of being the only black face in a white environment. I had experienced that myself too so I always attempted to encourage the employer to put on two Aboriginal people at the same time. There was nothing worse than coming in to work and being sufficiently outgoing and confident yourself to say good morning to everybody but the other staff feeling uncomfortable with you, because it comes from the other side as well. For some reason they do not know how to relate to you because Aboriginal people were not in their lives when they grew up in, say, Melbourne, and they are up here where Aboriginal people are more obvious. So they do not really know how to, if they want to at all, make a friendship with you. So if you put two people together at least they have someone to talk to. You can say to that person: 'Who do I go and see? I just made a mess in the till because I pressed the wrong buttons.' That sort of relationship can be built, but it needs help.

Out bush, job sharing and the CDEP are good as they allow people to work in other ways than the socially acceptable, nine to five, Monday to Friday job—which is not necessarily the work ethic out there. There are a lot of non-Indigenous people who do not uphold that work ethic—people who would prefer to take on part-time work. The same privileges should be given to people out bush through job sharing and through the CDEP. That would allow people to undertake their cultural responsibilities and deal with their kinship issues.

Mr ROBB—Putting aside the Aboriginals from remote communities for a second, 30 per cent of the Aboriginal community in the Territory have pretty much an urban background—and that figure is 75 per cent in the rest of Australia. And yet both here in the Territory and—to a greater or lesser extent—in the rest of Australia they are still not getting into work. That is for some of the reasons that you are raising, such as being the only shop assistant who has an Aboriginal background, for example. What needs to be done to break through that situation? How can even the urban Aboriginals start to feel comfortable being accommodated in mainstream employment?

Mrs Shaw—When we provide education at IAD, it is not just the three Rs; it is also the confidence that comes with that education. We put our students into situations where they have to stretch themselves. They have to come out of their comfort zones. We do not do that by pushing and shoving them. A graduate from IAD has some of the living skills that the majority of non-Indigenous Australians have because that is the lifestyle they grew up in. Aboriginal people have to learn those skills to come out into the mainstream work area. It comes down to giving people confidence, education and skills and taking them out of their comfort zones in a non-threatening manner. All of those things play a part.

I cannot answer your question directly unless I use myself as an example. Every Aboriginal person, like every non-Indigenous person, is different and has different needs in taking on challenges in life. One of those challenges is employment. Everybody, I presume—unless they are very sure of themselves—has butterflies in their stomach when they go for a job interview. But, if you do not get as far as getting an interview because you do not have the literacy and the confidence to write a job application, then you are not even over the first line. That pertains to every individual. I am very proud of my staff. They form relationships with our students which enable them to help those individual students.

Mr ROBB—From your experience on the other side of the coin and from the perspective of non-Indigenous employers—those who own the shops and all that—what is the principal barrier? Is it just the practical aspects? Is it that they do not want to accommodate some differences? Is it the difficulty of trying to manage people who have not got the same background as the rest of the staff?

Mrs Shaw—In your statement there, you have hit a few nails on the head already. The kinship of Aboriginal people means that relatives may come into the shop. That may not be acceptable because the employer wants that person to get on with serving other people who are going to hand money over. The Aboriginal person may be seen as spending too much time talking to their friends and relatives. All that is needed there is for the employer to take them quietly aside to have a heart to heart without victimising or picking on the person. They can say: 'I understand Aboriginal kinship. But do you understand my side of it?'

Aboriginal people are not stupid or unintelligent. A lot of Aboriginal people are simply uneducated. We have the same brains; it is just that, perhaps through a lack of opportunity, through negligence or a system failing, the majority of us are still disadvantaged in a lot of ways—that is, in health, education, employment and the whole range of things in life that other people take for granted.

Mr SNOWDON—Thank you for coming, Eileen. I want to go to a very different area, where IAD is actively involved in employing Indigenous people. A very significant proportion of your staff is Indigenous; is that correct?

Mrs Shaw—Yes.

Mr SNOWDON—One of the things we talked about yesterday was language. IAD is responsible for developing language dictionaries and employs local people to develop that knowledge, along with a researcher. Can you explain how that works, because that is a positive contribution to knowledge but also an example of where IAD is using its needs to employ Indigenous people to do work which would otherwise be seen as academic.

Mrs Shaw—We have a policy for the employment of Aboriginal people—and that does not throw out the door the merit principle of having the best person for the job, because ultimately we have a responsibility for outcomes. If you employ an Aboriginal person for their skin colour alone you are doing them a disservice because you are putting them in a situation that they cannot handle and you may knock back their confidence for about another four years.

What Warren is referring to is our dictionaries program, where we write dictionaries for languages that have the possibility of dying out. We make tapes as well. We use Indigenous people out bush; we send our staff out there to sit down with those people who tell us how to speak that language and, quite often, how to spell it. You may not be aware that we have language courses as well at the moment, and a lot of our Indigenous staff who are Indigenous language speakers are basically lecturers in that classroom. There may be a non-Indigenous person who is fluent in that particular language, but it is the Aboriginal person that runs the classroom. And that classroom does not teach just the language it is meant to teach; it actually teaches Aboriginal culture and cultural awareness through teaching the words and their pronunciation. Also, if our Aboriginal staff are accredited by NAATI, we can pay them a language fee because they are using their language on a day-to-day basis.

In the classroom you have language speakers who live on the town leases, so you have Indigenous students who do not necessarily speak the language being told words by other students who do and putting them together. That supports not only the maintenance and retention of language but also the mentoring of your identity as an Aboriginal person. Whether you live a bush lifestyle, a town lifestyle or a metropolitan lifestyle, you are still Aboriginal and no-one can take that identity away from you. But having Aboriginal people who all live different lifestyles in that classroom makes the interaction just so secure. It is like the work situation we were talking about: people feel more secure when there is some of their mob there. I was looking around to see how many Aboriginal people were in this room. It is a feeling of security—feeling confident and sure of yourself.

Mr SNOWDON—Another issue we discussed yesterday was the provision of interpreter services. We heard from a Northern Territory government person that they had an increasing understanding of the need for interpreters in the work that they do. IAD has historically provided interpreters. What work is IAD currently doing for interpreter training and the provision of interpreters?

Mrs Shaw—What are we doing? We have an interpreter training course. At the moment we have 14 courses which we are running in 2005 and we are starting to talk about the courses we will run in 2006. Interpreter training will be one of them. Warren, I agree with you that there is the potential for employment out there. There is also the potential that if you do not employ Aboriginal language speakers who are interpreter trained, then Aboriginal people may not get a fair deal when it comes to the courts and they may be misunderstood when it comes to medical services. There are so many situations in which the fear, the tension and the possibility of mistakes could be alleviated by using a trained interpreter.

It is a good area of potential employment. Not only should government departments keep positions which are tagged for Aboriginal people but also they should make sure that they have interpreters if the majority of their clients are Aboriginal. When I worked for Social Security, which is now Centrelink, they had them and I know that they still have interpreters there. That is of benefit to the person who is being interviewed in a situation where they are possibly not totally comfortable and where there can be a misinterpretation of words—very simple words can send you up the wrong trail in assisting that person, if you are a public servant.

In DEET, I watched a non-Indigenous person at the counter say to an Aboriginal person who had just come in from the bush, ‘I’m just going to register you.’ He was talking about a 211,

which is filling out details about the person—what training they had done, their age, their address, what sort of job they were after—and the person said, 'What, that motor car?' because 'registration' was a word that that person knew in relation to vehicles. Interpreters would alleviate that problem. They would assist the person through those situations to have more control of their own life in that interview situation.

CHAIR—I will wrap it up with a couple of questions. Would you mind, for the public record, having a go at how you perceive and how other people might perceive—from Aboriginal or other points of view—the value of employment? Not the traditional nine to five, but the value of employment. Could you just talk a little bit about that as you perceive it?

Mrs Shaw—If you look at the things that are of the most value for Indigenous people and compare them with non-Indigenous people—I am taking this from my studies; we did an analysis—non-Indigenous lists would start with a house, car, job and that sort of thing. Most of the Indigenous lists started with culture—ceremonies, responsibilities to kin. Further down there was a house. I am not saying that Aboriginal people do not have the right to a house—they do. But what I found was that in their set of values those material things were lower down the list than spiritual and cultural things.

In regard to my own sense of values, I have been brought up in an urban lifestyle and I have been educated in Alice Springs and Adelaide. My list, like that of a lot of other urban Aboriginal people in Alice Springs, would be different. I made that happen for myself. One of the things at the top of my list was a house—and that is basically because of my upbringing.

According to my values, yes, I put a lot of value on buying a house. But an Aboriginal person living a cultural lifestyle out at Yuendumu does not necessarily think that and would not live their life accordingly in that way. That should be respected. I go back to what I said in the beginning—that is, IAD educates adult Aboriginal people whose goal might not necessarily be to achieve a job in the long run, but at least they are skilled and educated to take up those opportunities when they choose. The choices of life become easier to take advantage of because you are not as disadvantaged as you were previously, where you are competing with people who are going to get things before you do.

CHAIR—In recent months, has anyone from the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination or DEWR come and talked to you about how you are going and that type of thing? Have you had any contact?

Mrs Shaw—No, none that has not been sought by me by going to a combined Aboriginal organisation meeting. When the Aboriginal organisations got back together again because of the changes in ATSIC they realised that there would be issues that would have to be dealt with in a different way, so they expected information about the representative body and how it would work. My IAD senior management team meetings are held once a month. I have sent letters to each of our major funding bodies, including NT DEET and DEST, to come along each time and give a 30-minute talk about what things we should watch out for because of the changes in their departments. Unfortunately, one of the things I have to deal with this week is to write a letter to those departments, including that one, to say: 'We missed seeing you. You didn't come to this meeting. It's vital that you keep us updated on our potential applications and the changes to your

department.' IAD has already been impacted upon by all these changes to your own departments. The short answer to that is no.

CHAIR—Thank you, I am glad I asked.

Mr ROBB—Could I follow up on that last topic you were talking about: the things that are valued by Indigenous and non-Indigenous. For a lot of Aboriginal people from remote communities, would it be fair to say that they would see the conduct of ceremonies and a lot of their responsibilities to kin et cetera as their job? Traditionally that was a key responsibility and they still have that responsibility. Am I drawing a long bow?

Mrs Shaw—I do not know whether they see it as a job. I think people understand that the job is a paid situation. I think they understand that non-Indigenous people see a job as Monday to Friday, nine to five and you get your pay. In regard to responsibility, I really cannot say what those people would tag it as. I can say that, to my knowledge and in my experience, that has always come first.

Mr ROBB—I understand. Thanks.

CHAIR—Eileen Shaw, thank you very much for your time this morning; we appreciate it.

Proceedings suspended from 10.49 am to 11.12 am

BLACKBURN, Mr Mark Douglas, Director, Corporate and Technical Services, Alice Springs Town Council

KILGARIFF, Mayor Fran, Mayor, Alice Springs Town Council

MOONEY, Mr Rex Roger, Chief Executive Officer, Alice Springs Town Council

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you for your submission. Would you like to make a brief opening statement before we go to a general discussion about the issues of our inquiry?

Mayor Kilgariff—Yes. I will make a general statement. Rex will talk more specifically about what we do at council. The town council has a memorandum of understanding with Tangentyere Council, which is one of the major Aboriginal organisations in Alice Springs. More recently, we have entered into a partnership with Lhere Artepe, who are the traditional owners group in Alice Springs. We have a lot of aims between the three organisations, but one of the big issues that we discuss is Indigenous employment. The council has also been supportive of an organisation called Footprints Forward, which is an employment agency for school leavers.

Speaking personally, I was born in Alice Springs and have seen a lot of changes over the years. What I see now is a lack of education for Indigenous youth—and I am talking about urban youth at the moment—and not necessarily because it is not available to them but because there are a lot of other factors in their life, such as their culture and peer pressure, which is a big one, which stop Aboriginal kids from continuing on at school. There are a lot of factors that cause them to leave school early and be virtually unemployable.

It is not just about education. There is still a very strong culture factor, even with quite strong mentoring. We have some businesses around town who have entered into Indigenous employment with the best of intentions and have provided mentors. They have found it very difficult. Young kids need a lot of support and a busy business may not be able to provide that all the time. Also, for cultural reasons kids take time off much more than other employees do. Even though employers around town might have the best of intentions, generally speaking, more often than not it is much more difficult to employ a young Indigenous person.

We in Alice Springs suffer from the same skill shortages that the rest of Australia does, but perhaps more so. We cannot get a lot of the skilled people we need, such as tradespeople and engineers. All sorts of people are just not available. I would say that if we were to do an audit of employment in Alice Springs it would show quite a lot of underemployment. Certainly the council finds that to be the case. It seems to me that one of the ways around this is to ensure that Indigenous kids who grew up here and are likely to stay here do become trained and skilled and take up some of the job skill shortages that we have here.

One of the interesting things that I have found in the town is that there is a lot of employment and creativity in the arts and film-making fields. I suppose that is because there are role models with CAAMA and Imparja and there is strong support within those Aboriginal organisations. You see young Indigenous people employed as camera people, film makers, actors and producers. It seems to be an area in which they are very strong and can make quite a good name

for themselves. I see the lack of Indigenous employment as one of the biggest issues facing Central Australia. If we look at the community as a whole, we see the whole area cannot go ahead until we find some way of making sure that these young people—and older people too, but I am speaking more about young people—are employed and contribute to our economy and prosperity, so I really see that as a very big issue.

Mr Mooney—The Alice Springs Town Council, as the mayor has alluded to, is faced with a chronic staff shortage, particularly with skilled labour. One area in particular is our engineering staff. We have a very high attrition/turnover rate. We simply cannot attract qualified engineers to come to Central Australia. We offer good work opportunities. We offer a great place in which to live and raise a family. There are all sorts of activities here for anyone who comes: recreational, arts, cultural, sport—you name it, and it is all in Alice Springs. We need to develop some form of a program that will support Indigenous employees to get into this field as well as into others. There is health and all the other related fields but what comes to my mind immediately is the engineering field. There are a lot of talented people out there. If only we could harness that talent because there are all sorts of opportunities for those sorts of skilled people here in Alice Springs.

The council is very keen to host Indigenous employees where we can. We have had a number of programs in place for some time. One is the staff training and employment program—STEP. We are pleased to host that. We have had two Indigenous employees in our environmental health section. We have an Indigenous employee in our library as a liaison officer. We have other traineeships in the administration and clerical side of things. Overall we have eight Indigenous employees in our outdoor staff. We have two Indigenous employees in what we call our fertile ground activity, which is to do with organic waste. We run that at the landfill site. One of our rangers is an Indigenous employee. We have an Indigenous services officer in the library and, as I have mentioned, we did have two Indigenous trainees in our environmental health section, which has been handed back to the NT government.

We have a very high staff turnover generally, but we would be very keen to work with you and any other organisation to promote opportunities for our Indigenous population in Alice Springs. With local government particularly—and there are a number of councils across the NT—there are all sorts of career paths that we can open up to the appropriately skilled people to stay in the NT. As the mayor has mentioned, we have MOUs with two Aboriginal organisations—Tangentyere Council and Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation. Lhere Artepe are the traditional owners of land in Alice Springs. Alice Springs is the only municipality in Australia to have a successful court outcome where the traditional owners now have native title over their lands. We work very closely with that organisation and with Tangentyere.

From the council's point of view, we are the second-largest local government authority in the NT. We are second only to Darwin. We have a population of about 30,000 people. We still call ourselves 'a town like Alice'; however, we are definitely a city because we are larger than Palmerston. Of course, Palmerston calls itself Palmerston City Council—so there is a plug.

Mayor Kilgariff—A little bit of Territory rivalry coming in there.

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

Mr Mooney—Warren knows where I am coming from here. We are thriving; we are the capital of Central Australia. We have lots of opportunities. Our doors are open; we are seeking to work with the appropriate authorities to make opportunities for our Indigenous people. I will leave it there, but I will ask Mark to embellish.

Mr Blackburn—We are starting to look at some positives as far as opportunities are concerned for Indigenous employment, which I know is a key charter of yours. We are certainly doing some work with the Northern Territory Tourist Commission as well as with the Australian tourism commission to position Alice Springs internationally as being a repository of Indigenous art and Indigenous culture. That is a real opportunity as far as Alice Springs is concerned.

To underpin that, we see our council establishing a lifelong learning centre. As our CEO has mentioned, there is an Indigenous liaison officer in our library. We have a significant patronage of Indigenous people coming into our library. We have an Alice Springs collection; we have an Indigenous collection. What we wish to do is to build on that and look at creating a lifelong learning centre in Alice Springs to assist and provide other support opportunities within the library. It is a place which, as I have mentioned, Indigenous people are frequenting and there are real opportunities to make some points of connection. In terms of longer term opportunities, we see some immediate opportunities for tourism and, more importantly, looking at other support services that can be connected through our lifelong learning centre.

We have also now appointed our HR officer, who is an Indigenous person as well. That officer is working with us to endeavour to achieve our objective of employing more Indigenous people within Alice Springs Town Council. The officer was previously the HR officer for Imparja TV, so they come well versed in and with an understanding of the cultural relationships in the community. Also, the officer is assisting us in gaining a greater appreciation of the cultural issues in employment with Indigenous people within the Alice Springs Town Council. They are some of the positive initiatives that we have been looking at.

As mentioned in our submission, we have been working in conjunction with Arrernte Council. Whilst they are working through some challenging times as far as their administration is concerned, we are continuing that relationship. We are providing positive employment opportunities through that council, and the CDEP program is also an important employer within Alice Springs. They are a couple of other opportunities that add to what both the mayor and the CEO have said.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your comments on behalf of the Alice Springs 'city council'—to show you your adaptable Australian parliament. The genesis of this inquiry was to try to find the positives. It is tough going and we do not underestimate the challenge in front of us. You have given us some of those positives, and we thank you. We cannot understate the challenge, which is huge, as you have defined and as we all know. I would like to talk about the high turnover rates. We heard yesterday in Darwin that it is a challenge for Darwin and for the Territory. They put it to us, as you have virtually said, that the best source of people is local people; it is finding people who will stay and stabilise, basically.

Turning now to Indigenous employment, I want to talk about peer pressure. The issue of culture always confuses me because there seems to be an element of convenience about it sometimes. I want to talk about peer pressure and culture and to define it so that we at the

Australian government level might assist in a welfare society, which has probably contributed to it as well. Would you like to add to those earlier statements you made, particularly about the young people?

Mayor Kilgariff—They say that Australians do not like tall poppies, and I think there is quite a strong culture within young Indigenous urban people around Alice Springs that they do not like to be seen to rise above their peers. They do not like to be seen as being in any way differentiated from them. They do not like to see that they might be in some way moving into the non-Indigenous area and succeeding there. I am speaking generally. There is not a strong focus on the value of education and it is not seen as the pathway to success in life at all. For example, a young girl I know, who was quite clever and had got through to year 12, came under such sustained peer pressure from her friends about why she was at school and that she was turning into a 'whitey' and that she was this, that and the other that in the end she dropped out. Some four years later she did eventually go back to do some study. It is a pernicious sort of thing that happens with the young.

CHAIR—We cannot talk about it. We ignore one of the really basic issues, and that is why I appreciate your candour in saying that. We do need to confront it and try to be honest enough with each other and across the community to have some opportunity to deal with it. No-one expects this to happen tomorrow, but at least we can talk about it. I have a question which is more at the administration level and, Mayor Kilgariff, you may be more familiar with this. Have you had any contact with the Indigenous coordination centre and the coordination policy which is basically the replacement for ATSIC? Have you had any discussion about some of the issues that may be able to be dealt with under the federal government's new approach to Indigenous affairs? We will be talking about partnerships towards the end here, and I am interested to hear whether you have had any contact at all with our bureaucracy. More importantly, have they approached you?

Mayor Kilgariff—Yes, they have come to council and talked to us, so on that information level we certainly have. Have we had any other contact, Mr Mooney?

Mr Mooney—Yes, I have had officer-to-officer level discussions with the recently appointed manager coordinator here in Alice Springs. He has been at a number of meetings I have attended. We have established a working relationship. Basically it is becoming in tune with what the new changes have really meant. They have been explained both at the council level and at the officer level. LGANT, the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, has meetings down here, and I know that Ross has gone along and addressed that forum as well. So we have had that introduction and that explanation.

CHAIR—Could I be specific. We have identified the issue. The mayor and I have had a discussion about young people, peer pressure and the value of education, which we know is the main passport to employment. Therefore, it would seem to not be beyond our wit to ask whether we could do something which would encourage young Indigenous people to stay at school longer. That could be seen to be more of a Territory government issue. But that does not matter. I am sure the federal government is interested to see whether we could do something in the very specific issue of Indigenous education. Do you see what I am getting at? Have we any concrete proposals and should we have some soon?

Mr Mooney—We do not have any, to my knowledge. There is obviously an opportunity there. And should we? Yes, I believe we should.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I just have a couple of quick questions. In the submission that we got from you, you talk about the hospital Aboriginal liaison team, and you talk about it in the past tense. Is it no longer there?

Mr Blackburn—One of our aldermen, Robyn Lambley, included that paragraph, and she was unable to make it today. She was in the position of managing that team at the hospital. Unfortunately, that particular role and function is not continuing at this point in time. That is why it is written in the past tense. It was seen as quite a positive initiative.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So those five positions do not exist anymore.

Mr Blackburn—That is my understanding.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—This sparked a very strong interest for me, given another inquiry of another time. The reasons that I was interested are, first of all, the need for those sorts of positions; and, secondly, that it said that the process of developing those roles was very long and difficult.

Mr Blackburn—Yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I am just wondering if any of you are in a position to explain to us what made it a long and difficult process to create those positions as described.

Mr Blackburn—What was reported to me by Alderman Lambley was having a greater sense of the cross-cultural training and awareness and a greater appreciation by the hospital of particular issues and particular times when people were unavailable to attend work—if they were attending to 'sorry' business or whatever the situation was. And then there is just the integration. Having worked in the health sector, it is a nightmare to understand the bureaucracy and how to work within a hospital setting, the positions within it and the reporting arrangements. It is a challenge for any employee within the hospital sector.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—How long did those positions exist?

Mr Blackburn—I am not sure of the number of years that it did exist, but it was for a couple of years. I can find that detail for you and get it back to you.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—The library one still exists?

Mr Blackburn—Yes, the library one is very good. It is a positive position, as I have made reference to, to be a liaison person and a point of contact. Also, people are approaching our library liaison person to access other services. So she is able to link them in with other services. In addition to that, she has arranged for the local schools to come in and have a story time within the library, and there is a significant percentage of Indigenous young people coming in for that.

Primary school students, for instance, are coming into the library. We are looking at and developing that program. We have a new Aboriginal liaison officer position and it is amazing how that program has shaped up over the short period of time.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I do not want to give the impression that I am being critical of the hospital's role; I am just really interested in the effort that went into creating these two things: the source of employment for five Indigenous people and a valuable role for their community within the health system. What went wrong to stop it? What happened? I would imagine that those five people had special training to take that role on.

Mr Blackburn—Yes, they did.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Did the council supply that, and where did they end up going? Are they lost with that training?

Mr Blackburn—That is information that I can feed back to you later, because Alderman Lambley was unfortunately unable to make it today and she would have been able to provide you with that level of detail.

Mayor Kilgariff—One of the issues—and I do not know whether it applies in this case but often it does—is that the person who drives a particular program or who has put a lot of effort into a particular person or whatever leaves and nobody picks it up, or they are unable to recruit for that position and then it lapses, or it is a government program and the money runs out.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That would have been part of NT Health, would it?

Mr Blackburn—Yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Sorry, my local ignorance is showing.

Mr Mooney—That is okay. We wanted to put that in the submission to give you a holistic view, if you like, of what is happening across Alice Springs. Could I just quickly comment about the library? It is digressing a bit.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is fine.

Mr Mooney—The library is really proving to be a resounding success with our Indigenous population. We are open Saturdays and Sundays and we have many Indigenous people coming to the library. We are actually seeking state and federal funding to enlarge the library. I just mention that to you for future reference, because it not only serves Alice Springs but serves Central Australia. We get a lot of comment about the library, but there is a high use. It is introducing our Indigenous population to books, videos and all that sort of literature. We have a great collection there, and that is perhaps something that we could build on in looking at future employment opportunities as well. It is a very popular facility here in Alice Springs.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I have one more comment, if I may. We are going to be speaking to the people who run this very park later today.

Mayor Kilgariff—I meant to say before that it is an excellent example, too, of the young Indigenous—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I wanted to ask you about that. I am only referring to the information in their submission; we have not yet spoken to them. There seem to be some initiatives that they refer to that cut right into some of the issues that were apparent in the early days of this inquiry into the employment of Indigenous people. Sorry leave is one of the things they mentioned. They basically need to flexibly massage and finesse that amongst themselves and their staff, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. To what degree is the council in any position to—or do you already—have similar sorts of staff management programs that the park appears to have to try to manage those particular instances of sorry time and other cross-cultural issues?

Mr Mooney—We do not have a lot of sophisticated procedures, I suppose I could say, at this stage. As was mentioned, we do have an HR manager and an HR officer. The HR officer is an Indigenous person and has a background in Imparja Television. So we are developing those as we speak. We are very aware of the fact that our employees can be away for some time on sorry business and other business. There is also competition from friends and relatives at pay times and that sort of thing. There are real demands on Indigenous employees, so we are developing those procedures. We are a very young council, from 1971. We are not from the 1830s or 1840s like Melbourne, Adelaide or Sutherland Shire and those sorts of places, so we are still developing and still growing. But we are very conscious of the need to do that. It would be wrong of me to say we have sophisticated procedures in place at the moment; we do not.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Did you want to add anything?

Mr Blackburn—Just that we are looking at developing those with our HR officer who has been employed. We have a specific objective of increasing our percentage of Indigenous employees within council, so we are being quite positive towards that. It is actually articulated in our strategic plan and is a key action within our business plan in the HR department itself. When you look at the percentage of the population in Alice Springs being 30 per cent and then look at the percentage in employment, we are endeavouring to be positive towards providing opportunities and support services and being sensitive and culturally aware. In fact, we are embarking on a cultural awareness training program as one of the key induction programs within Alice Springs Town Council to ensure that we have that greater appreciation and understanding. So we are being quite positive there.

Mr ROBB—You mentioned that education is not seen as an avenue to progress in life. From your observations, having been here all your life, what are the aspirations of a lot of these Indigenous kids? What do they see as their end point? What marks achievement and progress for them?

Mayor Kilgariff—Integration with a supportive and caring family, and the same goals that other people have in terms of housing and being able to look after their kids. Some have made the leap from here to all sorts of jobs—jet pilots and all sorts of things. But generally speaking many of the others do not picture a life outside of Alice Springs for themselves or, for instance, a life where they rise to the top of or own a business. I think it is changing. There are now a

number of role models that are making a difference. But there is a lack of what we would call 'aspiration'.

Mr ROBB—Even if they do not have a lot of the aspirations of non-Indigenous people—as you have pointed out and which is understandable—most people, even non-Indigenous people, usually do not aspire to leave their community, although they might end up doing so. Non-Indigenous people have the same aspirations and most of them see schooling as a way of achieving them, whereas your observation is that that is not the case with these Indigenous kids.

Mayor Kilgariff—Yes. In their teenage years a lot of Indigenous kids do not have parents on their backs saying, 'Study, study, study—it is the pathway to your life.' They do not tend to have the support which is so essential to motivate and inspire them. They do not see around them family members—again I am speaking very generally—who have a strong work ethic. So a lot of them, around the age of 15 or 16, become very lost and have no idea what is going to happen to them. They just live within their group, their culture, from day to day without a sense of inspiration or, without being too dramatic, hope.

Mr Blackburn—I will just add, while we are talking in general terms about aspirations, that my previous history is of working for a local government in the western suburbs in Victoria. You would all be aware of that area's socioeconomic status and high dependency on social welfare—in St Albans for instance. Education is not perceived by the people there as an area of response and automatic progression. They have a sense of hopelessness. They do not think they are going to get a job, so education does not mean a lot to them. We have been looking at a lot of models of engagement and at what actually means something for them. It is not too dissimilar here. In part the reason I came to Alice Springs was to learn more about the culture and the cultural awareness. There may be some secrets for us to learn from looking at the models that have been implemented in other areas of socioeconomic status as well.

Mr ROBB—With this related issue of having a strong culture of not rising above their peers, and with a lot of them not having parental pressure, is it your sense that having role models would be a way out of that?

Mayor Kilgariff—I think so. It is certainly one way. I think sporting role models for boys are important because they see that as being a way that they can succeed. There has been some talk in town about having an institute of sport here. Originally, the talk was about it being specifically Indigenous but there is some talk now about broadening it such that it is an institute of sport and arts but is tied into education—that, if you were to excel in one area, you would also have to make a commitment to your education or study in another area. It is a bit of a carrot and stick, I guess, but it might work. Although it is very early days, other areas with football colleges, where young men get to play football and it is tied into their education, have been fairly successful. To have some other aspiration that can be tied to the education is important.

Mr ROBB—Could you tease out your comments on the employment you have seen in the arts and film making areas? Very roughly, what numbers are you talking about? Are there significant opportunities? What sorts of jobs are they doing?

Mayor Kilgariff—At any one time I do not think they are significant, but CAAMA and Imparja Television, both of which are Indigenous managed, have a very strong culture of

employing Indigenous people. They train up young camera technicians, actors and news presenters. CAAMA has won prizes for its films in Cannes, so they are films of an international standard. So it has set quite a high standard. Young people coming through there can see that they could be on the international scene rather than just on the national scene, which is very good for the people who have gone through those two organisations. I would not be able to tell you how many there have been over the years, but CAAMA has just had its 20th birthday and a lot of young Indigenous people that are in the arts now and who come from here would have come through those two organisations.

Mr ROBB—It would seem that you are seeing some real, sustainable progress not just here but in other parts. The Indigenous community have all the strengths of the non-Indigenous community but they have particular skills, for instance in sport—especially in football—and in certain elements of the arts. Is it your view that you have to leverage these strengths? Should the focus on employment be on their particular strengths?

Mayor Kilgariff—I think so in the arts and sports but also in town here. Most tourists that come here want to see Aboriginal faces behind the counter and waitressing et cetera but there is still very little employment for Aboriginal kids in those areas. Every second backpacker gets a job in the local restaurant but our Aboriginal kids do not. However, a couple of years ago a local restaurant owner trained a couple of young girls, and that was very successful. They became very good waiters. They were maitres d and they could do a fair bit of management of the restaurant as well. I am not 100 per cent sure what she was doing differently from other people, but she was strongly supportive of them and understood when culture took them away. She also had very high expectations, so I think it might have been a bit of a mix of those. She set very high standards; she would not take anything that was not exactly right. She has since left and, of those two girls, one is now not working and I am not quite sure where the other one is. So I think that element of support is really important.

Mr ROBB—Support and understanding seems to be critical.

Mrs VALE—Thank you very much for your report. It is lovely to see you here. Fran, this is probably not your problem but I am also interested in the issue of peer pressure. I think we all understand that education is the building block for anything else that is achieved. Perhaps this is not the council's responsibility, although it does appear to me that the council in this beautiful, unique place is taking on roles that most other councils do not. At what age do the children start to feel peer pressure? Is it around high school age? What is the drop-out rate for children at primary level? Does it happen at primary level too?

Mayor Kilgariff—It does happen at primary level, but I do not have those figures. You would probably have more of an idea of those figures.

Mrs VALE—But it is enough to make you concerned.

Mayor Kilgariff—There is a drop-out rate from primary school. At a couple of our primary schools, the majority of kids are Indigenous. There is quite a big drop-out in the early years of high school and it goes right through. We rejoice when we get an Indigenous kid through year 12, because it is a remarkable feat for them to have done that. There is quite a large drop-out rate in early high school. They have quite a few programs aimed at peer support and all the rest of it.

However, a teacher at a local high school said to me the other day that she despaired because they only go there to socialise with their friends. The social side of school is so important to these young Indigenous kids and education is something they have to do to get to socialise.

Mrs VALE—Have any of the schools tried providing food for the children, especially at primary school level?

Mayor Kilgariff— Yeperenye Primary School, which is Aboriginal controlled, gives the kids breakfast.

Mrs VALE—Does that help to keep the numbers enrolled?

Mayor Kilgariff—I believe it does. A lot of the students that go to that school come from the town camps. The conditions that they get up to in the morning are vastly different at some of those camps.

Mrs VALE—I know. I am aware of that.

Mayor Kilgariff—It is an attraction for them to eat when they get to school.

Mrs VALE—I would not imagine that it would be an initiative from the council—as Rex said, you are already looking for funding to expand your library, and I congratulate you on the programs that you have already established—but do you think that if the schools provided three meals a day for the children it would help them stay there a lot longer, especially for a hot meal by about four o'clock in the afternoon?

Mayor Kilgariff—I suppose it would. It would also go a long way towards feeding those kids—

Mrs VALE—And sorting out some health problems and making sure they had a good, balanced healthy diet.

Mayor Kilgariff—Yes.

Mrs VALE—If that was the case, maybe there are children that would make sure they at least finished primary school—if they thought they were going to get a hot meal at the end of each day. You said that there are very strong film-making and art activities. A school in my area teaches how to video. Children can graduate from the school and go and get a job with any of the television channels, virtually. That is what the school teaches. Do you think that if a school offered that to Aboriginal children there might be a real interest? Do you think that they might see that the learning they do can actually lead to something that is highly creative and that reading Shakespeare—and I do not know whether they teach Shakespeare in schools today—and going through the normal, regimented school subjects can actually lead to something for them? I am just thinking of carrots, that is all.

Mayor Kilgariff—I suspect it would.

Mrs VALE—On the issue of peer pressure, the challenge to me is to raise everybody up to that level, so that all the children see a value in education and see it as a key to themselves and to their futures, rather than perceiving somebody to be a tall poppy because they have completed year 12. If everybody does it—if you have a whole class doing it—you have a mental attitude that that is okay and that that is where we are all heading. All you need is for people to come up with simplistic solutions, but I am just trying to think laterally about carrots and trying to make school relevant. What Mark said is right. There are very close similarities with people in, say, Western Sydney and in my area. Having said that, a lot of those kids have to go to school or they are dragged back by the truancy officer, but you cannot keep them there once they get to about 15. Then you have to give them something that is relevant and that will entice them to stay there. We have found that the school I mentioned that teaches film and video making—they have concerts and run 'a star is born' type of stuff, where all the kids perform and it is all done on film, and it is all packaged up—is absolutely fantastic and the kids cannot wait to come to school.

Mr Mooney—That sort of initiative is excellent.

Mrs VALE—But it is about funding, I know.

Mr Mooney—Yes, but also it goes right back to the younger children. My wife tutors Aboriginal young children at the primary school age. One of my wife's frustrations is that there is no continuity. A child will be there one day but they will not be there for another week.

Mrs VALE—But they would be if they thought they were going to get three meals the next day.

Mr Mooney—Yes. But it is not the child's fault so much.

Mrs VALE—I know that and, when we talk about intergenerational learning, I am also concerned about the kids that have already dropped out. Some ideas that you can come up with will have an impact in the future, but there are kids out there now that desperately need that kind of educational opportunity. There is a little intergenerational learning centre called Ayerrkyenge, which you would be aware of. Is there any support or funding that the council can give to that organisation to try to catch those kids that have dropped out—to give them an education?

Mayor Kilgariff—Council does not fund Ayerrkyenge. They have never asked us.

Mrs VALE—I know you have everybody putting their hands up and wanting something. I know that that little organisation had difficulty in getting funding because it was not quite a school.

Mayor Kilgariff—That is right.

Mrs VALE—It was a real problem. I tried to get some money for it on one occasion. It just seemed to catch kids that dropped out of the school system because they could not cope with the lock-step educational system that we have. I thought it really had some value, and I often wonder what happened to the children.

Mayor Kilgariff—It is still going quite strongly. However, what you said about Ayerrkyenge makes me think of another hurdle towards achievement: most Aboriginal organisations are unable to work with other Aboriginal organisations. That is a real stumbling block to the proper use of resources and the proper fulfilling of their roles. In town we have many Aboriginal organisations that are funded from different programs. A lot of them are Aboriginal organisations that employ many Aboriginal people. One of the things I see is many of those organisations not having anything to do with each other, because of family or clan differences.

Mrs VALE—So you have a spread of very finite resources, and they are spread very thinly.

Mayor Kilgariff—It is more the case that there are a lot of resources but they are not shared. Ayerrkyenge is a particular family or group. Other people do not go there. The gap year centre runs fantastic programs, but some kids do not go there because they do not feel comfortable. It is not their family. So you end up with almost a silo, where Aboriginal people will go to one place—the kids especially—but not to another, because they do not feel comfortable. They do not feel it is their family or their area.

Mrs VALE—I understand. It is such a shame when you have such a skills shortage. There are people here who could be trained to fulfil your skills shortage, if they had the opportunity. When we came in from the airport, I noticed a couple of big hangars for Aboriginal Aircraft Maintenance and Services. How does that work?

Mayor Kilgariff—I am not completely familiar with that. That is an organisation that flies out to the communities and transports people and supplies.

Mrs VALE—Do Aboriginal engineers do the aircraft maintenance too?

Mayor Kilgariff—I do not know.

Mrs VALE—I have just one more question. You talked about the young girls who were waitresses. Is there a hospitality school here in Alice Springs?

Mayor Kilgariff—There is, at Charles Darwin University.

Mrs VALE—Are young Aboriginal girls able to go there to do hospitality?

Mayor Kilgariff—Yes.

Mrs VALE—It would not be a university degree in hospitality, would it?

Mayor Kilgariff—No, it is not.

Mrs VALE—It is just a training school?

Mayor Kilgariff—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Do those young boys and girls have an opportunity for jobs if they graduate?

Mayor Kilgariff—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Do McDonalds train Aboriginal young people?

Mayor Kilgariff—I am not sure whether they target Indigenous kids.

Mrs VALE—You have a McDonalds here, I should imagine.

Mayor Kilgariff—Yes.

Mrs VALE—One?

Mayor Kilgariff—Yes.

Mr SNOWDON—More than enough.

Mrs VALE—It is a good opportunity for kids. It is a good entry into a job.

Mayor Kilgariff—It is.

Mrs VALE—So they do employ Aboriginal children?

Mayor Kilgariff—I am not sure whether they target Indigenous kids but they, like everybody else, have such a high turnover and are always understaffed.

Mr Blackburn—Can I add one comment as far as retention strategies are concerned, to give a bit of an insight into that?

Mrs VALE—Yes.

Mr Blackburn—When you talk about making school fun to go along to, one initiative is Crocfest. It is a key feature. There is active participation. It is a long-term training program. Kids go along and participate and festivals are held later on in the year. It is staged in Alice Springs, and council is engaged in assisting and providing the support to stage that event. Young children are involved in rehearsals and are actively engaging in a bit of fun at school. This attracts them to staying at school. When you talk about a 'carrot', there is also that opportunity. That program has been quite successful in being integrated into Alice Springs. It is a good activity that is supported, and it can lead on to the opportunities you spoke about.

Mrs VALE—What age group does Crocfest target?

Mr Blackburn—It is the teenage group from 12 to 14.

Mrs VALE—Early high school.

Mr Blackburn—It is a good age.

Mayor Kilgariff—I need to make the point that we are talking this morning about urban Indigenous children. It is a whole different ball game out in the communities. There are very few jobs out there, and we have not touched on that at all.

Mr SNOWDON—Do you access any programs from Department of Employment and Workplace Relations for employment assistance for Indigenous kids?

Mr Mooney—I do not believe that we do. We access available support programs, but I do not think we are doing that at the moment.

Mr SNOWDON—Could you get back to us with a list of programs that you currently access and how long you have accessed them for?

Mr Mooney—Sure.

Mr SNOWDON—I would like to ask a question of our secretariat. Given the conversation this morning, I think it is extremely important that we get the Commonwealth education department to provide us with an analysis of the effect of the changes in the IESIP program and the tutorial assistance program to the outcomes in education. This was done at the end of last year. To my knowledge, not one red cent has arrived at any school in Alice Springs for IESIP in the last six months.

Mayor Kilgariff—A lot of people have commented to me about that. Tutors have been taken out of schools.

Mr SNOWDON—To me, given the conversation this morning, and given the interest that the community has expressed in education, I think it is important that we get a handle on what the impact has been on the community and on individual schools of the changes to IESIP. I can tell you what it has meant in Alice Springs, because I have a particular attachment to a few schools around the place, but I think it is very important that we get a summary and have a discussion with the minister if possible about those issues. We will be talking to Tangentyere next. My questions are going to be related to how you enter those partnerships, and it is fairly obvious from your submission. So I am happy with what you have said. Thank you.

CHAIR—We are meeting with the department on 8 August, and we will pursue Mr Snowdon's request there. A last question from me relates to the employers' role within the community—and the chamber of commerce and those groups. I have some recollection of a program some years ago where an effort was being made to connect. The lady with the two young women reminded me of it. Is there a campaign or some kind of effort made by the employers' groups? The McDonalds discussion reminded me that we have across Australia a corporate Australia approach to Indigenous employment—whether it is extra effort made, the Cape York Partnerships, an initiative in Western Australia or whatever. Are you aware of any corporate involvement here?

Mayor Kilgariff—The board of Footprints Forward is made up of local business people. Many of those came through the chamber of commerce, which has been actively involved in these sorts of programs. Dick Estens has been here a couple of times with his Moree model.

Footprints Forward actually grew out of that. I think Voyages resort has a target of 10 per cent for Indigenous employment, but I am not aware of anybody else that has that sort of target.

Mr SNOWDON—I think the issue here is that we are in a town of small businesses. The way in which the federal government has targeted these employment strategies over the last seven or eight years is to move away from small business and target big business. That has had an effect in some areas but has had very little impact on this town. The Indigenous support programs that used to operate here no longer operate.

CHAIR—So Dick Estens has made a couple of visits?

Mayor Kilgariff—Yes, he has been here a couple of times.

CHAIR—In the last six or 12 months?

Mayor Kilgariff—Probably not in the last six months, but in the last 12 months.

CHAIR—As you would be aware, some of the outcomes they are getting are quite inspirational. Is there any uptake or development from that at all?

Mayor Kilgariff—Not from his model in particular but certainly from a Footprints Forward model that seeks to have that peer support and being run by Indigenous people.

CHAIR—It is not as if you are not trying. You have been giving everything a crack. I suppose we all are, and we share the same frustrations. We will not solve it here in this hour or so today, but we really appreciate the input from the Alice Springs City Council. Thank you very much for your time. We genuinely appreciate it.

[12.10 pm]

COWHAM, Mr Peter George, CDEP Manager, Tangentyere Council

HARVEY, Ms Maria Elena, Assistant Manager, Tangentyere Job Shop, Tangentyere Council

MALONEY, Mr Michael Joseph, Human Resources Manager, Tangentyere Council

STRACHAN, Mr Peter James, Manager, Tangentyere Job Shop, Director, Tangentyere Council

TILMOUTH, Mr William, Executive Director, Tangentyere Council

CHAIR—Welcome. William, I believe you would like to make a statement to the committee. I am sure others will have the opportunity to add something if they wish.

Mr Tilmouth—I do have a prepared statement, and thank you for the opportunity. John Taylor, of the ANU, said:

> ... against stated aims of key Commonwealth policy initiatives, it is clear that outcomes for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory are deficient. Employment in the mainstream (and in particular in the private sector) labour market has declined, not increased as had been intended. The Indigenous share of total Territory income has declined while the gap in personal income levels has widened.

Tangentyere Council's message to the inquiry is that redress requires significant investment in Aboriginal people. Our initial submission provided a series of examples of what we have achieved in Indigenous employment and details the lessons that we have learned from our experience. In respect of employment pathways, if Aboriginal people are to successfully compete for skilled, mainstream jobs with other Territory residents, there are deep structural hurdles to overcome. These include poor literacy and numeracy levels. Therefore, pathways need to be created to assist people in the transition to full-time work. CDEP is a significant tool and a stepping stone for hundreds of Indigenous people in Central Australia. It must be recognised as such.

In respect of on-the-job-training, the experience at Tangentyere shows that the training that works best has an emphasis on practical, skills based learning; it occurs in groups, so there is group support and encouragement; the trainer-instructor is Indigenous or has plenty of experience working with Indigenous people; it includes accreditation as part of the process and outcomes; and it builds on learning as part of the project or a contract so that participants learn the requirements of budgets, deadlines and quality control.

In respect of building apprenticeship opportunities: the Tangentyere submission detailed the success of the construction apprenticeship known as the centre remote model. The dilemma with new apprenticeships, often, is that the wages are too low for people with families to feed. However, employers face supervision and training costs for limited productivity in the first two

or so years. Government funding assistance to offset these costs to employers should increase numbers commencing and completing, while offering the apprentices a living wage.

In respect of contract preference, the inclusion of Indigenous employment requirements in government and non-government contracts are an important step in generating employment opportunities, but this is only effective where such contract provisions are enforceable. From the lessons drawn from our experiences we propose comprehensive employment generation though an import substitution model such as the successful central remote model for housing construction. This needs to be implemented across all areas of service provision, including roads and civil construction; stores; community services such as child care and aged care; essential services; financial services such as banking; administration, education and health.

While this will not create full employment, it will create employment for a significant number of Indigenous people and open pathways to employment in mainstream industries such as mining and tourism. This is imperative given the labour shortage, which is projected to worsen with the ageing of the mainstream population and the drift from rural and remote regions. In contrast, the Aboriginal population in the Northern Territory is younger and growing.

Of equal importance is the impact on remote communities. We found from the delivery of the central remote model that considerable community pride has been developed and that the apprentices are now role models in their own communities. This is very important to increasing participation in education. The first step to achieve this objective is a detailed, regionally based quantitative assessment of the supply of and the demand for labour for different economic activities that already exist or that may be created at a local level. This, then, would inform the appropriate mix of resources for employment, training and enterprise development.

As always, Tangentyere stress the importance of Indigenous control. Our submission details how we have developed partnerships to ensure that we have access to the professional expertise necessary to undertake these functions. We also consider that it is imperative for such programs to be undertaken on a regional basis—that is, in Central Australia—to achieve economies of scale. There are not the monetary or human resources available to achieve this any other way.

Since our written submission, Tangentyere have undertaken work with DEWR and the Northern Territory government and we have a viable proposal that targets employment in mining and associated industries. I would like to table as an addition to our original submission the document I am holding, if you will give us your permission.

CHAIR—Certainly.

Mr Tilmouth—With that I would like to thank you. My staff and I will do our best to answer any questions you might have.

CHAIR—Thank you. Would anyone else like to say anything? Shall we go straight into a general discussion? Can I open the bowling by asking about the program with DEWR. Can you describe that a little further? I may have missed it; I may not have heard it. It is only the last week or two, is it—the last few weeks? How long ago did DEWR—

Mr Tilmouth—Can I have the privilege of introducing Mike Maloney, who has been pivotal in the negotiations of that—

CHAIR—I would just like to get a bit of a handle on that, to see what has happened there.

Mr Maloney—I will take you through the second last page of the submission, because it encapsulates it in a very brief way. It is called the Tangentyere Council Indigenous job model. The theory is that, when it comes to Indigenous employment, the employment function, at least in the early stages, is best carried out by an Indigenous organisation. What would otherwise be the employer would become the host employer. The steps to achieving this are as follows—and I read from the document we have just tabled:

(1) Indigenous organisation to establish a labour hire capability.

(2) Their first task is to identify an appropriate emerging project that has the possibility of providing a critical mass of suitable job opportunities.

(3) Having identified the emerging project the second task is to initiate discussions with the project owners with a view to identifying a critical mass of job opportunities. These job opportunities will most likely be either—

- Specific jobs (eg drivers) or
- A process or part of a process that will give rise to an enclave of varying job opportunities

(4) Once these job opportunities are identified the next step is to negotiate their outsourcing to the Indigenous organisation.

(5) Having secured their outsourcing, the Indigenous organisation uses the lead time to recruit, select and train a pool of Indigenous people to meet the contract.

Finally the need for critical mass is to ensure economies of scale in work location, type of work, time lines, training needs and ongoing support.

The need for a pool of people to meet the contractual arrangement is so the Indigenous organisation has the flexibility to cover contingencies such as sorry leave and ceremonial leave.

The involvement of DEWR arises because we approached DEWR to finance a field trip up through the mining sector and on to a conference in Western Australia. We believe we are now at the stage where we will be going back to DEWR and others, asking for a comprehensive feasibility study of that proposition.

CHAIR—So you are not quite at a deal yet. You are well advanced, though, in terms of discussion and putting money on the table.

Mr Maloney—I believe this model should be looked at very closely.

CHAIR—But where are you at with DEWR? What is the position?

Mr Maloney—DEWR funded the field trip. I indicated to DEWR at the beginning of the process that if, when we come back from the field trip, we still think we are kicking the footy in the right direction we will be going back to them for a new contract to provide a comprehensive study of this. The original contract was only a very small funding arrangement. I suspect we are looking at a $100,000 feasibility study here, because this has the capacity to provide work for all Indigenous people.

CHAIR—Can I just define the timeline. Here we are in July; would you be thinking September? If it goes the way you hope, and you are able to agree, would you hope to have something in two or three months time?

Mr Maloney—I expect we will be putting a request to DEWR in the next couple of weeks.

CHAIR—I have just one other question. In your submission, you talk about some 'wonderful success stories' and lessons learnt from them. Can we talk a little bit about that. Give us a couple of examples. I think I know one or two of them, but could you help define the 'success stories' as you have seen them in recent years.

Mr Tilmouth—Our major one would be the central remote building construction one. It is one that the government worked very closely on, through the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory. It was one where they changed the procurement process from each community having a pick of housing to it being under one project manager. The project manager had the responsibility of allocating the houses as well as the funding, so it was vacant of any deception or manipulation. That having been done, the standardised designs and standardised specifications came in. It got rid of a lot of unscrupulous thinking and made it workable. That is the way that the community had control over the apprentices, where they wanted the houses and the designs, and the money came directly from my hand into the project.

CHAIR—It is a pretty positive outcome. I see figures of 20 apprentices and, by September 2006, you are hoping 30 homes would be completed. Is that around the mark? One presumes they are all Indigenous.

Ms Harvey—Yes, all Indigenous.

CHAIR—That is a wonderful example. You have a partnership with your local council and local government people as well, haven't you?

Mr Tilmouth—Yes, we do.

CHAIR—Can you comment on that as well? How long has it been going? Is it going along quite well?

Mr Tilmouth—It has been going quite some years now. There used to be a sense of bad relationships until we set the MOU. Now we have quite a cordial relationship with the town council. It started off with the couch eradication program—to rid the river of couch grass. Peter Cowham is far more familiar, as the CDEP manager, with the finer details than I am.

Mr Cowham—Stemming out of the memorandum of understanding with the town council, we were able to set up several mutual projects using CDEP participants. One was the weed control program in the river that William described. The other major one we did was the upgrade of the town camp roads. That was done through NHAS money, I think, that town council was auspicing. We got a contract out of that to put concrete margins along all the roads in the town camp—some 15 or 20 kilometres. Out of that I recruited 12 to 15, straight off the CDEP. We ran it over 18 months—we drew it out as long as we could. During that time we not only employed them on a close to full-time wage but also trained them up and used that contract as a training

program for them—that included driving licences, concreting courses and a lot of on-the-job training. The extent of the success of that was that all those people subsequently moved into other employment. Before, they were unemployable; after the 18 months, they all moved into employment—and much of it away from the organisation. Some went to the mines, as they now had the confidence and the appropriate skills to move into those situations.

That is just an example of the success of an MOU where both parties work together with the same objective, but it also outlines the success of the contractual situation. We have talked about waivers and weighting towards contracts, whether they are government or whatever, that have preference for those organisations and those tenderers that employ Indigenous people and put training in as part of that contract. Some of those are mooted all the time—for example, the Desert Knowledge precinct. But quite often, unfortunately, the obligations are not met by the successful tenderers. Probably the latest one has been the Stirling Heights development over the road here. That was negotiated through Lhere Artepe for the release of the land. Three apprentices were to be trained up on the program. It was an ideal opportunity for the companies engaged to do that, but it has not happened. I think probably Peter Strachan may have some comment in regard to the success of that.

CHAIR—Sure.

Mr Strachan—In simple terms, there was an agreement as part of the total Indigenous land use agreement that positions would be made available as new apprenticeships with three private sector employers. We were advised in the job shop that these opportunities were there and that this was a fantastic opportunity. Maria made contact with all three, but the silence was deafening, basically. It was very disappointing that our efforts to pursue what we saw as legitimate employment opportunities were dismissed as, 'We're a bit quiet at the moment' or 'Things have dropped off from what they used to be'—that sort of meaningless response. We wonder if, in fact, these companies had simply said that they would look at the issue rather actually being committed to the issue. Because we are not parties to that MOU—that is between the native title representatives of Alice Springs and the individual companies—there is nothing we can do in leverage. But we have advised the lawyer working on behalf of that agreement just how shoddy it has been.

CHAIR—You felt misled and let down, basically.

Mr Strachan—It is not so much the developers; it is other fairly long-established companies in Alice Springs that we and most people in the town would have thought were doing fairly good business, rather than things being quiet and slow. In some cases—Maria can go into more detail—even getting access to the nominee in the agreement was difficult. The gatekeepers, the secretaries, just would not let you through. Whether they are doing that off their own bat or whether they are being advised to do that, we do not know. We have tried our best.

CHAIR—Thank you for sharing that. Maria, do you want to comment?

Ms Harvey—First off, I am the assistant manager and have overall responsibility for five local Indigenous employment specialists. Each one of those employment consultants has been taught how to reverse market their job seekers. In the case where one company, a glassmaking company, could not offer an opportunity, that particular job-seeker's employment consultant

phoned around until she actually got another glass company for job seekers. That is what reverse marketers do.

Not everybody gets reverse marketed; it is only the very employable job seekers. We look at the kinds of industries that they could possibly successfully work in. We also keep in mind that Alice Springs is a business based centre. They say a lot of it is tourism, hospitality and other things, but at the end of the day it is a very business driven town. For the three stakeholders we spoke of in the Lhere Artepe land deal we were not able, after several attempts, to contact any of the senior people, particularly in strong businesses in Alice Springs. We have targeted others, though. Persistence shows success. We not only look at who gives people jobs; we also look at people who do not and we start rallying them. We have been able to successfully place people at lots and lots of private places. They will be happy to take on more when they can.

CHAIR—There is the positive, and that is great, but there are some disappointments as well.

Ms Harvey—There are a lot more disappointments than successes. We have to do a lot of doorknocking before we actually get a placement.

CHAIR—Good luck to you. We might come back to that. I am sure it will come up as we go through questions.

Mr ROBB—How applicable do you think the Indigenous job model is to the mainstream jobs that are typically available in the town, such as working behind a counter and waitressing and those sorts of things?

Mr Maloney—The critical consideration is to identify a critical mass of jobs 12 or 18 months before they actually appear on the market. If a large tourism project were to come onto the market within 12 to 18 months with a fair few hospitality jobs in it then you would definitely target that as a way to train up a group of 10, 15 or 20 people over that period. What you do not have the opportunity to do is to fill spots as they occur. It is no use putting someone on their own in a receptionist job. It just will not work. If we had a receptionist job, a cleaning job and a number of other jobs where we had people working together then our success rate would be much higher.

Mr ROBB—So even if you had an expectation of 20 jobs being available amongst 10 small businesses, it would still not be likely to work too well unless you had—

Mr Maloney—You would not go near that. You do not have the critical mass.

Mr ROBB—Are you doing a lot of educational work with a lot of the young people you are putting through the Job Shop or the builder training program? Are you doing literacy, numeracy and other things?

Ms Harvey—I believe it does not become so relevant unless somebody is working. We have had quite a lot of success in numeracy and literacy with people who are already placed in jobs; therefore the literacy and numeracy training becomes a lot more relevant to them. But we have found that when we have tried to get lots of adults to go back to school it does not really work that well.

Mr ROBB—Could you give an example of how you might give literacy and numeracy training to somebody who is in a job? What physically happens?

Mr Tilmouth—With the builder training program they come in and do blocks of work with Charles Darwin University, which was the old TAFE. To give you an example, two of those young people left their apprenticeship, moved to Darwin and approached commercial builders. Because of the standard of education that they had received the builders took them on and they are both now working with commercial builders. So the standard is pretty high. The achievements of those young people were pretty high and it was accepted by the commercial world that they were the standard that they wanted. That is just an example of two young people who moved on from the builder training program into full-time commercial building.

Mr Strachan—With the builder training program we used to be able to access the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme, ATAS. I am not sure how that operates now, but that used to be accessible by people who were in accredited training, to reinforce the learning that they had in off-the-job modules. I guess this was alluded to in previous discussions: given the way the DEST programs now operate, I am not so sure that such programs can be accessed easily, but through Job Network if a person in their first six months of placement requires literacy or any other additional education or learning then there are funds to cover that short-term early-on issue.

Mr ROBB—I notice you have a top-up program through the CDEP on the building side. Can you give me a sense of roughly what the level of top-up is, how effective it is, the importance of that and how the whole thing works?

Mr Cowham—Yes. 'Top-up' is probably an unfortunate term. Historically, it developed that you got CDEP and then you got something over and above CDEP. We do not regard it as that. We regard it as either CDEP or award. When people in our organisation receive a top-up, they come under our Tangentyere award or our enterprise bargaining agreement. They are actually employed, and they enjoy the benefits of employment under the organisation that every other employee enjoys. We see it as a job creation program in itself and as a stepping stone to other employment. Sometimes it is a first step for CDEP participants.

As for the nature of our organisation, it is quite a large organisation and we are able to access a range of funds for a huge range of programs. Only William can understand the breadth of it all. It gives a range of opportunities for CDEP participants as well. It also enables us to run those programs effectively and it creates more jobs. So we may top up a position but at the same time the person will be trained. It may last a while, while the program funds are there, but there are also opportunities for them to move into more substantial employment or longer term employment. The employment can be part time or full time, depending on the availability of funds.

The importance of this top-up system cannot be underestimated. I feel it gets pooh-poohed a little bit sometimes, but it is an essential stepping stone to real employment. In itself it can be real employment. We have people in jobs such as receptionists and drivers but we also have people working in the bank, we have administrators and we have a whole lot of skilled people who are still in that top-up situation—they are training and becoming very skilled in their situation. Obviously, the new DEWR policy as to CDEP is—very meaningfully—to move people through the CDEP, use it as a stepping stone and transit them into full employment.

We have undertaken to do that and to expand the amount of people we move through the program. We have set up a new department within the CDEP just to address that. We call it 'Employment and Training'. We have employed a coordinator to help people to identify participants and to set up a case management approach to help move people through. Along the way they may move into a top-up situation within the organisation to award employment. We will endeavour to train them and we will also, through the Job Shop relationship, try to identify positions for them. We will engage potential employers, encouraging them to take CDEP participants into employment. We also have an apprenticeship program. We have four registered apprenticeships in the new apprenticeship centre and we are trying to set up a fifth. We have a carpenter in the constructions area and we have two land management apprentices. The problem we are facing with apprenticeships, as was said earlier, is that 40 per cent of the adult tradesman's wage amounts to about $6 an hour for most apprentices, and there are plenty of jobs around in which young people can get paid way more than that. Unfortunately, they make an economic decision on where they want to be. And at a young age a bit of money is important. So it is almost embarrassing to put someone into an apprenticeship situation and say, 'You're going to get $6 an hour.' That was the first issue we faced.

The second issue was the reluctance of tradesmen to take on apprentices, and that is a cultural thing. We actively talk to the tradesmen or potential supervisors of apprentices and try and help them solve their problems. I think this should be done on a broader scale to try and encourage tradesmen to take on apprentices, because a lot of them will not. They say that it is too costly, there are too many problems and they have to pay wages, superannuation et cetera. They put up all these barriers. We try and break down those barriers through negotiating apprenticeship positions.

The four apprentices that we have currently are on what we call a trainee wage, and it is fairly substantial. It is about $28,000 to $30,000 a year. It is a good starting wage for them. We are very careful about who we put into them, but we have to negotiate how they get paid. So we have put a hotchpotch of funding together, which includes STEP, CDEP, Job Shop and the tradesmen themselves. Our model for apprenticeships is that Tangentyere is the employer, we put the funding together and we place them with a tradesman. The tradesmen contribute as well, but we take care of the HR side of the employment. So far, we find that that is a good and effective model, but it is very expensive for one organisation to be able to do all the time. However, I think they are the parameters that you need to look to when you are going to talk about Indigenous apprenticeships.

CHAIR—Is that just with the one tradesman? There is no movement between tradesmen?

Mr Cowham—We have not yet been in a situation where it has not worked out with a tradesman. Fortunately, we have some very good apprentices. We do have the option to place them with another tradesman in such a case. We are the employer and we have that flexibility.

CHAIR—You remind me of the old group training principle, which I think about 10 per cent of Australia's apprenticeships were under. That is a very small model of that group training approach, which is, as you said, expensive.

Mr ROBB—In terms of the Alice, with all the small businesses, your expectation is that to really crack that nut of getting some Indigenous people into a lot of these jobs behind the counter

and things they are likely to have to start by being employed by some Indigenous organisation and then get the skills and confidence to get into other jobs where they do not necessarily require group support. Is that your assessment?

Mr Maloney—More often than not. Once we have identified the possible project that is coming on board we would recruit the appropriate people or make arrangements with CDEP and Job Shop, asking, 'Who do you have that we can train up to meet these skill needs?' We are still up in the air as to what status they will have in that period between when we get the contract to supply the labour to the project and when the project comes on board. There seems to be a vacuum in there which will hopefully be part of the DEWR study as to how we finance that part of it. But we take our labour from what we already have on board and, if necessary, then go to the open labour market.

Mr ROBB—I can understand the model from the point of view of large contract work, and I think we heard yesterday it is being applied successfully around Darwin—there is that sort of process on the railway lines. I am just saying that, having successfully done that in a few areas, they have some skills, confidence and work experience and they are more likely to be able to get into these other small business jobs. Is that the case?

Mr Maloney—Once you have a successful outcome. You might have an arrangement with a mine to supply 10 or 20 people. Over time, hopefully some of those people will leave the Indigenous organisation and take up direct employment—because we want that flow to come through—or they might be confident enough to take other jobs that are around. So in time there will be a flow through the Indigenous labour hire organisation to other jobs.

Mr SNOWDON—You talk about a critical mass: as I understand it, the turnover in the tourism and hospitality industry here in Alice Springs is quite high—I do not know what it is, but I imagine it is probably 50 per cent or 60 per cent. That would mean you have got a body of work ready to be taken at any one time all through the year. Has there been any discussion between you and the tourism industry as a group about their overall employment needs over a period of time?

Mr Maloney—Not that I am aware of, but others might know better.

Mr SNOWDON—It seems to me that that would create a real opportunity for that sort of model you are talking about.

Ms Harvey—We have got a trainee in the tourism commission who gained entry to the tourism commission through the Northern Territory public service New Apprenticeships scheme. She has almost completed her apprenticeship and she will be staying on. I have been building a relationship with their manager and she is also going to look at another Indigenous person after this person and try to keep that going to build up a mass of people. Retail is not the most preferred occupation of Indigenous people, nor is front counter work. They are not jobs where people just put their hand up and say, 'I want to be at the front.' They are much happier doing other things. That is not to say that there are not lots of prospective ones out there.

Mr SNOWDON—The reason I asked the question is that I know that, certainly last year, Rydges were importing labour from Newcastle because they could not employ locals. I

understand your point, but it seems to me that there is a real connection between an existing labour requirement and a labour supply. I am not sure what the inclination of your CDEP participants is, or what the future objectives of people who might not be job ready might be—some of them are still at school. It seems to me that there is an opportunity waiting to be tapped.

Mr Strachan—I would like to add to that. You would be aware, Mr Snowdon, that there is an organisation in Alice Springs called the Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre, which is an Indigenous-owned and Indigenous-controlled tourism business. Back in the late '90s they certainly had a goal of being a training ground in the tourism industry because they offered art sales and cultural experiences as well as taking people out on tours. There was a combination of opportunities for Aboriginal people here in Alice Springs to build up the skills and then move on into the broader tourism industry.

My perception of what happened there is that, as Maria is saying, it was difficult to encourage a lot of people to get into that industry because, for some people—especially those with family commitments—the sorts of hours required make it difficult for them to really commit to that industry in the long term. Also, that organisation had to operate as a commercial entity and so it was never going to be easy for them to become a training organisation as well as a commercial operation. As we all know, there are difficulties in matching the needs and the costs of both.

Another point is that in the tourism industry, particularly in central Australia, a lot of it is geographic. So, while there may be demand for some places in the town of Alice Springs which may suit circumstances where Aboriginals live in the town, there are also community based activities that might also be relevant, but the demands of that particular tourism activity in a community setting might be vastly different from those of a commercial operation in town. It is quite a diverse market and we cannot then have a training ground or an employment pathway that is specifically going to meet the demands of the industry here in central Australia. If you are recruiting to Uluru and places like that then the expectation of the visitors is local people speaking the local language, and you have then got to be aware of that.

Mr SNOWDON—On the question of IHANT and the building team, what discussion—if any—have you had with the Northern Territory government about changing their procurement requirements and tender documents to ensure that in simple construction in remote communities there is an obligation to try and employ local people or contract local labour or companies?

Mr Tilmouth—Requirements have developed for that sort of stuff. It stipulates that you be encouraged to apply for an exemption because of Indigenous employment and there is a waiver situation, but it is not one that is enforced. In the IHANT situation, the Papunya central remote model is now going to be adopted Territory wide for all the other remote areas that have large capital works programs. This model is going to be applied right across the Territory to try to achieve the same outcomes. IHANT and the Territory government have seen the value of that program. Numerous consultancies were given. When they came back they said, 'Aboriginal people do not want to be employed.' This one was tried and Aboriginal people are putting their hands up to be employed. So it is a model that is going to be right across the Territory.

Mr SNOWDON—That would be for IHANT only, though?

Mr Tilmouth—Hopefully for NAHS, in health, the construction of clinics, hospitals, schools—the mind boggles as to what work these young people can take on once their apprenticeships are finished. Tangentyere is not going to just leave them in the lurch and say, 'Now your apprenticeship is finished.' We will encourage them to take on repairs and maintenance programs within the communities and renovations and upgrades so that they in turn can employ their own apprentices. That, hopefully, is how we will build the capacity. It is not about just sustaining the longevity of housing infrastructure; it is also about creating the employment that goes with it.

Mr SNOWDON—What I was trying to get to was not that but to the issue of extending that model to civil works.

Mr Tilmouth—Yes, I think it could apply to road construction, airstrip maintenance, barge landings—we do not have any barges down here but—

Mr SNOWDON—We could find them! We could build a landing.

Mr Tilmouth—The mind boggles as to where you could stretch this to. It is right across the board. A few simple procurement changes will allow the dollars to drop down more to where they are needed.

Mr SNOWDON—I want to turn to the issue of school to work. We have had a couple of discussions here this morning about Indigenous kids dropping out of school early. There are a couple of primary schools where the majority of the school population is Indigenous—that is excluding Yeperenye. At the primary school that my kids go to nearly 40 per cent are Indigenous. That is not reflected in years 11 to 12.

Ms Harvey—That is true. Job Shop has recently won a contract for an Indigenous youth employment consultant. They were contracts that were made available right across the country. Our tender was successful in that. We have a project officer whose main brief is to retain Indigenous students who are in years 10 to 12, to work especially with the ones who are considering leaving and to set up employment programs for the ones who just absolutely cannot stay. The backbone of her role is to keep as many there for as long as possible.

Mr SNOWDON—What I want to get to, though, is how we actually get the connect between kids at school and jobs. If they are dropping out at years 10, 11 and 12 and not getting into higher education, presumably they are doing something—they are not playing footy. They have to be doing something. Do they go onto CDEP, do they get sit-down money—what do they do? What do you suggest is a way of attracting those young kids into trade skills and employment opportunities to fill the gaps that are here in the town?

Mr Strachan—I am on the management board of Footprints Forward. Fran was talking about that in the previous presentation. She was certainly reinforcing that there is private sector representation on the board of the Footprints Forward. It is working with the Job Shop Indigenous youth employment consultant to get messages to people at school as to what the world of work is really like and the opportunities that are out there.

Footprints Forward has representation from Group Training Northern Territory on its board, so we are trying to get a Group Training message across that that is another way of a person picking up skills and/or a new apprenticeship. I have just come directly from a board meeting where we talked about school based apprenticeships. They have declined a bit in Alice Springs. For some reason, achieving a balance between the demands of full-time education and part-time work for some students is quite difficult. Others have their jobs after school, but the notion of turning up to a workplace a couple of days a week and being part of a regular work force, as well as being part of a school, is difficult. So the numbers have declined a bit.

Another thing is that the drop-off rate is a difficult issue not only for this town but also nationally. But there have been—as was recorded in the Productivity Commission reports I heard on the news this morning—some small improvements in Indigenous education outcomes. My wife, who is an Indigenous woman, did a thesis on retention rates to year 12. She determined from surveys of the students that not only family support and commitment, along with diversity of curriculum—with access to Indigenous studies—but also a balanced non-school lifestyle were fundamental factors for a person so that it was not all work and no play. Getting the balance right was one of the messages that she put through in that thesis.

The support systems in the schools are quite good and we were pleased to see that there is money in the recent federal budget to support the role of careers advisers. What has happened here—and presumably elsewhere in Australia—is that careers advisers and VET coordinators have tended to become lumbered with a range of tasks. It is almost like an additional resource for the principal of the school, so their time and capacity to influence and advise and lead young people into educational and post school opportunities have diminished. So rebalancing that role is going to be quite important.

Mr SNOWDON—What about work experience? We have living with us at the moment a young lad whom we have tried to get work experience for. He is in year 10. We cannot get him work experience in the area that he wants to be involved in. Is that a difficulty?

Mr Strachan—It surprises me a bit, but it depends on the occupation or the industry that the person is interested in. Some employers in this town would be only too happy to employ people. There is recognition by people in the town—they are not all rednecks and racists—that it is a good idea not only socially and morally but also economically to have more Indigenous people—and obviously young non-Indigenous people—working for you. So there is a fairly strong commitment to the next generation. But, if a person is having trouble, there are a few people around whom we can recommend they come and talk to. I will give you my card.

CHAIR—Maria, which department let that contract?

Ms Harvey—It was DEWR.

Mrs VALE—I am from Sydney, so pardon my ignorance. Thank you all for coming. Exactly what is the council's area of responsibility? I know Alice Springs is here in Alice Springs. Exactly what geographic area do you cover?

Mr Tilmouth—We cover the 18 town camps around Alice Springs. These areas are where historically people lived or had traditional connections with the aspect of land and, over the

years, they moved from camping areas. Those areas became small fringe camps where people lived in car bodies and humpies and there was one tap for 300 people and that sort of thing. Then the Territory government granted special purpose leases to the residents of that land, so they had security of title in order to put the infrastructure in. They could not put infrastructure into those areas unless they had security of title, so the special purpose leases were granted. As a result, we have the 18 town camps on mains power, water and sewerage and quite a few houses have gone up as well. We deal with a population of approximately 1,600 people.

Mrs VALE—How far out does the area around Alice Springs extend?

Mr Tilmouth—It is within, say, eight kilometres of the CBD, so it is not really that far. The furthest would probably be about 12 kilometres.

Mrs VALE—So you would sort of circle Alice Springs like a doughnut.

Mr Tilmouth—Like a fringe, yes.

Mrs VALE—Maria, with your Job Shop, how many people would you have on your books at any time, or do you get the jobs first and then the people? Is that how it works? Do you have people on a database?

Ms Harvey—We do have a database and we have very projected numbers. We also have projected targets every month, and they exceed each month. Our total case load, which is how many people are on our books, is about 1,015. We actively work with about half of that case load in any given week. We are mindful that, as an Indigenous Job Network, we are responsible for people being able to effectively access all our services, because we do not just have Job Network; we have a personal support program.

Mrs VALE—There are a lot of pluses and benefits. I think Michael said at one stage that you get the job first. You try and get a person placed in a job and then you do on-the-job training.

Mr Maloney—When I said that I was talking about a future proposition, which will be looked at by DEWR, hopefully, whereas these are the day-to-day people.

Mrs VALE—So you have a core, if you like. You have identified certain job categories that are needed and you train people in those job categories.

Ms Harvey—To an extent, yes, but we are a normal Job Network provider, so lots of local employers advertise jobs with us. In the last 12 months we have had a bit of success with some corporate people like Westpac, Australia Post and so on. We do not just focus on jobs that are always vacant; we target the hidden labour market as well.

Mrs VALE—Do you do training to get people ready for jobs?

Ms Harvey—Yes.

Mrs VALE—And you help them when they are in the job.

Ms Harvey—We have a monthly training program of 10 intensive mornings for long-term unemployed Indigenous people. The courses are gender based, so we get a pool of men or a pool of women, and involve 10 mornings where we run through work preparation modules. In the last four courses we have seen that over half of the participants end up securing work within three to four weeks of doing the course. In a nutshell, it is a motivator and a confidence builder for long-term unemployed people.

Mrs VALE—You made some comments about face-to-face occupations like waitressing or—

Ms Harvey—Retail.

Mrs VALE—Yes, and how there are a lot of young Aboriginal people who perhaps find that confronting.

Ms Harvey—A lot of them do. It is difficult to pinpoint, because it is such a diverse group. But certainly people who have had less exposure to working in their lives would definitely prefer not to work in retail, whereas people who are more educated have—

Mrs VALE—Would you say, then, that it is a matter of confidence?

Ms Harvey—It definitely is a matter of confidence.

Mrs VALE—I know it happens with non-Indigenous young people too. It is a really big effort to meet and relate to strangers. Also, the cash handling that you are required to do in the retail sector is quite an experience on its own.

Ms Harvey—I think so, yes.

Mrs VALE—You also mentioned concerns about family obligations and that kind of understanding and sensitivity from prospective employers. Do you think that job sharing such as placing two or three young people behind a counter to do one person's job—I know that their salaries would perhaps not be sufficient and there would have to be other funding measures to top them up—would overcome that aspect?

Ms Harvey—That is definitely something that we are looking at in being more innovative. Now that there are more disability, open employment, parenting and CDEP participants, we know that we are going to get input from a lot of job seekers who are not forcibly looking for work. Therefore, we have to look at innovative ways of maybe creating job-share positions.

Mrs VALE—It is accommodating them. I did not hear the answer when Warren asked William about speaking to governments about them having a requirement in the contract for Indigenous employment when they subcontract work.

Mr Tilmouth—Yes, I was telling Mr Snowdon that most government departments do have a preferment for Indigenous employment. Whether that preferment is enforceable is another question. Most times, when push comes to shove, you will find that the preferment, or application for exemption, is not as concrete as people have thought. You need to force the issue to say that this is the preferred way to go. Tangentyere Council, being the size it is, can apply for

exemptions and waivers. But without the support of the Central Remote Regional Council at that time, chances are that we would not have got it.

Mrs VALE—Yes, it is not so much about there being a preferment, perhaps it should be a requirement.

Mr Tilmouth—It should be a requirement.

Mrs VALE—I do not know what the optimum percentage is; that would be a matter for you to decide and maybe talk to the Northern Territory government about. There are a lot of contracts, as you know, that go out from the federal government and the Northern Territory government.

Mr Tilmouth—I would like to see it not only in the territory government but also in the Commonwealth government. The Commonwealth does a lot of building and that sort of stuff out there as well.

Mrs VALE—It should be made part of the requirement of tender that there be a decided optimum level of participation by the Indigenous community so that when everybody does a tender, that is part of it—everybody is equal on that level.

Mr Tilmouth—With the exemption, 10 per cent above or below the price is usually the figure at which they look at giving exemptions. If you are an Indigenous person and you come in with a price that is under that 10 per cent figure but you are over, you can still get that exemption.

Mrs VALE—Maybe 10 per cent is not enough; maybe it should be 20 per cent. With the new arrangements that the government has made regarding Indigenous issues, there is a policy where the government wants to consult with Indigenous people for your priorities and needs. Have you had any mechanisms of access to put your concerns to the Commonwealth government at this stage?

Ms Harvey—Not that I am aware of. We have definitely been important stakeholders in the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, which is NT government based. They have asked us for information in various forums.

Mr Strachan—William, would you like to comment on the role of the ICC and the other federal agencies—the left hand knowing what the right hand is doing?

Mr Tilmouth—At the moment we are subject to the winds of change, and one of the changes that have happened is the ICC. I mentioned earlier that it was the Central Remote Regional Council that forced the procurement process to change with the Northern Territory government on IHANT. I only hope that the ICC—the Indigenous corporations and the coordination centre—takes the same approach as the Central Remote Regional Council, because it is really sad to struggle to do something on the ground when somebody in Canberra could change policy or take a different tack that will throw everything askew. I would like to see some sort of consistency between Canberra and the regional Indigenous coordinating centres. We have not yet been approached by the ICC but we are expecting that when it comes to a whole heap of agreements. I would like to see what the government intends. We totally agree with the outcomes of full-time employment and so on. If the government intends that then it should happen on the ground and

should not be altered in any way by someone in Canberra or by someone who thinks they know better.

Mrs VALE—So will you use that opportunity, then, of getting access and your message to government?

Mr Tilmouth—I definitely will because it would be a complete failing if it did not.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I refer to Job Shop and the Job Network. You say in the submission that you had 311 people on the books as of April just gone and that nearly 90 per cent of them had been assessed by Centrelink as highly disadvantaged. Is that right? Is the Job Network regime adequate to help you deal with such a large proportion of highly disadvantaged unemployed people in attempting to train and place them? Does it give you what you need?

Mr Strachan—I guess we entered the market understanding that that was a part of the labour market in Alice Springs that was underserviced. In a former life I was the regional manager of the Commonwealth Employment Service in this region, so I endeavoured, along with a good team of people, to try and deliver a service to town based people and town camp people as well as to remote people. But it was clear that the needs in training and development in a long-term way were not being met through the old system, despite what I thought were some wonderful programs initiated through Working Nation and so on. But with the creation of the Job Network there was an opportunity to target a service for town camp and other people, and so we knew roughly what we were in for.

One of the positive things we have discovered with the current employment service contract is that there is a considerable amount of money available, through what is known as the job seeker account and through the training account, to begin this long-term investment in individuals—to build their capacity, as William says. It is a tough game but recent figures show that our success rate in the last financial year was better than in the first financial year, and we are hoping to continue that. Clearly, some of the people we place are fairly easily placed. So, without dobbing people in, there were people here earlier from Desert Park who were successful placements of ours. They were high-quality candidates and, with a bit of effort from them and a small amount of support from us, they were able to get a job and keep it. But for others we are talking long-term—five years plus—unemployed. So, yes, it is a hard struggle but—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—They are the ones that I am talking about—the more difficult ones to place. My last question is to William. Part of our terms of reference is also to look at what role, if any, practical reconciliation plays in helping in any way employment for Indigenous people. In the submission you say:

> This submission does not identify the contribution that practical reconciliation has made to instances of improved employment outcomes. The funding that is provided for services and programs to Indigenous people are very largely essential services and it is not clear how practical reconciliation has added to these essential services and programs.

I just wanted to give you the invitation to expand on that, if you want, because you are being very precise about essential services and essential programs when we consider practical reconciliation. Do you want to add anything to that? I think that says quite a bit, but you want to add anything?

Mr Tilmouth—The fruits of practical reconciliation have probably not been made available to us in any great way, I suppose. Whilst we talk about employment, if practical reconciliation can be associated with the outcomes of creating full employment and the government shows a practical reconciliation aspect to allowing those contracts to be outsourced to Indigenous people, then I would say that practical reconciliation would have a great bearing on it. It is similar, I suppose, to unemployment: you give us a cheque and we will give you something in return; you give us an open door and we will take that open door. That is what I see practical reconciliation doing: you open the doors for us; we will walk through them with gusto.

CHAIR—I apologise for prolonging this, but I need to ask this question. You mention in your submission that the Desert Knowledge precinct is a good example of the requirement for Aboriginal employment in major government projects, and Peter just touched on it again when he said 'without dobbing in anyone in terms of the outcomes'. Can I have a quick comment on the outcomes of Desert Knowledge? How did that come to pass—the continuing job outcomes? I think it is important that I ask that.

Mr Tilmouth—Desert Park is where we have placed our trainees. Desert Knowledge is a CRC—a cooperative research centre—that is yet to be developed, but we have already won a few small contracts on land management, which I will get Peter Cowham to—

CHAIR—Yes, I had separate issues.

Mr Tilmouth—I got a bit confused then. Peter may want to elaborate on it.

Mr Cowham—The Desert Knowledge precinct is a physical development that is going on opposite Yirara College on the way to the airport as you drive out. Only two tenders have been formalised so far, and we have won both of those. That is through the CDEP. One was an employment contract where we employ a supervisor and two trainees—apprentices. They are to oversee the development and the land management of the site to see that the right trees are maintained and there is no unnecessary destruction of the site itself. Originally the concept of the Desert Knowledge precinct was that there would be intense Indigenous participation in the whole program. The physical works are $28 million, I think, so it is a massive construction and a massive opportunity. We hope that when the contracts are let the spirit of the weighting towards Indigenous training is enforced to the letter of the contract. I think that is what we have been alluding to here. This is the opportunity not only to talk the talk but to walk the walk with these contractors. We are talking about the Sitzler Bros being the main contractor. Too often in the past they have written into their tenders that they will address Indigenous trainees et cetera but they have not delivered on that. But, at this point, I think the Indigenous community is united to make sure that that happens.

We would like to place ourselves in a position where we can provide skilled Indigenous participation in any work force. If Sitzler Bros were to win the contract, we would hope that they would approach us at Job Shop and source out their Indigenous component so that they meet the obligations under the contract. It should be enforced to the point where they may even prevent access to the site. There has been some talk about that. That is how concerned the Indigenous parties are to see that this happens properly. The other contract we have is a practical landscaping contract. We have an employment contract with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment. We also have a landscaping project, and we are nearing completion

on that. That is on the way out. You will see it as you drive to the airport. That employs all Indigenous people.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Cowham—I think these contracts are the best way to create on-the-job employment training. While we are talking about that, the whole concept of the new initiative in the ICC is to have solution brokers within the ICC to broker jobs into communities by negotiating with all government agencies, both federal and state, to input money into communities and into our own community. In practicality, we do not see that happening. We approached the ICC to broker solutions for our own organisation but they did not seem to have the capacity to be able to deliver them. We found that there is presently only one broker in place with DEWR, and they do not seem to have the role of negotiating employment solutions for communities. They just seem to be negotiating CDEP contracts at the moment. This may be something you need to think about. This was talked about extensively by Kevin Andrews when he was here earlier on at the big workshops we had—that jobs will be created in communities by solution brokers who will negotiate real positions out there. We hope that that is delivered. We hope that it is not just an idea that has come out of Canberra and does not reach the potential that they have talked about there.

CHAIR—Thank you. I am glad I asked the question. Thank you very much. I think it is good to have it on the record. We could go on at considerable length but we are already way past time as I am sure you can appreciate. William Tilmouth, and Tangentyere, you never disappoint us, so we really appreciate your time.

Proceedings suspended from 1.22 pm to 2.06 pm

ALEXANDER, Mr David John, Manager, Land Management, Central Land Council

BAIN, Ms Tina Mollie, Regional Land Management Coordinator, Central Land Council

HOWARD, Mr Harold Francis, Employment Unit, Central Land Council

CHAIR—Welcome. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Alexander—Firstly, I would like to apologise for the absence of the Central Land Council Director, David Ross, who is unable to attend today because of commitments in Darwin. I thought it would be helpful to start by setting the scene of the CLC's current activities in the area of Aboriginal employment. These activities are directly derived from the performance of the CLC's statutory functions under the Land Rights Act to represent the interests of Aboriginal landowners for the southern half of the Northern Territory.

Our areas of involvement with Aboriginal employment are largely in four key areas: mining and other major infrastructure developments on Aboriginal land, joint management of the Northern Territory national parks and reserves, broader land management of Aboriginal land, and other areas of Aboriginal enterprise development. I will give you a bit of background on each of those areas. In the area of mining and infrastructure development, the CLC's role in settlement exploration and mining agreements on Aboriginal land provides the opportunity to negotiate beneficial clauses in such agreements for Aboriginal employment.

To support the implementation of these employment requirements, the CLC established a mining employment unit, which commenced in 1997. This was established under a contract with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, or DEWR, for the purpose of placing Aboriginal people from the CLC region into these negotiated opportunities. This occurs under what is referred to as a STEP—a structured training and employment program—which provides a role for the unit to identify and screen potential employees, many with no previous employment experience, and support them in every way through a staged program of short-term employment into permanent employment where available.

The unit, of which my colleague Harold Howard is the coordinator, maintains a database of over 850 Aboriginal people who are potentially available for such opportunities. The unit has established successful working relationships with numerous mining companies in assisting them to meet their employment requirements. The most well established and successful of these is with goldminers Newmont in the Tanami region and more recently Giants Reef in the Tennant Creek region. Over the years since the program started the unit has also been able to place Aboriginal people into employment with other major infrastructure development activities on Aboriginal land, including the Alice Springs to Darwin railway—which is now complete—and with major road construction contractors.

Harold is able to provide more details on the success of this program, which has been considerable and which has established sufficient confidence with the department for the contract to be renewed for a further 18 months, commencing this month. The new contract will allow the unit to expand into placing Aboriginal people into opportunities in the other areas that I

mentioned at the outset as they arise, although in these areas the path to permanent employment is not as clear.

Turning to the area of joint management of national parks and land management, you may be aware that successful negotiations between the Northern Territory land councils and the NT government have established joint management arrangements for over 20 national parks in the Central Land Council region. These arrangements put traditional owners in a position of gaining some form of underlying title. They have a significant role in the preparation of new joint plans of management catering for conservation, tourism and cultural interests. They also have first option over any associated employment opportunities in those parks. A significant plank in these arrangements is the development of an Aboriginal parks employment and training strategy. There have been a number of preliminary workshops with the NT government on this but we are still waiting for a higher level meeting between relevant Commonwealth and Northern Territory employment and training agencies to consider producing our customised program that is specific to park management roles and is suited to the remote circumstances of traditional owners.

Significant progress has been made, however, in the meantime to give traditional owners some tangible evidence of the benefits of joint management and an understanding of the roles involved. This has occurred through flexible employment programs providing project related work for traditional owners in some of these national parks. These projects have been funded initially directly from the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service and they have been operating since February this year. We have just concluded the first round of those projects and are hoping to have discussions this month about a second round of funding to keep them moving.

In summary, with respect to those park activities, the CLC has recorded 140 members of traditional owner families who have interest in park related work and these have been registered on the CLC's employment database. To date, over 60 people have participated in 30 on-ground projects in nine of these national parks. You may be familiar with some of them—Watarrka National Park, King's Canyon to the south west, the Davenport Ranges national park, up to the south-east of Tennant Creek, and the Devils Marbles, closer to Tennant Creek, Ruby Gap, in the east Macdonald Ranges, east of Alice Springs, Finke Gorge National Park, Rainbow Valley, Corroboree Rock and Trephina Gorge, again out to the east, and other areas of the West MacDonnells national park.

On average, these projects run for two to five days, but some participants from the Amoonguna community near Alice Springs, from the Ntaria, or Hermannsburg community to the west, and from Watarrka have had more regular work, returning to work on different projects up to 10 days at a time. The type of work that has been available to people has been fairly labour intensive: fencing, controlled burning, fauna surveys, walking track construction and repairs, training in fire control, training in weed control, and undertaking weed surveys in these parks. It should be said that, as these arrangements progress, a lot of these activities are likely to expand into areas more relevant to the cultural values of the traditional owners as we go through the process of reviewing plans of management for national parks.

Under the current arrangements, participants in these park projects have been largely members of CDP programs and have received a top-up payment in the course of those projects. We have also been able to place one traditional owner from the Rainbow Valley area into a trainee ranger

position at the telegraph station just north of Alice Springs. These new arrangements for parks have certainly created a lot of work opportunities, but the significant challenge for us is to find a clear process to convert these activities into full-time employment or at least regular part-time employment. At this stage the new opportunities for full-time employment appear to be confined to six proposed Indigenous ranger traineeships. These will be facilitated through our employment unit but, as you would expect, they will not satisfy the significant expectations created amongst the traditional owners of these parks.

In the CLC's view, this can, however, be largely addressed through coordinated support for the development of community land management or ranger programs operating out of larger communities in the vicinity of parks and reserves where traditional owners reside. Such groups could be contracted to undertake various land management works in national parks to supplement grant supported natural resource management activity which addresses priority issues on adjoining Aboriginal land that has been identified through such processes as the NHT regional planning exercise and a more local exercise, the Northern Territory parks and conservation master plan. These activities would be supplemented also by priority cultural maintenance activities of traditional owners.

The CLC is actively supporting the planning and development of such groups. You may have heard yesterday in Darwin about the Caring for Country movement within the Northern Land Council. This is basically a similar program. But to date we have only really got about four of these projects up and running. One of these is at Lajamanu to the far north-west of our region on the northern fringe of the Tanami. That program is supported by the Commonwealth Indigenous Protected Area program and is perhaps on a more secure footing than others. We have another group at Yuendumu and Willowra on the southern edge of the Tanami desert. They are currently only supported by a 12-month NHT grant. Similarly, with Tennant Creek we have had a high degree of success with the group there, but again that is only supported by NHT and other income they have been able to obtain through local contracts. The most recent of them is a group to the west at Hermannsburg or Ntaria. Through that park related project work, we have gone through a feasibility process for this group and we are now facing challenges on how to maintain the momentum.

The interest in these programs is growing in the CLC's region. From the Central Land Council's point of view, we are being careful to work within our own capacity to provide the necessary support and not overextend these groups. But we do have two other groups closer to Alice Springs operating out of Amoonguna and a group referred to at Black Tank, which resides on a small block of Aboriginal land to the north of Alice Springs within Bond Springs pastoral lease. For all of these groups it is very much early days. As I mentioned earlier, the development path is not completely clear and certainly full of a lot of difficulties. While they are attracting considerable community interest, it is evident that a significant amount of on-ground support and locally based coordination is required to continue the process of what I refer to as cobbling together funding opportunities to maintain their momentum and put them on a sustainable footing.

To date, the CLC has been active in identifying funding sources to provide equipment for these groups. That has largely come through the Aboriginal Benefit Account. We have also negotiated contract opportunities with mining companies and other sectors to bring in supplementary income. Such income allows them to provide top-up payments for activities

which address their own agenda on Aboriginal land where it is not available from any other source. I can give you a few examples. In the Tanami desert the Newmont mining company has supported or funded what is called the Tanami biodiversity monitoring program, which is assessing the cumulative impacts of mining and exploration in the Tanami. That is providing work for eight participants from the Tanami ranger programs. Those groups are also getting contracts for weed spraying and environmental management contracts with mines in the Tanami. In the Tennant Creek region they have been able to secure contracts for fencing, weed spraying and other mine related activity.

The CLC sees other opportunities for such groups if they receive appropriate training in the environmental management of major infrastructure corridor developments in the region such as the gas pipeline to the west of Alice Springs. We have had preliminary discussions which have been positive with FreightLink, which manages the Alice Springs to Darwin railway, to engage these ranger groups in the environmental maintenance of the corridor. Some of those activities will involve managing fire risks for the rail corridor, access clearances, weed management, fencing and issues like that.

The other areas where the land council is quite active is in the development of new Indigenous enterprises. These again are in early stages. They are in the areas of pastoral development, Indigenous tourism and horticultural development. These opportunities are largely being pursued through collaborative partnerships between the land council, the Northern Territory government and other agencies. I can give you a couple of examples which are active at the moment. We have a collaborative three-way arrangement regarding increasing pastoral development on Aboriginal land. That has been in place for two years and is to be renewed for a further three years. It is between the land councils, the Indigenous Land Corporation and the Northern Territory Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development. The areas of focus under these arrangements include supporting the development of sustainable pastoral initiatives of traditional owners on Aboriginal land and negotiating agreements with third parties seeking access to Aboriginal land. To maximise the benefits to traditional owners, we are applying criteria that these external interests must consider providing training, employment and infrastructure improvement outcomes for traditional owners of the land concerned.

We have recently entered into another collaborative arrangement with the Northern Territory Tourist Commission for an initial period of 18 months to develop new Indigenous tourism enterprises. Part of the focus of these arrangements are park related opportunities to fit in with the joint management developments, but others will be assessed in relation to major new tourism initiatives in Central Australia, such as the sealing of the Mereenie Loop Road to the west of Alice Springs. Jointly, the CLC and the Tourist Commission have assessed the known interests among Aboriginal and known areas of opportunity. We are currently working on a set of 10 initiatives. We have put them through an initial evaluation process through consultation with the people concerned with a view to having at least two successful enterprises through the business planning phase within the first 12 months.

In addition to supporting the initiatives of traditional owners, this new level of collaboration will provide a coordinated approach to addressing external proposals for tourism access or development on Aboriginal land, but again we will be looking for proposals that give emphasis to providing training and employment outcomes for traditional owners in addition to any

financial benefits or equity opportunities. Our CLC is also looking for other partnerships in the areas of construction, trades and road maintenance.

Another area of significant recent development has been in relation to horticultural developments on Aboriginal land. The Central Land Council was instrumental in the establishment of the Centrefarm Aboriginal Corporation, which is a participant in a working group with the Indigenous Land Corporation, the Aboriginal Benefits Account and the Northern Territory Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development and Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment. These developments are only in the early development stage but we are focusing on four projects at the moment. One is in the Ali Curung area, about 400 kilometres north of Alice Springs, which is for a major commercial mango project. Another is in the Ti Tree area where there is a table grape proposal. Nearby there is a similar proposal on Pine Hill pastoral lease. Finally, to the south of Alice Springs at the Apatula, or the Finke, community there are a number of commercial trial projects under way. All those enterprise areas are in early stages but obviously we are looking for strategies to maximise employment outcomes from those developments.

Mr SNOWDON—You covered quite a large area. I have three principal questions. We have a document here on David Ross's address to the Indigenous Economic Forum of 6 March 2003. There is a sentence on the second page which says:

> Two pre-vocational courses—at Yuendumu and the Granites Mine, which is relatively close by—have been run in the last two years. At the end of them, Roche and Newmont guaranteed jobs. As simple as that.

How has that relationship been built up, and what guarantees do you have that you will get employment out of the contractual arrangements that you have with Newmont and other mining operators?

Mr Alexander—I will refer that to Mr Howard as he is more familiar with those arrangements.

Mr Howard—I will give you a bit of the history of the eight-week prevocational courses. They originally started as three-week courses but that was not enough time for people to get familiar with what is out there, the work environment and stuff. So they went back to eight weeks and all contractors, along with Newmont, have to employ a person who gets through the prevocational mining course. If 12 people get through, each one of them will end up with a job at the end of it. From the last two courses we have run all participants are now employed, which is a good outcome.

Mr SNOWDON—How many would that be?

Mr Howard—In the first one we had 12 that started, nine that finished the course and eight who got jobs. In the second one we ran we lost three. The other nine ended up with jobs and are still working there.

Mr SNOWDON—So this commitment arises from the contractual agreements they have with the land council to provide employment opportunities?

Mr Howard—That is right. They also did not want to have to do a lot off their own backs to make these courses successful.

Mr SNOWDON—Would you say that Newmont, in your experience, has been a very proactive company in trying to promote Indigenous employment?

Mr Howard—For sure, yes.

Mr SNOWDON—I am interested in the national parks issue. You mentioned the Lajamanu IPA. What potential is there for that IPA model to be extended more broadly in the Central Land Council region? Is there any interest and, if so, what has been the attitude of the Commonwealth to stumping up to help with those IPAs?

Mr Alexander—The Lajamanu IPA is the first IPA that has been assessed within the CLC region. Where there might have been some earlier hesitation about—

Mr SNOWDON—For the benefit of others here, could you explain what an IPA is?

Mr Alexander—An IPA is an Indigenous Protected Area. It is a program run through the Department of the Environment and Heritage. A part of the early issues was concern from traditional owners about any change to the status of Aboriginal land. There was some reservation about being involved, but there is no change to the status. It is a voluntary management arrangement in which traditional owners elect to manage an area of Aboriginal land for conservation benefit. It allows the Commonwealth to meet some of their national quota in terms of land that is within the reserve system and is being managed for conservation.

The Lajamanu program is very much the pilot for the CLC region. It has been through a feasibility process, which allows the traditional owners to understand the concept and to see the benefits. There is interest being generated elsewhere in the Tanami. We have a second application with the Department of the Environment and Heritage for a Southern Tanami IPA. But it does require extensive consultation with traditional owners and making them comfortable with the concept. It still allows mining decisions to be made within the area but it is managed for other purposes as well.

Mr SNOWDON—The outcome for the landowner is that they are funded for a number of positions?

Mr Howard—They get secure funding for a number of years to operate the program. There are key positions like a senior ranger. I am not sure of the exact number of positions, but there is reliable funding for employment.

Mr SNOWDON—My point is to explore the idea of land management of traditional lands being a viable option for Indigenous people through the IPA process. What you are doing, with the agreement of the Northern Territory government, is not necessarily trying to do the same thing but to provide a similar sort of model for employment opportunities for people to manage their own lands.

Mr Howard—That is correct. The IPA program provides a reasonably secure and predictable funding arrangement. Our challenge is to set up similar arrangements in other areas that are not necessarily subject to IPA.

Mr SNOWDON—But I assume that, through the planning processes of the land council and in consultation with traditional owners, this is seen as a viable, long-term employment option for a relatively large number of people.

Mr Alexander—That is correct.

Ms Bain—There is one other point in relation to that. An NT master plan for parks and conservation has been created, and the draft is just about to be released for public comment. One of the key planks of that master plan is the promotion of a number of other conservation initiatives that do not rely on drawing a line and calling it a national park but on supporting local land management initiatives and supporting the continued development of IPAs to try to get a conservation outcome in a broader sense, considering the large areas, the remoteness of population and lack of resources in the Territory.

Mr SNOWDON—Thank you for that. I am just getting to the point of saying that you need not have high levels of literacy to undertake this land management work. These are jobs that can be done by traditional people on their own country.

Mr Alexander—That is right, and it serves the interests of senior traditional owners to see their families being active back on their own country.

Mr SNOWDON—I want to move very briefly to the issue of new business options. What training is taking place, or do you envisage will take place, for people who might ultimately run a business that might be leveraged by the negotiations? You have talked about working with the Tourist Commission and others. Do you have access to programs to train people to run a business? Is there potential, or is there a process, for people thinking about providing the back office support for running a business so that they do not crumble as a result of lack of management skills, lack of accounting skills et cetera?

Mr Alexander—We are really just wading into that area at the moment. We have had a person in place in the tourism partnership for only about six weeks. In the course of looking at those opportunities we will be establishing what the requirements are of traditional owners and then looking for programs that match the support required. I do not have all those paths mapped out at this stage.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Has the Alice Springs ICC been in touch with the CLC to seek your views on the work you are doing in relation to Indigenous employment training and enterprises? Have they been in touch to check on how you are going and what they can learn from you?

Mr Alexander—Through DEWR we have set up a forum for some time in the next couple of weeks so that they can hear more about what we are doing and we can hear more about programs that are available, such as shared responsibility agreements. We would like to understand those a lot more. We have met at a high level with the Northern Territory manager of DEWR and with

the Alice Springs regional manager, and we saw that as a good thing to do. We are in the information exchange part of things at the moment.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Was that your initiative?

Mr Alexander—No, they came to see us.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Would it be fair to say that that is the sort of mechanism you need to talk to federal government agencies of all kinds, not just to DEWR but to anybody who happens to be involved in this whole issue? Is that the mechanism you would use for that sort of consultation process, or are there others that you think should be in existence?

Mr Alexander—Are you referring to the ICC?

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I am referring to the ICC directly, but also indirectly to the view of how many times do people out there have to re-invent the wheel, to put it in simple terms, with all this government interest, correctly—and that is why we are here—in how it can all be improved. I am really interested to know what mechanisms are in place from the point of view of the government agencies to consult with you so they can see what you are doing, see what is working and what is not working from your perception and why so that it can go back the other way as well. That is what I really want to know.

Mr Alexander—What we have identified recently is that there is a lot of goodwill. There is a lot of discussion about partnerships. There is a lot of direction being given to both Northern Territory and Commonwealth agencies to get out and get involved with Aboriginal communities. It is creating a bit of mayhem in a way, with people tripping over one another. Aboriginal people are quite rightly covering their bets and taking in all-comers and expressing their issues to them. There is definitely a large need to sit down and get these things better coordinated.

I know that the Commonwealth and Northern Territory have different responsibilities and directions, but it would be helpful to all concerned out bush if there were a one-stop shop to address all these things and get better coordination. In respect of the tourism partnership, we have taken the initiative recently to bring in other players. There is a Northern Territory equivalent to Indigenous Business Australia within business, industry research and development, and we are taking the initiative to get around the table and find out what each other is doing and get better coordination in place. It is a boggy field out there, and it would be good if we could get heads together to coordinate a process or a one-stop shop approach.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—My last question is: do you think the ICC model is okay, or do you think it could be improved?

Mr Alexander—I could not pass a lot of comment on it at this stage. I know it is early and they are just settling into their roles. We live underneath the ICC and we have tested the waters on various inquiries that we have had. We would just ask them to try their hand with the ICC and see what kind of direction they get. It is evident to me that they are still settling in to their roles and responsibilities. Hopefully this forum that we have set up for the next couple of weeks will help to clarify things.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is going to be here in Alice Springs?

Mr Alexander—Yes.

Mr ROBB—I was reading where David Ross said: 'Success breeds success and Indigenous workers provide role models for others to follow and negative stereotypes are replaced by success stories.' That all makes enormous sense. What success are you seeing from role models going back into the community? Often you get one or two going back; you almost need a critical mass. What has been your experience so far with role models? How easy is it for them to be absorbed back into a situation and what effect are they having?

Mr Howard—In my time in the land council, we have had some success in the Walpiri region, which is where the Granites gold mine is. There are four major communities in that area—Lajamanu, Yuendumu, Nyirrpi and Willowra. There are probably only four people who have come out and have been successful who are either still there now or have gone on to bigger and better things coming from those communities. I suppose I could harp on about things like education and all that kind of stuff. The opportunities are there for people to take it up now through the prevocational courses that we run. It is very friendly out there. The atmosphere is friendlier than it used to be. The way I see it is that in a few years time we should be able to get some more success stories from that area because of our relationship with Newmont and the other mining companies that we work which.

There are some good stories. Geoffrey Gibson's is a good story. He is a guy from Nyirrpi. He did a two-week training course. He stayed on with Roche Mining out in the Granites gold mine. He was awarded a DEWR award as an Aboriginal employee. He is a role model for the rest of the people in the community. People do look upon Geoffrey and others like that. Whether they follow them or not, that is something that we have to keep pushing and, hopefully, we will eventually get there.

Ms Bain—In relation to some of the broad land management work, recently the land council hosted a National Indigenous Land and Sea Management Conference. There were 400 active participants from around Australia who came for four days and shared experiences and talked about the projects and the on-ground work that they were doing. Unanimously, at the end of that conference, people were saying that it was fantastic to see the inspiration of what other people were doing in their own communities. There were mobs of rangers from all over the country, all in their uniforms and really proud to be there and talk about their experiences and the work that they were doing in their own communities. From a land management point of view, the rise of the community land management initiatives and ranger groups and such things really have good potential to provide those role models in their communities. I think that we could say that within the local ranger programs in the CLC region already that is indicative of having an impact.

Mr ROBB—So we are getting close to a critical mass which might have a real impact?

Ms Bain—No, we are a fair way from a critical mass, but we are starting to see that that is having a result.

Mr Alexander—I could just add a local example.

Mr ROBB—Please.

Mr Alexander—It probably is a case of a critical mass. I mentioned the park related project out at Hermannsburg or one to the west. I brought along a nice little photographic journal of the activities that group have been involved in which I will leave behind. We received funding for a feasibility program for that community. It is a difficult community. There are difficult issues to overcome in the community, such as issues of petrol sniffing. We were not all that hopeful of getting, like you say, a critical mass of participation in those activities. Some of the earlier trips out there came back a bit empty handed, but over the four months that it has been active it has really developed that critical mass and generated a high degree of interest among young people who have not previously worked at all.

To quote some of the figures in the report, 23 people took part in that period, participating in 668 hours of work experience, and we had more people waiting in line to join the group. A lot of that just came around from lots of good on-the-ground cooperation and support from the local Tjuwanpa Resource Centre, which these kinds of programs put a huge strain on. One of the things that we need to consider is locally based coordination support for these groups. It is not going to work having the land council manage their development from Alice Springs. We can only stimulate the interest and plan for those groups. It has been a wonderful success in an area where we were not that optimistic, I suppose. Like I say, the challenge is there to keep it going, and I think that will serve as a great example to lots of other people of what is possible in communities that have all those issues to deal with.

Mr ROBB—So, getting on top of all those issues, it is overwhelmingly offering these positive outcomes, is it?

Mr Alexander—Yes. I have one other point about the National Indigenous Land and Sea Management Conference. One of the outcomes of that was discussion amongst people about some kind of national exchange program where Indigenous youth from other communities could be placed within communities where things were happening and were working quite successfully and could gain that experience from Aboriginal people themselves. Notwithstanding the considerable cultural differences among Aboriginal people around the country, it was still seen as a very positive thing to look to for support. With the outcomes of that conference, there are likely to be lots of groups around the country knocking on doors to seek that kind of support.

Mr ROBB—On your training courses in their different guises, what do you think are the top two or three elements of success with some of the training activities you have been involved with?

Mr Howard—With the mining, I think it is having the support out there of the three staff members through the land council. There are also three staff members who work for Newmont who are on the ground all the time, the whole eight weeks. There is also a full-blood Aboriginal man. He is a mentor to help these blokes and to get them through those eight weeks. I think that has a lot to do with the success of the courses, and I suppose there is selection too. You have a group of 12 people and, even though it is Yuendumu and the person might be from Alice Springs, it is still a different group. It is a matter of getting the right group together. It is also having females in those groups as well. I see the support out there as the No. 1 factor.

Mr SNOWDON—What about wages?

Mr Howard—Wages, yes. These guys get paid for the eight-week course. It comes from Newmont. It is sort of a wave-the-carrot thing, Warren, but I think it has got to be done to get these people through that time. It is a good thing at the moment.

Ms Bain—Regarding education in some of the land management programs, there has been a fairly strong call for education to be provided out of town—out bush where people are and where they are conducting that land management work. There is some capacity to provide that training out bush, but it is an area that could do with greater support because the other option is to bring everybody in town to do that training in blocks. There are generally other distractions and things that make it not quite so productive. Through the consultations over the joint management arrangements of the parks and reserves, there has been a consistent call from traditional owners for training for their young people out on their own country and on the parks where they will be working.

Mr ROBB—What about the urban Aboriginals? What works there?

Ms Bain—Most of the parks and reserves trainees are working basically in the telegraph station. That is where they start because it is somewhere that does have access to resources. Town staff also work here and in a lot of other town parks to get experience. That has historically been the main focus of town employment.

Mr Alexander—I could just add a little bit more information. Some of these partnerships, in particular the pastoral development partnership, have provided good collaboration with experts in the field and we have had some very successful training days for Aboriginal people to develop their pastoral skills. It is a strong part of Aboriginal history in central Australia. It is what a lot of young people in communities still aspire to. That has developed overwhelming success. People do want to develop those skills again. We are talking about middle generation down to 20-year-olds wanting to maintain the kind of participation that their fathers and grandfathers had in the industry. It is a very different industry now, so there is a vastly different set of skills required. Those days have been very successful.

We are not just doing it to better equip them to run their own enterprises on their own country. We would like to see greater uptake of Aboriginal people by the wider pastoral industry and, at the same time, the tourism industry so they can enter the employment opportunities that are there. There might need to be some kind of incentive scheme to encourage pastoralists and to establish tourism operators to take people on and train them, give them follow-up employment and a career path after that. If there is any way the Commonwealth can influence that process, I think it would be very effective.

CHAIR—Just remind me what the Aboriginal Benefits Account is.

Mr Alexander—The Aboriginal Benefits Account is created out of mining royalty equivalents from mining off Aboriginal land. There is an opportunity for community purpose grants—called 64(4) payments—for new initiatives on Aboriginal land. Historically, it has been focused on community development issues but it is moving more towards land management and economic development.

Mr SNOWDON—Last year there was $90-odd million in that account.

CHAIR—That was my next question. Is it generally managed through the land councils?

Mr Alexander—No. We will assist a group to put an application forward to the ABA for consideration. We are working with groups that have been through a proper planning process before putting them up to the ABA. We do not want to get involved with things that have not gone through an establishment phase and have them fall over.

CHAIR—It is a submission based process within the Territory.

Mr SNOWDON—The ABA was set up under the act as a committee which is effectively appointed by the minister. There are two nominations, I think, from each of the land councils, plus the minister nominates a chair. But the minister sets the rules. In effect, the minister has frozen payments out of the ABA until the regulations have changed. I do not know what the current regulations are but, for a long time, we could not get any money out of it.

CHAIR—But who makes the final arbitrary decision on an application?

Mr SNOWDON—It depends on the guidelines. The minister agrees to the guidelines; it is ultimately the minister. It is a delegated responsibility. The delegate will be the chair and the committee will make recommendations on submissions.

CHAIR—It is submission driven?

Mr SNOWDON—Yes.

CHAIR—Okay. I think we are just about all done. I will try and sum it up a little. David Ross has been quoted in the briefing paper, in his absence, at great length. In his fourth paragraph, he says that the Tanami mines have 100 Aboriginal employees out of a work force of nearly 500. Then he lists some of his key issues: commitment from industry is a key—credit where credit is due, as he has said; good communication; binding agreements; a dedicated CLC; communication within the Indigenous community; understanding what the industry needs; mentoring; and some funding support. That is a pretty positive outcome but not achieved without great effort. I want to go to one specific point David Ross made:

> ... ten blokes bringing home quite a few thousand dollars each after a fortnight puts up to $50,000 into the regional economy.
>
> However money management is a major problem—the culture of feast or famine among Aboriginal people is a barrier to ongoing employment, and this year we are developing strategies to encourage better money management. This is pretty fundamental.

Can you give us an idea of what might be happening there? This speech is 18 months old, I think. Can you give us a picture of what might have happened around that money management issue?

Mr Howard—For someone who is used to getting only a couple of hundred dollars a week and then gets $1,300 in their pocket a week, it is a big step for them. We lost a lot of the people who we placed at the Granites because of that amount of money that they were getting. That is a lot of money and they did not know what to do with it. After one or two pays, they were gone. In our prevocational courses now, we talk about money, money management and setting money aside for later. We tell them, 'Do you want us to help you get another bank account so that you can put it away so that the money stays there? This is for your family. This is for you whilst you are at work.' We say all that kind of stuff. We only talk about it; we cannot tell them what to do with their money. That is the way we are trying to combat that at the moment. It seems to be working okay, since we brought that into the course.

CHAIR—It is not an easy one.

Mr Howard—No.

CHAIR—You have acknowledged that it is a pretty significant challenge: you get there; you get to the barrier and past it, but it can still come unstuck.

Mr Howard—It can. We are only there to advise and suggest.

CHAIR—For all of that, I get a picture that it is two steps forward and maybe one back. It is still progress. Are you feeling that way?

Mr Howard—Very much so, yes. I have been with the land council for five years, and it has gone a long way in five years. All those things have made it what it is; all the things that Rossy talked about in his speech.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mrs VALE—Thanks very much, David, Harold and Tina, for coming in and congratulations on the success of your land council. Did David deliver the speech with the passion with which it is written? Were you there when he delivered it, because it is a very passionate speech? This is my feeling from having just read it.

Mr Alexander—He is a passionate man.

Mrs VALE—I can almost hear an unfamiliar voice booming it because it read with such passion. He is a very gifted communicator. He has listed all the concerns and you have identified them. But on the very last page of the speech, the second last paragraph—and I think we have all come to this conclusion anyway and I think we all know it—he puts it beautifully and he says:

Finally I don't believe we would necessarily be standing here today if the educational requirement of Aboriginal people had been taken seriously for the last 25 years, I don't think we would need this economic forum—I think people would have sorted it out for themselves armed with the tools—

And he is so right—

the creativity, the self sufficiency that most people get from going to school—to me education is the most fundamental issue we can address.

I think it is interesting, given the power of his presentation, that that is the very last thing and the most important message that he left his audience with. We have all come to that conclusion. I think he has put it succinctly and quite exquisitely.

Mr Alexander—It is where we all end up when we face the challenges of implementing all these things.

Mrs VALE—Absolutely, David. Have you got any ideas as to how we can encourage young Aboriginals to stay at school and get that education? This is something that we have put to almost everybody here today, and I think carrots have got to work better than sticks. If we were to say that we would feed the children three meals a day, with a hot meal at four o'clock, when they came to school, would that help? Would it help if we encouraged them with sport? Would it help if we encouraged them with film-making opportunities, which I understand the Aboriginal community here is excellent at? Do you have any ideas that we can put on the record and take back to Canberra?

Mr Alexander—I do not have all the answers, and I am going to ask where the 'too hard' basket is. I think a whole bunch of strategies are being applied with varying degrees of success. I suppose we should have in the community role models that have been through these kinds of processes and that people can aspire to be like, not necessarily sporting role models but models as to other roles in life.

Mrs VALE—If the sporting role model can show the children that they have to learn their tables before they get to kick a football, that might help.

Mr Alexander—One of the attractions of the community ranger programs is a uniform with a badge.

Mrs VALE—Yes, I heard Tina say that. That must have been pretty special.

Mr Alexander—Having those role models in the communities with people understanding how you get from school into those roles would be helpful.

Mrs VALE—We had some people from the Arnhemland Progress Association come and say how they are really focusing now on having their children educated in their local community schools. The children that stay a certain amount of time actually get an identifiable shirt that they can wear into their shops. The Arnhemland Progress Association actually runs stores, such as grocery stores or 7-Eleven type things, and a child can actually go into a store if they have that shirt on. It is only children with such shirts on that are allowed to go in and buy something from the store.

Mr Alexander—Are they sure shirts are not getting swapped outside the door?

Mrs VALE—These little Aboriginal children are actually much smarter than we think they are. They are very smart—absolutely. I am sure they have thought around that. It is a matter of encouraging them to actually stay at school.

Mr Alexander—Given the hurdles that are involved, we now say, in respect of the park joint management opportunities and other enterprise areas, that there is a very long-term commitment required.

Mrs VALE—Absolutely.

Mr Alexander—We have to put our horizons of success a bit further out. Because of the catch-up that is required in Indigenous education, I think we have got quite a long way to go.

Mrs VALE—That seems to be the nub of the whole problem. As David said, if it were otherwise we would not be standing here today. In another part of his speech he says the type of work involved needs resources to get results. He says:

And there is the rub. Believe me, there is plenty of money out there for Indigenous business development—ATSIC, the Indigenous Land Corporation and Indigenous Business Australia. Unfortunately they all may as well live on completely different planets to each other.

We have had a number of projects ready to go but obtaining funding from these bodies set up to do exactly that has been a circus.

They appear to work in complete isolation to each other, the funding guidelines are convoluted, unclear, inflexible ... Nobody out bush knows what the guidelines are—that's for sure ... Promises are made then promptly broken ... Even they don't seem to know what sort of projects they want to run ...

He also seems to be on a quest here—and I say 'quest' not so much as 'question'. He says:

The CLC is prepared to develop the vision and put in the work to assist indigenous employment, develop pastoralism, to develop horticulture and any other viable industries. But the work we can do is only part of the process—there is a major role for government, and indigenous funding bodies such as IBA, ABA, ATSIC, ILC ... and of course the private sector.

To me, that is a real problem for you. How do you think that we can help as a government?

Mr Alexander—It is, yes. There is a big move to integration. It is a word that is applied to lots of other areas—for instance, there is the integrated natural resource management strategy. In trying to get everything looked at together, some integrated funding framework would certainly—

Mrs VALE—David, do you think it is a role for government to try to create an umbrella structure under which you can all work?

Mr Alexander—I think so, yes.

Ms Bain—We have constantly asked for that through the negotiations on the joint management arrangements with parks and reserves to get those high-level discussions going. As

Rossy said in his document, there are so many different guidelines and frameworks that, to wind your way through this convoluted—

Mrs VALE—We need something simple. Perhaps you need a common set of guidelines, if you like, that everybody can understand. So, for every funding body, the guidelines are common to each and every one of them. There should be no reason why government could not do that.

Ms Bain—That is at a high level, too. Even at a low level, the very nitty-gritty level, if we are receiving external funds, a lot of people are required to be on CDEP before they can join a ranger program because there is no other way of paying people other than by top-up, because the land council is not an employer.

Mrs VALE—I understand.

Ms Bain—So you are dependent on resource centres and other agencies or councils to act as the employer, but they cannot do it for these people on CDEP, so it limits the contract work possible. For people on unemployment benefits, it limits their access to those programs. There are these little hurdles all the way along. Land councils work very hard to make the most of those cooperative partnerships, but then to try to cobble together enough work, projects or whatever—these little hurdles are always impediments to the success of the program.

Mrs VALE—When those little hurdles were first put in, there might have been valid reasons for that. But it is likely that they have outlived their use in the bigger scheme of things, given now all the different funding bodies and the cooperation that could be possible. You said that it was a success at Hermansville?

Mr Alexander—You mean Hermannsburg.

Mrs VALE—I beg your pardon. I do mean Hermannsburg; that is my ignorance. What key factors do you think made that project a success? You did not expect it to be a success, yet it was and you had young people waiting at the door to get on to the project. Have you had a look at it and think why did this twig?

Mr Alexander—I think that would be a useful exercise for us. It has only been through a feasibility phase. With this document and the success out there, we now have to maintain continuity as much as we can. We had a very determined employee working on the project. There was a complete lack of opportunity for people to work out in their country.

Mrs VALE—So it was an identification of opportunity. You felt that there was a resonance there for the opportunity that was available?

Mr Alexander—Yes.

Mrs VALE—That is a pretty important thing.

Mr Alexander—The joint management arrangements have defused a whole lot of baggage between the different agencies involved in this process. We had good collaboration from the land council, good support within the limits of the resources of the Tjuwanpa Resource Centre—the

local organisation—and good engagement with parks and wildlife staff on the ground. That is a big part of it: having people working together for a common purpose. It sounds corny, but that is really what it is about.

Mrs VALE—No, it is not corny; it is what it is all about. I have one message for David Ross: tell him I think he is a great writer and to never lose the passion.

Mr Alexander—I will do that.

Mr SNOWDON—How do you get onto the database and how do you maintain it? What does it cost you to run it?

Mr Howard—Nothing. It is a matter of people coming in to see us—me or two other project officers—doing an application, sitting down and having an interview to see what they want to do and what skills they want and whether they want to do the prevocational mining course. We find out which community they are from and, first off, what is happening in that community, as limited things happen. We were just talking about Hermannsburg. Probably a good reason why it worked was that there was nothing to do for so long out there. And all of a sudden there is something to do and people are jumping up and saying, 'I want to do something.' We do not get on the radio and advertise. It is just that, as we go around, people see us.

Mr SNOWDON—How many do you have on the database?

Mr Howard—There are 855 now.

Mr SNOWDON—If you identify mining company X and they have given you their skill sets and say, 'We can provide you with access to 10 drivers, a couple of forklift operators, a shot firer, whatever,' do you check your data base and say, 'I haven't got anyone who is quite there yet but I will get them trained so they can do that work,' or what?

Mr Howard—With the Granites, because people are trained in those areas out there, it is hard for us to get them.

Mr SNOWDON—They are doing it out there for them.

Mr Howard—They are doing it out there on the site. They say that to be an underground truck driver at the Granites gold mine with Henry Walker Eltin you only need a C class licence. They get four weeks training while they are there. They have a job. It is on-the-job training that is really important. They can go and sit in the classroom for two weeks but if they are not on the job they are not going to know anything about it. To us that is a very important part, just getting them—

Mr SNOWDON—What if another employer—not the Granites—comes along and is not prepared to provide that sort of training? Do you have the capacity to get people trained?

Mr Howard—Yes, we can do it with the help of people like Tangentyere, the Strachy mob, maybe Footprints Forward. We come together and we say, 'They are looking for 10 truck drivers

or HR licences.' Strachy will chuck in half of his blokes and we will chuck in half of our blokes and we will get them. Collaboration is good.

CHAIR—Thank you very much to the Central Land Council for being with us today. We went a bit over time; obviously we enjoyed and appreciated it.

Mr Alexander—I would like to present you with a land council show bag. It contains our annual report.

Mr SNOWDON—I see you have Beta Electrical on them, mate.

Mr Alexander—I should not advertise at such inquiries. It also has the outcomes of the recent National Indigenous Land Management Conference. There is a DVD, which is very entertaining, and a summary of the outcomes.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

[3.10 pm]

BLOOMFIELD, Ms Kylie, Guide, Alice Springs Desert Park

CLARKSON, Mrs Jodie Anne, Guide Manager, Alice Springs Desert Park

FORRESTER, Mr Garth, T2 Ranger, Parks and Wildlife Service, Northern Territory

FORRESTER, Mr Vincent, Guide, Alice Springs Desert Park

FRY, Mr Gary, Park Manager, Alice Springs Desert Park

MATTHEWS, Mrs Iona, Guide, Alice Springs Desert Park

STUART, Mr Bobby, Kwertengerle (Traditional Owner), Alice Springs Desert Park

TAYLOR, Mr Douglas, Acting T2 Specialist Guide (Cross-Cultural), Alice Springs Desert Park

WOODBURY, Mr Hugh, T1 Ranger, Parks and Wildlife Service, Northern Territory

CHAIR—Firstly I acknowledge Bob, the traditional owner of this area of Desert Park. I am particularly pleased that you could be with us and sit with us today, so thank you. I welcome all representatives of the Alice Springs Desert Park giving evidence today to our inquiry. Would anyone like to make a brief opening statement?

Mrs Clarkson—Werte! Anwerne akangkeme anthurre arrantherre apetyeme Mparntwe Desert Park-werne. We would like to welcome you all here to the Alice Springs Desert Park. We are really happy that you decided to come up here and have a chat with us today and I hope that you really enjoy your walk around this afternoon. I would also like to thank my colleagues here because this is a reasonably intimidating forum. I really appreciate their support. I felt sorry for Eileen this morning, sitting up here by herself.

Here at the Alice Springs Desert Park, as you will learn this afternoon, we share the stories of the desert: the plants, the animals, the people and the rocks and how they all fit together in the big web of life. Hopefully, we want our visitors to leave feeling really good about the desert—understanding it a bit better and having a good appreciation of the people, the plants, the rocks et cetera.

The Alice Springs Desert Park was the brainchild of Dr Ken Johnson, who is sitting in the audience but has to leave soon, so unfortunately he cannot sit up here with us this afternoon. It was his idea. Ken knew that, in order to interpret the people aspects of the environment with any kind of integrity, he had to involve the people themselves. That is when the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority sought the Kwertengerle, the traditional owners of this piece of land, to work out who the proper people were for us to start speaking to about this place—whether we can have it here, where we can actually put it, what kinds of animals we put on display and, most

importantly, what kinds of people stories they want us to share with our visitors. Bob is one of the Kwertengerle that we have been working with since the inception of this park.

In the early days, permission was sought from the Anti-Discrimination Commission to designate four of the then six park guide positions here at the park, because it was felt at the park that the only proper people to interpret the people's stories are the people themselves. We were successful in having those positions designated and that means that they can be filled only by Central Australian Aboriginal people. The guys sitting in front of you today—Kylie, Iona, Doug and Vincent—are in those four positions. Primarily, most of their responsibility is about sharing the stories of the desert, but one of the other major things they do at Desert Park is being fantastic role models to other Aboriginal people within our local community. Lots of kids look up to these guys, especially in the street when they are walking in their uniforms.

A couple of years ago we decided to raise one of those designated positions, turning it from a technical 1 position to a technical 2 position, because we realised it was time to start creating some proper career pathways for people in order to get them from the apprentice level to the park management level. I would just like to say that, within the next 10 years, nothing would make me happier than to see a Central Australian Aboriginal person as a park manager here at Desert Park. Given how the program is going, we have a real possibility of having that happen.

Doug, one of the other witnesses, is currently filling in the specialist guide position. He is responsible for supervising the guide team, rostering, training, working with Kwertengerle and other cultural advisers, and providing cross-cultural advice for management. It is not just his role that does that; all of these guys provide us with information and help us to understand things better and make it all work. The key to success I believe is 'akeltye ingkerreke'. This means 'learning together'. This is how we have made this program work.

Today, 22 per cent of our park staff are local Aboriginal people, which is good but not as good as it could be. We have developed a very successful Indigenous apprenticeship program with the assistance of Arrernte Council, Group Training Northern Territory and Desert Knowledge Australia. We have two zoo keeping apprentices. They are the first two zoo keeping apprentices in the whole of Australia. We have three horticultural apprentices and two guide apprentice positions. In our submission you will see that the guide apprentice positions are 12-month positions and the others are three-year positions. The reason for that is that we feel 12 months is enough experience to secure a full-time position as a guide whereas to compete in horticulture and zoo keeping fields you need at least three years on-the-job training to make it meaningful. We want real outcomes from these apprenticeships; we do not want to have them just so we can say that we have them. In a couple of weeks we will be starting something new which is to have two school based apprenticeships. They will just be coming to the park one day a fortnight as part of the VET in Schools program. Warren was talking before about the link between school and work. Perhaps this is one way we can build the link. We hope to. Ideally we would like our Indigenous park staff to be up to at least 28 per cent because that would reflect the Northern Territory's Indigenous population. We do not have any apprentices at this stage in maintenance or in administration. Perhaps they are the next areas we will look at.

Garth Forrester and Hugh Woodbury, two other witnesses, are based at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station. They started their careers at the Alice Springs Desert Park as apprentice guides. Both secured full-time guide positions at the completion of their apprenticeships. Later

they decided that, although they were fantastic guides, they really aspired to work in parks as rangers. We were able to assist them to build the necessary skills and knowledge to compete for, and win, full-time ranger positions. That was up against all those whitefellas who had just walked out of university. An important part of their jobs now is mentoring new Indigenous apprentice rangers. This is all with the onset of joint management. A big part of their job is going to be role modelling for their own apprentices. Who better to be doing that than these guys?

All the Desert Park staff take part in cross-cultural communication and teamwork, Arrernte language and antidiscrimination training. There is a real culture of support of our Indigenous employment program because that is part of our foundation. It is where we started. It grew with the park, it was not an add-on later on. There is the culture that it is part of what we do. It is a very important part of what we do.

Like I said in the introductory letter, our submission is not a step-by-step guide to setting up a successful Indigenous employment program. It is a bit of a snapshot of what we do and how we do it. We want to be able to share that with other people because we have learnt a lot from our experiences and we hope that it can be useful to others. The essence of our submission is that we believe it is essential to build formal and informal relationships with individuals, families and local Indigenous communities and organisations. We have found it really beneficial to spend the extra time on recruitment. Eileen mentioned before how intimidating it was for her to be the only Aboriginal face in a whitefella organisation. That critical mass is really important. Having lots of Indigenous people working here helps other Indigenous people to be able to walk in and feel more comfortable.

We assist people to develop a work ethic, if that is necessary. Some people walk in the door with a work ethic but for others, if their parents have never worked before, it is something you need to build. You need to help that person develop that work ethic. We have high but realistic and achievable expectations of all of our staff. I was a bit disappointed this morning because I heard a comment from a local about an Aboriginal girl that she knew that was ‘quite an intelligent girl’. I felt really offended by that because in my whole time here I have never met any ‘quite intelligent’ Indigenous people. They have always been highly intelligent, to my mind. It is those kinds of comments that really put limits on people. What we want to have is no limits.

We try to help individuals to balance the demands of culture and work culture. The way we do that is by learning from them. We always try to adapt our flexible but equitable employment conditions, as we were talking about before. When it comes to going to funerals, nobody in my department misses out on a funeral. If they have to go to a funeral, they have to go to a funeral. We can work around that. We can swap their days off, we can utilise their paid day off and we can utilise recreation leave if we have to. People can go on leave without pay for ceremonial purposes if they need to, or they can go on leave with half-pay. There are always ways around getting someone to a funeral, because that it is an absolute imperative.

We try to create a psychologically safe environment in which individuals know what is expected of them and where they feel comfortable in being themselves and expressing themselves. We expect to make mistakes and to learn from them when we do. We thrive on sharing and we listen and encourage our Aboriginal staff to become our guides to better understanding—in lots of ways we are each other’s apprentices. Some of the apprentices who walk in the door are not very confident, but they have so much to offer. One thing is language. If

someone has Arrernte as their first language it is a huge thing for the rest of us in the team to be taught some language by them, and we can teach them some language too. So it is all about sharing that knowledge: everybody has something to offer. We have discovered that building self-esteem within individuals builds pride within their families and, ultimately, can contribute to building pride within our community.

I want to finish on a personal note before we get into the discussion, which is the most valuable part of this session. I often question myself as to whether I am just another 'white do-gooder' imposing my views and my beliefs on others. I am still not sure about the answer to that question, but I do love to watch a human transform—there is nothing more inspiring. Over the past eight years I have seen so many local Aboriginal people walk into the office on day 1 with their head down and speaking almost at a whisper, and then 12 months to three years later that same person walks out the door with their head held really high, truly believing that anything is possible for them and their life. I think Eileen hit the nail on the head this morning when she talked about the strength to be able to make a choice. Hopefully, that is what we have been doing here. Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to participate. We look forward to your questions.

CHAIR—Thank you, Jodie. I have a couple of questions to start. 'It should be more than 22 per cent'—I am just going back a little in your presentation to us—so let us talk about two or three things that would help to make it more than 22 per cent. That might have been just a general comment from you, but you would have two or three ideas in mind. How would you make it more than 22 per cent?

Mrs Clarkson—We would need to get more funding from somewhere. I think that expanding it into those other units, the maintenance unit and the administration unit, would be one way, and then being able to expand the numbers. But, basically, it comes down to money.

CHAIR—How would you spend that money?

Mrs Clarkson—On wages.

CHAIR—Subsidising wages?

Mrs Clarkson—Yes. Our apprenticeships are set up at the moment with Group Training Northern Territory. They are the employer and we are the on-the-job trainer. But we still need to provide some money to supplement.

CHAIR—What about career paths and opportunities? For example, my wife and I came here three months ago with the *Ghan* tour. The service we received here was superb. I am going to see it again, but I have seen it to a large degree and it is magnificent. It must mean a lot to be able to work in these sorts of conditions where the people who own it have helped to develop it and are very much a part of it. Can you describe what it is like to work here? You mentioned people who start by being a bit down and then picking up and seeing their transformation. Describe a day. They might like to answer the question themselves. Let us talk a bit about what it means to work here. Would you bring to life for us what it means to work at Desert Park.

Mrs Clarkson—I think a lot of us like to work outside. The landscape itself is absolutely extraordinary, so coming to this office every day is an absolute pleasure. Perhaps someone else at the table might like to say something.

Mr V Forrester—The tourist industry is a pretty good industry to be involved in. I can have 50 people at one talk. I send 99.9 per cent of them away with smiles on their faces. I know I have done a good job. I get job satisfaction every day here, because it is a captive audience. I can do my thing. I can start educating Australians about their land, where they come from and what it means. There need to be more Aboriginal people involved in the tourist industry. Have a look, go down to Yulara. I will give you $10 for every blackfella you see working there. At Kings Canyon, it is same.

When they first started tourists at Uluru, I was in the cattle station next door. We used to make scones and cups of tea for the tourists. My uncle put the first bore down at Uluru—helping in getting the Uluru experience happening in the early days. Blackfellas cut the road with axes. They served the tourists with scones and cups of tea and sold sticks—boomerangs and all that—to the tourists. But that was in the infancy of the tourist industry. Now, there is little participation in the tourist industry. The tourist industry requires Indigenous participation and knowledge. I did not learn my knowledge of all the plants and the animal habitats and the Tjukurpa stories from a book; I learnt it from my grandparents. This is what white Australia wants, because they have not got Tjukurpa for the country. We are the only ones that can give them Tjukurpa for the country—explain all the animals, the medicines, what bush tucker is about and all these types of things. Therefore there is a demand for Indigenous participation in the tourist industry. I see this place as a good place of learning for the young people to come and learn about what is on around the place and how they can participate.

I also have a job. Nothing gives young people more pride than earning an award wage—not sit-down money, not work for the dole, but award wage positions. I come along here, teach the young people about some of the medicines. We call it napartyi napartji. They are teaching me how to use a computer. So it goes both ways, doesn't it? I was an inkwell monitor when I went to school, just like you. When we get into the industry there is a high human resource industry requirement. It is a whole industry. I come from the cattle industry. When they had to give us award wages they kicked us off the stations, so we came to towns. That skill was lost with our generation. But we still have that information about the land, the plants, the animals. I believe this is one of the reasons I am working here—I was not always a tour guide—to break down the ice in the tourist industry. Yulara has four and a half thousand young people working down there. They all come from Sydney. They do not come from Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek or Darwin. Why go out of state when there is the human resource in their own state? The participation of Aboriginal people in the tourist industry can only improve our economy. But there need to be a few things coming along before that.

Out at Yulara, they have Nyangatjatjara College. That needs to be an ongoing program, because of utmost importance to us is the education factor. In the remote areas of the Northern Territory you will find that very few young Aboriginal people have access to education. There might be 300 or 400 down at Yulara college, but what about those three and a half thousand or 5,000 kiddies out bush? They are missing out. Then along come the other problems.

CHAIR—And that is a real challenge.

Mr V Forrester—Yes, there will be a lot of challenges. You fellers are going to have to be pretty creative in your recommendations from here.

CHAIR—Yes, good on you. Does anyone else want to say a word? Please chip in with your comments.

Mr SNOWDON—Why don't we ask each person to tell us why they are here, how they got here.

CHAIR—Good idea.

Mr Taylor—To me, working at the park is like something I never dreamed of 15 years ago. My first job was in your electorate, Barry, at BHP in Whyalla, and the backdrop was similar—Whyalla to this. The best thing for me is to come to work here and be able to interpret things in my country to people who come from overseas. To see that we are getting the message across is the best thing for me. There is also the role model aspect of it all. There are a lot of young people in town here who have got aspirations. What we are doing at the park with the apprenticeships is a really good thing. One thing we could address is the amount of money, because money is a motivation for young fellows as well. I was not too sure about the actual amount of money until I asked Jodie about it. She described the amount of money with a four-letter word. It is not too good.

Mrs Clarkson—It is embarrassing. Someone else said this morning it is embarrassing paying an apprentice six bucks an hour.

Mr Taylor—Yes, if that could be addressed and money got from elsewhere to—because these are young aspiring people who want to further their personal development and be independent. The cost of living means that is a factor as well. As I said, for me it is fantastic to work here.

Ms Matthews—Working here at the Desert Park has been a bit of an experience for me. I have tour guided in other places, but the way the system works here is pretty good. We all work together, which is a great thing. Some of the stuff that I have learnt over a few weeks—I have only been here for about seven weeks—means my education is getting a little bit higher because I am learning a lot more things than what I originally knew. Being stuck inside four walls all the time is not great, so when you come here it is magnificent. There is fresh air. It is a great place to work and nice people to work with as well. They are very caring. That is a part of Aboriginal culture, sharing and caring and also learning. And you get that experience, which is really good.

Ms Bloomfield—I suppose working here, like everyone else said, is very inspirational to everybody—

Mr SNOWDON—Tell us how you got here.

Ms Bloomfield—My eldest brother, Shane, worked here first. He said, 'Jodie's got a position there,' so I applied for the position. I came in; we met at one of the meeting shelters and she said, 'You start this day.' We had a little bit of a meeting and she asked, 'Will you be able to talk', and things like that and I said, 'Yeah, I'm all right talking.' She said: 'You start next week. Is that all

right?' I have been here ever since. I wanted to start last year but I have just come back from maternity leave.

I always wanted to be a ranger. This is one of the biggest role modelling places in town. When kids see you down the street, they're singing out 'ranger' this, 'ranger' that—especially when you go to the schools. You are talking about the tucker and all that. A lot of the kids in the classrooms today have got their Arrernte language courses, which are compulsory in some schools now. They are learning both ways, which is really good. Usually you learn Japanese and things like that, but it is good to learn your own culture—especially for a town like Alice Springs.

I have got a five-year-old son. Since I have been back, he wants to come here every day. It is the plants and the animals and the people you are sharing the stories with; it is a great thing. Hopefully I can go a bit further in my studies. I am studying land management at the moment and there is quite a lot of on-the-job training, which is really good. It is not only tour guiding, you get to do fieldwork as well. It covers quite a lot of work there. I am enjoying myself.

CHAIR—Good on you, Kylie. Thank you.

Mr Woodbury—I started off as a trainee here for 12 months, as Jodie was mentioning before. Before that I was on the CDEP at Arrernte Council for quite some time. Before that I was actually up in the Top End. I spent most of my time living around Katherine. I was born here and my parents moved up north. I actually did Green Corps for six months, which is a great project. That really opened my eyes and I wanted to head in that environmental direction. I heard about the traineeships they were offering here and also up at Kakadu. I spoke to my supervisor, straight after that spent Christmas in Darwin and then came straight down here and got into CDEP. I waited around for a bit for the word from the supervisors there, met Jodie and came out here for 12 months. I ended up here for two years after that, which was pretty good. I learned a lot, especially with people like Vince, learning about our culture, plant medicines and bush foods and how to speak to the tourists about Aboriginal survival around here, which was great. As he was saying, when you put a smile on their face, it also gives you a smile, too.

After that I applied for a ranger's job, which I did not think I was going to get because there were fifteen applicants and they were doing interviews in Sydney, Melbourne and other big cities, where, as Jodie was saying, people are coming out with university degrees. I had come here and got a certificate II in tour guiding, but I did lots of voluntary work. Jodie likes to send most of us, especially the younger people, out on field work with scientists and rangers, which is great, because you get all that knowledge. It helps you out, too, in that you can put it on your resume. So I applied for the T1 ranger job and I was surprised that I got it, which was good. I was pretty happy. As Kylie was saying, Parks and Wildlife is one of the biggest role models for young Aboriginal people growing up: you are out on the land and you are looking after your culture and the land that you, your grandparents and your great-grandparents grew up on, which is great. I love getting out there and camping out bush and sleeping under the stars.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr G Forrester—My name is Garth Forrester. I am one of only five people here since the Alice Springs Desert Park started. I started working for the commission—the service, now—

before most of these buildings were actually built. I saw them get erected and I saw those aviaries getting put together. I also helped plant the very first plants in the park and helped landscape most of the habitats here. Once it was up and opened I did not mind giving interpretive talks to international as well as Australian visitors. That was in 1996. It will be 2006 next year, so that is 10 years next year. I am 28 years old.

After that I decided that the Desert Park was a bit too small for me. I started to think there was a bigger world out there—bigger parks—so I moved into regional parks. I have since served at Simpsons Gap and Watarrka National Park, which is Kings Canyon. I did 2½ years at Katherine Gorge. I went to Ormiston and I am now at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station. I am a technical 2 ranger, so I am above the low-grade one. My day-to-day duties includes helping teach new rangers such as Hughie—he is only a young fella compared to me—how to do a couple of things. Let him go. If he stuffs up, that's his problem—he's got to fix it. I can only show him and he has got to learn by doing that. By the same token—excuse me, I am a bit nervous; I am not usually nervous.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So are we!

Mr G Forrester—I have mentored a lot of people over the years. They want to be like big brother Garth or whatever. I do my job because I have kids to look after, number one. It was not about that before. Before it was about $70 or $100 cowboy shirts and $270 RM Williams boots, but not now. I have more responsibilities. Besides that, I see myself as being in a good position where I am comfortable at the moment. If I wanted to develop or expand my career, I could move into other sections of Parks and Wildlife. It is not all about tour guiding; it is not all about ranger work. I went chasing bilbies in the Sangsters Bore area in the Yuendumu desert there. I have also been out catching cats with wildlife research. There are things like that. It is about having an amount of knowledge as an Aboriginal person as well as a local lad. I have learnt all that on the job and I have learnt it here within the Parks and Wildlife organisation itself.

It is good to see this mob coming through. I remember Jodie's first day and all that sort of gear. I am pretty happy. It was money worth spending to actually invest in getting me as a part of the Northern Territory group training as well as Parks and Wildlife, who was our host employer. Once that happened, it gave me a chance. I have got a full-time job at Desert Park. As I said, it went from there. I went into regional parks. After regional parks there is more. It does not stop there.

Mr Fry—We are going on a tour later and I hope when we wander around the park you will see exactly why it is that I want to come to work here each day. It is a great joy. As an aside, a little while ago all the staff at the desert park went through a training exercise. We looked at our own personality profiles. I can make a fair stab and say that everyone up here is a peacock. That is their profile. But we not only employ people who have this outlook on life, if you like. There are a couple of other staff here in the room and it is not their business to tell stories publicly as they have other roles in the park. Desert Park is not just about employing people who are confident in standing up and chatting to 10, 20, 50 or 100 strangers who come through the front gate. We deal with and cater for other personality types, if you like.

To support what Jodie was saying and Eileen was saying this morning, it is about building confidence in people. We can only do that if the 50 staff who work in Desert Park own that

program. We all have to want it to work. We all have to be intimately involved in all aspects of the park's development, including staff development, in everything that we do. That is why the program is the success that it is.

CHAIR—I do not know if we need to ask any questions!

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Jodie, I was fascinated to read the information you have given us. This is all so positive. You have broken the mould to some degree in how you advertise for staff, interview staff, short-list staff and have the arrangement between management and staff on how they operate day to day for their needs and yours. I admire the fact that you have been able to do that, because there has been so much positive to come out of all of that. Were there any difficulties initially? How hard was it—if it was hard—to actually establish those sorts of protocols that suit this place so well, in what you have attempted to do and what you have achieved? I think you know what I am getting at.

Mrs Clarkson—I personally have had a lot of freedom in my job. Basically the last park manager said, 'Do it however you want.' So I just try lots of things. If they work I do them again. If they do not work I never do them again and I try something else.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Did the previous park manager not have the same approach? I do not want to be critical here.

Mrs Clarkson—He completely supported it.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So he operated in a similar fashion?

Mrs Clarkson—Yes. I did the on the ground stuff and he made the administrative stuff happen as far as getting the funding and all of that kind of stuff. Because I had so much freedom in my job and because he did not put any limitations on me, that meant that I do not have to put any limitations on this program. We can keep trying new things. If they work they work; if they do not then we do not do them again. We have made lots of mistakes. That is what I have said. You learn from those mistakes and you try something else.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—In all fairness, you say that this is not the blueprint or the recipe or whatever, but it is hard for someone like me not to see it in that light to some degree.

Mrs Clarkson—It is environmental: what works for us here in Alice Springs, working with central Australian Aboriginal people, may not work in Dubbo, for instance—that is a completely different ball game. But I think some of the underlying principles can work anywhere. It comes down to respect and learning from one another.

Mr V Forrester—For instance, every year I go on leave for ceremony. My workplace allows us to go. There are not very many other government departments in the whole of Australia that understand what your ceremonial obligations are. This department, and especially this park, allows us to go on ceremony.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is the point I think I was getting at, although a bit crudely. I am not being critical of anybody, but other people can say in a general way that, for instance, funeral

time or sorry time is problematic and difficult for them as an employer. It can offer situations where employers need to work out how to handle it, and yet you guys have worked it out.

Mrs Clarkson—It just comes down to a bit of creative thinking and not ever having a too-hard basket. Too many people are too quick to say, 'That is too hard.' It is about never having a too-hard basket and trying new things. You can work within government by-laws to make them work for you and you can get special consideration for things. You just keep pushing. I still have not had a response back about Vincent's ceremony leave, but I sent it away as an application for study leave. I said that what he would be bringing back to the park and what he was actually doing in that time could perhaps be seen in the eyes of the government as something similar to what you could possibly get from me going off to residential school for four weeks a year. That is how I put the memo up. It got to a certain level and a gentleman decided to put it up as special leave and said that he would accept it as special leave although not necessarily as study leave. From there, it has gone into the abyss and I have not had a response back. While Vincent was never going to not get that time off, at this stage he has had to take that out of his rec leave. Hopefully, that will be credited back as some kind of other leave.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Yes, when that gets further examined. Thank you, Chair. I do not want to prolong it, it was just fascinating.

Mr SNOWDON—Who is responsible for examining it? Is it the Commissioner of Public Employment?

Mrs Clarkson—No, it is the CEO of DIPE.

Mr SNOWDON—But DIPE has the ability to determine those working conditions on their own, without reference to the central agency?

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What is DIPE, by the way?

Mr Fry—It is the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment. It is the government department we were in until yesterday. We moved last night. We are now in the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts.

Mr SNOWDON—My question remains, though.

Mr Fry—I do not actually know the answer. Let me put it this way: having spoken with him a couple of times about these sorts of issues, the commissioner has been very supportive of the programs we have put in place and has also found and has been seeking imaginative solutions to these real problems that do not disadvantage anyone. If it ends up in his basket, we will get a very favourable response to those sorts of questions.

Mr SNOWDON—But are they part of the EBA negotiations with the unions?

Mr Fry—I do not know the answer to that.

Mr SNOWDON—We can find that out.

Mrs VALE—Maybe if that does not work he could apply to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment.

Mr Fry—That is exactly the place.

Mrs VALE—We spoke to him yesterday. Jodie, you said that you would like to put on more young people but that you could not because of the limitations in funding. Obviously, then, this place is not self-sufficient. Do you hope that it may be one day, or is it expected that it will probably never be self-sufficient and you will always require funding from some government body?

Mrs Clarkson—Most of our funding comes from our service level agreement—that is, our community service obligation. That is where we get our funding from. We are a government business division, so we are responsible for generating some of our own revenue, but we might never become self-sufficient because these kinds of establishments never do. They are a service to the community.

Mrs VALE—I notice that you have a little restaurant next door. Do you also have a shop for Indigenous artworks for sale, like a little gallery?

Mrs Clarkson—There are two business here. There is the one we are sitting in now, which is a function centre. Next door we have a cafe and over there we have an entry station and gift shop. They are concessionaire, so we rent those out.

Mrs VALE—You rent those out and get some income from that?

Mrs Clarkson—Yes.

CHAIR—I thank everybody. We had a four o'clock start this morning. It was lovely to have this very positive conclusion to our day.

Mr SNOWDON—I thought you were a dairy farmer; you are used to milking.

CHAIR—Yes, but I got a bit slack. Thank you very much for your participation. Thank you very much, Bobby Stuart. It is much appreciated. I wish all the best to all of you. If you have questions, we are happy to answer them.

Mrs Clarkson—In a nutshell, what is it that you are taking back to Canberra? What have you learnt today? What do you think the essence of this is?

Mrs VALE—To me, the biggest lesson today is just how clever human beings can be when they are given the opportunity—and having the opportunity is what is so important. Our Aboriginal culture has so much to offer not only the rest of Australia but the rest of the world. You have something very unique and very special here. This is the first time I have ever been to this place. I have been to Alice Springs on previous occasions. I am just dying to get out there to hear what you have to tell us with regard to the culture, the plants, the animals and the stories, because there is so much there that we need to know and the world needs to know about your special heritage and the knowledge that you have. To me, that is the biggest lesson. It is the

opportunity to open up a treasure here. It is such a shame that it has taken 200 years to learn of the treasure that you have. Maybe, as somebody said yesterday, the planets are starting to align.

Ms Bloomfield—We tell you that we are really good role models and that it is working in the community. You also talked about the education side of things. A big problem is the kids getting to school. Do you have much to do much with welfare and stuff like that? I suppose I mean more with the Centrelink payment kind of thing and how the mothers get the endowment.

CHAIR—That is us—and the national parliament.

Ms Bloomfield—A lot of the parents get their money but a lot of it is spent in other ways, some good and some bad. There are other ways of looking at getting the kids to school. You have these ASSPA committees that support the kids when they are at school. The only thing is getting the kids ready in the mornings. My son goes to Sadadeen Primary School. He only has to catch the bus. He takes his own recess, lunch and things like that, but at school they have breakfast in the morning that they supply to the kids and they have recess and lunch. A lot of mothers get quite a bit of endowment and do other things with it. Some produce good outcomes; some do not. Why not make sure that, if the parents are planning on getting their endowment, they have proof that their kids are going to school and things like that?

Mrs VALE—Before the endowment is paid to the mothers?

Ms Bloomfield—Yes. Make sure that their kids are enrolled, and maybe in a month's time you can check up how they are going at school. That is a way of getting them there. A lot of the kids—

Mrs VALE—Actually, Kylie, that kind of information coming back from you as a mother is really important. You have identified very clearly that you want a future for your son. You do not want your son just to survive in the future, you want him to prevail.

Ms Bloomfield—I have taken on my two little nephews; their dad passed away. Their grandparents have spoiled them so much in other ways that they have seen too much of that way; they are not seeing this side of things. They were freaking out with the fridge full every week—how come they got so much tucker? On the other side, they are spoiled with motorbikes and things like that but they have no food. They are hungry in that way. There are other ways you can do things for kids. Give the parents the endowment money as a voucher to Kmart, or half money and half voucher. The only thing that they have to do is get the kids ready, because a lot of the schools in Alice Springs do support that—just get them to school; they have food at the school and they drop them off afterwards. There is no reason whatsoever for Indigenous kids to miss out on education.

CHAIR—Can I just respond this way: you saying it brings greater strength than us saying it because when it gets to the parliament it gets into a debate which may or may not be productive. I think the community and the nation are open to all this sort of stuff now because we know that in the past we have not got it right. That sort of thing should be on the table, in my view. Many would disagree with me, but it does provoke a lot of debate in the community. I will not mislead you that we can change it, but the great thing you have done for us today is put it on the table. If Aboriginal people do it, the nation will listen. If we do it, it will not be listened to as much.

Mr SNOWDON—It is worth noting, though—we need to be fair about this—that here in this town the Tangentyere have a voucher system. Parents get some of their money but they are given a voucher to get food in the second week to make sure the kids do not go hungry and no-one misses out. Also, there is a process whereby Centrepay is being used in some places so that payments out of the tji tji money are made direct to the school to pay for the breakfast program. Those capacities are now available. Whether or not you can compulsorily sequester money is, however, a different point. I would argue that you should not.

Mr V Forrester—There are other things there, too, Wazza. The biggest problem I see is after they have finished primary school. They get to grade 5 or 6, especially in the bush—nothing there.

Mr SNOWDON—You are right.

Mr V Forrester—That is the guts of it.

Mr SNOWDON—I was interested in a statement that Danna read out from David Ross about education. There was 25 years of CLP government where no secondary schools were provided in the bush.

Mr V Forrester—Exactly.

Mr SNOWDON—The difference now is that those secondary schools are starting to be provided. The one you mention is an independent school.

Mr V Forrester—That one comes from royalty money.

Mr SNOWDON—What we have to do is see the advantages of forgetting the past—forget that history of neglect—and start to deal with what we can do now and in the future. It seems to me that, if the federal government can work cooperatively with the Northern Territory government, you can get the resources into the schools to provide people that opportunity.

Mr V Forrester—And make high schools available to them.

Mr SNOWDON—And the skills. But it has to be a cooperative exercise, otherwise it will not work.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—It was interesting to read in Jodie's submission about the work you have done where you believe it is appropriate to suggest that you help some people in your employment to set up a second bank account to avoid the inevitable sharing of income.

Mrs Clarkson—We do that automatically with the apprentices.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Again, that is another on-hand example of an acknowledgment of an issue and a way of trying to deal with it. When it comes from the community and from people like you directly, it has to have more weight than coming from anywhere else, quite frankly. There is the recognition of and dealing with a problem at the source, and that is the greatest way even to begin to attack it. I was very interested to read that.

Mrs VALE—Kylie, under the federal government's new arrangements and processes—and I do not know whether they have been put in place yet but they certainly will be—the government wants local Aborigines to have an input into what they need and want and what their priorities are. It will be very important for you and for all the mothers and the fathers to have an input into how we can solve this educational problem. You have the solutions in your heart; you know exactly what they are. We need to have them from you, and you need to tell us what you need us to do to help you.

CHAIR—Not only have you given us a very positive experience but you have given us hope—yourselves as well, I hope. You have also shown that you are prepared to tackle the tough issues, and that is really important because we all know we have a long journey ahead. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you. We are going to go and enjoy the park.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Snowdon**, seconded by **Mrs Vale**):

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

Committee adjourned at 4.02 pm