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Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Indigenous employment

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Wednesday, 13 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 9.13 am

COLLINS, Mrs Priscilla, Chief Executive Officer, Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association

HOWARD, Ms Jennifer Anne, Corporate Services Manager, Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association

REMEDIO, Mr James Daniel, Radio Manager, Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association

LANE, Ms Joanne, Consultant, Imparja Television, and Human Resources Officer, Alice Springs Town Council

SMITH, Ms Marilyn, Manager, Footprints Forward

CHAIR (Mr Wakelin)—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee inquiry into Indigenous employment. I welcome our witnesses. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament. Would anyone like to make a brief opening statement?

Ms Smith—Basically, I have worked in Alice Springs all my life. I have worked 20-odd years with the CES and most of my work has been with Indigenous employment as well as managing the youth access centre of the CES years ago. So I have had a lot to do with Indigenous employment and Indigenous people. I welcome this inquiry into Indigenous employment because I think there are a lot of things not happening within Indigenous employment and education in this day and age, which is quite disturbing.

CHAIR—We look forward to hearing about that. It is really important to bring that out.

Mr Remedio—Welcome. I thank the committee for coming here. In my previous life, I worked on a program with the Victorian Trades Hall Council. It was a program set up by the previous Labor government which embedded people within the trades hall councils across the country to look at using trades hall council support with their networks to get employment for Aboriginal people. The program was really successful in the areas that it worked in. They had offices in all the major capital cities—in Darwin, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane et cetera. The program was cut off when the Liberal coalition came to office. At the time, it cut off a lot of programs that were working successfully within communities. For example, the employment rate among Victorian Kooris went to an all-time high within their communities because they were running programs in conjunction with the trades hall. Those programs are even successful to this day—for instance, horticultural type programs and maintenance in the community type programs related to their housing. When the program went off the radar a lot of those people went back onto the normal CDEP queues. As a result of that, the unemployment rate among Indigenous people continued to expand.

I think a purpose of this meeting should be a renewal of such a program. People should not be fearful of basing these things in trades halls. The intent was not to suddenly unionise Aboriginal

people across the country; the intent was to work closely with trade unions—for example, working with companies like Qantas to do some deals to put people on at Qantas. If you go through Qantas now you probably would not see an Aboriginal face down there, but we were moving towards getting people full-time employment in those industries. I think there is a role for people, particularly unions and companies, to play. I believe that companies have tried a program similar to the one I was involved in but have not put in the same sorts of resources and people on the ground that organisations such as trade unions have.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What was that program called?

Mr Remedio—I think it was part of Working Nation.

Mr SNOWDON—It was my idea. We funded positions in all chambers of commerce and confederation of industry across Australia and all the trade union bodies. After the 1996 election, all the trade union positions were cut and all the business positions were retained.

Mr Remedio—That is right.

Mr SNOWDON—The idea was to get a match between the labour markets and jobs.

Mrs Collins—I would like to thank you all for coming here today. We welcome this inquiry. It is very important for us because, over the last 10 years, there has been no national Indigenous employment and training strategy in place. I came out of a national Indigenous training strategy 18 years ago. That went for three years and over 200 Indigenous people were trained during that time. All of those people are either leaders of organisations or film-makers who are well renowned throughout the world and have won all the major awards. Since that time, there has not been anything. The difficulty we have now is that we have no-one filling those managerial roles and we do not have film-makers coming through.

Like we were saying, all the training is really fragmented and you have to get a bit from here and a bit from there. It is very difficult to get someone on a three-year traineeship and get them on film attachments, for example, where they have mentors et cetera. There is nothing like that around any more. Well, there is, but it is so bitsy that it just becomes impossible to try to piece together. We believe this is very important and we appreciate your coming here and listening to what we have to say.

CHAIR—Thank you. In your submission, No. 32, you talk about 'implementation of the major employment strategy 1988-1993.' Can you give us a little bit more on that?

Mrs Collins—What happened was that CAAMA became part of the national Indigenous employment strategy. A majority of employees at CAAMA at that time became trainees. There would have been more than 100 trainees throughout the whole of the CAAMA group. That was radio, music, technical, shops and productions. It was all on-the-job training, and there was accredited training. It had a link with the Australian Film Television and Radio School, and we had Tom Jeffrey come out every three months and do an assessment of us and make sure that we were in line with the rest of the industry. We also did certificate courses through the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs. That was for people in admin, but other people who were in radio would go to other areas for training. We also had a mentor. Vince Forrester was our

mentor, and if there were any difficulties with social, economic or family issues you had that support to help you through everything.

There was also money so we could go and work on attachments. If you were working in radio you could go and do a live outside broadcast with the football mob, or you could do a film attachment. There was every opportunity to do on-the-job work with people in the industry, and we were getting accredited training. It was fantastic. People like Rachel Perkins, Warwick Thornton and Alan Collins, who are winning all the awards, came out of that. If that had not been there, we would still be probably glaziers, receptionists or something.

CHAIR—Why did it stop?

Mrs Collins—When the new government came in, they just stopped it all.

CHAIR—But the date says 1993.

Mrs Collins—That is when the funding had been committed. Once that went out, it was not renewed, and that is when all the training became all fragmented and bitsy. Since then, we have found it—

CHAIR—I need to ask, since I am part of the current government: if it stopped in 1993, it was three years ahead before the new government got in.

Mr SNOWDON—That was the last funding round. I was in charge of the strategy. Perhaps we ought to get the library to do a search and explain the policy. The MES worked in the public and private sectors and in the community sector. What it meant was that we would provide wage subsidies and training assistance for periods of up to 12 months and even longer, to ensure that people were able to get a job outcome at the end of it. It was a costly exercise. There were up to 100 per cent wage subsidies in some instances. What happened after that was that the MES was changed. What we have now with the corporate exercise is basically the residue of the MES. It is now focused on large corporates and it does not go anywhere near the community sector or the public sector.

CHAIR—Okay. We will get some work done on that. Marilyn, could you take us through those things that you believe need to be said about this employment issue?

Ms Smith—My role is in Footprints Forward. We were part of the Alice in 10 initiatives. The birth of Footprints was brought about in that we were to mentor Indigenous youths into employment, education or training. In all my years of working in employment and education, I still find, even today, that Indigenous kids are mainly being pushed through the school system for their age and not for what they know.

CHAIR—That was a national thing too.

Ms Smith—It is. Even today—

CHAIR—Whether it is Indigenous people or not. But I take your important point.

Ms Smith—It is still happening—even today. I have a grand-daughter who is seven or eight. She has a cousin who is 10 and comes from a town outside of Alice. My grand-daughter can read better than she can. It is quite disgusting. Now that she has come here we are trying to change that.

CHAIR—So you feel let down by the education system?

Ms Smith—Yes. My daughter-in-law asks how this can happen in this day and age, but it still is happening. It happened in my daughter's era too.

CHAIR—It would not come as any surprise to you that that is a pretty consistent theme that we have had presented to us in the last couple of days.

Ms Smith—With all the inquiries that you have on education, it is still happening. On the employment side, we have to canvas employers for work for Indigenous people. We get young kids coming in with no idea of what they want to do, so we have to talk to them and canvas employers to put them on. What we are finding across the board—it is not just Indigenous—that the training wage is very low. We actually have young kids who have left traineeships and apprenticeships because they were earning more money working on a weekend and after school at the supermarket on the checkout—being a checkout chick—than they earned by taking on a skilled trade. There is nothing you can do, because they cannot afford to live on a traineeship wage.

CHAIR—The incentives are hitting it the other way.

Ms Smith—That is the bad thing. If young people want to have their own car or some other transport to get to work—because transport is a problem—or their own spending money, they cannot afford to do a traineeship or apprenticeship.

CHAIR—What are a couple of things that we ought to do?

Ms Smith—Increase the traineeship wage. I have spoken to employers and they actually agree.

CHAIR—What about attendance at school—getting people to school—and that type of thing?

Ms Smith—I suppose there are a couple of things. The schools have pathways programs. Some parts of the program are good, but I think some of the kids use it as a cop-out. With the pathways programs they do a couple of days of schooling and for the other three days they work for an employer. They actually get paid for the work they do as a school based apprenticeship. But some of the kids use that as a cop-out. The three days that they are supposed to be with an employer, they are off walking the streets and not going to school and they do not go to school for the two days that they have to go to school. The schools sort of lose track of these kids.

CHAIR—So we have to get over that somehow.

Ms Smith—Yes.

CHAIR—Can you give us a picture of Footprints Forward? I get a picture that it started in about 2003. I also had in mind—and I asked about this yesterday but I did not do any good—an organisation or some work over the years in Alice Springs linking Indigenous employment with the employers and that sort of thing. I understand that that is part of the role of Footprints Forward.

Ms Smith—The young people come in and ask for different jobs. We actually doorknock for them and canvas employers, asking if they would like to take on a young Indigenous kid and give them a go. We have been successful in that regard. We have actually got two or three apprentices on.

CHAIR—You had some wonderful examples on the web.

Ms Smith—Yes. We canvas employers. Some of them would be under the pathways programs. The other thing with the system is that, with some school based apprenticeships, the occupations or vocations chosen by the kids are not accepted. We had two lads last year who chose butchery and airconditioning refrigeration.

CHAIR—Yes, I see that.

Ms Smith—They are not part of the school pathway subjects or the vocations chosen for a school based apprenticeship. The school unofficially let it go so that these kids could go off and work for these employers.

CHAIR—Do you know why? It just seems that it would be practical.

Ms Smith—Under the school based apprenticeships there are only certain occupations that are chosen, such as administration and, I think, mechanics. There are only a few occupations.

CHAIR—It is only within the education system that those decisions are made, I guess?

Ms Smith—Yes, along with the group training company. They are involved in the school based apprenticeships and there are only about six vocations available. These two young fellas went and did their work experience but were still going to school, so it became a work experience that went for a very long time.

CHAIR—It was very practical.

Ms Smith—Yes. The school agreed to turn a blind eye to what was going on because at least these two lads were going to work and the employers were impressed with them. But because the employers already had apprentices they had to wait for the other apprentices to finish before they could accept the new ones. They said that if the school could keep that going and we could all turn a blind eye to it and let it go—

CHAIR—The point was that you had two people in the workplace.

Ms Smith—That is right, and they were still going. That was a credit to those two lads because they lived 50 kilometres out of town. This year those two kids were accepted and signed

up as apprentices with those employers. Work experience is normally unpaid. I would like to give credit to employers around town, because when we have asked for work experience with them they have paid wages to the students while they were there. So these lads were getting paid for working, which is why it was not officially through the school. We had to tell them, 'When you start your apprenticeships your wages are going to drop a bit.'

CHAIR—That is a big effort.

Ms Smith—Yes, and the onus is on the employer if they want to pay them above the award. They are both still working and going great guns. It has been excellent that the school could turn a blind eye to something.

CHAIR—That is your role and what you endeavour to do?

Ms Smith—Yes, to negotiate with the school and the employers so that they keep at it.

Mrs VALE—Marilyn, what we have learnt—and what I think we all know in our hearts anyway—is that the key really is education for all children. It is encouraging them all to stay at school and get that level of education that will be the springboard. That might be different in each age group or circumstance but they do need that level of educational opportunity. Do you have anything that you would like to tell us? Your role and what you are doing is obviously quite pivotal. Is there anything you think we can do better to help encourage children to get that beginning?

Ms Smith—I suppose it is encouragement for people to be flexible and to not stick to the routine where you cannot deviate off the path because that is the chosen path and it is all in black and white. We need to allow for flexibility for good outcomes. I also believe that eventually these young fellas are going to need extra tuition in doing their school based—

Mrs VALE—Do you mean to have opportunities to pick up some schooling or education later on?

Ms Smith—We have found that we are running around in circles at the moment, before the departments change their name. There was money available from DEST and DEET, for example, for a tutor for apprentices. As long as it was accredited training you could get a tutor. We have been trying to chase this up for another young apprentice who is in a separate field. We could not get a tutor because DEST had given the money to DEET, DEET had not received it and they seemed to think it was not their role anyway. So we were in a bind because this kid needed help with his numeracy and literacy and we did not know where to get it. We actually went back to the pathway program at the school and asked them if they would not mind if this young fellow went back with them and picked up a bit on his numeracy and literacy—we could not get help anywhere else. The pathway program was happy to do that and set up some work for him to do in order to help him.

Mrs VALE—Even with that help, I should imagine that you would need flexible timing and flexible hours.

Ms Smith—Again, it goes back to the employer. I must say that the majority of our traineeships so far have been with private enterprise. We are quite happy in that regard and quite pleased that we have not relied on Aboriginal organisations to take up our Aboriginal kids. We have always looked at Aboriginal kids going to work for Aboriginal organisations as people following the path of their rellies, as people want to do. I know that my dream at one stage was to follow the path of my mother. You would not want to know what the occupation was, but that was the thing in those days, and I did for a while. She was a wards maid at the hospital. When I got asked at school what I wanted to be I said I wanted to be I said I wanted to be a wards maid.

Mrs VALE—That is a natural thing.

Ms Smith—Yes, because you want to follow their path. My father was a carpenter, but that was a bloke's trade in my days.

Mrs VALE—That has very strong biblical precedents.

Ms Smith—Yes. So you do not know, and I can tell you that kids these days do not know what they want to be either.

Mrs VALE—But even your job as the wards maid was an entry-level job. It was a springboard for other things for you. It is about getting that first job.

Ms Smith—Yes, that was my first job. When I left school I did not work at the hospital; I actually went and worked at the post office as a phone girl, typing up telegrams and so on.

Mrs VALE—My first job was in a lolly factory. I made Minties and Fantales.

Ms Smith—As soon as I left school that was my job.

Mrs VALE—You just need that entry-level job and that will be a springboard.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Thank you for allowing us to be here today. I want to ask questions of Jim and Priscilla specifically—and Marilyn can come in if she needs to. Jim, I want to take you back to what you and Priscilla said at the beginning about where things were some years ago. I want to do that not to rehash the past but to examine now. The suggestions you have in your submission are logical and commonsense suggestions that we need to cut through and consider carefully. Can you expand on where things have got to and to what degree we have gone backwards? Have we gone backwards? If so, how far? Are some of these recommendations being made on that basis?

I know there have been success stories through that time as well, but it seems to me that if so much progress was being made where do we sit now in comparative terms and how much more effort is required now compared to then in order to try and kick start all of this again? Discuss it with me generally, because I would like you to talk to it rather than just answer questions, because you have so many logical conclusions drawn in here and I want to know whether they are based on a situation that is worse now than it was then, or whether people have been struggling through the system anyway.

Mrs Collins—When I first started as a trainee, it was fantastic. Every person who was a trainee at CAAMA during that period is now either a manager or one of the leaders in the film-making industry. They are now working in the mainstream; the mainstream industry is chasing them. It was fantastic for us, because everything was on the job. You had your accredited training and it was fantastic. The money was there for film attachments. But that money has stopped. From 1993 until now, it has been a constant struggle every single year just to have trainees. The reason for that is because it is really bitsy. If you want to get a trainee, you have got to get a bit of money from CDEP and then a bit from STEP, but then STEP will not give you money the next year and they will cut out the CDEP. Then they will not give you money for accredited training, so you might have to go to a university for that. You go to a university and they say: 'Oh no, we don't do that course. You've got to go to another one.' By the end of it you are sitting there going, 'All we want is one trainee,' and it is just impossible.

If an organisation is administering the funds and they fall over, that money is gone. Last year we lost two trainees because the organisation went and the money went with it. In the last few years at CAAMA, since I have been CEO and Jennifer has been the corporate services manager, we have just been pulling in private money and trying to put aside money within those budgets. We actually have to fund the trainees ourselves. That is very hard on its own because when you get money for a project it is only for that project. No-one wants to fund trainees. To this day, we are finding it really hard. At the moment we have got three trainees in radio, we have got one trainee in production, we have got one apprentice technician and we have got one trainee in CAAMA shops. Really CAAMA is carrying all the costs for those positions. It is quite hard to do when you do not have the money to do it. You are trying to balance keeping trainees going through. At the moment, 75 per cent of our employees are Indigenous and all our key managers, except for about two, are non-Indigenous. You have got that level up here of quite a few skilled Indigenous people, and that was only because of this strategy here, and then there is this big gap to where you need the trainees. You know it is going to take them about six years before they can get to that level, but we cannot even get to the first year. They are just making it really hard. We have had meetings with DEST, DEWR and DEET. One says, 'We'll only give you this bit; you've got to go there.' No-one actually knows who is doing what in each department. I am sitting there going, 'If you mob don't know, how the hell are we supposed to know?'

Mr Remedio—The thing is: why am I sitting here? Why am I even here? I am from Bendigo in Victoria.

Mr SNOWDON—I know the answer to that.

Mr Remedio—You know the answer to that?

Mr SNOWDON—It is because it is the centre of the universe!

Mr Remedio—It is, yes! It gives you some idea about how strapped we are for people within this industry at the present time, and within the whole media industry. There are 23 licensed Aboriginal radio stations around the country. There are heaps of communities around with their own tiny little radio stations and people making films. It is a potentially huge industry that could employ quite a few people. If we take the example of Maori television, they get something like $50 million to run their enterprises throughout that country. They are at the cutting edge of

industry and of film; their stuff has been accepted overseas and their country has benefited hugely because of it.

But here there has not been the same emphasis put on this thriving industry, which could be a great industry. I get back to my question: why am I sitting here at 61? I should be home; I am a self-funded retiree. I should be there doing that. But it is simply because we do not have the skills within this industry. You need to start to take on trainees and give them traineeships and put them through the proper pathways that Marilyn was talking about. We have to design some other sort of system that gives people hands-on skills and not necessarily the whole school based theory stuff.

Look at my circumstances. I grew up in Cairns. There was a sawmill and a meatworks down the road. There were a lot of industries at that time and I know that, globally, everything had moved on. But, at that particular time, you could go down and get an apprenticeship for five years. You signed up an apprenticeship. If you did not get an apprenticeship, you went to school and you graduated and you were on a tradesman's wage. Those opportunities are not here or, if they are here, people are not investing in them. Another example that I have noticed is the 'fly in, fly out' policy of mining companies. Mount Isa Mines used to have up to about 150—or even more—apprentices in their heyday, where you had this whole heap of apprentices in all different trades going through the system year after year. They were working all over the country—all over the world, for that matter. But, for companies like the top-rating ones here—and all these mines out west—it is easier for them to fly someone from Perth, or anywhere, than to invest in the country that Aboriginal people are living on. I think it is outrageous that we can let that sort of thing happen, where we are not putting apprentices from Yuendumu and people on the ground within those places, so that those people can make a commitment to train them.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I note, Priscilla, that you said, quite correctly, that these people are all working in the mainstream—I think you mentioned 'mainstreaming' before—industry and that is essential. We hear a lot about role modelling. This committee has been told so many times of the value of role modelling in Indigenous education and particularly employment and training, and that many of these youngsters can aspire if they see role models and they have an influence in their lives. How far-fetched would it be for me to think that, sure, the film and television and radio industry itself can employ, but what else can it do by expanding its employment and training base for Indigenous people in role modelling? In other words, they see examples passing them, do they not? How much broader can that effect be on employment within the industry itself and what influence could it have outside the industry, on other aspects of role modelling and influence within the Indigenous community generally?

Mrs Collins—When young kids in town see an Aboriginal person working, even if it is in a bank, they will say, 'I can do that if Aboriginal people can do those sorts of things.' When I was young, I saw Sally Axton working at a bank and I thought, 'This is the first time I've seen an Aboriginal person working in a bank.' For me, that was a huge thing. So CAAMA have taken that into account, because we know that it is the young kids we have to look at. They will be the ones we will be employing in the future. We recently got money from the Alcohol Education Rehabilitation Foundation to go out to Santa Teresa and Hermannsburg and, over a 12-month period, we will deliver training in radio, video and music. The way we would do that is that we would get every position—such as a director, writer, cinematographer and sound recordist—from that area. An Indigenous film-maker from Alice Springs will be the role model out there

delivering that training so that the kids can look at it and say: 'This mob didn't live in Sydney; they are from Alice Springs. If they can do it, I can do it.' We do not want to bring people from Sydney, because it is unrealistic. If you want to get an actor you get Tricia Morton Thomas, who is in radio and she works here at CAAMA. That is the way we are trying to get the kids to get that confidence and to say, 'If they can do it, we can do it.'

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I see huge potential.

Mr Remedio—In answer to part of the question regarding what this industry can offer, the whole of the IT industry is involved as well, but we are not used to our full potential in that area. Another initiative that I had a little bit to do with previously was the cooperative multimedia centres that were established around the country. These cooperative multimedia centres were at the cutting edge of multimedia for the country. It was a whole new industry. No-one knew much about it, so the government or the administration of the day said, 'We need to do something.' So they set up these centres and within that was a strong emphasis on the cultural aspects of it, and there were some openings and positions there for Aboriginal people within those cooperative multimedia centres.

They did some great work in the early days—webpage designs and moving right into that medium. When that fell down, we lost all of that interest for people—not only Aboriginal people but all people. I think that we suffered as a nation as a result of losing those cooperative multimedia centres. We put a lot of money into the country, and private enterprise eventually took them over. Of course, the Indigenous people lost out in that whole aspect of it.

We had a little program running in Brisbane where we took some computers down to the valley in Brisbane. We just opened the doors, advertised it on the radio, and said, 'There are these computers there today,' so Aboriginal people down in the valley and street kids could go in and have a play with them. We sent down a guy who did a little bit of graphics on them. As a result of that, there was one kid who came forward who worked on the Softimage program. That is the thing where, you will see in the movies, people walk through doors and all that sort of stuff. That came from that little foray down into the valley in Brisbane, by a street kid. That kid had no high education standards. He had none of that sort of stuff. He just had this real capability to put stuff together.

In terms of making films and the stuff that CAAMA does with their production work, we are not in that area but we should be. There are opportunities there for us to do that. We are not into the IT where we should be. We have got to hire someone at $60 an hour or something. We could employ more apprentices in the industry in terms of technology for communities and things like that. We can really get some tangible outcomes with apprentices.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Could I finish by saying that last week in Canberra, at a NAIDOC lunch, I heard Tony Briggs stand up and tell his story to 800 people. He was a bit overawed. He said, 'It is easier to act than to do this,' but he stood up and gave his story about the influences in his life and how he managed to get where he has got. It was pretty impressive stuff, I have to say. It was all family influence and luck that he was in a circumstance that gave him that inspiration. It also showed what that inspiration can do.

CHAIR—I want to raise something. I feel that I have not come to grips with what CAAMA is. I have known it forever and I have known what it is. CAAMA's mandate is:

> … promote Aboriginal culture, language, dance and music, while generating economic benefits such as training and employment of Aboriginal people in order for them to progress into the mainstream employment market.

Priscilla, you challenged me to say this, when you talked about the person in the bank—if they can do it, we can do it. I think that is the most powerful message that comes to any of us, particularly young people. That is the role model and nothing beats it, in my view. You can educate, and governments can do all sorts of acrobatics, but that role model that you talk about is the most powerful. CAAMA is in a very powerful position. You know the culture, know the language and know the message. You can talk about not only dance and music—which is very important—but also mainstream employment. Can you talk to me a little bit about what actually happens on a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week radio station which actually challenges people to say, 'They can do it; we can do it.' How does CAAMA activate that?

Mrs Collins—CAAMA Radio is a 24-hour Indigenous radio service. All of our broadcasters, except for one, are Indigenous. We also go out to four communities and train people in those communities in radio and video. That allows them to broadcast within their own community. Then we switch over, between 2 pm and 4 pm every day, so that those communities get to broadcast on CAAMA Radio. It is just giving people out bush the opportunity to know that their voices can be heard by a large audience.

CHAIR—Your biggest audience is here, isn't it?

Mrs Collins—We go to an audience of about 500,000.

CHAIR—I presume that Alice Springs is your biggest centre. Do you have a program that talks about mainstream employment, for example? My memory of the valley is from a long time ago. It was flooded with about 20 feet of water.

Mr SNOWDON—How old were you?

CHAIR—Very young. You talked about bringing people off the street and challenging young people. Do you do much of that sort of stuff?

Mrs Collins—Yes. We bring in kids from as young as 10 years old. They do the party mix on Saturday nights, and during the holidays they come in and work with the broadcasters. At the moment we have two young kids—they are about 13—producing radio programs.

CHAIR—It is the message 'if they can do it, we can do it'.

Mrs Collins—Yes.

Mr ROBB—The AFL is pretty heavily involved—and is increasingly involved—in programs to help the Indigenous community because of, I think, the Indigenous community's involvement in football. I was just wondering whether, over the years, the large commercial television

networks, the ABC or some of the bigger film groups have sought to foster Indigenous activity in the same way that the AFL seems to be trying to explore opportunities.

Mr Remedio—I was part of a group that set up the National Indigenous Radio Service—a satellite service out of Brisbane. We approached the AFL to give us rights to broadcast, which they did. The AFL gave rights to the Indigenous sector eight or nine years ago to broadcast through the NIRS and major stations also take the broadcast. CAAMA takes the broadcast and most of the Indigenous radio stations take the broadcast. But there is very little movement of any funds from that. It is like: 'You can come and broadcast it if you like. We're giving you the opportunity'—which is good of them—'but it is up to you to go and market the thing.' We have to market it and sell it and, out of that, get some employment opportunities. Most of the broadcasters of a lot of the games—broadcasting from Fremantle or elsewhere in WA et cetera—are non-Indigenous ex-AFL players, but very slowly that is changing. We do have two Aboriginal guys in Melbourne who do the broadcasts whenever they get the opportunity or their turn comes up to broadcast. But, in terms of any real employment outcomes of it, they—

Mr ROBB—I understand that, but the AFL, in other ways—maybe not in the broadcasting field so much—are trying to foster good outcomes for the Indigenous community because there are so many Indigenous footballers. What I am saying is that there is a positive connection there, from what I can see, with a major organisation, the AFL, and the Indigenous community—running lots of schools, putting training programs in place and trying to do all sorts of things. I suppose I was trying to see whether, in your industry—the broadcasting industry—there has been any connection with the heads of Channel 9, Channel 7, Channel 10 or the ABC. Have they had any programs to try to foster trainees?

Mr Remedio—The ABC have Aboriginal trainees, cadets et cetera, but they are a bit lazy in this sort of thing. They will poach these people. One of our broadcasters was doing the news last years—Angela Bates—and she is now with SBS. So a person comes in and gets trained and then they go out and do other stuff. But it is good for them to go out and do other stuff, because that is what it is about—creating an opportunity.

Over the last few years, the ABC have not put a great deal of money into that, nor has SBS. They are very quick to grab the dollar and say, 'We're going to do this ABC training with *Message Stick*.' You have hit on a matter of real concern to the Indigenous media sector. It seems to be that someone sits down and says, 'There's your Aboriginal content; there's your $4 million'—or whatever it is—'to go and do that.' We know that we are going to get what the country needs and we can do this better, and those funds could be better utilised out of the sector that creates the activity.

Mr ROBB—So they poach people who succeed but they are not putting back in?

Mr Remedio—That is right, and it is putting forward the wrong face to Australia. It is saying: 'Look at this person. This person is really good. She dresses well, she speaks well and she does this well.' But we know that that is not the reality. When you listen to our broadcasters and hear how they are reaching the grassroots, you get the reality. It is really nice to put up the positives but all of us know that that is not the real thing that you see in the country—and it is not good for the country. It is not good to see that sort of thing put up like that. People from a community cannot aspire to do that. They know right from the start—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—It is like me aspiring to be Elle McPherson, quite frankly! That is what you are saying, isn't it?

Mr Remedio—Yes, that is what I am saying. It is a reality check. It is all part of that. People think, 'That's the Aboriginal content for the country; wow, isn't that good!' It does not help you guys, it does not help us and it does not help the people out there to get a better outcome. I would close down the ABC if I had my way—don't worry about that!—or that sector. The ABC move into all these areas—for example, Katherine. They do not have any right down in Katherine to have a station. That should be taken up by the local community station or those sorts of people. The ABC seem to cry poor but they get money to expand their industry. Now they are going to put Triple J and all sorts of things into these remote communities. What is the justification for that? How are we going to get out our cultural content when someone can flick the dial and get Triple J and all this hip-hop stuff, explicit music and all that sort of stuff? It is just being piled on top of us all the time, and we are trying to put out some cultural programming. The ABC just seem to get the dough. They put a transmitter there because they said that they were bringing that content to Australia and that they should have it because everybody else has it.

CHAIR—That is an interesting perspective.

Mr ROBB—How do you deal with issues such as ceremonial leave and all that sort of stuff?

Mr Remedio—We have a policy.

Mrs Collins—We have a policy for that. We have bereavement leave which is not just for someone who is your first family. That is all taken into account. We know when people have to go out for ceremonies, and that is taken into account. So it has not really ever been a problem for us. It is always something that we acknowledge, appreciate and work around.

Mr Remedio—It should also be said that, when a member of a band has passed away, we take that music off air as a mark of respect.

Mr ROBB—When you are trying to place kids in other mainstream jobs do you find that other mainstream businesses have learned from what you do with some of your work practices and things that you have in place for ceremonial leave and whatever? Is there some sort of sharing of all that sort of stuff?

Mrs Collins—It would help if organisations, even in the private sector, were a lot more flexible in the way that they worked with Indigenous people and took into account their family, their culture and stuff. By being flexible and taking those issues into account, the employee gives back a lot more, and we get a lot more out of it. If their kids are sick, sometimes they can come in and sometimes they have to take time off. If someone has passed away and they have to take time off, we do not make a big deal about it: 'That's fine. Fill in your form and come back.' That person is then happy to come back, and will give 100 per cent and be open to come and talk to you about their problems. We have not really had much of an issue. CAAMA is pretty open in that respect.

Mr ROBB—In a related way, I see that so many jobs have to be created around this town and in related areas.

Ms Smith—Yes.

Mr ROBB—Is it one of the big stumbling blocks to working in banks or the butcher shop or whatever that a non-Indigenous employer is not able to accommodate some of these—

Ms Smith—So far with us, touch wood, we have been pretty lucky in that regard. Part of our role is to instil in employers some cultural values about why people cannot go to work for cultural reasons and, touch wood, it has worked pretty well. As long as we let them know, employers will let them take that time off—as long as we say they will be back on such and such a day.

One young kid had only just started and he had to have cultural leave and the employers said, 'Oh yeah, he can have it.' Then the boy said, 'Now I want to go on holidays,' and the employer let him have it. So, in some cases, some employers are willing to accept what is happening and let it go. That is part of our role: to go and talk to the employers about cultural ways and issues. But we also have to teach our young people that culture runs both ways; what the white man expects from his workplace, how he expects you to work and things you need to do—and stuff the employer needs to understand about how young people talk in a workshop and other things that could have an effect.

Mr ROBB—Could I turn to the mentors that you have for some of the young kids who have jobs. Could you tell us a bit about how you match these people up? What sort of people have you got as mentors, and how does it work?

Ms Smith—In our business there are three others besides me. We have a mix of two males and two females, of varying ages. That is basically how we mix them. If the young lad comes up I usually give him to the young fellas. Some of the school teachers might say, 'This one needs a father-figure because he does not have a father at home,' so we use the older man as his mentor. It works out that way; we look at what mentor is the best person for each person at that time. Some others, if they want to go to uni, need mentoring and help in applying so you have to help them with subjects and so on. We have somebody on hand to do that—she helps them through it and gets all the details for them.

Mr ROBB—Do you think it is an essential component of success? For those who have succeeded, has the mentoring been a really important part of that?

Ms Smith—Yes, I think it has. So many young people just do not know how to go about things. They are too ashamed to ask so they will just sit down and think, 'Oh well, it will happen one day,' and in the end they just do nothing all day apart from watching TV or whatever. Or perhaps they are working and they do not know what to do; they finish one job and then just sit there. There is nothing worse for an employer than someone who has finished one job and is just sitting doing nothing. So we keep saying, 'Once you have finished that, ask them for more work.' That has happened.

Mr ROBB—With some of those success stories that you have listed, which are really encouraging, are there some key factors? Were all those kids quite literate and numerate? What common factors do you think led them to be successful while others were not?

Ms Smith—Just having somebody there to support them has been good. Also, talking to employers about their needs and the problems they face, whether in their home environment or wherever, has been helpful. Part of our role is to help them do resumes and job applications as well. A lot of young people—and even older people, I am afraid to say—do not know how to do resumes and job applications, so we assist them in that way, and we go to interviews with them. We have even had staff go to their workplace for a couple of days during their orientation period. Staff have sat through the young person's workplace orientation, met their supervisor and worked out things like that. We help them by just being there.

Mr ROBB—You almost need a mentor for the employer too—that is what you are saying.

Ms Smith—Yes.

Mrs VALE—I understood that to be what you actually do, whether formally or informally.

Ms Smith—Yes, we go and talk to the employer about issues, and we encourage the employer to ring us if they are sensing a problem—rather than just cut the young person off, they should come back and talk to us. We also say that to the young person: 'If there is a problem, don't just walk out; give us a ring and we'll come round.'

Mr ROBB—Thank you. Priscilla, are any of the schools running any courses which might introduce the kids to this area of mediation?

Mrs Collins—Not that we are aware of. At CAAMA, because we are finding that we are not getting people with skills, we are applying for funding ourselves. We are going through things like Regional Partnerships, to see if we can deliver training to the schools. In that way we get interest from the kids and once they start to leave school we can start getting hold of them and bringing them over our way.

The hardest thing for us is that, with the ASSPA going, a lot of the kids are missing out. Even in grade 7 the literacy of some of the kids is really bad. So we are trying to get them tutors, and the Indigenous mob at the school are saying, 'We don't have any ASSPA funding.' I do not know the detail, but a lot of it was not going to kick in until about July, so for the first six months those kids have missed out. Even my daughter, whose literacy was very bad, made the decision herself that she was going to live out bush, because she can do school of the air there and so she will get a better education. It is just not happening at the local school. There is no support there for her. I have been ringing up for tutors, but they say, 'No, we can't give them tutors.' We cannot get even the basics there, so CAAMA is applying for money all over the place so that we can start going to the schools and delivering the training ourselves.

Mr ROBB—So the kids are sitting in general classes, but if they are not keeping up or whatever there is no capacity—

Mrs Collins—They can easily slip through the system. If you are one of those pretty loud kids who seem really confident, you are going to slip through. When my daughter brought home her homework, I thought, 'Oh my God, you can't even write.' A year 5 student is writing better than she is. I said, 'How did you get to year 7 without that being picked up?' I rang the school and they said, 'There is nothing wrong with her writing.' I asked, 'Have you read it? She cannot even write "there" and she is in year 7!' So it is not happening. The schools just do not have the money for the after-school programs and one-to-one tuition.

Mr ROBB—You have made a strong point about fragmentation. Over the last 12 months there has been some attempt to get a more whole-of-government approach. There is ICC and so on. Has any of that touched the sides yet?

Mrs Collins—Everyone talks about it, and we have tried it, but I have not seen anything work. I cannot even get DEST and DEWR to know what each other is doing. This financial year, when we put in an application to the ICC, Ross McDougall was the one who said, 'Just put in the applications, especially the ones aimed at education in schools, and it should then be up to the ICC to get the whole of government, all of those departments together, to put in the money for those projects.' Everything we put in—and we put in about four activities—was declined. So it is just not happening. You cannot even get one department to talk to the other. You go to DEST, and they say, 'You need to talk to someone in DEWR.' Don't they know who that person is? Don't they know about that program? With respect to the whole-of-government thing, we have not seen anything happen.

Mr Remedio—At the moment, in broadcasting particularly, we are finding that a very difficult process with the ICC. That is right across the country. They are putting some unrealistic things into the performance indicators, such as a change in membership as a criterion for receiving funds. I do not know whether you are aware of that.

Mr ROBB—What does that mean?

Mr Remedio—They are saying that CAAMA and other radio stations across the country have to change their model rules to take in membership right across the broadcasting area, without going through a proper board process—and they are saying that members should be allowed to come into the organisation without any scrutiny whatsoever.

Mrs Collins—They do not even need a seconder.

Mr Remedio—It is not even necessary to have a seconder to get it, so if someone walks in and says, 'I want to be a member of CAAMA'—and this is their interpretation—CAAMA has to take that person into the organisation. We could have 500 members, but how are you going to get a quorum out of that, for example? That is part of the performance indicator. I do not think we have signed off on that performance indicator because we absolutely do not know what to do. We do not know whether to get advice on whether we should be doing that. This is something that has been put on radio, and we continually keep saying to the ICC people who manage media—DCITA—that we work under a set of codes of conduct within radio—the whole of the country does—and that is the standard that is set. But they are pushing us in a different direction and ignoring parts of those codes. My understanding of it is that you cannot fund somebody and then determine how they should do their programs. You cannot do it with the ABC or SBS or the

community, so why are you doing it to blackfellas? Why are you singling us out? Haven't we been singled out enough? Now you are putting these sorts of pressures on the system. That is just one of the things that make it very difficult to operate at the moment.

Mr ROBB—It has been put to us in the last day or two by some people that, as far as Indigenous employment goes, at least in the early stages it is best carried out by an Indigenous organisation—like CAAMA, for instance. They get experience and confidence and they are then better equipped to go into other jobs. Do you think that is true?

Mrs Collins—That is true. A lot of the radio broadcasters and film-makers who work at the ABC and SBS are from CAAMA; Tony Briggs is one. CAAMA is the one that has to go through the whole process of giving them confidence, having flexible working hours and taking their culture into account. We build them up and give them their accredited training and then it is the ABC and SBS who pinch them and take the glory for it. There is a lot of hard work that goes into getting someone to that stage.

Mr ROBB—Marilyn, you are running an Indigenous organisation to place young people and provide mentoring and all the stuff that is around that. Are there many examples where kids are just going from school and applying for a job themselves? I can see hardly any examples that we have been told of.

Mrs Collins—It never happens.

Mr ROBB—Does it ever happen?

Ms Smith—No. I suppose years ago the theme was that Aboriginal organisations would always take Aboriginal kids. That was always the push. They were more comfortable working in an Aboriginal organisation. Now, I think, at some stages kids want to try something different. All the rellies work with Aboriginal organisations and they do not want to work with their rellies all the time. Someone might go and tell mum and dad what they are up to or something like that. There is a swing away, because they want to do something different from what mum and dad did or what other people are doing. They want to go out and live more and be able to do other things, but they do not know what. That is half the problem: they just do not know what is out there.

I have been to a couple of employer forums where I said, 'Technology has changed from the old days.' They need to upgrade their info in their occupations so that the kids know what is available. The instance I always give them is the mechanic. It was easy to get an old Holden or Land Rover and look underneath, get your tools and have a go. That was a mechanic's job. But now it is all different; it has changed. Everything has to be rigged up to a computer before you can touch the thing. You cannot even touch it at home; otherwise you wreck your motor. Technology has changed and occupations need to be able to go with that.

Mr SNOWDON—Can I explore some of the broader aspects of CAAMA. Your list of successful CAAMA Indigenous trainees is very impressive. Could you explain what the CAAMA group does and perhaps explore the production side of things? For example, I refer to music. Paul Kelly performed here the other day and said that he used the CAAMA production studios to record a song in 1988. Paul Kelly is Paul Kelly, but Warren H Williams is here. He is a local, he works here, he produces his music here and he travels around Australia with John

Williamson—nocturnal. Perhaps you could go through that side of things to show how you have created opportunities for people and what the opportunities are for people through the broader aspects of what the CAAMA group does?

Mrs Collins—The CAAMA group consists of a number of departments. The first one I will talk about is CAAMA Radio. CAAMA Radio broadcasts to a footprint area of 500,000.

Mr SNOWDON—Can you explain the area?

Mr Remedio—I might be able to explain it this way. Imparja has a remote satellite footprint and basically radio broadcasts off the back of that satellite remote server. CAAMA has the only remote satellite broadcasting service in the country. It enables people at Burke and all those areas on the periphery—western New South Wales, western Queensland—to get the service.

Mr SNOWDON—And all of South Australia except Port Augusta and the major towns, western Victoria and western Tasmania.

Mr Remedio—And the Northern Territory except for Darwin. Darwin is the only one that is out of the loop.

Mrs Collins—It is pretty big.

Mr Remedio—We broadcast in there over another radio station.

Mr SNOWDON—Yes, to cover the black spots. There are black spots in New South Wales and Victoria on the coast. Someone was telling me about Apollo Bay. They said they were able to watch the footy on Imparja because Apollo Bay is a black spot area. The path of the satellite covers the black spots.

Mr Remedio—They can get CAAMA Radio there if they want to, if they put a coder in.

Mr SNOWDON—That was by way of letting people understand the extent. It is all in his electorate.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr SNOWDON—He watches the footy too.

CHAIR—We confused league and Australian rules a few years ago and that got a bit tricky.

Mrs Collins—CAAMA Radio broadcasts to that footprint. We employ Indigenous broadcasters. It is a 24-hour Indigenous Australia service. We have broadcasters from 6.30 in the morning until midnight actually on air. They are not prerecorded; they are live. We also have trainees employed downstairs as well. We have three Indigenous trainees and they are trained as radio broadcasters—news, current affairs, talk-back hosts, sports, hip-hop, language. What else do we have?

Mr Remedio—We have language programs.

Mrs Collins—And journalism. We also train the Indigenous people in the four Indigenous communities—that is, Santa Teresa, Hermannsburg, Papunya and Areyonga. We go out there and train them. There are probably about six participants at each community. We train them in video and radio so they get to broadcast within their own community and then they broadcast on CAAMA Radio from two to four.

Mr SNOWDON—Would most of those people be on CDEP?

Mrs Collins—They are on CDEP. The trouble with those on CDEP is that they are through the council. When we go out there to deliver training or when we want them to go on CAAMA Radio, because they are under the council, the council really prioritises what they need to be doing. We might want to get them on air; instead they could be out mowing the lawn. That makes it a bit hard. We did try to go through the ICC about getting our own CDEP. They just laughed at us and said that we are too difficult to work with and forget about it. We said that that was a bit useless.

We then went to DEWR. We put in an application to them. The trouble we have with the people in the communities is that CDEP is all that they are ever on. They never have a future because it is only CDEP. No-one wants to then top up their wage, get them into a traineeship and give them a job, so it is always at that level. So we are trying to get them into a traineeship and into future employment, but you need to train them first. We put a big application in to DEWR to try to get the people in the communities to be trainees. We even went through the process of where they would get their accredited training, how they would get into town, and what sort of schedule they would need, but, no, they would not do it. So we are now trying to go through ITEC and Job Shop to see if we can have any luck. You are never going to get anywhere with the people in the communities unless you can try to get them onto some form of decent wage. So that is CAAMA Radio.

CAAMA Music has three full-time people working there. We have the music manager, the Aboriginal development officer and an administration officer. They are all Indigenous. We develop, record and promote Indigenous musicians from remote and regional Australia to the worldwide market. We make sure that we are catering for the early beginners through to the more high-profile ones like Warren H Williams and Frank Yama. That department receives no government funding as of this financial year. Everything there is self-generated. We apply for funding through philanthropic or government avenues or wherever there is money. We go to Indigenous communities and we develop their skills, and we have an MOU with the Institute for Aboriginal Development whereby they get accredited training out of it. As a result of delivering those workshops, we can identify musicians that have the potential to be taken to the next stage.

We have funding from the Australia Council to employ the Aboriginal development officer. We have had that money for three years. His role is that once he identifies people he takes them to the next level. He gets them in to record an album or he gets them to do live gigs, depending on what sort of person they are or what sort of area they are specialising in. Then we have those like Warren H Williams and Frank Yama for whom we apply for funding to try to get them onto national and international tours. The music manager also goes to WOMEX every year to promote our artists over there to try to get more royalties or licensing or recordings from over that area. We try to cater to the early beginners and upwards.

We do it with youth as well. We have run two successful programs so far. One was Fusion City. We worked with Indigenous youth in Alice Springs. They were trained in drama, music and acting. Then we got them to perform live in front of an audience and they also recorded an album. We also did one with the Gap Youth Centre and the kids of Anzac Hill High School. They developed their music skills. They also performed in front of a live audience. They recorded an album and a video clip as well.

We go out and work with Indigenous people in really remote communities whose language is more or less endangered. At one there are only four or even fewer speakers. We go out and record all of their music. We work with them to show them how they can record so they can continue to do it themselves. We have a library department. Our library has the largest archives outside of the National Archives of Australia. We do not have any Indigenous people employed there. We did last year but that person has now moved on but we have a trainee coming through. That person is non-Indigenous. So that is another area of concern: we are trying to fill those positions but it is difficult to get the money.

We have CAAMA Productions. That is the film and television production company. It receives no government funding at all. It has only four full-time staff. Everyone else is employed freelance. We have a lot of very highly experienced film makers. That is a result of the really early training, but from that time till now there have been very few trainees who are at a level whereby you can take them out to a film set to film. We do try to keep people training. We get them to come in and direct language programs or do sound recordings, but we just do not have the money to have them work full time. At the moment we have only two trainees. You need to keep developing your writers and your cinematographers but you need them to be on three-year traineeships to get an outcome out of it, and we have not had any luck in getting funds for those. They produce for a number of broadcasters. They produce for Imparja Television and the national broadcasters—Channel 7 and Channel 9—and the international broadcasters: CBC in Canada, Channel 4 and National Geographic. They are also doing a children's series with Channel 9 and Disney at the moment. So there is a lot of work out there but it is a matter of trying to get the money to get the training happening.

Mr SNOWDON—*A Town Like Alice* is or has been filmed. How many of your people or ex-trainees are working or have worked on that film set?

Mrs Collins—Two. That is a joke in itself. I have been working at CAAMA for 18 years and in that time I have managed to pull $20,000 out of the Northern Territory government. They have never supported any of our films and then a non-Indigenous company comes here and they give them $300,000. We know the reality. I know exactly how many territory filmmakers are employed there because my husband is shooting it, and there are very few. There are only two Indigenous people and they could be employing a lot more than that. They are the things that we get a kick in the guts from every time, because we are the ones who work hard to train and employ everyone. But for a non-Indigenous company the NT government could not bend over quick enough. That happens constantly, even though CAAMA are the leader, not just in the Indigenous media but also in mainstream media. We are the ones winning all the awards around the world but we still get no acknowledgement from the Northern Territory government.

We have a technical department that has one Indigenous trainee. We also had one of our trainees complete his apprenticeship two years ago so he is now a qualified technician. They go

out to about 15 Indigenous communities and deliver technical services so that they can receive television and radio. Only one of those positions is funded. The other we fund ourselves. It is hard because they cannot get the training in Alice Springs—we have to send them away so we have to have travel funding and the money is just not available.

We have CAAMA shops. They sell wholesale and retail Indigenous artefacts, videos and music. They sell to the worldwide market as well. They do the national distribution and the international distribution is done through the internet. We have one Indigenous trainee there. They receive no government funding at all so they have to generate all their own income. We have an accounts department. There are two finance officers still in training and our financial controller delivers that training. We also try to get them to go to CDU as well for training.

Mr ROBB—So you have two Indigenous trainees in your accounts department?

Mrs Collins—They do the job but our financial controller trains and supervises them.

Mr SNOWDON—What about Imparja?

Mrs Collins—It would be better for Jo to talk about Imparja because she has been working with them recently on their strategy.

Ms Lane—With regard to Imparja's Indigenous employment strategy and what is going on there now, it has decreased in numbers. Imparja were recently looking at how we were going to go about sourcing funding to put on trainees. One of the biggest issues was with regard to the type of specialised training that is required, particularly as we are going to digital and to a new television station in the next six to eight months or so.

In the early days we had this problem as well with training on the ground. Just recently I had look around at what is going on with training in Central Australia. If you are not in the network for VET then you do not hear a peep. We are in industry so that is an important point to make: we need to know what is going on. We put in quite a bit of time and effort for the VET training program modules when they started a few years ago. We are still in the same boat, looking at how we are going to train the current Indigenous staff over there and move them into digital. That is where the major employment strategy came in handy. We were pretty much 100 per cent subsidised for wages and we had a training component attached to that, but the difficulty we still had at that particular time was not being able to tap into training providers because we were so far away. You must give credit to the ABC because they were willing to give us a hand on certain things, in particular signing off on camera operators and that type of thing. In regard to employment over at Imparja Television there are new strategies that need to be taken into account.

But I think the key issue that will come through with corporate leaders and the type of program that is happening currently is that when you have shareholders—I am not totally putting Imparja in the same category but there are connections—they are not willing to cut the profits in any way; they are there for the profit. So if you have an Indigenous employment strategy happening and you are trying to get Indigenous people into employment and they do not have the support mechanisms, if they do not have the expertise of people who have already gone through and done those training type arrangements or employment within organisations or

businesses, they are going to run into similar problems. At some point the shareholders will say, 'Hang on a minute, is this really working?'

Most of those businesses and corporate leaders are in the top 100 businesses in Australia. We have one locally here in Central Australia—Voyages. They are just getting off the ground. They have an Indigenous employment coordinator and they advertise that they are encouraging Aboriginal people to apply. But, funnily enough, I applied but I missed out on a position that I was qualified for because I did not have experience in the industry. These are just the age-old crappy things that will go on forever and a day. But if that is one indicator, what is going to happen where the real push needs to happen like out at Yulara with the Anungu people? There are huge things that need to be taken into consideration. I needed to make that point about corporate leaders and the training side of things.

There are a couple of other things as well. On page 6 of our submission we state:

> Establish host Indigenous organizations with larger resources to support employers.

That means putting up another organisation. We talked about the fragmentation of what is going on but we still need to pull all this together to make it happen. The whole-of-government approach is a pretty interesting concept, and an important point was made about not knowing what is going on—even with DEWR coming out and selling their product to an employer, and not just doing it once but coming back. I do not see that happening. Indigenous employment organisations need to ask: 'What about the rest of Alice Springs? What is going on?'

So in Central Australia—and it might be happening elsewhere as well—they have to come out and not have the people going to them. They have to sell their product and make it happen and then also be the people to take back the issues so that we can start improving. We have to have a number of avenues of feedback and review, making things happen and moving forward, because if we are all not going to work together it will remain the same.

I think the interesting part is the change of everything going mainstream. A perfect example is ASSPA not being at schools. Where is the voice? Where do you then get that opportunity to get back in? It is not going to be through employment—that is still going to be just as hard—so it is going to be devoid of any sort of Aboriginal content, voice or what have you, and I think that is another important point. Also, there are the ICCs and how they have been split in doing their criticisms. But in the same instance there are things we need to work on for the benefit of the community and Australia—so it is not totally negative.

It is important to have some sort of host organisation. It does not have to be a big one to start with. We need to have a look and work out how it would be able to support Indigenous business and the Indigenous personnel who want to go into their own enterprises. That is another interesting factor in itself. There are a number of businesses in Central Australia where we have the expertise only because Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have been imported from interstate to work in Indigenous organisations—because locals do not have the skills. We need to impart these skills and have a program to mentor people in business. If you have a financial controller who knows about the financial side of certain things, then they should mentor someone who has their own business and help them with any area in which they might need assistance.

Annette, you made a point about what else Imparja and CAAMA could do regarding employment. We should also be out there promoting and building up the mentoring program. We need someone from a host organisation to start structuring a mentoring program, and building it in such a fashion that it is much more supported. The dEadly mOb has a web site for mentors. It is a sad site in the sense that there are a number of people in all the organisations whose names are not on it. CAAMA and Imparja, being media organisations, can push those things and make them happen. We need somebody to think about these things, bring them together and push them.

Going back to Imparja: they are looking at increasing the Aboriginalisation rate. The same thing applies. There are times when we are not able to promote internally from one level to the next; it depends on the skills of the person. There are people who might have aspirations but there are employment barriers within an organisation or a business. Those sorts of things, where you have huge skill gaps, need to be taken into consideration. For example, I might aspire to be the CEO of Imparja television but I do not have the technical and financial skills. But that does not mean I cannot learn them. So, how do I get to the point where I can learn them? That is just using me as an example; examples of skills gaps also exist elsewhere.

Ms Howard—I have been working at CAAMA for going on 15 years, and I am part of the major employment strategy for trainees as well. I started as a trainee shops person and I am the corporate services manager these days, so I came from the same school that Cilla did. We worked our way through, learnt on the job and did some training here and there. It was flexible, like the sorts of things Jo was saying before.

I listened to your comments before, Andrew, about what people can take away from organisations as far as helping to improve things for other employees, not just for Indigenous employees. As far as Indigenous employment goes, as a whole community I think we are responsible. It does not matter whether you are Aboriginal; it should not be put just on the Aboriginal organisations. It is fantastic that Marilyn's mob are doing things. But there are key things in larger organisations, such as in the government, where there is opportunity for larger scale stuff to be done. They could take from how we deal with Indigenous employment within our own organisation—as Cilla said, things like being flexible and being a bit more nurturing because of issues, whatever they might be. What I have found while working for CAAMA is that for a lot of people time seems to be the thing that works. They want to rush people through training in a 12-month period these days because of all the funding and training issues, and they are pushing people into employment. Again, we are setting people up to fail because they do not have those skills. These people do need more time, and that might not be because their education levels are much lower but because they do take extra time to build up their confidence let alone their skills to take on normal work.

I want to say that there are lots of things that can be done within the organisation. You talked about mentoring. Last night we had a concert downstairs, because it was our 25th anniversary. Some people came from Wdjul Wdjul, a group that paid for themselves to come here just to play at our 25th anniversary broadcast on radio. This was a group of 17- to 20-year-old boys. I think those guys were looking at CAAMA like a sort of festival of music. It is an inspiration to them that we are out there and being seen by the community, and the Wdjul Wdjul community obviously see CAAMA as a stepping stone to their future in the music industry.

They might come to CAAMA now and say, 'I want to get a recording going.' I think of how important CAAMA and Imparja are in that mentoring role when I see Aboriginal faces out there doing it and having something to aspire to in the community. We are trying to do some of those programs now, as Cilla was saying, by going out to the communities and trying to get mentors to deliver that training so that kids can see that positive stuff. It is not just the positive; so many times people see the negatives. People, especially in the remote areas, see negatives a lot. It is very difficult for them. They see a lot of really bad things, and for them to see some really good things happening is great.

CHAIR—Thank you. Do you understand that our inquiry is all about that word 'positive'? In our terms of reference we are trying to find the positives. We accept the negatives. As Jim said, you have got to have a reality check, but we are really interested in positive examples and you have given us some good ones there. Thank you, Joanne. That was a wonderful presentation which was pretty much off the cuff as well. Marilyn, roughly how many employers are you negotiating with in Alice Springs? You are resourced in Alice Springs, predominantly. Would you have 150 or 200? Who can you go to and say, 'Can you give us a bit of a go here'?

Ms Smith—If a young person comes to us and asks for a particular industry we go to that industry, whether we know them or not, so we doorknock.

CHAIR—Do you feel that all of Alice Springs is pretty much open to you, that you can just knock on the door and see how you go?

Ms Smith—Yes. We have doorknocked just about every employer in selling our services, just to let them know that we are here. We have knocked on the door and said, 'We're Footprints Forward,' told them what we do and left our business cards if they are looking for employees.

CHAIR—I get the impression that you are not discouraged, that you get a reasonable reception from these people. Is it fifty-fifty? Can you give us a picture of what it is like out there? I just want to get Jim's reality check. How tough is it?

Ms Smith—I can give you an example. The staff have been to private enterprises in the industrial area and have got good responses. They have been to the shopping centres in town and have got negative responses.

CHAIR—Perhaps you can understand that a bit.

Mr SNOWDON—Why the negative response from retailers?

Ms Smith—I think because those Indigenous people who have not got jobs—the social issues—are in their face. Everybody is tarred with the same brush. An Indigenous person is the same as anybody else, and they do not see that others want to improve their life. That is half the negativity. Half of it also is that they are family businesses where there is only one person employed. That is it.

CHAIR—I think it gives us a good picture. You made a really important point to me: Aboriginal people are changing. At one time they would not have a go. Now they are looking to have a go. That is what I heard you say, and I thought that was a real positive.

Ms Smith—Before I started this job I was working with the Central Land Council in the employment unit. Our main aim was to get Indigenous people into the mining industry—

CHAIR—We got a bit of a picture yesterday, of course.

Ms Smith—mainly out at the Granites goldmine. It was CLC's stance then—and it still is today—that they would like to see community people employed, mainly from those areas. Education is a big issue, because we have tried to do that. But that was my thing. We run pre-voc courses to get Indigenous people from communities in to do little courses. Literacy and numeracy were problems then, and they still are. We used Alice Springs people as backup if those people failed medical checks, drug tests or police checks. Police checks was a big one. We used Alice Springs people. Once we got one person in there, and the others saw him in his garb and his big steel capped boots, that impressed them. They thought, 'We want a job too.' You would be surprised how many people have come and said, 'We want a job there'—especially with the colossal pay they get to go home with. We have had to talk to them about budgeting the money.

CHAIR—The CLC reminded us yesterday that there are real challenges in that too. You need to manage that. At least we get the foot in the door.

Ms Smith—They see what money can buy and they think, 'That's what I want.'

CHAIR—This is the change you were referring to.

Ms Smith—It is the same in the AFL, I suppose.

CHAIR—It is like Priscilla's point that I keep coming back to. It is 'if they can do it, we can do it' kind of stuff.

Ms Smith—Yes, and that is changing.

CHAIR—I want to ask very briefly, because I am running right out of time: can you give us a snapshot of Indigenous businesses? Joanne reminded us of it as well. It needs to be encouraged. What is your view? Do you have two or three private enterprises type businesses in the town?

Ms Smith—Not really, because most of them are stand-alones with one person, or they look for casual workers if they are busy.

Mr SNOWDON—Apart from the commercial enterprises, like the art shops.

Ms Smith—Yes. They are all family.

CHAIR—Yes. But there are not many small businesses there. My last question: CAAMA and Footprints Forward are here in the same building. How did that happen?

Ms Smith—We are poor. We get our funding from the government.

CHAIR—But there is a good synergy about that.

Ms Smith—There are probably two ways of looking at it. We get our money from NT DEET and DEWR, so we are funded both ways. None of them really fund you for rental. Our board is on the CAAMA board as well, so CAAMA was asked if they would mind and they had space available. Also, because of it being an Indigenous organisation, and you get a lot of local people coming in off the street selling artefacts and looking for music, that was also a drawcard to get them in.

CHAIR—It seems that CAAMA can claim some credit for this support. It is the point I was getting at earlier. I see the art, hear the music and all of that, but it is very important for people to have a reality check and acknowledge, 'I'm not going to be the greatest singer'—or whatever—'that God ever created. I've had my chance, and it's never going to happen. I've got to work with my hands as a tradesman, farmer or whatever.' That is the majority of us and that is where that linkage is. For people to get work, for all the reasons you said, is important.

Mrs VALE—Firstly, thank you to you all for coming in. This has been a very steep learning curve for me personally. I want to target a couple of your recommendations. No. 1 is an increase in the CDEP allowance, which you have noted as being important, and an increase in the trainee and apprenticeship wages. You also recommend a national Indigenous employment strategy for the private and community sector to offer it greater incentives to employ Indigenous people. Are there no incentives out there at the moment for the private sector?

Mrs Collins—Not that I am aware of. I know that for some of the people in the private sector it is in the too-hard basket.

Mrs VALE—So there is no practical monetary incentive?

Ms Smith—The only incentive for people to employ Indigenous people is where those Indigenous people are registered with Centrelink and a Job Network provider for an extended period of time—over six months or so.

Mrs VALE—What kind of incentives?

Ms Smith—Employers can get assistance with wages for a small time, or something to buy tools for the young person or people.

Mrs VALE—So they are not huge amounts?

Ms Smith—No. And there are the normal apprenticeship incentives that come along after 12 months.

Mrs VALE—They get the normal apprenticeship incentives as long as they are employing them as apprentices?

Ms Smith—Yes—in a trade.

Mrs VALE—But other than that there is nothing for basic employment of an Indigenous person?

Ms Smith—No.

Mrs VALE—Jo, I had circled your recommendation about the host Indigenous organisations being important. To me that is fundamental. You have recommended the development of a national Indigenous employment strategy, which would include three- to four-year on-the-job training; three- to four-year accredited training; funding for trainees to obtain specialised accredited training, which might not necessarily be associated with increased income; an allowance for Indigenous mentors, which is what your role is; and to have flexible programs, as long as milestones and outcomes are being achieved.

You also recommend the consolidation of all current Indigenous employment and training programs into one department. Has there been any mechanism—and I am learning, to my surprise, that it does not appear that there has been—where you can put your concerns to a government department? You are obviously telling us that you need to have a voice somewhere, and although we hope to be able to respond in a positive way that might be up to others. You need to have a return telephone line.

Mrs Collins—There is nothing at the moment. We have been going through the ICC through the whole-of-government approach. That did not work. So we went to the individual departments, thinking they were supposed to be part of the whole-of-government approach. We went to DEWR to get traineeships and they said: 'We can only give you the STEP part. You have to go to this department for CDEP. You have to go to this department to try to get money to send them away for accredited training.' But we got no money.

CHAIR—You made that point very well and clearly earlier as well.

Mrs VALE—The ICC has only just recently started up, hasn't it?

Mr Remedio—At the beginning of the year, in January. But it is no good for us when someone sits in Canberra and puts in the performance indicators a requirement that says, 'You must open your memberships and sign off on this performance indicator,' before we even get our money. So it is no good operating out of DCITA. This whole-of-government approach should be operating out of Alice Springs. The ICC still have to go to get their marching orders from people that are not industry based—the people who direct the traffic from Canberra and who know little about the industry. That is why we get stuck with performance indicators that are irrelevant.

CHAIR—Thank you. This has been a great exchange. We appreciate you all taking the time to come here this morning.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Ellis**, seconded by **Mr Robb**):

That this committee authorise the publication of the transcript of the evidence taken by it at the public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 11.00 am