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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

(Subcommittee)

Reference: Indigenous employment

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BRISBANE

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS
Friday, 29 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 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

ABAD, Mr Daniel, Director, Hanson Advisory Services; and Adviser, Purga Elders and Descendants Aboriginal Corporation.....	42
ABAD, Mr Thomas Manuel, Project Officer, Hanson Advisory Services	42
BURNS, Mr Darren John, Board Director, Quondomooko Land Council Aboriginal Corporation	58
CARLON, Mr Bernie, General Manager, Employment and Indigenous Initiatives, Queensland Department of Employment and Training	1
COLLINS, Mr Les, Indigenous Employment Strategist, Brisbane City Council	18
KING, Mr Mark, Member, Purga Elders and Descendants Aboriginal Corporation.....	42
MEACLEM, Mr Ross, Managing Director, Bluefin Seafoods Pty Ltd	58
O'NEILL, Ms Lyndal, Manager, People Services, Brisbane City Council.....	18
SANDY, Ms Sheryl, Equity and Diversity Specialist, Brisbane City Council	18
TYTHERLEIGH, Mr Kelvin, Manager, Organisational Development and Governance Unit, Caboolture Shire Council	32
WEATHERALL, Mr Ron, Executive Director, Employment and Indigenous Initiatives, Queensland Department of Employment and Training	1

Subcommittee met at 9.00 am

CARLON, Mr Bernie, General Manager, Employment and Indigenous Initiatives, Queensland Department of Employment and Training

WEATHERALL, Mr Ron, Executive Director, Employment and Indigenous Initiatives, Queensland Department of Employment and Training

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 and thank people from the Queensland government for being with us today. As you know, we have endeavoured to go a slightly different track with things Indigenous and to try and be positive, which I am finding quite refreshing, having been in this business now for a fair bit of my parliamentary life. As there is no objection to accepting the Department of Employment and Training's submission and authorising it for publication, it is so ordered. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr Carlon—We might run you through the main things that are in the submission. The Queensland government welcomes the opportunity to talk to you today. I apologise for the fact that our submission only arrived early this week. It got caught in the bowels of the Premier's department and we had trouble getting it out.

CHAIR—The Premier has had his own challenges lately.

Mr Carlon—Yes, he has had other things on his mind. The submission identifies a number of factors that contribute to positive employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland. It presents examples of good practice in Queensland and recommends ways forward for future policy and program development in this area. I will take you through some of the background in Queensland and some examples of what we are doing. Ron will then take you through the recommendations.

The first thing is that Queensland has a strategic policy framework which looks at Indigenous matters. It is now called Partnerships Queensland. It is the Queensland government's strategic policy framework which brings together all existing Queensland government initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Under it, Queensland government departments are guided by a set of goals and policy objectives. The main guiding goals and policy objectives are: strong families, strong culture, safe place, healthy living and, in particular, skilled and prosperous people and communities. The other thing it brings together is a new way of doing business, based on partnerships, community engagement, improved governance, better performance, more accountable service providers and shared responsibility.

In relation to the priority area of skilled and prosperous Indigenous people, I would like to focus on a couple of elements: leadership and capacity building, education and training, and employment and the economy. Before I do that, I will help you set the scene of the demographic environment for Indigenous employment in Queensland: 3.1 per cent of the total Queensland population identify as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and 27 per cent of Australia's Indigenous people live in Queensland. The 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander Social Survey reported that 25.7 per cent of the Queensland Indigenous population was unemployed.

CHAIR—Does that definition exclude CDEP?

Mr Carlon—Yes.

CHAIR—I see. You have it down as a dot point.

Mr Carlon—That is right. I was going to say that the unemployment rate for Indigenous people in Queensland would increase to an estimated 47.5 per cent of the labour force if you did not count CDEP.

CHAIR—Thanks for that.

Mr Carlon—That is basically because, of the 45.7 per cent of Indigenous people aged 15 and over who are employed, one-quarter of them are participating in the Commonwealth funded Community Development Employment Projects scheme. Queensland also has 34 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander shires and councils which rely heavily on community development employment projects as their major means of employment due to their isolated geographical locations. All use at least some of the CDEP participants to deliver a range of essential and municipal services.

In a separate submission the Queensland government made to the recent review of CDEP we actually supported in principle most of what the review was talking about. However, one of the things we stressed because of this heavy reliance on CDEP was that any changes that might be made be transitional. It took into account the Queensland environment with its heavy CDEP dependence, particularly in those 34 councils that do not have a rate base. They have no ownership there. It is not necessarily possible to replace that, particularly overnight. There are some examples which I can go into to later where, although we were assured that this would be a transitional thing, it is not.

I was talking to the mayor of Charleville only yesterday and there are people being pushed off CDEP projects up there already. This is a matter of concern. I can explain this in more detail a bit later on if you want. These people are white people but the community had made decisions about this. Charleville probably has some of the best racial relations in their community in Australia. One of the reasons for that is they have operated as a community. The mayor is considerably concerned. Anyway, I think I got a bit distracted.

CHAIR—We did touch on that a little bit yesterday in Cairns.

Mr Carlon—Did you?

CHAIR—Yes, so we are not surprised by that. We have DEWR with us next Friday in Canberra.

Mr Carlon—The other concerning thing about employment in relation to Indigenous people is that 28.2 per cent of Indigenous people are employed in low skilled occupations compared to

9.5 per cent of non-Indigenous people. Twelve per cent of Indigenous people in the labour force are employed in public sector jobs. The other problem is that the next largest employer of Indigenous persons is really the public sector in the sense that the jobs are in health, community services and education. There is a heavy reliance for employment on the public and community sector. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that 73 per cent of Indigenous people in Queensland have no post school education or training qualifications. Only 2.7 per cent of Indigenous people in Queensland have achieved a bachelor's or higher degree compared with 11 per cent of all Queenslanders. Of all Indigenous people 26,000, or 24 per cent, reside in remote and very remote communities with high levels of unemployment, limited labour market opportunities for educational participation or outcomes, and a higher cost of living. The overall situation is one where Indigenous people in the labour market are the most disadvantaged group in the community, both in terms of their attainment of skills and employment status and where they live. The majority of Indigenous people live outside metropolitan areas, where most of the economic opportunities are.

Having said that, there have been advances in Queensland. We have increased the number of people in education and training although it is not as big an increase as we would like. In the vocational education system there is a heavy clustering of people in the lower courses of Certificate I and Certificate II and, while there has been increases in enrolments in Certificate III courses and above, it is well below what the non-Indigenous rate of participation is. The interesting thing about it, though, is that when you get Indigenous people into these courses they achieve pretty well at the same rate, only slightly below the rate of non-Indigenous people.

CHAIR—I am a great believer in that, and there is a lot of anecdotal evidence. With a little bit of confidence and self-esteem and a bit of encouragement, we know that Aboriginal people can do as well as everybody else.

Mr Carlon—That is exactly right. To take that up, one of the key initiatives we have here is that since 1998 the government has had a range of employment programs under a banner called Breaking the Unemployment Cycle, which aimed by 2007 to have 100,000 Queenslanders in jobs as a result of the initiative. It is well ahead of that target at the moment, pro rata, in that over 91,000 people have obtained jobs since 1998. It is aimed particularly at disadvantaged people, of whom a major target group are Indigenous people. It works on getting people back to work on community projects. Once we get them back, we pay them, restore their dignity, give them some work experience and give them some skills. A heavy training component is put into that as well.

CHAIR—Just as background, we were at Weipa on Wednesday afternoon with Comalco. They have agreed that they will have a look at the transcript and we have agreed to have that in house. But I think the approach that they were taking struck all of us as pretty enlightened, and the aspirational issues around the whole situation—apart from all the other family issues, cultural issues or whatever—were quite inspirational. It was quite a remarkable experience for me.

Mr Carlon—That is good.

CHAIR—Back to you.

Mr Carlon—I wanted to say that 12 per cent of all the participants under this program are Indigenous people. The total number of Indigenous people assisted has been over 8,000, and 61.9 per cent of them have achieved employment. That is based on independent surveying 12 months after they have completed the programs. By the way, this compares favourably with the rate of non-Indigenous people, who have employment outcomes of 64.9 per cent. So it is quite close. Once again, once you get them into the programs, whether they be vocational education or employment programs combined with that, the outcomes are not that far below. The big business is getting them in in the first place.

The other thing is how you then run those programs. You need to run them in culturally appropriate ways and you need to run them with lots of support. The two major initiatives we have, which we would recommend the Commonwealth to think about on a broader scale, are some initiatives that Kim there runs. One is the Indigenous Employment and Training Support Program. That provides culturally appropriate mentoring and support to Indigenous people to increase their retention and completion rates in vocational education and training. They particularly concentrate on apprentices and trainees. For apprentices and trainees we have had quite a rise in the numbers of Indigenous people, and their completion rates in Queensland are starting to get near the normal completion rates.

Some of this is because we have 20 of these officers based in a whole range of communities. They work on a caseload basis. They actually work with the Indigenous person, firstly often to get them into employment or get them into courses but then to keep them there, solve the problems they might have—even go around pulling them out of bed if they do not turn up to work. But also one of the biggest problems once you get people into training, particularly into apprenticeships and traineeships, is the first time they have to go to TAFE. That is the time when their lack of grounding in literacy, numeracy and so on starts to show. These people are there to try and make sure that that is solved, because generally the shame of that—

CHAIR—Can I share with you what we heard at Comalco? There is a word for it, but it just will not come to mind. The issue of people turning up at work was better for the Indigenous—I do not think Comalco would mind—than for the mainstream work force. We took great delight in hearing that. I think I have got that right.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Yes.

CHAIR—So I think this whole positive affirmation is an important part of it.

Mr Carlon—Yes. We hope in the future to expand this program, because I think that that support is quite essential. By the way, we have found under our programs that, whether you are black or white, if you are disadvantaged you actually need that level of support. It is a thing that disadvantaged people need. They come in with low educational achievements, low self-esteem, and they do need people to help them on the way.

CHAIR—I know this is a national issue, but they are state and territory education systems. It has been put to us that it is somewhat frustrating to have to meet certain employment targets and skills shortages and all of those things and to actually have to go back to basic literacy and numeracy. I suppose what I would be very interested in would be what our states and territories, and the Commonwealth in partnership with them, can do to develop the more innovative primary

school models which are going to engage in a way which value-adds to our current system. I will just leave that with you. It seems to be a glaring one that has been coming out at us pretty regularly.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—It is pretty fundamental.

Mr Carlon—I think both Ron and I would agree that that is one of the most fundamental things. Unfortunately, in our department we end up with people who are 15—

CHAIR—That is right.

Mr Carlon—and it is hard at that stage. It is still possible, with the right types of programs and the right type of approach, to pull those people back. There is a whole range of reasons which are—

CHAIR—At Cairns we heard about the tutor issue and that sort of thing. I am not interested in the negatives of blame-shifting in the Commonwealth-state relationship, but I really think that we have a huge task in our education system.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—While we are on this subject, at the federal level there is a lot of talk about whole-of-government approaches to this whole issue. Does the Queensland government have that view? I know that we are talking fundamentally in this bit about education, which is not your department—

Mr Carlon—No, but they are associated.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Hence the issue. To what extent is the Queensland government in a position to do this? Are they following a whole-of-government approach to this? How does it work?

Mr Carlon—Very much so. Basically, one of the things we urge in our submission is partnerships, a whole-of-government approach and partnerships with all levels of government. We believe there should be a common approach. I might say that in recent times in Queensland we have been quite heartened by the Commonwealth approach in that regard. We are doing an awful lot with our fellow Commonwealth officers these days. That is a bit of a change, I might say, but it is quite a welcome change.

We have a fairly similar system to the Commonwealth. We have government champions. The directors-general of all departments have communities which they become champions for. Our director-general, Scott Flavell, has Warrabinda. Ron, for instance, works with our director-general because, although he is a central office person for the state, he actually works out of Rockhampton. You might just mention what government champions do, Ron.

Mr Weatherall—I suppose the role of the government champion is to oversee, from the government's point of view, government services to Indigenous communities in a collaborative way. They facilitate what we call negotiation tables, where Indigenous people and government come together to negotiate the priorities and needs of Indigenous people, both social and economic, and to develop strategies to address those priorities and/or needs. The government

champions' mandate is to facilitate government initiatives to support and resolve those issues. It has been operating for a number of years now.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—The negotiation tables have?

Mr Weatherall—Yes. All of the Indigenous communities within the Cape and communities such as Palm Island, Doomadgee and Cherbourg have dedicated government champions at a CEO level of government.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Can you discuss with us some of the obvious successes that you would see as a result of those processes? Am I being too definitive? I might be. I might be asking a question that you cannot answer, or a wrong question. As a result of those negotiation table processes, in terms of Indigenous employment is there something you can show us that is a link to that process?

Mr Weatherall—I suppose one that we could refer to is the establishment of Indigenous skills centres on communities, which were identified as priorities for the community to build capacity in skills, facilitate employment and support Indigenous business development. Essentially, those initiatives came from the communities and were supported by government across the negotiation table.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Are they working?

Mr Weatherall—They are working. Some are struggling, but the model is conceptually well grounded. There are some issues around the capacity and capability of the community to effectively administer and manage those services on an ongoing basis. Agencies are providing them support to build that capacity, but over time one hopes that the communities will have the capacity to administer and manage those centres in their own right and provide appropriate skills based training and business development.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—In your submission you made comment about the shared responsibility agreements at the Australian government level. You believe there needs to be coordination between that and this negotiation table process you are talking about. Can you discuss that a bit more?

Mr Carlon—The thing we were pointing to there is that, just like any community, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities do not necessarily see distinctions between the various levels of government.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Most of Australia does not.

Mr Carlon—That is right. I think that more than most, though, Indigenous communities tend to be constantly visited by people all coming in with their own little programs and so on. That happens at the Commonwealth, state and local government levels. We are basically saying that we should operate together. When we operate together, we often have more dollars and can do more. For instance, we have run a number of our projects under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative together with CDEP. As a result of our combined money we have been able to put people into 12-month traineeships rather than just two days work a week. If we are in the

business of trying to not confuse communities and so on, we believe we should be walking into the communities together.

In this state we have what we call a 20 per cent policy. For instance, government contracts that are let on civil or built construction—in built construction it is government contracts over \$100,000 and in civil construction it is all of them—must have a clause that the contractor will employ 20 per cent local Indigenous labour, half of which should be in some form of training. This is across the 34 DOGIT communities, as they used to be called. When we examined where the employment opportunities were, some of the major opportunities were in construction because there are often fly-in, fly-out people employed in the industry. The local people get nothing from it, the building is left behind and, when it starts to deteriorate, they have to fly people in and out just to maintain the thing. The idea was to get more people with skills there. One of the difficulties that that policy has for this state is that, although there are a lot of contracts let in these communities, it is the continuity of work that is the issue. There might be some building going on through a state government contract for three months and then they do not have anything going on.

If under the same policy we could combine that with Commonwealth construction, which is also undertaken here, we could get the continuity. You could get people completing apprenticeships, for instance, which generally takes up to four years, whereas at the moment we get them into apprenticeships, they get three months work and then there is down time and so on. It is essential, particularly in these communities given their size. There is a lack of sophistication in the communities too. They get totally confused by us all coming in with our own way of dealing with them. The Queensland government would welcome a business where we went in as one.

CHAIR—There was a wonderful story a few years ago. It might have even been at Weipa, but it does not matter. The number of Commonwealth and state vehicles and public servants coming in and out on the one day was a farcical situation. I am sure you have heard the story.

Mr Carlon—I have heard similar stories!

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—It basically means that these people are living on bureaucratic bus stops.

CHAIR—With respect to the other part of the 20 per cent rule—and if Mr Snowdon were here, he would remind us—we have discussed the idea and, as you said, the inconsistency in the drought, flood and famine of this work program. Maybe, in a regional sense, teams could also be part of the solution—that is, you work through the community and people follow a building team with that same kind of model.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—In a cyclical way.

Mr Carlon—Exactly. It will not be sustainable to have a building team in each of the communities because the quantity of work will not be sufficient to sustain it. But if you were to develop a regional based construction model that looked after a number of communities, with infrastructure development that is planned from a Commonwealth and state perspective, you

could develop a potentially sustainable business entity around construction that could support and sustain employment of Indigenous people.

CHAIR—I might be drawing too long a bow, but it seems to me that the concept of the Western Cape College is such that your resources are being developed in a slightly different way as another part of that model.

Mr Carlon—Some people have talked about the support officers, and we have what we call employment training managers who actually work with communities to try to locate economic opportunities in employment and then try to put in place training and development plans to get the people in. We actually put those people in the Western Cape College. We have given our money to the Department of Education to run the thing on our behalf.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Another aspect of this discussion—it has been mentioned to us in the last couple of days—is accreditation: ticking boxes for qualifications. Do you have an opinion on how flexible we need to be when we take on these training programs in the model that you were just talking about, where they go out and they find a community and they say, ‘We’re going to have a building program here over the next 12 months’? At the beginning of that, there may not be one person in that community qualified to do anything. What is your experience in how that then kick-starts? Do you have a view concerning the end of that training process where we then hypothetically have this team? Is there an issue about whether we try to accredit these workers and trainees to the Brisbane standard—for want of a better term—or should we have a more flexible approach to how we tick boxes for accreditation in those communities?

Mr Carlon—There is not one single answer to that. I believe there is a place for a much more flexible approach. For instance, back in the mid-nineties we undertook a project with Commonwealth money, I might say, where we developed an essential service traineeship for Indigenous communities. They do not necessarily need a plumber; they only need a person who can do a whole range of things. We developed this wonderful traineeship. One of my great disappointments is that that traineeship has hardly had anybody put into it over the years, for a combination of reasons. Firstly, we have not been able to get sufficient people to do it and then people like TAFE, for instance, have not been able to deliver it because it is just little bits of stuff. That was part of the trouble. There was a degree of union opposition, too. Dilution of the trades was one argument and so on. As a result, it has not taken off in relation to numbers. But I believe that is part of the way.

Having said that, we have been working with the Torres Strait Islander community at the moment regarding some of the people they have in apprenticeships. These people are completing their apprenticeship. But what they are finding is that, because of their lack of experience on the islands, they cannot keep themselves up to date. They are not up to date with the most modern equipment. It is one thing to have trades skills; it is another thing to have the skills to be able to manage and run your own business and get the necessary tickets and licences. Some of those licences are necessary for occupational, health and safety reasons, for protection of people and so on. We should be trying, wherever possible, to get them to the standard of anybody who gets a qualification down here in Brisbane.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I do not disagree with that for a second.

Mr Carlon—We have a special project we are trying to develop with the Torres Strait at the moment where those people who are doing, say, a carpentry apprenticeship may come to Townsville for a period and be put out amongst builders and so on there, so they can get a broader range of experience, and the councils up there are willing to continue to pay them while they are working for other people.

During that period we would also put them through some business courses and so on at the TAFE. At the same time there is also a place for a more flexible way for getting people individual skills—wherever possible accredited and getting a certificate. At the end of the day people do not get jobs because they have qualifications necessarily; they get jobs because those qualifications mean they have skills—it is the skills that get them the jobs. That is why a lot of people working in skilled occupations do not even have qualifications—it is more their skills. However, to the extent that you can give anybody a qualification which is proof of the fact that they actually do have skills, it is good.

I think it can be approached at both ends. We have tried. A lot of what we do with both vocational education and training and our employment programs in Indigenous communities is about trying to do it flexibly—combining a range of skills, particularly at the early stages. One of the big things we have got to do is try to move people beyond those more basic skills and into higher level skills.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Do you want to add to that?

Mr Weatherall—Bernie has covered it in fairly great detail. It has been clearly articulated by communities that there is a need for non-accredited training that builds individual capability and capacity to actually operate within life generally—it is about building life skills. The challenge, though, is to provide the pathways from there for higher level education and training and pathways to employment thereafter. The TAFE system does provide at this point in time some non-accredited training that builds capacity for individuals and communities, but the focus obviously is about the end result. Once we get them into the training and build the capacity, we have to get them out the other door with higher qualifications and skills that make them competitive within the mainstream labour market.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—It is really a case of not setting it up to fail in the first place, to what degree there are a number of stages required, and also, I guess, in my head anyway, an acceptance of what is required where. The fully qualified plumber will get work if he lives in Bundaberg, but he is not likely to get work if he is out in one of the really remote communities. It is horses for courses, to some degree, is it not? That is not devaluing the need for qualifications out there; it is maybe an acceptance of the reality. Is that the right attitude to have towards it?

Mr Carlon—I think you are right. That is why that essential services traineeship was actually developed. It is disappointing that it has not been able to be utilised—there have been some people through it, by the way. In some communities it has been very useful. At Coen, for instance, as a result of that traineeship, for the first time they had somebody there who could treat the water and look after their water supply.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—But is that still happening there?

Mr Carlon—I am not up to date—it is a couple of years since I last looked at it. I am not certain if it still is, but it was about two years ago.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is the other test about what we are speaking about—the test of time: getting these things into place and seeing what sort of tenure they have.

Mr Carlon—Ron is right—a lot of this is about capacity building, too. The educational disadvantage is so great. We were criticised in some quarters. For instance, we were putting sewing training into some communities. In some of these communities we also have to think about worthwhile activity and jobs in a different way than the traditional way you think about it. Giving women—and it was predominantly women—sewing training in these communities is a form of economic activity. It means that they can make clothes for the community and they can mend.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Are you involved in microcredit?

Mr Carlon—I do not understand the term, I am sorry.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Another part of this whole discussion we are finding ourselves having is entrepreneurship within Indigenous communities, setting up small businesses and how they set up to fail or not. One of the methods that has been described to us is microcredit, where there is a mechanism by which a small investment is made. The best example is with a Grameen Bank, as it is called overseas, where you go into a village and give the woman who can sew a sewing machine and before you know it you have this little enterprise occurring. A similar thing is happening here. I am just wondering whether that has come across your area at all.

Mr Weatherall—There are a couple of initiatives that might be of interest to the committee. Recently we undertook a project sponsored by the Department of Employment and Training to review and assess different models of small business development for Indigenous people with a focus around targeting and supporting clan groups rather than communities. I think there is sufficient evidence to suggest that community-based models of Indigenous enterprise development have somewhat failed.

We have now looked at, and Indigenous people have asked us to look at, how to bring it down to a micro level around clan groups and/or family groups. We are doing a project which is part of a national initiative to identify a best practice model for developing and supporting Indigenous small business development around clan groups. It is early days yet. It is in about its fifth or sixth month of development. The learning from that will inform how this department and/or the state might support Indigenous small business development with that sort of focus.

The other key initiative that the government is managing at the moment is a recent consultancy that was undertaken on behalf of the Commonwealth government, through the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, and DET and the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Policy within the state to identify Indigenous employment opportunities within the cape. It is called the Cape York Indigenous Employment Strategy. It was undertaken by a consultancy group. They identified a whole range of employment opportunities that could potentially be available to Indigenous people. They identified a number of Indigenous small business development opportunities, both in existing businesses and emerging industries.

Governments now through DET are coordinating a whole-of-government consideration, which includes the Commonwealth, DEWR and other agencies, to look at how we might take the findings and recommendations of that report to a point where we can realise some of those jobs. That is the big challenge for us, as we all know. We knew the jobs were there, but the problem is the capacity of people to take up those jobs with their poor educational attainment levels and the skills and expertise that are required to secure some of those jobs.

CHAIR—I know there are some recommendations that you would probably like to talk to in the time remaining. I have three or four things that I would like to raise. I have already raised one of them. It is not in your immediate province, but I would take advice from you about any initiative that the Queensland government has within the education system which might advance the cause. My colleague Annette Ellis pointed out to me this morning an article in the *Australian* about people on Nguiu and, I think, even Wadeye and Santa Teresa, south of Alice Springs, having asked the Catholic system to consider withdrawing their services. That is quite an article in my mind and, I am sure, in Annette's mind.

There is a huge challenge, and that is not to underestimate what the Catholic system has delivered over a long period of time in Aboriginal education all over Australia, and Lutherans and wherever. If you have something within your Queensland system, you might take it on notice. I am sure our committee staff have endeavoured to seek it out, but while I am on the spot I want to put that on notice. We need value-adding to our current system. We spend a huge amount of money there.

Mr Weatherall—We can take that on notice and provide you with that information. There are a number of strategies. One is the Partners for Success strategy, which is an initiative by the Queensland government. That is about increasing participation and retention and completion rates for Indigenous people in education. There are a number of strategies that underpin that. It is also underpinned by working more collaboratively with the individual Indigenous families to get them to be more proactively engaged in the education of their children and also to embrace and value education.

There is another initiative that the Queensland government is looking at in the Cape and Torres Strait—and it is really at the discussion table point at this time—in relation to achieving better outcomes for Indigenous people. It is very much focused around providing more intensive case management support and assistance to Indigenous students in the Cape and developing what they are calling 'individual learning plans' for students that can then be monitored, tracked and supported over the life of their learnings. So there are some initiatives, and we would be happy to take on notice and provide—

CHAIR—It is an area that I personally intend to develop further, as will, I am sure, many other members of the committee. It raises two issues—and we had a fierce disagreement yesterday in Cairns. One was the issue—and it leads into culture—of language. I am heading down what has become known as the Trudgeon line, and I am not getting bogged down in the semantics of it, because English is very important as well. It is fundamental to communicate so that everybody understands what we are talking about. I am not too troubled about how that happens but we know that it has to happen in terms of skill development leading to employment. So I leave that with you.

I would like to hear your comments about endeavouring to define culture. I was quite struck by the effort by Comalco to understand and genuinely engage. We are not just talking at people here but actually seeking to understand responsibility. A phrase that really stuck with me was 'be a facilitator not a benefactor'. And then there is that great welfare dependency issue, which we know is bedevilling us. Could you make a few comments about culture and how we harness it but bring to it the discipline of an economic system which I know Aboriginal people want to participate in. It is a great challenge. Could you talk a little bit about the cultural issue?

Mr Carlon—In terms of culture, we actually offer—and Ron has a unit that does it particularly within the public sector—cultural awareness training. We have a belief that you really do need to understand Aboriginal culture, respect it and so on. Unfortunately, many white Australians do not. At the moment we are talking to AGL Petronas about the gas pipeline and the opportunities that that will have for Indigenous people, and one of the things we are saying to them is that they should make sure that all the contractors that come on-site have cultural awareness training and understand the people that they are going to be working with. I think that it is very important to have that respect and to understand the other side.

Of all that we have been talking about, I think that one of the problems is that it is very hard to grab hold of one initiative. You get the initiatives that Ron talked about—and they are broad and they set principles and things. I think we are becoming great believers in an integrated place and case management approach. There are horses for courses. You look at the community that you are in. You identify what is needed. You do things based on an enormous amount of support. I think that the support thing cannot be overdone in many cases. We can give you some wonderful examples of where things have improved immensely through people taking that kind of local approach. But it is a local approach here. There is not a magic bullet that you can think you can put right across.

In our own area at the moment we have been spouting about our main roads department and the Georgina Bridge in Camooweal. The department actually dealt with the local Indigenous community there. They got money from the Commonwealth and the state. Firstly, they did the cultural heritage stuff on it. They talked to the people about the way that the bridge should be built. I cannot remember the terms of it now but there was a sacred area for the local Indigenous people, so they built the bridge differently. They then undertook to bring the community in. I think they had initially a target of about 30 per cent Indigenous people. They finished up with over 50 per cent of them. They completed the bridge on time and to a standard that was well above what normally would be done in those types of constructions.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Where is this place?

Mr Carlon—Camooweal.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Where is that?

CHAIR—On the Queensland-Northern Territory border.

Mr Carlon—It is the bridge that spans the river there in the wet.

CHAIR—Sometimes you cannot get through.

Mr Carlon—On the Barclay Highway. This is what the bridge is about.

CHAIR—It is the sort of thing that Territorians and South Australians are a bit familiar with.

Mr Carlon—Here you have people who had never worked before. One young bloke, for instance, who had never worked before in his life and was going nowhere is now a plant operator as a result of working with the Mount Isa Council and is earning \$64,000 a year. It is doing things like that that really do it. It is enormous to business. When the main roads department got the contractor, Barclay Mowlem, there was respect. They built the respect. The community then worked with them. The outcomes were quite magnificent.

Mr Weatherall—I think Bernie has covered the issues. The thing I would like to add is about valuing and respecting cultural diversity and difference, working in partnership with Indigenous people and building positive and constructive relationships with Indigenous people as equal partners. If people do that then there is an opportunity to go forward in a meaningful way.

The other thing I would say is that in some instances there could be some cultural differences in terms of how people see, for example, business development in an Indigenous cultural context. It is about sharing and supporting people. You are now moving to a commercial world and the practice of selling rather than giving. Some of those concepts are in conflict with the cultural values of Indigenous people, so it will take some time for Indigenous people to fully comprehend that. But I think Indigenous people are understanding that they do want to participate in the economy and to proactively participate in business development and to provide meaningful employment opportunities for their families.

The challenge is: how do we break that welfare dependency, which is an imposed cultural dynamic on Indigenous people as opposed to something they themselves were responsible for? It is now about how we break that dependency and how we support Indigenous people to more proactively participate in a meaningful way in the economy of Queensland.

CHAIR—We will have one quick question and then we perhaps should go to the recommendations and talk about them. In Cairns the last couple of days, we were quite struck by the opportunities in tourism. I suppose if you go to Cairns that is what you expect, but I had not expected to see that amount of development. A statistic was given to us that 80 per cent of international visitors are looking for an Indigenous experience. About 10 per cent of the people actually have that experience. I will stand corrected on the accuracy of that. It is a remarkable thing that that opportunity exists yet we do not appear to be fulfilling it for a whole range of reasons.

One thing that I was particularly struck by was that if you come to Queensland you do the Great Barrier Reef. If you are doing the Indigenous experience you do the Rock. The generic marketing around the world may develop that. I am sure it is not as simple as that but you get the picture. It has been raised by some committee members that Indigenous people may be more suited to certain employment opportunities than in other areas for a range of reasons. What sort of work have you done that actually endeavours to identify the opportunities and then match up the skills and the aspirations of Indigenous people? Could you give us a couple of comments on that?

Mr Carlon—I suppose the first thing is that we have funded across the state six what we call Indigenous employment and training managers. Their role is to do exactly what you said. It is to sit down with communities and say, ‘Who have we got here and what are the types of opportunities that are around us for economic activity or even jobs?’ and then to map out how we might move these people into those.

It is fairly new. We piloted one person for a while, and had some success with it. Most of the other five started from 1 July last year, and not all of them got on deck straightaway. They have been in operation for six to 12 months, and already we are starting to see some examples, like the one based in Townsville which is developing a program with North Queensland Water. A lot of them have started to focus on some tourism opportunities. There have been a range of things like TAFE run courses for Indigenous people on tour operations and tour guiding. We run what we call Community Jobs Plan projects, which often kick-start this. We pay the wages of 10 people for up to six months to start something off. But once again it is a little bit here, a little bit there; it takes some time to put together.

Mr Weatherall—The other thing I would like to add is that we work collaboratively with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to develop industry based service responses. We are conscious of the fact that DEWR has the corporate leaders for success project, and some of the major partners in that are some of the biggest resort and hotel companies with representation throughout Queensland. Companies like Accor, for example, are very proactive in the employment of Indigenous people. Where there are employment opportunities and where there are some opportunities whereby we can train and skill Indigenous people in tourism and hospitality through the delivery of training at TAFE, we would do that and thus strategically position Indigenous people with the skills to access those jobs.

In terms of tourism development in Queensland, the state department, for example, is in the process of developing the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy to support Indigenous business development. Some of the initiatives in tourism are focused around ecotourism and/or cultural tourism. An example of a small ecotourism project is the conservation of green turtles around Mapoon. An example of one of the bigger developments is the Tjapukai dancers in Cairns. Indigenous people are in actual fact seeking to move into the tourism industry. There are some initiatives in place that are being supported jointly by the Commonwealth and the state. We have the capacity and the capability, through TAFE and through our training arrangements, to provide people with that pathway to employment.

CHAIR—We were at the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park a couple of days ago. That was really interesting for me because they had a real private enterprise approach. They had adapted that in quite a remarkable way. I could not get over how I was left with a clear impression of an Indigenous experience, but there was a real sense of fun and a broader concept which I found quite exciting. In the little bit of time left could we just talk briefly about recommendations?

Mr Weatherall—The Queensland government has made a number of recommendations within the submission; there are five in total. The first one was that the Commonwealth government should articulate a national commitment to Indigenous employment and economic development as a high priority and provide a commitment to funding and resourcing the implementation of appropriate Indigenous employment policies and initiatives. We have had some discussion about some of those things here today. They also say that the commitment

should be underpinned by 'robust community engagement partnerships with Indigenous communities' along the lines of Queensland's Partnerships Queensland negotiation table process, to ensure Indigenous people are proactively engaged at all stages of government planning and decision making in relation to employment and business development. They say that this should:

Involve partnerships with State and Territory Governments to proactively support Indigenous economic development initiatives in rural and remote communities to enhance Indigenous employment within these areas, as well as increase Indigenous share in the prosperity and growth within these areas.

One of the challenges that we face in Queensland, and throughout Australia nationally, is the number of Indigenous people who live in areas with limited labour market opportunities, and it is about how we build sustainable opportunities through business development.

One of the other windows of opportunity is how we should work in partnership with the Commonwealth to facilitate employment opportunities through Indigenous land use agreement developments, where there are major developers who might be undertaking development in areas where Indigenous people have native title rights. How do we negotiate Indigenous employment and training opportunities and business development opportunities under those provisions? I think this national commitment and framework could provide the framework for us to go forward on some of those things.

CHAIR—They are very clear in their opinion of that. It is quite remarkable how you apply the corporate discipline and how that happened. I found that quite remarkable. I am sorry to interrupt.

Mr Weatherall—I think most developers would see the economic cost benefit in developing those sorts of partnerships and relationships, and given that commitment there is a unique opportunity to work with industry, the Indigenous community and traditional owner groups to maximise employment and training opportunities and business development through those initiatives.

Mr Carlon—We mentioned one before: the Georgina Bridge at Camooweal. One of the other things that came out of that is that the Nguiu community have formed a company where they contract to the Department of Main Roads for road maintenance and so on. The Department of Main Roads think it is wonderful because they have a contractor that is actually out there.

CHAIR—That is a critical part of the skills issue as we go forward.

Mr Weatherall—We are involved in partnerships with industry, employer groups, unions and Indigenous community organisations to build private and community sector commitment to employment and training outcomes for Indigenous people. As we mentioned earlier in our introduction, a significant proportion of Indigenous people in Queensland are employed within the public sector. We probably need to look at how we maximise Indigenous participation in the private sector and you can only do that with employer and industry support. So a framework that practically promotes and markets Indigenous employment and training opportunities to that sector would be invaluable in enhancing employment.

The second recommendation was around Australian public sector employment. The Queensland government acknowledges the commitment the Australian government has made to increase Indigenous employment under its Indigenous public sector employment program but would recommend that the program be enhanced to include the establishment of targets for Indigenous employment within and across the Australian Public Service at all levels, consistent with the Queensland government. At the moment the Australian government has an Indigenous public sector employment program and a commitment to Indigenous employment but there are no targets that say that this is what we will achieve in Indigenous representation in the Australian public sector.

Mr Carlon—We are told that the number of Indigenous people in the Australian Public Service is falling. We believe you have to lead by example if you are out there preaching to the rest of the community. It means looking also at how you recruit. Indigenous people do not necessarily do well on written assessments. You need to have different techniques to recruit different people.

CHAIR—That is a point I was going to raise about apprenticeships and the way you test for apprenticeships.

Mr Weatherall—It is not only recruiting Indigenous people to the Australian public sector but providing them with career development opportunities so that they can advance to the highest level of jobs within the public sector.

The third recommendation was around private sector employment. It says:

The Queensland Government recommends that the Australian Government develop and implement strategies and policies to build private sector employment opportunities for Indigenous people, including:

- Market Indigenous employment to employer groups and unions, targeting industries with the best prospects for Indigenous employment
- Adopt the principles of the Indigenous Employment Policy for Queensland Government Building and Civil Construction Projects - IEP (20% Policy) ...

We have had some discussion about that here. We are asking the Australian government to consider embracing that policy as a means to maximise employment opportunities for Indigenous people. It is very significant, particularly in the housing and construction areas where the federal government is a major fund provider for infrastructure in Indigenous communities and it has the capacity to strategically support Indigenous employment if that policy was adopted.

CHAIR—I have advocated it for 12 years—I was totally unsuccessful. We will see if we can do better this time.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Keep going, Barry; just keep advocating it.

Mr Weatherall—The recommendation continues:

- Develop Indigenous employment and training strategies with private sector employers and provide support through government-funded incentives and subsidies to increase employment and training opportunities in particular industries
- Develop strategic alliances and partnerships with industry and the banking and financial sectors to proactively support Indigenous small business development.

Recommendation 4 was:

The Queensland Government recommends that the Australian Government and associated agencies work with Indigenous communities to identify employment and skills development needs and establish goals, targets and performance indicators for employment programs—

consistent with the needs and aspirations of Indigenous people. It continues:

This will ensure that outcomes are focused on community values and help build community capacity.

I suppose that is developing a set of best practice principles in terms of how we might engage Indigenous people. It then says:

Given the disadvantage experienced by many Indigenous communities, employment outcomes from government-funded programs should benefit communities, clans and families as well as individuals. The Queensland Government recommends that the Australian Government consider ways to build and retain skills in communities, while also providing opportunities and support for individuals to participate in training and employment.

I think we made mention of some of those issues in the reform of CDEP. We recommended that CDEP be used to support Indigenous skills development through training as a part of CDEP but also as a pathway to employment.

CHAIR—Thank you. We appreciate your time here this morning. Do you have a brief concluding statement?

Mr Carlon—I suppose the underlying theme is that we need to put in an extra effort. There is also the necessity of there now being five per cent unemployment. You have got a situation where there are labour shortages developing and an ageing population, and that is all the more reason why it is economically important to make sure that five per cent are in work—and a major portion of those are Indigenous people.

CHAIR—It is a great opportunity the way it is shaping up.

Mr Carlon—We can only do that by being collaborative, and I think this integrated place in case management approach with lots of support is the answer.

CHAIR—The mentoring issue is coming through pretty strongly. Thank you.

[10.08 am]

COLLINS, Mr Les, Indigenous Employment Strategist, Brisbane City Council

O'NEILL, Ms Lyndal, Manager, People Services, Brisbane City Council

SANDY, Ms Sheryl, Equity and Diversity Specialist, Brisbane City Council

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you very much for the submission that you have presented to us. You might like to add to it or make a brief opening statement. We have about three-quarters of an hour to work through some of the issues, the things which you think are important and the things which we would like to highlight. Would anyone in particular like to lead off?

Mr Collins—Thank you for inviting us to this hearing. Firstly, we want to reaffirm our commitment to equity and diversity in our organisation. The gains that we have made in the employment of Indigenous people are driven by this commitment. That is complemented by an understanding of the interrelationship between our other major policy directions like the Living in Brisbane 2010 and Great Employer-Clever Workforce values and behaviours projects. We believe that the way these policy directions interface and get implemented shape and sustain a workplace culture that values and respects diversity. It is our firm belief that employers who do this will be more attractive to employees from all backgrounds and, as a result, will improve their prospects of recruiting staff from a far wider pool of talented people. Other than that, we are pleased to be here and to provide you with whatever evidence or advice we can.

CHAIR—Ms O'Neill and Ms Sandy, do you want to make general points? Perhaps you could explain where you fit in.

Ms Sandy—Les and I work very closely together on Indigenous strategies. I came in in 1998 and started the Indigenous strategies and then went on to do other equity strategies, on cultural diversity, disability and women. My role is to establish the cultural change within the organisation. When I started in 1998, people were saying that the change from EEO to equity and diversity was one that needed to be understood within the organisation. I would say a lot of people would have said: 'Why do we have to do equity and diversity? What has that got to do with business? How does that benefit us?' I think I have been on a journey since I have been there, changing the culture of the organisation to embrace that diversity. Hence we also have targets which we try to meet. Those targets are well understood within the organisation and we now have very proactive divisions that understand that we meet those targets for the broader good of the community, rather than asking, 'Why do we have to do it?' and doing it unwillingly so that we have to pay them extra dollars to do it. It is no longer like that any more. I have seen that shift.

CHAIR—I presume it must be quite gratifying now to hear people saying, 'How come it hasn't been like this all the time?' I suppose it is a bit like that.

Ms Sandy—You are not only changing the culture but people are understanding the benefits of equity and diversity as a business case—or whatever case you need—so that, if it needs to be

a business case, then you can actually say why it meets your business needs. If you have diversity within your work force, then you are actually going to have better policy, better service delivery, better customer service—all those things. That has now been understood. It has also involved going through the organisation and making sure the organisation's culture is welcoming as well, because if there are incidences of racism, or anything like that, it can deter the community. It is faster than a mobile phone: if the community hear that Brisbane City Council or the Queensland government or the federal government have got some sort of racist thing happening, the message really goes out that they are not a friendly place for Indigenous people to work. We have worked really hard at bringing about an understanding of Indigenous culture so that, when we are bringing people in, we are also ensuring that they are going to be welcomed within the workplace. It is twofold in that way, and Les can tell you more about that.

CHAIR—Just remind me about the Brisbane City Council: my understanding is that the whole area and not just the suburbs is under the one council, pretty well. Is that right?

Ms O'Neill—Yes.

CHAIR—So it is a little unique in terms of an Australian—

Ms O'Neill—It is much larger than many other councils.

CHAIR—I lived here a long time ago, and I can remember that much. That gives you a very large organisation that you are a part of. Can you just remind me of the numbers of employees?

Ms O'Neill—The council has about 7,000 employees.

CHAIR—It is huge.

Mr Collins—That makes it bigger than the state of Tasmania!

Ms O'Neill—So they say. There is a diverse range of employment within the council. We run libraries, we run buses, we do engineering, we build roads, we provide rates and rubbish collection and we do a full range of council activities. It is a major employer in Brisbane.

CHAIR—It is a major corporate organisation.

Ms O'Neill—Yes.

CHAIR—Therefore the leadership, in that sense, has an influence right across and outside the city itself. You run recruitment programs, support programs, mentoring programs and reference groups. I am attracted to mentoring, but support means the same thing and that is part of recruitment. Can we talk a little bit about how you go about it. The term that comes up—and Cheryl has touched on it in a different way—is the culture of the city or the organisation needed to adapt to the 21st century. Can we talk about the Indigenous culture itself, and how you manage, work within and adapt that.

Mr Collins—When we roll out policies like the Great Employer, Clever Work Force strategy, you get staff thinking about their capacities and commitments towards the 2010 vision and

certain aspects of that. So they say, 'I've got a passion for Brisbane. This is where I'm going to live for the rest of my life and where my family is going to live. I want to see a city that is going to be good for me to live in and also good for all the other people.' So they say, 'Okay, I want to be able to do my best and I know that the organisation needs to be able to do its best. The organisation is made up of a whole range of different people and they are all at different levels and have different skills and whatever it might be.'

I deliver a cultural awareness program in Canberra and I tell people about what has happened. We do not pull our punches; we just tell the absolute truth. People can understand that, historically, Indigenous people have been denied access to quality education. In the late eighties, 0.6 per cent of the students on awards at universities were Indigenous. If you were to transfer that to all of us then it would have been even lower, because Indigenous people could not afford to go to university—they would have had to have been on Abstudy, or something like that.

People could appreciate then that there were big gaps to be made up and they said, 'Okay, if that's the case we've got the ability to transfer skills and stuff like that', and they were more eager to become mentors, for instance. It is not necessarily as a 'do-gooder' type thing; it is because they understand that historical denial of Indigenous people having access to that sort of stuff. It was also their own commitment to a vision for a city that they would like to see everybody enjoy. That is where we try to make the connections.

CHAIR—Thank you. You have given in your submission some wonderful examples of enterprises, businesses and case studies. I saw a statement in there somewhere, *From Ceremony to CD-ROM*. Can we talk about the case studies and the council. How important are they to you? They seem to me to be pretty significant in terms of the Indigenous success stories in Brisbane.

Ms Sandy—When you say 'case studies', are you referring to the recruitment programs that we are doing?

CHAIR—I am going to the 'Indigenous creative industries in Brisbane' at page 8.

Mr Collins—That is a different submission.

CHAIR—I am sorry. It does not matter anyway.

Secretary—It is their exhibit, which is *From Ceremony to CD-ROM*.

Mr Collins—No, that is QUT working with Brisbane City Council.

Ms Sandy—There is a Brisbane City Council logo on there. I do not know why.

CHAIR—It is the report prepared by the Economic Development Branch of the Brisbane City Council.

Ms O'Neill—That is from another area of council.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Hang on. Look at the date on it, Barry.

CHAIR—August 2001. It is fairly old. But what attracted me to it—and if we cannot discuss it now, that is fine; we might take it on notice—is that there is a lot of work in here in terms of the role and the acknowledgment of the Indigenous businesses in Brisbane. Whilst it may not be core business of local government, I was just struck by the breadth of it; that was all.

Mr Collins—We are not informed enough about it to talk about it. I do know that the Community and Economic Development Division roll out the Indigenous aspiration strategy, and part of that strategy is economic development. The particular project's name is Black Business, Smart Business. That is kicking off.

Ms O'Neill—We could get some more information to you.

CHAIR—That is fine. In a general, national sense, this discussion is clearly coming from positive issues around employment. When I see something positive, I tend to grab it. Employment requires entrepreneurs. It requires private enterprise. It requires public enterprise. So I was trying to tap into that. But let us move to other matters. Let us talk about that document.

Mr Collins—I thought you would want to ask us questions from the information we gave you.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Yes, I am happy to jump in here.

CHAIR—Sure.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—There were 7,000 employees in the QCC?

Ms O'Neill—The Brisbane City Council, BCC.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Sorry, did I say the Queensland city council? That is what I think of you—you run the whole state! I am from Canberra, and every time we talk about self-government down there people say, 'Why didn't we do it like Brisbane?' so that is why I want to call you Queensland. I think I read here somewhere that there is a two per cent target?

Mr Collins—Yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So how many Indigenous workers are in that work force at the moment?

Mr Collins—I just did the quarterly report there—was it 177 or 170?

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Let us say 180 in round figures—or 177.

Mr Collins—Say 175; that will do. That is 2.49 per cent of our work force. Our target is 2.5, but, as we say in our submission, that is based on ABS statistics, plus we moved that upwards in response to the recommendations of the final report of the royal commission's inquiry.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So 2.5 is a work in progress?

Ms O'Neill—We base our target on the number of Indigenous people within the community, so that is what Les is saying: if that changes then our targets change in line with that.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Can you give me a snapshot? For those 175 people, can you give me an idea of what sort of work that encompasses—from what to what?

Mr Collins—There are about 60 in the blue-collar area, where they range from labourers to technicians and operators, if I remember. The remainder are in the salary area. Of those, we have two SES officers, which represent three per cent of our senior executive service. Most of the Indigenous employees in the salary area, say close to 70 per cent, would be in the band 1 to 4 area, but that also—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So that is administrative?

Mr Collins—There are graduates in that as well.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Okay.

Mr Collins—There are cadet draftsmen plus cadet engineers and architects.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So it goes right across the board?

Mr Collins—Yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Does anybody at all move into the region of the council to seek that employment opportunity?

Ms Sandy—No, I would say from my observations over the years that either they have been living here or they have come down to be with family and they have found employment.

Mr Collins—Although Jody Sampson, who is an Indigenous employment officer in our employment services section where they handle traineeships and apprenticeships, came from Moree. I do get inquiries from interstate and other regions about things like cadetships.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Forgive my clumsiness here, I do not wish to categorise but are we dealing in this case with the more urban living Indigenous people than the non-urban? That is the reason for asking that question.

Mr Collins—We have one trainee in IT from the Tiwi Islands.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So that happens, but it is generally the case that they are urban educated.

Mr Collins—Yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—One of the things that is fascinating me more than anything in this inquiry so far is the mentality or approach of business. You obviously have a policy in place as a

council where you are consciously supporting Indigenous employment. We were in Weipa two days ago and we saw evidence of the mining industry having this attitude. Are you in a position to share with us your views on how hard or otherwise it is to get industry or other parts of the private sector to follow examples of people like you or the mining industry and adopt a similar approach. It might be because we are dealing here with urban Indigenous people and they probably have a different view of the world, but it seems to me that two things are happening. On the one hand, some parts of industry in particular are not interested—it is all too hard. On the other hand, we are told, some parts of the private sector do not culturally suit Indigenous people—front counter service, retail, the people who might be behind the public desk in the library for argument's sake. I am just trying to get a handle on what we need to do or to think about to encourage that more.

Ms Sandy—I think there has to be a start. Certainly, as I was saying earlier, there were rough areas within council and there still are to some extent. You have to start somewhere. There has to be some resourcing in those organisations to develop some policy or initiatives to genuinely change the culture within the organisation. I think it can be done. It is ensuring that you get the right people in there to do it.

In the public sector, they will often say, 'This is the type of culture we have within our organisation. If you are interested in being in our office, would you be able to survive that?' That is oftentimes the ask, rather than saying, 'What do we need to do to be Indigenous friendly; what do we need to put in place?' I think in the council we have systematically gone through the organisation to make those changes over the years. We have had our spots where an Indigenous person has never been. For example, we had one guy in environmental health and there was a lot of hardship. People went through cross-cultural awareness training and we were able to retain that person doing that position.

When somebody first goes into one of the highly professional, technical places, they may find it a bit hard at first, but it is important for there to be something in place for mentoring and working with management to make sure that they adjust to the work environment. We have done it a number of times. But where there is no support and nowhere for them to go, and an Indigenous person is left on their own in a very different work environment, we will find that that person will not be retained.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Can you give us an example of one of your great success stories?

Mr Collins—Before we do that, I was going to say that a good person to talk to is the new CEO of Argyle mines. He has improved Indigenous representation in the Argyle work force from about seven per cent to 50 per cent and says that is still not enough.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—It is on our list of places to visit.

Mr Collins—My thoughts are that in industry a lot depends on the ethos. If the ethos is that the wellbeing of community and society is a secondary factor and the shareholder interest is the number one driver, it is a great concern. They are going to want to please their shareholders in the first instance and this sort of stuff could be a secondary concern for them. I do not know if that is the real case; that is just what I suspect.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Can you give us an example of a success story where you have come from great difficulty to great achievement? What were the components of it?

Ms Sandy—Gary Richardson?

Mr Collins—I do not know the full story with Gary, but he came into council as—

Ms Sandy—He was an apprentice in the first year I was here. We had the funding to take in quite a few apprentices and trainees.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—An apprentice what?

Mr Collins—An apprentice spray painter. But I understand that after a while he did not want to stay there, because the practices in the part of council where he worked were not terribly accommodating and he was a bit scared. He was originally from Mareeba and had been down here for a while. The work that Sheryl and others had done in rolling out the equity and diversity program and policy started changing the way people thought and behaved. The change was that extensive that not only did Gary want to stay but he ended up being the council's apprentice of the year, the Queensland apprentice of the year and the Australian apprentice of the year.

Ms Sandy—But there were some things in the workplace that needed to be fixed up—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Were they cultural?

Ms Sandy—Yes, absolutely.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Strictly cultural?

Ms Sandy—Cultural issues and work practices. Also, at that time we employed a number of Indigenous people. We used to joke that we could set up a shop because we had a spray painter, a mechanic and an auto electrician. We deliberately did that. That was a point that I was—

Mr Collins—Clusters.

Ms Sandy—Yes, having clusters of Indigenous people. That did help because they were able to talk to each other. When things were going wrong in the workplace they had each other and they had a point of call with the Indigenous employment strategist, which is the role that Les is in now. Also, when we knew there were issues in the workplace we took the Indigenous reference group there, introduced them and gave them an understanding of what we were trying to achieve. The divisional manager came on board and welcomed us. We ensured that we went to these workplaces so that people understood what the Indigenous reference group was there for and there was a better understanding of what was—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Has Gary become a bit of a role model? How do you use him?

Ms O'Neill—We have actually just recruited him to our employment services area to help with recruitment of trainees, apprentices, graduates.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What is his position now?

Ms O'Neill—He is in a temporary job in our recruitment area to go out and try to recruit kids as apprentices and trainees.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—And he is enjoying that?

Ms O'Neill—Loves it.

Mr Collins—Another way we have capitalised on his achievements is to lend him to the Queensland government to do a tour with them to schools and talk to Indigenous students about work and the world of work and apprentices and trades.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Did you make a point a minute ago, Les, that he was from Mareeba originally?

Mr Collins—Yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So he was not—I hate to harp on this—an urban educated Indigenous person in the sense of the Brisbane people. Mareeba is a little bit more—

Mr Collins—Yes, a little different.

Ms Sandy—But when he came to us, he had already relocated. That is what I find most of all. Jody is from down south but he had come to the Gold Coast. He was making his way up this way and then found himself a position in council. With the migration of people coming up this way, we may find Indigenous people being amongst that—I am not sure.

Mr Collins—I am from Cherbourg originally. I came to Brisbane in 1966, went to Sydney for a while, then to Cairns for 10 years, then back here. I was educated on an Aboriginal reserve. There would be a lot of people in similar sorts of situations but they have come to Brisbane.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—You have this obvious decision to meet employment targets for Indigenous people. How do you advertise within the law as it stands to do that? That is another important aspect of this. How do you manage that?

Mr Collins—We use the Indigenous community network. There is a whole range of community organisations out there who do not necessarily buy the *Courier-Mail* and look in the jobs section. We use the Indigenous media. Here we have 98.9 FM.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is a community radio network?

Mr Collins—Yes.

Ms Sandy—It is an Indigenous radio station.

Mr Collins—And by doing that the community organisations cooperate. We have a really good relationship with the community and we have a community reference group. This sort of suggestion has come from the community: ‘Why don’t you use us a bit more?’ The people in the organisations put the ads on their notice boards, in their waiting rooms, and other people see it. They might not be interested but they will know somebody who is. We have a saying in the community that the Murri grapevine is faster than the internet. That is how the messages get carried. The next thing you know, you have about four or five inquiries about this position. I get inquiries every day from people looking for work.

Ms O’Neill—We also have people like Gary doing the job he is doing now, going out to schools. We recruit school based trainees and school based apprentices now as well as the kids coming out of school. We actually go out to the schools and hand out applications and so forth there as well, try to get them to lodge applications with us. We have some deliberate strategies. We do not just take two per cent of our intake as Indigenous. We take 25 per cent of our trainees, for example, to try to increase the numbers and have groups that are supportive of each other.

Mr Collins—I think the other thing is that whilst we have all these good strategies and things happening, we probably need to give some credit to the Indigenous staff who work in council because they in turn go home and tell their families and their relations what a good place it is to work and that is how the word—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is why I was asking about Gary’s role, because the intergenerational issue applies not just to Indigenous people but to non-indigenous as well. If you are a child brought up in an intergenerational unemployed family, there are huge issues no matter what your colour or your background, frankly. It is just that in the Indigenous community the difficulties can be greater because of the lack of access to education and a few other things that we know exist. But there is a lot to overcome in that process when you have that intergenerational issue.

CHAIR—Have you had any contact with the Indigenous Coordination Centre in Brisbane? Are you particularly aware of them?

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—The new ICCs.

Mr Collins—No, we do not have any dealings with them. We probably deal with Walmeta. Ron Weatherall, who was here before, is the head of Walmeta.

CHAIR—Whom do you deal with?

Mr Collins—Walmeta, the state government section that handles all of their Indigenous recruitment, retention—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—For the whole of the state government?

Mr Collins—Yes.

CHAIR—The Queensland government operates that—

Mr Collins—They offer programs sometimes—

CHAIR—But you are not aware of the federal government's Indigenous Coordination Centre?

Mr Collins—We are aware of them but we do not necessarily work with them. We do work with DEWR, for instance. We have partnered with DEWR for our cadetship program and our mentoring program.

CHAIR—With regard to the apprenticeship issue, the council aims to fill 22 apprenticeships which are available each year with Indigenous applicants. That is based on the applications received, one presumes, is it?

Ms O'Neill—We take on approximately 25 apprentices each year and we are aiming at a target of 20 per cent of those being Indigenous.

CHAIR—That is what I was getting at. In other words, you end up with about five Indigenous apprentices and that is consistent—

Ms O'Neill—We have similar stats for our trainees as well. We take on about 120 trainees each year in a variety of different traineeships and we have similar targets around those.

CHAIR—To sum that up, of the 7,000 employees 175 are Indigenous and there are 20 trainees and five apprentices—

Mr Collins—At the moment we have about—

CHAIR—There are about 20 apprentices, I suppose, once you get over a four-year—

Mr Collins—Yes. We have quite a few apprentices. That is an internal policy too; it is not part of government funding—

Ms O'Neill—No. We rely on the state government a lot for funding around traineeships particularly. They contribute and they have targets around some of the different equity groups.

CHAIR—Yes, I see that in the committee jobs project.

Ms O'Neill—Yes, we do that as well. They put some targets on those but we have some internal ones that are a bit higher.

CHAIR—So it goes 7,000, 175 and probably about 20 Indigenous apprentices and probably about 20 trainees—

Mr Collins—I think it is about 10 apprentices all-up at the moment. As for trainees, it depends on the time of the year we are in.

Ms Sandy—We are about to do a recruitment drive now for September.

CHAIR—Your submission makes the point when it says:

Whilst we're not always successful in achieving these quotas, some 80% of indigenous persons recruited through these schemes find ongoing employment ...

It is a pathway through.

Ms Sandy—Yes. The important thing is that it is not just the appointments; it is the retention of those people. There are high retention rates in terms of our trainees and apprentices.

Mr Collins—We have done some work with the Chamber of Commerce to try to get those trainees who do not get ongoing employment some counselling. Maybe the Chamber of Commerce, with its links to the private sector, will try to encourage the private sector organisations to try and take that on.

CHAIR—I refer to your submission and the Indigenous creative industries in Brisbane, something that is dear to my heart. I do not expect you will be able to answer specifically because you have made it clear that it is from another section and it is probably dated somewhat but I am grateful to the executive officer who made the decision to put in because it does give a picture in a way I have not seen before in terms of about 20 businesses here which are very critical to employment in the overall situation. Do you have any knowledge of the council doing any further work in the past three or four years linking with an analysis of it in this way?

Mr Collins—Not to our knowledge.

CHAIR—You can take that on notice. Could you go to your development people and find out if there has been any update on this work? I would value any feedback that you are able to offer. It is an analysis in a way I have not seen before. I would like to say to whomever it was that I appreciated the opportunity to have a look at it.

Mr Collins—Can you tell me what that document was entitled?

CHAIR—Yes, here it is. Do not go to any undue trouble, just see whether—that was a document in its own right—there has been any further work or indeed if there was any linkage back into the council in the last three or four years which expanded it, gave benefit to the city and seemed to be of benefit to the council, that type of thing.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I am interested to read in your submission a vision to make Brisbane City Council the leading mainstream municipal employer of Indigenous people in Australia et cetera. You are obviously doing pretty well. What mechanisms are there, if any, for you to share your successes and dialogue with other councils around the country about Indigenous employment?

Mr Collins—Local government associations?

Ms O'Neill—There is a local government association.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Does it happen through that process?

Ms O'Neill—Not that way, no. One of the things that councils are building on is collaboration. A lot of the councils are into partnerships and collaborating with the other councils within the south-east corner particularly, so there would be some opportunity. I am not aware that we have been involved in anything, whether some of our community areas have done some stuff.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—It would obviously be through the LGA process.

Ms Sandy—I know that the LAMP workers do a profile on what they are doing.

Ms O'Neill—There is a bit of cultural stuff from employment—

Ms Sandy—But not from Indigenous employment.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is something that we might think about.

Mr Collins—There is another thing that I did, from an individual point of view, because my brother is the CEO of the Cherbourg Community Council. They used to have an ACC, a coordinating council. I said to them, 'If you would like, I could come and address the ACC about getting some students from the missions, the former reserves, into apprenticeships, cadetships or something like that and then council could help facilitate that.' Whilst he was impressed with the idea, he went back and asked a lot of the members and they said that one of the things they feared was that if that happened, they would lose them to Brisbane City Council. The people might make a decision not to go back.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—They might be attracted to what you tell them. On the other hand, the reason I am asking the question is that when I was working on another inquiry dealing with Indigenous issues, it was very evident that there are some councils that are pretty good at this relationship and there are some that are not. It seems to me that if you have a bit of a formula running, as an example, it would be good if there were a mechanism by which we could see some leadership.

Ms Sandy—We get a lot of inquiries from the Gold Coast and other councils. My impression is that they are just not resourced. We can give them a formula, but they are not resourced. There is no way that they could do what we are doing if they are not prepared to put in the resources.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Are you aware of any mechanism for councils to dialogue with the federal level about what you are achieving in terms of Indigenous employment?

Mr Collins—I keep DEWR updated on what is happening with our cadetship program.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Is that your initiative?

Mr Collins—Yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—There is no formal process by which that would occur naturally?

Ms O'Neill—No. Mostly our involvement is with the state government. We report back to them because of the funding that we get.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I am asking the question because we are a federal inquiry. It seems to me—

Ms Sandy—We do an annual report to the CEO and the lord mayor, so there is the ability to be able to take that.

Ms O'Neill—There is plenty of material around. We implement a lot of stuff, but it is mostly for our internal use.

CHAIR—Are there any other concluding comments that you would like to make?

Mr Collins—I think an important point is the way we are rolling out the 'Growing Our Own' Indigenous cadetship program. One of the things that the diversity framework calls for is representation to be across band levels as well as a portion of the work force. So we are looking at some of the ways we can do this that are sustainable and are going to complement our 2010 vision. We thought it was probably better going down the cadetship line than, for instance, going out on a targeted recruitment program and trying to get already skilled Indigenous people into the higher levels. If you do that, all you do is shift the chairs, because they are already employed. What does that do to alleviate unemployment? If we go down the cadetship line, we are taking a longer-term view and we are not shifting chairs around. We are getting new people into the organisation and more people employed and coming in with the skills we need for the organisation to deliver its business. We look at these other policy directions as well rather than treating it as a numbers game.

CHAIR—It is more sustainable.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Under 'Outcomes' in your submission you say, 'Individually, Indigenous employees report that council is a good and attractive employer for the following reasons,' and you list six of them. Which one is the most important?

Mr Collins—It is hard to say. That came from our reference group.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I think they are all important, but are you in a position to choose one that is the leader of that list? If you cannot, the reference group might like to let us know what they think later on.

Mr Collins—I think the first one is, because that is probably the one that most people mentioned. They did not say that it was the most important one, but most people would have mentioned it.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—If you would not mind asking the reference group and letting us know what their view is on that, that would be good.

CHAIR—Clearly the council have fairly strong views about that. There is a structure in the way it has all been done. I would imagine you would be the largest council in Australia—you

certainly are in my area. There is a significant commitment. I think that is what attracted us, particularly Annette, to try and understand it, because we come from a federal parliament in our three-tier system. In the submission a strong commitment is indicated, and we want to delve in a little further to understand.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—A lot of people in different parts of the country are good at telling us the difficulties, saying that it is all too hard and telling us the reasons why. Some of the reasons are in the submission, which is why I am asking the question.

CHAIR—Thank you, Annette, that is very helpful. Thank you to representatives of the Brisbane City Council for being with us today. All the very best. If you can add a little bit to what we have talked about today, that would be great.

[10.56 am]

TYTHERLEIGH, Mr Kelvin, Manager, Organisational Development and Governance Unit, Caboolture Shire Council

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you for being with us and for the submission, which we have numbered 27. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement. In the letter you have prepared for us you have gone through a few dot points that we will address.

Mr Tytherleigh—I would be pleased to. I come to you this morning with the thanks of my mayor and councillors. We certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak to you. For those of you who do not know, Caboolture is a shire where if I put you all in a car and drove for about 30 minutes we would enter the shire's boundary and about 15 minutes later we would be in the town of Caboolture. It is 1,251 square kilometres and has 130,000 people. It is in the growth corridor in the south-east corner, so a lot of people who live in Caboolture work in Brisbane. In political terms, if you think of Caboolture, think of the seat of Longman, with a bit of Petrie added on the side. Of course, it is bordered by Dickson, Blair and Fisher—and I understand that Peter Slipper is a member of your committee.

CHAIR—He is.

Mr Tytherleigh—He is not able to be with us today. So in the political context that is where Caboolture is.

CHAIR—Mal Brough?

Mr Tytherleigh—Mal Brough and Teresa Gambaro. There are a couple of points that we want to emphasise today. The first one is setting the right organisational culture. In terms of what the committee is looking at, we think it is vitally important that organisations and councils—whatever you are looking at—set the right culture in terms of Indigenous employment. We have gone about that in a particular way. We have chosen an aspirational model rather than a compliance model, and 82 per cent of our staff have undergone multicultural training, which is a four-hour session, so we believe that that is an important commitment.

CHAIR—What is the Indigenous make-up of your community?

Mr Tytherleigh—Of 130,000 people there are 2,253 members of the Indigenous community in Caboolture shire. That is the last, most accurate statistic we have. We are at the end of the census cycle—there is a census again next year—and some of the data is getting a bit marginal, I think, so it is probably a bit higher than that. But that is the most accurate figure we have. The council employs 859 people, so we are markedly smaller than the council you have just seen.

CHAIR—It is still a pretty significant council.

Mr Tytherleigh—It is still a fairly large council. Of those, 21 people self-assess themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Every second year we do surveys of our staff, and we ask a

range of organisational climate questions. That is how we have determined that figure. They are employed in a whole range of occupations, from transport engineer through to labourer, so there is a whole range of occupations they are employed in.

Getting back to setting the right organisational climate, we think that is vitally important. In March 2000 our council signed an Aboriginal accord with the local Aboriginal group. We could get caught up in the words of that accord but we think it was a really important document to sign with the Bamaga Mari network, which is the local aboriginal group we deal and liaise with. No doubt you have heard of them. The council also has, as I imagine most people do these days, a very strong EEO policy and a very strong commitment to EEO. So with our policies coupled with our training we can set the right culture to help the organisation.

When we were doing some research one of the things that struck us was the age structure of Indigenous populations in Queensland. It is very different from the non-Indigenous age structure in Queensland. No doubt you would be aware of that. 40.7 per cent of the Indigenous population are aged zero to 15 years—in other words, they are outside the employment cycle. The average age of non-Indigenous Queenslanders is 39. Any employment program for Indigenous Australians needs to be targeted quite differently. It actually needs to target a lower median age. That is what we have tried to do at Caboolture, so I would endorse that to the committee and recommend that in your findings you encourage other organisations to do that. Looking at the other end of the age structure, only 2.7 per cent of Queensland's Indigenous population is over 65. So issues we are dealing with with our other employees—an ageing population and an ageing work force—are not as significant when we are looking at Indigenous employment issues. Again, it is a difference in the age structure.

I only know a great deal about Queensland's employment and unemployment, I do not know a great deal about the other states, so I will restrict my remarks to Queensland. When you look at the ABS data, they have praised local governments. I will quote them:

Local government in Queensland employed almost twice its proportional share of Indigenous Australians.

So local government has been a real success story in terms of Indigenous employment. The ABS data goes on to say that the private sector employs less than half of its percentage share of the working age population. In terms of target groups for your inquiry, you probably need to better target the private sector. By comparison the state government is also low although not as low as the private sector. The Commonwealth government in Queensland as an employer is above its percentage share and local government is well above it. Those figures are produced by ABS.

CHAIR—Your statistic—forgive me if I go back a little way—was twice the national or twice the cohort? Which was it in terms of local government in Queensland?

Mr Tytherleigh—That is a Queensland statistic and I will quote it:

Local government in Queensland employed almost twice its proportional share of Indigenous Australians.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What is proportional share?

Mr Tytherleigh—It is based on the Aboriginal population of Queensland that are employed versus the non-Indigenous employed population. It is saying that statistically local government in Queensland has done very well. I certainly think the experience at Caboolture in Brisbane that you have just seen, and other councils, would bear that out.

CHAIR—I inferred, I think incorrectly, that it may have been twice the share of other local governments in the rest of Australia

Mr Tytherleigh—No, I am only talking about Queensland. My expertise in employment issues is very Queensland specific. I have actually spent some time as a CEO on a remote Queensland council—that of Boulia. If you fly into Mount Isa and drive south for about three hours you will get to the town of Boulia. Indigenous employment there is fantastic. More than half the working population of that council would be Indigenous. I think that bears out the ABS statistic.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What is the population there?

Mr Tytherleigh—The population of Boulia is only 650-odd. Geographically it is a very large shire but population wise it is a very small shire. It is a cattle and sheep area predominantly. The mayor out there, Trevor Jones, is a very big supporter of Indigenous employment, as was the previous mayor. Local government is a success story and there are good reasons for that. There have been some—and I noted that this was mentioned in Brisbane's submission as well—employment subsidy programs historically and they have worked really well for local government. I would encourage that those be continued. The current one is called Breaking the Unemployment Cycle and, whilst it is applicable to anybody in Queensland, it does have some target groups. Typically those target groups have been people with disabilities, people of non-English-speaking background, women re-entering the work force and Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. When councils apply for those grants, they are given some targets in each of those sectors. Caboolture has always met those targets, and we are really proud of that. I think that has been one of the key factors in the ABS data coming out—local government is doing very well.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Is that a state government program?

Mr Tytherleigh—It is actually funded by both the state and federal governments. It is a combination of both.

CHAIR—Can you give us the name of a couple of programs?

Mr Tytherleigh—The overall program is called Breaking the Unemployment Cycle—that is what we call it in Queensland.

CHAIR—Have you got a Commonwealth name for the program? You think it is coming via the state?

Mr Tytherleigh—In Queensland it is actually co-ordinated by the Local Government Association of Queensland. They have taken on the coordination role. I understand that they receive a small amount of funding, both state and federal, to coordinate it. It is a fantastic

program. The traineeships are generally for twelve months and aimed at certificate III and IV levels. They have been a wonderful success. Caboolture has been involved in that program for about seven years now. I believe most councils in Queensland have been involved on and off for about that period of time.

CHAIR—What is the sustainability and retention like?

Mr Tytherleigh—Our results are well above average, not only retention with us but also getting employment elsewhere. We have a really good working relationship with the local chamber of commerce, Business and Professional Women's Association and other groups that feed off us. Graduates out of our traineeship program get employment with them, but we have also kept employing some of them. We treat it as a recruitment practice for the organisation. We bring a person in for a twelve-month program and that allows us to see them in operation for a twelve-month period and, like any employer, we pick the eyes out of the graduates and keep some on. So sustainability has been very high. Caboolture on average, statistically, has been very high across the state. Some other councils have not experienced as high a retention rate as we have. We have also used it as an incubator to take people who are unemployed and lead them into further study. They get a certificate III or IV and a lot of those things now can articulate toward associate diploma and diploma courses.

CHAIR—Your unemployment rate would be quite low, I would imagine?

Mr Tytherleigh—Caboolture's unemployment rate is a little bit higher than the state average, because we have some sea change suburbs. When you have some of those sea change suburbs in your area—Bribie Island, for example is one of those—your unemployment tends to look a little higher. Queensland's unemployment generally averages somewhere between five and six per cent now in the south-east corner, so it is quite low. In fact if you look at the national trend, really since 1986 onwards, unemployment right across Australia has fallen and has continued to fall. If you look at Indigenous unemployment, again using the ABS statistics, Indigenous unemployment is still higher than non-Indigenous unemployment, but its rate of falling is more accelerated than non-Indigenous unemployment.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Across the state?

Mr Tytherleigh—Across the state. I can give you some statistics. In 1986 Indigenous unemployment was 34 and non-Indigenous unemployment was 11 per cent. In 2001 Indigenous unemployment had dropped to 20 per cent, a drop of 14 per cent. In 2001 non-Indigenous unemployment had dropped to 8.2 per cent, so that had only dropped three per cent.

CHAIR—We have had a discussion this morning with the Queensland government about that and the issue of whether the CDEP were in those figures or not. You are right, I think, with that 20-odd per cent, but once you include the CDEP you come out at about 45 per cent.

Mr Tytherleigh—I can tell you—13 per cent of those were CDEPs, so what you have said sounds about right.

CHAIR—Press on, my friend, press on.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Before you do, can I just ask you Kelvin: what proportion of your council's intake into that program you were just talking about is Indigenous people, because it covers those three or four categories?

Mr Tytherleigh—The four target groups. It does depend, year to year. We have just over 20 trainees in our current round. Of those, three are Indigenous. One of our fantastic success stories has been a young lady who is working in our central library. We have a small but growing collection of books specifically aimed at Indigenous Australians. She is able to work particularly with that collection and encourage other people she knows in the community to come into the library. As you are aware, literacy is a major issue. With such a large percentage of the Indigenous population under the age of 15—under the age of employment—there is a great opportunity to be proactive so that people, as they come into employment ages, are not immediately going into an unemployment situation. Literacy is a major factor in that group.

CHAIR—Press on.

Mr Tytherleigh—One of the things that we recommend to you is a survey. We think the collection of data is very important. The ABS data is fantastic, but we think there is an opportunity to conduct a survey of Indigenous unemployed Australians and find out what their aspirations for employment are. In our research we were not able to find that that had ever been done before. Caboolture would be only too pleased to participate in such a survey if you decided that you wanted to conduct one. Finding out the aspirations of people is, I think, the key factor to addressing unemployment.

I will quickly summarise. We thank the committee for its time. We encourage the committee to keep recording the data, whether it is ABS or from another source—we think that is very important. Getting the culture right and using the aspirational model are very important. Acknowledging the different age structure in any program that you do is very important. We cannot aim at the non-Indigenous age structure of our population or we miss our target group. We think labour market programs are fantastic. They have certainly been a success story in Caboolture and, I believe, elsewhere. We encourage a survey to find out the aspirations of Indigenous Australians. I am happy to answer any questions you have.

CHAIR—Thank you for an excellent presentation and for a commitment to a fairly tough question and a tough issue. If I say 'Indigenous coordination centres', do you have any concept of what they might be? Do you have any contact with them?

Mr Tytherleigh—I do not have any direct contact with them. We deal with the Bamaga Mari network who we have developed very strong associations with.

CHAIR—Directly with the association?

Mr Tytherleigh—That is correct. As most councils do, we employ a multicultural liaison officer. We have trained a number of staff to be contact officers in the organisation, so our contact tends to be directly between that group and our people. Given that we are probably a bit smaller than Brisbane, we can afford to do that.

CHAIR—You have an integrated system. You are using your government programs, you obviously have a council commitment and you are looking at the continuity into the private sector and developing those links, so there is an underlying capacity there. What would the council say about the next 10, 15 or 20 years? How would the council see the Indigenous employment issue and Indigenous issues in general in the next decade or so?

Mr Tytherleigh—I cannot speak for all Indigenous issues, obviously, but we have a very strong corporate plan and a very strong strategic plan in the organisation. Our shire is going to continue to grow enormously as the population of the south-east corner does. The employment within the council will grow proportionally and the employment of Indigenous Australians will grow proportionally as well. One of our other emerging communities in Caboolture is the Samoan community. We have the largest Samoan population in Queensland living in our shire, so we would see our proportion of employment of Samoan people also growing. Our commitment is very strong in that area, and we would see it only growing.

CHAIR—Is there any particular reason for the Samoan presence? Is it just a fact of history?

Mr Tytherleigh—There are certainly some historical factors. It is just a fantastic place to live. You can be in the city in 45 minutes and you can live on the coast. The lifestyle that you can get and the affordability of housing are very good. The current mayor has been made an honorary Samoan chief, so our relationship with the Samoan community is very good. We have built a Maoto Fono—I am sure I have not pronounced that correctly. It is a Samoan meeting place that the council has built at our Deception Bay area that the Samoan community use to conduct their traditional meetings. I guess if you show a commitment and you provide some facilities, you will only encourage the growth of that population.

CHAIR—You mentioned at the beginning of your comments the importance of setting the right culture. I am sure you have a personal commitment and I think it comes through in your conversation. Clearly, your council has that commitment as well. An issue that arises in this whole Indigenous question, forever, is the issue of culture and adaptation to culture. Some of it is, in my humble opinion, abused and used to set agendas. To separate out what is genuine culture and what is not is a big challenge for a government, particularly a federal government. Can you provide us with any observations which could lead us into the positive model that we have to create? You mentioned the success story of your librarian. Is there anything about the cultural issues which might take us forward?

Mr Tytherleigh—Certainly. There are probably two models that I have seen in practice. One is what I call a compliance model where, ‘You will do this or you will get hit with a big stick.’ The other model is what I call the aspiration model and it goes, ‘This is the culture of our place. These are our policies.’ It is led by example from our elected people. It is led by example from our senior staff. That is the model we have adopted. In all of our language, in all of our actions, we demonstrate the aspirational model. We say that we are a multicultural organisation and a multicultural community and that is how we act, behave and speak. Those are the two approaches traditionally. I would encourage your committee to take that aspirational approach. Yes, policy development is employment. Yes, if someone has clearly done something illegal, there needs to be a punishment—I am not suggesting that there should not be. We should emphasise the positive all the time. We should emphasise the aspirational model, and our action and our language should reflect that.

We found that really worked in our training courses. We had some people who were reluctant to go along to the training courses, but once the word got around how positive and good they were, everybody wanted to go along. They are four hours in length. An organisation with 82 per cent of its employees having attended a particular training course—given the turnover in an organisation and the occasional illness and injury—is a pretty high percentage. You are never going to get 100 per cent. That is a very high commitment. Again, the aspirational model has worked for us.

CHAIR—Relationships with other councils came up earlier. Do you have relationships with the more remote councils and the Indigenous councils? Is there much contact?

Mr Tytherleigh—In Queensland there is a multicultural liaison officers' network through Multicultural Affairs Queensland. They obviously do not just deal with Indigenous issues; they deal with a range of things. We have staff who attend those meetings but, by far, the most contact we have is with other councils in the south-east corner who are our immediate neighbours. We tend to deal with regional issues. Caboolture is a member of SEQROC. All councils in Queensland, and possibly around Australia, I am not sure, are members of ROCs—they are regional organisations of councils. Ours is the South East Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils. The one immediately north of us is called SunROC—the Sunshine Coast Regional Organisation of Councils. Our committee is chaired by the mayor of Brisbane. Those councils are attended by a mayor, a CEO and some other senior staff. All issues to do with the region are run through that, including all issues to do with multicultural affairs. That is how we tend to liaise.

We have recruited people over the years who have worked in the regional and remote councils, so we still have contacts back in the other councils. As I said, I worked for some time in a remote council. We still have quite a good network back to a lot of the smaller councils, as well. I think that experience is invaluable. My time working in western Queensland has served me well now working in Caboolture.

CHAIR—It seems to me that there has been an increase in the urbanised society, but urban communities have some advantages and some challenges in terms of the general issues they confront. I would just like you to perhaps offer what you can in terms of the challenges in front of an urban local government like your own but also those linkages with the Chamber of Commerce, which engenders, through your own leadership, the culture that you are endeavouring to transfer into the community. What are the challenges at the moment of an urban local government like your own? Also can you tell us about the Chamber of Commerce, your private enterprises and your people who are going to be, from my personal perspective, one of the main employers of Indigenous people in the future? What do you observe there?

Mr Tytherleigh—Certainly. By far the biggest issue that a council like Caboolture faces is its growth. From that comes the need for infrastructure, whether it is roads or water and sewerage, and how to deal with that growth and its effect on the natural environment. That is by far the biggest concern. I imagine that every council in south-east Queensland would give you a similar if not identical answer.

CHAIR—It is second fastest growing region in the world or something. Someone said that to us yesterday or the day before.

Mr Tytherleigh—We are always in the top 10. I am not sure where we are at now in terms of growth but I understand we are about fifth at the moment. There are some places in Western Australia that think they are growing but they have got nothing on us! That is by far the biggest choice. I guess the opportunity is to piggyback on that. Employment follows economic growth, obviously. In terms of Indigenous employment, if economic growth is in housing then employment opportunities are going to be in housing. If economic growth for us is in infrastructure, whether it is road works, sewerage or whatever it happens to be, then employment is going to follow those things. If economic growth is in technology—and that has not been a major factor in our shire; that has been more of a capital city phenomenon—then employment is going to be in technology. So the opportunity to create traineeships for Indigenous Australians into those generators is fantastic.

Whilst I understand the housing market has slowed, in Caboolture you could not travel more than a kilometre without seeing a new estate or a new housing development going up. It is still in a massive growth stage. So that is by far the biggest challenge in how it links back to the private sector.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—You have a work force of 859, of which 22 are Indigenous. What is the other multicultural makeup roughly?

Mr Tytherleigh—Statistically we have people from 99 different backgrounds. I do not know where they are all from but some are certainly European.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Samoan obviously.

Mr Tytherleigh—Samoan and people from right throughout Asia would be the main ones. Certainly we have people from Holland, Germany, Italy and Greece and right throughout Europe, and also right throughout Asia.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What is the average tenure with council of the 21 Indigenous employees that you have?

Mr Tytherleigh—Most of them are full-time permanent employees.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Have they been with you for a long time?

Mr Tytherleigh—Some of them have been with us for a great deal of time. There is not a statistical average for those people that I could present to you. One of them is in our transportation planning area, which plans the road networks in the shire. One of them works in our area that does waste management. They are right throughout the organisation. I guess it is where they felt their careers would lead them and they have continued with those careers.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—How often do you do your four-hour multicultural training?

Mr Tytherleigh—At least once a month, and often once a fortnight to get the volume of people through.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I am trying to get an understanding of the uniqueness of Indigenous employees and their cultural needs—for example, bereavement leave, ‘sorry’ leave and the need they have to answer their cultural demands in the way that they do. Could you explain to us how much of that training talks about that aspect of Indigenous culture? You are running a UN! In all fairness, that is what you have to do.

Mr Tytherleigh—That is right.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Our interest in this inquiry is Indigenous employees. To what degree is an aspect of that woven into your training?

Mr Tytherleigh—It is certainly woven into the training. We give examples in the training, but they are not exactly the same as you have given. The need is for flexibility in terms of employment relations, and that is reflected in our industrial practices. Most large organisations have what we call ‘rostered days off’; I am not sure what other people call them. Most organisations have family leave. That is certainly what we call it. There is the opportunity to use those things, those flexible industrial arrangements, to suit virtually any culture. If there were a particular day that a particular cultural group wanted off, they would take a rostered day off. If it were reflective of their family, they would take family leave for that day. If it were a really extensive period, they would probably take annual leave, although I am not aware of an extensive period; it is generally one day at a time that I am familiar with. It is simply a matter of being flexible with those arrangements. I am not aware of a single situation where a person has asked us for a rostered day off to meet a particular cultural need and it has been rejected. I am not aware of a single instance of that across the whole organisation. It is simply a matter of using those industrial instruments to assist you in that regard. That has not been a problem in our organisation at all.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Can you explain for me how the consideration of those requirements fits into the aspirational model that you run?

Mr Tytherleigh—Certainly. It is a great example. It is one thing to say something; it is another thing to demonstrate it by your actions and behaviour. We run an overall program called ‘the Australian business excellence framework’. I am sure you have heard of it. It is essentially based on two things: relationships and processes. They are essentially the two elements of it. So, as part of your relationships with your staff, if people are applying for leave for a particular cultural need and you are granting it and saying, ‘Yes, go,’ that is sending a fantastic signal. That is part of the aspirational model.

Saying, ‘Put it in writing,’ and ‘I will have to consider it at a committee,’ and ‘Two of you can go and two of you can’t,’ is the big-stick approach, and that will not work. It does not match with the aspirational model. After a while, that culture becomes embedded in the place. When a staff member who wants a particular day off for a cultural need goes to their supervisor or manager and says, ‘I would like an RDO next month for this,’ and the answer is ‘Yeah, of course,’ then that becomes the culture of the place. It is accepted that that is what is happening. Because we have been doing it for many years now, that is the culture of our organisation.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is good. I am asking because the Brisbane City Council, who we heard from before, in their list of issues had six highly important issues for the employment

of Indigenous people, and one of them is in fact weaving in the cultural, bereavement and other types of leave. I think they are almost explicit about it, but we are going to find out more about it. Even though you are smaller, it does not mean the same rules do not apply.

Mr Tytherleigh—We have approached it in a more generic sense, as we have structured it in a way so that you can have leave for any real, legitimate reason. We call it ‘rostered days off’ but I do not know what other organisations call it. Because we have structured it in such a generic fashion that it applies to everybody, it is, again, just part of the culture of the place. It is very well accepted.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is good. Thank you.

CHAIR—We have pretty much gone as far as we need to go on this side. You might have a couple of concluding comments.

Mr Tytherleigh—No, but on behalf of the mayor and the council we appreciate your time this morning. If there is any future help we can give you, please do not hesitate to ask.

CHAIR—Can I just thank your council and you, and leave you with the thought that I have appreciated—and I think the committee has appreciated—the opportunity to hear about a positive approach to Indigenous issues. We think that is really fundamentally important.

Proceedings suspended from 11.28 am to 11.55 am

ABAD, Mr Daniel, Director, Hanson Advisory Services; and Adviser, Purga Elders and Descendants Aboriginal Corporation

ABAD, Mr Thomas Manuel, Project Officer, Hanson Advisory Services

KING, Mr Mark, Member, Purga Elders and Descendants Aboriginal Corporation

CHAIR—I welcome representatives from the Purga Elders and Descendants Aboriginal Corporation to this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Would any of you, or the three of you, like to make a brief opening statement or add to your submission?

Mr T Abad—I might start since a lot of my words were put down for it. Most of the content of the submission that we gave you is in reference to a business development project that is taking place out at PEDAC. It probably started out at Purga about 2½ years ago. Initially, I think we started doing just a couple of small training programs and it was really to give us an opportunity to get to know the organisation and vice versa. We started with a little bit of governance training. Over time, we got to know the organisation better and we eventually progressed to a point where Purga were looking at their organisation and thinking, ‘Well, there are a number of things we’d like to address in terms of the constitution and business plans—more of a business model of development,’ and Hanson Advisory Services were able to assist them in that role. So that is how the relationship progressed. Now we are at the end of the third week. We were able to acquire funding for this project through the Indigenous Small Business Fund, which is run by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. This is sort of the first stage of that project. So that is the core of the submission itself.

The specifics of that—we were talking about this before—are pretty standard in a lot of senses, like doing business plans; there is nothing too exciting about that. But where I think the work we are doing for PEDAC gets interesting is in looking at how to work with an organisation, not just doing business plans. There is a lot of cultural ground that, being non-Indigenous, I have to make up and learn about the culture that I am working with out there. I often look at it as taking these business principles, which at the end of the day are a very mainstream, white kind of approach, and trying to make them as culturally appropriate as possible so that an Aboriginal corporation can really fulfil the community role that it needs to fulfil.

CHAIR—Could you advise the committee of two or three of the fundamental differences or things that may have confronted you or that you have found the most challenging?

Mr T Abad—Yes. One, and this is a very broad one, is not having a picture of how the community works. A good example is the first training program that we ran. On paper, it all looked good: we had identified a funding source and we had identified some participants who seemed happy to turn up. The elements looked good on paper, but then when we got onto the ground we had a few experiences such as people not turning up and that type of thing. We were in a situation where we were able to communicate a lot with the committee, so that got us around a lot of those difficulties. The challenge was identifying things that I did not realise were

assumptions that I was bringing to the situation, and I really see that as just the cultural clash of me not understanding an Indigenous community.

CHAIR—What was a specific thing that enabled and encouraged people to turn up? What did you do?

Mr T Abad—The first thing was that I learnt that contacting people by phone is not necessarily the best idea; sometimes face-to-face contact really helps. One thing I did a bit was go around and visit people on a one-to-one basis. Definitely one thing, which we have used a number of times, is that we have quite a good relationship with the committee and a number of the elders in the community. Often I might not know exactly what is going on, but that gives me the opportunity to talk to somebody and get the answers that I need. No matter what pops up, we are able to deal with it because we have that communication link in place.

CHAIR—You have given a long history, mentioning the Salvation Army involvement and the 62 acres. As briefly as you can, what is your purpose as you see it now? Clearly, the inquiry is talking about employment, and we are trying to look at examples of positive experiences.

Mr T Abad—Are you talking about the purpose of the projects that we are looking at at the moment, or the purpose of the organisation as a whole?

CHAIR—It would be useful to do both—a quick summary of the organisation, and the purpose of the project which I presume you are here today to talk about specifically, in terms of employment approaches.

Mr T Abad—Did you want the one about the organisation in general?

CHAIR—Yes, just a quick snapshot. You are a consultancy that has come in and had some linkage for a while. I think I have a picture of the organisation, but let's just go to it. Brisbane Tribal Council purchased 62 acres, and the demise of this council in 1999 obviously suggests that something has occurred which needed to change. I am trying to grab as briefly and efficiently as I can what the circumstances of that were.

Mr T Abad—I was not around at the time, so I do not know; that is something Mark would be able to help you with.

Mr King—Donnie Davidson was the driving force behind the Brisbane Tribal Council; there were not too many other people involved. Basically, after he died and once they started looking into the accounts of what happened there, they went into liquidation. Then the Ipswich people—Purga is based out in Ipswich—got together and wanted that land back, so they took it off Brisbane Tribal Council and gave it back to the Ipswich community. From there, we have just been sitting on the land; nothing much has happened. A lot of the community did not get involved, because of the previous ownership issues. PEDAC is now in local community hands, but we are not quite sure which way to take it—where we are going from here. The previous committee had stalled somewhat, so Hanson has come along and applied for the funding. That is where we are at at this point in time.

CHAIR—It has come from the death of a prominent person and then liquidation. Now, where to next? You are just endeavouring to steer your way ahead.

Mr King—That is right.

CHAIR—Can you define what you would think some of the aspirations would be? What might the outcome be? I know you are just working it through, but what could be one or two possible outcomes?

Mr King—It is largely employment. Employment is our biggest issue out there; it is a high unemployment area. And we need to get the community back and involved with the organisation. That is where we are at at this point in time.

CHAIR—I am seeing horticulture; I am seeing land regeneration; I am seeing computer room and homestead renovations—those sorts of things.

Mr T Abad—Do you mean looking at the specific aims of the project that we are engaged in?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr T Abad—As Mark emphasised, employment is definitely the overriding aim of that. I see it as a bit of a staged approach. The initial things we are going to be dealing with are just the fundamentals of organisational sustainability, which are all the things related to putting in a basic financial management plan, constitutional review and that kind of thing. Also very much related to the organisational sustainability is the need to create some sustainable employment within that organisation, both in terms of a number of key roles and a couple of the other ventures that they are looking at. By that point, the organisation will be at a stage where it has a fair bit of strength and is able to engage a lot more with the community, as Mark was saying. The submission mentioned things like horticulture, a computer room and a lot of other projects. The idea is to basically expand that structure into a number of ventures which can be used in a business sense to generate an income stream for operating costs and also to subsidise a number of community based activities.

CHAIR—Obviously, you have had a community development program since 1998. What is the status of CDEP now?

Mr T Abad—They probably only have about five or six participants at the moment. Is that right?

Mr King—Yes.

Mr T Abad—The position is probably reasonably small at the moment. That is going through a bit of a review in line with the rest of the organisation. There has been a bit of a change of hands with the CDEP administration, so we are looking to communicate with them to get a better idea of where to take it.

Mr D Abad—I would like to add a couple of words on the CDEP program. Our impression is that the relatively reduced amount of participation and involvement within the program could be

a result of—for lack of a better word—a lack of direction being passed on to a number of those programs by PEDAC.

CHAIR—What is the approximate unemployment rate at the moment amongst the Indigenous people in the region?

Mr King—I think we are approaching 90 per cent.

CHAIR—What would your main message be to the committee today? Also, what is your main aspiration for PEDAC?

Mr T Abad—We would all probably have a different take on that. I guess the thing that gets me enthusiastic about the work we are doing is that the core of it is relationship building. Going back to having those cultural differences, we found that taking things slowly and building a solid relationship between our organisations has really allowed us to do a lot of things. Being able to put some communication structures in place to get around that is pretty much the biggest strength of the partnership.

Mr D Abad—My biggest message to the PEDAC community at the moment is that there is an enormous opportunity to start some new projects, maybe out of the ashes of the recent ATSIC demise. Obviously the relationship that PEDAC has built with Hanson Advisory Services is the best thing that could have happened. It is a very timely relationship to get the most out of the new opportunities that are coming out.

CHAIR—What has been the impact and implications of the ATSIC demise?

Mr D Abad—There are a whole lot of new projects and alternatives being proposed and suggested both by Indigenous communities and the government. This is what my message to the community is: let us focus on what can come out of this new beginning.

Mr King—We were pleased that ATSIC closed down because of the Sugar Ray Robinsons et cetera. We are looking at cultural tourism. Not only that, we are looking at building businesses so that we can get the Indigenous people employed. We are looking at the basic sorts of things: plumbing, carpentry, all of those sorts of things. Our biggest venture at the moment is community involvement and community development.

We have a sports complex up there that has been sitting around for any number of years—Tambu housing—and we have never been able to get access to it. With the demise of ATSIC we are hoping that Amanda will go in and clean it out and hand it over to somebody else, which is us. We are in the process of developing a council of elders for the area so that all the streams and families in the community are represented in this. If we can get that sports complex back with its hospitality we can start getting TAFE involved in a lot of the training programs that we have.

CHAIR—Where do you want to be in five years time?

Mr King—We have latched onto cultural tourism. We see us running our own training centres with TAFE, et cetera so we are getting the training coming through. We hope to have some form of business to pick up the employment after they have done the training.

CHAIR—Finance?

Mr T Abad—Sustainability is key.

CHAIR—Where is the money going to come from?

Mr T Abad—The funding we have at the moment comes from both Commonwealth and state governments through grant applications. The idea is that in about three year the ventures in place should be self-sustaining.

CHAIR—What about the current level of funding and the sources?

Mr T Abad—The funding for the current business development project was almost \$45,000 including GST. We are anticipating that next year that will be expanded and go from about a four-month project into roughly a 10-month project. We are anticipating that may reach about the \$100,000 to \$120,000 funding mark. After that we would be hoping to reduce the levels the funding as the ventures themselves start to generate an income stream.

CHAIR—Have you had any contact with the Indigenous Coordination Centre?

Mr T Abad—When we had the last meeting with DEWR they mentioned the ICC and wanting to put us in contact.

CHAIR—I should call it the ICC. My colleague says the ICC. People have a resistance to these tags and I try to go to the full name. I am endeavouring to understand this in the context of the terms of reference. We are looking for positive examples of Indigenous employment. This is not about that; it is about the aspiration to have it. I need to get that in my mind. You have a determination and you like the concept. You obviously saw an advertisement that talked about this and you would like to put your view. You have indicated that you were probably frustrated with the old systems. You do see an enterprise based approach and you are endeavouring to bring that to the committee.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Thank you for being here. It is good to meet you. Forgive my total ignorance, but I need to understand some fundamentals of the structure. Who is Hanson Training Services?

Mr D Abad—I represent Hanson Advisory Services.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—There is a Hanson Training Services in here. Are they one and the same thing?

Mr D Abad—There are two separate companies. We have Hanson Advisory Services and Hanson Training Services. Hanson Training Services deals with training issues; Hanson Advisory Services deals with providing advice, mentoring support and a range of services mainly for Aboriginal individuals and communities. At this stage obviously HTS and HAS are working fairly closely together. Whilst the relationship with PEDAC has largely been built between PEDAC and Hanson Advisory Services, all of the training that has been supplied and provided to the community has been through Hanson Training Services.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So I take it the Hanson group has worked with other Indigenous communities?

Mr D Abad—Maybe not so many Aboriginal communities but, rather, Aboriginal individuals. Hanson Advisory Services is involved in promoting Indigenous culture overseas. In that role my involvement is with Indigenous artists and performers, the promotion of bush foods overseas and so on.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So you are the principal of the company?

Mr D Abad—I am the principal, yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I just needed to know who's who in the zoo, as we say! I did not quite understand where we were all coming from.

Mr T Abad—A good way to summarise the relationship is pretty much like this: the relationship is between HAS and the Purga elders and HTS, simply because it can offer training in a similar way to TAFE or a number of other organisations can, sort of competes for the training services.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—When did the relationship begin?

Mr D Abad—The relationship began seven or eight years ago, with Auntie Pat King and me. Over the years obviously the relationship grew and developed.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Auntie Pat King is an elder?

Mr King—She is my sister. She is one of the elders out there. My mother was one of the original people on Purga mission.

Mr D Abad—Unfortunately, Pat was not able to attend today, so Mark is her representative.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Mark, what is the Indigenous population in the region that we are speaking of?

Mr King—The ABS says about 3,000.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What you think it is?

Mr King—It is between 8,000 and 10,000.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—With the greatest respect to our colleagues at ABS, we always say, 'What do they say and what do you say?' So you are saying 8,000 to 10,000. I think you talked about the unemployment rate being about 90 per cent.

Mr King—I would say so.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—It is that community you are talking about?

Mr King—Yes, that is right.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Give me a rough geographic reading of the area we are talking about, because I do not know this region very well.

Mr King—The boundary of the area starts at Gailes, which is halfway between Ipswich and Brisbane. With the amalgamation of the councils, we now take in Boonah, Lowood and Rosewood, a couple of the satellite townships. Then the boundary follows the Brisbane River down until we get back to Gailes again.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Do you know what the total population of that region is?

Mr King—The last I heard, it was about 170,000.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is just so that I can get a feel for the area we are talking about. As Barry just said, we are talking more about aspiration here at the moment, or aims and what we are hoping to achieve, than about what has been achieved. But I notice that in PEDAC's submission, where you are talking about PEDAC's goals, under the heading 'Stage 2' you say:

Business Activities—PEDAC will implement 1-2 small-scale business activities.

What are they going to be? Do you have any idea at this stage what sorts of businesses they will be?

Mr T Abad—At this point the computer room is definitely going to be one of those facilities. A bit of funding was acquired through the Queensland Government Gambling Community Benefit Fund. That is simply because the IT need is so huge within the community because of the cultural and poverty issues. Then probably the other one is going to be using the organisation as a local Indigenous resource centre. There is very much a call for that. One of the messages that have been coming very strongly from council is that nobody in the region has the history to provide that kind of service. So they really want PEDAC to consolidate a lot of the information that they have.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Mark, do you have a view on the general education level of the population in your community?

Mr King—It is variable.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What would the average be, do you think? What would the extremes be?

Mr King—There are groups up there that have gone on to degrees and higher education, but they generally leave the area and go working elsewhere. The current schooling process is that, while they are going on to do senior, and that is not a great deal, they are not choosing OP subjects. So even though they are going on—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—OP subjects?

Mr T Abad—It is a Queensland thing.

Mr King—They are subjects to help you get into tertiary studies. So they are not choosing those subjects; they are going on to do senior but they are not going anywhere. They are still going back into TAFE and vocational education and training, and they are not taking up these opportunities at this point in time. Even once they do get training, they largely come from backgrounds of high unemployment—four or five generations of unemployment—so you are trying to get children to get up and go to work when no-one else in the household does.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Do you know what the overall unemployment rate is in that region?

Mr King—I do not know the overall rate—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—We would like to find that out if we can.

Mr King—but it is still relatively high.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Yes, but not 90 per cent?

Mr King—No.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So it might be 10 or 12 per cent?

Mr King—Yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Do you have a relationship with the local council, like the local government authorities?

Mr King—Not really. Patricia has worked there as the Indigenous project officer, but there were games being played there and she eventually left. The Ipswich City Council does not have an Indigenous policy, and I do not think it has much of a social justice policy either. With the circle of elders that we are trying to get happening, we are about to start pushing those issues along as well.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Mr Abad, do you have a view on what needs to be done? From the advisory service point of view, what plans are you contemplating in terms of that problem? To use an unfortunate word—but I have to—it sounds like there may be a certain level of racism; not in any violent sense, but in a cultural sense.

Mr D Abad—Yes; I guess ‘racism’ might be, as you say, a little bit extreme, but certainly there is a lack of understanding and of communication between the various communities out there. I think this has largely been an ongoing problem.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What can be done about that?

Mr D Abad—The local council and the justice department are certainly aware of the situation, and they have indicated that they would be willing to work towards closing that gap, although, as Mark has mentioned, very little is achieved. One of my feelings is that they have not really shown a great deal of passion or enthusiasm about bridging or reducing that gap, mainly because the Indigenous community was not really showing signs of really wanting to do something. There was a lot of disparity, there was a lot of disbanding, and obviously that certainly did not really favour the right kind of environment to go ahead with trying to fix it.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So we can assume then from what you are saying that the work you are doing through the advisory service, and the work of creating the council of elders and so on, is to start to try and address that impression or image?

Mr D Abad—We have already noticed that people are starting to listen a little bit more and are starting to become aware of what is happening, and the momentum is gradually just building up, yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Are there a number of different clan groups?

Mr King—Yes, and that is largely the issue with the council. They did not know who to go to; when one said yes the other was saying no. We have traditional owners and we have two borders where two of those groups come together, around Ipswich, so there is infighting about where the boundaries are. PEDAC is the historical people, and then we have a lot of people coming in from out west and settling in Ipswich; they have only been around for less than five years or thereabouts. Under ATSIC the organisations were all run by families. A lot of the problems that you are speaking about are not all government; 50 per cent of that belongs to the community because there was no cohesion and no unity in the group, in the community.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I am not wishing to give the impression that we want to see the unfortunate or ugly side of all of this, but it is really good for us to have an understanding, given the work you are doing—

Mr D Abad—Absolutely.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—as to where you are coming from and the sorts of barriers and difficulties you find in that process, knowing very well where you are hoping your positive paths will lead you. It helps us understand, because it applies—to different degrees—in many parts of the country.

Mr D Abad—You see, over the last seven or eight years I have been involved with Indigenous communities and I have certainly witnessed the same reaction within the Toowoomba Indigenous community, which is still made up of a large number of different groups. With the reaction from certain government departments whenever I just came up and proposed certain ideas, certain projects and what not, the first statement that was made was: 'Just make sure that those guys get their act together, to be blunt, and maybe we'll do something.' So I would not go as far as saying that government departments have actually played on the fact that there was disharmony within the Indigenous groups, but they certainly have not really—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—They did not help.

Mr D Abad—It did not help. Exactly.

Mr T Abad—I think in particular that highlights one of the differences between, say, urban and outback communities too. The impression I have got—and I have not had much experience with outback communities at all—is that no matter how good or dysfunctional the community is you have an identifiable community, there are identifiable elders and structures there, so from any policy direction it is a lot easier to work with. In terms of urban communities, as Mark was saying, you have a mix of traditional—historically, the traditional is a lot more blurred that it is in the outback—and then you have people who have just come in recently. So, for anybody in the city council or even just somebody like me coming in, it is really quite a maze when you first get there.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I have one last question before I hand back to Barry. In all of this capacity building that you are going through, both through the advisory service and through the community directly, have you set up or are you setting up any relationship with the education authorities within the region in terms of coming in at the bottom end as well, given that you have already talked about—and I understand very clearly—the intergenerational issues of unemployment and therefore the difficulties that presents? The effort to turn that around involves much, including an education at the bottom age group level. Has that been any consideration and, if so, how successful have you been so far in attempting to set up those sorts of relationships? That is, given that you agree that that is a need—you may have a different view.

Mr T Abad—At the moment, because of the fact that in the CDEP program out at Purga a lot of the focus has been more on, say, school leavers and people of adult age, that sort of thing is probably going to come in at a later phase, particularly because at the moment we have really gone back to that core capacity building of the organisation, so some of that stuff is probably a couple of years away. Yes, we will probably be looking at starting some of those relationships through council. Mark certainly works with a lot of the local schools. We know a number of other people who work promoting Indigenous culture within the schools, so we will be looking at drawing in those kinds of links.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Do the Indigenous kids tend to gravitate to particular schools?

Mr King—No, they tend to be spread out.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Are they spread fairly evenly?

Mr King—Yes—more so in the cities than in the rural towns. We can get them through primary school, and then once they get to high school it starts falling apart. We are starting to look into early childhood. We have a creche and kindergarten centre there which is not running very well. The community has not supported it, and that is largely because of creche and kindergarten. But, yes, we are starting to look at drawing all of these together. We have all the strings, and we just need to pull them all together and start talking to the—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I know that different things apply in different areas. Where I come from, we do not face the difficulties that you do to the extent that you do. But it is just interesting to note that in my town—and I am from Canberra—there is a primary school that is now almost becoming the gravitational point for Indigenous culture. I bring it up because, even though the

primary kids will probably be okay—as you say, Mark—what we learned through the school in my area is that the adults were drawn in by becoming teaching elders within the school. There was a sympathetic enough school community that the parents and the families of those children now go in and talk bush tucker. It was another way of bringing around a bit of a cycle, of pulling in a different age group for an entirely different reason, but the advantages out of that have been quite huge from the adult population point of view. It is just interesting to note that there are different ways of skinning cats, and this was one very good way of doing it.

Mr King—Yes, and that is one of our projects. That is one of my pet projects that I would like to start pushing on.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—It works extremely well because Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids in this school are doing dancing and all sorts of stuff and learning from the parents of the Indigenous kids, who have had difficulties of their own.

Mr King—Yes. We and the schools have found it very hard to get parents involved whether they are black or white, but more so with the Indigenous population—they just will not front.

CHAIR—The 62-acre property at Purga was part of the Salvation Army mission. I presume there is really no link to that history. Is there a symbolic link or some sense of community through that history?

Mr King—With the Salvation Army?

CHAIR—Yes. What is the significance of the 62-acre property? The basis is enterprise, but is there some symbolic connection over those 100 years? It is there for a purpose. Can someone enlighten me?

Mr King—It was started by someone from one of the groups up there who is now deceased. She just decided that they wanted this property back. It was their home and they wanted it back. They managed to get 60 of the 300 acres. When the property came up for sale, they applied for it and received the money to purchase it.

CHAIR—That sums it up.

Mr D Abad—Yes, it does have significance, because that 62-acre property is obviously part of the larger mission.

CHAIR—That is all I was trying to establish. Page 3 of your submission states that PEDAC is looking to ‘meet the needs of non-Indigenous community members’. What do you mean by that?

Mr T Abad—That is something that Auntie Pat and I have talked about a lot. In an urban setting in particular you do have this separate Indigenous community, though they are integrated as well. I guess we just felt that we are all living in Australia, so the whole thing is not just to get a little secular Indigenous community functioning. For the Indigenous community to function well it needs to have good relationships with the non-Indigenous community. That is pretty much taken as given.

CHAIR—I agree with the principle and I think it is important. I just want to isolate any particular needs of non-Indigenous people.

Mr D Abad—One of the needs to be met by the non-Indigenous community is better communication and getting to know the Indigenous community. I think Purga's role in that could be crucial.

Mr King—A lot of non-Indigenous people are supportive, but they do not know how to get involved. The dawn ceremony was one of the processes in that. Ipswich has a huge multicultural population. The Salvation Army was stripping the culture, and that process was about putting culture back.

CHAIR—Your submission states:

PEDAC has a long-standing relationship with the Quakers Regional Meeting.

Regardless of the Quakers, there is a philanthropic issue here. It continues:

The Quakers have also set up a Shared Wages fund, whereby members contribute a monthly allowance to help PEDAC cover unplanned expenses.

Has that been going for some time?

Mr T Abad—Yes, that would have been set up about three or four years ago. It is something I have heard a fair bit about through Auntie Pat King.

CHAIR—That is relatively unusual. Some of the religious groups around Australia have support, and I can think of them in my own community. It has been a long association. My question is: how significant was this in covering those unplanned expenses?

Mr T Abad—It has been pretty small scale so far. It is not an Australia wide thing to support Purga. I guess it has been just a few people who are interested, with the Quakers' representative who has been working there. Yes, it is definitely a non-profit organisation, depending on a lot of people who live in poverty. Even though it is quite small it has been quite significant. In relation to what Mike was saying, a lot of non-Indigenous people often do not know how to get involved or what to do; we even look at that. It is very similar to how people sign up for Amnesty International and things like that. There is a big thing going on and you feel you cannot get involved in that. But, for the price of one coffee a week, you can contribute to the sustainability of an organisation like this. We are finding that people are saying, 'Once that's up and running, let me know.'

Mr D Abad—We have had some very positive reaction to this particular—I will not call it a scheme—project.

CHAIR—Centrelink, Centacare, the Area Consultative Council, the Salvation Army—you have many partners; that is quite encouraging in that you are getting community support.

Mr T Abad—Yes. Even though PEDAC obviously has a number of organisational limitations, the actual size of the network and the respect that it has in that network is quite considerable.

CHAIR—I have two more questions, which Annette touched on earlier. You are endeavouring to bring it together. You are endeavouring to bring some healing and to find the right path ahead, and this is a real challenge for Indigenous communities across Australia. This is at the heart of it, in my view, in much of the resolution, the progress and the future. If you were to isolate out one or two things—and Thomas, you are probably in the thick of it and Mark, as well, and Daniel, I am sure, over a long period of time—and if you could wave a magic wand, although there is no such thing, what are the main blockages to progress at the moment? I sense that you are really facing some pretty big challenges here and that you are battling to overcome them. Do I have it right? It is about bring community together.

Mr T Abad—That is right.

CHAIR—If you had two or three things, what would you isolate it down to? Do you see what I am trying to say? We are trying to be really polite here, but you have hit some brick walls, haven't you? You have really hit some tough things to overcome?

Mr T Abad—That is right.

CHAIR—What do you need to overcome?

Mr D Abad—What we need to overcome is the lack of cohesion within the Indigenous community itself. That is one challenge. The other challenge will be to get the non-Indigenous community to come together with the Indigenous community at a much closer level.

CHAIR—That was not quite my question.

Mr D Abad—I am sorry.

CHAIR—That is fine, but I am trying to get to the nub of this. What is blocking it at the moment? What is stopping it?

Mr King—It is the Indigenous community itself, at this point in time. With the circle of elders, the council of elders, we are starting to address that issue. The second part is that we are unsure of all the funding that is available, and we do not have the people in place yet to start searching and going through all that sort of stuff. Those are largely the two major issues.

CHAIR—Thomas, if you had one thing, what would it be? What could bring you to some stronger conclusions?

Mr T Abad—There is a deeper barrier, I guess, but obviously it is the difference between an oral culture and a culture based more on literacy. With a lot these issues we have heard about regarding Indigenous organisations, whether we are talking about constitutions or funding acquittals and all that, at the end of the day I see a lot of it coming back to the fact that—and it has to be worked around—this is the imposition of a white, literate culture on an old, traditional oral culture. There is still that—

CHAIR—We are back to the cultural tradition.

Mr T Abad—Yes.

CHAIR—The last question is: what would you hope today might bring to you? We, as a parliamentary committee, cannot resolve this. You can take the easy response and say: ‘It’s not our role. We abstain. It’s too hard.’ Simply, we do not want to mislead you—that is the first point. We are not able to operate at a local level. Our role is to make general recommendations to executive government, to parliament, whoever the government of the day might be. I am trying to get a picture from the three of you of what you would hope today might bring. You seem to be addressing the general national problem we have. You have got your own challenges within your own community, which we cannot really address. I am happy to personally, but you have got your own member and your own people that you will deal with. What are you hoping to achieve today?

Mr T Abad—One of the things I hope to achieve is getting the message across that the focus is employment. That is very much the way we came in. We were thinking we would do some training programs, get people employed. You can see all the links. So the message I want to get through is the need to step back and build those relationships. I think Mark has a very good way of putting it: it is very hard to undo a whole life of dysfunction by saying, ‘We can put you into this program and get you employed.’ It just does not happen in the short term.

CHAIR—Through the imposition of a literate society versus an oral society.

Mr T Abad—And a lot of bad history and even dysfunction within the community too that needs to be unlearned, but it is just having to. We came in thinking ‘We’re going to help solve unemployment’ in a very narrow sense, but it is like having to step back and look at the bigger picture.

CHAIR—There would be those who would say that the Aboriginal community will need to change too. That is emerging and cultural change is occurring within the Aboriginal community. I do not underestimate that, but there are those who would argue that. So thank you.

Mr D Abad—What I hope to achieve out of this activity today is to obviously make you aware of PEDAC, its situation—maybe not its problems and issues because they are nationwide—and try to create a relationship at federal level through this committee to be recognised as one group or one community in Australia that is actually trying to achieve and develop itself into a better situation.

CHAIR—Through the positive employment outcome.

Mr D Abad—Absolutely.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr King—My answer is also going to go back to your second last question, but it is also about funding. Funding is so disjointed. When you talk about employment, it is not separate from housing, it is not separate from education. It is not separate. When we are sent out to find

funding there is a bit from here, a bit from there and a bit from over here, and you have got to have all of these processes. We need all of those stakeholders to come together and say: 'Right. We can fund up to here and then we will take over after that and then this can cut in after that.' I am employed at this point until December, by which time they will have applied for more funding. I will switch over into another program and it will go for a year. We need more than just a year to address these issues.

CHAIR—That is a common complaint, a common criticism of government in this area. You might hypothesise that if an ICC was working effectively it could do at least one of three things. You could say: 'No way, Jose. I can't help you.' I think government has a responsibility sometimes to say that. The second one, which is a little more optimistic, is to say, 'These are the pathways and these are the things that you need to address to be able to have an opportunity to access funding in a coherent way,' which is what you said. The third one, even more optimistically, is to say: 'There's the funding. If you satisfy the criteria, it is available to you in three months time.' That is the sort of coherence that I think I hear you say.

Mr King—That is right.

CHAIR—Even in my own mind I think I have teased that out a bit. We need to start wrapping up. You might have a couple of concluding statements, but we have probably just about done that.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Is PEDAC the only organisation Hanson Advisory Services are connected to in this way?

Mr D Abad—No. As I said, PEDAC is the main Indigenous community with which we work but Hanson Advisory Services is involved with a number of Indigenous individuals and Hanson Training Services operate centres in the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—As a registered training—

Mr D Abad—Absolutely.

Mr T Abad—But they are reasonably independent in terms of a lot of their operations.

Mr D Abad—Yes, they are two separate companies.

CHAIR—And you are both employees of Hanson?

Mr T Abad—I tend to stand in two pairs of shoes. Daniel is my father, and he runs Hanson Advisory Services. I have been charged with the responsibility of PEDAC, and that falls within HAS. Whenever HTS is able to supply some training needed by Purga, I take care of that.

CHAIR—A transparent normal corporate or business structure.

Mr T Abad—Yes.

CHAIR—Are there any final comments?

Mr D Abad—All I need to say is: thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to come to the committee hearing. I hope we can achieve something. I give special thanks to Cheryl, who has been very helpful in the last few weeks in guiding me in the right direction.

CHAIR—Thank you.

[12.47 pm]

MEACLEM, Mr Ross, Managing Director, Bluefin Seafoods Pty Ltd

BURNS, Mr Darren John, Board Director, Quondomooko Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear today?

Mr Meaclem—My wife and I own Bluefin Seafoods and have developed a system for aquaculture of beche-de-mer.

Mr Burns—My council is based on north Stradbroke Island.

CHAIR—I invite either or both of you to make brief opening statements and perhaps add to your submission, if you would like to. Then we can have a discussion about this issue, which is quite interesting.

Mr Meaclem— Thank you for the opportunity. We have developed one of three sea cucumber hatcheries in the world. It is a highly prized Asian seafood. I have been in the business for 14 or 15 years and am the original business holder. I have been dealing in Chinese delicacies for many years. We have been concerned over recent years about rapidly diminishing resources. It is like that for all fisheries, but particularly so with the sea cucumber, because it is a coastal fishery. The sea cucumber lives in the mudflats and mangroves, so it is very easily accessible. I flew to the Maldives, just below India, where there was an Indian government financed training school. I recruited two of their doctors through the federal scheme and they have been with us for three years, very successfully.

As I said, we have one of three hatcheries in the world that are mass producing the sea cucumbers. We will produce about one million this year. We are doubling our capacity at the moment. We are in the growing business, producing baby ones, and we need to put them out in the sea into fattening areas. The whole idea was to do it with Aboriginal communities, because that is where the sea cucumbers are. They are along the coastline. They are not out on the sea, on the Great Barrier Reef; they are on the coastline. It is the most expensive of all species and, as an industry, it is very easy to monitor. The technical work is done in the hatchery so as an industry it is very easy for the communities to administer and extremely profitable. In just one year one boat will turn over nearly a million dollars.

I have just done a joint venture with the Vanuatu government. I have particularly done a lot of work with the Quondomooka people because they have a natural resource here on Stradbroke Island and, like all natural resources, there is a lot there but it could soon be fished out. Currently, there is one splinter group, the Nunukal people, that have a wild harvest permit. With Darren, we made numerous approaches to government locally to get access to a small area to do aquaculture and have a sustainable resource. There are oyster leases over there that are perfect growing areas, which the people with a wild harvest permit at the moment do not access. They

are all keen to do programs with us, but to no avail. We have tried every avenue. Everyone sympathises with us but at the end of the day I feel that it is quite unjust that the Quondomooka people cannot do aquaculture. In its present form nothing is sustainable. Unless you are putting something back into it you cannot keep harvesting indefinitely. Aquaculture is where the future is and we just want to be able to do this program with the Quondomooka people—

CHAIR—I may have missed it, but I have not heard about the blockage. I have not heard what is stopping you.

Mr Meaclem—Darren can probably give a better insight into that.

CHAIR—I hear all the benefits and I encourage that. I am from small business so I have great empathy, but I have not heard about the blockages. I think the key to this is the blockages and the opportunity not being taken up.

Mr Meaclem—Darren has probably got more first-hand information. At the end of the day they are applying for a permit, not me.

Mr Burns—I can best explain it this way. I was involved at the initial stages of getting the Nunukal Ngugi fishery up. On behalf of that corporation I wrote the letters and helped develop the fishery proposal for wild harvest transferring to aquaculture. Due to the way the community business operates—as Ross has said—people go off into a splinter group. The Nunukal Ngugi are a part of the whole of the Quondomooka. However, the Quondomooka has three clans—the Nunukal, Ngugi and the Goenpul. By their names you can see that they are not all-inclusive in the decision-making and, basically, to cut a long story short, they have become insulated and cocooned. So we have got a classic case of a splinter group that have insulated and cocooned themselves. They have got their licence and they are doing their own thing.

The rest of the community who can see a bigger potential there are not able to realise that with the aquaculture side of it because it is locked up in harvest fishery. We have gone to DPIF and the EPA to try to get the current grounds that Nunukal control and fish in. They have got three zones that basically go from the southern tip of Moreton Island to midway down the western side of Stradbroke Island. We want to utilise the same area because it is convenient. To go anywhere else is just too far for our boats to travel or too far for us to monitor. Because it is a developmental fishery, we are not allowed into those zones; EPA and Fisheries maintain that it will interfere with the statistics and the experiment that is going on there. That is one reason they will not let us in there.

The people on Nunukal Ngugi have cocooned themselves, as I have said. They do not want anyone interfering. Under the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act, they have annual general meetings. We have the unfortunate situation where those AGMs are controlled; people cannot get in there. We have got a native title claim going, so there are all these other things that come in. The Native Title Act says that if the applicant to that native title claim signs a piece of paper then that constitutes endorsement by the whole claim group. So we have got a lot of different government mechanisms which interfere with our ability to simply put an aquaculture fishery out there. It is just one thing after another.

CHAIR—Let us explore the basics—and these are probably in your letter, Ross—such as the environmental reasons. I have heard the experimental reasons and the other reasons given, but it may be about native title as well, which is even more of a complex issue I imagine. In your mind, there is no fundamental environmental or sustainability issue which should prevent this? That is the first question. It is environmentally friendly; it is not going to take over the place and do some damage.

Mr Meaclem—They are beneficial to seagrass areas—very popular.

CHAIR—So that is all okay. Now, we get down to this issue of what I presume are state based regulations.

Mr Burns—It is regulated by the Environmental and Protection Agency and the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Queensland. When the fishery was initiated, we all believed it would be a harvest fishery. Because a harvest fishery solely is not sustainable, particularly with beche-de-mer, we had planned that after enough money had been made from the harvest fishery there would be the ability to set up an aquaculture facility so that we would start growing some to replenish the stocks. CSIRO, as part of the permitting application, are engaged every year to resurvey the areas that have been fished. The reports back from CSIRO have been favourable. In fact, they have said that there is more sea cucumber out there now in this third year of harvesting than there was before there was any harvesting, so that is a quirky kind of thing that has come back.

CHAIR—So the sustainability is there.

Mr Meaclem—But they are on a quota; the quota is 40 tonnes.

Mr Burns—Yes. There was a feasibility study conducted on them that said you could get 100 tonnes a year. We came right inside of that and said to Nunukal Ngugi, ‘We’ll go right back to 45 tonnes a year.’ We eventually went right down to 25 tonnes a year to stay sustainable.

CHAIR—So the blockages are the permission to enlarge, to give you the greater area?

Mr Meaclem—To actually get an area where we can start aquaculture. It is very important with sandfish and the sea cucumber that you do not put them in a foreign area. You have to put them in an area that is conducive. Around Amity and Stradbroke, they are in a confined area, but Nunukal has wild harvest permits over whole areas. You just cannot put them in an area where there is no history, because if there is no history it is for a good reason—the tides are wrong.

CHAIR—Compared to Australian aquaculture such as tuna farming or oyster farming, this is different. This is putting them in areas where they are not.

Mr Meaclem—No, where they have a history.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Where they have a history of existing.

Mr Meaclem—Yes. And these wild harvest permits provide blanket cover right through the main areas.

CHAIR—But you cannot.

Mr Meaclem—They can do it.

CHAIR—You can do a quota on the wild, but you cannot do the aquaculture.

Mr Meaclem—No. All we are asking—

CHAIR—And that is what you are looking for.

Mr Meaclem—Yes. There are a lot of oyster farmers there. The people with the wild harvest permit cannot go on resourced farms, because they are obviously privately owned leases. We are saying that they all want us to replace sea cucumber on their leases, but we cannot even do that. The argument was, ‘Some of your baby ones will spill over into the wild and it is going to muck up all our scientific data,’ which is a lot of rubbish. They do not move; they stay where they are placed.

CHAIR—CSIRO are relaxed about this. They are satisfied with their analysis, I understand.

Mr Burns—In their third-year analysis of the stocks out there, they said there were more there than when it was started.

Mr Meaclem—They estimate a total of 1,000 tonnes in Moreton Bay. I have put 900,000 in Hervey Bay, for argument’s sake, and they do not move; they stay in the seagrass areas and they filter sand all day. They are very beneficial to the flats. We simply want to make a business.

CHAIR—What we are talking about is an impediment to a positive outcome.

Mr Meaclem—We simply want an area to start—a couple of areas near the main town, which is just out in front. We are not talking big areas. Those oyster flats, for argument’s sake, are probably 30 hectares.

CHAIR—Is that right?

Mr Meaclem—In Hervey Bay, under Queensland fisheries because there is no Aboriginal impediment, I have two areas totalling nearly 90 hectares and I am just getting a third one which is nearly another 100 hectares.

CHAIR—Let me understand this 30 hectares. Are there some wild ones or no wild ones?

Mr Meaclem—Some. That is why we put them there.

CHAIR—So you just place them in the sustainable area and they feed enough to do the job, and you want to then bring them up and turn them into a productive asset.

Mr Meaclem—Yes. There are two areas. There is quite a group of oyster leases straight out in front of Dunwich, and they have sea cucumbers all through there. They are a natural place. They

already hold aquaculture leases. So we are arguing that all they have to do is to ask fisheries to put another species on their permitted list.

CHAIR—Could you sum up for me? You have said it but there are two things. There is the native title which is probably—

Mr Burns—It is government and traditional—

CHAIR—EPA and Queensland primary industry have the final nod on this stuff. Do they have advisory committees or just a bureaucratic structure?

Mr Burns—They have a scientific advisory committee.

CHAIR—No doubt you have been to the minister and done all that. The minister is accepting departmental advice.

Mr Meaclem—We had a meeting with the state over this at the fisheries building in Ann Street. The outcome of it was that fisheries were quite happy with it. It was—

CHAIR—EPA.

Mr Burns—It was the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

Mr Meaclem—They were the problem.

CHAIR—We have them where I come from too.

Mr Burns—What I heard was that it would interfere with the developmental fishery. As it is, someone might get a PhD or something out of it. They have the fisheries happening in the three zones. They call it mariculture, restocking or ranching. They said, ‘If you come in with your stock, it is going to interfere with all their numbers and the stuff they are doing.’

CHAIR—So you have been through your normal representative processes, your state politicians and all of that.

Mr Burns—We have done all of that.

CHAIR—The purpose of today is to say that you have some great opportunities for employment and some very good economic outcomes and they are being blocked, essentially. That is what we are hearing. Is the native title issue particularly significant or do you think it is not as significant?

Mr Burns—I think community politics and decision making is confounded by the Native Title Act. The Native Title Act basically empowers one man: the applicant. If the applicant for the native title claim signs in favour of the splinter group, then the government will say on the face of it that the whole community is behind the splinter group. That is not the truth. The applicant is one man. That is one whole slice of the problem. You could box it up and put it over there by itself. That is just one thing.

CHAIR—That is something we could reasonably have a look at and ask questions about. But the other matters are very difficult for us. Whilst we can raise them and point out that they are obvious impediments to employment, they are a matter within the state jurisdiction. I am sure you would understand that. There is nothing the Commonwealth could do to overrule that that I know of. Annette, I think this would clearly be a state jurisdictional issue.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I think so.

CHAIR—CSIRO might have some weight within the bureaucracy, but the democratic process is really clear about jurisdictional issues. All we can do is point to the fact that there are some opportunities that are not being maximised. If we were to take it further, we would rely on the science to advise us about where to go with that.

Mr Meaclem—There is a permit from Parks and Wildlife—which has been the main hindrance to the Quondomooka getting into aquaculture—granting us or my scientists permission to take sandfish for research purposes. We went down there and took 20 or 30 spawners and we produced about 100,000 juveniles. We were not allowed to put them back. We had to kill them. This is how ironic it is. On one hand we get a permit to allow us to go and do the research and we produce them. It is a mockery.

They have only just opened this fishery up. They have only been going about two or three years. A thousand tonnes sounds a lot but we can do a tonne a day on the reef, no problem at all. Sooner or later there will be a point in time when the resources are fished out. It is such a confined area. The Nunukal have this quota. We are saying that we will simply replace what we take—and, as well, that is where the income comes from.

CHAIR—I hear the frustration and I note that. I may have missed something here this morning or this afternoon, so I will ask the secretary what her understanding of this is. She has had a little more to do with it than I have.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I am going to be totally and absolutely ignorant because I need to clarify the language. You talk about sea cucumbers and you talk about sandfish. Are they the same thing?

Mr Meaclem—It is a species of sea cucumber.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Are you harvesting sandfish or sea cucumber?

Mr Meaclem—Sandfish.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Sandfish, which is a sea cucumber.

Mr Meaclem—Yes, and it is the most expensive of all the species.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So when you talk about the fishery that has been set up already there by this other group—

Mr Meaclem—Wild Harvest fishery.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Because you are using that terminology, I originally thought you were telling us that they were—pardon my ignorance—catching fish. But they are harvesting the same animal.

Mr Meaclem—That is correct, yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I just want to get the terminology straight in my head. You are dealing with someone here who knows nothing about what you are speaking of. Bear with me while I go through this. Group A comes along. You were involved with them at the time, you said.

Mr Burns—I was involved with them but—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—That is okay. Then this big thing on the map was given the rights to set up a fishery—Wild Harvest fishery. That means taking what is naturally there.

Mr Meaclem—That is correct.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—And there is a quota attached to it.

Mr Meaclem—Yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Within that area you want to carry out aqua harvest. We are talking about timber and plantation timber; we are talking about fish and ‘plantation’ fish.

CHAIR—Aquaculture.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Exactly. What you want to do is grow the babies, bring them along, put them into the natural environment and grow them, over and above whatever we are talking about in relation to quotas.

Mr Meaclem—That is right.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—This other group is saying, ‘You can’t do that, because we’ve got the lease.’

Mr Meaclem—That is correct.

Mr Burns—And the government agencies are supporting that.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—How long have they got the lease for?

Mr Burns—It has to be reviewed after the third year, at the end of this year of fishing. It has to be summed up.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What does that mean?

Mr Burns—They have to sum up. They say, ‘What’s been the net worth of this fishery in terms of money, employment—’

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—How many people are they employing?

Mr Burns—They are now employing 30 people.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—How many does your proposal have as the target employment?

Mr Meaclem—It is only as many as we are putting back in.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—This is important, Ross. If you got tomorrow what you want, how many people would you be employing out of Darren’s community?

Mr Meaclem—Around 40 or 45 because we would do the whole process.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So it is fairly comparative.

Mr Meaclem—They cannot keep their volume up.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Because it is wild harvesting and it is quota driven.

Mr Meaclem—It was a good spawn this year, but that will catch up to it; sooner or later you have bad years where you get bad spawn.

Mr Burns—It is a boom-or-bust kind of fishery. The critical point that I need to put across is that the vision we had when we started off Nunukal Ngugi’s fishery was this.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What you are now proposing?

Mr Burns—Yes. That was the whole vision.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What made them go off and say, ‘No, we don’t want to do that’?

Mr Burns—Quick, short-term gain. They were thinking, ‘Why bother going for the full picture—the full vision? We can just harvest and we make maximum profit.’ Also, one of the permit conditions was a 17½-centimetre fish—a sea slug—because that was a nice robust fish; anything smaller may have been still a juvenile. Fisheries and Marine Parks could not compliance a 17-centimetre slug, but you can get a 15-centimetre slug and stretch it out to 17 centimetres. They said, ‘That is a non-compliance mechanism,’ so they took that out of there. Now they can take slugs down to a nominal size.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—But their lease is due for review at the end of this year.

Mr Burns—Yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—If I can ask again from ignorance: environmentally, do you do this elsewhere?

Mr Meaclem—I have nearly 100 hectares which the government supplied.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—In other parts of Queensland waters.

Mr Meaclem—Yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—So there is no environmental impediment to what you are wanting to do?

Mr Meaclem—No, none at all.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I think I now understand; I needed to ask those basic questions.

CHAIR—You picked up the point on the three years. I heard the three years, but I did not quite get the part about it being reconsidered at the end of three years.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—What is really important is the employment projection.

CHAIR—It is really important that there is a possibility that you might get an entree after the third year, if I have got you right, Darren.

Mr Burns—We are not sure, because they have coined it an ‘environmental fishery’.

CHAIR—They are certainly not doing it for three years, but they leave it slightly open after three years: is that right?

Mr Meaclem—We hope so.

Mr Burns—We do not know what is going to happen; we know after three years—

CHAIR—That is what I understood from the answers given to Annette.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—From the land rights side of things, it is your land—for want of a better term—

Mr Burns—Nunukal Ngugi is all our land.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—upon which you want to conduct this business, hence the partnership.

Mr Meaclem—We need places to put our baby ones and, at the end of the day, they have the areas.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—And you want to get into business with this and do it.

Mr Burns—They are employing 30 people but they are getting \$10 a kilo for their product. From its start, it has been on a sliding scale—they had \$10 a kilo, \$9 a kilo, \$8 a kilo—

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Is that for the fresh product?

Mr Burns—It is the harvest product. The way we are talking about doing it through Ross—Ross could probably better tell you—could be getting us \$150 a kilo.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Because it is a dried process.

CHAIR—The purpose of this is to show us what?

Mr Meaclem—To show you the general concept of the hatchery.

CHAIR—Are you talking a hatchery here?

Mr Meaclem—Yes, that whole area is our hatchery. We lease that off the government out the front.

CHAIR—This here?

Mr Meaclem—That is all ours, yes. That is only to control our water quality; there is no product in there. We were also funded federally to set this up.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Through whom?

Mr Meaclem—Warren Truss.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Yes, but through what funding program?

Mr Meaclem—The Farm Innovation Program. Here we are mass-producing—we did nearly 800,000 crabs last year—and we had to literally tip them into those three ponds. We are not allowed to put them in the sea.

CHAIR—I have two remaining questions. What was your hope today? I think I saw what it was in the last paragraph but, for the purpose of *Hansard*, can you specify what you hope you might have been able to do with us?

Mr Meaclem—I just want the Quondmooka people, because it is right at my back door, to be allocated two areas of land. The least resistance, I think you would find, is from people that have existing oyster leases. From what I understand, the other tribe cannot go on those oyster leases. All the oyster owners want to do a deal with us and let us have access to seeding underneath their oyster leases, because underneath the oyster baskets is very rich in nutrients; you get the shell dropping off and all that mud is full of nutrients. We can stock up to 5,000 per hectare in good areas.

CHAIR—In the review process and the various options you have discussed with us, are others able to be part of the process? Are others able to participate in the industry?

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Is there a re-leasing process?

CHAIR—Do you need a long-term term lease?

Mr Meaclem— Quondomooka has the permit and, out of our profits, the joint venture pays the oyster farmers maybe \$1 a kilogram as a royalty. Oyster farmers are not making money; it is a hard industry. You need a secondary income. It is a real plus to them. That is the way I see it. The divers have access to the oysters. There is no problem there with the oyster farmers at all.

CHAIR—Let me ask that another way. There is a review process—the various options you talked about—for others to enter the industry. Is that an open process? Could anyone come through?

Mr Burns—I think that was part of the arrangement. After three years there is the ability for other applicants to apply to do wild harvest fishery in Moreton Bay also.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—We are talking aquaculture, not wild harvest.

Mr Burns—I think it was only specified for wild harvest.

Mr Meaclem—When they drew up these wild harvest permits aquaculture was unheard of as far as sea cucumber goes. That is the problem. No sort of backup was safeguarded.

CHAIR—I will ask it again. I need to understand what you expect from the committee because I do not think this committee can meet your expectations. I want to be clear that we understand your expectations of this committee. I need to be totally honest with you about the capacity of the committee. If we suddenly saw that there were 10, 100 or 1,000 jobs being restricted by bureaucratic mismanagement, pigheadedness, someone in aquaculture way behind the times or even native title then it gives us a hook to hang on. I want to be very clear about what you expect of us.

Mr Meaclem—Obviously, we want to get Quondomooka going. I am repeating it but we are so close and we just do not seem to be able to get—

CHAIR—It would be wrong of me it mislead you into thinking that this committee on behalf of parliament can move you to where you want to be. It is wrong. You have canvassed an issue and I hear that. But there are jurisdictional issues here that we do not have authority over, and even if we did there is still a fair debate to be had.

Mr Meaclem—I was invited by the community up to Groote Eylandt. I flew up there just before Christmas. They are desperate. It is the same recurring problem right around the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

CHAIR— I will ask my federal colleagues—I obviously know them well—about the issue to see whether there is something I have overlooked today. Annette might be able to do similar with

her people. I will undertake to talk to my colleagues and ask whether there is something I have overlooked today which may be able to advance the cause. I do not want you going away with an expectation about what we can do.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—We cannot tell the state authorities what to do.

Mr Meaclem—Quondomooka are going to use it as a model.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—We fully understand that.

Mr Meaclem—It is right at our backdoor.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—It is just whether we have the power to help you do that. That is the problem.

CHAIR—This is what we can do: we can say that there are opportunities here but the regulations are impeding them. That is all we can do. We do not have the authority.

Mr Burns—I have a point regarding CSIRO's role. They come in and monitor every year as per the permit conditions. We have asked them, aside from the oyster leases, to excise areas from the whole fisheries area to put some of the deeper holes that are out there in the harvest area to use as restocking areas. The argument that to restock would interfere with the numbers that are being evolved out there is debatable and CSIRO would join that debate. I think it is a fisheries, parks and wildlife argument and, as Ross said, fisheries backed away from it. They said they had no real objection to us doing it and it swung back to parks and they said they objected. I do not know that parks are doing any numbers on it.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Our problem is that they are two state authorities.

CHAIR—What does your state member say about this?

Mr Burns—The thing is that Nunukal Ngugi are a success story, in that for the wild harvest there they are getting training awards, employment awards, they have a lot of support down that way. We are not knocking them but we just think the vision, as it was, was so much bigger.

CHAIR—That was not the question. What does your state member of parliament say about these matters? What is the state member's view? Does he have a public view that you know of?

Mr Meaclem—I have not worked through ours because ours obviously relates to the Hervey Bay area.

CHAIR—Mr Burns, do you know?

Mr Burns—No. I know that Andrew Laming, the fellow down there—

CHAIR—Andrew is a federal man.

Mr Burns—Yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Who is Andrew Laming? Is he a federal member?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Burns—And Darryl Briskey.

CHAIR—No, I do not know Darryl. Can I encourage you at least to advise your state member of your troubles. They owe that much to you. You can request a clear position from the minister and from the member and at least get that down in front of you so that then that gives you something to work from and applies your point of view so it can be given consideration with everything else. But that is a little bit of gratuitous advice which I should apologise for. Gentlemen, is there anything else you wish to say just to finalise?

Mr Meaclem—It is frustrating because we have been in the business many years and we know it creates huge job opportunities. We want to build a hostel up next to our sporting facility where the young guys come up and stay for two or three weeks or months. It has to be a complete picture. You just cannot have it fattening. I built it with the idea of getting involved with the communities and I find it ironic that this year we will probably put half a million dollars into the Pacific islands and I am not even helping the people at my own backdoor. It just does not make a lot of sense. I got the money to start restocking the community and I cannot do it. That is the bottom line. I want to do the Quondomooka thing because it would be a model for all the other communities.

Mr Burns—I suppose our biggest problem is our own decision-making process in the community. We argue that this fishery should be controlled by the community but, because of the way legislation and constitutions are set up, if you stack a meeting and you get all your people in there then you have all the say.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—You have to talk to your state member.

Mr Burns—That is right.

CHAIR—One thing in there that I think is quite important, and it is a national issue, is this issue about impeding economic progress based on one issue. Quite often in the Northern Territory the traditional owner can tend to overrule the whole economic benefit. I think there is a really serious issue. Ross is frustrated, you are frustrated. It is a really serious impediment to economic development. I think that is one that is a federal matter. The other one is very much tied up with the state.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—But there is a federal message there.

CHAIR—Gentlemen, I feel your frustration but I want to be totally honest about how much we can help you here today. But I will undertake to talk to my federal colleagues about it at a private level.

Mr Meaclem—Bearing in mind that the decision review is coming up in a few months time—actually it is in about 12 months time, isn't it?

Mr Burns—August.

Mr Meaclem—We feel the timing is right, even if it is only on a trial basis.

CHAIR—Please talk to your state members. At least get it before them and get an opinion, if you can. You have come a fair way today.

Mr Meaclem—Not that far: three hours is all.

CHAIR—That is still a fair drive and we appreciate the trouble you have taken.

Mr Meaclem—All the ministers are up there at the opening of the Hervey Bay airport.

CHAIR—It's a big day.

Mr Meaclem—Warren Truss and all them are up there. The first jet is flying. One jet a day from Virgin and Jetstar. You can imagine for a little town of 40,000 people that will have a huge impact.

CHAIR—Big day.

Mr Meaclem—It will have a huge ripple effect. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Thank you, both Ross and Darren.

Mr Meaclem—Sheryl, thanks very much for the correspondence. I have got all your letters. We did not quite know what to expect. We just feel we have exhausted all our avenues. It is frustrating.

CHAIR—To have some bloke today tell you he probably cannot help you is not helping you.

Mr Meaclem—We are keen to get it rolling.

CHAIR—But just keep water on the stone.

Mr Meaclem—Okay, but if you can do something at your end, it would be much appreciated.

CHAIR—Okay.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Annette Ellis**):

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

Subcommittee adjourned at 1.25 pm

