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Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Indigenous employment

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Monday, 12 September 2005

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

Members in attendance: Ms Annette Ellis, Mr Garrett, Dr Lawrence, Mr Slipper, Mr Snowdon, Mrs Vale and Mr Wakelin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

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

WITNESSES

Committee met at 3.38 pm

SULLIVAN, Dr Patrick, Visiting Research Fellow, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

CHAIR (Mr Wakelin)—Welcome. I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into Indigenous employment. As you would know, these committee hearings are seen as part of the parliament and we ask that they be accorded that regard. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Dr Sullivan—I am a visiting research fellow and sometime acting director of research at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. It is in that capacity that I address you today.

CHAIR—Would you like to make a short opening statement?

Dr Sullivan—I would, and I will keep it brief. Thank you very much for inviting me along here today on behalf of AIATSIS. I have to make it clear that, in matters of opinion or judgment, I do not speak for the governing council of AIATSIS. But I will do my best to answer any questions that you have on the basis of my own knowledge and expertise. I can tell you something about our work at AIATSIS, and I would like to spend a couple of minutes speaking to our submission.

We promote Indigenous employment in two ways at AIATSIS: through our own research and through our grants program where we encourage other research, outside research. For our own research, we have at the moment 11 visiting research fellows. Several of those have research interests that impinge on this area through education, natural resource management or, more particularly, my own area, which is Indigenous governance. Indigenous governance is an area that we are increasingly concentrating on. We see good governance in Indigenous communities and organisations as being an essential prerequisite for employment opportunities in the future.

One of the things we have done in that regard is to carry out a research project which has been externally funded by a group of community organisations called the Australian Collaboration. We have completed stage 1 of the project, which was a pilot study. We are just starting on stage 2, which will look at up to 10 Indigenous communities or organisations that are known for being successful and for having good governance arrangements. That is the kind of research that we conduct internally. I would be happy to answer any questions on that.

The second way that we promote Indigenous employment and our main concern as far as employment goes—bearing in mind that we are a research institute and that, under our act, we are required to train Indigenous people in research skills—is those people who will be employed in a research capacity of one sort or another. We do that through our grants program. We have about $700,000 a year to spend on grants and we have raised Indigenous involvement. Currently, about 60 per cent of the grants that we issue are either Indigenous researchers or collaborative researchers with non-Indigenous people. In those cases, we look at encouraging skills transfer to the Indigenous researchers and we mentor the grantees ourselves through our research fellows.

I will finish by saying that we do not really think that that is enough. We are looking to increase our ability to further train Indigenous researchers. We currently have a submission before DEST to be able to train Indigenous people in general, and some of them in a research capacity, to be able to engage with the new structural arrangements in Indigenous affairs. In a nutshell, that is what we do. I would be happy to answer any of your questions on that.

CHAIR—You may be able to assist the committee, or at least me, in defining how we might think about success from an Indigenous perspective. Do you have a view on an encapsulation of this magical thing called success, which probably means a lot of different things to a lot of different people?

Dr Sullivan—Yes, I have a view, and I think it is an increasing view, that, for all the differences in Indigenous experiences, their views of success are fundamentally the same as anybody else's. They want efficient organisations that deliver the services that they set out to deliver; they want them to do it in a fair and balanced manner, and they want their processes to be transparent. They want the outcomes that the rest of us expect: safe communities, things that, as we all know, are sorely lacking in many parts of Australia. So it is not that difficult, I think, to determine what is successful on that basis.

Where it does vary is that, of course, they then need to be specifically Indigenous. That is another requirement that Indigenous people are continually asking for—they want their own organisations that are responsive to their own processes and their own social relationships. There can often be a conflict there, and it may just not be achievable but, where it is achievable, that is an added factor that we need to take into account.

CHAIR—Our inquiry, of course, is about positive examples of successful employment outcomes, and I have been pleasantly surprised by what I have found around Australia. We can easily describe those that have not been as successful, but certainly we have focused the other way. You mention successful organisations in your presentation. If you were to describe two or three vital parts of that success, what would they be, and do you have an example of an outcome where you have observed that?

Dr Sullivan—I wish I had more examples.

CHAIR—Yes, we all do.

Dr Sullivan—One that springs to mind is an organisation in which I have not personally been involved but which I have known well over the years, and that is Goolarri Media Enterprises in Broome, north-west Australia. In my experience, dealing with it pretty much as an outsider, it is a highly Aboriginalised organisation; it has a lot of local people working there; they seem to work very well together; they are skilled, and they tend to transfer their skills, so they can take people from quite outlying communities—for example, One Arm Point—and train them up as cameramen and so on. It is sufficiently managed; it produces a good service.

I suppose, getting to the heart of your question, one of the things that strikes me about that organisation, and others that quietly go on being successful, is that they are not involved in contentious areas; they tend not to be involved in highly politically sensitive areas, or matters of

land, for instance, or legislation. That is where you often get an atmosphere that is not really conducive to fine management and well thought out programs and policies and so on.

CHAIR—So it is relatively community friendly, and it is not hard to get people together and get outcomes, because people agree it is a good thing. I suppose we could say that about mining and tourism and those things. But we have talked about, or some of us have talked about, whether there are traits which are uniquely Aboriginal or Indigenous, such that those particular traits would match up with an aspect of the employment market—for example, retail versus the mining industry. I have not got an answer, but we have asked the question whether there is a tendency in Indigenous people which may match up better with a particular area of the employment market. I suspect that you have suggested a little bit of that there in that example.

Dr Sullivan—Yes, there are, but it is going to vary from one Indigenous situation to another. Another area that I am familiar with, for instance, is the Warmun community at Turkey Creek, which is in the mid-central Kimberleys. They have had a mine on their doorstep for nearly 30 years. Recently, I believe, the employment of the local people there has improved dramatically because of a change in policy by the owners of the mine but, in the past, it was difficult for the local people to engage with the processes of the mine.

That is an area where there does need to be an adaptation towards the particular way of life of those people who are on the doorstep of the mine. They are a tradition oriented community with a pastoral station background, although the younger people have grown up without any employment at all apart from CDEP.

The kinds of things that have worked there are where, for instance, the mine has taken on contract teams. The actual composition of the team does not matter as long as it does what it is supposed to do. That is either environmental rehabilitation, planting of new trees, or fencing—something like that. There is a contract, it has a defined outcome, there is some money attached to it, and it is up to the person who has the contract to put together the necessary plant and personnel to do that. That area is left in the Aboriginal domain, and that then is quite adaptable to their own processes. People drop in and out as the other requirements on their time dictate. So there is room in some areas for processes that are adaptable to Aboriginal culture.

Dr LAWRENCE—Thanks very much for the document. I am sure we cannot do justice to it, especially those two very substantial case studies that you have there.

Dr Sullivan—I beg your pardon. I do tend to get into detail.

Dr LAWRENCE—No, it is not a criticism; it is very useful to have the material set out so systematically. I just want to step back very briefly, though. You mentioned earlier the success question, and the definition is really pretty similar, no matter whom you are talking to in the community. You also mentioned the desire by Indigenous people particularly to own the services—to have a key role in the services—that are delivered in their communities. Is that something you would generalise about? Is it something you think is just typical of communities that are largely Indigenous, as big sections of the Kimberley are, or do you think it is a view that would prevail in, say, urban Australia as well, where the communities tend to be more scattered?

Dr Sullivan—I think it is a view that prevails everywhere, but I would not say that the ways of meeting employment needs are the same everywhere. They really are going to vary, partly of course because the circumstances are different if it is a large city but also because the people are different. They have adapted differently. They have had different historical experiences. Some of them may be already more closely engaged with employment and with markets in general. I think the conditions in the remote areas are quite distinct and need distinct solutions.

Dr LAWRENCE—One of the things that strikes me, depending on where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live, is that in some places the only workplace where they can gain employment is one where they might be the one Indigenous person, or one of two Indigenous persons at the most, in that employment, as opposed to other organisations. You have mentioned the contractual arrangements that apply in some mines, where they could be well and truly the majority. It strikes me that a lot of Indigenous people everywhere, but particularly in employment, often find themselves in a minority. Is that in itself something that we should be mindful of in talking about positive steps? You mentioned mentoring that might be taken to improve Indigenous employment.

Dr Sullivan—Yes, certainly. In my experience, even working in Aboriginal organisations where there has been, for one reason or another, a high complement of non-Indigenous staff, but also working in mainstream, non-Indigenous organisations where there have been Indigenous people—for instance, universities and research institutes—it is an issue that Indigenous people, no matter what their background, I think, tend to feel ill at ease. If we want to retain them, that really needs to be taken into account.

Dr LAWRENCE—I appreciate that. In both the case studies, it is very clear too that, as well as strong leadership and clear organisational structures, both are very precise in their focus on skills training, human resources development. They seem to put a lot of effort into making sure that all the members of their staff are constantly involved in that upgrading of skills and, in a sense, taking them to the limit and then a bit further. That is not always the case, I know, in Indigenous organisations. Do you want to comment on that?

Dr Sullivan—That is true. I am speaking personally now, from my own experience and impressions. The staff of non-Indigenous organisations who have no other experience except those Indigenous staff as they come in through the door often do not appreciate the need to adapt themselves, without making compromises in efficiency and so on, and adapt their behaviour to people who have a very different background—different family circumstances, different social circumstances and even a different sense of their own history and their relationship to other people. Probably in many places there is a tendency to say, 'Well, they're here now. They've got the job and they've got to be the same as everybody else. What's wrong with them? They should just get on with it.'

Dr LAWRENCE—Fit in.

Dr Sullivan—I think there is that tendency, and it is unfortunate because it is an unusual Indigenous person who manages to weather that.

Dr LAWRENCE—Are you aware of any organisations—not just Indigenous specific ones—that go to some trouble to educate the non-Indigenous staff about some of those things you have

talked about, like differences in expectations, family and cultural background, experience, as you say, and understanding? The whitefellas here have a very different view of the world to the people who were here and who were usurped by our coming, but I think a lot of people do not even get to that stage in their understanding.

Dr Sullivan—That is true. I am not aware of organisations that have put in place effective processes. I have known many that have talked about it and said, 'This is what we need.'

Dr LAWRENCE—Some mining companies.

Dr Sullivan—Wherever these issues are raised in the workplace, they can produce quite a lot of insecurity on the part of the non-Indigenous staff, who feel that they are being challenged and ask, 'Are you saying that, fundamentally, I'm a racist or that I don't understand normal human behaviour?' To convince non-Indigenous staff that perhaps there are things they could learn and that it is not a criticism of them is hard, I think.

Dr LAWRENCE—Thank you. I am sorry that Warren had to go. If I had been quicker, he could have asked a question.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Thanks for coming in and spending time with us this afternoon. Before I ask my other question, I want to reflect on what you said in relation to the community in Broome and your observations there and come back to what Carmen was just saying about leadership. My observation is over a few years. When we were involved in another sort of inquiry, Broome was one of those Indigenous communities that were really showing leadership in their own right. We were looking at health issues at the time, and the local Indigenous leadership and the community in Broome had got to the point where they were actually creating their own training programs for Aboriginal health workers. They were creating their own CD-ROMs to distribute that knowledge further within the community at the time. Where that nut has already been cracked, does that mean it is easier for that community to move forward progressively? Other communities may have different experiences and not have that background, but for some reason in Broome there had already been advances in the sort of area under discussion some years ago. I am curious as to how that might make it easier—or not—for the people coming in after that sort of experience.

Dr Sullivan—Yes, I think it is does. It is hard to draw lessons from Broome because it is a unique historical experience. I might say, before expanding on that a bit, that I think Broome is a community under intense pressure because there has been a massive and recent influx of non-Indigenous people, and it may well be that all of those positive advances are actually in danger because of the demographic imbalance in Broome. But they are positive advances. There are many factors involved but I would put it down to the many years that Broome spent as a relatively isolated township in which Aboriginal people felt that they had a very strong place in the community. They felt that their voice was heard. Some of them occupied really quite senior and influential positions in the community at a time when that was not general throughout the country.

I think that has influenced their ability to adapt to the era of self-determination, as it was called, to take the best of it and to move on from that. As I say, it is hard to draw lessons from Broome and take those elsewhere, particularly to the more impoverished areas. You must be

aware that my background is in Western Australia, so I would think that in impoverished areas like Leonora and Halls Creek it is harder to replicate the Broome experience.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Yes, it is hard to replicate it, but the question for me is: are there no lessons at all there that we can take elsewhere? Is there anything at all—not to replicate Broome but some of the things we have learnt through that experience—that could help us?

Dr Sullivan—Yes. It is the first thing that comes to mind, but I am not sure that it is an answer that you are going to want, and that is that Broome is relatively well resourced. I remember working in Halls Creek 20 years ago for the local Aboriginal community there and being intensely jealous of the people that were working in Broome, because they had all resources and that is where all the resources went. It also tended to attract larger groups of effective non-Indigenous people to work side-by-side with the Indigenous people and so on. So one of the lessons—and I am sure it is not the only one—is that where there is adequate infrastructure you can get better results. That should be fairly straightforward, but there is a tendency in Indigenous affairs today to say, 'No, that is really irrelevant.'

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—'Money doesn't matter.'

Dr Sullivan—Yes, 'Money doesn't matter.'

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Exactly.

Dr Sullivan—Of course, it does not do everything, but it does a lot.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—If it does something as basic as set up certain basic infrastructure, that in itself—

Dr Sullivan—There is something to build on, yes.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I do not think that is an answer that we wouldn't want at all. I think it helps to explain how you can in fact take messages from one place to another. The other question I want to ask is in relation to the submission. It is dated May but it refers to discussions with DEST about an increase to the training role. Do you have any advice as to whether that has progressed to any degree and whether there are any other funding opportunities available through the whole-of-government approach?

Dr Sullivan—No, it has not. It is still in the balance. We do not know—we have had no further word on this submission. We are interested in investigating aspects of the current whole-of-government approach in general, and this approach through DEST is only one of them. I am investigating with OIPC whether I can do some very close research work with them about how their processes are developing and I recently gave a seminar on the topic at AIATSIS. That work is primarily supported by AIATSIS and through my position but it is also getting some support from the Desert Knowledge CRC and as a collaborative effort with the Indigenous Community Governance Project at CAEPR at ANU. So we are pursuing other angles but not in terms of funding bids at the moment. It is definitely an area of great interest to us. I may say, just to expand a little bit, that this is the most significant change in Indigenous affairs administration since the late seventies and there are many potentially very positive aspects to it. Yes, we are

interested. We want to provide assistance, but we also want to get some knowledge of how it is working out, where the difficulties may be, and what may be done about them.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—Thank you.

CHAIR—I want to support what you are saying. I sense some great opportunities, but many of us are a little uncertain. We sense the opportunities. You might note Warren Mundine's quite challenging comments on the weekend and some of the things he was saying.

Dr Sullivan—I missed those, I am afraid.

Mrs VALE—In referring to some of the new initiatives, one of the key elements of the federal government's new Indigenous policy is to listen to local people, consult, hear their concerns and get their input. Has your organisation had an opportunity to have any input? Are you aware of organisations like yours that have been invited to have input? Can you recommend how it could perhaps be done better? I know that this is one of the new initiatives and it might be a little bit early for you to tell that, but I would be interested in your response.

Dr Sullivan—We have not been invited. I myself have made an offer to OIPC and I have had quite extensive discussions with them as to providing the services of AIATSIS in this area. Those have not yet come to any final conclusion. It may be that they say, 'No, we don't want any help from you.' I hope not.

Mrs VALE—So it is still in the pipeline.

Dr Sullivan—It is in the balance, yes. There are two aspects that you mentioned of Indigenous input. There are the shared responsibility agreements and the regional partnership agreements. Each of those is more complex than it seems to be on the surface if shared responsibility agreements are to be anything more than the old grant system where people said, 'We need a grant for a truck and then we will pick up the rubbish in the community. We can't pick up the rubbish if we don't have a truck.' That is the way the old Department of Aboriginal Affairs operated in the late seventies. In a sense, shared responsibility agreements could just fall down into that same system.

If they do properly engage with whole of government policy, they will need to bring in the state governments and a range of other departments. As the Secretaries Group has said, they want to go to more complex shared responsibility agreements in which a whole range of services are offered across the community and in return the community works out a plan which is a bit more than, say, washing the children's faces or whatever they have agreed to do.

Mrs VALE—They would need to have better liaison with many government departments if they were going to do that.

Dr Sullivan—Indeed. Then you get into a very complex situation on both sides. The coordination across government departments obviously needs to improve, as I think everybody has recognised with this new approach. But there also needs to be coordination at the community level. It is not a straightforward matter to go into an Aboriginal community and ask, 'What do you need here and then what are you going to do?' Who are you talking to? What are the

dynamics of the community? How are they related to other community and regional structures? Who speaks for the community? What are the impediments? No matter what they say, what is standing in the way of their being able to deliver? Those are very complex things.

I am not convinced that the Indigenous Coordination Centres themselves have the skills to address either side of that equation. They are supposed to be coordinating government services. On the other hand, they are supposed to be negotiating these complex shared responsibility agreements. Initially, my feeling is that they do not have the skills and resources to carry out that important job. I can go on. I realise this is quite an extended answer, but it does lead into the second part of your question, which is on the regional partnership agreements. I do not think the ICCs will ever have those necessary resources and skills, and nor should they if they are able to rely on regional representative structures that will be able to deal with those sorts of grassroots issues themselves.

It is part of the policy that consultation should be going on at the moment over regional representative networks, which are to be designed in a way that is congenial to the people as they find themselves at the moment. So it might be on language group lines, a coalition of organisations or some other structure altogether—it might be an electoral structure. It is those regional networks that enter into the regional partnership agreements that will support the shared responsibility agreements. Again, I know it is policy and it is under way, but I do not think it is very developed so far. There are clearly a number of problems in how you bring these regional networks together, who is in them and how they negotiate the relationships with each other. It is really too early to say how well those things are going.

Mrs VALE—Despite all those caveats you have placed on it, are you optimistic about the potential?

Dr Sullivan—I am enthusiastic without necessarily being optimistic. It is hard to be optimistic in Indigenous affairs

Mrs VALE—Right.

CHAIR—Many of us share that hesitation about shared responsibility and that simplistic view from 30-odd years ago, as you mentioned. But, as I understand the philosophy, it is to try to engage and give ownership to the community so that Indigenous people can get something in their mind, make a bit of process, get a bit of confidence from that and then move onto other things. But with the really entrenched things like education, understanding of health, 25 people in a house and all those sorts of basic resource issues we talk about, it seems that we are yet to engage in a way which offers Indigenous people the light on the hill. My question is about your 11 visiting research fellows. How easy is it for you in your organisation to engage with and tap into these issues and perhaps to stretch the thinking outside the square a little bit? We are, I suppose, feeling a sense of desperation because we have had 30 years of fairly ordinary results, not so much with political but with social issues. We have all not done very well and we are struggling with that. We say, 'Let's try something different,' and hope that we do not go through another false dawn. I am trying to get a picture of how your organisation might tap into that. You have suggested DEST and that sort of thing. In terms of the resources you have, how might you become more a part of that debate?

Dr Sullivan—We were established about 40 years ago with very different aims in mind to the ones that we are engaged with today. We were to gather information on the Indigenous people and to store it for research purposes. We do that but we do not do it in the spirit of that kind of research any more. All of our researchers are highly experienced people who have done on the ground field research over many decades, so they are aware of the problems and issues out there. Even if they are in a fairly traditional area such as linguistics they are involved in community language maintenance programs, for instance, and working with the community language resource centres. Many of us are increasingly engaged with more contemporary issues and policy issues. As I said in my introductory comments, in areas of natural resource management, for instance, which require good governance structures, the pay-off for Indigenous people is allowing them to continue on with, and the satisfaction of looking after, their traditional lands. They also offer employment opportunities, through substituting for non-Indigenous management; instituting new management programs, for which there might be a great need but with which state governments are not keeping up; or in other ways mixing in with what Professor Altman calls the 'hybrid economy' in his submission to this committee. I am aware of going into his area and I must say that I support his submission very firmly. His and my interests overlap considerably. To get back to your point: what can we offer in terms of our research fellows? As I said, in natural resource management we have governance arrangements. That is one of the things we do. We have a fellow in Indigenous education.

CHAIR—On that, is there something coming through there: engagement, motivation or purpose? In terms of education, is there something there that you might comment on?

Dr Sullivan—Yes. You have to know why in the remote areas there is such a poor response to the educational opportunities, and that is where research comes in. As you have indicated, some of it may be outside of the field of education. Some of the issues are health issues; some of them are just issues of poverty in general. A lot of the issues are just to do with the breakdown of social order in many of these communities. So you cannot deal just with education, which, getting us back to our previous topic, is why this new approach of whole-of-government integrated services and holistic way of viewing the problems is potentially very positive.

CHAIR—Fine. I just want to go down that path a little to put it on the record. You reminded me of Broome, and I will conclude my segment on this. I remember being there years ago and talking to an Aboriginal fellow. This is going back a while, to the era of Fred Hollows. Fred apparently had a very unique and direct way of speaking. This fellow clearly remembered what Fred had said about—and I will not repeat it here—getting things going and getting things motivated. It was quite interesting. I just wanted to share that with you in terms of the Fred Hollows influence.

Dr Sullivan—Those were important days; those were the days of anger and indignation.

CHAIR—Yes.

Dr Sullivan—They had an important point and they had an important impact. Partly because of that impact and because of the changes that happened, you have to get with the modern developments, and I think that is—

CHAIR—It is an interesting point you make, and I definitely will see whether Peter Garrett has got anything he would like to ask you as well. This older Aboriginal gentleman was doing it in humour, and he remembered back 10 or 15 years, or to whenever Fred said these things, and he could still remember it. It still had an impact and he was still hanging in there. It was done with great humour and with the passion of earlier years. Peter, do you have anything to ask?

Mr GARRETT—No, thanks.

Dr LAWRENCE—I want to follow up on what you said about the Indigenous coordination centres, which, as you say, are pretty vital when you are talking about employment or community safety or whatever. You suggested that they do not have, at this stage, the skills and resources necessary to supervise those shared responsibility agreements, let alone the regional partnerships agreements. What is missing and what could be done to improve that? You mentioned the issue of Indigenous representation still being up in the air but, in those centres specifically, what is required to make them capable of doing that work with the more complex agreements?

Dr Sullivan—We have to recognise that they have been given a very difficult job.

Dr LAWRENCE—Sure.

Dr Sullivan—On the one hand they need to be responsive to Canberra. On the other hand they have the job of coordinating government agencies somehow inside—

Dr LAWRENCE—On the ground.

Dr Sullivan—these Indigenous coordination centres. That is not entirely within their control; they need cooperation from the other agencies. At the Commonwealth level, that can, to an extent, be enforced through the ministerial task force, the secretary's group and down from there. At the state level you have to negotiate that. I do not think the ICC managers have the clout to negotiate that with the state governments.

Dr LAWRENCE—No, they are junior by comparison.

Dr Sullivan—Yes, so they have got problems vertically, if you like, with Canberra—well, not problems, but that is where they report. Now I am going to talk about laterally: across these government agencies. Then there is this added complication of an area which is incredibly complex in itself, which is stepping into Indigenous regional politics, regional social relations and community relations in discrete settlements. We all know this is a very difficult area.

I do not think you will find anybody with the necessary skills to encompass all those things. To give them credit, I do not think OIPC thinks they will find anybody, either. They are putting in place some other arrangements to deal with that. On the community side of things, without taking into account the experience of these people, they have been recruited because of their skills as senior managers, which is on the face of it a good thing to do. If you want somebody to get in there and do a good job you appoint somebody with a good track record, and you appoint them at a high level. Those kinds of skills may not be ones that they need. In negotiating with

such communities, if you do not have the experience it is often difficult even to understand what people are saying.

Without looking at some of the more basic issues, such as logistics, you cannot service an area such as the one I am familiar with—from Kununurra to Balga and Halls Creek—out of the Kununurra office. You would either be spending all your time out of the office, and not doing the work that you are supposed to be doing back in the office, or you would be spending all your time in the office and not knowing what is happening on the ground. There are structural constraints, cultural constraints and constraints of knowledge and skills which I think are going to make the job of these ICC managers extremely difficult.

Mr GARRETT—Firstly, I would like to commend the work that the institute does generally and recognise that it is making a very valuable contribution, not only to the sorts of things that this committee is deliberating on but more generally. I do not want to ask questions that may have been asked already or go over old ground, but I am interested in the issue of what it is going to look like with the new Indigenous coordinating centres coming into place. What will the interface be like between the person who is effectively the coordinator and the community? Does some thought need to be given to how that interface is managed, set up and, almost, arbitrated?

Does the work you have done here, and the research that you have referred to, show how much of what we are looking at is about finding those places where capacity exists, identifying them and getting the capacity centres—whether they are people or organisations—to agree on a plan and then to move forward on it, and how much of it is about the capacity and resources that are needed to do that? It is a bit of the puzzle in my mind that I am not entirely clear about. It is a bit of a convoluted question but I think you know what I am getting at.

Dr Sullivan—I do. I know from my discussions with the person in Canberra who has responsibility for ICCs that they, too, are aware of this. There will be a need for NGOs to operate as some kind of intermediary organisations between the Indigenous coordination centres and the communities or regions. Those organisations will be able to have more time on the ground and will have the necessary skills—not necessarily in a single individual. Some of those people will be good at communicating with the communities, other people will have skills in putting together plans and other people will be good at negotiating with government. The difficulty for OIPC is how to negotiate the relationship with such NGOs. I think that is what they are puzzling about at the moment.

Mr GARRETT—I have another question which relates to this. The electorate that I represent is Kingsford Smith. It has a pretty significant proportion of Indigenous people—diaspora Indigenous people effectively, but they are still there. The Indigenous coordinating centre will be sited in another electorate and the coordinator will operate out of another electorate. It is already very difficult to establish a line of communication to that particular office and those persons, who have a huge amount on their plate in terms of marshalling and providing a conduit for the whole of government approach, which still represents a number of different departments and different programs and so on and so forth, and delivering them to people. I wonder whether the members' offices may have some kind of role to play.

Dr Sullivan—My feeling would be that anybody has a role to play if they have some resources and they put their hand up. I do not want to, and I certainly would not, make any political statements one way or the other but I would make a comment that one of the intriguing things about the Labor proposal for new arrangements in Indigenous affairs is to replace the regional councils with regional bodies that would have on them both Indigenous and non-Indigenous representatives—not necessarily one or the other, that is that they would not be necessarily elected from the basis of whether they were Indigenous or not. Of course the bodies would have an Indigenous majority but you would be able to drag in skills and form structural liaisons with people out there in the community at large who could bring significant information and contacts. And the converse—they would be able to take information and contacts away from these councils. That seems to me to be a very positive idea, and I think the more skilled representatives of Indigenous people are moving away from a segregated approach to Indigenous affairs and saying, 'This is a partnership, let's do this together.'

CHAIR—Patrick Sullivan, thank you very much for your very considered approach and, as Peter Garrett said, it is a very respected organisation and we wish it well.

Dr Sullivan—Thank you very much. I will take your well wishes back to AIATSIS. Thank you for inviting us.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs Vale**, seconded by **Ms Ellis**):

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

Committee adjourned at 4.27 pm