
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Indigenous employment**

FRIDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2006

SYDNEY

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**

**Friday, 10 February 2006**

**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 Ellis, Mrs Vale and Mr Wakelin

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

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

**WITNESSES**

**Committee met at 9.12 am**

**DUNCAN, Ms Cathy, Director, Culture and Reputation, Aboriginal Employment Strategy**

**ESTENS, Mr Richard, Chairman, Aboriginal Employment Strategy**

**LESTER, Mr Danny, Director, Corporate Relations, Aboriginal Employment Strategy**

**RILEY-MUNDINE, Ms Lynette, Director, Operations, Aboriginal Employment Strategy**

**ECKERSLEY, Mr Thomas Gerard, Area Manager, Retail, Commonwealth Bank of Australia**

**McQUALTER, Mr Bruce, Regional Manager, NSW North West, ANZ Regional and Rural Banking, Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Ltd**

**VASTA, Mr Michael Joseph, Manager, Public Policy, Government and Regulatory Affairs, Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Ltd**

**CHAIR (Mr Wakelin)**—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs on its inquiry into Indigenous employment. I welcome you all here today. The inquiry is about seeking positive outcomes and the best practice around Australia to recommend to government the practical steps we need to improve the outcomes right across the nation. We do not ask people to give evidence under oath, but these are official proceedings of the parliament and we need to be aware of that. I welcome all the people from AES. It is a particular pleasure of ours to be here with an organisation that we have known of and have enjoyed their progress and innovation for some time.

**Mr Lester**—We will start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land—the Gadigal people of the Eori nation. I would like to thank the committee for inviting us to be part of this, I hope, history making process for Indigenous employment across Australia. From the AES company point of view, today is a day of some possible history within Aboriginal or Indigenous affairs. Today you will hear an insight into the business ethos and the company core business of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy. You will hear some innovative ways that we are currently doing business, namely, with the banks and in other programs.

The Aboriginal Employment Strategy is a company fully managed and operated by Aboriginal people, which is very significant in itself because there is no other model across Australia that is represented in that way. Part of the terms of reference of this committee is to look at positive ways and innovative solutions for the betterment of Aboriginal or Indigenous people in Australia. The AES model is a model that is working, it is providing actual outcomes and it is creating partnerships with corporate Australia. It is evident here with ANZ and CBA, which is part of only a small number of our corporate partners across New South Wales.

**Ms Duncan**—Coming from the bush and then looking at the expansion of our model, it is very powerful to sit amongst a bunch of Indigenous people running our own business and charging our own destiny. A lot of the ethos and the philosophy of the AES centres around

moving our people from a mentality of welfare to work. Through that process we use a combination of tools that assist us to motivate and get behind not just our business partners, as you see from the banks, but also from some of our other core people that we are working with in regards to Telstra, IAG and Rio Tinto.

A lot of the fears with Aboriginal people have been about going back to the community, consulting the community and working with the community. The niche of the AES model is to work with business. Our company gets out there and basically walks the street, talks to the business community, finds out what the commercial world is about and what they want and then delivers that back to our Indigenous people so that they have a far better understanding of the world of work. Too much we think it is a white man's world and that we do not have a place in it. AES has been a vehicle for change for Indigenous people to know that they have a company that will support them, but help them understand what is out there in the commercial world. A lot of our fallbacks or our fallouts in employment are through lack of understanding by all partners. That is one of the most important things that we do; we operate on a business front. We also look at programs within the community development area and we run a successful security program in Moree commercially with Woolworths.

We also run a highly successful program in Dubbo with security in regards to the Gordon Estate, which has been a very talked about crime spot in New South Wales. We do not run that by being mini-police, rather developing a program for our Aboriginal men. They are not running the country any more, welfare is not making them run their households either so we looked at a lost warrior syndrome that we had in Moree of Aboriginal men doing a lot of antisocial stuff that was not within our natural or cultural environment. The security program looks at putting our lost warriors back into a place of respect, giving them a place in the society in which they live and allowing them to deliver back into their community the pressure of what is right, wrong and antisocial. It is also about using them as active participant role models for our younger generation to show that life is not about having riots, fighting with the police and looking at every excuse out there to look at racial tensions; it is actually about trying to build within our own community. Those two programs are quite important.

We also do a school program in Moree and Tamworth that is about taking young Indigenous kids from year 7—I would like to teach it in kindergarten, if I could—and teaching them to understand the world of work. We are doing an enterprise model. It has been quite hard and enlightening because it is quite fearful that, at 13 and 14, our kids do not have aspirations for careers. We do not tell them that they need to be good role models; we actually take them and show them what business is about through our business partnership connections. We took a group of kids to Sydney and visited IAG and lots of other corporates with which we are involved. Three of those young people have gone back home now and have started to apply for part-time work. That is very important at 13 and 14. We are trying to break the mould of needing the baby bonus; CDP is two days a week but a traineeship or an apprenticeship will give you a job for life. Some of the philosophy that we are working on at the moment within our communities is not just building the unemployment arm but also building the children within our units so that they understand. If you have third generation of welfare in your family you hardly know what work is about, so the AES is used as a vehicle to let younger children know what is out there in the world of work, and that they have a place to be an employee but they also have a place to want to be a business owner.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—My background is in education, I am a primary and infants trained teacher and I have worked with the state department of education for 20 years. I have worked in a university, with Tranby College and with TAFE for 13 years. I come with a fairly considerable background. An issue for me is that employment is not seen to be part of the whole solution, it is pushed off to the side. With our government run programs we concentrate on education, we look at resolving issues with health and housing, but there has been no focus on employment. If we do not have a real focus on employment, then how do you break that cycle of poverty?

It is almost an accepted situation in Australia that one of the cultural attributes of Aboriginal people is poverty. I do not recognise poverty as a cultural attribute for Aboriginal people. There is only one way to make poverty history, if we are talking about slogans, and that is to give blackfellas jobs. The statistics on Aboriginal employment show that the majority of Aboriginal people are employed by the public service in social welfare positions. If they are employed in other occupations is it usually at the bottom end. The funding that is provided through DEWR, for example for education, is aimed at the bottom spectrum. If education programs are only provided to support kids who are unable to succeed at school and you do not give a lift up to those kids that are borderline or talented and gifted, then who have you got running your country and who have you got running your business? You are not pushing through and supporting those people who can actually do it. That is what is happening in employment as well. The types of programs that are offered are actually aimed at supporting people who cannot make it. What do we do when you have a history of unemployment and a history of a whole race of people that do not have an economic base? You are creating a suppression program that actually keeps them back in their place.

The AES is about providing an opportunity for Aboriginal people who actually do have talents and skills. We have all worked in a variety of positions before and we know how to do policies and procedures. I can design forms with the best of them. It may not be my preferred option but I do know how to run a company. Yet when I work in a government bureaucracy I am told that it is not my place to make decisions about how things should happen in Aboriginal affairs. So what is my option? My option is: give me an opportunity to prove it.

The AES is not just about giving employment to Aboriginal people. It is not just about building relationships with the corporate world, which is absolutely vital, because we do not do that; the focus has been on providing employment for Aboriginal people through government public service. Let us move out of that; let us look at where the economy really does generate from. Let us have a look at giving Aboriginal people the opportunity to prove that they actually can do it. That is what the AES is about. It is about having talented people. I must say this is the first time in over 30 years that I have worked in a job where I am actually working with people of a like mind and I do not have to convince them about what is needed to be done. I remember my first week on the job saying, 'We really should be doing this.' They said: 'Well, Lyn, you're an expert. You know what to do; just do it.' Isn't that wonderful because it is so empowering? It is about Aboriginal people who are driven, absolutely driven, because we have come from there. We have come from families with no money, where we did not know if we were going to have food on the table next week; we know what it is like. We are driven not just for ourselves but for our extended families and our communities out there who do not get that passion anywhere else.

I do not see the model, I do not see the AES, being supported in that way. It is time that we looked at models that are generated by Aboriginal people and supported them rather than models

that are driven by bureaucracy. Let us look at how we can get employment resolved and end the cycle of poverty so that we can make some real changes. We are doing it by creating real partnerships outside of Aboriginal communities and outside the government structure because we believe it is those partnerships and getting to really understand one another that will create better opportunities for Aboriginal people. That is why I am involved.

**Mr Estens**—We did an issues paper that talks about the core business and all the issues that we face and the problems we have.

**Mr Lester**—That will guide the process of our discussion.

**Ms Duncan**—We have had 30 school based trainees in and out of the AES in the last two to three years. Having business partnerships has been very important; by having the banks as partners it allows our children to understand money and to be in the front line of money. They are not at the back of the bank in the black box or back box, they are actually up front on the tellers. They are not stealing the money and running and becoming a bank robber. Our partnerships have been on our work, not on conning or convincing.

**Mr Estens**—The core business AES is corporate Australia. If you look at all our country towns, most of the main streets are full of corporate Australian businesses. In Sydney we can have direct relationships with the corporate offices and we can get a big outcome on the country towns in which we operate.

**Mr Eckersley**—Over two years ago when I was approached by the AES in Tamworth, the passion of the whole scheme that was presented was one thing that got me interested in it. Thankfully, when I took it further the bank agreed to get on board. At that stage we took on three trainees, all of whom have successfully completed their two-year program. Two of those are now employed full-time with us and they are doing a great job. The third one will take a job up in the mines in Queensland more than likely and he is a great young bloke too.

In terms of things that attracted me with the scheme at the time, it was not a case of picking up a young person and being told, 'Look we want you to take them on'; it was about selecting the best quality applicants for the role and then taking them through a selection process. The people that have taken on these traineeships are actually the best, they have won it on merit. They have had to earn the right to take these traineeships on, which I thought was an excellent part of the program. The trainees that we bring on board are treated as employees. They have expectations set. They need to understand what it is to work in an organisation that has equal employment opportunities, OH&S issues, a professional code of practice, and they all have to work to that. Their performance is judged and they are reviewed regularly, so they have to live up to those performance issues.

It is great to see them doing well because they do get positive reinforcement which lifts their self-esteem in the roles as well. From that point of view, a couple of our trainees have managed to come away to Sydney and been on harbour cruises and things as acknowledgment for performance over the last 12 months, because the business has done well. You can see them grow though that. Some had never been on planes before and things like that, so it was wonderful.

The other part of the scheme which has been great is the partnership side of it and I believe that is a must going forward. There is a relationship between the bank, the AES, schools, parents, DETNAC and other people getting involved with the trainee, in particular being the centre of that; they all work together. There is regular communication to ensure that the process is working well. Keeping that partnership alive will only see it being successful for the trainee.

In terms of where we are at now, we have taken on more trainees; we are running eight at the present time. For all intents and purposes at this point in time they are all going well and I am very pleased about that. Once again, the new ones that have come on board have been through the selection process; they have had to win the right to have the role. From the Commonwealth Bank's point of view, other regional areas are getting on board with it now and a strategy is being worked at the present time on taking it out on a national basis. I believe that is a big win and it is great that it has come out of the Tamworth-Moree area.

In terms of going forward, obviously we are on board with it; we intend staying on board with it while it is working successfully for us. It gives us a great opportunity to have a look at young people with a view to employing them permanently down the track. We have two now employed full-time with us, and we cannot see why that should not continue to happen in the years ahead. I believe that the strategy is a great idea.

**Mr Vasta**—ANZ has been in partnership with the AES for three years and we have been delivering a school based traineeship program in our branches in north-western New South Wales. I will let my colleague Bruce McQualter, who has been at the front of this effort, provide some more detail about our experiences, some of the challenges we have had and what has worked for us. I think the real value that ANZ gets from this partnership is the sort of mentoring and support that the AES can provide the trainees and their families. That is something we cannot do by ourselves. We need partners like the AES to do that.

**Mr McQualter**—The involvement started three years ago on a needs basis up at Moree. Cathy and I had our heads together. I did not know how it would work but I needed people and the AES was providing some services of which we were not aware. We ran a school based trainee program direct with a school in Wee Waa without an intermediary and we found that it was a logistical nightmare. The concept was great but we were ending up filling out a lot of forms for a lot of things and we had no idea what we were doing. Along came the AES and we said, 'Look, that is what we want but we cannot deliver it; can you deliver it?' Cathy ran off and found out all about the school based traineeships and we developed basically from scratch. It has really built quite excellent momentum.

We have had four graduates through the school based trainee program. Two of them are full-time at university. The first person we put through was not with the AES—it was done directly with the school—and she is off doing full-time university in Canberra. Of the three who graduated last year, one has started full-time university here in Sydney and the other two have obtained permanent roles in finance in the north-west, one with us and one with a local building society, which we have our eyes on to get her back. We have nine kids doing their HSC this year in year 12—they were with us last year—and another seven in year 11 this year, all in the north-west of New South Wales.

The magic that makes this work: it is sort of like the game of football, Aussie Rules, where you are allowed to shepherd. The school based trainee is holding the ball and the parents, the AES, the mentors, the school and the bank manager and employees are basically shepherding the child from all the influences that are hitting normal 15, 16 or 17-year-olds. Especially when their mates learn that they work in a bank—the worst of all evils—it is up to that partnership to protect that child. That is the magic of it; the mentoring is the unique thing that I have not seen in any other situation like this.

When the school based trainee comes through that maze of hormones, money and all the influences in the world and they come out, they have their HSC and they have received the business administration certificate II. They have conducted themselves in a large corporate organisation whether it be Commonwealth, ANZ, Woolworths or whatever. It is then on their resume with the HSC and with whatever training and life skills they can pick up along the way. Look at the employment opportunities that young adult has had that could only be dreamt about one generation ago. That is the pathway, the future, for those children because they have been able to get through. They are not going to be in junior positions for very long because they have the confidence at that great age. It is like a speedboat: they are pulling the skiers through, who are their brothers, their sisters or their cousins. They are the real role models for the new kids coming through. That is why we are doing it.

**Mr Estens**—We are under way with negotiations with Westpac and NAB to bring them on board.

**Mr Lester**—We have Westpac partly on board for a commitment, we are still to finalise that.

**CHAIR**—You are probably aware that Westpac have done a bit of this work in other areas.

**Mr Estens**—In Cape York in particular through their foundation. We want a hundred kids out there by the end of the year. That is an internal target that we set ourselves.

**Mr Vasta**—In terms of where we are looking to develop this partnership, we have a commitment to expand it not only geographically but also in terms of the sorts of roles that can be opened up to these traineeships. We have branch work at the moment but the potential is call centre roles and the like. We will be having discussions with the AES over the next couple of weeks to explore how that is going to work. Obviously it depends on the capacity of AES geographically, but there is definitely commitment there to expand it.

**Mr Lester**—We had John McFarlane, the CEO of ANZ, physically visit this office at the end of November. At that meeting he publicly said: 'I acknowledge the work that AES is doing. The outcomes have been fantastic. I want to ramp it up to the next process now,' which would mean it would expand in all possible recruitment opportunities in the ANZ Bank, including the current school based trainees but outside of the school based trainees as well. It is about continuing that capacity to get more Aboriginal people into the banking sector and ultimately providing them with a career.

**CHAIR**—We will introduce ourselves. On my left is Annette Ellis who is from the ACT and the member for Canberra. She is a very much respected member of our parliament from the

opposition and has been in the parliament for some years. Dana Vale would be known to many of you.

**Mrs VALE**—I do not know anyone here, so we should not make assumptions. My electorate is Hughes in southern Sydney which is Sutherland shire.

**CHAIR**—Dana brings a great interest in this issue. I am from South Australia and my electorate is about a million square kilometres from Adelaide to Alice Springs, including Pitjantjatjara. We have the same issues in our cities, Whyalla, Port Lincoln, Ceduna, Port Augusta and Coober Pedy. We want to draw out this issue about government; we have the positive model and I have a couple of hard questions that I would like you to help give me the responses that we need to write into our report about costs and how we deal with bureaucracy. You have that as your lead in here as well.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Thank you for having us here. It is a great advantage for us to come here this morning. We could talk for a day, so I will try and be brief. The thing that is impressing me so far is the positiveness of what you are doing and the uniqueness of the model that you are running against the stream of other models. I am not directing this to anybody in particular but when I listened to Tom and the gentlemen from the banks I wondered where those trainees would be if they had not had the opportunity that you have given them.

What would have been the outcome for these people? I would like to draw the contrast of the value of exactly what is happening here. In those traineeships and those employment processes, how are you dealing with the cultural issues that come from the non-Indigenous business community? When they talk about employing Indigenous people they immediately throw up to us a raft of hurdles, cultural issues, that they believe makes it too hard. In many cases they just say it is too hard. Some employers manage it, so my view is: if some do why can the others not? How do you actually deal with those sorts of issues as successfully as you do? As the paper you have given us this morning says, why is it that this model that seems to be so successful is not endorsed by DEWR? What are the issues? There are two things; one is from the employer's point of view. It is really easy for employers to say to us: 'It's just too hard; there are too many hurdles. It's going to cost us too much in every sense of the word.' But you are doing it. From the point of view of government, why is it that this model does not seem to be acceptable?

**Mr Estens**—You have an all-black team out there putting Aboriginal people into businesses; that is why it works. This is the only model. If you are using white Job Network providers, how can it work?

**Ms Duncan**—Put one Murri in the office and he takes on all the issues; it burns him out.

**Mr Lester**—You cannot have tokenistic Aboriginal people, and this is not tokenistic.

**CHAIR**—We had the Job Network people there; it was just chalk and cheese and it was a bit embarrassing to actually sit and listen to our team—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Where was that?

**CHAIR**—In Dubbo. The comparison was quite stark. That was at least two years ago.

**Mr Estens**—It is about building self-esteem and pride; it is the heart and soul.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—The major issue is of assimilation. DEWR are using the Job Network model as the only model. They are saying they would take our model and assimilate it into their model, but they would employ one Aboriginal person in each of their offices to do what we do. You would put all the pressure onto one Aboriginal person in each office to find employment for every Aboriginal person in their town and they are responsible for that cultural awareness. That is just so unfair because you do not have one non-Aboriginal person being responsible—let us reverse it, let us have all blackfellas in there and we will employ one white person to be responsible for the employment of all the white people and see how you go. The issue is the focus being on a welfare model. We are not focusing on a welfare model because we have all been there and it is not very nice living in poverty. I do not want to go back. When I have money in my pocket I can then help run dance groups and get kids into sports. It is not only for my kids; I would say 90 per cent of the income that my husband and I have earned has gone back into community development because we have had the money to do it. I would really like to have my own economic base some time; I am looking at that. That is what it is about—changing the focus from a welfare model to having people who are able to control their own lives.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—From the employer's point of view?

**Mr Eckersley**—Number 1 is the way we go about hiring the trainees. We are very clear and up-front as to what the expectations are. Their fellow staff know that the trainees have been hired on that basis, that there is not a special rate for them for them or anything like that. Generally, the feedback we are getting from the managers in the branches that have the trainees in there is very positive from the community who see these young ones as having a go. I have witnessed a couple of exchanges where we have had the trainee working and someone else from the Aboriginal community, from their peer group, has come in and said, 'Oh, what are you doing here?' 'I am working.' 'How long have you been doing this?' It is great to see the conversation happening. They have pride in themselves. With the early ones that came through when it was new, people were thinking, 'Wow, how did you get this opportunity?' When the young ones get talking about it across the counter their faces glow and you can see that they have pride in themselves because of it. With the two that we have brought on full-time, when they do something that is good they are growing. You can just see them growing every day and you cannot help but like them. The other staff like them more and more because they are performing well and the customers cannot help but like them because of the fact they are doing a good job.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—I do not want to give the impression that I think this is a problem but I want to understand the cultural difference point of view, because it just gets run at us all the time. I want to hear why you think it works so well.

**Mr Estens**—Sixty or 70 per cent of business want to work with us.

**Ms Duncan**—There is a 'dumb, black and stupid' perception out there—can't turn up to work, come in late—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It is also stuff like 'sorry time' and so on.

**Ms Duncan**—Lack of commitment. I think it works by having the mentors in the process. The mentors are there to understand our life and explain it to the banking industry and to the commercial world. They are then filtering, like a funnel, back through the kids what is the commercial world. There is a medium. Because of the mentoring that is happening on the ground with the managers in the local units, these guys understand that there are funerals and issues, NAIDOC Week and things that need to be done. They are giving the cultural awareness through being there, saying, 'Johnny did not turn up today because there is a large funeral on,' or 'Bruce, there's going to be a funeral in a couple of weeks and it's probably going to affect what's going on.' We look at who we choose during the interview processes. We want to put the kids out there who really are committed, but in the world of work we have to make sacrifices and that is something that we are mentoring through our kids. Every one of us have to make sacrifices. Sometimes we cannot attend every funeral. That is not always a good cultural thing but it is something that we accept when we step into this world of work. We are not turning our back on our people but we have to be aware that we have made a commitment to our employer.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—You are in a position of doing that where other providers of Job Network type stuff are not.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—Have you seen those rotating see-saws that kids play on? They do not just go up and down but they swirl around as well. They are great fun but, God, they are dangerous. I see the AES as the fulcrum; we are in the middle and we are balancing cultural differences and business differences.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—This is the value of what you do as against other companies.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—We not only mentor and support our people because they have the cultural issues to resolve—remember, we do not have a business cultural background, so we are also teaching our people that—we are also teaching the employers the cultural differences, and we are teaching our people the business differences.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—You are very well placed.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—That is not always easy because we are all learning it as well. I have 30-odd years in education but I am now learning something new—the commercial world.

**Mr Lester**—One of the strengths of the AES is that we are always on the front foot. We are always leaning forward, not leaning backwards. Obviously we are going to learn as we go, so part of our strategic plan is continuous improvement within the AES. Ultimately, our vision is to be the provider of choice for Aboriginal employment across the whole of Australia. Of the 24 multinational, international and possibly local corporate Australian businesses that we are dealing with, within the corporate office here at the corporate Australia level, at this stage all of them are supportive and committed to increasing Aboriginal employment. They do not know how to do that; they do not know how to engage community, they do not know how to go through the recruitment process, they do not know how to deal with those cultural issues that Lynette mentioned. The automatic stance of all humans is a barrier: 'No; don't want to do it; it's all too hard; let's put it in the corner.'

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It is too hard, they will not do it. Exactly.

**Mrs VALE**—And you are providing a solution.

**Mr Lester**—We are disadvantaging the most disadvantaged people in Australia. It is always backwards. 'It is too hard.' We are of the belief that we should challenge that 'too hard' notion and say it is too easy because we are delivering the outcomes. It is pleasing to see that these big organisations, including the guys here with CBA and ANZ, want to increase not only the economic independence of Aboriginal people away from welfare, but, through that, build a people-person result which is that one-on-one relationship. It is outside of doing everything over the telephone or through email; it is actually face to face conversation, which is very different to other employment organisations.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—A private observation of mine—and some of my committee members have made the same observation—is that when we see promotional material advertising Australia as a tourist destination, one of your mob is going to be up there somewhere being used in that depiction. I do not object to that. However, when tourists then come here it is really hard for them to find one of your mob doing much in the tourism industry.

**Mr Lester**—It is tokenistic.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Do you have any views on where you see opportunities for AES in that field?

**Mr Lester**—My personal opinion in the tourism area is that a lot of the organisations are manipulating the opportunities that Aboriginal people have, and that is culture, and that sells on an international scale. You can see it daily. From the AES point of view, how can we ensure that, for any organisation, we go from a tokenistic gesture into actual reality? It is getting Aboriginal people working with that organisation and being part of that whole culture. I think this is something we can discuss and lead with Tourism Australia, possibly with Aden Ridgeway being on the board. It is about how we can celebrate the uniqueness and the historical nature of Aboriginal culture to deliver outcomes. How can it get Aboriginal people off welfare? How can it get people into real jobs that are sustainable and are not just short term for the sake of ticking the box and saying, 'Look, we have done this job; we have moved on this process'? A lot of the campaigns are very tokenistic. There is an ad hoc approach: 'Let's address this in short term.' Let us move on from ticking the box. We need to deliver outcomes that are sustainable.

**Mr Estens**—A key thing is that governments give Aboriginal people money for a few years and then just pull it. It is a constant process. There is no organisation that is building, building, building, building career paths and going for the long-term outcome. Three times the rug tried to be pulled from under this organisation and that is the tragedy. The government owns the Aboriginal issue. Surely in this country now we are about getting people working and building the partnerships.

**Mr McQualter**—The big issue that is going to sell the sizzle is to get the employment on main street. Whether it be in tourism or everyday industries, they go to the post office, the supermarket, the bank; it is not on farms or in blue collar industry. That is the real sell for the tourists—to say that it is not favouring one or the other; we are accepting across the board.

**Ms Duncan**—We have Aboriginal guards employed by Woolworths commercially in Moree. People coming to Moree now, even non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people who have been away for a long time, will always make a comment on that program. They actually see Aboriginal people in charge of their own destiny. They are doing something not just for their own community. They are also protecting the non-Aboriginal lady who needs to go around and shop and take her bag to the car too. Psychologically, that has a far higher impact. It is the same with the Dubbo main street program—it is to instil in those warriors a position back in the community and also a position of protector of all the community. They are the sorts of front line images.

AES has offices in the main street with Aboriginal flags. In Dubbo they said they had never put up an Aboriginal flag, so Dick and I did. We put up an Aboriginal flag that says, 'Proud to be Aboriginal'. But on the flip it says, 'Proud to be Australian' because we need to remind society of that. It is those sorts of things that bring pride and self-esteem. Those high impact offices in the main streets have put a big stamp in the ground in Dubbo and Moree, saying: 'We're here, we're staying, and we're not going.'

We are building an enterprise centre next door in Moree because as a contemporary New South Wales people we have lost some of our culture through past policies and our own lack of strength. We will have young Aboriginal kids run their own coffee shop and art gallery because you cannot come to Moree and buy it off Aboriginal people. We are going to get some of the elders to start a link with Tourism Moree to link to some of our old cultural grounds and start doing talks. We have one of the largest pecan nut farms in the Southern Hemisphere, but instead of all the Chinese people going out to the nut farm, we want to have them looking at the Indigenous investment outside of our water.

We are looking at tourism but we start it small and then we grow. I have been all over the Territory. My biggest disappointment as a New South Wales woman going to the Territory was that we had to find a little boomerang hut somewhere out near Katherine to buy a didgeridoo from an actual tribal man. I would not buy one off anybody else.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—That is the only reason I brought tourism up. It is not the be-all and end-all but it is a bit of a flagship thing in a sense.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—We understand that, apart from getting people into employment, the next step is setting up your own business. I can remember about 13 years ago now working in the Dubbo Western Institute of TAFE, going out to Bourke, talking about the types of programs that we had running there and having a look at the profile of the whole town. I remember talking to an Aboriginal woman about doing some courses and she said, 'Oh, we're sick of courses because we don't get any jobs.' I said, 'Why aren't you doing courses so that you can set up your own business and take over the town?' 'Oh, we don't want radicals like you coming here telling us what to do.' We are battling the racism and the stereotyping that has become ingrained on both sides.

**Mrs VALE**—It is all in the mindset of the bureaucracy.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—What I see in the AES is a process. If we get people into employment, they start to understand how the business works and they go, 'I can do this.' Then they start to

look at setting up businesses. One of the plans that we have in place after getting people into employment is: how can we then help them to set up their own businesses?

One of the comments that made was: where might the trainees have ended up if they had not got a traineeship? That is a very important question. We have picked the whole spectrum; we have not picked kids who would make it anyway. We have picked kids who have come from totally dysfunctional families who have never had any employment. This is an opportunity for them to break out and show the rest of the family they can do it. We also have kids who could make it, but with this support we are putting them five to 10 years ahead of where they might have been. They will end up there, because we have some really smart young people. They will end up there but, without the mentoring and the support, they will be angrier, more frustrated and will have a totally different outlook on white people. They will think white people are shit, whereas now they think: 'Aren't these white people nice. I have learned how to work with them. They are nice people. I talk with them. I go to barbecues with them. White people are as nice as the rest of the people in my family.' When people say that there is little contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people they are only looking at it from a white point of view. Where white people do not have much contact with Aboriginal people, Aboriginal people stick to their own as well. We are trying to break that barrier to teach people about people.

**Mr Lester**—We are doing the buzz word that is in the government around 'building capacity', but we are doing the actual outcomes. We are doing it, instead of it being a warm and fluffy word. One of the strengths in the AES is that we are innovative and flexible in meeting the needs of the particular situation and opportunity in front of us. I hope through this process that policy can be changed in order for Indigenous employment to be moved forward, to be innovative and flexible.

**Mrs VALE**—It is particularly interesting to hear you speak about bureaucracies, Lyn, because even in broader Australia we see bureaucrats or bureaucracies as managing the status quo—they are not entrepreneurial—and what I am getting from you all is this incredible entrepreneurial energy.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—Can I tell you why I left my last job? I applied for a director's position and was told that I did not demonstrate strategic thinking, and yet I have had 30-odd years in education. If I 'do not understand all the issues' and you are not going to appreciate me and let me use my experience, then I will go somewhere where I can actually use it.

**Mrs VALE**—And you have. In this organisation—

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—They allow me to use it.

**Mrs VALE**—It is entrepreneurship and it is thinking outside the square.

**Ms Duncan**—One thing we use Dick for is not to teach us how to be Aboriginal and work with our own communities but to get us to understand business.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—We are sucking him dry!

**Ms Duncan**—I did not want to say it like that! It is like what we said to the managers and the new ECs, because we have rapidly grown under a lot of pressure from the government to roll, roll, roll. I said to Dick, 'This ain't like just planting a cotton seed and it shall grow;' the government is putting a lot of pressure on us to just put it out. It is a slow, special process. We say to all the managers, 'Don't be frightened of White Australia; don't be frightened of the commercial world; get out there and bleed every bit of information you can out of them.' I say to my own kids, 'Don't hate the white schoolteacher, because when you walk out the door and tell them to get stuffed they have just won because they've still got their wage and you've got no income and no education. You go in there, shut your mouth, listen and draw every bit of information you can out of that person to understand what their world is about so you can walk forward into it.' I think that is what has been special about the partnership. If a commercial businessman is half crazy to us, it is not about us—the Aboriginality is in us. It is the business that we did not understand because we were not in that world.

**Mrs VALE**—You are not going to get that kind of entrepreneurship from government departments, but that is why this partnership is working so well.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—The people who traditionally mentor and support Aboriginal people are not people who have been successful in the business world. If you have never run a business, then how come you are telling me what to do? I would rather work with a man who is successful in business so he can teach us rather than somebody who has read about it theoretically.

**Mr Estens**—The key thing that the AES does is manage up; bureaucracy manages down and pushes to the lowest common denominator. Six out of 10 Aboriginal people are on a government benefit and our clientele is the top three out of that six, not the bottom welfare mob. If you have a third of Aboriginal people moving through society okay, at AES we get the next third going with them through the commercial world. We are then giving the Aboriginal communities a mandate to take on the back end of the community—as you build self-esteem and pride you generate peer pressure. That is the game plan.

**Mrs VALE**—It seems to me that your organisation is providing a road map for young Aboriginal people. With those good kids who are probably 10 years ahead because of your mentoring, you are actually providing that road map of how to do it and where to go so that they are not lost and without direction. Cathy, you were talking about the protector role model of the young Aboriginal people who work in security at Woolworths. During my short experience in the interface that I have had with Aboriginal people, I went to Darwin and met some of the wonderful young officers of NORFORCE. They were standing in their uniforms all muddy and ready for going into the scrub—they were all grotty and so were the white officers standing next to them. These magnificent young Aboriginals looked me straight in the eye, which I am told is not what Aboriginals generally do, with a fierce pride. It was just wonderful to see. They had a role—perhaps it is the warrior image. They had a job and were taking their place side by side with these white personnel. It was absolutely fantastic. I know that you have had tremendous success in Moree, Tamworth, Dubbo, Maitland, Blacktown and Glebe. I understand that you also have these community bonds. Is it $50?

**Ms Duncan**—Dubbo is doing it, yes.

**Mrs VALE**—We have talked about how you have this wonderful entrepreneurial spirit—and I would also like to ask who started it all off, because I have not quite got that far. I understand that it came from an inquiry, but I would like to know who the catalyst was. How important is having that support from the community? You have yourselves in the Indigenous community, the bankers and the 'top echelon' business personnel, but, when you talk about grass root community acceptance and participation and support, I thought those $50 bonds were an interesting concept. How does that work?

**Ms Duncan**—In Dubbo they have put an Aboriginal kid with a non-Aboriginal friend because a lot of kids do not see colour until they are actually taught it. I have a seven-year-old boy who understands colour now, but at three and four he had no colour. For all our families and this company the philosophy is 'friendship has no colour'. When you put children together, mum might not like blackfellas but her son is bringing home an Aboriginal friend. I said at the Tamworth opening, 'You never know, one day my son might meet your daughter, and what are you going to do when it's in your face?' At the end of the day you put a psychological message out there to let children in schools choose their mates. And they take a photo to go on those bonds—there are Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal kids cuddling, smiling and happy. In the past, as we have gotten older we have started putting all these values into our children and created a society of black and white and riots and racism.

A lot of it is about what is core out there. A lot of people here would fiercely advocate for their non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal friends. It is because we have actually started to know each other in the heart. By these guys giving employment opportunities, the people who have opportunities in other areas are going home and saying, 'That white fella's not too bad, he's an all right bloke, though he kicks me around and I think he's a shit and I might come home and say other things.' And the mentor says, 'But that's the world of work; that's the way it works.' So they are role models out there advocating for their communities as people in workplaces.

For any grandma who has been through the process of Aboriginal affairs in this country, seeing their grandchild standing at the front counter of any bank or in any job is always going to bring a community along because they have always wanted a place for their children. They do not want any more young kids at 13, 14 or 16 having babies—out our way we have one of the highest rates birth rates and among the highest mortality rates. It is 'get a job'. A lady asked me the other day, 'How did you fix Moree?' I said, 'Well, Moree is not 100 per cent fixed.' No society will be fixed, because there is always ignorance in society. We did not go around and beat everyone on the head and tell them what to do; we just got people jobs. That is all it was, so that everybody in the community felt they had a purpose. They do not look upon the white community with hatred; they do not walk up the main street and see all the wealth and opulence and run to the pub and get drunk; they see their people up there and it drags them forward.

The Commonwealth Bank in Moree has employed an Aboriginal person now—I was actually frightened that the ANZ Bank would start getting all the Aboriginal accounts, because people want to bank where their own people are. I actually took my business from one bank, which was not the Commonwealth, to the ANZ because of Bruce's commitment to our people. We shop at Woolworths because of their commitment to our people. We have money. Whether it is the welfare dollar or whatever, we have wealth with our money. We have to buy food.

**Mrs VALE**—You have control, Cathy.

**Ms Duncan**—Yes, and it makes you want to go forward. I think that is how we connect communities: they see our kids not in Aboriginal organisations—not in government jobs where 'it is supposed to be your job to look after us'—but in jobs that they never thought they would ever take a step towards let alone a get a place in. All the old grandmothers around Tamworth will sit with tears in their eyes. The pride in those young kids at the graduation ceremony in December brought tears to our eyes. When they said, 'Thank you for helping us, thank you for making the program,' I said, 'No, thank you, because it is about you. It is not about AES, it was you changing your own destiny and now you have the confidence to bring everybody else along.' We invited mothers and grandmothers to that ceremony. The parents had pride in seeing their children achieve, because no Aboriginal parent wants welfare for their kid. I do not want my daughter to be pregnant at 14 and getting a baby bonus; she tells me she is going to be a lawyer. I have a son and I do not know where he will be, but that is what we want. We are parents too, just like anyone else, and we want for our children the same as everybody else does.

**Mrs VALE**—When is the next graduation?

**Mr McQualter**—November.

**Ms Duncan**—At the end of the year; we would love to invite you along.

**Mr McQualter**—We just made that up then!

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Perhaps you could let the committee know when it is on.

**Ms Duncan**—When we had the graduation we did not just reward the children; the managers got together and they were so supportive of these guys that we rewarded the bank managers for their excellence in their commitment to Aboriginal employment. It was not just shining the child; it was shining the partnership, and that is what is important.

**Mrs VALE**—Who actually began this concept? It is quite entrepreneurial.

**Ms Duncan**—The bonds came about from talking with Reconciliation Australia.

**Mr Estens**—One of our partner groups is Reconciliation Australia and we were using Mike Lynskey. It is part of what we do in the AES. We probably get $300,000 or $400,000 a year from corporate Australia and it is part of building our fundraising side behind the company. It is important that we build funds away from governments in this whole exercise.

**Mrs VALE**—It is another entrepreneurial leg.

**Mr Estens**—We try to get creative.

**Ms Duncan**—We have created GTO status for the banks to be a group training organisation. We will probably do a lot more work than normal, but it brings some income into our organisation with the school based trainees. We are trying to move away and make a base with the corporate world and the commercial world so we can start generating our own incomes outside of large government contracts, because obviously those contracts come with choke holds

around us and how we think. These guys are entrepreneurial already and we tend to flare and work quite well together because we are thinking the same things.

**Mrs VALE**—Bouncing off ideas. It has a synergy.

**Mr Estens**—Bureaucracy kills entrepreneurial decision making. You have to give room for people to move. If you get all the AES managers together and listen to what comes out—you and I would never think of it. It is about how to take them on and lift them up. It is a constant lifting process.

**Mr McQualter**—That was one of the key drivers of the whole partnership that elevated the AES into the niche area of being the intermediary for school based training, because bankers do not have the expertise of dealing with government in the front line and filling out I do not know how many bits of paper. The poor old Wee Waa manager would ring me up and say, 'What the hell am I doing?' I would say, 'I do not know, just find your way.'

**Mr Estens**—The AES pays the kids and we bill the bank.

**Mr McQualter**—Originally we were directly employing the school based trainees and the AES was just out there doing the nice thing, but at the end of the day why would you do it for no profit? Who is going to pay the bills? Dick is not going to pay them forever. The whole idea was that the child was actually employed by the AES and contracted to whoever. We pay the AES an hourly rate—the subsidy goes directly to the AES, not via us. We do not touch it, and, quite honestly, to get the subsidy is too much work. The AES have the expertise to do that and get the billing correct, so we just get the invoice, pay it and let the machine in the AES handle what they are expert at. We just do what we do.

**Mr Estens**—As representatives to corporate Australia do you want to deal with Job Network providers to access Aboriginal people or do you want to deal with an Aboriginal organisation like the AES?

**Mr McQualter**—We only have to look at the results. It is not what we want to do; it is what we have done.

**Mrs VALE**—Cathy, how did the nucleus of the AES begin? This is quite innovative—it is refreshing and very much entrepreneurial.

**Ms Duncan**—When I was about 19 or 20 we did a 'pick the blackfella'. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody brought about local Aboriginal employment promotion committees—there was one in Campbelltown and one in Moree. I happened to be in the CES at the time as a young woman. There was a group of people and we had talks. We were only cotton chippers so they got the cotton growers to come in. It was a horrible time because it was managed by bureaucrats. I hated the process. They got the black people to come in last just to add the cultural stuff in. I was in a thing where they had 'pick the blackfella' and I always remember the mayor who passed away saying to me, 'Why would you want to be Aboriginal when you can live so much in the white world?' I said, 'Because at the end of the day aboriginality is in me and I can't take it out. If I could slice a part out I suppose I could live in your world, but I actually like being Aboriginal.' That attitude in Moree at the time has always

stuck in my head. There were three champions at the time in one state: Dick, Peter Glennie and Alice Scott, a woman in the cotton industry. The cotton growers got sick of it. They took it over and gave Dick a measly grant.

**Mr Estens**—That was in 1990, I think.

**Ms Duncan**—It was 1991. I had just finished school.

**Mr Estens**—It got going at the beginning of 1997. I realised that, if you go to a town that is devastated like Moree, you cannot pluck a kid out and put him in a job for eight hours and then he goes back to sixteen hours in a community that is pulling into that welfare. Not knowing anything about how to fix Aboriginal employment, I knew one thing that we had to do was lift the self-esteem and pride of the whole community as we put people into jobs. That is what we have built it on. I knew that you cannot tell people to change; you have to create ways by which people change.

**Mrs VALE**—You have to give them a road map.

**Mr Estens**—You cannot set out and tell a town what you are going to do; you have to get in underneath people's thinking. It is about positive impact everywhere and a lot of reverse thinking. There is a lot of good psychology in the way we tackle things. You sit, nut it all out and then build off it. Every six months we would pull the town of Moree together, black and white, on a functional or notable impact. On the back of that we would get more jobs. It is how to build a capacity within a town. There was a set program and a set way we did it in Moree and it just worked.

**Ms Duncan**—Gwydir Valley Cotton Growers took it over, then the momentum started to slow a bit because they are in their own industry. Dick then created a company and there were a group of people in that process. I came along on September 11, 2001. When the twin towers went, Dick and I met and I became the chair!—no, not really; we already knew each other. He used to say things to me and I would tell him to get stuffed and get off the front stairs of my government office and I would not talk to him. But, he gave me the chair of the company and it was very interesting. The young people were picked from the community; it was not the community saying, 'We want these guys to do it.' It was a whole different mindset for all of us to be involved in. It has been a very interesting journey. From that we met each other.

It was quite interesting for us, because we did not want to be drawn out of our communities; we were just a pissed off mother and a pissed off cotton farmer who decided that they wanted to change the community they lived in—that was probably all. It kept growing and it has not stopped yet. Last night I spoke to a person who did the *Message from Moree* film. They asked me, 'How did he pick you and how did you pick him?' I do not know. I think someone up there did that. That was something that was happening on a different side of life than I know. It is just the passion of people. You live in your own community and then meet up with guys like Danny, Lyn, Phil and Natalie. The passion is there in Aboriginal people, but it was this man's ability to teach us business that allowed us to keep going forward and understand how to fight and not lay down.

**Mrs VALE**—The success that you have had in the short time you have been operating is a story in itself.

**CHAIR**—In our report we have to tell your story, but we also have to tell the other side about what you are confronting. We have to explain it to our government, to our parliament and to DEWR—and to people who do not and will never be able to understand it, in my humble opinion. I would like to think that suddenly the world is going to change, but it is not.

**Mr Estens**—But they should not be the roadblock.

**CHAIR**—No, exactly. It is still incumbent upon the parliament to tackle it. We cannot shy away from it. I do not want to exclude anything people want to say, but in this next half hour I want to try to understand why. We have talked about Peter Shergold and I have met with Peter Shergold in an Indigenous discussion in Canberra when his frustration about his own bureaucracy just burst forth. He is a fairly forthright man and he worked within the Indigenous bureaucracy very much in the past. There are some good champions in there, but we have to harness that spirit. What I do not understand is: what are those main roadblocks? We need to talk about DEWR and every bureaucracy and mindset that stops this happening—that prevents or does not encourage it. On the other side of that we have to understand the dollars. Is it a matter of taxpayer dollars? I do not think it is; it is part of it, but I do not think it is all of it. I think it is a mindset.

**Mr Estens**—Yes, I know where the problem is.

**CHAIR**—We have to draw this out. Everybody please chip in, and our banking friends as well, because they understand the commercial world and they do not want to deal with bureaucracy—it is just too hard; we are too hard. We do not think like that. I come from private enterprise too, but it is just a totally different mindset and it is almost impossible to get the two together.

**Mr Estens**—I will take you through a story. We build the AES around self-esteem and pride. In Moree, at the end of the first year we had 13 people in jobs, at the end of the second year we had 44 and at the end of the third year we were holding over 100 Aboriginal people in jobs. We had a big impact. We were funded through the STEP program, which provides funding for three years. When the funding ran out I got a visit from bureaucrats to say, 'Your funding is finished, we're shutting it down.' Here is the first town in Australia that had been changed. When bureaucrats said to me, 'We're shutting you down, we don't need you anymore,' I could not believe it. I said, 'Aboriginal people are right.' For years they had been telling me that the government has been the problem and I had been telling them we could do it, but then they come and shut me down. I was horrified. At my own expense—everything is at my own expense—I visited Peter Reith, who was the minister in charge. He said, 'No, Dick, we don't need you. We've contracted with Job Network providers to fix the problem, so we don't need you. Piss off.'

I came back to Moree and I said, 'Jesus, this is harder than I thought.' I rang John Anderson, who was the Deputy Prime Minister, and told him exactly what I thought. Then I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister's office and teamed up with Peter Shojquist, who runs the Indigenous festivals, to get the PM up to Moree. I got a real shock because the Prime Minister and cabinet

were picking up a bit of information and people were noticing Moree changing. The PM came up and brought quite a few cabinet ministers with him. Peter Reith came with him and never said a word; you could tell he did not want to be there. The bureaucrats were all there and I discussed the problem with the Prime Minister and he could not believe what Peter Reith had said. He said, 'Dick, they won't shut you down now.' Mr Howard, God bless him, used us as a throwaway line—'Moree was changing'. So the bureaucrats had to write meal tickets for another few years.

The same thing happened a year or two later. We went into Tamworth and negotiated with middle level DEWR management from Canberra. They agreed to fund us into Tamworth to expand the strategy. They said, 'Dick, you aren't going to make it work in Tamworth; you need a white champion.' I got involved in the telecommunications inquiry for the government and when I finished I looked at our contract and could see we had been double-crossed. They had given me the same amount of money that we had for Moree to do Tamworth and Moree together—we got shafted. I sent a three-page letter to Abbott, who was the minister at the time, and he was a ripper. He sent a guy up to Moree with a chequebook and I got a bit of money. I think the bureaucrats were shocked: we put a flash office in the main street. It was pretty impacting. I read a Job Network provider's annual report for 2003 and they skite about the fact that they put three or four Aboriginal people into jobs. In the first year we did 120 jobs. We opened in May and, by the end of 2003, 600 Aboriginal people had registered for work in Dubbo. At the end of six months 1,000 people had voluntarily registered with us. These are Aboriginal people wanting work not welfare. That is impacting—it is huge.

They never give us enough money to run the show properly, so I have debts on my back all the time. I am running my own business and working with Aboriginal people to get there. I think we have 40-odd people in the company. I am the only white person involved and I do not even get involved in running it; I just sit and talk to key managers about the philosophies of business. There are three offices running out in the bush and I know the moment I walk away and leave it to go under its own steam, the bureaucrats will shut it down. The only reason that it has survived is the tenacity of the fight. I think they thought it was easier to push us out of business, but one thing I am is a tenacious fighter.

At some stage I have to let go. For me to get a life of my own I knew that I had to drive this business into a bigger business. I knew to fix employment in the country I had to get better access to corporate Australia. If you are dealing with a company like Woolworths you just get flicked up and down the line of human resources managers. All the corporate Australian businesses in the main street of our country towns are the key, but corporate Australia needs a vehicle. DEWR have their pet corporate leaders program that they hang their hat on—there are 66 companies tied up in it and nobody administering it. I get really annoyed that, because DEWR are promoting their Job Network providers, Job Network providers get full tote odds up to $7,000 in payments for every job outcome that the AES gets. The AES does not offer the government subsidy to businesses; we call it a bounty.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—You are saying that for every job AES gets somebody else gets the money?

**Mr Estens**—They get paid full—

**Ms Duncan**—I brought this up with our account manager. She said, 'But that's the way the world works.' I said, 'I don't care. That's the world that we are going to change.' We are not attached to welfare because no stick is going to bring our people to us. Because all of the people that are on our books are attached to welfare, when we get them a job Centrelink will mark them as 'not active'. That automatically flags to the Job Network provider and they get a 13-week outcome. In Moree, in every other regional town and in even the new offices we can do case studies showing there is blatant plagiarising and stealing of statistical information from the AES. Those 13-week outcomes—

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—I call it double dipping.

**Ms Duncan**—The way the system is set up in the government is that the Job Network provider can, off the back of the AES, always achieve the 13-week outcome and possibly the 26-week outcome. I was fascinated to learn this because I thought the taxpayers of Australia would be very interested. They are always saying that we cost a lot of money as blackfellas—there are reports to say how much an Aboriginal person costs—but you can actually achieve a 13-week outcome off the back of us and the Job Network gets it.

**CHAIR**—Can we get that information?

**Ms Duncan**—It is available through DEWR. They are attached to Centrelink, so when Centrelink says 'You're gone,' it sends a message to the Job Network provider, they inactivate them and they are able to claim the 13-week outcome.

**CHAIR**—For my purposes, I do not rely on DEWR; I would like to see it from your perspective.

**Ms Duncan**—We are going to do some mapping.

**Mr Estens**—A major Job Network company in Tamworth with 44 employees got three or four Aboriginal people into jobs last year. Then we went into Tamworth and did 120, of which 66 survived 13 weeks. Just imagine the money that has gone to Job Network providers over the life of our program. When we got the funding for the new contract they forced us into case managing. I said, 'We'll try it; this will probably decrease the money going to the Job Network providers,' but they are still getting paid off the work of the blacks. The other thing that happens is that we do not offer the government subsidy to businesses; we want businesses to employ Aboriginal people for the right reasons. The Job Network providers go to our businesses and offer them the government subsidies behind our backs. That is what happens. Subsidies lower self-esteem.

**Mr Lester**—Research indicates that too.

**Mr Estens**—I get a lot of pressure from bureaucracy because for years I have constantly been saying that they are the problem. The politicians want it fixed and the people of Australia want it fixed, so why is it not getting fixed? I can sit here and say that DEWR has a deliberate program to throttle the AES at the moment. It is not bureaucracy; it is not normal government. I have worked with a lot of government organisations—DAS, DEST, FaCS, the department of communications and the department of transport. It is a vicious, nasty game happening to the

AES at the moment. In December 2004 I took a team of people to Kevin Andrews' office to drive it to a bigger level, because I need a life myself but I am not going to walk away from Aboriginal people. Somebody in this country has to go in and bat for them. At that meeting I talked to the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, John Brogden from New South Wales and senior executives from the ANZ bank.

**Mr McQualter**—You took some school based trainees as well.

**Ms Duncan**—Yes, two of the kids came.

**Mr Estens**—I took a team. I met John Anderson. He ducked off to visit the Prime Minister, and Nick Minchin, the head of the finance committee, said, 'Dick, we'll get your funding to drive it to the next level.' John Anderson's approach into cabinet annoyed people because he rammed it through. This company was never going to get through a government bureaucracy process to take it to the next level. DEWR were not at that meeting. It shocked them that we were able to drive it through. From that meeting I was asked to break back to a committee of three and go and negotiate with DEWR to get a reasonable outcome on the funding to take this forward.

Our first meeting with DEWR went nowhere. At the second meeting we got a framework together and there were no further meetings because DEWR seized control of the initiative and they wanted to bury us back into being a Job Network provider. We were told we had to become a Job Network provider. We got shafted during the budgetary process. I did not know how much money it was for; they would not let me be part of putting the submission together. I wanted to put the submission together. They put the submission together in confidence. They said, 'It's a confidential government budgetary process; you're not allowed to know what's going on.'

When the contract popped out the other end in March or around budget time last year, we got jammed with the contract. I knew it would not work financially. It has left us $2 million short over the life of the contract. They forced us into case management. If you look through that list on what case management does for us, we do not get paid now for up-skilling Aboriginal people. We are not there for the whole community anymore; we are not there for all Aboriginal people anymore. There is only a set group that we can deal with all the time. It is killing this company at the moment. We are getting letters from DEWR trying to bankrupt us; they are deliberately withholding money. It is a nasty, vicious, game we are in at the moment to keep this company alive.

I get calls from all over Australia from different companies that have had their funding lines pulled, and I say to DEWR—and I can say it very publicly—'How many organisations that were potential best management practices for this country have been bankrupted by you? How many people have gone away and suicided through getting no hope from organisations or bureaucracies like yourselves? How much blood do those guys have on their hands?' There should be a war crimes tribunal—that is what I think. I can sit here and tell you that the attack on the AES is not coming from middle people in DEWR. I know that the people in Sydney here that work in DEWR are a bit shocked and they are not game to say anything to us about what is going on. I can sit here and tell you that it is coming from the secretary of the department. I get inside information from DEWR so I know where it is coming from.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—Part of the contract was that we had to use the DEWR system, for instance, to show that we had registered people, to make claims for job placement and 13 weeks et cetera. It was not until October last year that that system started to be put in place. It is still not in place; it is not working. It was not until November that we started to get a cash flow in this company, so from July to November there was no cash flow. We are trying to establish three new offices which cost $150,000 at least to set up. We do not want to be an apologetic back street business. We want to have reasonable furniture and we want to look professional. Yet I have been asked: 'Why are you getting all this furniture? Why don't you go and get something a little bit more low key? That would save you money.' This is from DEWR. It is an understanding of how you present yourself as a business.

They want to put us into the EA2000 system, which is an old Job Network system. It is not the current one; they have actually improved their system. We are not going live. They have a special system for us to enter but at the corporate level we do not have access to that system. My managers in each office input the information, like when they register somebody, then that goes to DEWR and DEWR will send us approvals. From that I have to try and work out whether they match what our people have entered. We just do not have access to it.

**Mr Lester**—It is hopeless.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—It is quite difficult to manage.

**CHAIR**—You are providing us with a pretty big jigsaw puzzle. You intimately understand it and you know where you have come from, but at the moment what I am struggling to understand is, from a cabinet decision to a DEWR obstruction, to them wanting you to be a Job Network provider but you are not, it is a different role—

**Ms Duncan**—They are moving us that way. By giving us case management and allowing the people to stay stifled in their own people and dealing with their own people, it has taken away from what I said earlier that we are a business front, we go to the businesses. Our guys are now playing with more paperwork and more accountability from a contract. They are playing more with their people that they already know in their communities and it has stifled our cash flow because we are not out building the relationships with businesses. That is typical of Job Network.

**CHAIR**—Your cash flow is impacted in a way apart from what the agreement was in the initial discussion from the cabinet?

**Mr Estens**—It costs $900,000 to run this corporate office.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—It is actually an old game that is played in Aboriginal affairs. You stifle the cash flow and then you get a letter, as we did on 23 December at 12 o'clock, saying, 'We understand that you are an insolvent company.'

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Where did that letter come from?

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—DEWR. 'Please provide us evidence, on 23 December at 12 o'clock, that you are not insolvent.' I have been in business long enough to know that that is how you

play the game. It did not phase me too much. It is a running issue that we have. They stifle us, they create a deficit in terms of our cash flow—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—They deliberately do it?

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—Then we have to prove that we actually have money. We are a not-for-profit organisation so we are not that flash. I have a reasonable salary and I intend to keep it. Some of the issues are having to fight all of these battles in the background plus trying to create a business.

**CHAIR**—This issue of the way that 13-week and 26-week payment is made is a really important part of the puzzle and is not unheard of in the Job Network. You are doing the work and creating the initiative and then somebody else comes alongside and picks it up.

**Mr Lester**—It is double funded. On the point of the cash flow, we planned for a certain amount in January in terms of the 13 weeks and the relevant registrations to which we are entitled. We only got one-sixth of that payment. We raised that with our account manager on Wednesday and their response was: 'Oh, I wasn't aware of that. We'll get back to the office and address it straight away.' To me that is not an effective way of managing a contract.

**Ms Duncan**—They are fixing their system. It is over $100,000 worth of money that is owed to us but they are jigging us and have been mapping it around for the last two weeks. Someone said, 'Yeah, because you've been playing with us for two weeks.' We tend to not get our money. It is not that hard to look at an outcome and push a button. We are still owed money at the moment. We are constantly ringing. We are sitting in Sydney now and we are still constantly trying to ask where our money is.

**CHAIR**—It would be immensely helpful if you could provide us with a flow chart of what actually happened from that original cabinet decision, through to the meetings with the DEWR, to the subsequent key events which have led to this situation. I know it is probably a lot of work but it may not be that hard. We need your key dates and your key financial transactions.

**Mr Lester**—It is in the documents.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—The other issue is that we have offices—for instance, Moree—which have over 1,000 Aboriginal people on their books whom they may or may not be able to find jobs for but, because of the case management, they are only allowed to work with 150. So they have to pick and choose who are the best out of that. It is a problem.

**CHAIR**—Are you more expensive than any other option?

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—No.

**Ms Duncan**—No.

**Mr Estens**—We are if you double pay Job Network.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—This is a really sore point with me. We have been doing research on some of these organisations; we know who they are and they know who we are. A lot of the other employment agencies get quite substantially more money to find employment for Aboriginal people than we do as an Aboriginal organisation trying to find employment for Aboriginal people. Some of those organisations get funded to establish their corporate office. We have not been funded for the corporate section.

**Mr Lester**—From a company perspective, what we could do tomorrow is pull away from that community capacity that we are doing and just purely concentrate on employment. Then the AES would not survive. Our key cultural attribute and our business ethos is community capacity building which none of the other providers are doing, yet they are getting more remuneration.

**Mr McQualter**—That is what corporates really are looking for. That is what we want and that is why we use it.

**CHAIR**—Here we have the most successful venture delivering what I think most Australians would define as good key outcomes. Everybody in Australia knew about Moree yet somehow there has been a total incapacity of government or bureaucracy to match up. I accept that there may be different ways of doing it, but there has been a total incapacity of government to actually respect your core business and deliver it.

**Mr Estens**—In 2001 Reconciliation Australia did an independent report on our company just to make sure it was safe for them to back us. I was shocked by the attitude of the guy who came in to do it. I challenged him on the Monday morning after he had moved around the corner. I said: 'What's going on? You are coming up here to do a hit job on us.' For three hours I talked to him through our process. He said, 'Dick, I have been interfered by DEWR to come up and do a hit job on you.' In 2004 DEWR sent a consultant up, a real narrow eyed nasty little man, and they have done another consultancy on us that we were not part of. It was very professionally done in not a nice way and John Anderson would not let Kevin Andrews release it. They are sitting on it and using it as a basis of their decision making on this company. I have been instructed that I am not allowed to talk about that consultancy.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Where is the consultancy now?

**Ms Duncan**—In government.

**Mr Estens**—DEWR have it. We have a copy of it.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—This is not a political question for me. Who has the power to release it?

**Mr Estens**—I guess the minister, Kevin Andrews.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Are you saying the minister will not allow it?

**Mr Estens**—It was discussed when John Anderson, the Deputy Prime Minister, and Kevin Andrews met with us. He said, 'Dick, I don't think we should let the minister release this.' John Anderson was leaning on Kevin Andrews not to release this consultancy.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—In your opinion, why has DEWR got the attitude that it has?

**Mr Estens**—I am working hard with a lot of politicians now and the way it went through parliament pissed them off. Their sole thing is defending the Job Network providers: 'This is our model; this is what everyone in Australia has to use.' I have had calls from people in South Australia, Adelaide and Darwin—other organisations that have had their funding lines shut down and not renewed. I think in this country we need private people getting in partnership with Aboriginal groups and bringing them into the commercial world.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—We need whatever model is going to work.

**Mr Estens**—Everyone around the world is saying that we are doing a poor job with our Aboriginal people.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Do you think that it is DEWR being protectionist on behalf of the Job Network?

**Mr Estens**—It is more than that.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—It has to be more because in the grand scheme of things, financially and numerically, here is the Job Network, this great big thing and here is you, down here, it is like the David and Goliath thing. I do not understand why they are so fearful of you.

**Mrs VALE**—Could I propose that it is the fact that you are a success—

**Mr Estens**—DEWR say publicly that we are not as successful as we say we are.

**Mrs VALE**—You have to look back at why they would be saying that. The point is that they are blinded by their bureaucratic mindset that theirs is the only model. It is a territorial thing, it is an ego thing. The fact that you are a success and that you have turned around Moree—the fact that you exist and you are a success would be an irritation.

**Mr Estens**—Most of my time in this organisation is keeping DEWR off their backs and giving Aboriginal people room to move.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—One of the other issues is that they say we are not achieving outcomes, but we are restricted by the case management of how many people we can actually put into employment. I know that if we had it opened up we could triple or quadruple the employment. We are restricted to the case management, which they call the point in time capacity: at any one time we can only have how ever many people they have nominated for each office. We have not nominated them, they have nominated them. In Moree it is 150. In Glebe, where they said we would not get an Aboriginal person coming to enrol, we were restricted to 50 people. We had 50 people registered in the first week.

**Mrs VALE**—You were restricted to how many you could actually register?

**Ms Duncan**—That is right.

**Mrs VALE**—We want Aboriginal people employed and they are restricting you on how many you can register?

**Ms Duncan**—We get a budget announcement and then we are told where we can go. We get money and it is restricted to certain areas. They will not pay for the corporate office for fear that we may be successful.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—They did not believe that we would get anybody working for us.

**Ms Duncan**—From doing this run with Dick over the last three years, being that little girl in Canberra sitting there and arguing for our people, there is a political football happening. There are political parties and things happening in Canberra that are a deliberate sabotage that I fear talking aloud about.

**Mr Estens**—It is the politicians.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—No, it is not.

**Ms Duncan**—No, it is in a bureaucratic way—not in a ministerial way. Whether people got pissed off when John Anderson put us through the line or not and whether they think he is Dick's friend I find quite bullshit. He lives in Gunnedah. He is two hours from the place that caused the race riots in New South Wales. He saw what we did with his own eyes. Tamworth is 70 kilometres up the road. ATSIC was a government model that was made up by government. We have a bunch of people now sitting around now and making up processes with government. This has been driven from the grassroots up and that is what makes it so horrible to people out there in the government.

**Mrs VALE**—And new and refreshing. They do not have ownership of it.

**Ms Duncan**—It is so successful to us and communities because it is the one program that we have been allowed to do. I walked out of an 11-year government job. I walked across the road and said, 'I am going to do this for my community.' The answers for Indigenous people are in the communities and the people. This is just a program that allows the people to come forward. There are too many government programs for Aboriginal people always being set up by government, thought up by bureaucrats and ministers—not Aboriginal people saying: 'This is our life. This is where we want our destiny to be and this is where our future will be.'

**CHAIR**—We need to get that time line and try to understand that a bit better. We may already have that but it would be better if you did it. We have a lot of information here but there is a bit more work to get it down to the key issues. That gives us opportunities as we talk to ministers and departments.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—What changes would you like to see to policy at all levels of government to increase Indigenous employment? I think you have answered that.

**Mr Estens**—We have covered that.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—In relation to the next step, which is the creation of small businesses on behalf of these folk who then find themselves able to do that, what suggestions do you have for the removal of any discrimination that may occur in relation to resourcing, funding and financing for that next step?

**Mrs VALE**—Mr Chairman, could we have DEWR come before the committee? I have one or two questions I would like answers to.

**CHAIR**—We will; we are keen to have the minister as well. The great challenge in terms of the Indigenous family issue is lifting up rather than breaking down. It seems that this balance is so critical in the process. Do not drag down, lift up. The speedboat is the way to go. It is to me, if not the key issue, certainly in the top two or three key issues in employment settings.

**Mr McQualter**—The big challenge for corporate Australia is what do we do to look at removing resistance internally? It is to basically barrel through. It is not to win; it is just to knock them over—the hip and shoulder. The big challenge is to have Emma or one of the girls at Moree manage Moree branch or Tamworth or Gunnedah or anywhere in Australia in 10 years time. The goal is to have an Indigenous bank manager who is from that town.

**Mr Eckersley**—The bigger challenge is to have one of them in one of our roles. There is no reason why that cannot happen in another 15 or 20 years with some of these young ones.

**Mr Lester**—Corporate Australia are committed to and supportive of increasing Indigenous employment. They see the AES as the vehicle in order for that to occur.

**Ms Riley-Mundine**—One of the issues is that funding, as part of our contract, is aimed at long-term unemployed Aboriginal people. We are not able to help those people who might like support in changing their career path because they are already employed. It means that we are creating a suppressive economic climate because Aboriginal people often want just a little bit of help in how to improve their resume, advice on how to speak in an interview et cetera. It is not just the long-term unemployed. If we are going to create better career paths for Aboriginal people, we need to be able to open up to whom we offer help. At the moment we are restricted to creating economic suppression in our communities.

**Ms Duncan**—In answer to your question about building the business side, we have our hands up and are rolling up our sleeves in Moree at the moment and stepping towards that. That will be a challenge that we could probably talk to you about in the future. I cannot understand why the government does not want to build on success. I come from rural and remote and I am still in the country. We have built an office and I am not coming out of the country. I fear for the rural and remote children in this country because there are not a lot of opportunities. This actually gives them an opportunity where they can become quality citizens, but also quality contributors to the economic base of this country.

**Mr Estens**—The hardest thing that our team has to do is for our employment coordinators visiting the businesses to build the relationships, to find those people and get them to work to that pattern. We have a high turnover of staff in that area because it is pretty impacting work and they generally do not like getting out there, visiting businesses in towns and cities and understanding the corporate world. Once they understand the commercial world and visit those

businesses, they go back into those communities and talk about what they are learning. It is a real process of bringing people into the commercial world. In Moree we have probably had 50 people work in it. That is what changes a community and that is what changes a town. As we battle with our employment coordinators, they are our greatest asset, but they can also be our weakest links. We have good months and bad months, but it is a process of constant change and lifting to get change in Australia. Building a business with no reserve funding, to get the process going, has been tough. As a business person I would not be spending $100,000 a year of my own money if I did not think this process was working.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for having us here. We have some real challenges because the spirit of what you fed into us this morning is something that I certainly would not want to see die. This is tough stuff because we really are challenging status quo big time. That is what sticks out so clearly. Let us see where we can go in the next four months.

**Mr Estens**—We have been fighting this hard for five years and I am sick of it. I have had an absolute gutful of the bureaucracy.

**Mrs VALE**—I am totally shocked by what you have said about DEWR. Have you explained that to John Anderson?

**Mr Estens**—He is very aware of it.

**CHAIR**—John is my neighbour in the offices in the House so we will have a little chat.

**Mr Estens**—The Prime Minister's office is very aware of it. I had a big briefing with Arthur Sinodinos the other day. We had an hour with Shergold. Our best supporter in the bureaucracy is Wayne Gibbons. He has had the shemozzle of ATSIC and he says, 'Dick, nothing is working,' until he came and had a look at what we were doing. I think we were a breath of fresh air for him. He is really working hard for us at the moment. He heads up the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination. We are negotiating with the state government at the moment to bring them on board with funding. We are setting up a small fundraising team here in the next month, once we get a bit of weight off our back, to bring the people of Australia on board. We are here to give the people of Sydney and Australia a different face on what Aboriginal people can achieve.

**Mrs VALE**—The vast majority of Australians want to see Aboriginals succeed. Everybody really does want to see Aboriginals succeed.

**Ms Duncan**—I am just going to train my son to be the Prime Minister of Australia. I went home and said, 'Your new future is not to be a professional BMX rider'—like he told me he was going to be at seven—'you need to go to politics, my boy.' We need more people like Wayne out there. I am going to stay in this business.

**Mr Estens**—I want to reiterate one thing. Our problem is not with the bureaucracy as a whole. It is one person who heads that group up.

**CHAIR**—Coming from regional Australia, as I do, it is a wonderful testament to the commitment. There is one other issue. I stood at the Block at Redfern and looked back at the CBD and thought that it must be some of the most valuable real estate in Australia. I have a

dream of converting that into something of great value as well. There are challenges here in urban and regional Australia. Thanks very much.

[11.11 am]

**MUNDINE, Mr Warren Stephen, Chief Executive Officer, New South Wales Native Title Services**

**CHAIR**—Welcome to our proceedings today. We are appreciative of your time. Would you like to make a few opening comments related to our inquiry?

**Mr Mundine**—In regard to the inquiry, we need to start looking at a few realities in the whole process. There are a number of issues I would like to discuss. I note that you had witnesses from the Aboriginal Employment Strategy here prior to this, so I will also talk about that type of model as well.

We have to realise that there are 400,000 Aboriginals in Australia and most of those Aboriginals live in large provincial towns or in capital cities. We are not really talking about a large group of people, dealing with very remote communities who are outside the mainstream economy. We are talking about the majority of people living in the mainstream of the economy, who are not benefiting from and are not able to access employment. Those are the issues we need to start dealing with. The rural and remote areas are a different scenario which we need to deal with.

My main push in this area is that we need to learn from the mistakes and the good things over the last 30 to 40 years. Not everything has been a mistake and not everything headed in the right direction; there have been some good achievements and some good ideas. Some of those good ideas, which have not been achieved, can be built upon, can be put in a different direction and become more successful. Some of the things that have been successful—going back 30 or 40 years, who would ever have thought the number of lawyers, professional people like school teachers and doctors that are working and employed and doing quite well in Aboriginal employment.

At the same time, we have a large percentage of people who fall into this generational thing of unemployment; the idea of employment is quite alien to their culture. We are seen as the people from Mars, having to get up in the morning and go to work—they may be right. We come from the wrong front in that we are looking at employment. We need to turn it around and say that employment is a result of an activity. We need to look at what activities create employment. In the past, in a lot of areas we have tried to create artificial employment and sustain that artificial employment, which does not work. We need to look at activities that create sustainable employment in the long term and in the short term as well. Sometimes there is nothing wrong with short-term employment, working for a couple of months or two years and then moving on to another employment situation. A lot of people do that quite successfully. This is seen in a number of industries, especially in mining. We need to focus on the activities that get people into sustainable jobs, rather than actually looking at jobs.

We also need to build upon the activities of the past. I find it quite exciting and amazing that as you travel around the country within rural and remote areas, provincial towns and large cities, you find a large pool of Aboriginal people who have actually been trained in a number of areas

through TAFE, whether through pre-apprenticeship training programs, in plant operations or a number of other areas, but have never been able to then access the wider job market. You need to start asking why.

For example, when I was working with AGL we had to do the Ballera to Mt Isa pipeline, the Carpentaria pipeline, we were going out to places like Boulia and Jdarra. I said, 'How many people are we employing on a regular basis?' There were about 300 people working on this pipeline every day. They come and go but it is still 300 people. I said, 'Well give me 30 jobs.' He said, 'You are not going to get 30 jobs for Indigenous people in those areas.' I said, 'If I do not get them, you can have the 30 jobs back.' We went into these communities like Jdarra and Boulia and found people who had been doing pre-apprenticeship programs and plant operations programs. They had not quite finished them and received their certificates, so we then made arrangements with the industrial relations department in Queensland for them to work with the shire councils and finish their plant operations certificates, and then work on the pipeline. We were able to work with some of those people to do trades on those pipeline projects, but those projects are very short term and last only six to 12 months in those areas.

What I learnt from that experience was that if there are a number of these projects in a few areas, you can actually build up the skills base, but you need to have skills that are mobile, so that those skills that can be used in Boulia can also be used in Sydney and in Russia. It is also about mobility—you cannot expect to live in a small community and believe you are going to be employed continuously.

I use the example of Dubbo, a city of 40,000 people. If you are a carpenter in Dubbo you do not work in Dubbo full-time. You spend eight months in Dubbo building or renovating houses, and the other four months of the year going to Bathurst, Orange, Sydney and other places to fill that time. If it cannot be done in a city of 40,000 people, you cannot expect it to be done in smaller towns. You have to have mobility. You see that in rural towns across Australia—people are always moving around. That is not to say that people have to move from their communities. They can still live in their communities but they have to be prepared to travel 100 or 200 kilometres down the road to do some work or spend two or three months a year working in Darwin or Sydney or somewhere else. That is the reality of it. We need to work with Aboriginal communities to start looking at those realities.

We also need to get activities into communities to start creating employment. We have to have mixed economies in our communities. Yes, we need our community cultural activities within these communities and we need the government infrastructure—schools, medical services, whatever—but we also need a private Indigenous enterprise working within those communities creating jobs. That could be someone who is self-employed, a person who has been trained through an apprenticeship program at TAFE as a carpenter. They can be the carpenter or the repair and maintenance person for that community, self-employed, getting the rewards of that small business. We need to encourage a lot more small business development in a lot of these communities. In Sydney, we are starting to see a number of Aboriginal people doing trades within Sydney and other areas who are then moving into self-employment, such as roof tilers, carpenters and carpet layers. That is the area that we have to start moving people into. To me it should be quite a simple process to get people to break through those barriers and move into those areas. We need to be more adventurous in getting the skills and the trades.

When I was working with AGL in the mining industry, we used to fly people in from overseas to do the welding on our pipelines because we would not get the welders in Australia of the standard we wanted. Why can we not get people trained and working in these remote areas? There are some successful programs in Argyle and places like that where a large mine is working near an Aboriginal community. They actually bring those Aboriginal people in to be part of the mining project and give them jobs. They start off by having a social conscience to involve Aboriginal people in that industry, but at the end of the day it is about merit; they have to be productive just as any other worker on that project, otherwise it is a waste of time. Those are the things we have to really start focusing on. We need to bring the Aboriginal communities into the wider Australia economy and into the wider world economy, and people should be able to move around.

The chair brought up earlier the Redfern-Chippendale situation. We need to start looking at better use of the assets that we are acquiring within Indigenous communities, to have the benefit of an activity that then creates employment and creates jobs for that community. We have to be very imaginative with that. A lot of industries out there are quite happy to work with Indigenous communities. For example, the Woolworths experiment in the Northern Territory, the local store, the experiments now with Westpac in the Cape York area, working in a small business and getting those business enterprises up; these things will take a number of years to do because we really have to get people to step outside their culture and take on this new enterprise.

At the end of the day these things have to be profit driven. Profit is not a bad word—it has been in Aboriginal communities for many years in regards to enterprises. We have to sell that as a good word. We have to also make the Indigenous people in those communities shareholders. I deliberately use the word 'shareholders' rather than being 'members' of some of these enterprises, because in the sense of shareholders you actually get a benefit. If that enterprise is working, you get a benefit from it; if it is not working, then you get the failings of that enterprise. This creates a cultural shift in people's minds in that whether it does or does not work, it reflects back on themselves. We need to have that instilled in people to get things moving along.

We need to start looking at the model of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy company across the board—that is, of creating highly professional, profitable, well qualified Indigenous people who are Indigenous leaders within the private sector, the business sector and across the board, in health and education, who run these types of businesses, who have benefits and provide services back to the Indigenous community. That model could be used within the health area, people do it with AMSs and I think that some of these things are quite successful. In rural areas and provincial towns we could do it better; we could look at having larger organisations with a number of offices who can provide those proper health services and medical services back to the Aboriginal community. It creates employment. It creates Aboriginal people who are properly skilled and properly trained in these areas. Legal services, education, bodies I work with, the native title representative bodies and native title services areas, can also do it better as well. Our organisation is one of the few that actually employs Aboriginal lawyers; most of them are non-Aboriginal people. We need to make that commitment to Aboriginal lawyers, to people working in our IT systems as well as our accountants and finance people. We need to get that across the board and bring those people up.

My idea is that you bring them in for two or three years on signed contracts and then we get them out, they go out into the wider world, they train out there and they can come back. They come backwards and forwards bringing the skills that they have built up over a number of years, putting that back into Aboriginal communities. These are the ways forward that we need to start working with. Of course the vast majority of people will not be lawyers, doctors or nurses or anything like that; they will be at the other end of the scale. We can look at trades, at unskilled areas that support these communities and we can better utilise the CDEP program. I think in some areas it is quite good, in a lot of areas it is very much underutilised, in some areas it is even used as slave labour for the local shire councils. We need to better utilise that and move them into a more enterprise driven area.

**Mrs VALE**—You mentioned the word 'shareholder' and it is a really fantastic word. More than anything else, even there is not a benefit at the end, there is an expectation of dividend, which is just so inspiring to keep people belonging and trying, and that is so important. You talked also about people from communities having to travel 200 kilometres to actually get a job or training, that it is important that they actually understand that they have to do that because that is part of the challenge of living remote. Do you have trouble explaining to community-living people that they might have to move? Do you meet resistance with that acceptance of reality?

**Mr Mundine**—You have to be careful about using the word 'move' because people want to live on their country. I think people can live on their country where they have ties, but if they are going to build an economic future for themselves and have jobs, then the reality is there are two things you can do. One is that you do physically move for a number of years, the other one is that you can stay on your country but you move to get educated and then come back. You then work in your community in whatever area you are educated in, so you may be a nurse or the local tradesman working in that community, but at the same time that is not going to be a full-time job. You are going to have to work in several communities and travel to several communities doing that. That is the message that we need to instil in people, that you can live on country but in certain parts of the year—and it is just like what we did in traditional society, you did not stay in one country, when the drought was on you would moved, when the rainy season was on you would moved. We need to explain that.

**Mrs VALE**—So, there is even historical relevance to that?

**Mr Mundine**—The Aboriginal people do that. Prior to the 1970s we worked as drovers—we moved. It is nothing new. It is something we seem to have lost in the last 20 to 30 years that we need to put back into our culture and into our psyche to say, 'Yes, this is a normal thing for us, we can do these things.' For other people who have visions of grandeur and decide that they want to go on and do great things in the world, then I think we need to have them invest back in their communities. If they want to move out of their communities, become multimillionaires or become an actress overseas or even go stupid and want to become Prime Minister, then we need to have them reinvest back into their communities. What is wrong with them to go back and do these things to help set up a tourist operation, invest in the education program in their communities? We need to have these things happening all the time. Also, what is wrong with them travelling backwards and forwards? I do this a lot, I go back to my community and holiday there. It is about reinvesting back into your community.

**Mrs VALE**—That is not just something that is peculiar to Indigenous Australians. I think all of us move around Australia and we do go back.

**Mr Mundine**—I do not think it is anything peculiar to Indigenous except the part about living on country and being tied to your country because of culture. Looking at other Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities around the world, it is a similar issue with which we have to deal.

**Mrs VALE**—My background and history has never allowed me to have exposure to Indigenous communities until in recent times since I have been in parliament, so I am on a very steep learning curve. I come from Sutherland shire which is suburban Sydney and we have some Aboriginal elders whom I have met only perhaps in the last 10 years. It does seem to me from what I have read and what I have seen, that Indigenous communities seem to have a retrospective view of the world and themselves in it. The message I am getting from you is providing a prospective view about goals that can be set, ambitions that can be achieved, training that can be had and about themselves taking their place. To me that is a huge shift. Is that something that just you are bringing to this area?

**Mr Mundine**—I have a very strong sense of my Aboriginality and a very strong sense about self-esteem and stuff like that. Unfortunately because of the historical situation, a lot of communities have been forced off country and into reserves. Moree is a good example—they trucked people into Moree. Bourke is another one. During the 1920s and 1930s, people were trucked to south-west Queensland and north-east South Australia. They were forced hundreds and hundreds of miles off their country and forced to live on reserves. They had a very much controlled life where you could not fart without permission. There was a very strong control over people.

A few people have very negative views about things and they get caught up in their own world of despair, that is why when we look at the statistics we see that there are huge numbers of domestic violence and substance abuse in our community. That is the result of poverty, the result of people being powerless and not being able to move forward. I want to use our culture. I want to use our Aboriginality to move forward and to create a better future for ourselves.

You can take it across the spectrum, like the Michael Mansells and other people of the world who want to drive ‘whitey’ back into the sea and create an Aboriginal nation. That is fine, but to do that you have to have the skills. When ‘whitey’ gets driven back into the sea, we have to have the nurses, the doctors, the plumbers, the people who can build the houses, work the sewerage systems and deal with the infrastructure to make us as a society.

People know about a neutron bomb, which is something the Carter government was looking at back when I was a tiny little boy back in the 1970s. You would drop the bomb and it did not destroy infrastructure, just human beings. So I thought: why don’t we get a white neutron bomb, drop it in Australia and all the whitefellas disappear? We need to have the vast range of skills for our society to move ahead. We need the bankers, the politicians—some people would debate that—the plumbers, the tradespeople, the truck drivers. We need to get those people into those industries. That is what I am talking about. We need to be part of the world, because the world is an exciting place. We use globalisation in positive areas, like being part of the UN, raising our issues there, raising our issues around the world. Why can’t we use globalisation as part of our economic development as well?

**Mrs VALE**—What do you see that we can do for you?

**Mr Mundine**—It is about changing the paradigms. In the past we have focused too much on employment. We should be looking at activities that create employment—getting economic development and other activities in our area. It does not have to be an economic thing. It can be government infrastructure in regard to schools, medical services and other things, but we need to look at the activities that create jobs. If you are just looking at employment then you are trying to get a job to fit an area when in actual fact you need to say, 'Okay, let's have an activity that needs jobs.' That is how the rest of the world operates. The rest of the world, no matter who they are, operate on an activity that creates work for people, not on a job that tries to create an activity.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Earlier this morning we heard from the AES about the way they run their training program and their school based training program, and we heard about the involvement of the corporate world; the banks were here to talk with us about it. Earlier this morning before we started I was chatting to one of the officers who works as a coordinator for employment here at AES and she was explaining to me how they had a young Indigenous woman who had a disability and they have found employment for her. The mentoring was the most important key to that in as much as this young woman actually went out with the client for the first 30 or 40 days of contact with the employer until things were settled down.

The reason I am saying all of that is because there seems to be a range of different ways of doing this. There is the whitefella's way, the blackfella's way, the Job Network way, all sorts of ways. The message I am getting is that we need to look very seriously at how we actually set these things up so that they will not fail but will actually achieve. Could you discuss with us your views on what sort of relationships and systems you think need to be in place to ensure that that sort of process and outcome is achievable—not just Job Network figures for the sake of picking on Job Network, but more than that. Can you concentrate on that and tell us what you think about how those processes should be? It comes into what you are saying about creating the activity rather than just the job.

**Mr Mundine**—There are several levels. There are around 60,000 Aboriginals living in Sydney and a lot of them are not accessing the economy of Sydney and benefiting from the Sydney market. It was raised earlier about Chippendale and the housing company down there; a lot of this is not rocket science. You mentioned mentors. If you go into private industry or into large corporations you have a mentor that looks after you and helps you through the system as you work your way up through the company. I have seen that in large corporations across Australia where you come in and a senior executive or a middle manager mentors you and helps you achieve through the company. That is not rocket science, companies do that now. Cadetships are another example. How many companies go to the universities and drag people in to work for them in a wide range of skill areas? That is nothing new; you are not selling anything new to those companies. You need to get better at this cadetship program. I know some of these things are happening, but I think we can do these things better.

**CHAIR**—How do you see those things applying to the young Indigenous community particularly but the Indigenous community generally? AES appear to do it.

**Mr Mundine**—We need to get the AES and also some of these companies into the schooling system. We need to show these kids that there is a linkage. One of the problems that Aboriginal kids have is understanding the link between education and getting a job. A lot of them do not quite understand that. We need to have programs where we go into the school system and work with those kids but not at the year 10, 11 and 12 end. That is a bit too late; a lot of Aboriginal kids are dropping out at year 9. We need to get back down to the lower levels of school and work with those kids and say: 'If you do A, B and C this is where you can go and this is what you can do. These companies will mentor you and will give you cadetships, but you have to do the hard yards; you have to get this level of education.'

**CHAIR**—Do you think it is a bit of a tripartite? It is the community and the individuals in it, the government and private industry as well.

**Mrs VALE**—It is what AES is doing.

**Mr Mundine**—That is what you have to do. Private enterprise needs to be a very strong provider in this system because they are the ones who create the jobs. The government does not create all the jobs and the government does not provide all the jobs that we need in our communities. We also need to look at contracting, encouraging contracting where governments and the private sector contract Indigenous companies, mentor them and work with them. We have to go through this process and it has to be a continuing process for a number of years yet before things get legs and run themselves. In the wider Australian economy we do mentor, we have cadetships and we need to have a lot more leadership programs dealing with kids at a young age and their self-esteem.

Someone spoke to me the other day about locking kids up. I said: 'I don't believe that kids should be locked up'—depending on the crime of course—'I think we need to do things with kids and work with them to break this cycle.' This is another problem we have to deal with. That is why I was very supportive of the Governor-General who said, 'Why do you not take them out bush and put them in bush camps?' People said to me, 'How does that get people to be productive and be contributors to themselves and their self-esteem and to the wider Australian community?' I said: 'Have you ever been to leadership forums and seen some of these corporate blokes running around, climbing up trees, swinging naked, playing bongo drums, dancing around fires and doing teamwork stuff? We do that with corporate leaders. Why don't we do that with these young kids? Why don't we do these things a lot more?'

**Mrs VALE**—It is not just going bush; they are actually structured programs. Even things like abseiling and taking on the impossible.

**Mr Mundine**—Teamwork and building that self-esteem: 'I can climb to the top of that pole even though I'm scared of heights.' It is about opening the universe up to kids. One of the other things we do which is both good and not so good is we tend to focus on the ones who have done the bad things. One of the things I notice in a lot of western New South Wales is that it is a kid who has played up who gets the trip to Sydney, because we are trying to correct their behaviour. The kids who have not played up seem to get ignored in Aboriginal communities. I have seen a lot of young Aboriginal kids who are doing quite well. They get to a certain stage and they need that little bit of a leg-up, a little bit more support, but, because they have seen the ones playing up getting the trips, the culture care and things like that, they fall over as well. We are losing

those types of kids. We need to start focusing on how we can encourage kids who are going to perform and do better. That is not to say we forget about the programs for the kids who are playing up; it means we have to do more and work with the kids who are not.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—That was one of the strong messages that we got out of the AES this morning, about the banks taking on the trainees and the process the AES had gone through to choose those participants. The point was made very strongly that they were not just choosing the kids who would make it anyway but they were choosing the kids from intergenerational bad employment record families or whatever. In the outcomes they were seeing that kids coming from the more difficult backgrounds were being given an opportunity they maybe never would have had and it begins to break that family record. But, for the kids who would possibly make it anyway, it was giving them an advance in terms of time for their potential to develop. You are saying the same thing, but we saw a good example of that through how the AES said that they were actually choosing their participants.

**Mr Mundine**—That is the way forward. I am sort of echoing it—I did not know they said that. It is a very good point. We also need to tie people back to role modelling as well, given how important that is to communities. It is all very well for me to fly into a community—'Hey, here I am: I've been successful'—but you need to have examples from that community. You need to see people who actually came from there, lived that life and were able to break that cycle. We need to bring them back and do a lot more role modelling to show people that they can achieve things. Frankly, there are a lot of people out there who do not see any future. They do not see education as a way of breaking out of poverty or breaking out of the situation that they are in. They just do not see a future for themselves. That is a problem we have in a lot of these rural communities.

**Mrs VALE**—Probably because there has never been jobs for them to go to. Education has not seemed like a natural stepping stone.

**Mr Mundine**—They have not seen it and they cannot form those linkages. We have to do a lot more work in the lower education areas, like primary and infant schools. I am a great believer that we actually have to go back to prenatal education: we have to work with the families and the parents and work our way forward from there.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—You obviously get around the country a bit and meet with a lot of Indigenous people and with others as well. Our inquiry is also looking at trying to identify the best examples we can find of where Indigenous employment works, where we can see that there has been a successful outcome, and then to understand why that has been the case in that instance and see what we can do about spreading that success rate further. Do you have any examples in your head of where you have seen good outcomes in Indigenous employment according to how you would judge it?

**Mr Mundine**—Mainly because I have a background in construction and mining, I think the mining companies—this may surprise people—are heading in the right direction. I think some of the larger mining companies—not all of them but quite a few—are doing quite a good job. Looking at the Pilbara and some in the western Queensland area, you are seeing mining companies that are making a commitment to bringing people in. They are not doing it for charity; they are doing it because they need the workers. They need workers who they can rely

on to be there. They know that these people live in the communities: they are not going to be shooting off and running away.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Other than knowing why they are doing it, do you have a view as to what they are doing that helps it work? Some employers find the cultural issues and other issues just too hard.

**Mr Mundine**—It is the same thing as we were talking about before, the mentoring program. They are working from both sides, not only with the employee but also with the company and the senior management, to deal with those Indigenous issues as well. You need to have that two-way flow. When you are doing that, yes, the bottom line is that the person has to be productive and making money for the company—there is no argument about that—but there are many ways of doing that. There are many ways to skin a cat. Having that mentoring and the support systems in place works very successfully.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—Is there anything at the federal government level that you would like to see changed or enhanced even more? Is there any emphasis that you think should be skewed a bit?

**Mr Mundine**—I get frustrated from being outside the bureaucracy. They are a bit too narrow. We need to be more adventurous in the way we are dealing with things. The government needs to work a lot more with and to encourage private industry. Government has to also produce the goods. It is all very well to go to private industry and say, 'This is what you need to do'; I think the government needs to have some winners up as well. It needs to be recruiting and doing similar things to what the private sector does. It needs to forge partnerships as well in these areas.

We have had good schemes in the past which could have done some wonderful things for Aboriginal people. In the past state governments were guilty of bringing Aboriginal people in for the short term and then dropping them off; they did not really train them. We need to put in place proper training programs, proper outcomes: sign them up to make sure that these kids are coming in, getting the skills and the career paths they need, and building a future for themselves.

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—We talk and hear a lot about the potential of establishing Indigenous-run business. There are two aspects of this. One is the historic one where there have been many attempts and many failures, which we have to acknowledge. I have a personal view that sometimes those things have been set up almost knowing that they are going to fail because the bars have been too high or the parameters have been too impossible. It is really easy to then say, 'We're not going to give those blackfellas any more money because they just do not do it right.' Mentoring is the other part of that, which has possibly been missing. The other aspect currently is to what degree there are difficulties or not in genuine attempts by people to set up businesses and to try to access finance as a result of some of that history. Do you have a view about that?

**Mr Mundine**—A good example of that is to look at the enterprise development in Indigenous communities in the past—the programs that were set up prior to ATSIC, the old ADC. It was actually better to go to the banks and get a loan rather than get a cheaper loan through those organisations, because the banks were driven by wanting to get the repayments back from that

loan so they worked with you and helped with your business plan. That was not the case in the government-established structures like ADC and ATSIC. To be quite honest, I thought with the expertise they were trying to put across that they really were not business people. We needed access to business people who knew what it was like to—

**Ms ANNETTE ELLIS**—So again we are talking about partnerships?

**Mr Mundine**—Yes. A good example that I use is in my business. For my own selfish reasons, I sent my executive assistant over to IAG. They took her away for three weeks, then every couple of months they take her away for another week and they train her up to babysit me and look after me. She will have those skills. At the end of the day she will say, 'I can get a better job than with you, Warren' and she will go off and be a great personal assistant. We need to do a lot more of that. I do that with my lawyers too. I send them off to law firms. I arrange for them to go away and spend a certain period of time in the law firms, and then they come back to us. You have this partnership of skill sharing and building up relationships. I think that needs to be done in the legal services. We need to do that across the board in a number of areas and get support for this.

Another thing that we do in these remote communities is set up enterprises. It is very difficult for them to succeed because in small business you have to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If I was an Aboriginal person sitting in Cape York and I had a choice between seven days a week, 24 hours a day and nothing, I would take the nothing any day. It is too easy for me. We need to put some more support mechanisms in those areas. In Arnhem Land in eastern Northern Territory, there is a franchising system of support through the stores. Under that, if a family who is running that store needs to go away and get support—everyone needs training and updating—then they can go away, and through the franchising system a manager is put in for that period. If they need to go on holidays, a manager can come in and look after them. We need to look at those types of activities as well.

**Mrs VALE**—In reading some of your articles I noticed that you articulated a concern regarding poor governance in Aboriginal corporations. Do you think it would help if a mentoring program could be put in place for the governance of corporations?

**Mr Mundine**—Governance is a big issue, as you alluded before, Chair. I have done this myself—I am as guilty as anyone else of setting up organisations and thinking these people can run them. But you are taking people who have not worked within these corporate structures before and they do not have the skills base. You presume they are going to do good. Most of the problems we have in Aboriginal affairs do not involve dishonesty or corruption; it is about people trying to do good and falling on their face.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Through a lack of support or training.

**Mr Mundine**—The lack of support and training and so on—that is exactly right. Of 100 organisations, 99 would have fallen over for that reason. You do have corruption, but that is only that one per cent.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I do not want to be overdramatic about this, but to what degree is the history of all of that impacting on the present? Is it impacting at all or are we now looking at

establishing new Indigenous run businesses accessing finance through whatever means with a clean sheet?

**Mr Mundine**—I am an optimist and we are living in exciting times. The leadership is changing: we have a younger, more articulate, more educated leadership coming forward. A good example of that is the number of Aboriginals now standing for parliament and getting elected. We have just seen the preselection in Western Australia of a 31-year-old constitutional lawyer, Ben Wyatt. Twenty years ago who would have thought of an Aboriginal doing that? Hopefully he will get elected, though as he is a Labor candidate I know some people might have different views!

**Mrs VALE**—Quite frankly, he probably will get elected. When you put forward a candidate of that value it is hard competition for anyone.

**Mr Mundine**—The governance issues are strong. As I said, I have been guilty of this in the past: subconsciously we set these people up to fail; these organisations were not going to operate. And I am not trying to blame anyone; I am trying to be nice about the whole thing. There is no sinister plot; it is just that through trying to do good we set these failures up. Now we need to go back and ask, 'How do we get the balance between a community board and having professionals on that board who will make it operate and jig and shake?' That is the dilemma I have in my organisation and it is a dilemma in organisations across Australia. I look at the Kimberley Land Council, which has 45 people on its board, and I think, 'My God, how does that operate?' We need to deal with those governance issues. It is something that the Aboriginal community get very angry at because, as you pointed out before, what about the white fellas and the big corporates out there? I tell them that I am sorry to say that not only in Australia but in the world community the view of governance has changed. They are tougher on governance: they want boards, directors and senior executives of companies to perform better and be more honest, transparent and accountable. You cannot escape that. That is what I tell them. How do we get that into the Aboriginal communities?

**ACTING CHAIR**—But that cannot be done without proper consultation and partnership with the Indigenous people with no impacting down from White Australia.

**Mr Mundine**—Also learning from experience, and there need to be partnerships.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Exactly. We need to work it out together.

**Mr Mundine**—I am working with IAG at the moment to bring Aboriginal people who are on boards in these corporate areas to sit in at committees with IAG to see how these operations work and what is demanded of their performance and of them as directors to oversee the executives to make sure they are not mucking around and diddling the books. They can see how policies and structures are put in place and how they look as a performer in that area. We need to take a lot more people out of Indigenous organisations to spend some time in the wider Australian organisations—or send them to China or wherever. They just need to look at how things operate, expose them to that and get that to feed back into how they properly run their organisations. Then we will get a better performance. I am not saying it will be 100 per cent, because nothing is going to be 100 per cent, but you will start to see better governance of these organisations.

**ACTING CHAIR**—In the past it has been too easy for us all—and I say that collectively—to stand up and criticise the failure of these organisations and target that failure too directly when, in fact, there has been a failure—

**Mr Mundine**—It is a structural failure.

**Mrs VALE**—It is systemic.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Exactly, and we could all wear that.

**Mrs VALE**—You have articulated the achievable goal of home ownership for Indigenous communities. How has that been received? That is another of your visions that has been very positive.

**Mr Mundine**—It is a bit of a mismatch. People have taken it a bit out of context. It was thrown up as an idea. I do not see it as a panacea for the ills of the Aboriginal community, but I do want a discussion about it. It is not only about home ownership; it is about having private enterprises and the ownership of a number of assets and how we better use those assets to benefit the wider Aboriginal community. There is no great science to this. If you own your own home—and I have had three generations of it in my family—that then forces you to ensure that you are employed, that you have an income and that you are looking after the house because it is your asset. That change in your behaviour then spreads through the wider community. I look at Dodge City at Brewarrina: the Australian government has spent $20 million building houses there over a number of years. It is not that they now have $20 million of houses out there; the same houses have been burnt down or destroyed and then rebuilt again. How do we break that dependency?

I will use an example: when I was at Toomelah this bloke had a broken sewer pipe under his house and sewerage was going everywhere in his backyard. I said, 'It's a very simple thing to fix: you need to get a hessian bag and put a bit of cement on it. That will hold it for a while and we can go into town and get a pipe to replace it.' His reply was, 'No, that's an ATSIC house. I don't have to fix that; ATSIC has to fix that.' How do we break that cycle and that mentality? By home ownership.

That is not going to be the answer for everyone. It is a fact of life: in these remote communities, why are you going to build a house for $400,000 on land that is only going to be worth $1 an acre anyway? You have to be realistic about the whole approach. For most Aboriginals it can be achieved because they live in provincial cities or large rural towns. It is a different kettle of fish in the remote and rural communities.

**ACTING CHAIR**—We are going to draw to a close. We thank you for giving us your time this morning. I call for a motion to be moved for the committee to receive the evidence presented by Richard Estens earlier today.

**Mrs VALE**—I so move.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I second the motion.

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 11.59 am**