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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities

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

Wednesday, 6 August 2003

Members: Mr Wakelin (*Chair*), Ms Hoare (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Cobb, Mrs Draper, Ms Gillard, Mr Haase, Dr Lawrence, Mr Lloyd, Mr Snowden and Mr Tollner.

Members in attendance: Mr Cobb, Mr Haase, Dr Lawrence and Mr Wakelin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Strategies to assist Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders better manage the delivery of services within their communities. In particular, the committee will consider building the capacities of:

- (a) community members to better support families, community organisations and representative councils so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities;
- (b) Indigenous organisations to better deliver and influence the delivery of services in the most effective, efficient and accountable way; and
- (c) government agencies so that policy direction and management structures will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people.

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Committee met at 10.10 a.m.

BUTLER, Mr Raymond, Chairman, Nomads Charitable and Educational Foundation

HALE, Mr Monty, Chairman of the School Council, Nomads Charitable and Educational Foundation

THOMAS, Mr Bruce, Chairman, Wangka Maya (Language Centre)

YOUGARLA, Mr Crow, Board Member, Nomads Charitable and Educational Foundation; Senior Lawman and Elder, Strelley Community

CHAIR—I welcome the representatives from the Nomads Charitable and Educational Foundation to today's public hearing in our inquiry into issues around Aboriginal communities. On behalf of myself and of the other parliamentary representatives here with me today, I thank you for the invitation. We have pretty good weather for it. Where better to be on this fine day than Strelley. I am glad to see that so many people have turned up. We will have a bit of a chat about where you would like your place and your people to go and some things that the government might be able to talk about to you. Let's keep it pretty informal. We would just like to hear your story. I will pass over to you. I should introduce myself: I am Barry Wakelin, and I am the chairman of this committee, but I am also from South Australia, which has a number of Aboriginal groups within 90 per cent of South Australia. We are your neighbours to the east, so I am familiar with some of the issues we might want to talk about. I am not sure whether Crow or Ray wants to lead off, but I will leave that to you.

Mr Yougarla—This bloke helped me. We had a talk in Strelley; we had a meeting. We had four men in that meeting. He was talking in it. There were two people. I had my word there and the mob too. I had a few words; I put my word in that time in Strelley. Most of the others were taken from the Strelley teacher that time. Those are all the words I will say. I cannot say much.

Mr Butler—I will come in at this point. I would like to welcome you all and thank you for coming today. We certainly appreciate you coming out of your way to a place like Strelley. We do not have a very good reputation according to ATSIC, yet we are the group that has been continually struggling since 1942. There was a bush meeting—or a large meeting—of representatives of all those traditional people who still existed in the state. I have had permission to call this dead man's name now. Don McLeod was given a position within the law and given a job to secure a stretch of country around the edge of the desert where people could come and take those parts of white man's culture and knowledge as and when they thought appropriate. The group has always been, first and foremost, directed towards the law. It is a traditional community. In recent years we have had problems as older people have died off and the younger people have been influenced by alcohol.

However, on the positive side, the school has always been the centre of the community. When you see it operating here, as I think Barry has, it is inspiring. You will see what great importance has always been placed on education by the group. Strelley itself was purchased by the group. It took us 15 years to get this station, because of problems with the state Department of Lands in those days. They shifted after paying the \$5,000 deposit; they shored the sheep and over the next five years paid off \$25,000. They then purchased Carlindie; it was a worn-out sheep station. We

had agreed to buy it, and then there was a big flood and the owners lost most of the sheep. We subsequently bought Lalla Rookh. These are now, essentially, cattle stations; they are entities operated by a company called Strelley Pastoral Pty Ltd, which receives no government money. It has been operating since 1971.

There were two stations—Warralong and Coongang—which were purchased by the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission, and they are managed by the same manager at Carlindie. This is one of the few cattle stations that does operate successfully. Any profits from the cattle sales go back into developing the stations, because we are very aware that we are under close scrutiny by the Lands Department or the Pastoral Appraisal Board, and we make sure we meet their requirements.

Getting back to the school, when we first shifted here in 1972 the first thing that the community did was to set the homestead aside for the school. At that stage there were about 1,000 people on Strelley. We approached the Education Department for a school; they would not supply one. The homestead was not in a condition that was acceptable to the requirements of the union. After continued negotiations with them, we eventually asked whether we could have an independent school. We were lucky that we received a \$50,000 grant to establish that school after the Whitlam government had been sacked. It was a passing gesture of the federal minister at that stage—because it was in his tray, he was able to process it—and this started the whole independent Aboriginal school movement in Western Australia. Initially, we started with a very heavy bilingual component. That has been cut back over the years, simply because the emphasis has been on numeracy and literacy. We have had to do it. Many of the bilingual aspects are carried out in camps. The people go out and live traditionally for a week at a time and Nyangumarta is the main language spoken at those camps.

The structure of the foundation is such that there are seven Aboriginal members from the communities and two white people. Jack Williams has been associated with the group since 1955 when Commissioner Middleton threatened to starve the mob if they followed Don McLeod and not him. Both he and one of the previous Attorneys-General, Mr Ron Bertram, were present at that historic meeting. Anyone who has followed the history of Western Australia and gone through the annual reports of the Native Welfare Department of that time and the words of S.G. Middleton will soon see that there was perhaps a problem involved with some of his reasoning of that time.

Through the constitution, the foundation board appoints a school committee, which is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school. The school committee meets as regularly as it needs to. It is not limited to membership. It is only the Aboriginal members who can vote. The principal is there as a nonvoting secretary. So the aspect of governance is in the hands of the people. The foundation board itself is only responsible for the legal aspects. As a registered charity, we are able to receive funds exclusively for the nomads group and those are apportioned from time to time.

We have always been very lucky in that the Commonwealth's department of education, under its various names, has been able to support us all the way through. Without their help, we would not have survived. We have never had any problems with the department. Even when ATSIC was doing us over, we had no troubles with the department. They acted as true bureaucrats. The problems we see at the moment, from the foundation's point of view, include the ongoing

funding for our scaffolding program for literacy. There is some threat that that may end at the end of this year. Another area where we have problems—and all communities do—is the area of older youths. The lawmen looked at the alcohol problem as it came up, and it was decided that they would go through the business at a younger age. So they are now regarded as adults by the time they reach 14—and we lose them from the system. This is the tragedy, and we have tried to tackle it in various ways. We have had a mechanics course and made special provision for them, but it is still a problem. It is a problem because you cannot hold them. Some of the girls are going off too. We try to get in as many people as we can as teacher's aides. There is a predominance of women in that area. The area that is perhaps starting to emerge as a problem is teaching staff. The image of dysfunctional communities that has been created by the press means that we are getting fewer and fewer applications for teachers. In the early days, we were overwhelmed with them, but over the last two years we have found it very difficult to get suitable teachers. Those are the main areas where we have problems.

We really do not have any problems with the Commonwealth education department, and all we can say is that we are very thankful for its continuing support in this area. Regarding independent Aboriginal schools, I suppose you can draw a parallel with the Red Rock Indian School in the United States. It started 10 years before us, as a demonstration school; we started in 1976 and this is our 28th year of operation. The development of independent Aboriginal schools has been important, because the community has always emphasised that they want their kids educated where they can see them and be involved with them in the school. That is essentially what has been happening for the last 28 years. We have had some very dedicated staff during this time. Our first principal stayed 10 years. Chris and Ingrid, our current co-principals, have been here for 10 years. They are due for long service leave next year.

Apart from that I would like to leave it open for other members of the community to comment, if they wish to, on any aspect of the school.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Ray, Crow and Monty. Shall we see whether anyone wants to come forward to say anything?

Mr Butler—Do you want to say anything about the school, Monty? Monty would probably be the best. Crow was involved with the school right from the word go. He was one of the driving forces for the school. Attendance is very important. Bruce Thomas would like to make a contribution. Bruce is a linguist who has been working for the literature centre in town. He periodically comes in and out of the community.

Mr Thomas—I think education is really important, and language is really important too. Education is really important in our language too. We need young people to read and write in our language and to be literate—to read and write—in English. We are not getting funding for our language to be recognised. The government reckons English is really important, but our language is really important too. We need education in our language. If we cannot have education in our language, we will end up as white men and we will have no culture. People have got to understand that we need to get funding for our language. It is really important. We are talking about education first. English is important and our language is really important. At the end of the day, we will be like all white men. We have got to think about our young people. In 50 years time, what will they be doing? Will they all be reading English or their own language? I do not know. At the end of the day, there will be no culture.

CHAIR—Thank you, Bruce. I would be interested to try to understand what you see as the place of English and what you see as the place of the first language. How do we get people to operate in both worlds? That seems to be the challenge, doesn't it? You feel you are losing your language—everything is all in English. Can we talk a little bit more about that?

Mr Thomas—We need some teachers working in our language full time. We need some funding for the language. There is not much funding.

CHAIR—Do you think you are losing language?

Mr Thomas—Yes. Sometimes, we lose old people too. If the old people are going, we need to record their stories, to keep our stories and culture. Our language is changing too—from the old people to the young people.

Mr HAASE—Thank you, Chair, and thank you Crow, Monty and Ray and, of course, thank you, Bruce. You have given evidence that I find difficult, in the immediate situation, to put into the total order of circumstances. I know something of the background of Strelley and its people. We have just heard from Ray that it was in 1942 that Mr McLeod was given the responsibility to help the Strelley people, the Aboriginal groups that were associated with Mr McLeod. Here we are in 2003—61 years later—and the question in my mind is: what we know as the Strelley mob, are they up there side by side with the Aboriginal population of Australia? Are they doing as well, better or not as well?

When you say we should put more money into teaching language, I wonder if that money is more or less important than putting money into education that will get jobs that will get money that will get independence. This is the problem I wrestle with and it is also part of the problem that this standing committee wrestles with in writing a report about capacity building for Aboriginal individuals and communities. I would like you to explain to me more about why you feel language is important. I want you to place the money for teaching language and where it fits in terms of money for general mainstream education or housing and other community development funding. Can you explain that to the committee, please?

Mr Thomas—ATSIC is really important. If you look at white man's side of education; what about the Aboriginal side of education? We need to teach our people now, educate them too. You can go and do a course, anything like that, if you are a white man. Our young people are missing out. All the training is on the white man's side and we do not have enough training on our side. We have to think about our side too. Education is good. Reading and writing, that is good. But we need reading and writing in our language too. It is really important. If there is nothing, it will be lost on our side. Language is a cultural thing. It will be all white man's culture.

Mr HAASE—You still put the boys through the law and we have heard from Ray how those men are younger because of the attractions of mainstream community. In the perfect family, the family's tradition and culture are taught in the family. What you are suggesting is we ought to be giving money for that culture to be taught in a formal way outside the family, perhaps, and that is the idea that you have to reinforce. You have to talk about that problem here today, but only a little bit, Bruce, not a lot; I hear what you say. I am happy to move on to other questions.

Mr Thomas—We have a problem that not a lot of young people listen to old people because they think they are smart. At the end of the day, they will end up nothing. We grew up listening to old people in that past. Today you have a lot of other things happening. A lot of things are happening and young people, they have a lot of fun.

Mr HAASE—Do you have an idea, Bruce, as to why young people do not listen to old people any more?

Mr Thomas—They get a little bit of grog and they are smart; they do not listen to the old people.

Mr HAASE—Traditional law does not have any effect on young people any more?

Mr Thomas—No, they do not listen.

Mr HAASE—White fella law is not much good?

Mr Thomas—I do not think so. They go to learn, to get education but they go half way and they do not learn anything. I say, ‘You are not learning anything.’ They go to school a little bit and then they have a problem. They are not going to go further on in school.

Mr HAASE—How can parents make sure their children go to school when they are very young? Can they do that?

Mr Thomas—Yes, that is really important. We need a teacher for young people in the school. Our school, same time too, work together.

Mr HAASE—The Strelley mob still teach some language, yes?

Mr Thomas—Yes.

Mr HAASE—At Warralong, I think it was, I opened the library and there were many books in language in that library. I was surprised how much language was being taught. I believed that the Strelley mob had gone to a primary English teaching system. We have heard from Ray this morning that teaching of language has been reduced somewhat. Can you confirm that, Ray?

Mr Butler—Yes. Bruce does not work for the school; he works for the language centre in town.

Mr HAASE—I understand that.

Mr Butler—His concern with the language is very real in the community. We have had to rationalise this in terms of the need to meet the conditions that the Commonwealth places on us for receiving funding and certainly in terms of numeracy and literacy, the emphasis has to be on English. The kids still speak the vernacular in the camps and on the cultural camps.

Mr HAASE—I do not know if this is going to be possible or not, man to man, Crow, but would you like to talk to me about what you think of the importance of language and whether the Commonwealth should be funding the teaching of language? I would very much like to hear what you have to say about that?

Mr Yougarla—We go in the school and we have got language to talk about ourselves, in the people. It is important to them and our tribe. That is all it is.

Mr HAASE—Would Monty have a comment to make? I do not know Monty as well as I know Crow, but it would please me, Monty, if you could add some comments about the teaching of language and how important that it is to you. We need to have such information if we are to put it into our report. I would very much like to know how important language is to you.

Mr Hale—Language is important to our children. They have to learn both ways: our language and English. That is the way we start off in this school. We do not lose it. When they are 14, 15 or 16, they do not look back. They have got other ideas, all the kids—the boys and girls, anyway. A few can read and write our language. I think the kids have not followed what we are telling them to do. They go to town now, and there is too much drinking and all that. We like the kids to read and write both ways but they ignore us. We try to bring them back but they mix with grog and it is hard to bring them back to the community. That is all.

Mr HAASE—Thank you very much, Monty. Is it true that all the Strelley mob—I am not sure how to refer to the groups—are all dry camps?

Mr Butler—By rules they are, yes, but young people, when they come out in vehicles, you have no control over them. They are drunk.

Mr HAASE—How bad is it in practice? How much booze comes onto your dry camps?

Mr Butler—It varies. Mainly on pension days or CDEP payment days we have problems. It has got worse as the older people have died off because they are no longer able to control them. In the past it was controlled very well. They had a committee of 10 who worked in conjunction with the police and they would round them up and take them into the desert. There was a punishment camp or a drying out camp, which they funded themselves.

Mr HAASE—You say ‘they funded;’ the Strelley mob?

Mr Butler—The Strelley mob funded it all the way through to South Australia. We found that ATSIC, or DAA at that stage—I would have to check my dates—was concerned about this because they were not being told. We have always found that certain sections of the bureaucracy want to be told everything; if they are not told, they will move in on you. They prepared a report and that whole section of people was split off from the Nomads. They were originally with the Nomads; they were living in Strelley. The lawmen were to make the desert a dry place; they had a whole network of radio communications. When this split happened, grog was taken into the desert. We had that terrible tragedy where a number of people died when they were going out there. That would never have happened under the original system. So we have had this interference all the way through. We are still in the process of documenting it all, but it is a case of bureaucrats behaving badly. It is the dark side of bureaucracy. We have been the victims of it.

When the Strelley investigation by ATSIC came up the state manager refused us legal representation. The Commonwealth had legal representation. We were denied natural justice. As soon as we went into section 70, the court case, we had more troubles because there were potentially big funds involved that would have put ATSIC at risk because it would have been paid outside their domain. We had a shadowy person by the name of Livingston who came on here and prepared reports. He was employed as the caretaker at the time to look after the stations. He prepared reports and distributed them widely. We got a bad press. This was all in the lead up to the section 70 action. We were warned by our solicitors at the time, 'Watch out, you will get it because of the dirty tricks department.' Where they are coming from, we are not too sure. This came up on the eve of the Owen case. It finished up with Jones—and you can look at the transcript of that in Sydney—taking up Livingston's thing and asking repeatedly: 'Who owns that car? Did the Commonwealth pay for this?' It was almost as though he was paid for it. Whether ATSIC paid for it or not, I do not know, but it is an area that requires very close examination because there are some big implications here.

Mr HAASE—Has there been an investigation and, therefore, a revelation of the off-country holdings of the Strelley Pastoral Group or associated companies? Has that been made public?

Mr Butler—Yes. The off-country ones: what do you mean?

Mr HAASE—When I say 'off-country,' I mean away from lands.

Mr Butler—Away from?

Mr HAASE—In metropolitan Perth, for instance, or elsewhere.

Mr Butler—In metropolitan we have a base there. There was a long-term supporter, Elsie Lee, who supported them right from the word go. When she died she left her home unit to the group which was used to buy a house we call the Elsie Lee House. There were another two units that had to be sold further down the track to help support the group in other areas. At the moment we have Elsie Lee House in Perth, which is the centre for accounting. We have a large group of voluntary supporters that this group has built up over the years.

Mr HAASE—Is there still a large stream of funding from overseas channelled through the foundation? Is that still occurring?

Mr Butler—We have never had any funding from overseas. There have been all types of rumours running around but—

Mr HAASE—I know, but my observation is that none of you—you, Jack or Don—were living a millionaire lifestyle. It always surprised me a little that there was such a rumour.

Mr Butler—I have been supporting the group for 40 years. I have not had a brass razoo from them. I have supported them on principle.

Mr HAASE—I think the chair will chew my ear if I keep going, Ray, so I had better defer to him and give somebody else a go.

Mr Butler—Okay.

Dr LAWRENCE—Thank you very much, Crow, Monty and Ray. What I want to ask is very simple. We have heard today some of the history from Ray; we have heard stories, obviously. One of the things that is clear, if you look at the records and look around, is that 10 years now without ATSIC funding has had an effect on the people here. I do not think anyone would pretend otherwise. The question for us is: how do you get over this impasse? This cannot continue forever. We have to look at what is going to happen tomorrow, not what happened 10, 20 or 30 years ago. I am not saying the past is unimportant but from the point of view of getting funds to flow to the Aboriginal people here, to the Strelley communities, the issue is important. I know some is going to Warralong but a lot of people talked to me earlier. They want to live here. They want to have a house here, they want electricity here, they want running water here and they want their kids to go to school here—they want to be here. A lot of them are not living here now because that is not the case. How can we bring together the wishes of the community with the funds that are available from the Commonwealth government? You are getting it in education and health, but you are not getting it for housing, roads and all the other things. How do we solve the problem? What to do next?

Mr Butler—It is a case of the Commonwealth making payments to some of the community organisations. How they want to adjust it from the point of view of accountability is negotiable. Alternatively, we have to find our own. I am a supporter of Barry's concept that we have to be economically viable. In the past our strengths lay in mining and using traditional skills and intelligence. Multiple intelligence is coming more and more into education these days. I will give you an instance. A white prospector will walk across there and he might see four pieces of tin. One of the mob will walk across there and will see 44 pieces of tin. These are certain abilities that have been used in the past and have to be used in future.

It is absolutely ridiculous what is happening. You go down to Roebourne and see these large populations growing up. They should be involved in the development. They should be involved in sharing the wealth of the north. We have a big expansion in iron ore at the moment but people do not see the benefits of that. There are a few pittance here and there. We receive some money, I understand, through Bruce on this pipeline that is going through. There are going to be a couple of houses from that.

It gets back to training and finding an alternative for these 14-year-olds. It has to be a different type to the standard types. They want excitement. You have to be able to move around. You have a nomadic existence and this is the thing you have to utilise. It has to be an exciting curriculum; it has to be an applied curriculum. They are all capable of doing it. We have some very bright kids that go through. That has to evolve. In America they have the concept of demonstration schools. The federal legislation provided for that and that is how the Indians started up their equivalent of our schools.

We have reached the stage where we have to look at developing a new type of secondary education. Bruce is looking at going back to the desert because at least you can get the kids away from the influences here. But the kids are fine if they are supervised and you give them the excitement that they want, the same as any kid. We are a consumer society today. Why are we a consumer society? Because we want change. We want something new all the time, something to

look forward to. The nomadic existence was precisely that; you would shift on to another place. There was excitement in living. We have to do that.

You see these houses here. If people die others move away. Depending on that person's status is how long before anyone comes back to those houses. But the assets that are on Strelley will be used over the years. I do not know that some of the ideas that are coming out of the Territory from the leaders there and the \$300,000 or \$400,000 houses are a good idea. I do not think it is on. The community would prefer five different houses in five different exciting locations rather than one big house in one location that they are stuck with. It is moving around; they are a very mobile group.

It is that ability and characteristic of nomadic society that has to be utilised in any future post primary education program. We have lots of ideas on it, but you have to be very careful. We have tried one of them with mechanics. We brought out that program from the Territory, which involved units, external examiners, and spread it over as many years as you like. It was fine until one of the middle-aged people got \$300,000 compensation. He then bought motor cars, took all the kids to town and they got drunk. One of them came back half drunk and threatened the life of one the teachers, swung a great star picket and just missed his head by that much. These are the things that are happening everywhere, I guess, in many of these communities.

It can be beaten; they are good kids. They need direction and perhaps the student-staff ratio has to be raised. We have also looked at the possibility of taking some of them down to Perth, housing them at the office with the unit there, perhaps with some community members, and the kids going to school every day—we have looked at two places that are still on the drawing board—to Scotch College, with which we have had a close connection, and we have looked at Swanleigh, which is not far from the house. That is another possibility.

It has to be discussed in the community; it has to go through traditional decision making. The immediate thing that Bruce is trying to get is to go out to one of our previous camps at Callawa, Camel camp or Mijjimaya, and take these young blokes there. It is a repetition of what we did years ago, but that is going to require a fairly heavy investment in caring teachers. It is a lack of discipline that we have essentially. Many years ago we looked at the Army. We approached the Army to put some people in the desert and get some of these kids under a sergeant major to get the discipline established. Anyone who has done national service knows that they can take a person and turn out an entirely different disciplined person at the end of that three months' training.

It is creating a disciplined environment with the people to give them direction. Without a vision you are dead. That is what it gets down to if the community loses its vision. For so long the community was focused on the source of income through the one per cent. That is what they saw as the future source of income for the group but they wanted to develop the country with that and also maintain the law. The law was always supreme with this group. That source through section 70 has been lost. That has gone through the court. We cannot get that. The only way that would ever come back would be through political action. If you read the transcript of those six court cases, you might have a different outlook.

Dr LAWRENCE—There are a whole set of questions you answered there that I did not ask. That is okay, it is useful information. To follow up that question, then, I appreciate the

importance of training and your independent economic development, but I would put in brackets the fact that the people here have rights as citizens that everybody else is entitled to. So I would not want the people who live here to be treated less well than people who live in Port Hedland or Perth. That is my first point. The second point is you have pastoral leases; they are operating. What is the relationship between the education that you are providing in the schools and the training opportunities and economic development? I know that that does not necessarily provide a huge number of jobs, but what is the link there? Is there anything that might be done to assist or facilitate that learning?

Mr Butler—Vertical integration in the pastoral industry could blossom. As it is at the moment we have an Aboriginal manager. At mustering time, what, four people are employed. It still has to be economic because we have to operate these as economic units and develop the stations. We have had programs where we have had fencing. We have contract fencing that needs to be done at different times. If there was someone in the community, you would say, ‘Yes, I will take that on at \$1,000 a kilometre,’ but we have never been able to get it. Why should you work when you can get CDEP and sit on your arse for nothing?

Dr LAWRENCE—Presumably that could be a CDEP program with training attached as well.

Mr Butler—It could be if we had sufficient funds for our contribution to it. What we do not want it to interfere with is the economic running of the unit. Most of these stations will only support a single family. Most of the ones in the Pilbara go broke. The three we bought here, they have a history of going broke. Only by amalgamating them and introducing cattle have we gradually built up to the situation where we can operate at a slight profit; not a big profit but that profit has to go back into the development. Yes, there are some openings there, to be sure, within that area but the opportunities are limited and seasonal.

Dr LAWRENCE—To press a little harder, what are the jobs that you are thinking about for training?

Mr Butler—Fencing, mustering, it is all done by helicopters these days.

Dr LAWRENCE—No, I meant in your earlier discussion you talked about—and it is obviously important—the need for education and training, an appropriate postsecondary program. I do not disagree with any of that but where does it lead the people who get the skills? Where do they go?

Mr Butler—Hopefully into the mining industry because the mining industry is the major employer here, if you look further down the track. Hopefully, the group will have equities in or own the mining operations that they have. We have a number of projects that we cannot put on the table at this stage. Mining is essentially that, or downstream processing of the pastoral industry. That is where the money is; the money is not in rounding up cows and selling them.

Dr LAWRENCE—No, I understand that. Those days have long gone. Again, in the rest of the community other Australians might expect in those circumstances, where there are high levels of unemployment, not enough skills development and few economic opportunities, that in order to become self-sufficient and independent, they would get some assistance from the government in the training programs, links between training and employment opportunities and the necessary

capital investment. That is why I am asking you: is there any way of overcoming this impasse that currently exists, apparently, between the organisations that run the stations and manage the foundation and those sources of assistance that ordinary citizens take for granted.

Mr Butler—It is not our problem; it is their problem.

Dr LAWRENCE—That is why I am asking you.

Mr Butler—We have no problem at all with it coming in here. For some reason, ATSIC cut us off completely 10 years ago. They put out voluminous reports without sufficient criticism of those reports. We have analysed them and many of the accusations are not correct; they may be exaggerated. There was no money lost for anybody in any of those operations.

Dr LAWRENCE—Is it possible for anybody to act, in a sense, as a broker or a mediator, because I think the impasse is not healthy for anybody? It is not a good thing for anyone, ultimately.

Mr Butler—They say, ‘You cannot have those organisations.’ We have put in applications under Aboriginal corporations, which are terrible organisations, really, you cannot compare them. The control on Aboriginal corporations now is that thick, you might say. We did it because ATSIC said, ‘We will only consider you with Aboriginal corporations.’ Mumbultjari and Coonan Aboriginal Corporations put in applications eight or nine years ago. We have never received a reply from ATSIC. The only money that has come through has been for Mumbultjari health. That \$60,000 that is in your last newsletter and refers them to the Mumbultjari-Strelley and Mumbultjari-Warralong communities, they are not Mumbultjari communities, they are Nomads communities. That \$60,000 disappeared overnight. They said we were going to get it but it is off the books now. Health is a different area and it is beyond my area of expertise to talk on. Health is a successful program, we are very happy with health. We go through the body in Port Hedland who sends out nurses. It is an excellent service. But that \$60,000 disappeared somewhere.

CHAIR—Ray, you would accept money for these things if you could get through the impasse.

Mr Butler—Absolutely.

CHAIR—Therefore, you are saying that ATSIC refuses on whatever criteria, by whatever definition, to fund you in any way because of historic practice?

Mr Butler—Yes.

CHAIR—To take Dr Lawrence’s very good point, no Australian should miss out on those things to which they are entitled.

Mr Butler—We have had 10 years of it; we have had 10 years of starvation rations. There is absolutely no conscience amongst some of those people, they are totally different; removed. Placing us under Port Hedland ATSIC as opposed to traditional people in the Western Desert was the first move that spelt disaster. The people there do not speak for traditional people.

CHAIR—We will not resolve it here today.

Mr Butler—No.

CHAIR—I am endeavouring not to become part of the impasse but to join with Dr Lawrence and ask: can the impasse be resolved?

Mr Butler—It can be resolved. We have applied for funding on that and we will be fully compliant in those areas. There are no problems from the Nomads' point of view.

Dr LAWRENCE—That is right, Barry. Thanks very much indeed. I do not know if anyone else wants to add to that.

Mr JOHN COBB—It has mostly been said but, as the others have done, I thank you all very much for what you have told us. You mentioned earlier that the young blokes become adults at 14 and then you seem to lose them to the town. Obviously you must have said to yourselves: why are we losing them to the town? Can you tell us why you believe you are losing them?

Mr Butler—Peer pressure.

Mr JOHN COBB—That is a pretty broad answer; can you be a little bit more specific?

Mr Butler—It is the same in white society as others. I have been doing study for 10 years on working class youth in Perth and comparing them with the United States. Those kids are all capable of achieving university graduation. They get pressures from other groups who say it is not cool to pass maths. If the girls do maths they get criticised if they do any good because the boys pressure them. Here, it is almost a right of passage to have convictions. Once you are men, you are men once you have been through the law and, as a man, you should be able to drink. Once a person is drunk, very little takes place in the way of logical thinking. You have this problem of a cycle; it is exciting when you have it, when you get the grog. I do not know what the answer to that is, John. It is a problem.

Mr Thomas—With the young people, we cannot grab them in white man's law. They say they are over 16, you cannot touch it. If we go grab the people there, they say you get nothing in the white's man law. In our law we have a right to grab them and try to put them through the law but in white man's you cannot grab it. Today, a lot of young people are dead in the white man's law. We cannot touch it. Say, over 18, you cannot touch them.

Mr JOHN COBB—Are they leaving here when they are 14?

Mr Butler—It is a gradual process. You have the Coles culture, which you have probably heard about and you will hear about it this afternoon, where they get on the grog and sleep in the gutters and things like this. Then you get the high instance of burglary and a whole range of acts that are reflections of a dysfunctional subculture. They go backwards, forwards, come back for a while, but they are always reclaimable. It is very difficult when they are no longer under the control of the old men. They do not take any notice of others.

Mr Thomas—There are lots of problems in town. We have to sort the problem. We cannot sort the problems for all the young people. The older people don't live in town; they cannot move.

Mr Butler—Is Gerry here yet? Gerry always has his pulse on the community. When it is a happy community, everything runs well. Then occasionally someone will come out. The women are the strength of the communities today. They have much better control over some of these drunks when they do come here. They are very strong women. Some are off to town again. Some are getting houses and then everyone will finish up in a house. It is an endless cycle at this stage and it has to be broken. You have a work force there for the north-west. They are the most efficient people to work in the north-west. It is a major problem. It is not a problem that is going to be solved by ATSIC. It is a problem that has to be solved within individual communities and individual communities being able to establish a program.

Mr JOHN COBB—The girls tend not to leave the way the boys do?

Mr Butler—Not as much. There are some girls who get into problems. Many of the girls get pregnant fairly early. It has been a problem in the past but you tend to have grandmothers looking after the kids and that is the stabilising aspect of the schools that there is something there that they can all centre themselves on, get involved with every day.

Mr JOHN COBB—From what I have seen, you seem to have women here of all ages but not many middle-aged or younger men.

Mr Butler—No.

Mr JOHN COBB—Is that a fact or is it just—

Mr Butler—It is partly the fact. There are probably more middle-aged men at Warralong than there are here. In general, I would say yes, we tend to have the older women and younger kids. The demographic distribution would be quite different. Many of our lawmen have died because the problems are so great. When they originally went out Don McLeod wanted them—they needed to meet together to solve these philosophical problems. When you are scratching to survive, you do not always have that time for it. The answers are there in the law. They are not there for imposition elsewhere; it is how you adopt those aspects to solve the problem. We have solved it on several occasions with the movement to the desert.

Mr JOHN COBB—What you are trying to do here is not stay apart from the rest of the community in terms of work and employment—am I right in saying that?

Mr Butler—Yes.

Mr JOHN COBB—It is in terms of keeping the community based here.

Mr Butler—One of the three communities. Warralong is getting a lot of funding. Strelley is also a refuge, so you get Punmu people who come in—we get a lot of people passing through. I understand there is a lot of petrol sniffing at Punmu. Parents want to get their kids away from it;

they will come and stay at Strelley for some time. People are backwards and forwards to town, depending on funerals and the routine of everyday life. We have a hard core of people and mainly children for the school.

Mr JOHN COBB—The reasons you had your parting of the ways with ATSIC in the first place, do they still exist?

Mr Butler—No.

CHAIR—We are winding up this section but just a couple of quick questions. You see the CDEP as people sitting on their bums; ‘sit-down money’ is its national name for many people.

Mr Butler—Yes.

CHAIR—It is doing some good work but there is a lot of evidence to say that it does not give very good job outcomes et cetera.

Mr Butler—Yes.

CHAIR—That is clearly your view of CDEP—you see it as not a positive program.

Mr Butler—Under the present structure, no, it has not been. Our experience in that area has not been good. Mind you, it was originally put in to cut down the unemployment numbers.

CHAIR—That is right—someone raised that with us yesterday, about how it changes the statistics. You would be able to apply for Work for the Dole if you so wished?

Mr Butler—Yes, Work for the Dole, I think.

CHAIR—That leads into my last question. People would not be missing out on main welfare payments; they would be getting the normal welfare payments. It is just those things that come in under the ATSIC umbrella—infrastructure funding and those sorts of things.

Mr Butler—Yes. Mainly pension money and things—

CHAIR—Of the four pillars in the infrastructure funding, that would be the main one, I would think.

Mr Butler—Yes. We try to channel as much money as we can to the Aboriginal community through the school, through employment. The school has provided a major source of employment.

CHAIR—Thank you. What we need to do now, Ray, Crow and Monty, is to invite the co-principals and nurse in to say a few words.

[11.14 p.m.]

MARIAN, Ms Carolyn Anne, Remote Area Registered Nurse, Wirraka Maya Health Service

WALKLEY, Mr Christopher Ainsley Murree, Co-Principal, Strelley Community School

WALKLEY, Mrs Ingrid Anne, Co-Principal, Strelley Community School

CHAIR—Welcome. Does anyone want to give a brief overview? Ingrid and Chris, you have been here quite a while. You would have a pretty interesting story to tell, I would imagine. You have 70 students over three school areas or campuses—however you describe them. Would you like to tell us a little bit about them?

Mr Walkley—Ingrid and I have been with the school since 1994. Ingrid's first placement at the school was in Woodstock and mine was at Strelley; we have since moved to Warralong—I think that was in 1995. In that time we have had around 70 students in the school. That figure has remained constant over the last few years.

CHAIR—Are you familiar with our terms of reference at all? You are not probably familiar with our terms of reference. Essentially, it is the purpose of education in the community—it is broader than that but, from your perspective, the purpose as you see it. Some of that includes attendance rates, literacy and numeracy issues. We had discussions about that earlier. We had some compliments yesterday in Perth about the Commonwealth program—that it was a valuable value-adding exercise. They are a couple of clues you might like to talk about.

Mr Walkley—Attendance has always been a huge issue for the school. It is now up against influences such as sports carnivals that are run during school terms. Just a few weeks ago a Western Desert sports carnival was held during school term and faxes were sent asking all the students from the schools to go to the Western Desert and take part in the sports carnival.

Mrs Walkley—At the same time, our attendance rates, once the students are in the communities, are very high. If students are residing in the community, they have impeccable attendance and are generally only away because of sickness or family obligations. Our biggest thing is trying to keep the students in the community to maintain those high-attendance rates.

This year the school has received funding through the NIELNS attendance initiative. We have various programs that are in operation this year to encourage students to stay in the community. One of the issues raised in community meetings as to why we have trouble with students staying in the community was that there is a lack of action—action that we cannot offer compared to the joys of a town. We have had various initiatives happening this year for training students. Recently we had circus skills training, so students learnt how to do juggling and various circus act skills and then had a circus performance. It is these sorts of activities. We have sewing, martial arts and dancing coming up shortly, so we are trying to provide opportunities to make schooling exciting and for students to want to stay in the communities and be part of it.

Mr Walkley—One of the points that students make as to why they hop in their cars and go to town—we asked them why—is that there are not enough kicks in the communities. That is what NIELNS has been based on, to improve the experiences and opportunities for children in the communities.

CHAIR—You raised the issue about students hopping in cars and driving to town. What age are these students and where are they living? Are they living with parents, living independently—what have we got?

Mrs Walkley—A lot of our students have family that is based in town, whether it be for work commitments or a need to be closer to medical facilities and things like that, so there are plenty of places where our students can stay once they are in Port or South Hedland.

One thing we have achieved through our NIELNS attendance initiative is a bankbook program where students are awarded school money for their attendance. They are also awarded school money if a parent or responsible adult from that child's family gives a legitimate reason for why the student is not at school. We find our students' carers are having a greater influence in the students staying in the communities because of this program and that even some our students are telling parents and carers that they do not want to go; they want to stay where they are. So we are starting to see these positive aspects. Our attendance initiatives that we have in place are starting to see some results, and the students and carers are taking responsibility for their attendance rates.

CHAIR—Just on a point raised earlier concerning the issue of attendance as a correlation with results, can you give us your description of that corollary?

Mrs Walkley—Each of the three schools tends to have their core group that has very high attendance rates that tend not to travel very far at all. Certainly in those core students you do see a greater attainment of numeracy and literacy. There are groups of itinerant or semi-itinerant students that may spend time in Port Hedland. There are some that are not attending school and you can certainly see that their level of achievement drops. Quite often you have to reteach a lot of issues because students have been away from school for some time, so you have to go back over old ground to try to make those students catch up. The longer the students are away from the schooling system, the harder it is to get them back to where they should be.

CHAIR—My question arose from one of your comments, Chris. On the sports and distances—just describe what that entails. When you talk about distance and going to some sports day, it probably entails a few hundred kilometres or some such excursion. Describe what it means when someone is invited to a sports day.

Mr Walkley—The recent sports day I talked about was in the Western Desert at the Punmu community and that is a day's drive. I raised it as being a negative point that someone had organised a sports carnival during the school term.

Mrs Walkley—It is encouraging students to be away from school for an entire week.

CHAIR—That is what I thought you were implying—a day there, a day back and a day or two at the sports—

Mr Walkley—A week at the sports carnival and a day's travel either way, so it was expecting students to be away for a whole week.

CHAIR—As you would appreciate, most Australians would think of a sports day of three or four hours—say, from 10 o'clock to three o'clock—a day out of a week or year, and that would be it. But it is a different story when you talk about it here.

Mr Walkley—Even if our students travel to a one-day funeral at a community down the road like Jigalong, perhaps 400 kilometres away, the least amount of time we can expect those students to be away would be three days—a day's travel either way and a day for the funeral itself.

Mr HAASE—It is great that we have this opportunity to read into the record some of the achievements that you have been involved with here. I think it is a very fortunate stroke of circumstances that brings us together. I know that there is a great deal you want to show us, so I will endeavour to be brief during this hearing.

To get your point of view on record, perhaps you would like to tell us a little about the significance of language and the necessity to teach it, and I would like you to address that from a perspective of independence and future. I am particularly concerned with our terms of reference, and that is that we want to build the capacities of communities and families, of organisations and government agencies, to create that capacity to self-determine how people are going. You might like to talk about language, and I am sure it will give you the opportunity to contrast that with the teaching of English literacy and, perhaps briefly, the scaffolding program that I know you want to show us later.

Mrs Walkley—Since the inception of our school's development, there has been and continues to be a school aim that the school must teach good quality English and also teach high Nyungmarta, which is the main Indigenous language.

Mr Walkley—Mr Monty Hale referred to the point that 'we have to teach both ways', so our literacy and numeracy and then the language and culture.

Mrs Walkley—Over the last 10 years that I have been working in the school I have seen the funding for teaching Indigenous languages reduce dramatically, to the point that it certainly is being taught these days as a language subject other than English. At the same time, I think it is highly important that we continue to teach Nyungmarta in the school for the students' benefits in maintaining their cultural identity, maintaining the language—keeping its importance—and valuing where these students are coming from: their community, beliefs and culture. It is an incredible self-esteem aspect of their education as well, I believe—self-identity.

Mr Walkley—We get together with Aboriginal independent community schools from the Kimberley on several occasions each year. We hear of their plight at present, and that is language revival. They have lost their language. The students in their schools cannot speak their Indigenous language—they are speaking Kriol and English. Their emphasis now has become language revival and trying to teach students their first language. We are in the position where we are fortunate that these students do speak their first language and it is being taught and maintained in the school.

Mr HAASE—Can you throw that into the context of developing capacity—capacity for the development of the individual, the community. How does that knowledge of language improve that?

Mrs Walkley—It is really maintaining their identity. In 10 years I have seen a lot of very special people passing away and we are losing this knowledge. We need to continue this program so that we have students coming up that can read and write their language so we can have a record of these special stories. In discussions with Monty, the language has evolved and there are different usages of words these days that also need to be recorded. The old language needs to be recorded as well for prosperity, for their identity.

Mr HAASE—When developing a future direction, if young people are to be involved with elders—and these young people would be men who have been through law, I am assuming—taking from the past knowledge, would it be imperative that full language knowledge be possessed? Would these discussions go on in language or English?

Mrs Walkley—Both, really.

Mr HAASE—It gives you the opportunity to make a case here.

Mrs Walkley—I know.

Mr Walkley—Whenever we get together with these other Aboriginal independent community schools, they always say to us, ‘Jeez, we are proud of what you fellas are doing. We are so envious of where your students are at, being able to speak their first language, knowing who they are, knowing their culture.’ A lot of other schools are desperately trying to hang onto that or bring that into their schools now. Our students have it and it is incredibly strong.

Mr HAASE—Has the confidence building created by knowing language improved their grasp of English and their ability to learn English because of their confidence levels?

Mrs Walkley—I think any student who feels very confident in themselves and has a very clear understanding of their self-identity is naturally going to bring those skills into other subject areas. If they feel good about themselves, they are going to feel good about everything else they are doing.

CHAIR—The language is?

Mrs Walkley—Nyungmarta.

CHAIR—I am interested, from a teaching timetable point of view, in the actual time that it takes to do it justice—and one presumes that you both have become, if not fluent in the language, understanding of it. Would that be fair to say? I have been trying to learn a bit of Pitjantjatjara, from where I come from, and I am not fluent. In terms of the demand on the teacher’s time, on community time, and then the competing debate about other issues—literacy and numeracy—from a practical teacher’s point of view can you tell us what that actually means?

Mrs Walkley—At the moment our main emphasis is on the cultural excursions, whether they are week-long or afternoon projects, and we certainly draw on the wealth of our community members and our language experts, such as Monty Hale. As far as the classroom teaching side of things goes, we try to have at least half an hour to 45 minutes a week in the classroom, and that is dependent upon our language teachers because it is certainly not my role or the role of Chris and the other non-Indigenous teaching staff to teach that. We are there in a support capacity, to help to get resources together and so on. We try to have the class. At the same time we have Indigenous teachers in the classroom the whole time. We certainly do not discourage the use of language at any stage. Our Indigenous teachers are often reinforcing what the white fella teacher is saying so that students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them in their task.

CHAIR—It is supplementary; it is not conflicting with what you are trying to do—

Mrs Walkley—Not at all.

CHAIR—It is complementary. I am trying to get to the balance in terms of your time regarding the other requirements of a reasonable curricula. It fits in, to your mind, quite well.

Mrs Walkley—It does; it fits in very well.

Mr Walkley—We set aside certain periods, certain days or weeks, for these concentrated language encounters, if you like—bush trips, a trip to the creek, a cultural camp around the Great Sandy Desert.

CHAIR—Thank you. I will move to our health service and invite Carolyn to say a few words.

Ms Marian—I am funded by Mumbultjari, which is Woodstock, and Strelley, which I come to twice a week. It has been included through Wirraka Maya for me to come to them, but there is no funding at all for the Strelley community. Mumbultjari was funded because they are 180 kilometres away and the doctor running the service could not warrant me going to Woodstock four days a week, so he sent me to Strelley as well so that they would be covered with a health service.

I am here today on the women's behalf. Health revolves around adequate services as well as adequate accommodation and things like that, and Strelley itself has no adequate housing at all. They do not have power to their houses or any facilities in their homes. There is a toilet block, which belongs to the school—that is where it is placed—and showers have been put in there as well. But in housing, my people do not have anything; they just have the basic shed and that is it. They cook on their fires outside, which they like, but there is nothing there at all—no power, nothing to their homes. This creates quite a problem, especially now it is cold. I have problems getting into the shower in my house, but they have to walk over a kilometre to get their kids ready for school. No-one showers until quite late in the afternoon. All these things cause breakdowns in health.

I am here to ask you to help us out of this situation. We need 24-hour power and decent accommodation and we need the other facilities in Strelley. I know nothing about the funding with Nomads or anything else, but as a people we need this for our general health and lifestyle. Health problems here are probably no different to anywhere else. I have a lot of diabetics, a few

renal failures and the children have a lot of ear and nose problems; just the basic problems that most Aboriginals suffer from somewhere along the line. Some of it is alcohol related, but it is the old and the young who live here at Strelley and they are the ones suffering because they do not have the facilities. Their health suffers a bit. I come in twice a week and provide bandaid health—as I suppose you could call it. I solve the problem, fill up their dose boxes and make sure they are taking their tablets. If they are really sick, I have a vehicle to take them into town—and that is basically it.

The people need a lot of help and they need the facilities, which they do not have. There was a rec centre when I first started here, and I have been coming here for 3½ years. The wife of one of the mechanics here ran it; they left and the rec centre went shot. Now there is nothing to keep the teenagers here. That is part of the problem. When the rec centre was running—it ran for about nine months—the lady would have it open every day of the week. The kids would go in and play pool or watch videos. It was something for them to do. Now they finish school and that is it. They go hunting, but there are only so many kangaroos around here. They need housing and proper facilities so that they can educate and I can educate them about their health problems.

CHAIR—How are you funded?

Ms Marian—I am funded through the Mumbultjari Health Corporation—Norton is the chairperson at Woodstock.

CHAIR—Is that a Commonwealth or state based—

Ms Marian—No—the funding goes through Mumbultjari, which is a corporation, to Nomads, who then pay for my wages, the doctor's visits and the general equipment that I use.

CHAIR—That would be the Commonwealth, out of OASTIH—

Ms Marian—Yes, that is right—it is through OASTIH.

CHAIR—Would there be any state government contribution in terms of those health arrangements?

Ms Marian—I do not think so, but I do not know.

CHAIR—I think you have put it very well. I do not have anything to add other than to ask if you could give the committee an indication of the number of people that you are endeavouring to service. It is difficult, I know, given the movement—

Ms Marian—There are usually about 30 here. Most times there are 20 or so children, and then there are the younger mothers and the grandparents who look after them. So there are 30 to 60. I know there are a few people who have housing in town—including one lady who has come out here today—because they want a refrigerator. Nutrition is another important issue.

CHAIR—Power equals refrigeration.

Ms Marian—Yes.

CHAIR—Kerosene fridges, when I grew up, were not quite the go.

Ms Marian—No.

Mr HAASE—I am very conscious of the time. Could you just comment on something that we have previously discussed in this committee; that is, the relevance of delightfully planned, theoretical solutions to health in the form of training to prepare people to live in a domestic situation where you shower once or twice a day and you have three meals—you prepare them and you have a consideration of the nutritional values of food et cetera. I wonder if you would like to comment on the appropriateness of that in this environment.

Ms Marian—It would work. You can educate the women on the nutritional side of things, but the people who come out here to educate them need to look at what is available in the environment. I have taken my ladies to a dietician at Wirraka Maya. There was one visit for child nutritional habits so that these women would know if their babies were failing to thrive. That was one two-hour visit. What we need, if people are going to educate, is for them to come out and see how the community cook—it is all in one pot—and see what goes in. From that point of view, if you do not have a refrigerator, you cannot have fresh meat or vegetables for very long—you have nowhere to keep them so it all goes to pot. You end up having a lot of damper. In this weather now it is fine but when you are here in summer and it is 90 per cent humidity, 45 degrees all the time and you have no power then obviously you are not going to be fed properly.

Mr HAASE—Tell me about the process of sourcing nutritional food at a reasonable price, how far it is from here to do so, how long it takes, how you get there and what currency you use.

Ms Marian—Coles is the closest, I suppose. It would be about 65 kilometres away. That means that, if you are going to not have the facilities, it is a daily trip. Maybe you could do it every second day, but for meat you would need to make a daily trip. You would need a vehicle. Although there are a few around at the moment, there isn't always a vehicle, so your coordinator or someone would have to go in every day. That becomes an issue too. You are wasting your money on diesel and fuel, instead of spending it on the adequate food you require. If you have the facilities here, you can do a weekly trip. There was a complementary bus service arranged for six weeks, but I have been told that the funding for that is \$400-odd a week, and then you would have to work out who would pay for it. Although there was a trial for six weeks, and it worked—the women went in and it was great—someone has to fund it to continue. So that is the other side of it. Fuel costs quite a lot—

Mr HAASE—How much?

Ms Marian—I am trying to go on my diesel tank. I suppose it costs \$25 for a return trip.

Mr HAASE—If it costs \$25 a return trip, it would be about \$1.08 a litre, I believe.

Ms Marian—Yes, something like that. So you are solving one problem in one way—you are giving them vehicles to go into town every day—but on the other side of it your money is being depleted through being spent on fuel and you are not spending it on good food.

Mr HAASE—Thank you very much for that.

Dr LAWRENCE—Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you. Obviously nutrition is vital and you are doing what you can to advise people, in the couple of days that you have every week. What is the relationship between the medical service in Port Hedland and these communities, in terms of health prevention and promotion?

Ms Marian—We run quite a lot of programs that the people here are invited into. Once a month a dietician comes up for a couple of days, but that is also run for the townspeople, so you can only have about 10 or 12 people in, so really it is a one-off visit. There are other programs as well—sexual health programs, hearing programs and eye programs—that people go out to all the communities with, not just to Strelley and Wirraka Maya. The eye program is funded for the whole Pilbara community and goes to Punmu, Jigalong and all over the place, and we do get that service here as well. The doctor here has a huge list, so from an eye point of view these people will get one eye done—have a cataract extraction or something—and then have to wait quite a while for the other.

Regarding health education, the best way for me to educate people is to sit down and have a cup of tea with them. We sit down and talk women's business. I feel that you would solve a lot more too by sitting down with the women for a few hours. But unfortunately the—

Dr LAWRENCE—It is not possible.

Ms Marian—It is not possible. First of all I had to get to know the people, which took quite a long time. Then they invite you into their confidence, and then they come to you with their problems. One thing they do desperately want is a power supply and a water supply. Obviously that goes with adequate housing.

Dr LAWRENCE—It was the first thing that was said to me when I arrived here today, so it is obviously top of mind to many people. Could you give me a brief indication—and I am conscious of the time, Mr Chair—of the comparative status of this community. I do not mean to be offensive, but could you indicate how this community compares with some of the others that you see.

Ms Marian—Strelley really is the poor relation. As I said, there is no health funding for Strelley either. I was incorporated into it. I was actually only employed for Woodstock. So, even though I come here two days a week, there is no money for health. Because originally all the housing was moved from here when it was huge—it all went to Warralong—and there has been no housing funding, they do not get any of that either. To my knowledge, the funding for Strelley is for education—the funding for health is Mumbultjari. For the rest of the improvements, the money has to be found from somewhere. So Strelley is the poor relation. They miss out on a lot. It is a real shame, because they are part of my group and I hate to see them being the ones that do not get anything at all.

Dr LAWRENCE—Your description of the need to go backwards and forwards—because there is no refrigeration and so on—also points to the fact that there is no store here either. A store could help in that respect.

Ms Marian—That is right. There is no actual coordinator. There is a caretaker, but there is no coordinator. When you have a coordinator, you tend to have a store. Punmu and a lot of the other communities have that. But there is no coordinator here, so therefore, with no coordinator, you do not get any CDEP programs—although there are people being paid for CDEP who do not live here any more; they are still being paid to work here—and you do not have any of the other ongoing programs either.

Dr LAWRENCE—I am sure we will keep talking. I would certainly like to talk to the women too in the time that I have. Thank you.

Mr JOHN COBB—This is health related, but I do not think it is a question to you so much. How long has the power not been on here? Obviously it must have been at one stage.

Mr Butler—Many years—probably since they shifted from Strelley in the 70s.

Mr JOHN COBB—Why was it turned off then?

Mr Butler—Because there were no people here. They shifted because of the drunks.

Mr JOHN COBB—What happened? Was the power turned off first. or did the people leave first?

Mr Butler—The people left first.

Mr JOHN COBB—There is no doubt about that?

Mr Butler—No, no doubt about it.

Mr JOHN COBB—Why can't it be put back on now?

Mr Butler—There is no funding for it. The only power we have here is to the school. It covers the two teachers' houses. The community has run cords from there, and there are quotes to put a power line across from the generator to one unit. We do have a coordinator—Gerry Roberts—who would take the people to town in the truck to get provisions on pension day when the bus was not operating. A lot of the people have vehicles now, so they go to town every second day, you might say. We have had a recreation centre. That was wrecked by some of the young blokes coming in and stealing the equipment. We did have a freezer there at that stage, but someone left a couple of kangaroos in it. It was turned off and that finished it.

CHAIR—I need to draw this to a close. Thank you every much everybody for being part of this morning's proceedings. Thank you Crow, Monty, Ray, Chris, Ingrid and Carolyn.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Cobb**):

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

Proceedings suspended from 11.39 a.m. to 2.12 p.m.

ATTWOOD, Mrs Mary, ANS Worker, Port Hedland Regional Aboriginal Corporation

BRAHIM, Ms Helen, Administrator Coordinator, Ngarda Sport and Recreation

CHONG WEE, Ms Joan Jillian, Coordinator, Pilbara Indigenous Women's Aboriginal Corporation

DRAGE, Mr Raymond, HACC Coordinator, Tjalka Warra Community

HAYES, MS Trudy, Committee Member, Pilbara Aboriginal Women's Corporation

MacKAY, Ms Jean, Deputy Chair, Murambarinya Aboriginal Corporation

WOODLEY, Mr Victor, Vice President, Aboriginal Legal Service

CHAIR—I declare open the public hearing of the ATSIA inquiry into the capacity building in Indigenous communities. We have been all over Australia and now we are in Western Australia, specifically at Port Hedland. I welcome representatives from the Port Hedland Regional Aboriginal Corporation, Tjalka Wara, Pundulmurra College and the Pilbara Aboriginal Women's Corporation. These are official proceedings of the parliament and need to have respect accorded to them.

Mr Woodley—I have been allocated the job of introducing members of the community and the organisation. First is Jean MacKay from Murambarinya Aboriginal Corporation.

Ms MacKay—Thank you for giving me this opportunity to briefly go through some of the issues that we have. Ours is in relation to land and land tenure. We are not in a position to—

CHAIR—I need to remind you that we will stick pretty strictly to two minutes and then you can enlarge as we get into the questions. That will give everyone a fair go. We have a little less than an hour because we have flights et cetera.

Ms MacKay—I have documents here that we will present to you. Our issues are that we do not have the benefits of our own land because we have been denied them. We have been arguing for many years about going back to land that is traditionally ours. It is all documented evidence out of government offices that I will be presenting to you today.

The conflict of interest is in relation to the Aboriginal Land Trust when land that belonged to the Ngarluma people was given away to the Yandeejarra community by Mr Barry Taylor, who is the son of Mr Peter Coppin. He was in charge of Yandeejarra station at that time and the leading member of the Mugarinya group.

We have been strung along by the Department of Indigenous Affairs, the Land Trust and the native title services. We can prove where we come from and our history goes right back to when the white pastoralists first came to the Pilbara region. It is documented evidence that when a

white man took an Aboriginal woman, he recorded his children. We are descendants of those people so we can prove where we come from. Every time we go to someone to ask about these issues and the reserves and the lands that our people come from, we get shoved aside—‘This will happen; that will happen; wait, wait, wait.’ We would like an inquiry into this.

CHAIR—You have 15 seconds to summarise.

Ms MacKay—On what I am going to present to you today we would like some sort of action taken. We would like an inquiry into the way that our family has been treated by the various departments, and it does not rest there. If it is happening to us, it must be happening to other people as well.

CHAIR—Thank you. I will respond briefly, but can we hear from Mary Attwood, please?

Mrs Attwood—I have a few issues that I want to raise. I have also presented the documentation to one of the girls. I am concerned that CDEP is not being used to fully support and provide services to Aboriginal communities. As a result of that, our Aboriginal communities are disintegrating and domestic violence is increasing. Everything that is happening could be reduced if CDEP were better operated in the communities. I will leave it at that because most of the stuff is in writing.

I am also concerned about the regionalisation—for instance, housing—where all the funding that is coming into the Pilbara is now being put into one organisation. It has taken away the opportunity for employment, involvement and decision making—you name it. It is a really negative approach and I believe that it should be investigated because of the millions of dollars that one organisation has, and other organisations that are providing a service are not getting any funds at all.

Aged care is another concern because I work with housing. There are not enough services. Many people are living in Homeswest houses. The rental charged is linked to standard rates and all Homeswest tenants living in the property are being charged 25 per cent of gross income across the board, regardless of who are the legal tenants. This has a devastating impact on people who are trying to make a home. I am putting people into houses without any furniture, no gas and no power in some cases. You wonder why Aboriginal people are going off the rails and turning to drink and domestic violence. The problem is we are not even servicing them. I think this rental policy that Homeswest has at the moment is a major problem.

CHAIR—We can talk about that in detail; you just need to wind up now.

Mrs Attwood—The other concern I want to mention is the regionalisation of housing. I think I have raised it already.

CHAIR—You certainly did mention it.

Mrs Attwood—I will leave it at that.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mary. We will come back to the issues; we can have a chat about them. Welcome, Raymond.

Mr Drage—I am from the 12 Mile community.

CHAIR—You have just a couple of minutes on the issues and we will come back to them as the time permits.

Mr Drage—You saw this afternoon when we went for a tour around 12 Mile what sort of state it is in. I would like to see 12 Mile get a bit more funding so we can upgrade the houses and the places around 12 Mile—cleaning up, and a few trees we have grown around there. Like I said this morning, at the moment I am supplying a lot of the stuff myself—tools and so on—to help clean 12 Mile. This is my feeling: if you are an octopus and you have relations working in government places, if you grab on one of those leads or the octopus on the legs, that is when you get support. I think we should have a bit more support at 12 Mile.

CHAIR—That is it in a nutshell.

Mr Drage—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Feel free to stay because we would like to have a chat.

Mr Drage—Yes.

CHAIR—Helen, over to you.

Ms Brahim—I have been asked by my committee to speak on the problems that we are experiencing with ATSSIS, mainly the regional manager; the Department of Sport and Recreation, with whom we have an MOU; and the nepotism that is going on with ATSSIC. ATSSIS is not coming out to meet with organisations. The information that is getting passed on is incorrect or not true. There is the funding situation that is going on between the organisations within the Pilbara, the nepotism that is going on in here, the support from ATSSIS to the Aboriginal people of the Pilbara and the youth. There is a whole lot of stuff to do with ATSSIS and other government departments that have come in here and done the wrong things, like sacking workers without committee decisions, telling ATSSIS that we were insolvent when we still have money, and commenting that Aboriginal people are not capable of running organisations. There are a lot of legal issues and we have a lot of documentation.

CHAIR—Thank you, Helen. Finally, I think we have Joan.

Ms Chong Wee—We will be seeking for the government to recognise the problems that Indigenous women face in the Pilbara. There is no legal representation for women. I had to appear in court the other day for a hearing before a judge for a woman who had no legal representation. I have gone everywhere. That is one of the problems, like domestic violence. Helen said that there is no consultation with ATSSIS about our funding or anything. We do not get visits from them. They make brief phone calls but that is about it. We want a network throughout the Pilbara for the women and to set up subcommittees so that we are aware of all the problems,

like domestic violence, and whatever happens in the community. We do not seem to be getting anywhere because we have the problem with the local ATSI and the regional council.

I will be presenting documents to you but I am just asking for government support for Indigenous women and what we put up with. I am only the coordinator but I had to appear in court. As you know, in hearings of the Family Court lay people cannot attend but it was a special occasion because there was no legal representation. That is a problem we face here for a lot of the women. The Legal Aid Commission or the ALS pick up the men on things like breach of VRO or assault—something to do with domestic violence. When the women come up, they have nowhere to go. They do not have any legal representation or anybody to support them. I have been here for three months and I have had, I would say, victim impact statement clients coming through here, family law and deceased estates. All these matters are because Aboriginal people cannot talk to the white solicitors because there is cross-cultural—

CHAIR—I think we get the picture: the legal representation.

Ms Chong Wee—Yes. We are seeking something for the women of the Pilbara.

CHAIR—We will come back to that. I want to set up what I think are realistic understandings. As a parliamentary committee, we do not have authority to grant you one cent. We do not have the authority to grant you your instant and every wish. We are about—and this is the whole of idea of our terms of reference—community capacity: how does the community do it better, how do government agencies do better and, therefore, how does the Commonwealth parliament help to facilitate that. The first thing is to say that is the reality of our lot. We are backbenchers and we do not have the authority to grant—

Ms Chong Wee—What about an investigation into ATSI and the regional council?

CHAIR—We can raise issues. There are various levels of investigation and who should do that and who is legally entitled to do it. Certainly we can raise issues, and that is our role.

Native title now has quite a history in Australia, and that is something for very specialised discussion. We have a committee of the parliament that deals with those sorts of issues. We would not regard that as our brief other than if there were something that we could pass on. We see it as the basis of many issues to do with land and Aboriginal people but I would not want to mislead you in any way by saying that we can help resolve your issues other than note them. That is the first point.

The CDEP is an issue of direct interest to us, Mary. That does involve ATSI and those issues within our portfolio. Those issues are of great interest to us, so I will be interested to hear whatever you might want to add on that.

As far as nepotism goes, Helen, I think what we need to look at are the issues of the democratic structures and the involvement of people. I will be looking at that; other members will have their own views. It is an ongoing issue within families. How do families manage their own relationships? That is part of our terms of reference. How do families manage relationships with other families? How does the community endeavour to facilitate better relationships? We know it is an issue. To deny it would be to walk away from our responsibility.

As for the general issues, what I quickly want to do now is to introduce myself to give you a picture of who I am, and I will ask other members to do that as they come to their questions. I am Barry Wakelin, South Australian. Over 90 per cent of the state of South Australia, which is only about half as big as Mr Haase's electorate, has a significant Aboriginal population, in places like Pitjantjatjara, Maralinga et cetera. You may be aware of some of those names. There are also the Adnyamadhanha people of the Flinders Ranges. I have that background and 10 years in the parliament, and I have been with this committee for the 10 years, with a brief break.

I might go to Mr Haase as the local member and invite him to introduce himself—he does not need any introduction—and ask some brief questions, and then go to Dr Lawrence and Mr Cobb. Then I will try to sum up a little. We need to be gone in 40 minutes.

Mr HAASE—Thank you all for giving us your time; we do appreciate the opportunity. No, we cannot click our fingers and solve your problems but we can be made aware of them. I believe that this is a great opportunity for you to get your story across and get it into *Hansard* where it is on the public record.

Yes, you may know of me; I am your federal member based in Kalgoorlie. The federal electorate of Kalgoorlie is from Esperance to Wyndham. It covers about 91 per cent of Western Australia and it has amongst its 82,000 electors some 12,000 who are Indigenous. I take seriously my responsibility to Indigenous people but it is an endless task to bring all of those communities up to the standard that they richly deserve. It would damn near need an act of God to correct all the conditions that so screamingly need to be fixed. I wonder what it is—and I will go specifically to your comments, Helen—in your opinion that sees some communities funded and getting those things that you refer to and others not. I would like you to put on the public record the reasons you believe that there is not more equity.

Ms Brahim—Personal opinions—it just goes down to personal opinions and they should be kept out. They should be professional but unfortunately a lot our so-called people who make our decisions make their decisions on personal opinions.

Mr HAASE—What is the nature of those personal opinions? Personal opinions about what, for instance?

Ms Brahim—It is about individuals. If they do not like the individual or someone who is close to them does not like the individual, they do not like the group or the group gives them a hard time, then they are wiped out.

Mr HAASE—So you believe that to get funding you need to be compliant, passive and friendly. What about the parameters—

Ms Brahim—You can be friendly but you still will not get it.

Mr HAASE—What about the nature of the project that you are seeking funding for, does that question come into it?

Ms Brahim—No, that is what we have asked. We were on the verge of closing down. I was asked by my committee to come on board to see what was going wrong; I have been on board

now for six months. We have had nine programs that have been very successful. We have had complimentary letters from the community about reconciliation and things like that, and how we were working well in the community. We have had a lot of positive comments and still they do not want to fund us.

Mr HAASE—What specific activities are you asking for funding for?

Ms Brahim—For sports and rec. We get \$92,000 a year to do the whole of the Pilbara in sports and rec, that is including paying wages, maintenance, running the office and doing programs throughout the communities and towns. We have, say, 12 communities throughout the whole of the Pilbara and six or seven major towns, and we get \$10,000 a year to deliver programs to the whole of the Indigenous communities of the Pilbara. Out of that, \$7,000 is to take people to Perth for a football game.

Mr HAASE—Does ATSIC see that they are funding that same sport and rec initiative with other communities or groups? Do you feel you are being discriminated against as a group or do you believe your cause—sport and recreation—is being discriminated against?

Ms Brahim—I would say that we are being discriminated against as a group. We have met their guidelines; we have not been in breach or anything like that. They are putting pressure on. They are telling us about our constitution but I have read other people's constitutions and they are going against their constitution and nothing has been said to those other organisations. You have one organisation that is getting over \$5 million a year to run it and you get other organisations like the women's group and us who get \$92,000, and we are throughout the whole of the Pilbara region. That \$92,000 has to pay wages and run the office. Like I said, the basic day-to-day running is \$92,000 and we have to cover the whole of the Pilbara region. That does not even cover one town.

Mr HAASE—You understand our inquiry is specifically about capacity building. I am not sure how many of you have seen the terms of reference that we are working to. I wonder, for the sake of the public record again, how you would rate your prescribed activities in the area of sport and recreation and the outcomes you might achieve in relation to the aspirations of some other groups that are being funded and the outcomes of their projects.

Ms Brahim—We have had a lot of positive outcomes, we work in with other organisations. We are also working with the AFL and the department of sport and rec. As for capacity building, the Department of Sport and Recreation and ATSIC sacked their Indigenous sports development officer without any knowledge of the community, the committee, me, the executive officer. They also told us we were insolvent, we could not compete any more, and we had \$185,000 in the bank. So capacity building is not happening because they will not give us the money or the capacity to have capacity building.

Mr HAASE—I would encourage other members to raise other issues so that everyone gets an opportunity. How would you rate the outcomes for your projects as being a foundation on which to create better capacity for the individuals and communities?

Ms Brahim—At the moment, from the way we are working and the comments we are getting—about eight out of 10.

Mr HAASE—In a more practical way, what is done better by individuals as far as their future capacity—

Ms Brahim—With us?

Mr HAASE—No, with their total environment as a result of going through sport and rec programs that you might direct. I want you to clearly spell out that nexus, that connection.

Ms Brahim—Unity. We work as a unit. We talk with communities and everything is becoming united instead of divided. So we build capacity by working with other organisations. We attack the alcohol problem, the abuse and things like that, so we work in with government departments to try to use sports and rec, which Aboriginal children are good at. Most Aboriginal people are good at sports or any form of recreation so we use that to combat all the other stuff—education, health—right across the board.

Mr HAASE—I see a strong relationship. How do you, in a practical sense, overcome the traditional Australian attitude to most sports, especially team sports, and the connection between winning, celebration and alcohol?

Ms Brahim—The weekend before, three of my workers were sent out to Yandeeyarra for a football carnival. I was quite happy because one of the young boys and the organisers there commented that that was the first time that there had not been any trouble at any sporting carnival in the community. It was well run. We looked at the health side of the kids who were drinking—you have to supply them with water because of the dehydration, you should not be drinking at times, be in bed. The compliments we got from Yandeeyarra with the things that we put in place were very positive. On alcohol, we said you can drink too much, get dehydration, have a stroke, whatever, and that can cause a problem in Yandeeyarra. We kept that under control by talking with the people, having good management skills, time management. We had a few flare-ups. One community had not played, so we sorted all that out, and that stopped a lot of the drinking. People got around talking, yarning, so it became like the family environment.

Mr HAASE—In a nutshell, do you think you should be receiving continuing funding for ATSIC for your endeavours?

Ms Brahim—We are receiving funding, but \$92,000 to do the Pilbara is highly impossible. I cannot use that to do here.

Mr HAASE—Reduced from what?

Ms Brahim—We put in for \$600,000. We had a meeting yesterday and we were told that when it came up from regional council they had cut it from \$600,000 to \$230,000. And then it got cut again to \$92,000.

Mr HAASE—Was there ever an era when you received \$600,000 for the Pilbara?

Ms Brahim—No. We have been running for three years. As I said, we were on the verge of closing down because we had not done anything. As a unit, the committee and the workers built it up and it has started to become successful, and they still are not happy with that.

Mr HAASE—Do you have any appreciation of the fact that \$600,000 is a substantial amount of ATSIC's budget?

Ms Brahim—Yes, I certainly do, but we have proved—

Mr HAASE—What should they not fund to fund your sport and rec?

Ms Brahim—I got told yesterday by ATSIC that they are funding Pilbara Meta Maya for infrastructure in the communities and their field officer told me yesterday that infrastructure in the communities had been completed, yet they are still getting funded for it.

Mr HAASE—What do you mean, physical buildings?

Ms Brahim—Yes, infrastructure in the communities. We were told yesterday that they were already completed. We could use the communities because the infrastructure was there. Yet they are still getting funded for infrastructure. How is that possible if they already have the infrastructure? Where is the money going?

Mr HAASE—Good question. I will leave it there.

Ms Brahim—Thank you.

Dr LAWRENCE—My questions could be answered by any of you. You obviously have a lot of experience in dealing with the whole question of funding arrangements, applications for funding, accountability and a whole range of areas where there is a little bit of money for one purpose and you are expected to relate to other organisations who may or may not give you the credibility you deserve. We are hearing that someone turns up as the Aboriginal sports person without anyone ever having to talk to you about how you are going to work together. I guess I would like a little bit of feedback because what we are trying to look at is the government side of it—ATSIC, government departments and agencies, organisations who work with Indigenous communities who often do not do that very well either. So are there any observations you might like to make to us that you think would lead to an improvement in that relationship?

Mrs Attwood—I was thinking about that, having spoken to someone. They talk about rationalising Aboriginal organisations but I think there should be a rationalisation of the funding that goes to everybody. In Hedland, we do not know where all the Aboriginal money is going. There is no way we can make anybody accountable. The only people we can challenge are the Aboriginal organisations and those that get ATSIC funding. When you look around in Port Hedland alone, there is money for HACC and alcohol abuse; there is money going everywhere. But the Aboriginal people do not know who has got it.

Aboriginal dollars are a cash cow for everybody and we do not even know where it is going, yet we are being dragged over the coals because we do not account for our money. But where are

the other millions going? You have to start looking at trying to rationalise and make state and local government accountable. ATSIC has to put into its annual reports where they spend their money. I ask Mr Haase there: does the WA state government do it? Do they give us any feedback on who is getting the money and what it is going on?

Dr LAWRENCE—Neither does the Commonwealth.

Mrs Attwood—No. That is a concern because the dollars are getting fewer. We took ATSIC to court for \$105,000 a year for our Aboriginal organisation that provides housing and support services to Aboriginal tenants in Homeswest housing. Pipunya Aboriginal Corporation Inc did the same. They have wiped off our funding. We fought for \$103,000 for PHRAC and \$93,000 for Pipunya. Organisations like Marta Marta Aboriginal Corporation are getting \$5 million. You ask the question about capacity building. How can we build our communities when we do not have the physical or financial resources to build? All this is going into one body. And why? Because of the connections to the councillors. You look at Jinparinya and it has only 10 or 12 people there. Last year they got nearly \$150,000; Marta Marta, \$127,000, and there might be a handful of people. You go to Strelley and 12 Mile and there is no funding from ATSIC. Where is the equity? Where is the accountability? Where is the capacity to build and to retain our communities to support our children, families and our elderly?

Ms Brahim—We have a big problem here with crime. We have worked in with the police on crime because of the issue of crime through the Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal towns and all the local towns. Youth crime is a big issue throughout Australia. We have worked with the police and capacity building to stop the crime and we have had successful discos where we have dropped off the kids, we have had a reconciliation ball for the young kids, a native reconciliation ball for the whole town to bring them in and we have actually dropped off kids.

Crime is the biggest problem. When we hold sporting programs we do not have any crime in the town because we drop off the kids. Then ATSIC says, 'Our sports and rec did this.' Yet they do not support us. They get the compliments, 'Yes, we support them, no worries.' In the next breath they are trying to close us down. The biggest issue is crime throughout Australia with youth. We have an organisation that is battling crime and they want to close us down. They get the compliments when we do this stuff and then in the next breath they say, 'Yes, you have done a good job but we still want your job back.' There is capacity building; it is knocked out the door.

Ms Hayes—I come from Onslow and one of my concerns is about all our old people. As a result of the services that come from the government, like the health department, all our old people are being taken out of the town and moved up here, six hours away, or to Geraldton, which is 10 hours away, and their families cannot visit them. We want to keep our old people in their homes. The services that they offer, like someone to come in to clean their houses once a week or whatever, that has been taken away from them.

Our old people are our library books; our history is not written. We do not want our old people to be taken away, we want them to stay in our community so they can instil the traditional and cultural knowledge into our children. They are being taken away and we want them to stay here. It is not only with the Indigenous people in these small towns but the non-Indigenous people as well. We have had old people living there that have worked there, delivered our babies, and they

are being taken out of the town as well. We would just like to see them and that relates to the whole town which has—

Dr LAWRENCE—Lost funding?

Ms Hayes—They lost their funding. They have taken their care packages away and given them to people here in the main centres where they can get that sort of help. It is just here; this is a regional area. In the smaller communities they are not getting that, they are taking it way from them. They come into town; they are just in there two hours. How can you assess someone in their home in two hours? They come in and go out of town the same day. Four people to come into town. Where is all the cost involved of three people's wages, several cars coming into town and out again? We do not get the services that other people in regional areas would get.

Dr LAWRENCE—How many people would be affected by that?

Ms Hayes—Onslow is a town where there are a lot of old people. There are about 700 people there now but out of that there are probably about 100 elderly—

Dr LAWRENCE—Some of them would be with aged care—

Ms Hayes—Yes. The health department talks about consultation with the community. There is no consultation. There is never any consultation for any services in the remote areas. Even ATSIC talks about how they come and do consultation. They come into town. That evening they are standing in front of the supermarket buying grog, having a big party and the next day they have gone out of town. They stay in the best motels and they are out of town the next morning at seven o'clock. So no consultation has taken place with the people in the communities. I have a lot more to say but I do not want to take up too many other people's—

CHAIR—Thank you for that.

Mrs Attwood—Can I add to that. We have the HACC program in Hedland and I work with housing. All the elderly Aboriginal people who live in Aboriginal housing are really desperate. They are supposed to get HACC services but they refuse to service them. The food they provide is not adequate or appropriate. A lot of them are feeding their dogs with it or they just refuse it. On top of that, this HACC program is making them pay for each meal. You wonder why because I know they get funding for it. I have one elderly lady; they want to charge her \$2 a day to come and shower her because she is in a wheelchair.

Those are the services that come from a federal base. We have been trying to say we need to have an Aboriginal organisation to provide services and meals and to go into houses to assist them, but they will not support that. It really raises the issue about these dollars and that they are not prepared to get Aboriginal people involved in servicing the people, especially when they control all the money. I want to quickly go into CDEP. You can butt in.

CHAIR—Just before you go there, Carmen, on those issues did you—

Dr LAWRENCE—I am happy. I would like to hear about CDEP because obviously that is a big area of concern that has been raised.

Mrs Attwood—CDEP is supposed to provide the opportunity to—and I am taking this from the ATSIC book—undertake work and activities chosen by the community organisation. The scheme facilitates community development or capacity building, whichever you like, for communities and is community led and participant led. What we have now is the regionalisation where the communities have lost all their control over program delivery, supervision and expenditure, and you wonder where all the money is going. Millions of dollars are going to on-costs, CDEP capital and wages.

CHAIR—Has the local community ever had control?

Mrs Attwood—No. It has gone into a regionalised body. Everybody here knows about it. What concerns me is that over the last 18 months they have cut the funds and where is all the money going? We did not get funds to have any programs. That is why you have all this antisocial business, you have people moving from their communities—

Ms Brahim—Where has their training money gone?

Mrs Attwood—If you want to know why everybody is out at the shops drinking and boozing and belting their wives and husbands, it is because all the activities in the community that were previously funded through CDEP no longer exist. We want to know why. We want an investigation into it because money has been siphoned off.

Dr LAWRENCE—Just to give us a feel, what sort of things have stopped?

Mrs Attwood—For instance, Tjalka Wara, they had services there such as removal of rubbish, cleaning, helping with old people, taking kids to school, and when they suspended the funding, there was no more money to provide those ongoing services.

CHAIR—The advice we have had is that the funding may be available but no-one will go out there.

Mrs Attwood—That is wrong.

CHAIR—Is it? Okay.

Mrs Attwood—Everybody can tell you it is cheap work with CDEP. They cut the funding and there were no programs. That is 12 Mile; look at Marble Bar, it is right out there. They have no—

CHAIR—I can only test what I hear: it is not so much a funding issue as the fact that the participants are reluctant to go there.

Mrs Attwood—It is supposed to be the community, and that is where the problem started, when they started taking the instructors and supervisors out there instead of developing the community. That is what community development is about, isn't it?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mrs Attwood—What they did was bring in the participants and left those people sitting there doing nothing. Now, nobody wants to do anything as well.

Ms Brahim—I have CDEP participants working for me. Part of our contract was that they were to supply training for the CDEP participant. When I signed my contract and I asked for training for my CDEP participants, because the whole idea was to have them on for so long so they could get into the work force proper, I was told that they had no training dollars whatsoever and have not had any for the last 12 months. The training of the CDEP participants was up to me. CDEP has no training dollars. I know people who have been on CDEP and top-up since it started and they have no training dollars. If you have a CDEP participant, in your contract it states they have to supply the training; they do not. We have to supply it. So where has the funding for that training money gone?

Ms Hayes—How do you train someone up to reach that level of education or to have skills in something if there are no training dollars? The other thing is the appointment of the managers. They are just put into the position—without the proper process. They have been ripped off by the last manager and CDEP has been still for 18 months.

CHAIR—Can we go to the core of CDEP a little further and dig a little deeper. How many people that you know of have gone onto CDEP and gone on to a full-time job?

Ms Brahim—None.

Mrs Attwood—I was a manager of a big program when they transferred it to ATSIC. They transferred all the dollars over. We argued about keeping that budget separate but they never did; they absorbed it into the ATSIC funding. That is where the problem is. You have CDEP participant numbers but there are no specific training dollars there. Maybe you guys have to look at that, and education and training has to look at that—as a lot of people around here are saying. Otherwise you need to have a real good look at structuring your training so that, first of all, you get people work-ready. They learn the basics: turning up to work, cleaning, learning to look after tools and all that sort of stuff. But how can you do that when you have this body that controls it all?

CHAIR—We want to know how. Can you tell us how?

Mrs Attwood—You have to go back to the communities. You have to provide community development officers who can work with the community to develop training programs within that community. That is how we did it with DEET, and we had everybody. There were no domestic violence problems in those days because you had the capacity to work with the community to develop programs that they needed and wanted.

Ms Brahim—In Hedland we have a lot of duplication of services—they duplicate services. They have just started up another organisation in Hedland—Pilbara Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce. We have NAC that does CDEP, yet I know that someone got a letter from PACC thanking them for putting their resume in. PACC is supposed to be a service provider to do books, not an employment agency.

Ms Hayes—I work for an employment agency with young people aged 15 to 21 who are on the JPET program. When we place, PACC comes in and wants to take over. I have done all the hard work on getting that person into—

CHAIR—Who was this?

Ms Hayes—Pilbara Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce.

Mrs Attwood—An ATSIC project.

Ms Hayes—We do all the hard work for it and then they want to take over and place that young person into a job so that they can get that funding.

CHAIR—They get the dollars for the outcome?

Ms Hayes—Yes.

Mrs Attwood—That PACC is a disaster on legs because it takes away people's jobs.

Mr JOHN COBB—You said that you cannot identify where the money is. The only organisation where you can identify it is, I guess, is ATSIC—and you are obviously not very happy about the way they are performing. So do you think we should have 100 or a dozen different bodies doing all of this? Should we have one body doing the lot and the people being part of it? How do you think it should work? It is a bit of a conflict.

Ms Brahim—What do you mean by 'a bit of a conflict'?

Mr JOHN COBB—In one sense you are saying you cannot identify what body has got what amount of money, where it is coming from and how it is being spent—and the only body that pretty much is identified you are very unhappy with in terms of the way they are working. How do you think the whole thing should work—as one big body?

Mrs Attwood—I do not know what other people think, but I honestly believe that we have gone backwards in the last 20 years. Maybe it is because the regional councils started to understand how to exploit the system—and everybody does. We are not naive here. Maybe we have to look at how we can ensure that people are going to get funding because of the priority that is there, because of the amount of dollars that are there, and that there is some accountability. We know that millions of dollars are being spent and wasted and yet these organisations that work on a day-to-day basis with the Aboriginal community are not getting any.

Mr JOHN COBB—What you are talking about is very important—about what should happen. So how do we fix that?

Mrs Attwood—Maybe now with the change to ATSSIS it might help, but you have deadwood there from DAA days. They all have this attitude that they know what is best for us. People say, ‘Don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater,’ but maybe you have to. You can laugh, Mr Haase, but we have been struggling for the last 30 years, and for 200 years before that! Now we have to go back to the same situation. They control our money, our options; where do we go?

Ms Brahim—Maybe one way is to make people more accountable. I know what has been going on. Mr Ruddock made the comment that, unless there is a figure over \$200,000 and people rip it off, he ain’t interested in it. That \$200,000 can come to us because we are interested in it. No-one is made accountable. I know people who have written letters from here about ATSSIC and ATSSIS and all that happens is that the matter gets handed back to the regional manager, who is a part of that little organisation anyway, and nothing goes on.

Mr JOHN COBB—You are saying that there should be a removed body that they are accountable to—one not involved with the politics or the policies?

Ms Brahim—Yes. It is about accountability. We are supposed to be concerned with self-determination. The Aboriginal people are getting told it is about self-determination. We have no self-determination here; we are ordered to do what we have to do. We get grants and funding and ATSSIC tells us how to spend it. It says, ‘You cannot spend it here,’ but we say, ‘Hang on, the committee wants to spend it here; this is where we have prioritised.’

Ms Hayes—The remote areas do not get anything. They count us as their numbers but we do not get anything.

CHAIR—On this subject, what do you think of ATSSIS and the separation of powers? By what you are suggesting, you would probably support the separation of powers so that ATSSIS can be separate?

Ms Brahim—Because you have a regional manager who is making decisions, if she does not like you, you get nothing.

CHAIR—Don’t you think regional managers may have been under pressure from their boards and their elected leadership?

Ms MacKay—Not necessarily here.

CHAIR—That is the principle—the separation of powers.

Ms MacKay—In theory, but also in theory we have an actor over there who has been acting as a regional manager, and this is what we normally end up with in the Hedland or Pilbara area. The view is: ‘Chuck them up there. They can do whatever they like. They can manipulate the people.’ At the end of the day it is the people on the ground who are missing out. What we are saying is: investigate it, please. Do something about it. Don’t just have us coming to the table

and telling you about all these things. These are genuine concerns. It is not just a group of people coming in here to have a session on running down this thing and that thing; it is genuine concerns.

CHAIR—I am glad to hear that. You are quite right—that is the important principle. You have to come back to principle.

Ms MacKay—The people out there are hurting, whether it is housing, health or education. For goodness sake, Port Hedland is targeted under NIELNS as one of the attendance strategies. You can go down the street any day of the week and there are kids not at school. We had an Aboriginal college that was funded under DAA days. What are we doing? We are meeting in here; we are not meeting there in the conference room. Where has so-called Aboriginal education gone? We are down here.

Mr JOHN COBB—Joan, did you want to say something?

Ms Chong Wee—In relation to the funding from ATSSIS, when I first started here I received a call from Commissioner Whitby telling me, under no certain terms, that there was no way he was funding a women's group. That caused me to send an email to the CEO in Canberra, but nothing came back about it. About a month after that I got a call from the so-called regional manager and he said, in a round about way, 'I think he has spoken too harshly.' But he told me that he was not funding a women's group and I should do as I am told. That was coming from a commissioner of ATSSIS. There is that type of attitude, and I do not want a person like that sitting up there making decisions for the Indigenous people here.

CHAIR—You raise a very important point. What should be the advocacy for women, in particular, in the Aboriginal funding issue? That is what we are talking about here. You really pressed a button for me to have a flashing amber light—if not a red light—because that is a very important issue.

Ms Chong Wee—Yes, it is.

CHAIR—I will not make a comment about the commissioner's comment; that is not for me to enter into.

Ms Chong Wee—I realise that.

CHAIR—But it is a very important point and I am trying to rack my brain about what is the appropriate funding. There is a great level of support at senior government for what you are talking about. Now, of course, the ATSSIC board is making those sorts of decisions. That is where the separation of powers may help, but the board is still driving policy. There is a serious issue there and we will have to be persistent in that one. I hear that one loud and clear.

Ms Chong Wee—I have the documentation there as to his involvement here and what he wanted out of PWAC. Now that I have not played his game, I am not getting any funding and I am not doing as I am told.

CHAIR—Can I be game enough to ask whether there is an ATSI/A commissioner from Western Australia who is a female?

Ms MacKay—No, it is a boys' club.

Ms Chong Wee—There was a female within the regional council, but she had problems with the men's club to the extent where she resigned because of the pressure.

CHAIR—It is a great pity because she was needed.

Ms Chong Wee—Yes, I know.

Dr LAWRENCE—I want to raise one question because I would not want us to be left with the wrong impression. It strikes me that, while you may be unhappy with the way ATSI/A is operating, you would not necessarily want to see it replaced entirely by just another white bureaucracy, would you?

Ms Brahim—No way.

Ms Chong Wee—We need to investigate the players at the moment who are in there playing the game.

Dr LAWRENCE—You have to be satisfied with what is there, but you want participation in the decision making.

Mr JOHN COBB—Carmen has touched on something there. If you want to divorce the politics, be they local or otherwise, how are you going to do that unless you do go outside the local groups or families?

CHAIR—The local men's group as you describe it.

Mr JOHN COBB—Or whatever. How are you going to do it?

CHAIR—That is the unanswered question.

Mr JOHN COBB—It seems to me that is the question that is just sitting up looking at us.

Ms Brahim—From all the complaints that have happened, we have formed a social justice committee out of a few organisations that have had enough of ATSI/A and ATSI/S; these are most of the members here. Steve Mason came over because we had problems. Ngarda Sport and Recreation had a few problems with ATSI/S and ATSI/A and the Department of Sport and Recreation. We rang up Ruddock. Steve Mason was sent over the consequences of that. We invited the rest of the organisations to come and talk as well, and out of that we have formed a social justice working party against ATSI/S.

CHAIR—This may be an appropriate point where everyone starts to wind it up.

Mr Woodley—I am the Vice President for the Aboriginal Legal Service for WA and executive member for this region. This social justice committee that we have just been discussing covers a lot of issues. We sit here and we talk about funding. I have been listening from the start—it is all about funding and where the funding comes from. At the end of the day, it is about responsibility from the people who are put in the positions to distribute all these funds, and it has to go back to them because it is their responsibility. They are under the funding guidelines, and formulas and instructions come with it. They have been instructed and then they get to instruct us. It is back to the responsibility of all the parties to deliver this funding to the services.

CHAIR—Thank you, Victor. We presume that the application for the women's movement or for additional legal services has been done and the debate has been had—the advocacy has been made. How much work is going into continuing to put the position forward? Is it an ongoing program of lobbying your ATSIC people?

Ms Brahim—Social justice.

CHAIR—That is fine, so long as that is still occurring. Has anyone got any vital 10-second statement?

Ms Hayes—I want to talk about youth and education. The education system is failing our kids. I am getting young people coming into my program who say they have been to year 10, but they cannot even read and write properly. It is really failing our system. I do not know how you are going to work it.

CHAIR—You are quite right and we are not going to walk away from that. We accept everything that you say about that. We had some discussion in Perth with some people who are endeavouring to improve that, but it is a key issue. It will be a key issue for a long time and you and I know that. You are probably aware of Bob Collins's report in the Northern Territory, but the issues that Bob and his committee talked about are staring us in the face; we just have to do a lot better. Thank you. I feel a little guilty, Jean, in terms of the native title issue, but I need to be totally candid.

Ms MacKay—Just a minute, Barry, our arguments came in before native title.

CHAIR—I see. All I can do today is offer to have a look at it and we can get back to you, but I cannot mislead you. Those sorts of issues are generally in the jurisdiction of others.

Mrs Attwood—On native title, that is an area where people could have the capacity to build and to get their families back on track again, but it has been totally destroyed by ATSIC and regionalisation and Namaji land. If ever you wanted to investigate it, investigate them because they are destroying our culture.

CHAIR—To pick up Carmen's earlier point, it sounds to me as if you would not be that unhappy if a new name came out of the pack somewhere. You are not that happy with ATSIC.

Ms MacKay—It is no good changing the name like they do with the welfare; you need to have a whole new strategy in there. You need to restructure.

CHAIR—I agree with you. It is not a matter of a name change, but there is also fundamental difference. You are not talking about ATSIC as it exists now. From what I hear, you are saying you want something fairly significantly different.

Ms MacKay—You say capacity building, you say empowerment; we have no power because those people over there have taken that away from us.

CHAIR—I hear you loud and clear.

Ms Hayes—Some communities who refuse to join the organisation have told us that we cannot get any funding just because of the distance we are at.

Mr Woodley—Just in closing, Barry, I would like to take the opportunity to thank you fellas for coming here. Obviously, there is not enough time to get through everything that we wanted to, so maybe next time you can extend your time and we can have you for a full day so we can hammer and tong you on all our issues. Once again, from everybody here, thanks very much for coming.

CHAIR—Thank you. Just in response, on behalf of our committee, I thank you for being here; we got a good roll-up. Mary, thank you for your interest; and, to all of you, thank you for your interest. It is very important.

Ms Brahim—Are we going to get an answer? Are you going to give us notes on this?

CHAIR—Certainly anybody who has been a witness will get a copy of our report, if that was your question. You will get our report sent to you, which, I understand, is normal protocol.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Haase**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 3.11 p.m.