
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities**

MONDAY, 7 APRIL 2003

YAMULOONG

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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

**Monday, 7 April 2003**

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

**Members in attendance:** Ms Hoare 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.

## WITNESSES

**Committee met at 11.28 a.m.**

**ARMSTRONG, Mrs Leah Marie, General Manager, Yarnteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation**

**GORDON, Mr Sean, General Manager, Yamuloong Association Inc.**

**PIPE, Ms Kellie Maree, CDEP Manager, Youloe-Ta Indigenous Development Association Inc.**

**WRIGHT, Mr Abie James, President, Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association Inc.**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into capacity building in Indigenous communities. As some of you would know, we have been in various locations around Australia, from the Torres Strait through to Darwin through to Victoria. We are now beginning our New South Wales component today in Newcastle—or, more accurately, Yarnteen. I welcome representatives from Yarnteen and associated organisations: Youloe-Ta, Yamuloong and Arwarbukarl. I invite each of you to introduce yourself and explain the position you hold—and perhaps you might be able to tidy up my pronunciations.

**Ms Armstrong**—I am the general manager of Yarnteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation. I thank the House of Representatives Standing Committee for coming to Newcastle and having a look around at our organisations. The support that we receive from Kelly is wonderful. I will give you an overview of Yarnteen and our associate organisations, and they will correct your pronunciation of the names of their organisations for you, Barry. After the overview, I will hand over to them and let them discuss some of the issues that they have identified with respect to capacity building. I will perhaps round it off at the very end.

To give you an overview, Yarnteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation was established in 1991 to focus specifically on enterprise, training and employment development. We became an organisation out of a bigger organisation in this area, which is called the Awabukal Newcastle Aboriginal Cooperative. I understand that Ray Kelly will be here later today to talk about that.

Our main objectives and our vision have been to enhance equal opportunities for Indigenous communities, organisations and individuals, which will assist them to prosper within the whole community system and to become full, free agents. Our objectives are to have sustainable economic development opportunities and to improve our social wellbeing.

Yarnteen has developed a capacity building model, which I presented to the MCATSIA meeting in Brisbane. It was basically a four-point model. The basis of what Yarnteen started with and established was, firstly, having a sustainable governance model. In establishing the sustainable governance model, we have identified that the organisations need to understand the history of the communities in which they live. In our case, with the Newcastle area being a large resettlement area, it is important to have an understanding of the history of where the people in Newcastle have come from, what other lands and other countries they have settled here from, recognising the community and political cultures and understanding the legal frameworks of the

organisations and communities that are already here. In that model for sustainable governance, we have acknowledged the traditional decision making practices that are within our cultures, practices based on clan groups and family groups.

Our second point regarding the capacity building model that Yarnteen identified is that we need to have a shared vision and to have long-term planning in place. We promote having a shared vision between our organisation, the community and our employees. We also maintain a specific focus on what we are here to achieve, on whatever is our core business in our areas of employment, training and economic development. We have also promoted a whole-of-community interaction that recognises that, as an organisation or as a community, we are also part of a broader regional and economic community with the non-Aboriginal community.

We hope that we promote entrepreneurial leadership within our managers and our community. As such, we hope to make sure that we have informed and committed managers with open communication skills and, importantly, vital access to information. Within our organisation, we encourage ongoing skills development and networking, and we also hopefully foster creativity and innovation. I hope that the bush tucker tour which you were on today in Yamuloong displayed a bit of that creativity and innovation that we hope to create and foster.

We also recognise that it is important to have responsive resource management that is accountable not only to the funding bodies but to our community needs as well. We have measured decision making and we also seek advice—that is, we acknowledge when we need to seek advice from outside our organisation and the impact of that decision making on all levels. Finally, we are always on the lookout for continuous improvement in making sure that the programs or the services that we deliver utilise the best method and are meeting the outcomes in the community that we seek.

That is just a broad overview of Yarnteen's idea of capacity building. From that, as we have set up our new organisations and taken on a new direction, we are hopefully mentoring and modelling those capacity building initiatives for our associate organisations. I will now hand over to Kellie Pipe, the CDEP Manager of Youloe-Ta, to put her points forward.

**Ms Pipe**—The Youloe-Ta Indigenous Development Association has two programs. It runs the Community Development Employment Program, which is funded by ATSIC, and it is also a group training organisation. It has submitted to become an Indigenous employment centre but that is still in the pipeline. The things that I would like to talk about today are as follows. Firstly, Youloe-Ta CDEP has a vision of working towards assisting each of our CDEP participants into securing full-time work. Its vision reflects the needs of our communities, participants and also those of Yarnteen, as Leah has briefly mentioned.

To achieve this vision, we need a whole-of-community approach to address all issues that our participants face. In relation to community capacity building, employment is an essential tool for all of our Indigenous participants and community members as we strive for self-determination, economic independence and the unrelenting task of addressing our socioeconomic needs. We have tried partnerships. Some are successful; some are not. One reason why our partnerships are not successful is that organisations and departments seem to think that they have the most appropriate programs and that they know how to work with Indigenous people. Nine times out of 10, this is not the case. Our people are placed in the too-

hard basket. People do not know how to work with our people, and it is evident in the failure of Job Network providers to address the employment issues of our people.

For Indigenous employment centres to be a success, we need the government to be realistic when they are projecting the outcomes for them. It is not just a matter of saying, 'The CDEPs have six months to place people into full-time employment.' We have the same problems in urban communities as in remote communities. We have drug problems, health problems and other problems, which affect how our people secure employment. For us to do this again and for it to work, we need to take a whole-of-community approach, as Leah has said. We also need to have ownership of that; we need to manage our people. We know how our people work, what would work and what would not work.

Discussions are constantly taking place around there being more moneys for remote areas to address their needs. If urban communities are to move forward, we too need more resources. We need to do business with a holistic view and with shared visions, and we need to do it in our way, with flexibility to achieve greater outcomes and greater autonomy.

In conclusion: for capacity building to work in this community, we need to plan strategically in order to achieve greater outcomes for our community. On the other hand, government needs to be less focused on the accountability of dollars and more focused on outcomes from our community organisations, in partnership with a greater focus on the accountability of dollars for non-Indigenous communities and government departments and really seeing what they are spending their money on. If we are to work hand in hand—which I think is what capacity building is about—to meet the needs of our communities, we both need to come to the table and to be realistic about where we are going, who knows how to run these programs and who should be listened to.

**Mr Gordon**—Welcome to Newcastle and Yamuloong. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us, and thank you to Kelly for her support in organising this meeting today. I am the General Manager of Yamuloong Association, and I have been with the company for about two years. Since coming on board with the company, I have held the belief that it is necessary to ensure that self-determination for our people is a major item on our agenda with anything that we do. I have had lots of experience in the past, coming from a training background—I have had seven years with TAFE—and I have lived pretty much all my life, other than the last two years, in remote communities such as Brewarrina and Moree.

Over the years, I have seen lots of different things take place, especially out at Moree. It seems to be recognised that communities in remote areas have a higher need for programs and government support. I would argue against that and say that the people living in urban areas are pretty much in the same situation. The kids are very similar, and the issues of the adults—the drug and alcohol problems—are very similar. There needs to be a focus on urban communities, rather than government continually pushing our dollars and support programs towards those remote areas.

Let me give you an idea of where we are with Yamuloong. Yamuloong's vision is to become a leading provider of education, training and employment services, working to build partnerships between cultures. That is the key to how Yamuloong are operating and to where our future lies. The way in which we create those partnerships is that we currently have relationships with 22

different high schools and we run what we call school-to-work orientation programs that are fully focused around providing our Aboriginal kids with identity, motivation, self-esteem and career opportunities. We encourage the kids to stay on at school; to move into years 11 and 12 if that is the correct path for our kids; and to go on to further education, which is university and TAFE as well as Yamuloong, as an RTO. We also try to encourage our kids to go directly into employment and ensure that that focus is continually pushed.

I will just give you an idea as to where we fit in as far as capacity building and partnerships within our communities. I believe that we in Yamuloong have taken a holistic approach in the way in which we are going about our business. We currently work with our younger kids from primary school through to high school and we work with our adults when they are leaving school. We have taken the approach that, rather than trying to fix the problem when they have left school, we will attempt to fix the problem whilst they are in school.

Amongst the things that we are continually pushing towards is that we are trying to lift our profile in the Newcastle community. It is not always easy to lift a profile, especially of an Aboriginal organisation and especially when you are an Aboriginal RTO. It is a very competitive market in Newcastle—we currently compete with around 90 RTOs in the Newcastle area—and, as you would know, it is a very cutthroat industry. The way we are ensuring that our successes are happening is to be proactive. We have become a member of the local business chamber, we are a member of business clubs and we are promoting our services to Rotary Clubs and so on. So we are continually pushing ourselves to the limit to ensure that we are going to be a success.

We have on board a business development group, which is a group of very successful businesspeople who are volunteering their time and their service to assist us in what we are doing. I am very new in business and in management, and I continually have to make sure that I have support from other people who have succeeded and have had successes in the past. To be able to have a voluntary group assist me in my future direction is a great support in where we are going.

The two questions that I am looking at are at point 7 and point 8 of the letter that you sent to us. The first question is: to what extent are governments and their agencies building genuine partnerships with Indigenous groups and are these partnerships leading to better services and improvements in communities? My response to that is that ‘partnerships’ is a very strong word to use when working with governments. I would tend to move more towards ‘relationships’ rather than ‘partnerships’ due to the fact that, in most cases, it takes 12 months or more to establish a working relationship. Once a relationship is established, all the work is then put back onto the organisation to ensure that the requirements of the relationship are being met—that is, the program outcomes, the objectives, reporting, acquittals and audits.

It seems to me that when governments are talking about partnerships their role in the partnership is to contribute the dollars rather than to play an active role in the programs. Partnerships take time, trust and active participation by those involved in the partnerships. I strongly agree that partnerships need to happen between government and Indigenous groups. I also believe that these partnerships can deliver better services and improvements in our Indigenous communities.

The second question is: how well are governments coordinating their work at the community and regional level and does it make a difference? Coordination varies with each individual government department. I have experienced both good and bad coordination roles from different departments. In most cases, the bad coordination generally comes from a government department that feel that they have more to lose if the program is not a success rather than thinking that, if the program is a success, they have more to gain. Government departments need to coordinate their programs across sectors—that is, across employment, education and health. Indigenous programs need to complement each other and government need to know what other departments are delivering within our communities.

It is quite difficult at the moment in that I am working with about five or six different funding organisations. The bottom line for most of those departments is employment. But the reporting requirements put back on to someone like myself, having to do reports on seven different funding applications, seven different acquittals and seven different audits, make it very hard. Leah was talking about encouraging entrepreneurial leadership. It is quite difficult if your leaders are continually doing submissions, reports and so on, rather than looking at the big picture stuff.

I think that what we are doing here at Yamuloong and what we are doing in Newcastle is leading the way, as far as covering the whole of the community. I would also like to see—coming from these types of things—that we are looked at as leading the way and ensuring that our success is being promoted in other communities, with them possibly looking at what it is we are doing, looking at piloting that with other communities and seeing how they can then learn from what we have done.

**Mr Wright**—I am from the Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association. What is the Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association? We have been running since June 2002. We are a cultural organisation. Our priorities are language, culture and identity, which we see as being the main problems in our community at this stage. We have shortened the Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association title, and we now call ourselves ACRA. We look on language as the soul of our being. In a lot of our communities, especially in New South Wales and the urban communities, languages are dying at a rate of two languages per year. There were over 600 different tribes in Australia when Captain Cook and the English first landed, with between 200 and 300 different languages spoken. We think that identity has a lot to do with our kids and has a lot to do with the problems they are facing today. A lot of our kids do not know who they are. They know they are Aboriginal, but that is the extent of what they know. They do not know the traditional ways. They do not know their language. They do not know how to go out and gather bush tucker. They do not know protocols. They do not know how to interact with a lot of the elders in their community. I suppose it is like putting a square block into a circle; it just does not fit. There are two different cultures in this country. When the first Europeans came to Australia, there was already a culture, a living society, with over 40,000 years of successfully living in harmony together. There was not always harmony. We established Arwarbukarl, with the help of Yarnteen, because a lot of our people are not aware of our traditional history—including the 200-year period since the first Europeans came—up until now.

How best can communities and registered organisations do business and make decisions in traditional ways while meeting wider governance and accountability standards, and what can governments do to help more Indigenous organisations remain stable, well managed and successful? At ACRA, we believe Aboriginal organisations need to be formed into clan groups,

as we have done through Yarnteen. Yarnteen helps our organisations that have just started. In traditional times—pre contact—our governance was made up of family clan groups, and we see family clan groups as the way to go. With regard to accountability in our communities, traditional family groups are the way to go because that is the way our people interact with each other. We Aboriginal people are very family orientated.

Governments can support Aboriginal organisations by giving more support to groups who know what is needed in their communities. What I am saying is that Aboriginal people are probably the best at being experts on our own culture, who we are and how we interact with each other. We are the ones who are living it day to day and know how things are working in our communities and what can be done to improve our situation in this society.

By knowing our past, we can use our traditional social structures from past times efficiently in today's society by setting family clan groups, as I said, into organisations as we have here. Our people need to know their history. Our kids are slipping through the education system; a lot of them do not know who they are. A lot of social problems are happening in our community which our people are just not being consulted on. We should be consulted more on different things that are going ahead.

What additional skills and resources do community members and organisations think they need in order to run their communities more effectively? Aboriginal communities need more admin support to keep our organisations running. As Sean was saying, we need to be able to plan for the future. Our communities need to plan for themselves, because not everyone is the same. Not all Aboriginal people are the same. You have traditional communities and you have urban communities, and we have different problems in some instances.

We need our people to know the history of our people's struggles so that we do not make the same mistakes as past policies the government have implemented. Through ACRA we are looking at setting up our own cultural training and organisation centre where we can take our culture into the future through IT and learn all our traditional stuff as well as taking it into the future. We believe that every town in Australia should have a living cultural resource community centre where our people can learn about history, customs and traditional knowledge for their own identity and wellbeing. If we do not know who we are and where we have come from, we do not know where we are going.

**Ms HOARE**—Sean, you mentioned that the Job Network is failing Aboriginal people. We have had some discussion about this previously. Do the students in your training programs come from any of the Job Network providers? If so, are we getting the majority of Aboriginal students through Job Network providers? If not, what is happening to young unemployed Aboriginal people if they are not being referred through Job Network providers?

**Mr Gordon**—I was fortunate enough to meet with Minister Brough a fortnight ago last Thursday, and he asked exactly the same question. I gave him some figures showing that, since July 2001, Yamuloong have placed over 180 people in employment with different organisations. I think that success comes from the flexibility and the support we provide to our people when they go into jobs. We have looked at the possibility of going down the Job Network path, and the biggest concern is that the programs are too structured. We cannot set times and limits on

when our people are going to turn up to meetings and then issue them with breaches for nonattendance.

So I think the major reason for our success is that we have committed people on the ground here, we work in all different areas—we are not just focused on employment; we are also focused on the training and education of these people—and we are trying to ensure that their long-term interests are taken care of. We are not a Job Network provider. We are not interested in the up-front payment, and we are not interested in the 13-week payment or the 26-week payment. If we were, our focus would change, I believe, to being a dollar orientated centre rather than a people orientated centre. So our success is due to: one, our people that we have working here; two, the programs that we deliver; and, three, our main focus, which is Indigenous employment and self-determination. I can strongly say that Job Network providers do not have this same focus.

We have established partnerships with Job Network providers in the past, and it was an unfortunate partnership where we were doing all the employment placements and they were collecting all the dollars. We spoke about partnerships earlier—partnerships need to go two ways. It is not just about collecting the money; it is about making sure that there is equal activity and equal involvement within that partnership. I spoke about that when I spoke about partnerships with government. For me, it is good getting the money off government, but it is great getting the additional support that is expected. I think with the additional support, government will then understand how much work goes into Indigenous employment. It is not easy. I tell pretty much everyone I talk to in regard to Indigenous employment that it is not easy but it will be easier if you bring the right people on board to assist you with that.

By doing that, we have created partnerships. We have a partnership with the RTA—the Roads and Traffic Authority—and we have a partnership with Macquarie Generation. We are currently negotiating a partnership to place 60 Indigenous kids into employment with McDonald's. We are looking at it being a pilot program for the Newcastle region. The way the partnership works is that McDonald's are not experts in Indigenous employment—they are experts in the services they provide—so they allow us to do what we are good at and they continue to do what they are good at.

What I need to bring up as well is that a lot of government departments coming into areas such as Newcastle promoting their programs need to remember that there are organisations located in Newcastle that need to then work with these people. I have had situations where people from government departments have come from Sydney talking to different motel chains and different companies about employment strategies. Unfortunately, those people get back in the car and drive home, and you have a company there with an employment strategy to employ 10 people but with no idea how to go about it. They need to make sure that they are involving local organisations. I was told by Minister Brough that the reason they are not involving us is that there needs to be an even playing field for all training companies, all Job Network providers and all group training companies. Unfortunately, all Job Network providers, all group training companies and all registered training companies are not achieving the outcomes we are with Indigenous employment, so I think that needs to be looked at fairly seriously.

**CHAIR**—I want to go back to an informal conversation we had earlier about the way this facility was built, in terms of the ability to get capital infrastructure money and then the difficulty getting ongoing training money. You really touched on some of that with how you saw

Job Network. You also highlighted the traineeship and apprenticeship focus, really the interface between state and federal as much as anything. We may even draw in some of Kelly's comments about the CDEP and how that could interrelate. Perhaps Sean or Leah could focus on this issue.

**Mrs Armstrong**—To reiterate, the specific example of the lack of cooperation from the Commonwealth and the state levels was that Yarnteen was able to acquire the infrastructure and the capital funding from the Commonwealth via ANTA and ATSIC to build Yamuloong's facility as a training centre. It was initially via ANTA, because they wanted a focus on giving capital infrastructure to establish Indigenous private training providers. It was a national strategy. Then it was left up to the state, even though the state had to administer that fund. The idea was that the state would then come in with the ongoing training dollars so that we could go out and market the training programs that we run here at Yamuloong to our Indigenous people and then the money would flow through. Unfortunately, the state training dollars did not follow through and for a number of years Yamuloong had to struggle to conduct training programs for our people because there was no money coming through. There is a commitment made at different levels that is not flowing through to the state and therefore the community misses out.

We were tapping into the state training profile or plan, which had allocated a certain amount of money towards contracted training placements, which we were tendering under, and apprenticeships and traineeships. The state or Commonwealth push to get a lot of traineeships and apprenticeships up and running meant that everybody was putting on trainees and apprentices. Therefore all the training dollars were heading towards this great big traineeship and apprenticeship area which left very little in the contracted training placements. This is where Sean was talking about flexibility. Traineeships and apprenticeships are locked in to the type of training you want and for our people we wanted the flexibility to do some pre-employment and pre-JobSearch type training, which was not there. The resources were not there. The response to that was that there was a lot of money in the Job Network area that was meant to cover that issue. But again, as Sean mentioned, the Job Network providers were not spending that money. Kellie could probably iterate some of those issues as well. The Job Network providers were not willing to spend the money on getting our people ready for employment. It is a long process to get them ready for employment.

**Ms Pipe**—When the CDEP was with Yarnteen we were one of eight CDEPs nationally to participate in the employment trial which eventually led to what forms the IECs now. It was a very different, more flexible set up and it was a success because it was flexible and the IECs are not. We had to nominate a goal of between 20 and 25 outcomes for the CDEP and were given six months to do it. Yarnteen nominated to place 25 people into full-time employment. This was meant to be done with the help of a Job Network member. Not one Job Network member contacted our CDEP out of the whole Hunter region. We sent out information about promotional days and received nothing. There was no assistance. What we did find with our participants was that when we had done the work, and Yamuloong helped us out a lot especially with our training, then Job Network members would ring up and say, 'This person is a client of mine, could we have the information?' They are not willing to spend the money and the reason why—

**CHAIR**—And they cherry picked?

**Ms Pipe**—Yes, that is right. The reason CDEPs and our local organisations can make a better success of it is that our clients are not a number to us. They are not a dollar sign either. They are our people, they are our communities and we know them.

**CHAIR**—Instinctively I think that should be prohibited. You have put in the—for want of a better phrase—pre-voc or you have done a lot of the work and then they say, 'Excuse me, we now claim them.' But that is water under the bridge and, while that has been going on, you are developing other ways around it, although as we acknowledge, Leah, it is still an ongoing issue. I think, Sean, with another Commonwealth department, the Abbott department—DEWRSB—

**Mr Gordon**—It is DEWR now.

**CHAIR**—That is right—you have to rearrange those letters a little bit now. But you developed some outcome models and you then developed confidence and respect from them to the point where it could become ongoing—if I understood your comments earlier. Is that roughly correct?

**Mr Gordon**—With regard to what we have done with DEWR, if I can go back a bit first, to begin with we continually lobbied state DET to try and get some training dollars to ensure there was some activity for our participants. To look at where we are: Youloe-Ta currently have 266 participants on the CDEP, Newcastle have an estimated 15,000 Aboriginal people living in the region, our unemployment rate is getting up around the 27 per cent figure for Indigenous people and our largest age group are people aged under 25. They are the key people we need to be focusing on, but it is very difficult to do that when you do not have the dollars there to deliver the training. As I said, I come from a TAFE background, where if we decided that in two or three weeks we were going to run a course we would run that course because the dollars would have been available to do that. But if I have negotiations with someone and say we are going to run a course, it might be 12 months before I get the dollars to be able to do that.

In relation to negotiations with DEWR, because we exhausted all our options with regard to DET we went to DEWR and put it to them that we have a program here, we are employing Indigenous people but we are not able to access the dollars through the Job Network providers. DEWR then turned around and said, 'Okay, that is fine, but we do not fund training.' So we then came up with a strategy and said, 'If we place this many people into jobs, will you then fund us for those people for going into the jobs?' It took us 12 months of negotiations to actually get a contract out of DEWR to get that program going. But, once we had that program up and running, in the first seven months we placed 20 of those people into jobs, which was our target. We have now renegotiated for another five people, to up the ante again. It looks like we are going to place another three people from that program into employment within the next two weeks. So we know that we can do employment.

**CHAIR**—Effectively you have doubled what you expected.

**Mr Gordon**—That is right—we have gone above our expectations. We set out for 20 and we will achieve 25 quite easily. But the government puts us in a situation where if we can get money over here for placing people into employment, why do it for free? I think they need to start looking at that. Why would we want to assist the Job Network providers in ensuring that they are going to get their quota and their dollars for that? At the end of the day, we are looking

after our people but we need to make sure that we look after our own interests. The only way we can do that is to ensure that this property and the building and facilities are sustained in some way. Indigenous employment is a way of sustaining that.

**CHAIR**—I think you or Leah mentioned the traineeship and that the outcome really is not there, right across Indigenous and non-Indigenous. As I recall, you also mentioned how you were exceeding that. Whatever the case is, can you make a comment or two about the traineeship and the way that is, or is not, operating?

**Mr Gordon**—I will give an example on traineeships. In July 2001, when I started with Yamuloong, we had 12 trainees placed in different organisations. We have now got that number up to about 52 trainees placed in different organisations, both in mainstream employment and with our group training company. We also have non-Indigenous trainees in that program for whom Yamuloong are the registered training organisation, and we have non-Indigenous people placed within our group training company for whom we are also responsible. It is a big step up to go from 12 to 52 within 12 months. That shows that there is an increase in the traineeships. It also shows that across the board—for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous traineeships—50 per cent fail. If we look at the Indigenous figure, we are probably looking at about a 75 to 80 per cent failure rate in Indigenous traineeships. We are achieving that. We had eight trainees finish at the end of last year with the RTA. We have just placed another eight. We have just had a group of five trainees finish over at the University of Newcastle who have been offered permanent jobs as well as contracts to continue their employment. And we are continually bringing on board new companies who see the benefits of working with an organisation such as ours to ensure Indigenous employment is working.

**Mrs Armstrong**—I wish to make a comment about the whole overview of what we have just talked about. What happens is that for Yamuloong to survive or for Youloe-Ta to get their outcomes, we have to chase government departments and try to meet their expectations of what should be happening under their guidelines, rather than the community saying, 'This is the way we think we should do it.' As Sean mentioned earlier, you have to report to seven different departments with seven different guidelines and seven different outcomes. Instead there should be an overall community planning process that is holistic so that you do not have to do that. Therefore for Yamuloong, Yarnteen or Youloe-Ta to survive they have had to go down the traineeship track. That is good but you are also changing the game and direction every time to meet government policy and outcomes. So there is a view that that needs to be changed and that the priorities should be coming from the community upwards.

**CHAIR**—What I am hearing you saying, Leah—and correct me if I am wrong—is that everything that is obvious and practical and commonsense is there but you have failure at a systemic level with a number of programs over a number of the years and then you go and negotiate all the time to adapt to the mistakes of the programs. I am hearing you say that someone should come and sit down with the groups—the CDEP people with Yarnteen and Yamuloong—and identify the problem. They would have spotted it quite quickly; you do not have to be Einstein to see that something is not working. They would then set to work on it and say, 'Let's negotiate something which starts to give us these outcomes and is not chasing. There are plenty of opportunities but there are different ways of going about it which can give you outcomes a lot quicker and in a lot better way for probably no more dollars expended. In fact, you are going to have far greater success. There may be some dollars in the swings and

roundabouts. Am I getting it right? It is about getting in there a lot earlier and a lot more parochially.

**Mrs Armstrong**—There are the situations that Sean raised earlier in which they are trying to do partnerships with departments. The partnerships are only coming in and focusing on it and saying, 'Don't stuff this up,' rather than saying, 'Let's get some positive outcome.' The partnership is coming in and saying, 'You'll get it but don't stuff it up.' It is coming in negatively.

**CHAIR**—Yes, rather than sell it by saying, 'Let's celebrate. This is fantastic. Why didn't we think of this before?'

**Mrs Armstrong**—There is the example of the experience with the CDEP program—and I will throw this over to Kellie as well—which has been under review and under review and under review. We have had a CDEP for the last 10 or 11 years and we have probably gone through five reviews of the program itself. In its holistic form the CDEP is a fantastic program if it is left to achieve the community outcomes and if it is left to the community to decide this is where it is going. But when you start tweaking this and that, the program becomes unmanageable and I think that it is getting to that point. Certainly there are splits, rather than people coming and saying, 'Okay, let's look for the best outcomes.' The CDEP is an example of where they have just tweaked here and there and made it an unmanageable program.

**CHAIR**—Do you want to say something, Kellie?

**Ms Pipe**—On what Leah was saying, our ATSIC region and Port Augusta participated in a risk appraisal pilot. Ours were the only two regions in Australia to do so. We had to provide written outcome statements for our CDEPs. There were 11 requirements of each of our CDEP regions. We have a CDEP regional forum here. We meet quarterly and discuss what is going on. The interesting thing is that we were given the statistics of how we were going after six months and for every outcome we have achieved above and beyond what we have set for the region. However, there is still discussion about how we can manage CDEPs more effectively, so again it is that whole process of not listening. We are working and we are doing what is good but people want to change what is going good.

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Ms Pipe**—The other thing I would like to say about CDEP is that our focus is employment but we should never forget the social and cultural needs of our people, especially in urban areas. We are affected by urbanisation. Our population is so dispersed and you cannot just throw a blanket over us to see all the problems we are going through. In remote areas communities live closer together.

**Mr Wright**—We have actually identified that a lot of our community have issues when they come into our organisations, training and employment and CDEP. There are issues of identity, because a lot of people think that as soon as Aboriginal people have a job out there they are in employment and that is it, it is finished. A lot of our people do not know who they are and they do not know how to interact with non-Aboriginal people in regard to actually speaking. Some people cannot speak properly. They have gone through education and fallen through the system.

Kids are doing it and adults are doing it. Our people have not got the self-confidence to interact with people. There are different prejudices in society and we cannot say everything is equal. As we know, that is not the truth. We have to face up to these issues and the fact of society not being equal at the moment. We need to equip Aboriginal people as best we can to go out there and live in society and actually interact and coexist with pride in themselves and their culture and who they are and basically know why they are in the situation they are in. Aboriginal people are going to jail at a greater rate than non-Aboriginal people, and on a scale of social issues we are a long way down compared to other communities. Our people need to know the reasons why these things are happening.

**CHAIR**—And a few clues as to how they might overcome them. Start at the base and work through it.

**Mr Wright**—That is right. That is why we started Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association, to get to the root of these problems, get to the kids while they are young and tell them the situation we are in, tell them about 200 years and what has happened over the 200 years. We need to give them the understanding of why they speak the way they speak. Aboriginal English is not broken English; it is a form of English that is a dialect of English. Linguists are identifying these issues today, that it is a dialect of English and not broken English or a wrong way of talking; it is how we actually speak; it is our culture, it is who we are. As I said earlier, it is like putting a round block into a square hole. It is not working at the moment. People need to identify that there are different cultures in this country, a first culture and the society we are living in now. We have to see these issues and talk about them and confront them.

**CHAIR**—And develop that understanding. I have two more quick questions and it will have to be quick comments because time has got away from us. I want to touch on literacy and numeracy and I would like you to bring it into your school-to-work program we talked about earlier. We talked about 40-odd schools now up to three-quarters of an hour away and that type of thing. That seems to be pretty fundamental. I presume you go to the schools by invitation or negotiation. Can we get that on the record; Kellie I hope might add a point or two on it. It seems very practical and it picks up Abie's concept too in terms of where we are at. A very strong part of the theme is where everyone is at so we can understand why things are the way they are. But there is a fundamental, literacy and numeracy, and there is this fundamental meeting of the need that you have done with the schools. I do not know but probably your outcomes are partly related to school to work. Maybe I am jumping ahead a bit. Could you respond to that? There are literacy and numeracy, school to work and any other comments, and the cultural side.

**Mr Gordon**—We have been running several programs for the past two years. One is the school-to-work orientation program, which is funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training—the VEGAS program. Another program is the enterprise education program, which is funded by the Enterprise Career Education Foundation. The other program is a workplace English language and literacy program, funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training. They are the three core programs that we have been running over the past two years.

Our school-to-work program is basically set up to motivate our kids and to build their self-esteem and confidence—confidence to be able to attend school, turn up and be active within their schooling. The way in which we do that is we bring the kids from the school to the centre

and we run the program here at the centre. We put in front of the kids Aboriginal people who are currently going through university obtaining a degree or who have completed some formal training at university. The reason we do that is to promote role models. We continually promote role models within that program by introducing the kids to people who may have failed at school but have succeeded after school with university and so on.

The enterprise education program is focused on moving our kids away from the general labouring and construction type skills to the retail/hospitality area, which is a big area. There is a real need for Aboriginal people to move into that area as there is a shortfall there. The program also focuses on entrepreneurial and leadership skills and moving them towards self-management or business management, so that they gain the skills to be able to run their own business or to go into a business and have a better understanding of how businesses operate.

The other program is the workplace English language and literacy program which we ran for 2001 and 2002. Our contract was to put 60 CDEP participants through the training program which was through Youloe-Ta. There was a target of 40 males and 20 females. Unfortunately, we did not reach our female target—we achieved only 16 females going into that program—simply because our women are more employable than our men. Our women are going into jobs—

**CHAIR**—So there was actually a positive in that sense.

**Mr Gordon**—Our women are—

**Mrs Armstrong**—They are getting placed better.

**Mr Gordon**—Our women are getting placed a lot easier. They are ready for work and they are more employable. Unfortunately, we are losing a lot of our men between the ages of 15 and 25—I do not know whether you would call it 10 years of socialising or 10 years of not having too much interest in a lot of things—and then, from 25, they seem to want to get back on track and are ready to settle down to family, work and those sorts of things.

We put 10 young Aboriginal boys into that program who were aged between 16 and 21. The 10 boys in the program were all around the numeracy and literacy level of year 3 or year 4, which was astonishing. I have two of those young blokes working here with me. What we achieved with those guys was to move them from year 3 or year 4 levels up to year 6. The change in their attitude, motivation, confidence and self-esteem, just in getting up three grades, was unbelievable. Their work ethics changed, their values changed and their pride in themselves changed. I see those guys walking around today—and it is a big movement. If we can get a lot of our people coming out of school with a better education, even if it is at the basic year 8 or year 9 level, it is still a long way from where they are coming out at the moment.

There is another issue that we are continually dealing with in that area. Schools are encouraging our kids to go on to year 11 and year 12 because they are great touch football players or they are great at running or at basketball. They are great at these other things but they are not focusing on their education. So they are not encouraging our kids to stay on and get an education; they are encouraging them to stay on because they might win the state touch comp

again this year. So another thing that needs to happen at a school level is that they need to better assess—

**CHAIR**—They need to refocus their view and how they present it.

**Mr Gordon**—They need to refocus their view but assess our kids at the right stage.

**Mrs Armstrong**—Education and a certain level of literacy and numeracy are definitely vital to any capacity building in any community. That is basically the foundation for knowledge, and everything in the community is based on your education and your literacy and numeracy.

**CHAIR**—You are probably aware of Bob Collins's work in the Territory. Right across Australia, it is the same issue.

**Mrs Armstrong**—That is right.

**Ms HOARE**—I appreciate the fact that the committee has been able to come to Yamuloong and hear stories of best practice and of what is working in a regional city rather than maybe in a capital city or a remote area. I am very proud to be associated with you all, and I encourage you to keep up the good work.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much to the local member. It has been a pleasure to be with you. It was wonderful to share your hospitality on our walk this morning. Our tastebuds enjoyed that and I still have my leaf here for my cold, and it is going along well. We will draw a close to this now unless you have any final comments. I think we are greatly encouraged by what we have seen, but we all know that we have got some huge tasks in front of us.

**Committee suspended from 12.26 p.m. to 1.01 p.m.**

**LESTER, Professor John Henry, Head, Wollotuka School of Aboriginal Studies; and Director, Umulliko Indigenous Higher Education Research Centre, University of Newcastle**

**CHAIR**—I welcome the representatives of the Wollotuka School of Aboriginal Studies to our public hearing this day. I particularly welcome Professor John Lester. We may have Mr Sydney Heath with us.

**Prof. Lester**—No, I have to apologise for that.

**CHAIR**—John, fundamentally, as you know, these are proceedings of the parliament and we value your input. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

**Prof. Lester**—I am the head of Wollotuka School of Aboriginal Studies. I am also director of the Umulliko Indigenous Higher Education Research Centre at the University of Newcastle. As an opening statement, I want to say that, quite clearly, the standing committee has touched on what I think is one of the key aspects associated with the future of Indigenous peoples in terms of their futures. Capacity building is a fundamental issue that we need to address. In the past we have found it in many instances. I speak to the committee based on 26 years in Aboriginal education. I have the credentials, I suppose, because of being the first Aboriginal professor of Aboriginal studies in New South Wales. Prior to that I also was the first Aboriginal principal of a TAFE college in Australia. Prior to that I worked in school education and was instrumental in leading and working with the development of the first Aboriginal education policies. That is the background I bring to the committee. Obviously my submission is slanted in terms of a number of issues, but primarily it looks at capacity building and the role that education can play in that important task.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for your brief introduction. We are used to lengthier statements. Yours gives us the maximum opportunity to talk with you. I will pass to Kelly, as the local member, and she will lead off.

**Ms HOARE**—John, in your opening statement, you outlined your strong background in education in schools and TAFE and now at the university. A lot of the communities we have visited not only have concerns about retention rates for Aboriginal students; they also have concerns about just getting Aboriginal children to school. Can you outline some of your experiences and maybe some solutions to those issues?

**Prof. Lester**—I am currently undertaking some PhD research in a shortened form as to why Aboriginal kids switch off school, so I am two years into a longitudinal study in that regard. I bear midway through that research, I suppose, some background. Because I have worked in schools and education for the length of time that I have, quite clearly I have some fairly firm views, which I have articulated on several occasions—including in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in recent weeks. Also, in the past, I have presented papers along the lines that I will talk to you about now.

Our submission quite clearly articulates that there is a huge crisis. Given Aboriginal population trends—and there are significant numbers of Indigenous people under the age of 15—the crisis has not really hit schools to the same extent as I think we have experienced in the past, and the paper obviously addresses that issue. If we are to move forward in getting Indigenous people engaged in education, then quite clearly we need to look at ways in which that can be encouraged. I was part of the group which designed the first Aboriginal education policy, and that policy has been going now for 20 years. Next year we celebrate 20 years of Aboriginal education policy in this country and in particular in New South Wales, where it was pioneered. The biggest issue that I think we face is that our students just are not engaged in classrooms. Quite clearly, my feeling is that that is at crisis point in terms of the numbers attending and choosing to leave.

**Ms HOARE**—Is that both boys and girls?

**Prof. Lester**—It is both boys and girls. It is non-discriminatory in terms of its background. We have spent 20 years trying to get the system to change, and it has changed. I am not saying that there has not been an effort in New South Wales or at a Commonwealth level; what I am saying is that the effort has not borne fruit, and therefore we need to try fairly radical approaches to the way we are going to go. In New South Wales, I would be arguing that we should have publicly funded Indigenous schools. Quite clearly, issues that the public education system as a whole cannot come to terms with in terms of Indigenous teaching—pedagogy, epistemology or knowledge styles—need to be enhanced amongst Indigenous students. I would be encouraging that to take place. There are currently about 25,000 Indigenous students in New South Wales. In reality, if we could look creatively at designing schools within the school system that specifically look after the needs of Indigenous people, I think we would get far better results than the current system gets. It is too big a system and just cannot change in time.

**Ms HOARE**—You would be aware of the Gowie Street school in Shepparton that has been operating now for 20 years within the normal primary school system. Aboriginal parents there have a choice as to whether their children go through the Indigenous education program solely or whether they go through, for want of a better term, the mainstream part of the school. Do you have any comments on the Gowie Street project?

**Prof. Lester**—I am not specifically knowledgeable about the details there, but given my involvement with other schools of this type—and generally they are bound with private schools and locations—I would think it would depend very heavily on what role the community plays in the running of the school. The schools that I envisage would have significant input in terms of community involvement et cetera. I am sure that we could improve results.

**CHAIR**—John, your comments about schools lead to my questions. I have four issues which I will precis: one size fits all; your enterprise career education foundation; the middle management void; and flexibility and coordination. That is a summary of your submission, and I will just work my way through those issues. In relation to one size fits all, my question is: why do we insist on this one size fits all concept in just about every portfolio and every department? I have my own views, but I am interested in yours. It is almost an act of faith with government. As I said, I have my views, but can you give us a few clues on why you think government insists on going down this track?

**Prof. Lester**—One size fits all is easy to manage. You can recruit your staff, you can develop your pedagogy and your teaching practices, and you can develop your curriculum along the line that fits. Unfortunately, Indigenous kids are not dissimilar to a whole range of kids that have been ostracised from educational access. Because we do not fit into boxes the system cannot take care of us.

**CHAIR**—Would it be fair to say—I will share my view with you—that quite often the system is more preoccupied with making the system suit itself rather than suit its clients? Is that too harsh?

**Prof. Lester**—No, it is not too harsh. I think one of the biggest difficulties you have to look at is how the system replicates itself. The system replicates itself because it recruits people that support the system; therefore, the system replicates itself. It has only been in recent years that we have been starting to attract mature aged people into teaching, and those sorts of issues. I will give you a good example of how we treat innovation in schools. When I first came on board in the Department of Education 20 years ago, the then Schools Commission established grants for innovation. The Department of Education's response to that was to create a department called 'innovation'. The anomaly is quite clear: that sort of thinking permeates the whole system. It is also a big difficulty when, in reality, the size of the structure is too mammoth to turn around. I have been at it 20 years and have made a very concerted effort, and it cannot change. It cannot fundamentally change its principle that you fit into the mould or you do not fit.

**CHAIR**—You get squeezed out somewhere.

**Prof. Lester**—That happens because Aboriginal kids in particular and other kids similar to Indigenous kids who do not fit into the boxes are suspended and expelled in disproportionate numbers. I have never run into a parent who has not told me two things: that they want their kids educated and that they want them to have the skills to perform in contemporary Australian society. I have never run into a parent who has not done that. They are also saying that it should be in a system that respects its Aboriginal background. That is where it starts to fall asunder. You show me a good program in Aboriginal education anywhere—I do not care at what level; TAFE, university or school—and I will show you a handful of very dedicated teachers. It relies on their goodwill. I have also seen those dedicated teachers try to change the fabric of school and I have seen what happens to them. I have seen this over my 20 years experience. They are alienated and, in fact, ostracised from their own school groups because they are in there trying to work with Aboriginal kids. They get all the problems, they are not listened to in staff meetings and they are not empowered.

I have seen only one departure from that and it was during my recent work at Forster High School. For the first time, I witnessed in a public school a core of about 10 teachers and support staff who specifically had significant input into Aboriginal education. In the last couple of years, through a number of initiatives in that area, that resulted in the highest level of year 12 enrolments at that school. If you ask me how to turn the system around and whether or not it can be, I will say that I have tried for 20 years and that, in reality, we need to think outside the square and to try something new.

**CHAIR**—This is really fascinating. I know the frustration. I come from a little rural community and quite often I relate the way my little rural community adapts to government and the way Aboriginal communities adapt to government. We are much more fortunate in a range of ways but there are similarities which are a bit scary—the way you just get flicked by a system which rolls over the top of you and pushes you out. I want to refer to that dedicated teacher and how we might empower them and how we might insist or demand—you can use any word in the English language, which is the only language I have—that they make sure that the client is respected and that the relationship can deliver the outcome. You have touched on the empowerment of teachers. It is not good enough that anyone who wants to think outside the square has to go through the process you have been talking about.

There may be some ways in which the institution has to be much more accountable, and here we are talking about the states; we are limited in terms of the Commonwealth. We may be able to offer incentives which do a little more than offer innovation and then some smart alec sets up a department of innovation. You may not be able to offer anything in that regard, but it seems to me that in terms of empowerment of our teachers, if our system is too dominant and not respectful enough, we may be able to find other ways to achieve the outcome. We could go through human rights and so on but that is all very cumbersome and legalistic. There may be something about empowering teachers and the system that will give people a far better crack at it. I offer that up and you might come back to us on it. You might have something that you have seen work which you have offered us already. I am going on about this because I think it is critical that thinking outside the square is so important.

**Prof. Lester**—Most definitely. The saddest part about the teachers and the system is that too few teachers understand Indigenous kids or work with them.

**CHAIR**—That is a good clue in itself.

**Prof. Lester**—I have seen the state government pour millions of dollars, primarily of federal funds, into staff development. There was a massive staff development exercise in New South Wales. Millions of dollars were spent to get teachers to accept that Aboriginal kids need to be catered for. A level of awareness was gained through that, but the reality is that it has not caused a significant shift. What we need to do is gather these quality teachers, be they black or white, and bring them together where they can collectively work in an environment that will facilitate innovation and change.

I am talking about the schools that are publicly funded but Indigenous run. I say ‘publicly funded’ not only because I am a great advocate of public education but also because of the difficulty of private school provision for Indigenous people—and I know how supportive the Commonwealth government has been in establishing Indigenous private schools, and private schools in general. The reality is that there is always a shortfall. When you are dealing with a low socioeconomic group, you spend all your time chasing the shortfall in funding instead of progressing the teaching and the learning. It needs to be publicly funded. It is no different from creating a specialist high school for sport, drama or whatever you want. Why can’t we create one for Aboriginal studies?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Prof. Lester**—The school I envisage would not be just for Indigenous students. There would be a range of non-Indigenous Australians who would welcome the opportunity to go to a school which was innovative and fundamentally following the philosophies of Indigenous people.

**CHAIR**—I think you are right and Shepparton picks up that principle. It is not exclusive; it welcomes all. However, it is focused in that particular way.

**Prof. Lester**—Yes, and people coming in would need to know that that was the focus, and that would attract a lot of people.

**CHAIR**—I share the reality of the effort that is being made which may not have succeeded. There was a program in South Australia called ANTEP which has been applied to the Pitjantjatjara lands for 20 years. It has involved millions of dollars—I cannot remember the exact amount—going into an Indigenous teaching program. There may be one teacher across 10 or 15 schools in the lands in the 20 years when millions of dollars have been spent. There was no lack of good intent or money, but it just has not got there.

**Ms HOARE**—Following the point about Indigenous schools, that goes against what has just come out of Professor Vincent's report where he talked about the phasing out of the selective schools you used as an example so that all kids can be actively involved in high quality education at all schools. That, of course, would be our ideal. How do you respond to the school of thought that there should not be selectivity and that the public school system should be funded well enough to provide good quality education to everybody, whether they be Indigenous, academically very good or good at sports, drama or whatever?

**Prof. Lester**—I would have to agree with Vincent's report. They are very selective and do not fully encapsulate and develop the broader perspectives of kids. The best example I can give you is that it is very hard for local schools to field a football or netball side against a sports high school. Is there an incentive or a disincentive overall for kids to play sport when they have to play against a selective high school? That is a frivolous but specific example. However, the reality is that we have never tried it for Indigenous people. Selective schools were designed not to cater for a particular need but to follow a trend in education. We are facing a crisis with Indigenous peoples and, while Vincent may argue against those selective schools, we are saying that this need is paramount and goes beyond trends about whether you have selective or non-selective schools. The reality is that we need to find answers, and I believe that the real answers are not within existing systems; they need to be systems within themselves.

**Ms HOARE**—Are there any case studies or role models in other countries—maybe in Canada or New Zealand—where this has happened?

**Prof. Lester**—Yes, there are. I do not have the specifics in front of me but there are examples throughout Canada, where Indigenous communities are taking over the roles and responsibilities of their own schools. In New Zealand they are pioneering higher education institutions—polytechnics and all those sorts of issues. So, yes, there are plenty of examples worldwide.

**CHAIR**—Middle management—why and how? It is just not happening, is it?

**Prof. Lester**—You have high flyers like the Johnny Lesters around the place, and you have probably been speaking to a whole lot of people who are very opinionated and have lots of background in history. The reality, however, is that the best laid plans will not come to fruition unless you have on-the-ground skills.

I will give you the best real example of this that I have seen. I had the luxury of being the first Aboriginal principal of a TAFE, at Griffith TAFE college. A program in a neighbouring Aboriginal community had sown the equivalent of $300,000 worth of wheat. The TAFE college got intimately involved in the process, working with local people just outside Lake Cargelligo. Two weeks before the wheat was to be harvested the head player fell ill, primarily because of the pressures he was under. When he fell over, there was no-one to take his place. The wheat rotted in the fields during that time because no-one else had been given the skills or the capacity to move the community to those lengths. It was inappropriate for us to move in and make those decisions on behalf of the community, but I saw it as the classic example.

If there were middle management behind these community leaders and it were developed to a certain level, when these people fall over—and unfortunately they do, consistently, because of the amount of pressure they are under—there would be somebody to pick it up and run with it, and hopefully those people would relieve the pressure on the leading individuals. We had a saying for a long time in education that if you work in Aboriginal affairs you end up in the 'CIBOB Institute'—the Charcoal Institute for Burnt Out Blacks. Many of our people get into that situation. We have to work with communities to build up those middle management skills so that there is a collective of people on the ground—not an individual but a collective—to pick the skills up and move the agenda forward.

**CHAIR**—I think you said that you are interested in attracting 300 Indigenous Australians—

**Prof. Lester**—Pleasingly, and against national trends, which show a downturn.

**CHAIR**—There would be a number of reasons but you might like to identify three. In that, you might talk about the summary of the degrees, the cross-section or spread of the degrees and where they are headed in terms of outcomes, if you like.

**Prof. Lester**—Of the three reasons, the first would be that we have enormous, generous support from management at the university. To give you an example, in the first 12 months that I was there, I attended the first of the university's strategic workshops and I sat at a table with the deputy vice-chancellor and, as I normally do, I started laying down what I wanted. I said, 'We want to do this, this and this.' I looked at the deputy vice-chancellor straight in the eye and he said, 'What is stopping you?' I say that because he put the ball clearly at Indigenous people's feet. He said, 'I am not going to stop you doing this. You take the ball now and run.' This is the first environment, in my 20-odd years, where I have ever had such freedom and support in taking risks and doing those sorts of things. So the first reason is that the institute are extremely supportive, and that is reflected not only in their support but also in their commitment. They have just built a $3½ million dollar facility—I think it is the best in Australia—specifically for Indigenous studies at the university.

The second most important thing is that we attract high quality all Indigenous staff in the delivery of our programs. The university has made a commitment to appoint people like me at

professorial level, where I am involved in key decisions and discussions and have the capacity to attract and recruit quality Aboriginal staff. Our employment of Aboriginal staff is going ahead; it is increasing not decreasing in number. Our enrolments are increasing against trends. Our performance is above every one of the national base criteria. Quality staff would be the second reason. The third reason is that we have endeavoured to work as closely as we can with the community and have fundamentally in our vision the empowerment of the community across a whole range of areas. Hence, we have very good community support. I think they are the three criteria that put us in the position we are in.

**CHAIR**—What about the spread of degrees? Where are people heading?

**Prof. Lester**—I can share with you some exciting developments that I have never seen before. Because of those three criteria, we now have for the first time in my career institution-wide support of Indigenous programs. I do not know how it happened. I think those three ingredients that I have mentioned were fundamental in the process and it seemed to culminate in the new building, which may have been a catalyst but I believe that it was symbolic rather than reality.

That leads me to say that our students are spread across every discipline in the university. In fact, one of the difficulties we have is encouraging students to come back to Wollotuka to share their experiences with one another. We have 300 students. We have an Indigenous student doing Master's research in music, in didgeridoo playing, and we have an exceptional range of people involved in medicine and those sorts of careers. That is taking place in every faculty. The other thing is that most faculties are now out there actively looking for Indigenous research students and they are now starting to come to us. So there has been a momentum picking up that I have never seen before across the university in terms of willingness to get involved. I think it is an extremely healthy environment.

**CHAIR**—Having been in parliament for 10 years, I can remember Newcastle university's medical faculty being mentioned. My last question is a really tough one, and I admire you for having a go at it. There is this single government entity agency empowered to coordinate services. There is the review of ATSIC at the moment. There are the COAG arrangements with the Commonwealth and state at the most senior bureaucratic level for 10 pilots across the states and territories, endeavouring to get the most senior Commonwealth people involved in 10 communities across the country. There is also our modest effort in terms of our inquiry, so there is a great interest. There is the Pearson corporate approach to those issues in Cape York, and there is the issue of Aboriginal leadership. There are a number of quite exciting and worthwhile things happening. Can we have just a couple of words about single government entity agency coordinated services? It is an immensely complex and difficult subject, but are you prepared to have a crack at it?

**Prof. Lester**—Yes. Communities spend all their time chasing resources. They go from pillar to post chasing them between as many agencies as they possibly can. They finally get the resources, and they spend the rest of the time not doing what they are supposed to be doing but reporting on what they are supposed to be doing. When I was in TAFE running a statewide program for Indigenous people, I had 17 sources of funding. I coordinated that, moved money between sections with separate guidelines, and all those sorts of things.

ECEF, I think, best touched on this matter in some research that I did with them. We started looking at projects that ECEF funded. In reality we were trying to come to terms with how they managed Indigenous programs and where they would go. We developed, along with ECEF, a program called 'hands on, hands off and hand up'. Basically, you categorised the communities into those three areas. If it was 'hands on', they needed lots of work; they needed to have lots of agencies working collaboratively. If it was 'hand up', they needed less support, maybe the generation of income, but obviously a concerted effort to give the community a hand up. If the community or the organisation was doing exceptionally well, we called it 'hands off'—leave them bloody alone, give them the money and let them get on with the job.

Quite clearly, the poor buggers who were getting on with the job then became best practice and had to fill out all the criteria for best practice and reporting along those lines, when it would have been better to hand those communities the resources and to have said, 'You've still got all your accounting responsibilities et cetera but get on with the task, pool the resources and make it happen.' Our communities are at various levels and our skills base is at various levels. I think that a funding formula that is along those lines does not take away accountability. All it takes away is the bureaucratic rubbish that gets in the way of communities.

**CHAIR**—It is climbing all over them.

**Prof. Lester**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. That was wonderful. Have you a summary that you might offer us for the next nine or 12 months we have to try and work through this stuff?

**Prof. Lester**—In summary, as I stated, there could be no more important area than getting communities to come up with their own answers. We need to have the capacity to work with communities in that regard. Education should be delivered flexibly enough so that it is responsive to community needs, not dictatorial of what people in ivory university towers perceive is needed in communities—which is not our way of doing business—but actually getting on the ground and working with the community. I have talked about action research as a base, where we get into the community and, hopefully in our philosophy, do research and have involvement that makes a difference in communities. But that is designed and purposely built for the particular community and the community's needs. That is the way we have to go: let the community articulate its needs and let education support and develop it from that point on.

**CHAIR**—Professor Lester, thank you very much. We much appreciate that.

[1.36 p.m.]

**BLUNDEN, Mr Stephen Vincent, Regional Council Chairperson, Many Rivers Regional Council of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission**

**GRIFFITHS, Mr Rick, Commissioner, North East Zone, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission**

**RILEY, Mr Andrew John, Regional Manager, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission**

**CHAIR**—I welcome representatives of ATSIC and Commissioner Rick Griffiths to the public hearings this day. Commissioner Griffiths, I invite you to make a short opening statement.

**Mr Griffiths**—There are 160,000 square kilometres and 44,000 blackfellas that I represent within the region. Very briefly, I would like to thank the inquiry for the opportunity to have some input into the review. We have prepared submissions along with our regional plan. It has been a collaborative approach by the chairperson, me and the administrative arm of ATSIC for the Many Rivers region, and that is why the three of us are here today. We would all like to think that we have the opportunity to give some sort of a presentation in relation to the plan for the next three years.

**Mr Blunden**—I am also privileged to be here today to talk on sections of our strategic plan, particularly capacity building for individuals and organisations.

**CHAIR**—We are delighted to have you. Do you wish to make an opening statement or will you do it a little later?

**Mr Blunden**—Andrew may wish to introduce himself first.

**Mr Riley**—We in ATSIC work in partnership with the Many Rivers Regional Council. I think the area of the terms of reference of the review on capacity building is particularly relevant to the regional plan that has been revised, and the submission prepared for this inquiry attempts to give a regional perspective of capacity building, directly addressing the terms of reference of this inquiry. You will see from both the submission and the plan that this council are being very proactive in the area of capacity building. It is a clear priority of their plan and they have clear and fairly coherent strategies in that plan to address some of those issues at a regional level.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for that.

**Ms HOARE**—I am interested in your comments, Andrew, about how the regional council has been very proactive in building capacity. We had representatives of Yamuloong and Yarnteen here this morning giving evidence. What is happening here with the different programs and how they are working in the community, with Aboriginal people being involved from the conception through to the delivery of the programs that are happening, is a real good

news story. Can you give us two or three other examples of where the council has been proactive, in what communities, how it has worked and why it has been successful?

**Mr Griffiths**—I think one of the major successes in our region has been the Durri Medical Centre, where they started with a deficit in terms of dollars and a dysfunctional service, and they now have one of the highest funded medical centres probably in New South Wales and the best practice model that Professor Lester talked about. At this stage, they are in charge of a $36 million coordinated care trial, which is mainstream money. They were able to beat whitefellas for money that they were supposed to get and did not get. That is largely due to the fact that governance, one of the things that people talk about quite often, was put in place with an Aboriginal organisation—a medical centre—that showed all those initiatives prior to this inquiry being called. The fact that they were able to compete for that money and be successful speaks volumes for that particular centre itself.

There are other organisations up and down the region. I believe that the Aboriginal Employment Strategy that comes out of the Moree region is fairly successful. That is part of the Kamilaroi zone which I cover. In terms of capacity development for individuals within communities and individual organisations, some of the smaller organisations, the land councils, in the region are buzzing along quite well. It is not common practice up and down the coast or inland, and there is still a long way to go in terms of those sorts of things. I might let Steve talk about Durri because he was the previous CEO there for 18 years. I thought I would just jump in there.

**Mr Blunden**—Importantly, the capacity building we developed to bring Durri from a social perspective to a business perspective was based on ensuring the life of a directorship. An example would be that, once upon a time, Durri used to have a change of board every 12 months. Naturally, that was okay for a social club but when you enter the world of business you need to have continuity in management. The way we changed that was basically to develop a 12-person board. In the first instance, four board members would be elected for three years, four for two years and four for one year. Thereafter, at every 12-month interval, you would elect four people for a three-year term. There are a number of benefits in that. Basically, you have continuity of management. The same board members who have stepped down are eligible to be re-elected. In terms of the CEO looking for dollars to train the new board members, you would only have to look for a minimum of dollars. Rather than training 12, you would be training four and upskilling the others during the life of the board. One of the key secrets to empowering and giving good governance within a Koori organisation is to maintain that expertise so you can achieve and work in partnership with your staff to ultimately try and meet the everyday needs of the Koori community in health service delivery. That was a quick answer in respect of our medical service.

Going on to our strategic plan, in terms of capacity building, we are basically very pleased to announce a partnership with TAFE in northern New South Wales. Last Friday, we signed off on the document. We will be looking at rolling out a training package for the boards of directors of organisations, in partnership with TAFE. We have developed 12 to 14 modules. Each one of those modules will be accredited. Maybe Andrew could give us a little bit more about that, but it is exciting stuff in terms of moving forward and helping train our organisations to appropriately operate the organisations.

**Mr Riley**—It builds on the managing in two worlds project which was a development of ATSIC and TAFE. The regional council and the North Coast Institute of TAFE have just signed off on an agreement to roll out that package and the first modules, which are about roles and responsibilities. That is part of an ongoing strategy that the council has in relation to organisational capacity. This is a new regional council so a lot of these strategies are in the embryonic stage.

The second major focus of the plan is in relation to community representation, particularly in terms of service delivery. The council has as a clear strategy the establishment of some community representative forums throughout the region. We have commenced discussions with the New South Wales Premier's Department about a regional agreement which will attempt to marshal particularly state agencies in some key human service related areas to coordinate and engage with the community. The other strand of that strategy is for the council to establish community representative forums so that there is a forum that is designed by the community that has a mandate to engage, particularly with state agencies, over the design and delivery of services. Professor Lester said this morning that one of the true reasons for success is community engagement—and I think you also mentioned this, Kelly—at the inception stage. That is one of the major planks of council's strategies across the board: getting community engagement to identify needs and then working collaboratively with agencies to develop strategies to address those needs on a very localised basis.

**Ms HOARE**—We have a map here of New South Wales; the chair is from South Australia. Can you outline the Many Rivers Regional Council area?

**Mr Blunden**—The Many Rivers Regional Council area extends from Tweed Heads in the north to the Hawkesbury Bridge in the south. It extends west to Muswellbrook, Walcha and Kyogle along the range. In that area we have a Koori population estimated at between 32,000 and 33,000. It is interesting, and I think that you should know, that about 60 per cent of that population is under the age of 19. I think Andrew mentioned some community forums. We are in the process of setting up a youth forum—a section 96 committee. Our strategic plan lends itself to looking at the youth as a major priority within our region, but we will tell you more about that.

**Ms HOARE**—The reason I asked that was to move on to the review of ATSIC, which is happening at the moment, and to what ATSIC's role should be. Andrew, you were talking about the different partnerships in the region and how the council is involved in facilitating a lot of those partnerships. If it were your choice, what would be the role of ATSIC if it is not going to be involved in the service delivery area? I am interested in your ideas and your opinions about the direction that ATSIC, or the department of Aboriginal affairs or whatever, should go.

**Mr Griffiths**—The irony of this committee today is that you are talking about capacity development in communities with individuals, and you have a review of ATSIC that talks totally about separation of powers, where you have people truly elected to represent their people in different regions who sit around and adjust or look at and comment on policy. To me, that is like giving us a brand-new Jaguar, leaving the motor out and saying, 'All you black fellas get in and have a drive.' There is nothing there.

Everything that underpins self-determination has been taken away by the separation of powers determination by Minister Ruddock. We do not have control or a say in determining the best needs for our people. The people determine who it is that represents them, but at the end of the day we will not have any say in how we can best meet those needs for the people because we cannot have any involvement in clear decision making where there are dollars involved, or programs or projects.

**Ms HOARE**—To develop that further, we talk about community involvement and individual involvement at the inception level for some of the projects we have heard about here this morning and some that are happening in your region.

**Mr Griffiths**—The goodwill for that is through the elected council, with a new chairperson commissioner. I am only a new commissioner and we have a new chairperson who wanted to do business differently with the administrative arm. Previously there was 'us and them': the chairperson commissioner worked in isolation to a degree from the administrative arm, which rolls out some of the projects or programs in certain areas. As I said, the previous chairperson worked in isolation to a large degree or alienated himself from the administration.

**Ms HOARE**—That is what I wanted to get to, if you can develop that a bit further. Since you were elected commissioner and Stephen became the chairperson, how have you been able to go from a relationship which may not have been working to one which now is? What were the practical steps?

**Mr Griffiths**—There is a lot of goodwill on both sides. We wanted to see projects and programs that meet the needs of the people and develop the capacities of individuals and organisations within our communities. There is only one way we can do that: to work as a unit, as one team—to all work together. That is why we have already got our regional plan done, it has been agreed to by our council and it has been sent to central office for endorsement. I believe we are the only regional council in the nation that has done that. We hit the ball up hard; we hit the ground running. And we wanted to see the response of the blacks, who have said thank you very much at the forums for giving them the opportunity to comment on our regional plan. What did surprise them was the fact that we only had $1 million. And when you take away the quarantined money for legal services and other things and for the other agreements that we have already entered into to try and enhance our ability to deliver services or programs in different regions, there was something like $555,000 for 32,000 Aboriginal people. You work that out per capita; it ain't very much money!

But at least we provided them with the opportunity to help us develop our plan, which is in line with this inquiry in terms of capacity development. We take that in the broad sense, not just to do with organisational development. It is also about individual development, giving people the opportunity to put bread on the table, to allow their kids to play rugby league, soccer or whatever the sport may be, or just to make decisions about what they will have for tea. People are worried about those sorts of bread and butter issues at the local level.

**Mr Blunden**—When our council first started we had a strategic plan from the previous council and everything in that plan was a priority. We looked at what we should do about it in the three years we would have in office. That led to nine major community consultations throughout the Many Rivers region. One of the issues we pushed forward was that the council

was going to be very transparent in how we operated. We went out and told the people what our total budget was. We gave them a clear indication of what was quarantined, as Commissioner Griffiths said, and what was not quarantined. We more or less had to make them aware that there was not an endless bucket of money and that we were dealing with them quite transparently, up front. We showed them the types of programs we have nationally, state wide and regionally, and then sought their input on what they perceived as their real needs.

The guts of our strategic plan was to go forth and communicate with our people—the people who elect us—to see what their perceived needs are and to develop a plan to incorporate into the previous plan to target real priority areas. We will look at youth, elders and family together with capacity building in organisations, which our strategic plan will show you. That is all we can really do: to move forward and be honest and up-front with people; there is no need to beat around the bush.

We have made it quite clear that we estimate that the total budget for Indigenous people in this country is $2.6 billion. We have made it clear that ATSIC would probably receive $1 billion; the other $1.6 billion would be spread across Australian states and territories to fund other government agencies to roll out services. The plan will identify those organisations. Those organisations have never been reviewed to the extent that ATSIC has been reviewed in terms of accountability. I think that ATSIC are quite accountable in how they spend their money compared with a lot of other government agencies. The challenge that we put to those other government agencies is that this regional council will be turning over the rocks with the dollars under them so that we can help them to work in partnership with us to deliver better services to our communities or they can return the money to government and ATSIC will manage those dollars more efficiently and effectively than they are doing currently.

**Mr Riley**—To expand on that a little, the council have a real thrust on their advocacy role in working with other agencies, particularly state agencies. As I think the Commonwealth Grants Commission said, the states are the bodies that deliver a lot of services. Councils are already influencing the way those services are delivered. An example of that is the Aboriginal child, youth and family strategy that is being rolled out by the state government. Within the Many Rivers region the council engaged early to provide some advice and direction to the responsible agency about how to improve outcomes by partnering with Aboriginal people. It was a very top-down approach that was being prescribed. Council developed a framework that clearly has Aboriginal partners all through the various tiers of managing the program, again based on the foundation that unless you get that community engagement and ownership you are not going to get sustainable programs.

One of the key points is leverage. It is about how other agencies engage. There is very much a silo mentality within departments. It is very difficult to coordinate. It is an easy word to say—we have been talking about it for a long time now—but it is very difficult to coordinate across silos and across jurisdictions. Certainly, the regional council have a large focus on better coordination. Some of their programs are very useful leverage points to bring something to the table because no one agency seemingly has the whole pie; it is a matter of amassing the sum of the parts.

There are other issues such as cultural maintenance. No-one else funds it. The regional council have huge demand on their budget to fund important fundamental cultural issues. With

housing there might be an alternative provider and in other areas there are potential alternatives but on important issues of cultural maintenance there is a huge gap out there.

**Mr Blunden**—One very important aspect which we made clear to the community was that, even though our population is between 32,000 and 33,000, our regional ATSIC council is probably the second or third lowest funded regional council in Australia. We have written to the minister and to the commissioners informing them that we seek equity per dollar per capita so that we can provide better programs for our communities. There are some issues about uplifting our own capacity as a regional council. We went into partnership with the Australian Aboriginal arts board. They put $50,000 on the table; our regional council put $50,000 on the table. We put that $100,000 towards small arts grants ranging from $1,000 to $5,000. That has uplifted our capacity as a regional council to provide not just $50,000 but $100,000 in grants. We did a similar project with the New South Wales Department of Sport and Recreation in reviewing our program, signing up to a partnership with them and working in partnership with them. They contributed a certain number of dollars, as does our regional council.

Those are two examples of how we have developed these meaningful, real partnerships in order to provide better services to our youth in terms of sport and recreation. That is the path we are going to follow over the next three years. As Andrew and Rick mentioned, that is one of the reasons why implementing our strategic plan in the first three months of our council's life allows us to roll out our plan to our community over the next 2½ to three years. We are up and running, as Rick said.

**Mr Griffiths**—With the small grants, we allowed people to apply for that money while being unincorporated. Normally departments will say, 'Run away and become incorporated.' Therefore they form other registered entities within the region. These small grants are available to people who are unincorporated, to individuals or organisations. We see that as an effective way to help people who do not necessarily want to start an organisation or a business but who need $5,000 to give them a bit of a kick along. It could involve a group of two or three women, guys or whatever the case may be. We thought it was important for all of the communities to be able to get access to that money.

**CHAIR**—I have two questions. Commissioner Griffiths, with respect to the Moree Aboriginal Employment Strategy, could you take us through it? It is well documented and seems to be achieving some significant outcomes. Can you give us some background it?

**Mr Griffiths**—I knew you would ask that and I have not got the information with me. I believe it has been driven by Reconciliation Australia, by a bloke called Dick Estens and another by the name of Lyall Munro. I will actually be in the area tomorrow, and I will then have a lot of that information. I could feed it in to the inquiry. I believe they think it is the best thing since sliced bread. Other people are not necessarily of the same view. There are conflicting reports in relation to it from people in the Northern Tablelands areas, the Goori up there as opposed to the Murri from down Moree way. They seem to think it will solve all their problems, but clearly it will not because one size does not fit all.

**CHAIR**—There was a view put to us that it might be all right while the players are there but, when they are not, how successful will it be then? I do not know what your view is.

**Mr Griffiths**—The people that are driving it are really committed to it. If you take the program and move it to another area, you do not have the same level of commitment. People in other areas are not as receptive or as welcoming as Lyall, Dick and the others are in the Moree area. It is about time that the cotton growers put something back in. They have taken a hell of a lot out.

**CHAIR**—It is a mixed bag. In the letter leading into the submission, it makes a very interesting observation that the Commonwealth should hold government trials on the important issue. But there is a need to exert far greater influence on state agencies. Andrew, you gave an example of one of those agencies. It is no secret that this is just about as old as the length of time that Australia has been around. In terms of Commonwealth-state, how we all do it and how we actually get on with the job, can you give us a couple of pointers on how we can exert far greater influence on state agencies? If a state department wants to do something, it just gives the classic two-finger sign to the Commonwealth, doesn't it? It might do it more politely than that, but the result may well be the same. We obviously have to move beyond that, and many times we do. ATSIC itself exerts that influence in a different way to the Commonwealth, but hopefully with some kind of reasonable outcome in mind.

I want to talk a bit about this influence. A lot of it is at the core of better governance, in my view. Put the individual Aboriginal issue right over there; forget it is Aboriginal. This whole issue of Commonwealth-state bedevils all of us. I want to talk about the way that we might enhance it. Clearly these trials are worth while, et cetera. But if we cannot engage with the states as the Commonwealth and perhaps as ATSIC in the best way then we will never get the best outcome. It is a matter of people being honest. If the Commonwealth, for example, is cost shifting and not accepting its responsibility then it should be nailed. If it is the states that are playing games then they should be nailed. If it has got to be a bit brutal about who is doing what then let that be so. But I wanted to talk pretty directly about how we apply some influence. Let us not be exclusive about the states; let us bring the Commonwealth in as well, but start with influencing state agencies and then talk about the Commonwealth. Can you give us a couple of snapshots of how you people see that?

**Mr Griffiths**—I have a totally different view of the world. It is not something you have not heard before. You have been around for quite some time. We have a partnership agreement with the state land council which Bob Carr and Geoff Clark signed. There is a partnership there. Andrew will talk about that in a minute. To be quite brutal, open, honest and frank, we need to circumvent or bypass the state government in relation to service community delivery and capacity development in local communities. My view of the world is that the money should come directly from the board of commissioners to regional council, which flies in the face of the minister's determination of conflict of interest and separation of powers. This is the opportunity for me to express a view and I will. I believe that every four years the elections are held and the ATSIC elections should dovetail in and they should be compulsory. The Commonwealth government have to start to get serious. It is all right finger-pointing at the state but until they start to accept responsibility and get serious and have four-year terms and have four-year terms for commissioners and chairpersons we are never going to get anywhere, because by the time our three-year term is up we are just starting to get some runs on the board and all of a sudden there is a new election.

I believe that all the money that is given to education and health should be driven back into ATSIC. I believe we should act as a senate. A minister for Aboriginal affairs should be

appointed out of the board of commissioners to the ruling party, whether it be the coalition or Labor or whoever the case may be, and ATSIC should be non-party political. But, if the 18 people around Australia can get elected on their merit during that period of time, I believe that they should be given the status that they rightly deserve and be able to make decisions for and on behalf of the Aboriginal communities they are coming from, the states and zones, whichever the case may be—to make real decisions. When we can make real decisions about our own future, when the money is coming down there and it is appropriated against the different buckets like education and health, we can then start to see real development in communities.

Individuals—the people that Professor Lester talked about educating—will then be proud of the fact that they can say, 'I've got all these degrees. I want to get back into the organisations with all the skills that I have acquired through university, TAFE and things like that.' Then you will see improved standards of health and education and you will see a reduction in juvenile justice problems. I believe you will also see a swing away from the passive recreational drugs and the socially acceptable drugs when you have people who are real role models, who are elected to represent our people and who can stand up and provide these people with the correct information. For those things to happen, there needs to be bipartisan agreement and there needs to be block funding for the four-year term that they are there. As I said, it is nothing you have not heard before.

**CHAIR**—I have not heard it put quite as directly as that before.

**Mr Griffiths**—That is one of my traits. Some people do not like it, but anyhow I am fairly direct. That is my view of the world. We have to be taken seriously by both levels of government and our money has to be quarantined so that when there is an election the money is not trimmed and slashed so that the notional figure, whatever is granted to us at budget time, is maintained rather than if Labor wins the next election they come in and cut whatever it is.

**Ms HOARE**—We wouldn't do that!

**Mr Griffiths**—I have lived through both on numerous occasions. As I did say, we have the state agreement and I think to a degree we can use some leverage with the Carr government et cetera. But, taking the old two-fingered approach, if they want to do that they are quite at liberty to do that because the state government does not take the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council seriously, for a start. The irony of it is that you have a minister for Aboriginal affairs at state and Commonwealth levels and they establish their own advisory committees. Yet you have people democratically elected and they do not seek their advice or information on particular issues; they will go and get a group of people from outside who are not down and dirty in the community.

**CHAIR**—That is a pretty acute observation. That is what we are here to talk about.

**Mr Griffiths**—Can I ask you a question? Is this going to feed into the ATSIC review?

**Ms HOARE**—No, this is separate to the review.

**Mr Griffiths**—It will not feed into the review but will you ask the review team any questions?

**CHAIR**—That is my intention. We understand reporting will be at the end of May, so we will have an opportunity. I have had informal discussions with the executive officer or deputy officer, which Kelly has just learned about.

**Mr Riley**—In terms of the initial question about the Commonwealth-state arrangements, certainly ATSIC and the New South Wales Land Council have developed a partnership around better service delivery, and that is to try to have far greater influence over the way the states deliver services. The issue of cost shifting is an interesting one. Cost shifting happens at the local government area and it is an area that gets missed out on a lot. Across Australia, the Community Development Employment Program, CDEP, provides a phenomenal amount of services that really are the responsibility of local government.

With respect to the issue of the direct grants from the Commonwealth, clearly dollars accrue to local governments based on levels of disadvantage and unfortunately it does not take a Rhodes scholar to understand that shires or LGAs with large Indigenous populations are going to score well on the disadvantage graph. As a result, lots more dollars flow in and there is no reporting back on that. There is no real involvement of Indigenous people in decisions about what those funds should be used for. There is a common phrase around within Aboriginal affairs about it being black dollars. I think it ends up being grey dollars once the local governments have finished with it, because it accrues because of a certain demographic but then it just seems to go into the general allocations.

The state-Commonwealth issues are interesting for ATSIC because an observation of the state is that we find they have very much a silo mentality—this is just observation; it is not meant to be critical of them—and they are a bit risk averse: everything is under ministerial control. It allows very little room for innovation because there is a political outcome there that could be very adverse for the minister. The level of decision making that is allowed at a regional level is always going to be a difficult issue when dealing with some state agencies. The regional level is where all this stuff happens. It happens at regional and subregional levels and in communities.

The whole idea of this agreement was to provide a framework within which regional arrangements can be made that have a far greater influence over service delivery, but the regional council wants to monitor state government service delivery. That is a very difficult thing to do within the financial reporting arrangements. It is also a very difficult thing to do because, as the community said to us, 'Okay, ATSIC, we now have an understanding of your limited capacity in terms of resources. Can you find out where all the money is?'

I think that some of the council's approaches are to try to harness the resources that are out there because, according to the state government—and this is clear—the government is delivering lots of programs. I think that a lot of the time it is about the way they are delivered: instead of resources being made available to the community to design and deliver services, state government agencies employ staff who go out and try to work in larger geographical areas rather than just get down to the community level, which is where the localised solutions begin. That is where you build capacity in communities. If people can see the benefits in coming together and becoming a cohesive group that can articulate their needs and solutions, that is a wonderful thing to have; but they are going to get very sick of doing that if no-one takes any notice of them. We still tend to design round holes in Canberra and Sydney and then go shopping for a round peg, whereas the shape of the community is very unusual.

So, to try to get back to the point where I started, taking better outcomes reporting through the Commonwealth's arrangements with the state, if the Commonwealth become a purchaser it means that we are purchasing some outcomes. The state is only just coming across the inputs-outputs financial framework, so there has been a mismatch in the appropriation processes. If we can get some alignment in that and all start talking the same language, virtually the Commonwealth in a lot of cases can become a purchaser from the states. With Aboriginal people in there through their representative forums as being an equal partner, at times the community will have to deliver services back up the line, because the state will purchase them off them. But they are also an end user. So I think we need some alignment at that higher level.

**Mr Blunden**—It is important to note that when we talk about partnerships we mean that they need to be real partnerships because there is a big advantage in having real partnerships. Say you go into Kempsey to look at the problems there. If you go in as whole of government representatives and share the load of doing one strategic plan for the community or the valley, in the past four or five different agencies would go in and do their own thing and probably not talk to each other. I think the government departments have to learn to talk to each other so that they can reduce inefficiencies in terms of dollars. In saying that I mean that they need to work more closely with the Koori community and with agencies like ATSIC so that we can be assured that the dollars are being spent appropriately, particularly when they are limited dollars.

**CHAIR**—My next comment will show you that at times I am more of a pessimist than an optimist. What I want to ask is important—I need to wrap this up because I have gone way over time—because ATSIC is so important. I have a seat in South Australia and I have been sitting on this committee off and on for the last 10 years and I think ATSIC has been asked to do mission impossible for a long time. Mission impossible—that is my view—because of all that expectation. I am encouraged that you are talking about telling people, 'This is reality. This is what we get and this is what may be possible.' My last question is simply this: taking glimpses of commonsense in the 'Australian' world, which you could not call a perfect world, can you think of an example of when the Aboriginal community, the regional community—call it local government—the state government and the Commonwealth government actually got their heads around an issue and delivered something to the ultimate of its outcome? I think I have to start scratching my head because of all the silos and the various bits and pieces and all the agendas, but you might find one. There might be one. Stephen, you might have an example of something approaching that.

**Mr Blunden**—One thing I found very interesting and close to my ideal world was that, in the nine community consultations we have had—Tweed Heads, Lismore, Grafton, Nambucca Valley, Kempsey, Taree, Wyong, Newcastle and Maitland—we found in a number of those forums that people were so happy to see us out there for the first time. They felt: 'We voted for you fellas, this is the first time we've seen you and it's fantastic. The information you've given us has given us some strength and we feel good about that. We want you to come back.' So the community is screaming out for a partnership with us. Basically, I needed to make that point and I think other government agencies can take a lesson from that. They need to talk more closely to consumers out there on the ground and in an organised manner. Perhaps they could come along to the forums that we organise. They should not be afraid that people are going to put hobnail boots into us, but they might kick us gently on the day. We should take on board what the real needs of our communities are. I think it starts at that level—we take a helicopter approach to ensuring that we service the community more efficiently than we have in the past.

**CHAIR**—We met with IATSIS a fortnight ago and we got into this—'After 200 years, where are we?' and all that stuff. One of the members said, 'Surely we can come together a bit better than we have done and get on with it.' I think it was Mick Dodson who said that you can look back and think, 'Yes, we have made some progress. Some things have happened, but you can also see the great potential for a lot more to happen if you start to come to grips with it.' But that is enough of my philosophising. Would any of you like to offer some final comments before we move on?

**Mr Griffiths**—We have to have compulsory voting for the ATSIC elections. I think that is essential. I believe that the separation of powers should never be considered and that the block funding should come directly to ATSIC and it should filter down to the regional councils. Then, if the state government needs to purchase services like those I previously talked about, they should purchase them from the regional councils.

One other issue is that state governments should never do business in the region without first coming to the regional council to talk about what it is that they want to do. Whether it is health, education, juvenile justice or the department of community services—all those key agencies that impact on our families right across the state—they should never do anything, develop any projects or programs or deliver any services, without coming to the regional council to talk to the elected owner prior to arriving.

**CHAIR**—It is common courtesy in a way.

**Mr Griffiths**—Some of our councils have some good ideas.

**CHAIR**—I want to thank you very much for appearing. It is much appreciated. I must quickly add, Commissioner Griffiths, that I am not authorized to deliver on all those requests, but thank you very much.

[2.26 p.m.]

**KELLY, Mr Raymond Frederick, CEO, Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Cooperative**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. I remind you that these are legal proceedings of the parliament. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Kelly**—I am presenting here today as a community member. This is the second time I have been asked to speak at a gathering of this nature. I have not learned a lot from the last one in terms of presentation but I will do what I can to give you my views and opinions about what capacity building in communities is. I would have liked to have made a written submission today. However, the phenomenon of a squeaky wheel getting the oil is the situation we are in today, so I am here to speak off the cuff. I hope to draw on everything I have learned about life itself and through the notion of community development.

I come from a community in Armidale, a small reserve. Recently I had an opportunity to speak to a friend of mine who lived up the road, a non-Aboriginal kid, and catch up on old times and how people go their separate ways. Some time down the track we ended up talking about things that were probably more important to each of us back when we were children but, because of social status or the fact that he played soccer and I played football, we ended up going separate ways in life. Over the course of our discussion we found out a lot about each other—things that we did not say to each other when we were kids. We were happy with the lives that we had each chosen on our way but we spoke about the difficulties.

The reason I am telling you this story is that we tend not to look outside the square in which we live. As a community based organisation we have recently begun to undergo change in the way we perceive ourselves. We recognise now that we have a responsibility to provide a quality service which is not just about providing to people but also about listening to people, learning what issues people are experiencing and then trying to find ways to help bring about change.

I believe that it has been far easier in the past to try to work within a small circle, simply because there was not a lot of money around. Unfortunately, the minute you do that what tends to happen is that someone says, 'Take your hands off this; this is mine.' But the reality is that capacity building in communities or social investment—whatever language you would like to use—is about sharing ideas; it is not about reinventing the wheel. Parts of the organisation operate under a regional partnership with the area health service. Therefore, we come into contact with many other community groups in one form or another, seeking either assistance services or help with their development and so on.

Our initial reaction as an organisation was to identify the amount of work that needed to be done and to put our hands in the air and say, 'We cannot do it. It is just impossible. There is not enough money and there are not enough resources. We do not have the skills and we do not have the capacity to carry it.' It would be way too easy and it would be remiss of us to do that, because we are now starting to recognise that many of the people who championed the cause before us—who got us to this position today—did it in far more difficult circumstances with way less money, way less profile and way less recognition.

We have begun to think about how we can create capacity building. One of the things that we managed to do, or that we saw fit to do, was to bring in an external consultant—not somebody to come in and find ways to deal with our issues but somebody who would come in and work for us. We secured the assistance of somebody who came in with a great deal of skill, but we said, 'We want this type of service from you. We want to be able to deal with these issues that are in front of us; not the issues that you might think are important but the issues that the organisation sees as important.' In the process, we have been able to get right around the full gamut of the problems that we see. Obviously, skills development is an area that needs looking at constantly, as well as an understanding of process, communication and information gathering. All these ingredients help to bring about outcomes. More importantly, you also need to have courage. I noticed that the commissioner, Rick Griffiths, mentioned the notion of courage, about stepping outside of that which is normal or what we see as normal. I note that he was talking about the budgets. Budgets always have a very big impact on the community. To a certain extent, I agree with that, but I would prefer to talk about social development as a process of people.

I talked to that friend of mine about my dad. I recalled a paper that my father wrote many years ago called *From the Keeparah to a social bind*. I have to tell you, it has taken me 42 years to understand what he meant by the notion of 'Keeparah to a social bind'—Keeparah being the process of ceremony, law and so on. Order is probably the key to a social bind, meaning that we existed on the fringe of society; therefore, we were kept. To a certain degree, that is the journey that we began many years ago, seeking this wonderful word called self-determination. I have often asked myself: what is the core of self-determination? I painted the picture that I believe self-determination comes when we are held accountable for our own actions.

That in itself is a very difficult thing when you consider that as an organisation you end up under the scrutiny of any group of people. If we are not prepared to take criticism and look for change, then we end up with this compound that continues to perpetrate itself and nothing looks like we are moving forward. For quite a long time we have had many people in different communities always highlighting the issues that have gone wrong and focusing on the negatives when, in fact, there have been enormous amounts of change over many years in many areas. What we need to do is to build on the foundation of those good examples and understand what they are about. I recognise today that in this community there are a number of young people who want to recreate the notion of protocol—how we will operate when we are in the presence of community elders, who will speak, how they will speak and so on. To some degree, I think that is making some sense of the notion of the cultural bind. We can benefit as a community by gathering together all of those key elements, and you have heard of many of them today.

There is an enormous amount of wealth of knowledge throughout this community of Australia, if you like, and particularly in the Aboriginal community, about change and development in communities. The key will be to gather together those people to make sense of that growth. I came out here with the intention of mentioning today the statement made by the late Kevin Gilbert who said, 'Because a white man will never do it.' The reason I was going to make that statement needs to be clarified. When I talk about investment in community it does not matter whether it is a black community or a white community. Communities are communities and you have to invest in the community in order to provide for the community. The point that I wanted to make was that the notion of leadership has to come from the Aboriginal community. We have people who are prepared to stand up and be scrutinised, to be

held accountable and to face the music if you like. I think there are those people in our communities and in our leadership as well.

Where we are as a community organisation is that we have legacy of 30 years of wonderful development in this town. There have been many great champions of people who have contributed and have championed the cause of Aboriginal people, and yet it is like we are on end of that. We have these so-called leaders today and, if we do not have a historical context as to why we do things today, there is an opportunity that either we will make the same mistakes or we will not build on the good work of those earlier people. I truly believe that that is what social development is about.

**CHAIR**—You would be surprised if I did not ask you a question about the arts.

**Mr Kelly**—Yes, okay.

**CHAIR**—I do not have any great linkages with the arts but I have seen some wonderful examples of Aboriginal people and the arts. You can take any example you like; I will not go into that. But I would like you to give a view of what you think the arts can do—in the widest possible way—for Aboriginal people and the wider Australian community. I think it is much more significant than many people understand, though many do. Then I want to follow up on the issue of self-determination and this quote: 'I believe that self-determination exists only when we are held accountable for our own actions.' You have already touched on that; I want to talk about that a little more. But could we talk first about the arts, Aboriginal people and the wider Australian context.

**Mr Kelly**—I understand Aboriginal art to be a very diverse spectrum of art skills—dance, music et cetera. If I was to say that it probably has been a great vehicle for the process of change and reconciliation, for want of a better word—

**CHAIR**—Just a simple explanation, a simple understanding.

**Mr Kelly**—Of what is art?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mr Kelly**—Art is life itself. It is the living experience of people and place. That is what I call art.

**CHAIR**—For the wider Australian community, for every Australian? Aboriginal art: do you have a view about what it means to every Australian?

**Mr Kelly**—No, I do not have a view for every Australian. I would hope that in time—it is not here now—people would embrace and own Aboriginal art as a part of this country, as a part of their own cultural mind-set of place.

**CHAIR**—As part of whoever they are.

**Mr Kelly**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I agree. Can we talk a little about this quote: 'I believe that self-determination exists only when we are held accountable for our own actions.' What does that mean to you?

**Mr Kelly**—What it means in essence to me is that we make mistakes and that, if we are prepared to face those mistakes in honour and integrity and are then prepared to find ways to make good those mistakes, that is self-determination. I think that in our communities we have been asked on many occasions to deliver and transport communities out of poverty without appropriate skills, without knowledge, and it has been easy to sometimes make those mistakes. I certainly would never cast my eyes down upon anybody in that way. I just recognise that in my own personal life I have made mistakes in the past that I have been extremely sorry for. Having said that, I am not going to dwell on that; I am going to get on with life and try and find ways to make good.

**CHAIR**—As thus it is for every other individual, I suggest.

**Mr Kelly**—I would hope that that would be the case.

**CHAIR**—For most of us anyway.

**Mr Kelly**—I would suggest that, from a traditional point of view, there would be a process within the nation of law and higher education through that law; that there would be a process of that education that, unfortunately, is not available today to every community person. I have to say, though, that I am very proud and extremely excited by the amount of energy being channelled by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people into working with young people today, creating mentorships and the boys to men program. If a higher learning comes out of that and we then understand what that cultural bind is, I think that is a very powerful movement.

**CHAIR**—I agree. We have seen little glimpses of it in the past 12 months. It is exciting.

**Ms HOARE**—Ray, you talked about the conversation you had with your friend in Armidale about how your lives have gone. Further to the exciting stuff that is happening with young people, how far have we now come from when you were a kid in Armidale and I was a kid in Kurri, and what projects or ideas can we harness and continue to work with?

**Mr Kelly**—I have come away from Armidale, yet I return to Armidale and other communities like that and I do not see an enormous amount of change in some ways. I think the cultural bind still exists for many people in this country. The second part of your question was about examples?

**Ms HOARE**—Yes. What has worked? Why are we are now seeing the SWOP program here, for example, with its cultural identity component? It was really powerful this morning, when we were going through Yamuloong and talking about the SWOP program, to hear the staff talking about how Aboriginal kids can identify that they are Aboriginal kids and then that is it. What made you a leader in your community, and how can we keep harnessing that across the board with all young people?

**Mr Kelly**—It is really about opportunity and investment by people. It is funny that the only other Aboriginal person in this room is Jimmy Wright. I came to this community when I was a

17-year-old kid, and Jimmy Wright gave me an opportunity. He was a great mentor and a great leader when I was a kid, and a lot of my opportunities were nurtured in those times. Certainly I have grown into somebody else as I have matured. The opportunities need to be created and made available. You are right: a place like Yamuloong does provide those opportunities for kids.

You need to focus on programs that ask children to talk about what is within rather than what is without. You asked a question about what culture is. For too long the notion of culture—the image and identification of Aboriginal culture—did not come from Aboriginal people themselves but from archaeologists, anthropologists and romantic writers who silhouetted the Aboriginal against the sunset. Today we have people—and I understand that you heard Professor John Lester speak—who are not just academics but very skilful writers who are recreating history, helping to identify what history is from an Aboriginal perspective.

Those opportunities help crystallise for me what it is to be Aboriginal. I do not in any way see myself as separate from any person living in this country from any other culture; I just see that this is my background, this is my history and this is who I am. As each of those children is asked to go on a journey of self-exploration, what they will do is ask about their self-worth.

I mentioned earlier the way in which society identifies the Aboriginal problems. For many of those children it is very difficult to openly face up, if there have been problems associated with family, and they do not want to be treated as anything less than equal. For a lot of those children it is very difficult to do that because, unfortunately, the education process starts from a very early age—well before preschool. I have often said that we—the parents and the grandparents—have been taught over a long period of time to be uneducated, and the reason we were taught to be uneducated is that we were given a place on the edges of the community.

Today people are taking a very proactive role, not just in dealing with the Aboriginal issue but in civic life—not that anybody is going to stand for the Newcastle City Council very soon, but it is an issue, and it is an issue that will need to be developed. We will need to have people like Councillor Warren Mundine, the wonderful Linda Burnie and so on. We will need to have people who are prepared to step away from the Aboriginal dollar, the Aboriginal issue and the Aboriginal place and make their mark in the wider community.

You asked the other witnesses earlier—and you may not want to ask me the same question—about whether they had seen a good example of all the parties, local government and national government working successfully. I actually have. I went to the reconciliation conference in Melbourne. To some degree it was a talkfest for a lot of people, but I actually saw leaders of both the major parties speak and deliver an opinion about what they saw and what needed to happen in this country. The thing that I admired most about it was the fact that the agenda was set by another group of people. I will not say it was Aboriginal people, because there were many people on that council who were not Aboriginal. The agenda was established by somebody else. I watched a very great man named Patrick Dodson that day carry himself with such pride. It was a very wonderful thing to see. It is an inspirational thing to watch many of our people who have suffered over many years continue to pick themselves up and brush the dust off and go on with life. Many of those people are not your civic leaders; many of those are people like the elders and the women in our community. Too often it is easy to identify Jim Wright or Ray Kelly, but there are other people.

I think one of the keys is the notion of recreating protocol. How that is done will be based on people wanting to offer ideas and suggestions about what that protocol will be. One of the things that I recall as a child was that you could not sit down until an elder sat. You would not dare take that chair; you would get a hiding for it. But it was more than the physical hiding; you would never take that chair. It was just something that you were taught. I hear a lot of young people wanting to reinvest in that place, and I think it is a very special thing. I think it is something, as a country, that we could all reinvest in. We do not want to just ship them off to the local beachside holiday where they can play bowls and stuff like that, even though a lot of them want to be there.

**CHAIR**—We will need to wind up, Ray. Can you give us a final comment before we conclude?

**Mr Kelly**—If I could say anything, it would be that I think the investment needs to be in young people. The investment needs to be in their development, but it can only be done by the elders. We have so many people today saying, 'I think I'm getting into the elder status.' Many of them who refuse to be the elders are the elders. Does that make sense to you? You have a lot of people who say, 'I'm an elder,' and they are elders too, but they are older. What you have are those people who are naturally leaders in an elders program. If we can start to invest by getting those children to work with those elders, then I think our future will be secure.

**CHAIR**—Raymond Kelly, thank you very much. Your evidence has been very much appreciated.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Hoare**):

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 2.56 p.m.**