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Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities

WEDNESDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2003

CANBERRA

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Wednesday, 12 February 2003

Members: Mr Wakelin *(Chair)*, Mr Danby, Mrs Draper, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Mrs Hull, Dr Lawrence, Mr Lloyd, Mr Snowdon and Mr Tollner.

Members in attendance: Mrs Draper, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Mr Snowdon, Mr Tollner 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 4.43 p.m.

COCHRANE, Mr Peter, Director of National Parks, Environment Australia

ROSE, Mr Bruce, Assistant Director, Indigenous Policy Coordination Section, Environment Australia

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. I welcome the representatives of Environment Australia. Do you have any comment to make about the capacity in which you appear today?

Mr Cochrane—I am the Director of National Parks in Environment Australia. I am a public office holder. My primary responsibility is for the Commonwealth reserves. Foremost of those, I guess, are Kakadu, Uluru, Booderee and Jervis Bay territory. I also have—

Mr SNOWDON—Christmas Island and Cocos islands.

Mr Cochrane—I was thinking in the context of Indigenous communities. I also have been given some responsibilities in the department for the National Reserve System Program, which includes the Indigenous Protected Areas Program. My colleague Bruce Rose is the Assistant Director of the Indigenous Policy Coordination Section. I work with Bruce. We had a large hand in putting the submission together. It does attempt to cover the breadth of interests across Environment Australia. Some of my colleagues are not able to be here, notably from the Heritage Division. The Heritage Division includes the Heritage Commission and other responsibilities. If you have any questions related to the Heritage Commission or Indigenous heritage and those matters, I will have to take them on notice and get back to you as soon as we can, because the relevant representatives are unable to be present today.

CHAIR—Thank you. This is unrelated to the inquiry, but it has always seemed curious to me that we call all of our parks 'national parks' regardless of who administers them. Has that ever been discussed?

Mr Cochrane—In part, it is because New South Wales was the first off the mark in 1879 by declaring the national park 'royal'—now the Royal National Park.

CHAIR—So we do not differentiate between national and state.

Mr Cochrane—It is very confusing to many other countries, and not the least to Australians.

CHAIR—You do not want to add to the submission, particularly in terms of addressing the community capacity issue?

Mr Cochrane—The only thing I would like to add, given my particular responsibilities—I am referring to Kakadu and Uluru in particular, and Booderee to a lesser extent—is that the leases that the Commonwealth holds with the traditional owners of those parks very strongly require us to build capacity in Indigenous communities to work towards handing back those parks over a very long time frame, being 99 years. Nonetheless, the leases impose a series of

obligations on us to build capacity to undertake park management type activities. So I have a very keen interest in the subject of this inquiry—not that we have any unique answers. Matters such as governance in Indigenous communities and things like administrative and financial capacity are all of great interest to us. We have worked for a long time to try to build some of those skills through our own training programs. The task is beyond any single agency, so we are increasingly interested in how these things can be tackled across government departments and between levels of government.

CHAIR—I will interrupt you briefly. We have just been joined by a Fijian delegation, Ms Kalo Takape and Mrs Maraia Voka. You are most welcome. I trust you enjoy your time with us.

In terms of the heavy emphasis on the requirements in the act, could we touch on some of the things that you have tried—where you see the emphasis and impediments. Could we have a feel for how you find it. I presume that you are based in Canberra.

Mr Cochrane—Yes.

CHAIR—You go out into the field on a regular basis and you have your officers there et cetera.

Mr Cochrane—That is right.

CHAIR—Perhaps it is useful for us to understand the geographical difficulties. How often would your people get there? How do you connect? There is then the relationship, how you build the relationship and develop it. What are the impediments and the pluses?

Mr Cochrane—I will also ask Bruce to respond because Bruce is intimately connected with the IPA program. They also maintain a separate network and close interaction with clients. I will start with the national parks. Personally, I would probably be in the Northern Territory every month. I would visit our key parks—Kakadu, Uluru and Booderee—on a monthly basis, meeting with our board members. Each of those three parks has a majority Indigenous membership of the boards and Indigenous chairs. I should also say that we have nearly 50 per cent Indigenous staff in each of the parks. They are almost all local Indigenous staff. There is a fair—

CHAIR—What would that be in numbers, approximately?

Mr Cochrane—Out of about 160 staff in those three parks, probably between 70 and 80. That is not including all the Indigenous staff that we employ on a day labour and contract basis. For an awful lot of our work that we do on a daily basis—things like fire work or survey work et cetera—we will engage people on a day-by-day basis. That is not just convenient to us; it is convenient to Indigenous people.

One of the features of our arrangements with those three parks is that we have a very flexible style of working with Indigenous people. We try to slowly build our proportions of Indigenous staff. From my personal view and from our current experience we have reached a limit on that, with between 40 and 50 per cent of Indigenous staff, with local capabilities and the sort of cross-cultural issues that we have to deal with. Quite a number of our Indigenous staff do not like fronting the public and quite a big part of our job is fronting the public. We need to be able

to deal with a range of issues. We have come to a bit of a plateau in terms of our own Indigenous employment. The opportunities where I see growth in Indigenous employment—this relates to capacity building—is in contracting out and looking at much more flexible ways of obtaining our services or delivering our services.

Some of that involves small local contracts. For example, we work with the Mutitjulu community at Uluru. We try to maximise the work with the local community, using the local garage for servicing our vehicles. Not all of it can be done there, but we are trying to structure our contracts and our work so that, with respect to what capacity is there, we provide to them. We are particularly interested where that can provide the capacity to put on apprentices or trainees. Because of these lease obligations on us to build Indigenous employment, to provide training, to assist with the promotion and development of Aboriginal enterprises, I would like to say that we are doing our best. But I honestly believe that we could do a lot more than we do at the moment. But we do what we can to make sure we structure our contracts to provide appropriate work where there is the capacity to do it. The challenge for us is how you get additional capacity. That keeps things where they are going. Often we are the major employer in those regions, so the task falls on us, to a degree.

CHAIR—Bruce, do you want to say something?

Mr Rose—I will talk briefly about the Indigenous Protected Areas Program, which is a program that resources Indigenous landholders, landowners, to manage their land for conservation as part of our national network of reserves.

Effectively, it provides some resources for an Indigenous community, who may have the aspiration of managing their land for conservation, to do so in a structured way such that that land and that management can be recognised as part of Australia's efforts to manage our biodiversity and cultural heritage. The program at the moment has 17 Indigenous protected areas—I think the paper mentions 16—that have been declared around Australia. The map included shows the locations of some of those projects. They cover a wide range of situations. They involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who are at very different stages of development with regard to their capacity to deliver land management services. They are also facing a lot of the other issues that communities are facing in developing a sustainable base for themselves on the land. So our approach, of necessity, has to take into account those very different stages of development.

Some communities which approach the program for funding already have an established capacity to deliver some sort of land management service. For example, in Dhimurru in Arnhem Land, they have had rangers established there for a number of years doing work on marine turtles and managing the population at the nearby town of Nhulunbuy—trying to mitigate the effects of people using the country on Aboriginal sites around the community and those sorts of things. So they have been established for a long time. Other communities have been only recently gaining access to their country through purchases by the Indigenous Land Corporation or through native title claim processes. They have very little capacity to actually manage some of the issues that they are confronted with there in terms of biodiversity, feral animals, weeds and those sorts of things. So they are organisations trying to establish Aboriginal ranger programs to look after the biodiversity and cultural heritage values there. So we need to have a very flexible approach to how we work with those communities. The program has very much relied on working at a pace that a community can work with.

The really important thing here is that ownership of these projects is with the community. It is not about contracting others or government to manage their land. It is about Indigenous landowners managing their own land and the Commonwealth contracting effectively the delivery of that service from the community. The communities are in the best position to manage in particular their cultural heritage values and also, more importantly, things like the traditional knowledge that they hold of species on-country, which European scientists are only just starting to take advantage of and starting to work with. Effectively, it is like a contracting arrangement. The Indigenous community has to be managing these projects.

Out of the 17 which have been declared Indigenous protected areas, they are proceeding apace to do land management activities. There is also an increased connection through the program with a whole lot of other services. It is really important to recognise that people cannot provide these sorts of services in terms of environmental and cultural heritage management without being able to live out there in these remote areas. You have all of those issues of health, housing and education, which are vitally important to the mix of being able to be on-country, particularly in remote areas, to provide conservation management.

We are finding that a lot of the Indigenous protected areas projects are forming a core of activities that brings in other agencies or indeed industry to help the community to develop capacity. For example, again at Dhimurru, the Nabalco mine provides funding to Dhimurru to deliver environmental services through the Indigenous protected area.

Mr Cochrane—It is also fair to say that through that program we have supported some basic infrastructure to some of those projects. In a project in Tasmania, one of the critical pieces of infrastructure for the community there to access the lands for management, weed control et cetera, was actually a basic jetty and a little bit of housing. So that was the very first step; otherwise they were not going to be able to spend a few nights there and actually do the work. In the NT we have worked on some wells and tracks, for example. So it is that basic in some places.

CHAIR—Implied in your description are significant expansion and significant infrastructure costs. The question arises about long-term sustainability, viability, costs to government, the skills required and going at, as you mentioned, Bruce, the pace that people want to or can. Can you comment on that sustainability, viability and the implications for administration. You mentioned people's ability to share the knowledge and also, I think, to develop the capacity to match the science of the biodiversity. Could you touch on that.

Mr Rose—The IPA program has been resourced through the Natural Heritage Trust. It is part of the National Reserves System Program within that trust. Funding for the projects provides a fairly minimal level of resources, often for wages or a top-up for CDEP, and for providing some basic infrastructure to allow things to happen. From the very start of the program, it has been recognised that we cannot, through this program at its current level, support the range of activities that need to happen on-country to manage it, particularly when we are talking about, in the case of some of the larger IPAs in South Australia—for example, on the Pitjantjatjara lands—huge areas of land covering 2.7 million hectares.

I think what the program does is to tap into those resources that are already there in terms of traditional owners on-country living there already and their desire to maintain their communities on-country and to look after culture. So there is a strong interest from the community and, as I

mentioned before, support from other areas of government in maintaining people on-country to do that work. So in effect it is a matter of focusing those activities. For example, with CDEP, the Community Development Employment Program, which often involves the community doing a whole range of work, there is a labour force there that a lot of communities like to put towards, for example, this IPA management, particularly because it has a strong emphasis on the knowledge of the elders and the importance of that knowledge. It allows people to be on-country and to maintain it. So there is a lot of value added, if you like, and a lot of synergy with other programs.

In terms of long-term viability, the IPAs make a commitment to manage their land in perpetuity for conservation. That is not a legally based decision; it is a decision about their aspirations. The issue of providing long-term funding from government to those lands is one that really needs to be addressed. Communities know that government cannot commit forever and that other options for supporting their work need to be looked at. That is something that we are trying to work on. For example, at Yalata, at the head of the bight in South Australia, we have assisted them with funding for a business program to develop their tourism business. It is a business plan for their tourism business which would help supplement their ranger activities.

There is also the fact that the protection of the biodiversity in these areas is of importance to the nation of Australia. With respect to funding from government to maintain those areas, perhaps we need to identify that there is an ongoing need for resources to manage those areas, much as we need to resource the management of national parks.

Mr Cochrane—I will give you some ballpark figures on that. Roughly, we invest about $100,000 a year in each IPA. It varies a bit between $75,000 and $150,000, I suppose, but that is a ballpark figure of what it costs us. Some of these are very small—a few tens of hectares—and some are up to millions of hectares. Partly, it is a matter of what they ask for. We have constraints, obviously, but the program has increased from about $1½ million to $2 million this year, so it is relatively small beer compared to full-on national park management as we practise it at Kakadu and Uluru, where you are talking about many millions of dollars per park, with full-time employment and the full public service conditions of employment et cetera.

CHAIR—There is significant revenue generation.

Mr Cochrane—Yes. So you are looking at two quite different approaches aimed at the same thing. One has its genesis many years ago in the early years of hand-back, lease-back and management as a national park. The other is the much softer, newer approach, with the control originating and being maintained in Indigenous landowners' hands.

Ms HOARE—I have a couple of quick clarification questions and then a couple of questions about what you have just touched on regarding ecotourism and business skills. When you talked about getting 50 per cent Indigenous employment, was that for the IPAs or the joint management of the national parks?

Mr Cochrane—No. That is for the jointly managed parks.

Ms HOARE—In the training that you mentioned you provide, do you provide business skills training as part of that? In the support of ecotourism and long-term sustainability, has the organisation ever thought about micro credit type schemes being provided to communities?

Mr Cochrane—Not through my funding. My specific arrangements are set up under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, so there are certain things to which I can apply the money that I am given. They certainly do not extend to lending money. In terms of training, we are mostly focused on training for land management type activities. We tend to put people through land management certificates. We work very closely with the Parks and Wildlife Commission in the Northern Territory and we have jointly developed ranger training programs that are delivered in the Northern Territory. For our board members specifically, we provide financial management training, albeit at a fairly rudimentary level, aiming to build capacity there to help them undertake their roles as directors on the park boards. Training is usually on a case by case basis because the boards sit for five years. So there is usually a burst of training at the beginning; then it is really on request—board members ask for something in particular or for refresher courses.

Honestly, I think we could be doing a lot more in that area than we do. I have talked to Indigenous Business Australia and to ATSIC about how we can tap into some of the other programs that exist. We do not need to reinvent some of these things. However, it is sometimes quite difficult to actually unearth what does work, where to find it and how to direct people there. We are certainly, I believe, very generous and open to sending people to appropriate courses and supporting them through that. We also do quite a lot of staff rotation, particularly with Indigenous staff who have an interest in working in other areas. They respond very well to that in terms of making connections across different types of country, different clan groups and different experiences. So probably one of the most useful aspects of capacity building is actually moving people around at their request.

Mr SNOWDON—We intend to visit Uluru probably in late August. It would be good for us to speak to the board members that might be available and to the park officers.

Mr Cochrane—That would be terrific.

Mr SNOWDON—We will talk to the community, obviously. You might want to think about that. We are thinking about dates now. It will be some time in August. I am interested in the comments on page 4 of the submission about impediments to success. You might want to comment on them. I am conscious of the IPAs, particularly at Dhimurru. If the committee ever has the opportunity—I have the opportunity often—to look at what Dhimurru does, I think people's horizons would be expanded significantly.

Mr Cochrane—As to what is possible. It is really quite inspiring

Mr SNOWDON—They do turtle protection across 70, 80 or 100 kilometres of coast. It is quite a large area. They use helicopters and surveys. They work closely with the mining company and the town community, and they control the permits effectively for non-Indigenous people to fish and undertake other recreational activities in the region. It has developed in a very positive way. I must say that my friend from the Northern Territory is not there any more, but the previous CLP government refused to place rangers in the region because they were in competition with the IPA group—the Dhimurru land management. With the new government, that is being renegotiated. But there were conflicts which appeared then because they had different priorities. Their idea about land management was different from what was being proposed by the then Northern Territory government. So it is an interesting case study, I think. Could you comment on the impediments to success.

Mr Cochrane—Bruce has partly touched on this already. With respect to expectations and aspirations, certainly with IPAs, what we are talking about is in perpetuity. The annual cycle of funding under the NHT is an issue that is raised with us regularly. It is not uncommon for us to face the argument, 'We're in here for the long haul. What about you guys?' That is a very difficult one to answer. It is a matter for governments. Nonetheless, one of the ways we have tackled this—it does not solve the annual cycle problem—is that we do have quite a considerable degree of flexibility with the program. Whilst we call for applications, often what Bruce Rose and Steve Szabo—unfortunately Steve could not be here today—do is to talk to Indigenous communities about what they want to do. So there is a lot of face to face contact. They are looking at areas that we know are of high biodiversity. We actually solicit applications. So we are not bound to annual cycles of applications, assessment, getting the cheque out the door and then worrying about it being spent by 30 June.

I think one of the fantastic aspects of the Indigenous Protected Areas Program is that we can cope with people coming at any stage in the year, usually. Nonetheless, the funds do turn up every year on a cycle. We have had problems in the past with that. We have had some problems with wet seasons, as is mentioned in the submission. But we have worked through that a little more with more flexible funding and being able to roll things over from year to year.

CHAIR—That is interesting. As you said that, I wrote down the word 'rigidity'. You are telling me it has become more flexible.

Mr Cochrane—We have a degree of flexibility in the program, which is very helpful. Bruce might want to comment more on that because he is more closely associated with the whole administration.

Mr Rose—I will attempt to take the issue a little more broadly. With the Natural Heritage Trust, of which the IPA program is a small component, there have been obvious difficulties with Indigenous communities accessing that funding. That is well recognised through Natural Heritage Trust mark 1 and now Natural Heritage Trust mark 2. Both Environment Australia and AFFA, who manage the Natural Heritage Trust, have taken steps to try to address that issue by putting in place a network of Indigenous land management facilitators. Their role is to work with the Indigenous communities, to help them look at their aspirations and to match them up with possible programs available under the Natural Heritage Trust. Again, it is very difficult to deal with those issues of annual funding cycles when communities might run into wet seasons or other issues which basically make it difficult for people to get involved in the first instance.

CHAIR—Let me understand that: the facilitators have helped; NHT is too rigid. Is that what you are saying? Are you suggesting that the NHT are running into the same difficulty? I am a little unclear.

Mr Rose—There has been difficulty with Indigenous communities accessing those programs. Having facilitators is an attempt to assist that. There are 13 Indigenous land management facilitators located around Australia. Through that program the level of Indigenous access has increased.

CHAIR—How many of them would be Indigenous?

Mr Rose—The facilitators?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Rose—Probably 70 or 80 per cent. There are some non-Indigenous ones.

CHAIR—Which is consistent with the way that the facilitators work around Australia, as you would appreciate.

Mr Rose—Yes. They are located with host organisations. Effectively, they are funded by Environment Australia but they are located with either an Aboriginal lands trust or with a land council. In some cases, they are with the Indigenous Land Corporation or with a state government agency, depending on which process the Indigenous organisation sees as most effective for them in the circumstances. So they have increased access.

CHAIR—We might come back to that.

Mr Cochrane—I have one brief comment about flexibility, which you were asking about. Given the land management facilitators' knowledge of these programs, they can help the communities with whatever flexibility there is in these programs. So it is not a remote process of sending an application in, finding out months later that you have got it, the cheque finally turning up and then having to spend it quickly. So there is a close relationship with the facilitators and communities.

CHAIR—I understand that it has worked quite well. From about 1998 on, the intention was to have it community based rather than have it bureaucratically based, if I could put it that way, and departmentally based. There would be community facilitation, which meant a facilitator.

Mrs DRAPER—I have a couple of questions for Peter. You alluded earlier in your presentation to the fact that there was quite a difference in terms of funding for the various parks. David Tollner had to leave, unfortunately. He has asked me to ask you whether we have an actual cost analysis or a rough figure of what it costs to manage and run Kakadu, including all of the outsourcing of the programs in communities et cetera. As the member for Solomon in the Northern Territory, he feels that, with Kakadu, there are competing interests in terms of the need and the desire to, I guess, manage the environmental issues as opposed to tourism and how that is managed.

CHAIR—That was the member for Solomon's question. What about the member for Makin's question?

Mrs DRAPER—I am getting there, Mr Chairman, very quickly. What are we doing to enhance the tourist experience and attract more visitors? I will move on to my question.

CHAIR—Do you want that one tackled first?

Mrs DRAPER—This is a really easy, quick one, Mr Chairman. It is about turtle protection. I know it has been brought up a couple of times. From my point of view, as a city person, what I am really worried about is those horrible cane toads that we know have come across to Kakadu and also whether fire ants will cause a problem, from your perspective.

Mr Cochrane—The first one is relatively easy in that we provided a detailed answer to Senate question No. 60 about the budgets of Kakadu and Uluru. So you have a four-year time course broken up into various components. I will leave it at that.

CHAIR—That is clearly available.

Mr Cochrane—That is clearly available. As for managing the conflicts, the Woodward report in the early 1970s about land rights set some of the principles that we still work to in jointly managing these parks. It focused quite a lot on the conflicts both between conservation and uranium mining and between conservation and Indigenous interests. They were the early days of land rights. With respect to the mechanisms and principles that he suggested, we actually still have them in place. In some respects, they are formally represented by a majority of Indigenous people on our boards of management. One of Justice Woodward's principles was that Aboriginal people were entitled to the confidence of numbers in dealing with some of these sophisticated and well-organised interests, such as conservation and mining interests. Structurally, that is reflected in the park board of management. We take the board of management very, very seriously, with its majority of Indigenous people. But that does create some interesting conflicts for us, not only with tourism, as you mentioned—I will come to that in a second—but also with other priorities. They help us set priorities.

Someone mentioned the conflict between Western science and traditional interests. We have to deal with that almost on a daily basis as well. There are different perspectives on what is important. We work through that with lengthy negotiations. No-one tries to stand over another. I think we have developed a relationship of trust and confidence. I think that also would go for Indigenous protected areas. It is a matter of being there face to face, talking these issues through and coming to an agreed outcome. A lot of the time it does not actually fall one way or the other. We negotiate a compromise.

Sometimes to the outside world we do not seem to be delivering all of what we should, be it the tourism industry or conservation. It was a matter of some surprise to me, for example, when I first took up this job, to find that there was a 100-square kilometre buffalo farm in the middle of Kakadu National Park, farming feral animals for Indigenous meat. It did not take me long to work out that that was entirely consistent with the purposes of the park as a whole. One might argue that it is not appropriate for a national park but for Kakadu it is entirely appropriate. So we come to accommodations. But that is not a simple process. As we have pointed out in the submission, you get to that point by dealing with the other parties around the table with respect. You work through those issues. I think that is very important.

In terms of improving the tourist experience, which was your third question, it is a matter very much at the forefront of our minds. We are increasingly trying to provide encouragement and support. Your earlier question was about business experience and the capacity to manage tourism. That is something that we are really trying to work on at the moment. We have only recently become aware of an organisation called Aboriginal Tourism Australia, which has just launched the Respecting Our Culture Program. We sent a contingent from the Yalata IPA to a training course they recently ran in Darwin which focused on building the capacity of Indigenous tour operators. I am in a dialogue with ATA—Aboriginal Tourism Australia—to look at whether we can have a formal relationship with them. We have such a need for building capacity that it would be worth that investment and looking at tailored courses for some of our Indigenous staff and owners. I think there is a great opportunity there.

CHAIR—I will intervene quickly. The classic example of the issue about culture versus tourism was the closure of the park a while back and the pressure and obvious conflict there.

Mr Cochrane—Are you talking about the climb at Uluru?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Cochrane—That was a matter of some moment at the time.

CHAIR—I just observe that. I do not want to interfere with your general answers.

Mr Cochrane—At the end of the day, that did not affect tourism numbers. Overall, the park achieved quite a significant recognition for its protection of Indigenous values. The resort was very supportive of what we were doing. By far and away the vast majority of the feedback we got was very positive. Our priority was protecting park values, if I could put it that way. But it is a priority for us to improve tourist experience. Particularly with Uluru and Kakadu, people come increasingly for a cultural experience. The major negative comment made by tourists as they leave is, 'Where are the Aboriginal people?' or 'I would've liked to have engaged more and learnt more.' But that is a big challenge for us because there are some significant cultural issues there for Indigenous people fronting up on a regular basis to answer often fairly inane or rude questions from visitors about their life and lifestyle.

Part of what we do—again, we could do it better—is help our staff with general lifestyle skills, including the capacity to deal with visitors to the parks asking inane, silly questions. It is about developing a robustness, I guess, and resilience in our staff in handling those sorts of issues. That is a big challenge and a long-term issue for us, but it does relate to this whole question of building capacity in communities.

CHAIR—What about the question relating to turtles and cane toads?

Mrs DRAPER—And the fire ants.

Mr Cochrane—Fire ants are not an immediate threat to us, to the best of my knowledge. Cane toads are certainly inexorably working their way through the park. They are certainly well established in the southern half or the southern third of the park at the moment. They have not moved through the park as fast as we thought they would have. We are now picking up isolated individuals close to Jabiru, which is in nearly the top third of the park. But we have not seen as many toads as we would have expected, nearly two years after their first entry into the park, which is interesting. But their impacts are starting to be felt.

Mrs DRAPER—What are we doing to deal with that?

Mr Cochrane—There is nothing we can do to prevent their move through the park. We have certainly investigated physical, chemical and biological approaches, but the physical topography of the park means there are no fences. Pretty well anything you can do is going to have an impact on something else or is just utterly unrealistic cost-wise. Our major strategy is monitoring the impact of cane toads. Our preliminary survey work at the moment is suggesting that they have an impact on northern quolls, which had been identified in a risk analysis we did

a couple of years ago as being the most vulnerable to cane toads. It does appear that they are having an impact. So to that end we are exploring with the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the NT and the Northern Land Council a proposal to actually translocate populations.

CHAIR—What about the turtles?

Mr Cochrane—I think Mrs Draper mentioned that she knew about the turtles.

CHAIR—You are happy with the turtles issue?

Mrs DRAPER—Yes.

Mr HAASE—A solution to your cane toads problem and saving the quolls and others, as discussed with my learned colleague, is that we ought to be, through government, legislating a bounty payable on those cane toads—20c or 50c a throw. Who would begrudge it? The kids would love it, and it would knock your problem off. If Lee Kwan Yew can get rid of flies in Singapore, surely we can get rid of cane toads in Kakadu. Let's go get them!

CHAIR—They're pretty good with shanghais too.

Mr HAASE—Indeed. You mentioned in your opening statement the percentage of Indigenous employees in the total work force. You very briefly touched on what you might be doing about training courses for your board members.

CHAIR—We have to attend in the chamber because a division has been called. We will return shortly.

Proceedings suspended from 5.28 p.m. to 5.39 p.m.

Mr HAASE—In your opening comments you talked about percentages. You mentioned training briefly. Do you provide specific training? Before you answer that, I am interested to know what the predominant areas of Indigenous employment are. You mentioned a degree of day labour being contracted. I am interested to know the terms of contract for that day labour. I want to know whether they are getting special rates, normal rates or whether you have special conditions of employment. Is the same performance demanded as if a non-Indigenous person was doing that contract day work? I am trying to get an indication of equity. What interest is there in the Indigenous community in gaining employment? Is there interest to the degree that individuals are demonstrably keen to attend training courses on a regular basis to skill themselves to the extent where they can take those jobs? I am not asking these questions from a position of ignorance. You know my electorate, I think. Have you looked at what the ILC is doing with their funds to provide training? The ILC is well aware of the matter. They know it is necessary. We have talked about it in this committee for a long time.

I have raised something by way of question or suggestion to other witnesses—I cannot quite recall the last ones; I think it might have been the collective chorus of ATSIC commissioners. You referred to the problem of the demographic that you take notice of, being those with a fairly high degree of English, the young and outspoken who want to set the world on fire but who lack the traditional elder cultural authority to give those commands. On the other hand, the reverse is that those with the cultural authority to speak for country who do not have the Western overtness to put their message across. I will go on a little further. You mentioned there is a

keenness to move from area to area. I wonder about that. I was quite surprised to hear you say it. I know that there is a great concern traditionally about speaking inappropriately for country. I wonder how you bring those two facts together.

Mr Cochrane—I will try to deal with all of those questions. I will work from the bottom up, I suppose. I guess what facilitates the capacity to have people move around is that we are all working within the same national park framework, so there is a degree of similarity in what we are trying to do, even though there are cultural differences.

By way of example, the training officer at Uluru-Kata Tjuta at the moment is a Wreck Bay person who was the training officer at Booderee National Park—vastly different backgrounds. She has been well accepted there. She went there on a trial basis. She is just starting her second year as a training officer at Uluru. Her daughter has transferred up there as a trainee. Her mother is there, so she has some sort of kinship relationship there to help her. Again at Uluru, we developed a cultural heritage management plan for the site. We invited a range of participants, including people from Kakadu and Booderee, and from outside as well, who came in to workshop the development of this cultural heritage management plan. They have then gone back to try to apply that approach to their own communities. So they are both learning opportunities and opportunities to build bridges between them. As I said, because we are working within the national park context, we are all working towards very similar ends, even if it is in different contexts. So there is a degree of familiarity about what we do. The traditional owners of those countries are generally very welcoming of people who come to do the same things and help and work with them. I will leave it at that, given that you have asked a series of other questions.

Mr HAASE—That is fair enough.

Mr Cochrane—The difference between young and old is a really difficult one for us. I might ask Bruce to talk about that in the context of IPAs because it is a live issue there. In terms of the parks, generally speaking, the Indigenous people on our boards of management are the older generation. With respect to the way we try to facilitate their engagement, particularly in Uluru, for a number of them, English is definitely not their first language; in fact, it is not a particularly strong language for them at all. At Uluru, the board works on a bilingual basis with an interpreter. From time to time that has not happened because interpretation arrangements have fallen through. However, the vast majority of meetings will be interpreted. We have recently introduced that at Uluru to facilitate the engagement of one particular board member who, again, is not strong in English. We really do need her full engagement in board activities. To do that, a linguist sits beside her and interprets both ways.

We are very mindful of not trying to force too much of our business to be dealt with in English in those circumstances. So that is how we deal with it. It adds to the slowness with which we do things and the length of consultations et cetera. If you are dealing with these issues seriously, to me, that is pretty fundamental.

Mr HAASE—How do you select your board? Is there a queue to get on the board? Is there remuneration for attendance at board meetings?

Mr Cochrane—The minister appoints members to the board. The precondition for Indigenous staff is that they be nominated by the traditional owners. So the traditional owners of

Uluru roughly comprise about 700 people. The Central Land Council organises meetings and the nomination processes. Eventually, that turns into a formal letter advising us of the number of people. Currently it is six. They will tell us who the six names are, and the minister appoints them. At Booderee it is now seven. At Kakadu it is 10. It is the same process, though. At Kakadu, the Northern Land Council runs the process. The Wreck Bay Community Council does so at Wreck Bay. So they decide.

With regard to remuneration, under the EPBC Act, Remuneration Tribunal sitting fees apply. So they are reimbursed for their participation in board meetings. Board subcommittee meetings and any consultation processes that we arrange which they are involved in attract a board fee. I think that covers your board questions.

Mr HAASE—Yes, it does.

Mr Cochrane—On the difference between young and old, a lot of our staff are younger members, but not all are. If I could make a gross generalisation, a number of those who are on contracts or day labour tend to be the older members. They are employed specifically for their knowledge and come in and advise us on a particular program or way of working or sites to avoid—that sort of thing. They come in and are paid for their time and then sit in the background. You are right: a lot of the younger people tend to be the ones seeking full-time employment or fuller time employment. They are generally more articulate, but not necessarily. We have Indigenous staff who are not strong in English. That is a little bit of a challenge for us.

CHAIR—It is an interesting point—'articulate' links with English.

Mr Cochrane—Articulate in English, sorry, yes.

Mr HAASE—I guess by definition they are able to communicate; that is what I assume 'articulate' to mean. I guess one can be extremely articulate and not speak English, but it is perhaps less frequently observed from a Western perspective. I am sure there are many extremely articulate people who have no English at all.

CHAIR—I have just been on a Pitjantjatjara course and endeavoured to try to understand a little about it. The response you get when you try out your rather poor Pitjantjatjara is quite interesting. However, it is so vital in terms of communication.

Mr HAASE—I just realised that I posed the hurdle but did not give you my classic solution. It is that we run a formalised system of understudy. It is the problem of having on the one hand a person with bright ideas who is gregarious but who has no authority and on the other having a culturally appropriate person who is retiring but who has authority and absolute knowledge. We need a coming together of these people so that we are not pushed down the wrong trail by the bloke who is very influential with the mouth. We need to listen to the wisdom of the elder who has the authority. We need to bring those two together, because this one is going to have to pay due respect to the elder. We then get the interpreted and correct message of guidance from the elder through the mouth of the gregarious youngster. I just think it would be the perfect system. I think I was howled down by ATSIC commissioners and told it would not work, for some reason.

CHAIR—I do not recall it. I think it is an excellent point.

Mr HAASE—I think it is something that should be pursued. I guess the immediate criticism would be that it would require double the resources to engage two where previously one was engaged. But I would like to think that a degree of goodwill would be exhibited and, if this was collectively recognised as a positive step, there would be some contribution or sharing. I do not know why we would expect it to double the cost and double the resource.

Mr Cochrane—I think you are absolutely on the mark. Again, my best example of that is at Uluru. We have a board subcommittee that has only Indigenous board members, including other invited senior men and women, who oversee what we do with cultural heritage. You are absolutely right: a lot of young, articulate men and women are actually out there doing things, but we are very well aware that it is very easy to transgress things that we white fellas do not understand at all. So this board subcommittee is the one that keeps a very watchful eye on what is happening in the park and what those young fellas are doing. It is mostly young fellas. As you would know, there is quite strong gender separation in how these things are dealt with. It seems to be managed an awful lot easier on the women's side than it does on the men's side. There is a lot more theatre on the men's side about what should and should not be done.

Sometimes those groups comprise only four or five people; sometimes there are 30, depending on the issue and the place. Those meetings will be called to deal with particular issues on a regular basis to keep an eye on what we are doing with cultural heritage. So it does not double the cost. We do have some meeting costs. If we have board members presiding at those meetings, then we pay board fees, obviously. We may pay meeting fees as well, depending on the scale of the issue and its importance. But I think you are absolutely right: you need that. Because we have this obligation to look after cultural heritage and cultural traditions, we have to pay great heed to seniority and authority. It is difficult sometimes to know who the right person to talk to is.

But that is in their hands. Again, it is mediated by the land councils. We have had to draw in the land councils a lot more vigorously to help us with this because the Aboriginal Land Rights Act in the Northern Territory basically says that we cannot be confident about a view of something of significance to Indigenous people unless the land council has signed it off. So we are engaging the land councils more in doing those consultations and in ensuring that they have been constructed correctly and that the right people have been spoken to et cetera. It is not our job. We are not competent in that. We are competent in dealing with on-the-ground issues. But the consultations, particularly when the issues are significant, are structured properly and according to the land rights act requirements. I think that is really important for us.

Mr HAASE—Are you confident that the outcomes that result from this close control by the land councils—

Mr Cochrane—Facilitation; I would not say control.

Mr HAASE—Control of the process, therefore facilitation.

Mr Cochrane—Okay, yes.

Mr HAASE—Are you confident the outcomes achieved through that control of process are in the best interests of the environment, or are they in the best interests of power broking? Are

they in the best interests of financial outcomes for participants? Are you confident that the environmental outcome is maximised or at least realistically considered?

CHAIR—Can I add something? In the last dot point under 3.1 in your submission—'Key success factors and impediments'—it is stated:

> Willingness to not interfere with community processes outside the brief of the department.

What is the brief of the department?

Mr Cochrane—It is exactly as you said. One of our primary interests is the environmental outcomes. But particularly at Uluru and Kakadu we also have cultural heritage responsibilities. Particularly at Uluru, which is listed as a cultural landscape under the World Heritage Convention, our obligations extend an awful lot wider than mere sites and places. One of the key values at Uluru is the ongoing cultural traditions. So respecting decision making and traditional authority is a very important part of what we do. In a sense, it is an end in itself as well, to ensure that those things continue to be respected.

Whilst from an Environment Australia or Parks Australia perspective we are looking primarily at environmental outcomes—we worry about weeds, feral animals et cetera—we have almost equal responsibility for cultural matters, which sometimes are very difficult to grasp hold of. That is why we do depend on the Central Land Council to ensure that the right people have been consulted on the right issues. It is a very complex issue for us, as it is for them sometimes, particularly in the Central Desert region, as you would appreciate, because the responsibilities involve issues that I do not really understand. Some of the staff do reasonably well.

Mr HAASE—We have mucked things up with our Western influence. No-one is quite sure these days who should do what.

Mr Cochrane—We have a dual interest; it is environmental and cultural. The cultural is not just about places. It is about people and continuing traditions. It is about valuing traditional knowledge and ways of doing things.

CHAIR—There is the evolution of culture and evolutional change.

Mr Cochrane—Absolutely.

CHAIR—With regard to Western influence, if you asked most Aboriginal people to go back to 200 years ago, they would not be interested, in my opinion. That would seem quite provocative, if anyone reads the *Hansard* at some point. But if you asked people to not have motor transport or access to stores or general Westernised conveniences, I do not think many Aboriginal people would be interested. So there is that evolution of culture anyway.

Mr HAASE—With respect to the lease arrangements at Uluru, for instance: is there any profit making at the end of the day by an agency through tourism, sales, accommodation or whatever?

CHAIR—There is a surplus by the group, isn't there?

Mr Cochrane—The resort, which is on freehold land adjacent to the park, runs at quite a respectable profit.

Mr HAASE—Of which the government shares nothing, except via taxes?

Mr Cochrane—That is right. Of the entry fees to the park, which make up nearly 80 per cent of our operational costs, a quarter of that goes directly to the Indigenous landholders.

Mr HAASE—Eighty per cent of the operational costs?

Mr Cochrane—Of the operational costs.

Mr HAASE—So you are 20 per cent shy?

Mr Cochrane—We are 20 per cent shy, plus there are things like depreciation and capital costs at the moment. The current costs all up of running Uluru to us are about $11.5 million per year in round figures, of which we get $6 million from gate takings at the moment. The gate takings have been rising at five per cent a year for more than 10 years. We are trying to keep our expenditure flat. So the revenue from the gate fees is slowly making up a larger proportion of our costs.

CHAIR—That five per cent is increasing traffic?

Mr Cochrane—Increasing traffic, yes.

Mr HAASE—And you disburse a percentage of the gate takings?

Mr Cochrane—Twenty-five per cent under the leases goes back to the landholders.

Mr HAASE—And that is distributed through the 700 or 900?

Mr Cochrane—Roughly 700, yes.

Mr HAASE—Is it distributed equally down through the 700, does it go to family groups or individuals?

Mr Cochrane—It goes to family groups. That is a matter that is entirely under the control of the land trust, which is a formal body that owns the park itself. Again, that is mediated mostly by the Land Rights Act.

Mr HAASE—I know a little about that. We have done an inquiry into the Reeves review.

Mr Cochrane—That is right. The rules are all preset. We have no control over that. We just pay the money quarterly.

Mr HAASE—I was going to ask you whether you are able to take the profits from one operation and put them into the other areas that you are trying to fund. Obviously you do not have to worry about that question.

Mr Cochrane—I do, and I do have to do a bit of juggling, but the boards take a very close interest in their own park's budget, so it is actually quite difficult to do. You asked a couple of other questions which are important. Could I briefly touch on them?

Mr HAASE—Please.

Mr Cochrane—Interest in employment is an important issue for us. We generally, but not always, have little difficulty in recruiting Indigenous staff into the ranks. But there is a bit of a turnover. People go off and want to do something else. Retention is probably no better or worse than it is for non-Indigenous people.

Mr HAASE—Living there in that location?

Mr Cochrane—In that location.

Mr HAASE—Backpackers et cetera—the non-Indigenous workers?

Mr Cochrane—No. Most of our non-Indigenous staff will be people who have—if it is their first job, and that is fairly rare—natural resource management degrees, park management training or something. We will invariably these days have people who have tertiary qualifications who are non-Indigenous.

CHAIR—Do your Indigenous employees have literacy and numeracy issues?

Mr Cochrane—At Uluru, because of the preponderance of non-Indigenous speakers, for example, we encourage our staff to undertake language training. A number of our staff are good Pitjantjatjara speakers.

CHAIR—My question was specifically about Indigenous people. What is the requirement for employment? Do we have basic skills testing or literacy and numeracy issues? What do we have?

Mr Cochrane—We do not do basic testing, but everyone runs through a properly constructed selection panel process. In almost all cases we have a majority of Indigenous staff on those selection panels.

CHAIR—In terms of capacity, one of the fundamental issues that we seem to be running up against regularly is literacy and numeracy. I was interested to know whether that is an issue for you in terms of competency and going up in the ranks into senior administrative positions.

Mr Cochrane—It is. We do not see much in the way of movement up into senior administrative positions. It is a problem. I will say it is a problem.

CHAIR—That is what I was trying to get to.

Mr Cochrane—One last comment is that we are trying to change the nature of our jobs to recognise traditional skills more. We have had a project going for a couple of years run by some of our Indigenous staff on how we change our job descriptions to reflect a greater component of

traditional skills rather than just the Western way of doing things. That is slowly working. You talked about understudies. Again at Uluru, we are slowly instituting a system of what in Pitjantjatjara is called malpas, or helpers—employing Indigenous staff to work alongside non-Indigenous staff in particular capacities. We are trying to get malpas associated with each of our senior administrative staff.

Mr HAASE—What was that word?

Mr Cochrane—Malpa, a helper.

Mr HAASE—It is a traditional word?

Mr Cochrane—Yes.

CHAIR—An Aboriginal word.

Mr Cochrane—Yes, a Pitjantjatjara word. So that is one way we are trying to get some more diffusion of skills and a degree of comfort with the sort of work that our park staff do at those levels.

CHAIR—I think the issue of linking to the traditional skills is very important.

Mr Cochrane—Yes.

CHAIR—Can you give us an example. You said it is slowly developing.

Mr Cochrane—Some of the best examples involve knowledge of country. In fact, in some of our positions we specify that people do have a good knowledge of country. So that tends to bias our selection process in favour of local people. One of our problems is that we have to work within the APS structure.

CHAIR—You acknowledge that it is tough.

Mr Cochrane—But it is changing.

CHAIR—It is very difficult.

Mr Cochrane—Fire management is a particularly good example. Cultural heritage management is—

CHAIR—Very topical.

Mr Cochrane—Yes, absolutely. But we are working in all of our parks towards fire management regimes which approximate what we understand was the process many years ago. So we value those skills and the capacity to understand them.

Mr HAASE—You have just put up a big target for me—fire management skills. How on earth do you handle the quite obvious clash between now and then? If you are moving on foot

as a gathering or hunting party, you might cover 25 or 30 kilometres a day. You would have embers in a coolamon and you might start a few spinifex fires here and there. They might go for a couple of hundred metres. If you are travelling at 60 kilometres an hour along a couple of hundred kilometres of road flicking matches out the window, you start a firewall that is a couple of hundred kilometres long and burns out game for hundreds of square kilometres. They are so far away that even if it does rain, they do not come back for that green pick. How are you handling the obvious clash between the changes in everyday activities and the clinging to the cultural appropriateness of firestick technology? How are you doing that?

CHAIR—I can give you another example involving someone who does not get served at a pub. They do not burn the pub down but they go out and burn the country around it. You end up with the same kind of result and covering a fair hunk of country. Yes, it is scary.

Mr HAASE—Do you have a solution?

Mr Rose—Can I add a little with regard to some of the Indigenous protected areas. Fire management is a key issue for biodiversity protection in the country. In a lot of areas where people have not had continued access to country, there is a build-up of material. Getting to a point where you can burn safely is really crucial. It is an issue that all the IPAs deal with in developing a management plan for country and getting advice from state agencies about how to deal with that. Also, because community based organisations are doing the management, they are using elders' advice about where to burn and when to burn and trying to work those two areas of knowledge together to come up with a way to get the country back into some sort of balance in terms of fire. That involves going out daily. Some of the projects use satellite imagery that is available fairly readily or with the assistance of the state agency to map fire frequency on their country and to look at places where they need to go and burn next year.

The right people for that country will be spoken to about it and go on several trips of days duration, doing a whole range of things in the country, including burning and trying to get a patchwork of burning back there while they are perhaps doing surveys for endangered species. Often with a lot of the IPAs, that might involve a visit from a university party which has a relationship via research on some of those animals or a state agency which has been doing ongoing work on threatened species. So there is quite an interaction of people there, directed by the traditional owners about reinstating a fire management program on-country. It is a long process.

Mr HAASE—I find it to be a major problem. The elders have been consulted. The scientific adviser or the adviser with the Western scientific point of view is saying, 'Well, this is what we hope to achieve.' The elders are saying, 'Yes, we understand what you mean,' because that is the old way. The young bloke who reckons it is fun to burn country simply goes out and does it because he has lost respect for the final word of the elder. The elder will throw his hands in the air, walk away and say, 'You Western blokes took away our discipline, and now it's not our fault any more.'

CHAIR—We come back to science versus—

Mrs DRAPER—It is no different to non-Indigenous arson.

Mr HAASE—Exactly, but it covers such a huge tract of land.

CHAIR—We need to start winding up here.

Mr Cochrane—It is less of an issue in the parks because there is a collectivist view, through the board of management and the wider consultation arrangements, in terms of what should be burnt and when and going out and doing it. But I appreciate that there is an issue there where you do not have that same sort of framework that we work under for fire management.

You have raised a really important point on this question of how you deal with these issues in areas that have been depopulated where you do not have anywhere near the same sort of impact. We attempt to mimic it in a couple of ways. One is that often people will walk to burn. You go out, set up with Toyotas and equipment, and you work with drip torches. As Bruce says, with a back-up of GIS, some remote sensors, if you are lucky, and maps et cetera, people will go out and walk areas. This particularly applies to Kakadu because of the scale of the place and the extent of depopulation: we use helicopters and incendiaries to try to mimic that. There is attention there but there are also opportunities there to do as best we can to mimic what would have happened. Again, we work closely with traditional owners. In some cases, they are relearning some of these skills too. They are transferring—

Mr HAASE—We have not talked about the people external to the park and the relationship and how that impacts? Are there any dramas or positives there?

Mr Cochrane—A key area for us is good relations with neighbours. At Uluru, our neighbours, apart from the resort—and they are on freehold land—are all Aboriginal land trusts. We also work closely with the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory in terms of broader fire management. Quite a bit of our work ends up being off-park in terms of helping fire regimes. Even cultural heritage work can be off-park.

CHAIR—I am going to have to wind up the proceedings. I have one thing that I should try to link. It is this whole issue of culture. You rely on the land councils quite profoundly, I suspect. This is outside our terms of reference but it would be interesting to understand the capacity issue in terms of Aboriginal people. How does Environment Australia operate in terms of its definition versus the land council according to its definition? I am endeavouring to grapple with how that is negotiated. You have touched on it. I do not think we need to go any further. The reliance on the land councils is something that troubles me slightly, I think.

Mr Cochrane—I see it as a professional relationship we have with them because they provide a service, and that is arranging and ensuring decisions that at the end of the day they are actually legally liable for. Once they have signed off the decision making as being according to the act, the responsibility is in their hands.

CHAIR—That is the point you made right at the beginning. You said it was within the act.

Mr Cochrane—So that is the structure—

CHAIR—That helps me a bit, because it is under the act.

Mr Cochrane—We could talk a lot more about this if you come to Uluru. It would be a great opportunity to consider this in more detail.

CHAIR—Is there anything you want to say in conclusion?

Mr Cochrane—It is a huge topic. There is probably an awful lot more we could say. You asked about the Indigenous Land Corporation. We are actually working on an MOU with the Indigenous Land Corporation and the Indigenous Protected Areas Program, for example.

Mr HAASE—With regard to administration training?

Mr Rose—With regard to a whole lot of service delivery and support that can be mutually beneficial.

Mr HAASE—Because they have got a lot of quids.

Mr Cochrane—Yes, we are attracted by them.

Mr HAASE—Why not? They have $43 million a year.

Mr Cochrane—Our basic philosophy is working in partnerships with Indigenous people and with other providers of services where we can. That includes organisations like the Indigenous Land Corporation. The issues that we deal with are far bigger than any one agency can deal with, whether it be training, employment, capacity building or whatever. So we are looking for productive and constructive ways of working with people. We have some good examples of those.

CHAIR—The message I get from you people is that you have seen significant development over the years. You are encouraged by what is happening. There is plenty to be done. But you are seeing capacities improved and developed?

Mr Cochrane—And the way it works is that you have to be there for the long haul.

CHAIR—That is a great way to conclude. Thank you very much, Peter and Bruce.

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

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

CHAIR—I declare the public hearing closed.

Committee adjourned at 6.15 p.m.