COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities

TUESDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2002

WADEYE

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

INTERNET

The Proof and Official Hansard transcripts of Senate committee hearings, some House of Representatives committee hearings and some joint committee hearings are available on the Internet. Some House of Representatives committees and some joint committees make available only Official Hansard transcripts.

The Internet address is: **http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard**

To search the parliamentary database, go to: **http://search.aph.gov.au**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Tuesday, 26 November 2002

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

Members in attendance: Ms Hoare, Mr Lloyd, 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 11.00 a.m.

BULLEMOR, Mr Terry, Town Clerk, Kardu Numida Incorporated, Wadeye

BUNDUCK, Mr Felix, President, Kardu Numida Incorporated, Wadeye

BUNDUCK, Mr Francis, Member, Kardu Numida Incorporated, Wadeye

BUNDUCK, Mr Kieran, Member, Kardu Numida Incorporated, Wadeye

BUNDUCK, Mrs Mary, Member, Palngun Wurnangat Association, Wadeye

CHULA, Mr Joseph, Member, Kardu Numida Incorporated, Wadeye

KARUI, Mr Gilbert, Member, Kardu Numida Incorporated, Wadeye

KOOLUMBOORT, Mr Lawrence, Member, Kardu Numida Incorporated, Wadeye

KUNDJIL, Mr Les, Member, Kardu Numida Incorporated, Wadeye

MELPI, Mr Leon, Member, Thamarrurr Council, Port Keats

NARNDU, Mrs Theadora, Council Vice-President, Kardu Numida Incorporated, Wadeye

SEANIGER, Mr Dale, Deputy Town Clerk, Kardu Numida Incorporated, Wadeye

IVORY, Mr Bill, Senior Development Officer, Northern Territory Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs

CHAIR—Welcome. We would like to thank Felix, the council and everyone else for your welcome. I can see Mary and Theadora there, who I know will want to say something later on. We also thank the Territory government for their earlier evidence. That has given us a picture of the situation here. The department were here a week ago, and so what you as a community would like to do will still be fresh in your mind. We appreciate your welcome and really look forward to hearing your views. We will go along the row and introduce ourselves to you.

Mr LLOYD—I am Jim Lloyd, the member for Robertson. I have been on this committee for seven years, and this is my first opportunity to visit your community. Thank you very much for your welcome and for your hospitality. I look forward to hearing what you have to say during the proceedings today.

Mr TOLLNER—I am Dave Tollner, the member for Solomon, which covers Darwin and Palmerston. Like Jim, I am very happy to be here. Thank you for your welcome.

Ms HOARE—I am Kelly Hoare, the Deputy Chair of the committee. My electorate is Charlton in New South Wales, on the coast, just south of Newcastle. Thank you for your welcome. I look forward to talking with you some more.

CHAIR—My name is Barry Wakelin, and I represent the electorate of Grey, which is on the southern boundary of the Northern Territory. I have the Pitjantjatjara people in my electorate, and a number of communities right through to the Western Australia border. I should add that when I was a boy, which was a long time ago, I worked over here at a place called Tipperary, on the Daly River, on the blocks there. So I am familiar with your country—not that I ever got down this far—and I really enjoyed my time in the Northern Territory and this part of the world.

Mr SNOWDON—I am Warren Snowden, the member for Lingiari and formerly the member for Northern Territory. I was the chairman of this committee in 1998 and 1999.

CHAIR—Felix, would you like to say something about your role?

Mr Felix Bunduck—I have been here all my life, and my role is President of the Kardu Numida community.

CHAIR—What about you, Theodora?

Mrs Narndu—As well as being the Vice-President of Council, I have the role of President of the women's association—the Palngun Wurnungat Association. I am a traditional land owner, and the community respects my authority as a traditional land owner.

Mr Chula—I live most of the time here at Wadeye. During the wet I live at one of the out-stations.

Mr Koolumboort—I have lived here all my life and these are my traditional lands.

Mr Melpi—I am on the Thamarrurr council. My country is on the other side of Port Keats.

CHAIR—How far is that subdivision?

Mr Melpi—It is about 2½ kilometres.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I acknowledge Terry Bullemor's presence, as well. Does anyone want to make an opening statement about how you are seeing it? You have had big meetings these last few weeks with the Territory government and with the Commonwealth people. Can you give us a few words about how it is going? You have had lots of meetings. Can you tell us a little bit about that? It is up to you. You might want to tell us about the things we talked about earlier—about where you see the problems, and about giving the kids a chance. There are a lot of things, and I want you to be able to tell us in your own words just how we should handle it.

Mr Bullemor—I will give an overview, and that might help people talk about their respective areas. Our community is extremely interested in capacity building. We recognise that we have lost great capacities in the 60 years since this place was centralised as a mission. We understand why we have lost those capacities, and the people are anxious to get those capacities back. We recognise what we had and we recognise where we are now. We know that the time it will take for us to catch up may be considerable, depending on the type of support that we get from both the Territory and the Commonwealth government. We are fortunate that we have been selected

as a pilot project under the Council of Australian Governments partnership agreements to work at getting better outcomes for community development on Aboriginal communities. We state that we are very pleased about that and believe that we will be a very loyal and strong partner in that pilot.

When we look at what we have lost, we know that we do not know enough about how the world works today. In lots of ways, our region is both geographically and economically isolated from the rest of Australia. We also recognise that things are moving so fast that there is fear that we will actually get further behind and not catch up, if we do not do something for ourselves. The people are determined not to let that happen. We also recognise that one of the reasons that we are so far behind is that the backyard of the Territory has got a long way behind the front yard over the past 20 or so years. We recognise that there is no strategic plan for the development of remote regional centres and that if there is not some type of strategic plan developed we will all end up in Darwin, which will certainly create a problem for Dave and his people up there.

It has to happen. We know that as an organisation we can be effective and efficient, but essentially this town is supported by four charitable organisations and you do not build regional centres with charitable organisations. We want to normalise—normalisation is a theme we use a lot. People expect us to be normal but we are living in extremely abnormal conditions, and that needs to be addressed. We have the capacity to be very good citizens of the Northern Territory and Australia, but we are going to need a bit of help to get there. Generally, we are looking at developing capacities across a range of areas. We want to further develop the construction industry in our area because we see that as a prime and substantial opportunity for development and training.

The women have identified a number of issues that they want to address to further develop their capacity to support themselves, their families and the community, and we recognise that the women are the backbone of the community. We recognise that the youth we have are possibly our greatest resource, but unless we do something for them to help them achieve as much as they can in their own lives then they will become the greatest cause of concern we have.

We have identified three areas. We do not expect to leap from a one-star service to a five-star service in a period of 12 months or anything like that. We recognise that this is a growing thing. Our main interest in this capacity building and also with the partnership arrangement—we are working with the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments—is that it truly allows us to build our capacities. If the bubble bursts in 12 months and someone decides it is not a good thing, we want to at least gain something from it. So it is very much a building process. Initially we will probably look at a 12-month period of doing virtually conceptual education, because if we are going to be normal we need to know what is expected and what is the norm. To that end we intend to develop a range of workshop content that allows us to do that capacity building.

Mrs Narndu—I have worked for the women's association. I would like to tell of my experience of living in Wadeye as a traditional landowner and a senior woman. I have had these experiences because of my role. Back in 1992 and 1993 I was the first assistant teacher teaching at the post-primary level. Through that education I felt and I knew what education meant for me. Part of my teaching was asking the question of my students: what does education mean to you? They would tell me a story. They would say, 'Education can be outdoor education or

inside,' and when I asked what 'inside' education meant, they said, 'It is the whitefella way of education. It is the whitefella way of educating our bush kids.' So through my years of teaching those students I would take them out bush. I used to have a couple of pieces of paper and a pencil.

These kids are mixed-up kids. In this one school they have a different environment. They have a different dialogue—what is called 'the countryside'. We have saltwater kids and inland kids and you have Moyle 'out in the plains' kids—the hillside and the riverside. So for me and the education I gave it was very important to take those kids to see the difference in the country. The Moyle people's kids would never have experienced the saltwater place and what tucker is out there. That is the education I meant—when those kids took an interest in what they could experience, mainly the sights, out there. I feel that is very important to those kids because we have mixed-up kids. Today, it is very difficult to educate those kids both whitefella way and blackfella way.

When people say it is a poorly attended school out here in my community they do not see the problems and what the story is in the first place about educating our kids. In my role here today, in educating those kids I have found it is very important to have someone in my role—to have somebody in a consultation role—sitting down with the individual's family and hearing the story of that individual's family, whether it be about education, health or housing. Every one of those families would say the same thing. It is no different from sitting down with other family groups. They would come up with the same issues.

When we had that talk and the Commonwealth came and entered the Moyle camp we told them, 'You have to listen to us. It is our information that we have to give you—what is out there in a community of that size and the support we need.' We are not sure whether they heard our story or whether they were interested in our story. But that is how we felt. We walked away after giving them our stories of this place and what a community of this population size is struggling with. This is the document that has to be handed over after my speech. It has been developed through the women's centre. It is our stories which have been developed through the individual families with my consultation.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. That will be given to us now. Theodora, did you mention Mark Sullivan then?

Mrs Narndu—Yes.

CHAIR—What did he say to you when you told him? Did he say very much?

Mrs Narndu—He never said much.

CHAIR—And you were wondering about that?

Mrs Narndu—Yes.

CHAIR—As we go through I will be having a look at that and coming back to ask you some questions. As the proceedings go on I will have a quick read and pick up some things in it, as I am sure we all will.

Mr SNOWDON—Theodora, what do you see as the most important thing for us to understand?

Mrs Narndu—It is a long story, but a few of the problems that we have, especially after 60 years of living in this community, are just seeing the family. We have to develop something positive and something solid within its foundations. After we had that meeting with those two bodies I went back and had a look at a few of our families. We are starting to develop this new model to work with one family, just to give it a go and see if it is going to work or not. That was a strong message that came from the family as I sat with them. The first thing they said was, 'You look at health.' One of the men came up and said, 'I have 23 people living in three bedrooms. Can you fix that?' Straightaway that was the word that came from each individual family when 200 families came together that first time. That is why I have started to develop that new model. I am just starting with one family at a time.

Mr SNOWDON—So it is important that we take the message away that each individual family will have different issues; they will have their own concerns.

Mrs Narndu—Yes, their own individual concerns, whether it be education or whatever they mention. When you are talking about this, people want to work. I think it is very important to say, 'Let us employ 10 people to be monitors for working with families.' Give those people a full salary and full hours because it is very important. That is where it has to be fixed. These foundations should be coming from their own people. We must identify issues from that one clan so that the family can continue.

Mr SNOWDON—You would say that you want to use CDEP or some other form of employment to get individuals working with each family?

Mrs Narndu—Yes, working with each family in a full-time job—with full-time hours.

Mr SNOWDON—Whitefellas might call them councillors. Is that how you would describe them?

Mrs Narndu—We can be called coordinators or mentors or helpers. We could identify our own names and use those. These are the people who have to be working along with that family.

Mr SNOWDON—When they have worked along with the family, they work with the council?

Mrs Narndu—They come together. The main body would be coming back to Thamarrurr. That is where we get the authority to help with the families.

Mr SNOWDON—So when you come back to Thamarrurr and they have said, 'In all these families, we have identified these problems, 'you go to those partners and say, 'These are the things that we need to have fixed'. Is that how you are describing it?

Mrs Narndu—You can always bring the story back to the council.

Mr Seaniger—Following on from what Theadora was saying, in relation to schooling and in relation to a lot of issues that affect our people here, I do not think we express strongly enough the point that for the people who live here, it is really only their mail address in lots of instances. A lot of our people are not here today because they are away doing other things. When Theadora talks about the coastal people, the plains people and the inland people, that is very important. It is not only from the schooling perspective. We have talked before about how great the school is working this year. There has also been a school established this year up at Quoid. It is working very successfully. We really need to decentralise as much as we can and get people back towards their own homelands. I know that is going to take a lot of money and a lot of effort, but it has already been started. You will see later in the day the Manthatpe subdivision, over this way. There are four family groups going back down that way.

I was thinking, while Theadora was talking, that she wants to get established back down where there is already a bore set up and equipped last year, ready to take some of Theadora's family groups back towards their own country. There is another bore equipped up at Three Ways, with a view to getting people back towards their own country. People do feel locked up here in lots of ways and they cannot express themselves on other people's land. The Diminin people themselves struggle because they have been inundated with a lot of problems that are not necessarily of their own making. They have a lot of trouble sorting problems out that do not refer to their family groups. The same applies to all the individual family groups. That is why it is important that this Thamarrurr structure be set in place very quickly from a whitefella's perspective, so we can give it some teeth and some strength to support the people in what they have had in place for years and years. They do not need us to drive it. They can drive it themselves. All we need is to give them the tools to help them.

Mr Melpi—I just want to talk in Aboriginal language before I talk to you guys in English. I just want to explain.

CHAIR—I think that is a very good idea. Do you want to do that now?

Mr Melpi—I will do that now.

CHAIR—Thank you. Do any of the witnesses have questions for us, Leon?

Mr Felix Bunduck—I would like to talk about work in the town.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Felix Bunduck—At the moment we are here in the town, and we talk about the town. We talk about upgrading roads around here, but a very important thing on our minds is that we would like to bring our other family here or make a bit of a town in another place, away from here in another area. Some people talk about the out-stations, but how could we do that?

As it stands now we are talking about a town and saying, 'We are going to a build a town here, with a swimming pool over there.' The rest of the budget will all go into the town, not for the outside yet. We have to run our business here. We thought that maybe a programmer could be given from somebody else. We do not know, but we are looking very closely at that. We may have to set up another town maybe two miles away from this town. We have to make that town peacefully. I don't know; but jobs are going around this place. We are looking at another town,

and people say, 'Okay, I will grade the bitumen again and draw the lines.' For the rest of the jobs we are looking at how many people we are leaving in one area—the town of Port Keats. In that sort of activity we should relax a bit and normalise ourselves a bit. As it stands we are all tightened together in one town. It is part of the way we have this town for the children here. There are a lot of middle-aged boys here and not many elder people. But we will have to wait and see. Maybe we will have to fill up our applications with somebody else, maybe through local government or the Commonwealth government, for what we want to do.

CHAIR—Felix, are you talking about setting up other towns for other communities?

Mr Bunduck—Yes.

CHAIR—Terry, do you want to add anything?

Mr Bullemor—I can add an example to that. Next door to us is a community of Palumpa or Nganmarriyanga, which is now around 450 people. The community started from here. These people have seen that community grow, with support from them and from the government, into what is considered a model community. A core part of the community's affairs is the running of a successful cattle operation, which has been going successfully for 27 years. It is a proprietary limited company operated without government assistance and it is quite successful. It recently built an abattoir, which cost about three-quarters of million dollars; $300,000 came from ATSIC, and money came from the station itself and from this community. This place is very much a self-help community. These people have seen that place grow in the last 15 to 16 years from a couple of houses to a nice little town. They recognised that it did not break the government and that it did not break themselves. The school works well, the clinic works well—everything works well. They say, 'We started that one year ago, and it worked well. Can we start one somewhere else?'

Mr Melpi—I will just talk about the housing industry. It began back in the late seventies with Felix Bunduck and Lawrence Kodumboort. Some of them have moved on, but a lot of the guys are still about; they would be about my age now. This housing project was a very good one before the unemployment benefit came. We used to make our own bricks, even though they were small cakes. The resources we used were from this area.

CHAIR—That would help to keep your costs down. It went on to be quite successful?

Mr Melpi—It did. The government could not give us any money at the time. During that period the mission used to run the show for us. That was about the time of the superintendents era. There were good things and bad things about that. We got our own housing managers out of it, we had bricklayers—

CHAIR—You built them yourselves.

Mr Melpi—We had our own brick makers. Later on, when we go around, Terry will probably show you where the old brick factory was. We had to make about 150 bricks a day.

CHAIR—That was very important. You had things to do and you created your own—

Mr Melpi—There were job opportunities. I must have been the youngest—about 17—working with old Les and my uncle Leo. We used to work down in the brick house manufacturing bricks. It was done by hand and we used to run an old cement mixer.

CHAIR—Yes? I have done a few hours on the mixer.

Mr Melpi—We had people who used to fill it up with sand, and it was good. But just coming on to the late 1970s, it came to an end when the council took over. We still had same housing. We had Les Watts who was the housing manager and when they left the job was just continued. Our local people used to build their own houses.

CHAIR—It is very important. I understand.

Mr Melpi—What we need to do now is to go back to the same system. But we need to own the housing industry under the Thamarrurr Housing Authority. I would not want any more contractors coming in taking the job from us. They have taken the opportunity from us.

CHAIR—I can perfectly understand that you would want to be able to do it yourself.

Mr Melpi—The system with the housing method is that we have got our tilts up. You will probably come across some later on—we are going to go around and show you which houses.

CHAIR—That would be very interesting. Leon, did you want to explain in language to these people what we are talking about again? I think it is important—

Mr Melpi—We have talked about this a hundred times.

CHAIR—So they know. You will do that when you want to, won't you? You will use language—

Mr Melpi—We have done this so many times, every one of us knows it just like the back of our hands.

Mr TOLLNER—What is stopping you having your own housing industry now? Why do you feel obliged to feel that you need to have contractors come in?

Mr Melpi—Can I leave that with Terry? Terry can explain that, because we have got to be dealing with the same sort of thing.

Mr Bullemor—Just following on from what Leon was saying, the people are anxious to rebuild the construction industry in the region. If there is anything that is stopping us from developing an industry it is the lack of continuity in funding for projects. Currently the main funding for housing for Aboriginal communities comes from the joint Commonwealth-Territory governments-ATSIC agreement under IHANT, the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory, or from ATSIC programs through the National Aboriginal Health Strategy. This industry worked well here when there was continuity. Nowadays, there is no real knowledge of what is coming in the future so there is a lack of continuity of funding. Unfortunately, you cannot develop an industry unless you have some type of continuity.

We are currently under the IHANT program. The money for IHANT comes from Family and Community Services, ATSIC, and the NT government. There needs to be work done on the distribution of that funding and its allocation because it does not always follow a needs basis. The Jabiru Regional Council area that we are part of has probably the highest housing need in the Northern Territory. Our own organisation has the highest housing need in the Northern Territory. But there is no consistency. The money we should get, if it was on a needs basis, would probably be for around 10 or 12 houses a year. Some years you might get none. Some years you might get one or two. Some years you might get three or four.

CHAIR—I note that that in your submission, about $2 million maybe.

Mr Bullemor—Something has to be done about that. We have the capacity to develop the industry. We have people who have a regional structure that allows them to work together. Our people can work here, they can work at Palumpa, they can work wherever. Under this Thamarrurr arrangement, it is owned by all the people.

Mr SNOWDON—Why does the material come from Darwin—any particular reason?

Mr Bullemor—It is coming from Darwin at the moment because we are not sourcing it locally for a number of reasons. It is not that the available material is not suitable. As Leon said, years ago the construction industry was in their hands. There are so many consultants and so much advice going on at the moment that we are building houses that are structurally beyond our needs. We do not want to build cheap houses but we want to build good houses. We are addressing that situation. Our aim is to get cheaper houses. There is no way known to us that we are going to address the housing shortage under the current funding arrangements. We have an occupancy rate of 16 per house now. We are heading for an occupancy rate of up into the twenties on average. To help address that, we believe the only way we will get cheaper houses is to use local people and local resources.

We are changing our construction method from block into concrete tilt-up panels. That is proving to be quite successful and it is also cheaper. We are getting some organisations like Boral involved. The Northern Territory have an Indigenous Mining Enterprise Task Force which is an organisation of government, various businesses and mining interests in the territory. We have good support from them. We want to develop the extraction industry here to support our housing construction methods. We recently bought a screening plant because a lot of this alluvial wash material can be screened and can give us aggregate good enough for roads and buildings. We have no coarse sand here. We have fine sand unfortunately. The Daly River, which is not very far from us, has supplies of coarse sand. Eventually, we want to have all of the money spent on building products apart from steel virtually coming from this place. In that way, using local resources and local materials we will gradually bring the cost of a house down.

With our new construction method, we can knock down the price of a four-bedroom house currently under block formation by using concrete panels to about $40,000 a house. Currently, our construction costs are between $1,100 and $1,200 a square metre for a normal economic community house. The material we buy from town—the concrete aggregate material—is $25 a metre. If we have to barge it in, we put another $100 a metre on top of that; if we have to truck it in, we put $65 on it. It is the same with coarse sand. So there are reasons to develop the construction industry in the region.

We have good project management capacities. We have relationships with reputable engineering firms that go back 20 years. Our own staff turnover of non-Aboriginal staff in this organisation is pretty close to three and a half to four years. These people have been able to maintain good relationships with staff and that is shown in the fact that they have had many people working for them for 10 or 20 years. So we have good financial management capabilities. What we need to develop that now is just continuity of funding. These people do not want anything that they do not deserve. A lot of money is spent on developing these needs bases and we believe that they should be adhered to.

Mr TOLLNER—Terry, in relation to some of your partnerships, are there active mines around here?

Mr Bullemor—No, there are not. Rio Tinto have just been given an explorational license to come into this region to look for gold and diamonds as their main interest. People have been trying to get explorational licenses in this area for about the last 20 years and now they have been approved. One of our reasons for wanting to further develop the extraction industry is the close similarity between extraction and mining. If we become proficient and get to understand the extraction industry, we are going to create employment opportunities for future mining, if it ever happens. We will look at the possibility of gas coming onshore. I am not sure where that is sitting now but, once again, if something was to happen we do not want to be standing flat-footed and just get a royalty payment for somebody wandering through the country. We have to be part of it.

We believe that nobody but ourselves is likely to invest real money in Aboriginal land. We do not have assets, we only have liabilities at the moment. We do not have arguments with individual contractors but we believe that the government is going to have to change its procurement policies to recognise the fact that we are economically and geographically isolated and there is a need to develop industry in this region. We have the capacity to run a very good organisation but we do not have the capacity to build a town—not many charitable organisations do—but that is what we are being asked to do. A great boost to our capacity would be if everybody else did their job right, then life would be much easier for us. One of the amazing things for these people is how some things can happen in an urban environment but cannot happen on Aboriginal land. The moment that you cross the boundary, often people's thinking changes totally.

CHAIR—If you could give us a simple example of that, it would be great to have it on record.

Mr Bullemor—We have been arguing with Centrelink, or the department, for the last nine years—possibly I have been arguing with them for longer than that. We recently had a situation where we stopped being a Centrelink agency. We said, 'No, that is enough.' I will just go back a little bit. This place actually had a financial and administration crash in 1994. We all got together, people reformed Thamarrurr to get more control and we looked at what had happened. During the reconstruction process we found the reason it crashed was that the administration crashed under the weight of trying to service the town. No money was stolen; there was not bad management; there was just a lack of knowledge. The greatest leakage in our economy at the time was in our operation of the clinic as a grant and aid clinic for the Northern Territory government. The actual cash cost per year to us at the time was $950,000. The grant was a little under $700,000. The cost of wages and pharmaceuticals was $680,000, so it left about $20,000

to run things. Part of that was for the provision of staff accommodation. We are the sixth largest town in the Northern Territory, but there is no public rental accommodation here. If we want to employ staff or trainees, not only do we have to find the money for a wage, we actually have to build them a $2,000 house.

CHAIR—It is a straight investment policy—the decision to make an investment policy and invest the money in rental housing, which has never happened here.

Mr SNOWDON—Mr Bullemor is saying that every other town in the Northern Territory—Tennant Creek, Katherine et cetera—has got public housing.

CHAIR—That is right.

Mr Bullemor—It is choking us at the moment.

CHAIR—What does the government say when you raise that issue? You have touched on one issue of investing in Aboriginal land.

Mr Bullemor—The government are now wanting to get out of a lot of things that we never got into the first place. That is the problem. The NT government probably want to get out of housing commission houses and into normal home purchasing. We have not even got to that first stage yet, and that causes us a problem because we are completely out of step. Where we are is so far behind in so many ways that we are out of step. When the national property manager for Centrelink came up here, we talked about things we wanted to do. We believe that the Centrelink office here should offer the same services as the office in Darwin. We have 780 Centrelink clients. Centrelink has certainly expanded its role from the old DSS days of just filling in forms. Now it is supposed to do a lot of things, including case management. We do not have the facilities to do that. The amount of money that they want to give us to run it as an agency generally means that we lose between $40,000 and $50,000 a year. We are continually finding that communities are being asked to prop up the services of both the Commonwealth and the Territory governments.

CHAIR—You contribute your own funding.

Mr Bullemor—Yes.

CHAIR—In your submission, you suggested a model of Job Network, Centrelink and I think one other agency.

Mr Bullemor—If we are going to improve our capacities, then we cannot do it alone.

CHAIR—Do you think the parliament might allow you to do that?

Mr Bullemor—We have got tremendous faith in, and excitement about, the pilot program. Our understanding is that it is a serious attempt to do things in a better way.

CHAIR—Have the government said that they will look at the proposal you put to them of bringing together Job Network, Centrelink and the other agency?

Mr Bullemor—They are looking at that.

CHAIR—That is only looking.

Mr Bullemor—But we have to provide working models. You cannot expect policy to come from government, because you get tied up in a lot problems.

CHAIR—That is fair.

Mr Bullemor—Commonsense comes from the people, and these people have got tremendous amounts of commonsense. Theadora was talking earlier about the people getting themselves mobile—and that is worth supporting.

Mr SNOWDON—What is happening currently with the Centrelink service?

Mr Bullemor—Until a day or so ago, Centrelink field staff were coming out, say, once a fortnight. We have negotiated an agreement where they will pay $50,000 a year—which is up from about $30,000—for this project. We have asked Centrelink to develop a business plan for it, and then we will find the other money. We said to them that we did not want to cap the service at $50,000 because it will not give us the service we need. We said, 'Let's sit down and develop a business plan that you would like.' Under the pilot project, we are encouraging government to think outside the circle, not within the constraints of existing programs. We want them to think about how they would like to do it, and then to see how we do it. If we could have a model here for Centrelink that offers the same things that somebody would get in Melbourne—

Mr SNOWDON—Or Maningrida.

Mr Bullemor—or in Maningrida, then we would ask, 'What would be the cost to do it?' If we have to do it by saying that there will be a levy of a $1 a head per week on the users, that is fine. We do not mind paying for service, but we do not want somebody in government shying away from the problem and saying, 'It's too big. We can't do it. We will give you $50,000 worth of service.' That is not what we want.

CHAIR—You would not pay for that in Darwin.

Mr Bullemor—Yes, but we have become conditioned to the fact that Aboriginal people seem to have to pay.

Mr SNOWDON—I will make this point for the record: the impact of opening a Centrelink office in Maningrida was to increase the income into the community by $50,000 a fortnight.

Mr Bullemor—That would be the same situation here.

Mr SNOWDON—The model shows that there are large numbers of people in Aboriginal communities, right across Australia, who are missing out on benefits. Whilst you can talk about the welfare economy, the fact is that most Aboriginal people in many communities are not getting their share of what they would be getting if they were living anywhere else. The issue is

that Centrelink has effectively refused to provide the same service here as they provide elsewhere.

CHAIR—Not only are they missing out; they are being asked to pay for it?

Mr SNOWDON—That is right.

Mr Bullemor—We are conditioned to paying our own way, because it is the only way that things happen. If you sit back and wait for somebody else to sort their programs out, you would be extinguished.

Mr TOLLNER—I wanted to comment on the court case that was on last week, involving Paul Toohey, and the trespass judgment that was handed down by the magistrate. Whilst I do not want to comment on the case, one of the points raised in that hearing was that Aboriginal land, unlike other parts of the country, has no public areas. There are no public restaurants, the council building is not a public building, and you are only allowed into the area on a permit basis. Call it a lack of understanding or whatever, somewhere along the line I think a lot of people in—dare I say it—mainstream Australia would have a completely different view about funding that goes to Aboriginal organisations and communities as opposed to the people on the ground in those communities. I come out of a superannuation background and I know most people are upset about the taxes that they pay on their super, but you talk to people in government and they say, 'You're getting a big tax bonus when you invest in super.' So there are two very divergent views there. Is that something you are intending to look at and are there any restrictions in the land rights act to allow investment on a commercial basis into Aboriginal communities?

Mr Bullemor—We are workshopping the land rights act at the moment and various pieces of legislation. The best way for us to do this conceptual education is to start from a law base rather than an opinion base. I think the land rights act has done a very good job protecting the people for number of years. One of the issues we are looking at is how we are going to get more housing here. At the moment, the only door we can knock on for housing is the Aboriginal door—and it has not gone a lot of money behind it. We have to normalise, to some extent, how we get other funding into it.

As ways of starting to do that, people are looking at Thamarrurr as a structure—having a formal agreement with the landowners to actually lease all of that community housing stock so we can put in normal management practices, which is going to be important for us to protect the housing stock we have. We build quality houses and they should last 100 years, but we have got to protect them. People on the out-station groups or in areas such as Leon's—over on their own land—are looking at developing body corporate type structures so that there is a greater sense of ownership. We would be prepared to argue the case that if these people can contribute to their own house on their own land, they should be able to get the first home owners grant. We will put up a case for that.

We believe that, as things do, the land rights act will change. We want to make sure that these people understand the land rights act as it is now. We were standing flat footed when the Reeves review came here—there was not actually a copy of the land rights act in the community. The only people who have some knowledge of it are people like Felix, who were around when it

was coming into effect. Middle-aged people have never been associated with or seen the land rights act.

They want, as I mentioned earlier on, to identify their own estates. That is going to be critical to us because we do not want to end up like the Arabs and the Jews—fighting over land we have forgotten who owns. While we still have the knowledge, we need that. If natural resources are found here, people want to be able to participate. So we are looking at what we can do under the land rights act.

One of the things we want to do at the moment is under the land trust, which you do not see enough of. You see lots of the land council, but you do not actually see much of the land trust. When the people started workshopping the act and realised the land trust is essentially owning, on behalf of the people, all this land, they said it would not be right in your way, and it certainly is not right in our way. We would like to start with development of smaller land trust areas that pick up the combined estates of these people who have natural relationships and contiguous boundaries. That should be possible under the act. It is not so much it is going to change, rather it is movement. We are actually moving towards normalisation, because these people want what they used to have. At one stage, these people's fathers and grandfathers had total control of their estates. They want that again.

Mr SNOWDON—When this land was granted it was granted to a trust as a big reserve. They gave the trust deeds and they got trustees. But under the land rights act there is no reason why that should not be small trusts. There is certainly no reason under the land rights act why land cannot be leased. Section 19 provides that capacity now. The other thing to be understood here is that the permit system is administered by the Northern Territory government and not by the land rights act—it is part of the Northern Territory lands act. So there is a whole relationship that has to be understood. But it is very clear that the land rights act has the ability for Felix, for example, if he wanted to lease land for 90 years, to do it. The only problem is that there are a whole lot of bureaucratic structures above the decision that are controlled by the minister and not by the people.

Mrs Narndu—I have been to one of the northern lands councils before, many years back. That is very important when the people are talking about the land trust board. It is only a board, but what does it say for the land users and all that belongs to the people? That is where the information has never been given to the people of how the land act story relates to our people. To my knowledge, the story has been handed down from our people, they had a responsibility of looking after their own boundaries identified for each clan group. That was very significant for that family to say it is still here and people can be proud of that land. Everyone has got to be responsible to look after their area, even though we have three or four clan and family groups. When all those four people come together that is the decision making to have that land agreement.

Mr Seaniger—Just taking Terry's point to clarify it a bit further. When you talked before, Dave, about council being on Aboriginal land and other buildings being on Aboriginal land—what the people propose to do is to have land use agreements with the likes of the council but the council will then lease this parcel of land from, say, the Diminin people. Terry talked about land use agreements over on the new subdivision and so on, and that same principle is extended right throughout the region. The people who lease that property—say, the council—will then be able to receive or not receive people from the outside. At the moment, the permit system is the only system that can apply to protect the rights of the Diminin people, whose country we now

system that can apply to protect the rights of the Diminin people, whose country we now sit on. There is a transition going on here, and in time there will probably be different principles in place. The Daly River and Port Keats land trust chairman is actually a fellow who sits over at Palumpa. His country is down in the valley and he has really no say over what happens here or anywhere else, other than on his country.

CHAIR—It just shows that—as we were calling it, normalisation—it is incorporation to normalisation.

Mr SNOWDON—One way of looking at it is to see the land trust or the owners as if you are talking about the crown because under the land rights act, because their title is inalienable, the traditional owners are the crown.

Mr Seaniger—Actually, I was thinking about that. I was taken to task last week by an ABC journalist about why it is different when you are driving into Tennant Creek. What you just said is correct. The public area of Tennant Creek is open to the public but once you go into individual people's properties it is basically a permit system like we have here. It is no different except our people own all this land on which we sit, so that is why they have the right to say who comes and who does not come. It is the same as Theadora would have found in her country and it is the same on any cattle property, national park or whatever.

Mr TOLLNER—Quite often we will not ask the government to build us a house on our private land and that, I think, is the difference.

Mr SNOWDON—That is not the difference. Let me be clear about it: that is not true. The fact is that the government has an obligation to provide a capacity for housing. Whether or not it is Aboriginal land, the government took a decision as the result of a royal commission to set up the land rights act and give people land. It also undertook to provide them services. You cannot use the excuse that because it is not crown land they should not have public housing. That is just a nonsense.

Mr Bullemor—Part of the normalisation is that the land rights act will change and all we want to do is make sure that we know more about it before it does. If we have any gripe with the land council it would be with the lack of the community development side of it. They have become very much a bureaucratic side and have spent a lot of their time and energy doing a lot of good things, but somebody has to look after the community development side of things. People know that there is going to be a time of change. They will change things themselves. They are not scared of change, what they want to do is have intellectual awareness so that they can participate in change. One of the sad things is that Aboriginal people are talked about so often, but talked to very little.

I have been in the industry for probably 20 years. There was more community development happening 20 years ago than there is now. ATSIC have become a grant administrator. The Northern Territory government's mainstreaming policies over the years have caused everyone to become mainstream. We have lost the Aboriginal empathy in lots of ways. These people have virtually been relying on their staff to get information from the outside. There is no citizenship education in schools nowadays. All these people did social studies like we used to do and knew about the country they were living in. They knew where people came from. There is none of that now. Our kids now, as Theadora would say, do not know what they are growing up in.

We are missing out on so much. At the moment it is sad for us that probably the biggest combined industries in the Northern Territory are the Aboriginal industry and local government. There is no career structure in the industry at all.

CHAIR—For good administration you have to put a high value on it. That is very important to the whole deal.

Mr Bullemor—The Northern Territory government is looking at rationalisation and things. If they are done right they can be good. We have to get a higher quality of management. As I mentioned before, we do not have a problem in this community as far as retaining staff is concerned. We have to get continuity and we have to be more professional. There is an expectation of this. Some of you people know something about Aboriginal affairs and some of you do not. These people have been Aboriginal for a long time and have been receiving generations of field officers and different people. Bill could talk about it because he is a second-generation field officer working in Aboriginal communities.

We cop young kids who come out here as field officers with absolutely no skills whatsoever. A lot of the Aboriginal organisations have fallen into the trap of 'Aboriginalising' but not training. You are sending kids out who might be part Aboriginal but do not have the community development skills. There is no training going on. These people are coming from a situation where, because it has been dominated, there is an expectation that things come from place. We call our government structure 'regional governments' because Thamarrurr means 'regional'. The term 'local government' is so hard to understand. These people have seen health being dispensed from the health department; they have seen power and water dispensed from the department of power and water; they have seen education dispensed from the education department; and there is an assumption that local government is dispensed from this area of state government. Warren, do you remember when the future directions paper came out?

Mr SNOWDON—Yes.

Mr Bullemor—We were at Yirrkala, and we were talking about possible changes to local government. We had people from the Department of Local Government, representatives from the local government associations in the Northern Territory and people who were thought to be from various local government bodies. We started talking, and five minutes into the thing one of the old men pointed to me and said, 'Just a minute, you're local government'—I was with the department at the time—'you've got it on the side of your car.' I said, 'No, we're not.' He said to Jeff Hoare, 'Well you must be from local government in the Northern Territory.' He said, 'I represent all of you.' Eventually this old man said, 'Somebody must be local government; when you find out let us know.' The conceptual education is so important. We have been seeing generations of people coming down; generations of programs have been coming down out of Canberra and Darwin to solve the problem. Give these people a chance to gain the information, and they will solve the problem.

Mrs Narndu—My knowledge, being of this community, is that you cannot be responsible for these people. It is too much; it is too huge. This family tried to have their vision and their view of going back to their homeland where the spirit is. I believe that is where the family ought to develop its own life. It has to rebuild from that family. In my family my own kids have gone through with that training or whatever—they had that skill. I believe some of them have the skills to take it back to their homeland. What I am saying by 'homeland' is that that is where my

land is. This is my land, but I have to follow where my son is because that is my life forever now. For Aboriginal people we have a different category. When you have a grown up son you send him away, but when my kids are 20 or 40 they will still be within the family until they die. That is very strong in the family; you have to be with the family. That is where you can have the knowledge, the skills and everything that you can develop. They will be able to run their own business in their own land.

Ms HOARE—Theadora, I am interested, firstly, to ask how the school attendance rate has been increased from 20 to about 160 over the past 12 months. Whatever you are doing sounds as though it is working well, and I would like you to tell us about it if you would.

Mrs Narndu—It is just that we have seen our kids struggling in life because of what affects the whole community. I believe there are only two weapons that are destroying our family life. It is alcohol and probably gunja. Before, we had petrol problems but the community itself fixed that issue up. That is where we see the problems. Most of the stories are in that document with statements by individual families. The only program that can be accessible and which will achieve something will need to involve our own people. Before, we had outside people coming here and telling us what to do about running a program to fix an issue, and it did not work. Now we can look at an issue—we are the right people who have the local knowledge to say, 'Let's fix it and do something about it.'

Mr LLOYD—In relation to this hearing, how was it advertised within the community? Does the community know that this public hearing is on today? How did word get around?

Mr Bullemor—To some extent, the community is meetinged out. We generally have between 10 and 15 government visitations per week. When we talked about this hearing a lot of people recognised the fact that perhaps we are very lucky that we virtually already have a pilot program in place that is going to give a lot more potential to develop capacity. The other thing, as Leon mentioned, is that a lot of people are fairly busy. Whilst it was advertised locally, when people said, 'What's it about?' we said, 'In some ways, it's more of the same—more of the last two weeks, to some extent.' Then they said, 'Fair enough; we've done that.'

Mr LLOYD—More bloody whitefella politicians from Canberra.

Mr Bullemor—What surprises us is that you have come up in the summer. Generally, we get you up here around July or August. To be quite honest with you, we have discussed that and we thought it was a bit of a signal that you might be quite genuine about the whole thing. You were prepared to come up in the build-up and get bounced around in aeroplanes and not just come up in the dry season, so you got points for that.

One of the things I would like to add—and it came out very much in the meetings we have been having over the last couple of weeks; I made mention of it earlier—is that people said that for us to build up our capacities, we have to regain our self-esteem. If anything damaged these people, it was the introduction of sit-down money. Prior to that, they took pride in the work that they did. As mentioned previously by speakers, we had a construction industry and we had things where people worked for their daily existence. We know that there are possibly changes to how sit-down money is going to be dispensed. We want to put on record that we are not scared of those changes. People will be pleased when, once again, it is the norm to work and get on in life, not to sit down. We would be keen to have further discussions on that, either with

government or ATSIC—whichever area it comes from. It is a critical time at the moment in that a lot of the elders are passing away. The middle-aged people, who are the future elders, are the last of the people who have a reasonably good contemporary education and traditional education. Behind that there is a big gap and that gap is not going to be filled for a long time yet. If we do not achieve some of these things in community development in the next five to 10 years, the job will be a lot harder because we will be talking to a people who do not have the same comprehension of what needs to be done. The best time to look at capacity building with Aboriginal people, particularly, is right now.

When you look at the traditional communities across the Northern Territory, each of their future leaders are the last of the educated people. Education has not worked as well as expected for lots of reasons. The bilingual education program has not been successful, particularly in our case because the Aboriginal language chosen was naturally the changed language of the people here, but consideration was not given to the languages of people from all around here. They have seen that as a sort of cultural imperialism. But we have to live on their land and we have to learn their language. Those sorts of things have more to do with the social upheaval of communities than with lots of other things. We have different nations here. It is important, and these people recognise that we have got to get better at managing our community and our people. At the moment we are workshopping the Charter of the United Nations because we see the similarities. We are united nations here, and we need to have just such a structure to make sure that we can control the hotheads from time to time. It is something that people want to do.

One of the things that we will ask as a way of improving capacities is to change the nature of some of the funding. We have focused on accredited education particularly in areas of training. Warren, you would remember the days of the TAP program. Maybe it was too good for us in those days, but it was the best. It provided for general education awareness type of stuff. We probably squandered some of that years ago, but we would not squander it now. I think that, more than anything else, we need to give this age group the opportunity to fully understand where you people come from so that they understand more what the norms are, and then we will be able to move on with you.

What we are pleased about more than anything else with the partnership arrangement is that government is prepared to form a partnership with an Aboriginal organisation. A lot of people are scared to be in Aboriginal communities. As I mentioned before, a lot of young field officers are worried about coming here. We have all brought up our kids here. We have lived together for about 20 years. What you have here is a group of citizens who just do not know what they need to know. Some years ago when we were analysing the situation, these people quite honestly said to us: 'We don't know what we don't know.' That is a problem to us. Someone says, 'What do you want?' What are the options if you do not know? We used to ask everybody for a Toyota. It did not matter what department they came from.

CHAIR—At least you got to ask them the question. Once you start to question, you can do the sorts of things that you are starting to do.

Mr Bullemor—There have to be phases for us with capacity building. If we get too much in a hurry, it is like everything else: you spill too much. We desperately want information. We cannot lift up 2,500 people at once, but we can certainly allow people to lift themselves up. The women, in particular, are very strong in the community. There are a lot of good young people who want to learn. We cannot fund their learning, but through this partnership agreement we

hope that the TAP program re-emerges. We have to do the conceptual education. We called the theme of a conference we had the other day 'bridging the gap'. The gap is where somebody perceives the starting line is—from Canberra or some place— and where we know the starting line is from here. Unless we bridge that gap, the programs fail. There have been heaps of programs aimed at Aboriginal people.

CHAIR—On the Canberra end of that, how much effort goes into understanding your end?

Mr Bullemor—I do not think very much at all. I am not going to have a shot at ATSIC but everything has become political and the community development has gone. There was community development here years ago, but there is no community development done now. It is the computer age with all these different things. Years ago, for example, people in this community could run the whole payroll on the old Kalamazoo system. They had beautiful handwriting—people such as Michael Bunduck and Edwina. There were no problems at all. Then we got into the computer age because everybody said we had to be there. We were never there, we are still not there now, but we have probably lost a lot along the way because nobody could translate. These people are trackers, and through the old Kalamazoo system they could track and track and track all the way back to the first entry. It made sense to them.

But things are different now because white people have come and worked in the communities. We love these opportunities because we probably think: 'We have more knowledge than anybody. We can do what we like', so we throw out all the old Macintoshes and bring in the IBMs. We chuck out the Hitachis and bring in something else, and these people's heads spin and spin and they say, 'Stuff it'.

We have to get people back. We do not want to be isolated from Australia but in lots of ways we are. The very fact that you are here today obviously signifies that there is a gap and you are worried about it. We have to bridge that gap. We will go your way as fast as we can, through conceptual education. We do not want you to stop, but we want you to slow down a little bit and come our way, too. You are going to be dealing with Aboriginal people for a long time yet—

CHAIR—As long as there is Australia that will happen.

Mr Bullemor—If we work in partnership, we have more capacity to teach field officers than your departments have. I think Bill would back that up. When the Territory government became mainstream, we were all going to be 'Territorians' all of a sudden—great idea—but once again 'Territorians' are the average ones and we are still back here. We never got to catch up. Now we have a need, but we are so far behind that it is a worry to us. A lot of catch up is needed. This partnership agreement, this pilot program, has to be successful because it has to be replicated.

CHAIR—In 12 months or three years? Have they defined a period?

Mr Bullemor—They have not. They say 'a long time', but a long time for government is not long, is it?

CHAIR—So they have not defined it.

Mr Bullemor—We are hopeful that the fact that it is an initiative of the Council of Australian Governments will mean it may become a long time. That is going to be important.

Mr LLOYD—The reason I asked that about the public hearing was I am very pleased that there are so many people here today, and I appreciate the fact that lots of government people come along. I find myself at a disadvantage because I am trying to understand what everyone here in the community wants and their needs. Because of the language difficulties and because of the lack of the education, I very much appreciate what Theadora has been able to say because of her education and her English. I have heard from Bill, Dale and Terry at length and in everything they say they talk about these people. With great respect, I want to know what these people are really thinking but I am at a great disadvantage because of the language barrier. I feel inadequate. When I go away from here today, am I really going to know what this community wanted to say to me? That is why I asked whether there were more people here.

During the morning tea break, I went out the front and sat on the fence there, with a young bloke. I do not know his name. He had quite good English, and I was able to speak to him. He said he was working on the roads here and was part of Norforce. He started to talk about terrorism in Sydney and the difficulties and the issues there. I do not know the substance of what he said but I felt like I was communicating with someone in the street and maybe getting some views. He said that the roads were a problem here and that you need more money for that and for housing. I do not have the answers to those difficulties. I want to put on the record the possibility of having interpreters here to let the people of the communities have more of a say. This is more a statement than a question.

Obviously, you have a very high birth rate, with lots of young girls having babies. If it is inappropriate to answer this, please tell me because I do not know. Within your culture is there an education process for young women about sex education and about having babies and whether that is good or bad? You say that you have a high birth rate and do not have the housing for the population. If anyone wants to answer, that is fine. If no-one wants to, please feel free to say so.

Mrs Narndu—I will answer the question for you. This is the thing I am looking at in setting up this new role. It has to be developed through an individual's family. It is very important when you are talking about stuff like that. It has to be in—

Mr LLOYD—Within the family.

Mrs Narndu—within the family. I am working on a new model with some of my strong women, and especially getting with the senior people. I have just heard your story. It has to be the right people, it has to be the right time and it has to be the right decision coming from the authority. That is where I have to be patient with time to sit with the people and listen to the story of the people first. If it is okay, then I can go ahead with that new model.

Mr Ivory—In relation to your first question, what you are getting here today is like a condensed version of many hours spent in workshops. You have only a day to be here, and a lot of the people are having difficulty understanding what you are saying. Probably why we tend to speak a fair bit is because we have spent days and days out listening to people, and they have been talking in their language. They will talk in their language maybe for an hour, and then they will come back to us and say, 'This is what we are thinking. Can you take this message to government or whatever.'

Mr LLOYD—Thank you for that. Don't take my comments as questioning what you are saying, but you can see the difficulty I and lots of other people have. I come from an urban New South Wales town, and I admit readily that whilst I have a great interest in Aboriginal communities and their needs, I am not an expert by any means and I rely on what you people say and what the communities say.

Mr SNOWDON—Mr Melpi would know, and Theadora would know, if these guys were telling us rubbish and you would tell us.

Mr Melpi—This happens every time. Why repeat ourselves when we have people here to talk on behalf of the elders as well.

Mr LLOYD—That is good.

Mr Ivory—Many times we get pulled up by people who say, 'You are saying the wrong thing. That is not right.'

CHAIR—All right. I will try to get my three in very quickly. I took it as a given that that was the structure. There is not enough time in the day and there are not enough days in the year, et cetera.

Mr LLOYD—There never is.

CHAIR—I took it as a given that I was talking to people—Theadora, Leon, Terry, Bill and Felix—and I could pick up from the effort you have put in today, and the presentation earlier, that this is a condensation of a hell of a lot of work. You have started on a journey, and I can sense the excitement that you really have got hold of something that you are believing in. I picked that up. I took it as a given that this was how it worked. To all of us it is a bit confusing because we do not have the language. Wouldn't I give a lot of money to have all the Aboriginal languages of Australia so that I could just go into that language and communicate? I have about 10 words of Pitjantjatjara, if I am lucky, and they probably would not understand five of them anyway when I said them.

I have three quick ones, and Terry has pretty well answered them. You talked about being nice, and we sit around too long being nice. It is good to be civil, but these people are strong enough to actually be direct with us and come to the guts of what they want to do. We have heard that today. We have heard how they want their independence, and they want to have their land. They want to get away from this welfare dependency. It is not really a question, but I just want you to tell us how to be less nice and more effective. You might have a short, punchy answer to that. You have answered a fair bit of that today, but you might have a think about that.

With regard to the definition of the region, I am fascinated by it. Bill, Felix or Leon might be able to help me here: in terms of the federation, if you like, of the communities—why is there that definition of the region? What is it about that region with all those groups, because that seemed to me to be a little contradictory to Aboriginal culture in terms of community? There would be a very good reason for that, but why that region?

My last question is to Theadora. In your paper you talked about the local Aboriginal women who were consulted who said they had good memories of time before the welfare dependency

era. That is what I have heard today. I want to be very clear that I have heard that: that you want help, but you do not want to be dependent on welfare. Have I got that right? When you talk about welfare dependency, do you want to move away from that? How do I interpret that from your own paper here? Is that a fair thing to ask?

Mr Bullemor—Give Theadora the chance to talk to the others in her language about that.

CHAIR—Yes, thank you.

Mr Melpi—Could you give us a break for five minutes to go outside to talk about this?

CHAIR—Yes, I am happy to.

Proceedings suspended from 12.38 p.m. to 12.44 p.m.

CHAIR—Let us go again. We appreciate that stretching of our legs. Did you want to have a go at that question, Theadora?

Mrs Narndu—I apologise for my nervousness. Every one of us here had a different time of birth, growing up as a different personality. I grew up in a mission time era. I was in the care of the people at the mission. The government sent those missionaries out to look after us. It was a strong memory and important to put down for you mob to read, because there was also welfare dependency.

We have our own experiences of seeing our parents. They brought us to that place, the dormitory. We were in the care of the nuns around us. There was discipline that we did not like, but we had to accept it because that was just the way they were disciplining us. It was a bad time but there were some good times that we had. It was very important to see what our parents did because at the time the government never gave much money to service our people, especially our young people. It was a poor time, that era.

What the mission did for us was to have our parents look after us and feed us; they gave them that job. One example is: they had planted a market garden with fresh vegetables, bananas et cetera. There was food each day to feed us. Some weekends our parents would go back to the bush and collect bush tucker and then they would feed us. There was a job there for them. When I was growing up the people at the mission were giving us a job and we were starting to plant our own small gardens in our own small areas. So, because we saw our parents do something for us, we took that and said, 'Let us plant our own small garden.' We planted pawpaws, watermelons and whatever. But we were naughty kids and had to steal because we were hungry. But, because the influence was so strong, it has given us a model from our own parents to do something to help our kids. It was a job that our parents did with no money.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Mr Melpi—I just want to talk in language again.

CHAIR—Thank you, Leon, take as long as you need.

Mr Melpi—I came at another time. I was born in the late fifties. These people were born before us. I was taken from my mum and dad. The responsibility for me was taken away from my mum and dad. It was during the mission days and back around the welfare days that they did not give mum and dad the chance to teach me what I know now. We were forced to go to school; we had no other options. You either went to school or did something else at the mission.

One thing I can remember that my father taught me was survival. He taught me how to hunt. It is something I will never lose. He taught me how to hunt for food and to get fish. That is one skill that my father gave me. I passed that on to my sons and daughters. I guess the main thing, again, is that they have taken the responsibility from our parents. When we lived in dormitories, there were a lot of things taken away from our parents. My father was a builder by trade. He worked where Felix was. He used to earn award wages and pick up about $700 a week. Come payday I used to wait for him. I knew my father was going to get paid that week.

CHAIR—Very important.

Mr Melpi—But that has stopped now.

CHAIR—Thank you. I think this is the appropriate place for us to stop too. I think that is our dilemma and it is what we have to work towards overcoming. Would anyone like to say any more?

Mr Ivory—I have just one further thing, which I think relates to Jim's question. People may wonder why those 20 groups have formed in Thamarrurr. Do you want to talk about that?

Mr Melpi—No, you talk to them.

Mr Ivory—One of the reasons is that different clan groups occupy all the rest of that country. A lot of the clan groups surrounding Thamarrurr were given the opportunity to join as well. However, they have affiliations to other centres. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing and a lot of discussion but, at the end of the day, these were the 20 groups that, even though at times they may argue and fight with each other, still share the common bondage of Thamarrurr. It is the way of life for those 20 groups.

Mr SNOWDON—Does that stop people from coming in later on if they decide that they want to be engaged? If that other mob want to come in, can they join?

Mr Melpi—They can come in.

Mr Bullemor—A lot of people are actually observing to see what they think.

Mr SNOWDON—Suck it and see?

Mr Bullemor—The geographical boundaries that the people had obviously pre-existed geographical boundaries as we know them now. One thing I might add that is relevant to capacity building is that when ATSIC started years ago, Aboriginal people were quite enthusiastic. We know Gerry Hand flew around Australia in a very short time and came back with all this knowledge—and it was good. What happened, as often happens with Aboriginal

people, and why we want you to tell it how it is—that was one of the questions you asked—is that we thought that these people finally recognised what we had had all these years. We had a structure that was a structure of governance and we thought, 'God, they have finally caught on. That is great.' I know that people like the Mudjura knew how they felt and they said, 'We have got this too.' Every Aboriginal group has got Thamarrurr in some shape or form. The Yolngu have it, everybody has these structures of governance.

When they got back and decided to have these regional councils, they looked and said, 'God, we are going to have hundreds of them. How about we do the boundaries.' So, they just drew the lines on the map. We got linked up with people whom we were not culturally affiliated with that all. We got grouped up with very traditional people and with a lot of part Aboriginal people in urban situations. It did not work; it was not how it was. When ATSIC started off years ago we thought that they were recognising Thamarrurr then. We thought, 'Gee, that is good. That is how we want it: one-to-one government. We have our structure of governance, you have your structure of governance and we can do business, no problem.' We want to do that. Thamarrurr can be a regional structure: it could be an authority under the ATSIC act; it could have a local government structure; it could have a land council structure; it can be a regional Chamber of Commerce; it can be all these things.

The only way to do it is to tell you how it is. Do not be sensitive. Treat us as people, not as Aboriginal people, just treat us as people. We may have some special needs in some cases, but tell us how it is. The job for us might be to find out how we get up here to bridge this gap. As long as we know that you are fair dinkum, we know how to reach you. If we are not quite sure, then we are on quicksand, aren't we?

CHAIR—Dodging and weaving. Thanks, Terry. Unless anyone has anything particular to say, we will end there. Is it the wish of the committee that the following documents—'Workshop paper and youth activities paper' presented by Mr Bullemor, 'Further development of a construction industry of the Port Keats/Daly River Reserve' presented by Mr Bullemor and the 'Plan for women and family dreams for the future' presented by Mrs Narndu—be tabled? There being no objection, the documents are so tabled.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 12.56 p.m.