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SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Estimates

FRIDAY, 3 JUNE 2011

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SENATE
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Friday, 3 June 2011

Senators in attendance: Senators Adams, Boyce, Crossin, Eggleston, Ludlam, McEwen, Moore, Scullion, Siewert and Payne

CROSS PORTFOLIO INDIGENOUS MATTERS**In Attendance**

Senator Arbib, Minister for Sport, Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development, and Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Mr Finn Pratt, Secretary

Ms Liza Carroll, Deputy Secretary

Ms Cath Halbert, Acting Deputy Secretary

Mr Bruce Hunter, Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer

Mr Andrew Tongue, Deputy Secretary

Ms Serena Wilson, Deputy Secretary

Outcome 7—Indigenous

Ms Robyn Calder, Acting Group Manager, Indigenous Leadership and Engagement

Mr Dave Chalmers, State Manager, Northern Territory

Ms Kate Gumley, Group Manager, Office of Remote Indigenous Housing

Ms Cate McKenzie, Group Manager, Women's and Children's Policy

Mr Bryan Palmer, Group Manager, Indigenous Communities and Economic Development

Mr Brian Stacey, Group Manager, Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination

Ms Lucy Bitmead, Branch Manager, Indigenous Housing Policy

Mr Mark Coffey, Branch Manager, Alice Springs Transformation Plan

Ms Lisa Croft, Branch Manager, Indigenous Housing Delivery

Mr Andrew Davitt, Branch Manager, Indigenous Budget and Coordination

Ms Mandy Doherty, Branch Manager, Indigenous Constitutional Recognition

Ms Allyson Essex, Branch Manager, CDEP Policy and Program Management

Mr Lex Dodd, Acting Branch Manager, Indigenous Programs

Mr Matthew James, Branch Manager, Performance and Evaluation

Mr Joe Martin-Jard, Branch Manager, Indigenous Policy

Mr Gavin Matthews, Branch Manager, Indigenous Housing Programs and Services

Ms Sally Moyle, Branch Manager, Land Reform

Ms Karen Pickering, Acting Branch Manager, Indigenous Community Safety Unit

Mr Geoffrey Richardson, Branch Manager, Governance and Community Strategies

Mr John Sheldon, Acting Branch Manager, Remote Service Delivery

Mr Pat Sowry, Branch Manager, Remote Housing, Northern Territory

Indigenous Business Australia

Mr Chris Fry, Chief Executive Officer

Ms Kaely Woods, Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Ms Dianne Rimington, Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Mr Satish Kumar, Chief Financial Officer

Northern Land Council

Mr Kim Hill, Chief Executive Officer

Mr Ron Levy, Principal Legal Officer

Ms Shanti Rama

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Mr Robert Griew, Associate Secretary

Ms Jo Wood, Group Manager, Indigenous Economic Strategy

Ms Katrina Fanning, Branch Manager, Indigenous Economic Strategy

Ms Tania Rishniw, Branch Manager, Indigenous Economic Strategy

Ms Fiona Buffinton, Group Manager, Specialist Employment Services

Ms Sharon Stuart, Branch Manager, Specialist Employment Services

Mr Derek Stiller, Branch Manager, Income Support Group

Ms Marsha Milliken, Branch Manager, Income Support Group

Mr Patrick Burford, Acting Branch Manager, National Schools and Youth Partnership

Ms Gabrielle Phillips, Branch Manager, National Schools and Youth Partnership

Department of Health and Ageing

Executive

Mr David Learmonth, Deputy Secretary

Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

Ms Linda Powell, First Assistant Secretary

Ms Tarja Saastamoinen, Assistant Secretary, Policy Branch

Mr Craig Ritchie, Assistant Secretary, Remote Health Services Development Branch

Dr Brendan Gibson, Director, Remote Health Services Development Branch

Mr Garry Fisk, Assistant Secretary, Capacity Development Branch

Mr John Shevlin, Assistant Secretary, Performance Support Branch

Dr John Walker, Acting Assistant Secretary, Family Health and Wellbeing Branch

Ms Alison Killen, Assistant Secretary, Better Health Care Branch

Regulatory Policy and Governance Division

Ms Teresa Ward, Assistant Secretary, Office of Hearing Services

Ms Lynne Clune, Director, Office of Hearing Services

Pharmaceutical Benefits Division

Ms Beryl Janz, Assistant Secretary, Community Pharmacy Branch

Ageing and Aged Care Division

Ms Samantha Robertson, Assistant Secretary, Residential Programs Management Branch

Health Workforce Division

Ms Bernadette Walker, Acting Assistant Secretary, Nursing, Allied and Indigenous Workforce Branch

Mr Graeme Rossiter, Director, Nursing, Allied and Indigenous Workforce Branch

Primary and Ambulatory Care Division

Mr Mark Booth, Acting First Assistant Secretary

Acute Care Division

Ms Veronica Hancock, Assistant Secretary, Hospital Development, Indemnity and Dental Branch

Mental Health and Chronic Disease Division

Ms Georgia Harman, First Assistant Secretary

Mr Leo Kennedy, Assistant Secretary, Chronic Disease and Alcohol Branch

Ms Colleen Krestensen, Assistant Secretary, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Branch

Mr Simon Cotterell, Assistant Secretary, Drug Strategy

Business Group

Mr Adam Davey, Assistant Secretary, Communications Branch

Ms Susan Parker, Director, Communications Branch

Office of Aged Care Quality and Compliance

Mr Iain Scott, First Assistant Secretary

Ms Fiona Nicholls, Assistant Secretary, Aged Care Workforce and Better Practice Programs Branch

Ms Lyn Murphy, Assistant Secretary, Quality and Monitoring Branch

Medical Benefits Division

Mr Richard Bartlett, First Assistant Secretary

Mr Shane Porter, Acting Assistant Secretary, Medicare Financing and Analysis Branch

Committee met at 09:03

CHAIR (Senator Moore): Good morning, everyone. We will commence the Community Affairs Legislation Committee on cross-portfolio Indigenous matters. The committee is considering budget estimates on Indigenous matters that senators have indicated that they wish to raise. They have been grouped on the program into themes and issues that relate to the portfolios of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, particularly in the employment area; Health and Ageing; Centrelink as an agency of the Human Services portfolio.

The committee must report to the Senate on 21 June 2011 and has set Friday, 22 July, as the date for the return of answers to questions taken on notice. Senators are reminded that any written questions on notice should be provided to the committee secretariat by the close of business next week, Friday, 10 June. Officers and senators are familiar with the rules of the

Senate governing estimates hearings and, if you need any assistance, the secretariat is here to help you. I particularly draw your attention to the Senate order of 13 May 2009, as I need to do, specifying the process by which a claim of public interest immunity should be raised.

The extract read as follows—

Public interest immunity claims

That the Senate—

(a) notes that ministers and officers have continued to refuse to provide information to Senate committees without properly raising claims of public interest immunity as required by past resolutions of the Senate;

(b) reaffirms the principles of past resolutions of the Senate by this order, to provide ministers and officers with guidance as to the proper process for raising public interest immunity claims and to consolidate those past resolutions of the Senate;

(c) orders that the following operate as an order of continuing effect:

(1) If:

(a) a Senate committee, or a senator in the course of proceedings of a committee, requests information or a document from a Commonwealth department or agency; and

(b) an officer of the department or agency to whom the request is directed believes that it may not be in the public interest to disclose the information or document to the committee, the officer shall state to the committee the ground on which the officer believes that it may not be in the public interest to disclose the information or document to the committee, and specify the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or document.

(2) If, after receiving the officer's statement under paragraph (1), the committee or the senator requests the officer to refer the question of the disclosure of the information or document to a responsible minister, the officer shall refer that question to the minister.

(3) If a minister, on a reference by an officer under paragraph (2), concludes that it would not be in the public interest to disclose the information or document to the committee, the minister shall provide to the committee a statement of the ground for that conclusion, specifying the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or document.

(4) A minister, in a statement under paragraph (3), shall indicate whether the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or document to the committee could result only from the publication of the information or document by the committee, or could result, equally or in part, from the disclosure of the information or document to the committee as in camera evidence.

(5) If, after considering a statement by a minister provided under paragraph (3), the committee concludes that the statement does not sufficiently justify the withholding of the information or document from the committee, the committee shall report the matter to the Senate.

(6) A decision by a committee not to report a matter to the Senate under paragraph (5) does not prevent a senator from raising the matter in the Senate in accordance with other procedures of the Senate.

(7) A statement that information or a document is not published, or is confidential, or consists of advice to, or internal deliberations of, government, in the absence of specification of the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or document, is not a statement that meets the requirements of paragraph (1) or (4).

(8) If a minister concludes that a statement under paragraph (3) should more appropriately be made by the head of an agency, by reason of the independence of that agency from ministerial direction or control, the minister shall inform the committee of that conclusion and the reason for that conclusion,

and shall refer the matter to the head of the agency, who shall then be required to provide a statement in accordance with paragraph (3).

(Extract, Senate Standing Orders, pp 124-125)

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

[09:04]

CHAIR: I welcome the minister, Senator the Hon. Mark Arbib, and officers of the portfolio departments. I welcome Mr Finn Pratt in his first Indigenous portfolio Senate estimates and also all the officers. Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Senator Arbib: No, thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: Mr Pratt, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr Pratt: No, thank you.

CHAIR: Mr Pratt, I also want to put my and the committee's appreciation on record at the beginning for the support your officers gave in coordinating the program, because one of the only ways that this day can work is if we can actually try and coordinate as effectively as we can beforehand, so as always Mr Tongue and the officers were able to give us great assistance.

Mr Pratt: You are welcome, Chair.

CHAIR: The committee will begin today's proceedings with matters relating to Closing the Gap, and then we will proceed following the order as set out in the circulated program. I intend to take the break after the Northern Land Council's appearance. Who is going to lead off? Senator Scullion.

Senator SCULLION: I will just kick off in terms of some general questions in regard to the National Indigenous Reform Agreement and some of the Closing the Gap targets. As we understand, and we all agree, some of the targets have been set in a number of areas: life expectancy, mortality rates, early childhood education, reading and writing and numeracy, attainment rates by Indigenous students in year 12, and employment outcomes. They are the principal areas under which we are looking at Closing the Gap. With respect to those, we are talking about within a generation, within a decade, within five years, within a decade, four years away in 2015, and again, within a decade. All of those are quite long periods of time. Have you set any interim targets in terms of Closing the Gap?

Mr James: In terms of interim targets, we have had a discussion in this committee before about the so-called trajectories. They have all been agreed across jurisdictions and were provided to the COAG Reform Council just before Christmas. That is the closest, I guess, we have got to that, so in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, the COAG Reform Council is required to do a number of things. Firstly, it has got to say whether the change in the target indicator has been statistically significant—that is, it is real—and secondly, whether or not it is in line with the trajectories—that is, whether the pace is fast enough. Obviously, it is going to be easier for the CRC to make definitive comments on that as we add more years, but the CRC's report will be released on 8 June—so next week—and that will have some assessment against the trajectories. The area where it will be able to make the biggest assessment is the literacy and numeracy—the reading, writing and numeracy—targets, because it has got three years of NAPLAN data; 2008, 2009, and 2010.

Senator SCULLION: Are you able to provide us with the trajectories, because from those trajectories we can extrapolate exactly what those targets are?

Mr James: I do not see that that would be a problem. I would just, as a courtesy, let the states and territories know that we are doing that, but I cannot see that that would be a problem.

Senator SCULLION: By the time we receive them, it is probably likely that the report would be out. Do you have an understanding about when that reporting date would be?

Mr James: The COAG Reform Council report will be out next week on 8 June.

Senator SCULLION: I think given the timing under which that will happen, one would not think there would be any problems from the states.

Mr James: The report itself has quite a bit of detail on the trajectories as it is, but I cannot remember whether it has got every single trajectory in that or not.

Senator SCULLION: Outside of the obvious one and the answer in terms of the NAPLAN testing, what are the other ones under which you try to measure success?

Mr James: For example, we can only measure life expectancy every five years, but you can measure mortality trends every year. So, that is an example where we have actually got a separate trajectory for that and there are trajectories for all of the targets. One of the challenges we have is that some of the targets are measured more frequently than others, but in all instances we have got what we call proxy indicators—that is, an indicator you would focus on when you do not actually have the headline target for that year.

Senator SCULLION: Often when you have a target or a trajectory, part of the challenge is that you simply do not have the sort of data that you would need to be able to work that out. Have you identified areas under which you think you need to either measure more or gather more data to be able to come up with an empirical answer?

Mr James: Yes, there are ongoing challenges with data gaps. There is a schedule in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement itself that identified agreed actions to improve data, so yes, there are data issues across a range of areas, but there is work ongoing to try to address those. Another challenge, of course, is that some of the data by its very nature is a little volatile from year to year, so you are going to be able to get a better read if you look at a two-year trend rather than one year. We actually have a working group with the jurisdictions that I chair, where we go through all the data issues on the NIRA, we follow what is happening with data gaps and keep an eye on that. There has been quite a bit of improvement in data in recent years, but there are still some ongoing challenges.

Senator SCULLION: In New South Wales, as you would be aware, the Auditor-General has released a report, *Two ways together*, a plan of the New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs, which shows 10 years of reform that appear, certainly by reading this document, has done little other than raise public awareness of the need to address Aboriginal disadvantage, and the disadvantage is clearly, on any measure, still substantial. As FaHCSIA is the lead agency in the reform process, what actions have been implemented to address the recommendations of this report?

Ms Halbert: You may be aware we have a range of working groups that sit under COAG, so the minister for our portfolio chairs the working group on Indigenous reform and it has a number of subgroups through which we try to monitor and drive progress for the states to

meet their commitments under all of the COAG agreements—Indigenous specific and mainstream agreements—that might affect Indigenous Australians. With regard to that report, the working group on Indigenous reform has not met yet, but we are going through that auditor's report to see the implications and we will be talking with New South Wales about that.

Senator SCULLION: This is an important report because it does go to a lot of the detail about the process of implementation. I always contend that it is a Commonwealth matter but you cannot go to sleep in the Commonwealth; you have actually got to do it in a state or territory somewhere. New South Wales is a pretty good example about how this is going or not going. You may not be across the details, but as you said, if you are across the report, on page 3 of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, it states, 'The agreement sets out the objectives, outcomes, outputs, performance indicators and benchmarks.' So, how often do you review those measurements?

Mr James: In fact, I actually happened to bring the New South Wales audit report with me. On page 3, one of the points they made was that they found evidence of 250 targets, indicators and measures, which are set at various times. That is a very large number of indicators. In the NIRA there are only 27 indicators and the main process in terms of seeing where that is going is the annual COAG Reform Council report.

Senator SCULLION: Oddly, I am sorry, I did not mean to mislead you. I was actually referring to the National Indigenous Reform Agreement—the national agreement—not to the auditor's report, although they are both mentioned on page three, I have to say. I was referring to the National Indigenous Reform Agreement and Closing the Gap—that is the agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia, including New South Wales—and I was referring to your own agreement, not to the report.

Mr James: Yes, that is right. Was your question, though, how often do we look at the performance indicators and benchmarks?

Senator SCULLION: That is right. The agreement states that you set out the objectives, the outcomes, outputs, performance indicators and benchmarks. They are all a bunch of measures, but as you have indicated we know more every time we have a look at them, so how often are you actually reviewing those measures?

Mr James: When you say 'reviewing the measures', if you mean the actual performance against the measures, that is annually. Every year there is a process for all COAG agreements whereby, I think it is, 3 July or 4 July we have to agree the detailed specifications for all indicators, so all the indicators are under review every year because sometimes new data becomes available or we can improve the specification of an indicator. To give one example, in the last budget I think the government announced that there was going to be another two rounds of the Australian Early Development Index, so that potentially allows that to be used as a measure as well.

Senator SCULLION: Are those reviews of the measures consistent in terms of what time of the year you do them? So, is it the end of the financial year or earlier—when are they conducted?

Mr James: In terms of the indicators for the next round of the NIRA reporting it is early July—either 3 July or 4 July—we have to provide the detailed specifications to what is called

the review of government services committee. The Productivity Commission is the secretariat for that committee and the Productivity Commission then has the job of collecting all of the data together from all of the agencies against those detailed data specifications, so it happens every year.

Senator SCULLION: You mentioned one of the changes to the agreement is subsequent to some of the reviews. Have you got any other examples or changes to the agreement that have been made as a result of the reviews?

Mr James: In terms of the agreement itself, the NIRA, there was a refresh in February this year that was agreed by COAG. That included a number of changes—some changes to indicator specifications—but also it provided the national level trajectories in the NIRA itself. It does not have all the jurisdictional trajectories just because of space limitations.

Ms Halbert: I will add that just currently within the Commonwealth there is a process to review the appropriateness of the indicators as well, so we are refreshing in that way as well.

Mr James: That review, I think, is meant to be completed by July, but that will affect not the next cycle but the cycle thereafter.

Senator SCULLION: So, I am taking from that, with the exception of those issues that you have mentioned, the government is currently satisfied that all programs are receiving the best outcomes.

Ms Halbert: We are reliant on the COAG Reform Council report to report on progress. When that comes out I am sure we will find a range of areas where there are still challenges, but we use those reports and, as Mr James has been saying, our arrangements with the states and territories are to continuously monitor and implement change when that is required.

Senator SCULLION: Where would I go to find the current performance outcome data that you would gather there?

Mr James: There is actually a report that accompanies the CRC report that will be out next week and that gives you all the data. It is actually a very, very large report but it accompanies the CRC report.

Senator SCULLION: So, that would be available about this time every year, so it is something to look for in terms of that data?

Mr James: Yes.

Senator SCULLION: Government reports at present appear only to measure inputs and it has been a constant consideration of mine that it only seems to measure the inputs of how much money is actually spent. We talk about how much money is spent on this and that, and we always seem to be pretty light on the actual outcomes: what improvements are being made and how we are tangibly closing the gap. Are you looking at how we might improve having a better understanding, not of the input—we have done that—but just in terms of some of the outputs? It just makes it easier for Australians and people like me, who are trying to understand this better, to understand.

As I said, it is not hard to find the inputs, but it always seems very difficult to find the actual outputs about the measurables and tangibles—how did that go? We spent this much money, we employed this many people, we have got 500 four-wheel drives, or whatever it is, but if you look at the outcome that we are trying to provide and the motive behind it, it is

always hard—it appears to me anyway, to be very difficult—to find out what the outcome was.

Ms Halbert: Through a range of reports, including the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory monitoring report and the Prime Minister's Closing the Gap statement to parliament, we do seek to at this stage report on outputs as well as the inputs. We have not got the actual high-level outcomes at this point and I will ask Mr James to talk a bit further about that, but we do seek to report on the outputs as well.

Mr James: I suppose with the NIRA, as much as possible we are trying to measure outcomes: what has happened to life expectancy, child mortality and things like that, so the actual outcomes. There are some challenges with that, of course, where on some occasions the indicators you end up using end up being maybe not pure outcome indicators, but as much as possible we try to move to outcome indicators.

Senator BOYCE: What is an example of that?

Mr James: Take the year 12 target. The way we are measuring that with the National Indigenous Reform Agreement is based on the percentage of 20- to 24-year-olds who have a year 12 or equivalent qualification. The main source for that is the census, but between census times we look at apparent school retention. I guess apparent school retention is kind of an outcome variable, but it is not a great one, so the longer term goal there might be to move more towards a measure of certification, that is what percentage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous young kids have actually achieved a year 12 or equivalent qualification. That is an example where the proxy indicator we have is not perfect.

Senator BOYCE: That is almost across the board, is it not?

Mr James: It varies. For example, the NAPLAN data is quite good data, so you have got an annual good measure every year, so you do not need a proxy in that instance.

Senator SCULLION: A significant part of the New South Wales Auditor-General's report was that the office claimed that agencies need to be more publicly accountable. It said that there needed to be clear recognition that the local community is best placed to understand its own needs and to be responsible for its own future, but importantly he found that poor indicators, targets and measures have contributed significantly to the lack of accountability by agencies. I am not suggesting there is any mischief in that. I understand the difficulties in time. We have started on what seems like a recent journey, but it is a pretty significant period; they have looked over 10 years. Whilst I am not suggesting there is mischief by agencies, given that at this point of our development and being able to find some benchmarks to be able to get there, is the agency doing anything to address that particular commentary and recommendation from the Auditor-General in New South Wales?

Mr James: To be honest, I do know about the report. I have got it in front of me, but I have not had a chance to look at it in detail. I do think we should consider that in the context of the review of the NIRA indicators. I mentioned one point there where the auditor found that there were too many indicators—he was saying it had found 250 or something—so that is a consideration as well. In fact, that is one of the criteria we will look at in terms of the NIRA; do we have the number of indicators right? Because it is a trade-off; if you have too many indicators it just becomes very hard to follow, whereas if you have too few you cannot really assess progress as well as you need to.

Ms Halbert: Obviously, we cannot speak for New South Wales and how they will respond to the report. Clearly, they have just gone through a period of significant change, but we would expect that they would do as we are doing within the Commonwealth, which is then to have a look at the appropriateness, the effectiveness of the indicators, and how the data is being collected.

Mr Pratt: As a general response to your question, the New South Wales auditor is clearly looking backwards 10 years. I would have to say, being relatively new to this area, that quite clearly the government has taken a different approach here with the Closing the Gap targets in themselves. They are quite clear, outcome focused targets. We have just been talking about the trajectories that are being used to measure ongoing performance against that and the range of input and output indicators which are available to track that. It seems clear to me that we, in fact, have made great strides in this area in recent years.

Senator SCULLION: With respect, Mr Pratt, I find it very difficult over the last three years with the CTG reforms to really know if the gap is closing or not in some areas. I understand some of the difficulty, but they are looking quite forensically in this area over the last 10 years and one of the substantive recommendations is for more transparency. For example, some of the jurisdictional plans or the regional plans are secret. There are some significant criticisms about nobody knowing what they are and the communities not being involved. The Commonwealth has only been playing in the space in this particular iteration for a short period of time, but I would have thought that, whilst that is historical and this is a whole new start, the rear-vision mirror in this case would have provided a lot of instruction about perhaps the sorts of things we need to be cautious of about repeating the same process.

Mr Pratt: Yes, I understand your point of view and I agree. The audit report reported some very important things which governments need to focus on. My point is that I think that is what the Commonwealth government has been doing in the last couple of years, and of course we will see the CRC reports over future years which will give us much greater clarity around actual achievements.

Senator Arbib: Can I just add to that? I think we are doing the complete opposite to what has happened in the past, as Mr Pratt has said, and the data will become much more useful over time now because it is still early days, as you have said. As we see more data coming out and the trajectories, we will know exactly where we stand, but that is going to take some time.

Senator SCULLION: Can you give us an appreciation of when the COAG Closing the Gap implementation plans would be made available for public scrutiny with all their indicators and targets?

Mr James: I might seek some assistance from my colleagues, but I understand that quite a number of the implementation plans for the NIRA are already publicly available. I might pass over to a colleague.

Mr Davitt: The National Indigenous Reform Agreement is of itself an umbrella agreement that tries to capture a lot of the essence of what is occurring in other areas. As you would be aware, the NIRA is a mechanism for saying here are our targets, here are our objectives and here are the range of agreements that sit under this that are going to get us to where we think we need to be. Some of those agreements are Indigenous specific, such as the Indigenous health outcomes NP, remote service delivery and those sorts of agreements, and others are mainstream agreements. Under those agreements there are implementation plans,

and it is really those agreements that drive us towards the achievement of Closing the Gap targets.

Senator SCULLION: So, what is the availability of those agreements; where are they all found?

Ms Halbert: There is a range of agreements called the overarching bilateral implementation plans, which where they have been agreed, they are publicly available on the internet.

Mr Davitt: On the Treasury website.

Senator SCULLION: From the Commonwealth's perspective, I am taking it that there are no problems about making them transparent. Is that subject to the states? So, if they are not on the website, they are either incomplete or the states and territories have not agreed?

Ms Halbert: That is correct.

Senator SCULLION: In the circumstances where a state or territory has not agreed to the publication or the transparency of the plan, which states and territories would they be?

Mr Davitt: No jurisdiction has not agreed to have their plan published. There are two that remain to be finalised, with the ACT and Western Australia, but all others are finalised and published.

Senator SCULLION: Thank you.

CHAIR: Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT: Can I go first off to a question that I usually ask and that is: do you have a spreadsheet of expenditure against the different measures under Closing the Gap?

Ms Halbert: We do not have a spreadsheet; there are multiple agreements under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, but within each agreement we would be able to track expenditure.

Senator SIEWERT: In the past you have given us a great, big spreadsheet with the expenditure against the various programs.

Ms Halbert: That is total government expenditure. In fact, recently the Indigenous Expenditure Report was released, which has a very comprehensive report on all state, territory and Commonwealth spending.

Senator SIEWERT: Where do I find that?

Mr James: That report is on the Productivity Commission website. It is the Indigenous Expenditure Report and it is the most comprehensive ever collection of spending. The thing that it has done that other reports have not done before is that it attempts to estimate the spending in mainstream, if you like, programs, that is universal programs.

Senator SIEWERT: What I am going to do is look at that and if I have got any more questions, I am going to put some on notice. I might have to ask this particular question in the health report, although it does belong in the monitoring report section. In the last two reports you have not been giving the raw data for the number of hospital separations for children under various conditions and I am wondering if that data is available and can you give it to us if it is?

Mr James: Yes, I think we could provide that on notice. The reason we are not providing the raw numbers is we reflected on those numbers, and generally with hospitalisation data you do it per 1,000 or so population, because otherwise a raw number does not give you a sense of the scale of the issue. So, that is why we changed: to be more consistent with what, for example, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare does in its publications.

Senator SIEWERT: But you can provide that on notice?

Mr James: I think we could. I will confer with DoHA, but I do not see that there will be a problem with that. There will be some areas where we would suppress really small cell sizes, but that would be using protocols that are established with the Northern Territory government, for example.

Senator SIEWERT: I think that will answer my next question in actual fact, if you provide that. That would be appreciated. The next question on that one I need to ask in health. Senator Scullion, are you and everybody else done with that reform because my next question is at Cape York?

CHAIR: I was just wondering about moving on to that. Are we finished with the national Indigenous reform process?

Senator BOYCE: I have got a couple of general questions and then I have got some Queensland ones.

CHAIR: We will go to your general questions and at 9.40, if you are not finished, we will go to Cape York and then at 9.50 we will go to Alice Springs, just so people know with the time.

Senator BOYCE: Mr Pratt, did the Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services write to the secretary of FaHCSIA in mid-2010 saying that there were problems within the department that were impacting on the efficient and effective implementation of the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership?

Mr Pratt: That is before my time. I will seek assistance on this matter.

Mr Tongue: Normally the Coordinator-General raises issues in his reports. I would have to check about a letter. I will just seek assistance. We are not aware of such a letter, so can I take that on notice and come back to you?

Senator BOYCE: Yes. Perhaps when you come back to me you could provide the date of the letter and advise whether the letter could be made public. If not, can you tell me what concerns were raised in the letter and what actions have been taken in response to the letter?

Mr Tongue: Yes.

Senator BOYCE: Could you tell me, as a general comment, as to whether the Coordinator-General has raised concerns across the board around the department's ability to effectively and efficiently implement the partnership?

Mr Tongue: The coordinator has pointed to some areas where he thinks we could improve our capability. Some of that is to do with the skills and training of staff working with remote Indigenous communities. Some of it is to do with the speed with which we are able to give effect to the various aspirations of remote communities.

Senator BOYCE: Or the lack of it.

Mr Tongue: Or the lack of it, I should say. The coordinator has made observations of government, state and territory agencies in each of his reports. As he is not here, I do not want to—

Senator BOYCE: No. We will certainly be asking for him to come next time.

Mr Pratt: As the new secretary I have met with the Coordinator-General on a number of occasions, in fact quite frequently, and like Mr Tongue I certainly do not want to verbal him in any way, but the indications I have got from him have been generally quite positive. We have agreed and I have this view that this is an area of such significance and importance that we need to constantly focus on driving implementation. He has not given me the impression that there are outstanding concerns with the department's capacity to do its job. As I said, I do not want to verbal the Coordinator-General and at the next sitting of this hearing we will be able to provide his direct assessment. So far, I would have to characterise our discussions as relatively positive.

CHAIR: I want to put on record that it was clearly advised by this committee that we would not be seeking the Coordinator-General at this meeting.

Senator BOYCE: I appreciate that, and that is why I mentioned the fact that our request was after the time that it should have been put in.

Senator Arbib: He has made himself available on numerous occasions.

Senator BOYCE: Yes, absolutely.

Senator Arbib: He is the first to talk about the challenges and the complexities of the issue. We want him to challenge us as a government. We want him to challenge all governments to ensure that we are meeting our obligations. If he has criticism, then we welcome it.

Senator BOYCE: My questions went to his interaction with the department and not around the partnership itself.

Senator Arbib: I understand. We do not know whether that letter exists or does not exist. As Mr Tongue has said, we are happy to check that. Overall, I would say that we have a robust relationship with the coordinator. We certainly take on board any criticism that he has and we will work towards ensuring that we meet our obligations.

CHAIR: We can move on.

Senator BOYCE: We will move on to a whole new section. The baseline maps were going to be done so that you could work out the remote service delivery communities and the scope of the local implementation plans. How many complete baseline maps have now been provided to the 29 priority communities?

Mr James: All but four have been provided to communities. The only four that have not are the Cape York Welfare Reform communities.

Senator BOYCE: Are they the complete baseline maps?

Mr James: Yes.

Senator BOYCE: How many of the local implementation plans had been written before the baseline maps were available?

Mr James: Before I answer that I might mention that on notice we provided to the committee the key points from all 29 baseline reports. We would have to take the implementation plan on notice. In terms of the material in the baseline reports, that was available within government well before they were provided to communities. Often the issues that are identified in the baseline mapping reports were well known. There were some new issues and the reports are much more detailed. As for the specific detail of when a particular local implementation plan was finalised, we would have to take that on notice. I do not have that detail in front of me.

Senator BOYCE: My question goes to the ownership of the plans if you did not have the baseline maps.

Mr James: As I said, a lot of the issues with the baseline mapping were quite well understood anyway. I think quite a few of them were available before local implementation plans, but it depends on each place. The other point with local implementation plans is that it is not as if you just have the initial draft of the local implementation plan and it can never change.

Senator BOYCE: How many of the local implementation plans have community safety plans involving child safety?

Mr James: I will have to pass to my colleague on that one.

Mr Palmer: I do not have the details of the specific contents of the local implementation plans. There are some 3,800 actions in the local implementation plans.

Senator BOYCE: But there are only 29 plans.

Mr Palmer: There are 29 plans, yes.

Senator BOYCE: Perhaps on notice you could provide to us how many of those 29 plans include community safety plans, especially those covering child safety issues.

Mr Palmer: Certainly.

Mr Tongue: Do you mean community safety plans or actions relevant to community safety?

Senator BOYCE: Perhaps both. That sounds like a good solution.

CHAIR: There is an officer attracting your attention.

Ms McKenzie: Twenty of the 29 RSD communities have explicitly identified the development of a community safety plan in their LIP. Six RSD communities have identified alternative, but similar, mechanisms to community safety plans, such as the implementation of identified strategies through community safety committees. Three RSD communities are yet to finalise their community safety plans.

CHAIR: I will jump in because it is 20 to 10 and any other questions will need to go on notice for that area.

Senator BOYCE: Thank you.

CHAIR: We will now move to the Alice Springs issue. Senator Scullion.

Senator SCULLION: What is the long-term future of the Cape York plan? It is the second year in a row where we have decided to provide a one-year extension. Certainly for people existing within a plan it is hardly something to base a career on. I am not sure about

the circumstances under which you would have said this. Is it that we are just not confident about the plan? What are the reasons for only giving an extension of a year?

Ms Halbert: We are currently in the process of evaluating the Cape York Welfare Reform. We have done one phase of a three-phase evaluation, so that is the reason that the long-term future has not been established. We need to complete the evaluation.

Senator SCULLION: How long will the evaluation take?

Mr James: As Ms Halbert mentioned, there are three parts to it. The first part is the Family Responsibility Commission implementation review that is available on the FaHCSIA website. The second part is what we call a progress review that will be done by the end of this year. Shortly following that there will be the full outcomes evaluation. With the outcomes evaluation we are attempting to do quite a bit of data matching to try to make it as rigorous as we possibly can. For example, you can tell something from the aggregate school attendance data, but what we want to do is break it down to what happened to school attendance patterns for a family before and after they had a contact with the Families Responsibility Commission. We are also going to look at whether we can do comparisons with other communities. We are working closely with the Queensland government and also Cape York institute and partnership in that evaluation. It is a joint exercise across those three players.

Senator SCULLION: Do you have an expected completion date for the review?

Mr James: We are looking at the progress review being finished by the end of this year. That is the key next step.

Senator SIEWERT: Is that this calendar year?

Mr James: This calendar year, yes.

Ms Halbert: And the whole evaluation by the middle of 2012.

Mr James: The progress review will be a very important step on that.

Senator SCULLION: So we could reasonably say that by this time next year a decision will be made, given that it has had a year extension, where people could feel confident that a decision would be made completely about its future and the proper program rather than taking another year?

Ms Halbert: Clearly, that is a matter for the government, but the information will be available.

Senator SCULLION: I would like to go back to the evaluation process. You talk about those people who have had access to the Family Relationship Commissioner and those families or individuals who may not have had access to try to have some relativity. How have you gone about working out the motive for someone not having access to them and how that would impact the outcomes?

Mr James: You try to at least link any change in behaviour to the assistance, so the comparison would not be so much with people who had not gone to the FRC, but more the same people as to whether their own behaviour has changed over time and also, potentially, you could do some matching, but we need to work this out because it is quite complex. You could potentially do some matching with people in other communities, but that is a complex process because it needs to be like-for-like as much as possible.

Senator SCULLION: What you are saying is that you are measuring the changes in individuals within the program rather than having it controlled outside of the program.

Mr James: That would be the first thing. The first thing that you would try would be a before-and-after type approach, but then you would also look to see whether you could do some comparisons with people in other communities, for example other parts of the Cape York.

Senator SCULLION: So the second phase of the evaluation will be available when it is complete?

Mr James: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Who is doing the evaluation?

Mr James: Stage 2 and stage 3 will be going to tender in the next few days, so I cannot answer that.

Senator SIEWERT: Why is it only starting now? Why was it not put in place when the trial started?

Mr James: The implementation review, which was the first phase, has already been completed. We have had an evaluation strategy the whole way through, so it is not as if we have not been doing anything before. There are some documents that are available around the evaluation apart from the ones that I have mentioned. I would need to go to my notes to find those.

Senator SIEWERT: Stage 2 and 3 of the evaluation are starting now after the extension.

Mr James: They are not really completely starting now because we have been doing a lot of preparatory work. What is about to start is the actual contracting for the really detailed work. We have been doing a lot of planning to get to this stage. It is not as if we are just starting now. In fact, if we had not done all of the work that we did before, then we would not be here. For example, there was an evaluation framework and program theory developed by Courage Partners in the second half of 2008 and we have been using that to help us with this whole evaluation. That framework is on our website.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. I will follow that up later.

Senator BOYCE: Is it correct that there are 19 remote Indigenous communities in Queensland?

Ms Halbert: Yes.

Senator BOYCE: Aurukun, Cohen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge, which are in the Cape York project, were included in the remote service delivery national partnership. My query is that, given that they were already two years into their welfare reform project, why were they included rather than including other perhaps less well resourced communities?

Mr Tongue: The selection of the communities as part of the remote service delivery national partnership was an interaction between the federal government and the state and territory governments. I was not part of that negotiation, however the effort that was already going into those four communities as part of the welfare reform process reflected the sorts of practices that we were hoping to replicate more broadly across the other 25 communities, so in our negotiations with Queensland a judgment was made to put all the communities into the wider national partnership which is, from memory, worth \$290 million over a period of time.

Senator BOYCE: To those communities?

Mr Tongue: The bulk of the resourcing is associated with the effort to support the communities, so it pays for Indigenous engagement officers, the development of community safety plans and those sorts of things.

Senator BOYCE: There is some wonder that perhaps other communities were far more in need. Every one of those communities and certainly some of those remote communities are in great need. The concern has been raised that it is simply a cost-shifting effort by the Bligh government that this funding has gone there rather than into other communities when there was already a lot of reform work and support for the Cape York communities.

Mr Tongue: There are certainly communities in remote Australia that are not in the broad 29 communities who have expressed a view that they would like to be part of the remote service delivery exercise. Reflecting on the philosophy of what we are trying to achieve around remote service delivery, to date governments have held the line about not expanding that number of 29 because of the effort that is required to work with those communities in a remote context. It is the case that we think we can only focus on a limited number of communities. I am not surprised that you have heard that some communities in Queensland might like to be on the list. We are aware of other communities across Northern Australia, in particular, that would like to be on the list. It is an effort to try to contain and focus our efforts; rather than trying to do a little bit for a lot of communities, to try to continue to do what we are doing for all communities, but focus our effort on a smaller number.

Senator BOYCE: I will leave it there.

CHAIR: We will move on to the next item, Alice Springs.

Senator SIEWERT: I have a question and I do not know if it belongs here or this afternoon in health. It is about the Bath Street Lodge. Should I ask that in health? It is about when the lodge is expected to open and is related to dialysis.

Ms Halbert: It would be best with health.

Senator SCULLION: I refer to the Alice Springs Transformation Plan and particularly to the rollout of the houses. I have already commended the minister publicly. It is proceeding quite well. The amenity that the houses have provided is great. What I am not aware of, and obviously it is something that you may know rather than myself—there has been a lot of movement into Alice Springs and a lot of difficulty with some of that movement—have the people who have occupied the new houses indicated or have you observed whether or not they are subject to the same overcrowding that we were trying to offset by the provision of new houses?

Mr Coffey: We have touched base with some of the new tenants after they have been in the houses for some time. There is certainly an indication that it has reduced the overcrowding for them. Along with the new houses come tenancy reforms and with that come rules around the management of visitors and also support services so that the residents of those houses can deal with visitors when they come in. Complementing that is the opening of the visitor park in February this year. Traditionally people that were visiting Alice Springs that did not have anywhere to stay would stay in the town camps. Now there is a safe and affordable option of staying at the visitor park.

Senator SCULLION: The tenancy agreement has been much wider than the previous tenancy agreements. It is a new way of doing business and we have all accepted that needs to be the way forward. When you say that you continue to liaise with the tenants in these houses, do you have an audit process? Ordinarily the audit would be higher frequency, but as people become completely compliant then the audit frequency would become less and less in a notional sense. Do you have set periods under which you would first visit, where you would inspect the house to make sure that they are in compliance after three months and then after a certain period of time? How does that work in regard to the tenancy agreements in the Alice Springs Transformation Plan?

Mr Coffey: That is a role for the Northern Territory Department of Housing through their tenancy agreement. They have some set times when they visit. There are also some other programs that we have implemented like the Intensive Tenancy Support Program where a non-government organisation is funded to work with tenants in their house. They are the people who need high levels of support. They would visit them sometimes on a daily basis to provide support and link them in with other services that are available out there to ensure that they have the support and skills necessarily to maintain their tenancy. We also do it informally through the government business managers and Indigenous engagement officers. They are in the town camps on a daily basis talking to residents and talking to the housing associations so if any issues arise we refer them back to the relevant department.

Senator SCULLION: The areas that you are talking about are education and things like environmental health. While you say that the Commonwealth are involved in managing tenancy agreement, and I accept that is their role, what sort of role does the government or yourself, in your particular role, play because you oversee these arrangements? Do you or your officers participate in that same process of auditing with the Northern Territory government or is it completely their role and you know nothing about it?

Mr Coffey: The Northern Territory Department of Housing look after tenancy arrangements. As the Alice Springs Transformation Plan is a joint Northern Territory government-Australian government initiative we have some involvement, but probably at arm's length. We certainly have close linkages with them and where issues arise then we immediately talk to their people to address those issues.

Senator SCULLION: Have you had circumstances where people have had to be evicted or are in a crisis position, or are all of the issues that you are saying that you are bringing into place bringing about a normalisation in the way that the house would be looked after and the capacities to resist larger numbers of people than are allowed under the tenancy agreement? I know I am asking for an opinion in a general sense because I am not able to get some specifics, but do you think that is being met?

Mr Coffey: To date there have been no evictions. We could get some specific data from the Northern Territory government, but in a general sense we have seen a marked improvement in the general amenity in a number of town camps. That is not to say that it is in all town camps, but in a number of them.

Senator SCULLION: I understand that when you have a new house it is pretty much a new start. But there is a difference between that and those people in a town camp, for example, who have had a refurbishment—and I am on the record about my views on those. Is it more difficult to be able to manage a new tenancy agreement where the level of amenity has

remained pretty much as it was before? Is it easier with the new houses in terms of managing that arrangement?

Mr Coffey: That would be a matter for the Northern Territory Department of Housing.

Ms Gumley: I can also add that the Northern Territory government has advised that they have quarterly inspections and that, under the tenancy agreements, visitors are only permitted to stay for up to six weeks or less if requested by the tenant. That is part of the normal terms and conditions of the lease agreement that they administer.

Senator SCULLION: Obviously you have this joint arrangement in the transformation plan and more widely with SIHIP and a number of other arrangements that you have in place. Are you privy to how those inspections are going? In other words, after the first inspection how many breaches, not in terms of compliance, show that obviously an education process has to happen? Are you aware of some details of those processes?

Ms Gumley: I do not have that information with me.

Senator SCULLION: Is it entirely a matter for the Northern Territory government? I know it is not, but on notice can you provide information as to how well people are adjusting to the new tenancy agreements in those circumstances in the new houses given that there is a quarterly inspection? You can take that on notice. Obviously you are not aware of that.

Ms Gumley: We will take that on notice.

Senator SCULLION: With the new rules that have been applied to the visitors centre, which is basically strict liability about alcohol and those sorts of areas, have you been aware of how compliance is being maintained and managed? Is it still a place where there is no alcohol at all? Have there been difficulties in that area?

Mr Coffey: I am aware that there have been some issues from time to time, but it is a fully secure facility. It remains that way. However, I am aware that people have let other people into the gate and there have been people that have had to be removed. Generally speaking, it has been highly successful and is working really well with fairly high occupancy rates.

Senator SCULLION: Who provides the security? I understand that there is security within the secure area.

Mr Coffey: Aboriginal Hostels Ltd manages the property and they look after any issues that arise.

CHAIR: It is now 10 o'clock and that is the end of the opening session. I am going to see whether I can change the program as we have people stuck in a plane. I am checking to see whether it is possible to have Indigenous Housing next followed by the Land Council. Are the housing officers here, Mr Pratt?

Mr Pratt: Yes.

CHAIR: I know Senator Payne has questions on housing so I am going to check to see whether she can come. We have people who are due to give evidence for the National Land Council who are in the fog.

Senator SCULLION: Are they flying in?

CHAIR: Yes. On that basis we contacted Senator Payne, but Senator Scullion can kick off. Thank you to the officers. I apologise for this, but it is beyond my control. We are now going to move to housing.

CHAIR: Welcome to the officers for housing. Senator Scullion will start questioning.

Mr Pratt: We are waiting on one officer, so if we come to something where we will need his expertise then we might have to take it on notice.

CHAIR: We are waiting on one senator as well. We are hoping that Senator Payne will be able to come soon.

Senator SCULLION: In the last estimates I referred to a budget document that was prepared by the Alliance Partners for the SIHIP preliminary works at Wadeye. I understand a copy of this budget has been supplied to the department and details \$20.6 million in expenditure. What was the total value of the Wadeye package? I asked in question 218 last time, but I have to say that I do not think that you really answered the question. Part 2 of the question on notice was: what was the value of each of the above packages? You stated, 'The total value of the packages was \$550—blah blah; infrastructure work has been funded; national partnerships as foreshadowed—blah blah; release of the funds by the Commonwealth is subject to targets being met and as such not all funds are released yet.' I ask the question again, because it was in a number of other questions: what was the total value of the Wadeye package?

Ms Gumley: Mr Sowry is joining us. He manages our Northern Territory work. Could we take national matters first and follow that with Northern Territory matters? He should not be too far away.

Senator SCULLION: Senator Payne is going to be dealing with some of those matters.

Senator BOYCE: Senator Payne will be doing those and she was expected to be here at 11 and not 10.

Mr Pratt: I would be happy to take it on notice.

CHAIR: We will have a short break and I will see what we can do with the program because it has been thrown out. Are those officers for employment and economic development in the room?

Mr Tongue: No.

CHAIR: I am just checking. Sometimes people come for the whole day, as you know.

Proceedings suspended from 10:04 to 10:14

CHAIR: We will reconvene. We are now going back into Indigenous housing. I put on record my appreciation for Senator Payne, who has been able to change her schedule to get here, and also to the officers who had to come forward when they were expecting not to come on until later.

Senator SCULLION: We had some preliminary questions earlier. I think I got up to asking: what was the total value of the Wadeye package?

Ms Gumley: The value for the Wadeye rebuild and refurbishment and new housing package is \$62.3 million. That is the total value of the package.

Senator SCULLION: What was the basis under which that sum was agreed to? There must have been a negotiated basis where someone has done an assessment. Houses are easy;

they are X amount. I think it was \$450,000 notionally allocated. But how do you come to the conclusion that that much money is actually required?

Ms Gumley: It did not start on the basis of how much money was required house by house. In the original negotiations with the Northern Territory government there was an amount of money that was invested with the NTG. Then there were decisions made around which communities would participate and then an amount was provided for houses, refurbishments and rebuilds for each community. Each community was given advice about a notional allocation.

Senator SCULLION: We have agreed to that as a budget. You are now aware, as you have indicated, that it has been in the media. I have spoken previously about the 15 managers/supervisors/students—all those sorts of processes—being acceptable given that the new houses are going to be built by subcontractors who have their own supervisors and managers. This is just in regard to Wadeye. The Thamurrurr Housing Construction Company has built a large number—50 per cent or whatever the number is—of the houses. They had all their own processes. Have you questioned the alliance about why they would require the 15-odd supervisor/managers given that half of that money is actually being allocated to another company?

Ms Gumley: The requirements for the alliances are to manage the overall cost and outcomes delivered from a package. So they, as the head contractor, are responsible for a number of matters, including accountability to the Northern Territory government to deliver those outcomes. They are the tier 1 contractor that is required to have Federal Safety Commissioner accreditation and make sure that all of the worksites in that area meet that. In addition, the Thamurrurr Development Corporation is now building at much higher levels than what they had previously. A lot of that has been the result of investment and effort from the alliance in supporting the growth of that company, moving from doing about seven or eight houses a year to 49 over the two-year period.

Senator SCULLION: I think it can reasonably be said they were quite capable of building the 49; they just needed someone to provide the funds. Who signed off on the payments or agreed to the charges that are actually invoiced to the government? I know there has been an allocation of \$62.3 million. That is one lump. I would have thought there were payments, either quarterly payments or payments per house or by task. I am not really sure how it works. How are those payments signed off and how are they made?

Ms Gumley: Those payments are subject to the contracts between the Northern Territory government and the alliances. The Australian government is not a party to those contracts, and the funds released from the Northern Territory government go to the alliances. We are not part of that process. We are certainly there working with our joint management team in the alliances in the allocation of work, making sure that the works are completed, the housing reference groups are consulted, and working with cost estimators, et cetera. But the actual funds release is a NTG matter, because it is their contract.

Senator SCULLION: But we all know that, because of the complete mismanagement of this by the Northern Territory government in the initial phases of SIHIP, and the public pressure. The Commonwealth government has officers embedded in the process in the Northern Territory. We thought that was a good thing. You are not aware at all of the

payment processes and how that might work? I would have thought that would have been fundamental to making sure that the Commonwealth gets what it wants.

Ms Gumley: I could tell you generally, but they are Northern Territory matters so there would be invoicing arrangements and then they will make regular payments where they meet satisfactory requirements. But other than that, it is really a matter for the Northern Territory government.

Senator SCULLION: This is always a very difficult part about the Senate estimates, and it is just a general comment. It is not only me but a lot of Australians have a problem with how taxpayers' money is being spent. Normally the Commonwealth government would be able to tell me exactly how the process works, but because we have handballed it to the Northern Territory government, the arrangements between the alliance and the Northern Territory government—and I say this without mischief—conveniently are not subject to the normal scrutines of the Commonwealth. Yes, that is normally the case, but we are talking about pretty much the most substantive issue associated with the SIHIP program, and that is value for money. I would have thought the Commonwealth should have knowledge of the entire arrangement as to whether quality has been achieved, the standard set, the money paid and the job done. If you are providing this just to the Northern Territory government and saying, 'That is all we need to do', one would think in any transaction that the Commonwealth would have far more understanding of that secondary contractual arrangement.

Ms Gumley: It is a Northern Territory government contract. Therefore, their officials are bound to the equivalent of the Commonwealth Financial Management Act. Their officials need to execute those responsibilities along the payment of NTG moneys. That component is managed by their chief financial officer.

Senator SCULLION: What arrangements do you have with the Northern Territory government? Obviously you do not just say, 'Have some money. Good luck.' I would hope not. What is the arrangement with the Northern Territory government? What do they have to provide to you to say that the Commonwealth taxpayers' money has been spent properly and appropriately?

Ms Gumley: The performance indicators for the funding under the National Partnership on Remote Indigenous Housing are contained in the agreement. That is the level of outcome and performance indicators that we get from them. We also have quite robust steering committee arrangements with all states and territories and we meet monthly—usually the head or the second-in-charge of the housing departments. We review their progress month-by-month against capital works and other matters. In the Northern Territory we meet with them monthly. We also have 15 staff headed by Mr Pat Sowry, who has just joined us now. We have 15 staff embedded in the Northern Territory government team. That enables us to have much better visibility and involvement in making sure that the outcomes from the program were delivered in line with the August 2009 report.

Senator SCULLION: Thank you for that. I understand that better. It is really important to understand what the relationship is between the quality delivered, what is being delivered and how our money gets spent. I know it is going through a third party, but I would have thought the Commonwealth would have had access to what is basically a contractual agreement to provide services. Perhaps there are elements of that contract that might be in-confidence and

those sorts of things. But I was in business for a fair while before I came to this joint, and there would be large sections of the thrust of that contract that would cause you to ask: how are you acting in the Commonwealth's interests and those sorts of things. I would have thought you would have had access to that.

Mr Tongue: One of the significant things that is different about the way we are doing remote Indigenous housing in general now is that they are subject to intergovernmental agreements and arrangements. In the old days there would have been a direct contract and you would be quite right in expecting us to manage direct funding arrangements and to have all that detail. But in the new world of Commonwealth-state relations we are working under a set of intergovernmental arrangements and, as far as possible and most particularly with the Northern Territory, we do try to respect the sovereignty of the Northern Territory government in what is money handed from the Commonwealth but ultimately their responsibility. Mr Sowry and his team certainly work very closely with the Northern Territory government staff and we think we have a very good relationship, but there are some matters that are rightly the purview of the Northern Territory government. Through joint steering committee arrangements and other arrangements we do have a deal of visibility over the program, but there are some aspects that we leave to the Northern Territory government.

Senator SCULLION: As to some specifics in Wadeye, the project has delivered 105 new houses. How many did the alliance directly build and how many were built by subcontractors?

Ms Gumley: Wadeye is 105 houses. I understand 49 of those were delivered by Thamurrurr Development Corporation, but again under the oversight of the New Future Alliance as the head contractor for the package.

Senator SCULLION: Were there any other subcontractors?

Ms Gumley: I do not have that detail with me.

Mr Sowry: Not that I am aware of.

Senator SCULLION: What was the budget for each house in Wadeye?

Mr Sowry: Across the program the average cost of new houses is \$450,000.

Senator SCULLION: Was that maintained across Wadeye itself in that package?

Mr Sowry: That is correct. That is right.

Ms Gumley: It is \$450,000 as an average cost across the program, including the contingency funds. That \$450,000 average will go across all of the packages. That is how we will derive the—

Senator SCULLION: It is not just Wadeye. I understand that. What was the contract price for houses constructed by the contractors?

Ms Gumley: That is a matter for the Northern Territory government, because it is their contract.

Senator SCULLION: I will have to try to pursue that from some other angle. I have received advice that the TDC was paid approximately \$370,000 for a three-bedroom house, and I think they have done very well. A second company built the three-bedroom duplexes, which actually count as two houses, for \$478,000 per duplex. That is minus the slab. If you give an extra \$200,000 for the concrete slab, it still comes in at \$678,000 for two dwellings

against a budget allocation of \$900,000. So, there was a \$220,000 gross profit margin per duplex. If you do not know what was actually paid to the subcontractor because it is a territory issue and, therefore, you do not actually know how much profit was made on the deal by the alliance when we are talking about value for money in other areas, do you not think it would be important to have an understanding of those matters?

Ms Gumley: I cannot disclose the commercial prices for the works, because they are an NT contract and it is not a contract the Commonwealth is party to. But certainly as a result of the involvement in the embedded team we do review the works done in each package and the cost before they are agreed. In relation to those, we work very closely with the alliances, understanding all of the different impacts that go into delivering the house. In terms of the work that is being done in Wadeye, some costs NFA will bear across the package. I suppose what I am trying to say is that the costs of the TDC house or what TDC has paid for might not fully represent the cost to deliver that house in the package.

Senator SCULLION: Thank you for the answer to the question on notice with regard to the reference group. Thank you for the prompt answer in that regard. As to the minutes of the meeting, we just took one of the lots and it says, 'Lot WL has a drain running through it and requires extensive fill, which is expensive and the cost exceeds the budget allowed under SIHIP.' This is what the reference group has been told. 'It can be used for housing at a later date perhaps under another program. Another lot will need to be found.' But it specifically says that the costs are going to exceed the budget allowed under SIHIP. That is \$450,000. As I have told you, the TDC were paid about \$370,000 for the houses that they delivered. It really throws into question the decisions that are made on the ground as to what people have been told out there. You have the minutes from the reference group. Clearly there is a notion that if there is any extra work to be done, 'Oh, look, we are absolutely fixed on a budget.' But when it comes to looking from a company perspective of profitability, all the houses that the TDC delivered at \$370,000 were provided with a great deal of flexibility. With a block that is now not being used and could have been used—and somebody does not now house on that block—it would appear they are using the excuse that it would exceed the budget allowed under SIHIP.

Mr Tongue: The Northern Territory government is working to a budget. These are very remote communities. There are extensive costs—and we covered this at last estimates—associated with building at scale in remote communities. Out at Wadeye there is a very large construction camp that would look like a sort of mining style construction camp. We are trying to build a quality housing stock, something that has not necessarily happened in the Northern Territory previously. The tilt slab houses that are being built in Wadeye are one version of that housing stock. The Northern Territory government is making judgements across the Northern Territory about where houses go in communities, and part of that is related to cost. I think a taxpayer watching this estimates probably has in their head houses being built at the end of the street. These houses, as you well know—the committee has been out to many of these communities—are incredibly remote. Access to some of the communities is not possible 12 months of the year. We are doing this program at a scale that has never been attempted before. That is a costly exercise.

In supervising the program—and Wadeye is a good example—there are local interests who would like to be involved in the construction of these houses. Where possible that has been

included. But to go at scale, meet federal safety requirements, look after all of the occupational health and safety arrangements associated with that, do it remotely, it just carries costs. Those costs are reflected in the price per house and some of the variations between the communities. Wadeye at least has a barge landing. With other inland communities it is a matter of either getting in there in the dry and stockpiling materials, which carries with it its own costs or, God forbid, fly them in, and we do not have the budget to fly them in. There will be variations across the territory, and that is why we work to averages across the program.

Ms Gumley: Can I also add just a couple of matters around the block you were talking about. There will be some blocks we go to where there may well be reasons, either the infrastructure on that block or other details around the block, that do not make it suitable. In that instance that particular block was too expensive to put in, but further down on the same page, the HRG also said—and I am quoting from the same question on notice, and I will get the number for you—that it had spoken to the family involved and reported that they were happy for a three-bedroom house to be built on lot 444, which requires a lot of expensive fill to level the ground before building. There are some sites that are expensive and cannot work within the overall package of funding, and there are other sites that are still expensive to do, but they will bring those up to speed. What they are trying to balance is the outcomes overall that they achieve within the package.

Senator SCULLION: The point I am making is that the \$370,000, despite all the things that Andrew Tongue mentioned, was delivered by an Indigenous housing company in Wadeye. That is what they were paying for the house. There was no talk about anything else. It was, 'This is what we are going to pay you for 49 houses each. That is it.' The alliance on average has received \$450,000 for the house. One would have thought there was enough fat in that to be able to provide some fill so people can put a house on it. I understand from the answers you have given me that I am going to have to try to explore this through the Northern Territory government somehow about how they are rationalising the payments and what sort of connection they actually have with the alliance, because clearly that is not available here today. I appreciate those answers, but I do not think we are going to get too far there.

Ms Gumley: There is one further piece of information. We will know the entire cost of the package to deliver when they are fully complete, with those particular packages. Work is expected to finish at Wadeye in July and then I expect some finalisation time after that, and then the figures will be available.

Senator SCULLION: I have a list of all the Wadeye house refurbishments and rebuilds. I visited the community. I must say that the new houses are fantastic. It is all great. It has made a real difference. It has been a bit slow and I think we have all been pretty frustrated with that. As to the costings, as I said, that is a matter that obviously I am going to have to try to find out about elsewhere. I have copies of the spreadsheets of the budgets that were renovated by the same alliance, the New Future Alliance in Tennant Creek. Each spreadsheet lists every bit of required work in every house. They have done an assessment. The contractor has gone out and has said it needs a sink, it needs a new garden or whatever it is. So, they have said, 'This needs to be fixed. This needs to be replaced. That will have to be done.' It is a scope of works. As to the estimated cost for each line item, it actually goes to the actual cost of the item once

the work has been completed. I have no issue with that. Have you seen the spreadsheets for the Wadeye houses?

Mr Sowry: I have seen some of those spreadsheets.

Ms Gumley: Could I clarify this. Are they the spreadsheets that you tabled last estimates?

Senator SCULLION: No, that one was from Tennant Creek. There would be a similar spreadsheet for Wadeye. I am just focusing on Wadeye. Mr Sowry has indicated that he has seen—

Mr Sowry: Are you talking about the scopes of work for individual houses?

Senator SCULLION: The scopes of work for each house; that is correct.

Mr Sowry: I have seen samples of those.

Senator SCULLION: So, the Commonwealth is not aware of what work is being done in any more detail than a sample of what the scope of works would look like?

Mr Sowry: Given specific lots, I can investigate and look into individual lots.

Senator SCULLION: Can you have access to it if you chose to access it?

Mr Sowry: Yes, that is correct.

Ms Gumley: We do have access to the work done in each lot for the alliances.

Senator SCULLION: Did you have access to the scope of works required? Before any work is done there is a scope of works. Do you have access to the scope of works documents as to what work is needed to be done on each house?

Mr Sowry: We do not but, yes, we can access that information.

Senator SCULLION: Do you access that information?

Senator Arbib: Chair, is it possible to get Senator Scullion to table the document he is working off, to assist the officials?

Senator SCULLION: I tabled a document for Tennant Creek at the last instance, Minister. I was just simply asking if they have access to the same processes but in a different place in Wadeye. I do not have that document. I do know such documents exist. I am just simply saying—

Senator Arbib: It is hard for the officers to respond to questions off the document.

Senator SCULLION: No, I am asking, if you have access to these documents, whether you access the documents. In other words, if you are going to Wadeye, it might be handy to know what work is being done on lot 242. Do you access it for those reasons or is it just that you can get access to them?

Mr Sowry: If there is a specific requirement to access and review a particular scope of works we can do that.

Senator SCULLION: You have already explained that the Northern Territory is responsible for payments per work done and those sort of things, but I would have thought that some sort of an auditing arrangement, given that it is the Commonwealth's money, would take place to ensure that that is the case, given that you get access to these documents that are fundamentally about 'this is what is needed to be done'. You could go and check to see that it

is being done. That would have been a way of auditing it. Do you carry out any audit arrangements in that regard?

Ms Gumley: The Northern Territory audit office would be examining in their remit the payments made from the Northern Territory government to the alliances. The Australian National Audit Office are currently auditing in the Northern Territory.

Senator SCULLION: In regard specifically to this or just more generally across the purview of the NT audit office? Are they reviewing the NT audit office's audit of SIHIP of these processes?

Ms Gumley: It would be the funding provided to states and territories through the national partnership. That funding would be able to be reviewed, like any funding in any of the governments—for instance, the New South Wales government. It would be able to be examined by their state or territory audit office to see that the funds have been properly used.

Senator SCULLION: I have provided you with some photographs of a house and lot No. 232. I have a number of these. I do not have a complete set for everyone. They are just simply some colour photographs. I hope that is sufficient for the committee. I visited a number of houses. I have been very keen to inspect a rebuild rather than just a refurbishment. I have not managed to find a refurbishment, I have to say, that in my view would have cost more than \$20,000 to refurbish. I just simply have not found one anywhere in the territory. I was very keen to have a look at something that cost \$200,000. I am not sure if that is actually on average. Can someone provide me with the average for a rebuild, or is it \$200,000 for a rebuild?

Mr Sowry: It is on average.

Senator SCULLION: 'On average' is a bit of a catch-all for the alliance, isn't it? Luckily there are in fact 28 houses to be rebuilt, not refurbished. This is a rebuild in Wadeye. These photos are pretty self-evident. There is no external painting whatsoever on the building. Inside they have actually painted over water damage from a leaking roof. This is a rebuilt house. There was a notion of structure or some structure that would have to be done. There would have to be some sort of major structure. They have actually put a scree about five millimetres thick on the veranda. They have never been good with colouring in, because they only got within about 20 centimetres of the wall and gave up. But that is the only structural change in terms of a rebuild that has been made to this house. We still have pieces of jagged, dangerous awning on the side of the house and tin sort of falling off. You can see that the PVC water inlet is actually not even to standard. It is internal piping. Take the brick on the broken window ledge—there has been no attempt to fix anything structurally. There is a broken lid on the water isolator. It could easily have been fixed. This has already been checked. There is loose tin on the eaves. It just goes on and on. It is just a complete shambles. You go in the front door—they have actually made a bit of an effort on the front door—and see the tiles did not quite overhang, so someone tried to stick a bit of grout there. You can get your fingers between there. It is not going to take long before those tiles just break and fall off. It is just appalling. I said to someone who was with me, 'It cannot be a rebuild.' They said, 'No, it is on the list.' I said, 'We are spending an average of \$200,000 on this. It can't possibly be a rebuild.' But I can tell you that the other 28 houses that are rebuilds there are the same. To be a rebuild you obviously have to have some structure, so on one of them they have a 300-millimetre extension being put on the veranda. Why you would want an extension on your

veranda I really do not know, but they got sort of tired halfway down the veranda and that was enough. That is obviously the trigger for a rebuild.

I have been through some of the specific details of the costs involved. Internally there is basically a stainless steel double sink and drainer. The alliance themselves have said, 'Well, that is going to cost \$1,560.' That is the cost they have got on it. I cannot find anywhere that charges, just walk-in retail, any more than \$800 for the new stove, and they are the only two levels of amenity apart from three fans, four electric light switches—and that is it—on an average of \$200,000.

These are photos that were taken on my last visit. These are the images I have. On any of the houses in the SIHIP this level of amenity is average. And if we are talking about the rebuild, the make-safe program, this is actually a house that is supposed to have been rebuilt. There are 28 of them. I know you are, and have been, as concerned about this as I am. I very much encourage the minister or officers to visit Wadeye. There are only 28 rebuilds there. The level of amenity is exactly the same as I have shown you here, and somebody has charged someone an average of \$200,000 for something that, according to even their own calculations, probably even with the most outrageous multiplier of five on top of cost and labour, is still only \$20,000.

I can understand from Ms Gumley's response what control you have over the contract, but it is a given that at the end of the day you have to bear some responsibility because it is a Commonwealth program—and I know we have done it through the Northern Territory. You tell me that the Northern Territory audit office are responsible for this; I have had a great deal of difficulty trying to find that out myself. I know with the relationship you have with the Northern Territory government it might be a lot easier to find out. Perhaps you can tell me this. Who actually in your understanding of the process signs off to say, 'Yes, this is completed. This house is now ready to go'?

Mr Pratt: Thank you for the opportunity and thank you for giving us this material. Of course we share your concerns about ensuring that we get appropriate quality in the refurbishments. I might ask Mr Sowry, who is not only looking after this and dealing with the Northern Territory government on a daily basis on these issues but is also an engineer, to take us through how the refurbishment program is meant to be working.

Senator SCULLION: Can you perhaps focus on the rebuilds rather than the refurbishments? I have had much discussion about the previous one.

Mr Sowry: Certainly.

Senator CROSSIN: Just before you answer that, can I ask you whether this is the first time this has been brought to your attention?

Mr Sowry: Yes, it is.

Senator CROSSIN: Why is that?

Mr Sowry: It is the first time I have seen these photos.

Senator CROSSIN: Do you not get a report on the refurbishments as they are done?

Mr Sowry: Not on the individual lots, no, I do not. I can ask for those as our staff go throughout the regions.

Senator CROSSIN: What is the quality assurance process between your work and the work the Northern Territory government is doing?

Ms Gumley: There are several layers around the quality assurance work.

Senator CROSSIN: I am sure there are.

Ms Gumley: In terms of the investment, the work is scoped and then priced with the alliances. The contract management team—there is one for each alliance—goes through and reviews those and then meets with what is called the alliance leadership team to drive down costs and resolve issues around each particular package. The works are then rolled out on the ground. There are supervisors in that. There are certifiers as part of that as well. In addition, the Commonwealth has funded a separate quality assurance process, and the Northern Territory government, like all other states under the national partnership, has to have a quality assurance plan. This is a really big program of works. There will be some issues as we go through in particular locations, just as there are in any major works. We will take very seriously the information that has been passed to us today. Mr Sowry will be out in Wadeye next week and will personally go and inspect that. I might ask Mr Sowry to describe to you what would be done in a rebuild as opposed to what would be done in a refurbishment.

Senator SCULLION: Thank you for that.

Senator Arbib: Before we determine this is a refurbishment or a rebuild I would like the department to go back and check with the local authorities and alliances. You are saying it is a rebuild, but this might be a refurbishment.

Senator SCULLION: I can assure you it is a rebuild. I have the government documents in front of me for Wadeye. It says that this is house 232, regional priority 6, that it is a rebuild and it needs to have disability access.

Senator Arbib: I have said previously that we are happy for you to table the documents so we have them in front of us. You have not tabled the documents.

Senator SCULLION: That was a different issue. I just assumed you would provide it. I am sorry, it is a different document. I just assumed you would have it. I am more than happy to provide it for you.

Ms Gumley: We have not brought individual scopes of work for individual homes with us today.

Senator SCULLION: Could you say that again?

Ms Gumley: Neither I nor Mr Sowry has brought individual scopes of work for individual homes given the size of the program that is underway.

Senator SCULLION: I guess the issue for both me and Senator Crossin is that I can assure you—you can go and check all these things—I have actually been to all of these houses and they are the same. They have been allocated under the New Future Alliance allocations here. Some are rebuilds, some are refurbishments and I assumed you would have them. If you do not, I will provide them to you. But you can get them through your partner, the Northern Territory government. All of those are exactly the same. This seems to have completed failed any audit process. There is nobody I would understand as an inspector of works who could have stood in front of that house and said, 'Yes, this is fit to go,' on almost any of them. This is a rebuild. This is not a refurbishment.

Mr Tongue: I have not had the opportunity to view all of the photos. The one I am looking at now has odd tiles and no kitchen cupboards. In most of the structures the Northern Territory government does not fit kitchen cupboards. They are stainless steel benches. That is in part to reflect the advice that is provided through the *Indigenous Housing Guide* about what is appropriate to build in these houses. As to odd tiles—

Senator SCULLION: That was just a comment; the tiles had been broken. One cannot even be bothered to put the same colour tile back. Sadly, that is my commentary on the day. People were saying to me, ‘Well, maybe that is because we’re just blackfellas.’ One of them is a brown tile and the others are white tiles. And it is supposed to be a rebuild.

Mr Tongue: That may have been a judgment that somebody on the ground made that we might look at and say, ‘Well, inappropriate judgment.’

Senator SCULLION: But the houses have already been handed back. They have already been ticked off. They must have had a spare pallet of brown tiles, because right across all the refurbishments, which I have almost given up on, they are exactly the same. They have not bothered to match any tiles. They have just got these chocolate ones. They had them hanging around so, ‘Just stick them in. It will be right.’ Given that people like Mr Sowry are on the ground why is it—whether or not you accept what I have told you is correct—that when you visit the people on the ground you are not concerned as I am if this is a rebuild? I know this is up to the Northern Territory and you may not have the purview to interfere with that. But at the end of the day it is our money. Why are we not able to intervene in some way to be able to ensure that these are meeting any sort of standard?

Ms Gumley: We do have an Australian government team up there embedded and we are working with the Northern Territory to get the works delivered. The Northern Territory government, in addition to the quality processes that I have mentioned before, given that they are taking on the stock, has asset management officers. The Northern Territory government checks that they are suitable to be handed over to their property and tenancy—

Senator SCULLION: You said Mr Sowry was an engineer. Are you aware of the sorts of checks that are conducted by the Northern Territory government and who actually conducts them? Are you actually aware of who does that?

Mr Sowry: Yes, I am. The normal process at the handover element is that a Northern Territory government officer will be there with a member of the alliance and conduct a handover where they will go through the scope of works for an individual house and confirm that the work within that scope has been done.

Senator SCULLION: So, the actual signatures on there would be from a surveyor—or would there be a particular qualification?

Mr Sowry: Generally it may be an asset management officer from Territory Housing.

Senator CROSSIN: Given these layers of bureaucracy and endless quality assurance processes and teams, why is there such a vast difference between what Senator Scullion has shown us today at Wadeye and what I have seen in the Alice Springs town camps, which are fantastic? If they are the same processes, why have we got such vastly different outcomes?

Mr Sowry: I think that Senator Scullion is referring to a specific rebuild and—

Senator CROSSIN: I have seen rebuilds in the Alice Springs town camps.

Mr Sowry: Looking at these photos, I would need to investigate further and take that on notice, but the photos do not represent what I would say is a typical rebuild product that has come out of the alliances.

Senator CROSSIN: I hope not.

Ms Gumley: It may be that it is actually a refurbishment. We have asked for information about it.

Senator BOYCE: It is poor quality, whatever it is.

Senator SCULLION: I am also able to provide another photo of another house. It is exactly the same—I just did not want to waste your time—but even if this were a refurbishment, on the scope of works that has been provided there are exactly these things. It is for a stainless steel sink arrangement. It is for a new stove. Invariably they all get a new electric stove, a handful of switches and some fans. Even if that is a refurbishment it is a complete and utter joke to tell anyone—and I am sure you do not believe it—that they are being constructed for an average of \$70,000. I have been right across the Northern Territory in the SIHIP processes and I have yet to find a house in a refurbishment that is any different from this apart from in the Alice Springs town camps, and I think that is fantastic, and apart from some houses in Tennant Creek. One more cynical than me would say, ‘Well, that is where the politicians visit and they are the easy places to go.’ I have to say we are going to need some sort of intervention from the Commonwealth in these processes of the Northern Territory government and the alliances to ensure that the sorts of things that I see on the ground and that I know other people are concerned about on the ground are investigated. I will be doing the same thing at the next Senate estimates.

Senator Arbib: I am sorry, but did you not say before that you thought the new builds in Wadeye were of a high quality?

Senator SCULLION: For the new houses I did. I am just talking about the rebuilds and the refurbishments.

Senator Arbib: I just wanted to make that clear.

Senator SCULLION: That is all right. As Senator Crossin has said, in Alice Springs and in some parts of Tennant Creek the refurbishments and rebuilds are entirely different. For example, the refurbishments in Tennant Creek have ducted air-conditioning. Ali Curung, just out of the way, in the same area, by the same alliance: ‘Well, you just get a piece of board nailed up over your window. You don’t get one.’ There is a vast difference in those. That has all been evident. We have all been talking about the territory. No-one can get to the bottom of it. But if you do not have the capacity to look into the contractual arrangements with the principal deliverers that oversee that, which is the Northern Territory government, we are in strife.

Senator Arbib: The officials have said that they are happy to look into the issues you have raised and get to the bottom of it. I also think Ms Gumley said there would be officials visiting the region.

Senator SCULLION: I am happy to be provided with further information.

Senator Arbib: In terms of refurbishments, there is an issue in terms of a massive backlog of this work over many years and previous governments. I think we need to keep that in mind.

Senator SCULLION: I am not blaming the government. I am not saying that.

Senator Arbib: We all accept that quality needs to be at the forefront of our mind. But at the same time, the aim in terms of refurbishments is the safety of the occupants and ensuring that they are functional. It is pretty clear that we need to have a look at the photos you have given us, but at the same time we need to understand what the aim is of the refurbishment program and how it is progressing across not just one area but the whole of the territory.

Senator SCULLION: If you are establishing what level of amenity was required under the contract, I wonder if it would be useful then to perhaps take on notice, because you will not have it now, how much was actually claimed for that house and how much was actually paid for the house if it was the same. Was there a spreadsheet or a budget that was actually developed for the house? I have made the assumption that in Tennant Creek that is the way everybody did it. I am assuming that would be the same case in Wadeye. If there is a spreadsheet for this particular house it would be the usual benchmark to be able to say what needed to be done and what actually has been done. If you could provide that to the committee I would be most grateful.

Senator PAYNE: You are assuming that—

Senator SCULLION: I have asked them, and the confident answer from Ms Gumley is that it is all in the hands of the Northern Territory and for whatever reason we are not able to get hold of it.

Ms Gumley: As for the scope of work for each house, there is clearly a scope of work for what happens on each site, but we have not brought the detail of that with us. This year we have completed 1,000 refurbishments. We would not carry that level of detail with us to estimates. I am happy to take the information on and go through that. It is important to know though for refurbishments and rebuilds, given what Senator Arbib was saying, that often you cannot see a lot of the work. A house that might have had a few new light switches might actually have been fully rewired. A bathroom might have been refurbished.

Senator SCULLION: In no circumstances has that been the case. It is absolutely irresponsible to suggest that might be the case.

Senator Arbib: We have said that we will check on the examples you have provided. I think Ms Gumley makes a good point.

Senator SCULLION: There is a possibility.

Senator Arbib: Of course, but not just there, across the whole territory.

Ms Gumley: In terms of the work that is done across the territory it is around that functionality—bathrooms/kitchens repaired. While we do not put cupboards with the stainless steel benches we do provide a pantry that is lockable. As to bathrooms and kitchens, there is a priority around making sure we have plumbing and people can cook a meal and bathe safely. Mr Sowry will be in Wadeye on Thursday this week and we will make a point of taking the scope of works and reviewing those in conjunction with the alliances.

CHAIR: When can we get a response? You have all this evidence that has been put forward in terms of Wadeye. You are going there next week. When can the committee have a report back?

Mr Tongue: I think we would need a bit of time to—

CHAIR: I understand that, but I think this is the third separate time in these estimates that these issues have come up. I am just trying to get a time frame. I do not think it falls under the standard notice in terms of coming back by the date we have given. I think it is more urgent. I will leave that with you as to if we can get a comment back from your office to the committee. We would like to have a report back to the committee about the Wadeye visit and what you have seen.

Mr Pratt: We will attempt to report back as soon as humanly possible. We will examine the scope of work that was required for this house. We will look at the process for authorising the sign-off, if that is what has happened, and we will get the Northern Territory government's take on this and come back to the committee as soon as humanly possible.

Ms Gumley: It will probably take us around three weeks to go and check the site and review the work.

CHAIR: If we can get a preliminary response about what has happened in three weeks time to the committee generally through the secretariat that would be very useful.

Mr Pratt: Yes.

Senator BOYCE: I have one question in relation to Queensland Indigenous housing. Queensland was the worst performer of the states in terms of Indigenous housing and lost \$3.1 million in funding because of that. Could you tell me what else you have done to improve the performance in Queensland?

Ms Croft: In relation to Queensland in 2009-10, one of the predominant reasons that Queensland did not deliver the full target by the end of the financial year was the delay in addressing leasing. It took them quite a considerable amount of time to have communities come on board with the 40-year lease arrangements. As a result of that they started their construction program quite late in the financial year. While they had more than 62 underway by the end of the financial year, they were unable to complete all of them. In terms of progress, then, for 2010-11, we meet regularly with the Queensland government. We have monthly joint steering committee meetings with them, as we do with all of the states. In addition, the government has put in place some in-jurisdiction officers in a number of states. We will have an officer based in Brisbane who works with the Queensland government on a day-to-day basis.

Senator BOYCE: They are embedded?

Ms Croft: They are not co-located with the department of communities in their building; they are located in our FaHCSIA state office, but they work day to day with those officials in the department of communities regarding the progress of all of the work under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, of which capital works is clearly one of the key components.

Senator BOYCE: What sorts of reports do you get from that person? How publicly available are they?

Ms Croft: They work with them in a general liaison sense, but then there are papers that come to the joint steering committee meetings.

Senator BOYCE: You reported that they were way behind because their ability to organise the leases apparently was different from other governments' abilities in this area. Where are they at now? How far behind is Queensland still?

Ms Croft: I think they were at 44 at the end of the last financial year. They now have 91 houses completed and a further 17 underway, for a total of 108. In relation to refurbishments, they have now completed 303 refurbishments and they have a further 271 underway. I met with the Queensland government not long ago and we have talked with them about this financial year's targets. From the advice we have been provided they are confident they will deliver both their new house and refurbishment targets for this financial year.

Senator BOYCE: Did they tell you that last year, too, though?

Ms Croft: I think last year they were certainly working towards it. I think they were confident towards the end. However, the delay in starting meant that they could not complete. But I have to say, of the ones underway for this financial year—I think they have about 17 left that they need to deliver target; and just checking my numbers—I think they have seven that were at lock-up. This data is slightly old. It is April data. But they had seven at lock-up and a further eight that were past frame stage and almost at lock-up and a further two that were kind of at frame stage.

Senator BOYCE: On notice could you provide me with the sites of those and the sites of the ones that have been completed or refurbished as well, please?

Ms Croft: Would you like the numbers in communities?

Senator BOYCE: Yes, please.

Senator ADAMS: There was something that you were going to help me out with in relation to the Blackstone community and the new houses under the environmental standards, which was putting gyprock on the internal walls instead of the blocks. I have not heard anything back.

Ms Croft: We did respond to question on notice 235. The answer to that question is that it is not gyprock. It is fibre-cement sheet. In addition, in those houses they place the wall frames closer together, so the spacing is less, to improve impact resistance.

Mr Tongue: My memory is that it is 9mm fibro-cement sheet. It is pretty thick and with the additional stud work they would be pretty solid dwellings.

Senator ADAMS: We will have a look next time we go up there.

Senator PAYNE: I have a couple of questions which are follow-ups to answers I received to questions on notice. Could you advise me whether in this section any questions I have to IBA in relation to the HOIL are appropriate to ask now?

Mr Tongue: We were anticipating that we would do HOIL in this section.

Senator PAYNE: There was an answer to a question on notice 230, which related housing rent returns, and which provided me with a table with some breakdowns in that. As I am sure you will all recall, we spent quite some time at the last estimates talking about the decision to build houses with fewer bedrooms to avoid overcrowding. But when I have a look at the way the rent-setting policies are designed to contain caps, which you say are to ensure that people living in overcrowded houses are not disadvantaged due to higher total household income, can I ask whether there is any evidence that those sorts of policies actually encourage

overcrowding because they effectively enable more families to move into houses without any additional cost. Do you actually monitor that?

Ms Gumley: There is a performance indicator under the national partnership about reducing overcrowding. States and territories do report on their service delivery through the report on government service delivery. I am not aware of any evidence about the detail that you have gone to in your question, but I am happy to go and ask states and territories to see whether they have information about that. I know that three states in particular, Queensland, the Northern Territory and WA, are looking very hard at reducing those overcrowding rates. Other states are as well as part of the national partnership.

Senator PAYNE: Under the NPA and under the funding arrangements for the delivery of Commonwealth funds to the states for Indigenous housing are there any restrictions placed on the number of people who can physically live in particular houses or is it left open?

Ms Gumley: That would be something that would be set by each jurisdiction as part of their public housing arrangements.

Senator PAYNE: I understand that. Are there any?

Ms Gumley: I do not have that detail with me, I am sorry. I am not aware that it exists or it does not exist.

Senator PAYNE: Will you try to advise me on notice?

Ms Gumley: Yes.

Senator PAYNE: I know you were speaking with Senator Scullion earlier about a particular alliance arrangement concerning Wadeye. I think you said during that answer that the entire cost of the program would be known when the packages are complete. Is that what you said to Senator Scullion?

Ms Gumley: Yes.

Senator PAYNE: In answer to a question to Senator Scullion from the last estimates, question No. 229, you referred to the average cost of a new home being \$450,000 plus contingency. Is the Commonwealth not differentiating the size of homes, between say a two- or a three-bedroom home in that case? Is the Commonwealth not making any differentiation at this point in the size of homes in terms of what they cost?

Ms Gumley: It is the target cost that was set by the August 2009 review—

Senator PAYNE: Does that mean it is okay to build a two-bedroom house for \$450,000?

Ms Gumley: It recognises that there are some larger houses and some smaller houses and some sites are more difficult to build on than others. So, it is an average across the program including contingency.

Senator PAYNE: At the completion of the packages will you actually have a specific cost for the construction of each house?

Ms Gumley: We will have a cost of the construction across that package.

Senator PAYNE: Is the answer to my question, no, you will not have a specific cost for the construction of each house?

Ms Gumley: I would have to get some advice, but the cost that has been agreed to in discussions previously has been around the cost per house per package. As to the cost per

individual one, I am not sure whether the contract that the NTG has with individual alliances costs on a per house basis; it looks at the complete scope of works that needs to be delivered within that package.

Mr Tongue: Noting that a scope of works around each individual house will include some infrastructure elements. For instance, particularly infrastructure from the house to the front fence was included in the packages.

Senator PAYNE: Tell me you do not mean the NBN.

Mr Tongue: No. Embedded in all of those costs is a range of what I would call costs related to dwellings but not singly the construction of the house. There would be infrastructure elements.

Senator PAYNE: I understand that. I am not at all concerned whether there are infrastructure add-ons. But I am concerned to know in terms of how this particular approach 'performs'. It was innovative, it was different, it has issues, as we have discussed repeatedly over many estimates sessions now. I do not think it is unreasonable to seek guidance on the cost of the construction of each individual house. I actually do not think that is unreasonable. If you are going to tell me that the commercial arrangement is between the Commonwealth, the NT government and the alliance members, that that is not required, then I actually think that is a serious inadequacy in our ability to understand and to assess the construction process. If the answer is—as it is in your answer to the question on notice from Senator Scullion—that the average cost of a new home is \$450,000 plus contingency and I, or any senator, is meant to accept that that is an okay answer for a two-bedroom home, three-bedroom home or whatever else might fall into the category, I actually do not accept that that is okay.

Senator Arbib: Ms Gumley said that she would try to get you those answers. I think you should wait and see what we can do for you.

Senator PAYNE: Can you tell in relation to that answer what the contingency funding is?

Ms Gumley: The amount reserved for contingency was at attachment E of the SIHIP review, and it is \$47,240,000. That is across a full package of \$672 million. There is a footnote on the same page. Contingency is a normal allocation in a capital project and covers eventualities such as cost escalation on materials and labour, major stoppages or problems due to litigation and weather. In the event that contingencies are not required they will be used for capital works.

Senator PAYNE: For capital works?

Ms Gumley: Yes.

Senator PAYNE: Where?

Ms Gumley: Further capital works. If we do not fully use the amount of contingency because it is not needed to be drawn down on, then we will deliver further works beyond what was—

Senator PAYNE: To what?

Ms Gumley: To houses—new houses, refurbishments or rebuilds.

Senator PAYNE: You will build more new houses or do more refurbishments or more rebuilds? You will not just randomly add something to a house that is another extra capital work?

Ms Gumley: If we are in a position where there are contingency funds remaining, that would be a matter for decision between governments about how they want that used. But it would be consistent with the footnote that was in the August 2009 review.

Senator PAYNE: Do we know what the status of the contingency fund of \$47 million or thereabouts is now? Has it been drawn down at all?

Ms Gumley: There will have been some use of contingency with the works that we have done so far. I do not have that detail with me. Again, it is that matter around the Northern Territory Chief Financial Officer from the department of housing oversighting that.

Senator PAYNE: I may not have been here for that discussion. Does that mean that you cannot advise the committee on notice what the status of the contingency fund is, how much has been drawn down and what it has been spent on?

Ms Gumley: Not today.

Senator PAYNE: I understand that. Can you on notice though, I said?

Ms Gumley: I could take that on notice.

Senator PAYNE: In the time available, could I just seek a quick update on matters concerning the HOIL funds, please. Can the committee please receive an update on the status of HOIL as it currently stands, the Home Ownership on Indigenous Land program? Can you tell us how many houses have been built and whether the land issues in the communities been resolved?

Mr Fry: With respect to your question, we have concluded 16 HOIL loans and we have another four loans currently ready to be drawn following negotiations between the clients and the builders to initiate the process.

Senator SIEWERT: Where are the new ones?

Mr Fry: The four new places are currently on Tiwi Island.

Senator SIEWERT: Most of the other 16 are up there, too, aren't they?

Mr Fry: That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT: All of them?

Mr Fry: I understand all the 16 are up there on the Tiwi Islands.

Senator SIEWERT: Are all of the HOIL program loans located on Tiwi Island?

Mr Fry: At this point in time.

Senator PAYNE: Where is the \$56 million of the HOIL capital at the moment? I thought it was transferred temporarily.

Mr Fry: That is correct. In the last year, 2010, there was a temporary transfer of \$56 million from the HOIL program across to the HOP program, which is loans available for non-remote Indigenous clients. As a consequence of that transfer of \$56 million we have seen the waiting list decrease in the last 18 months from approximately 1,600 clients to currently 416.

Senator PAYNE: Is there still \$56 million for HOIL or has that decreased?

Mr Fry: There has been a temporary transfer from the allocation of funding for HOIL on an ongoing basis to HOP. As we find that requirement for HOIL loans to be drawn into the future we will make the necessary adjustments.

Senator PAYNE: The funding has not diminished?

Mr Fry: No.

Senator PAYNE: It is available?

Mr Fry: That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT: Do you intend to top it up so that the \$56 million that was there is going to continue to be there?

Mr Fry: It was a temporary transfer in October of last year, recognising that there was greater demand at the current time within the HOP program, and when there is more demand through the HOIL program it will be adjusted back accordingly.

Senator SIEWERT: Does the pie for HOIL remain or will a lower amount go back to HOIL because some has been spent on HOP?

Mr Fry: I might rephrase my response there. In terms of the total allocation of funds for home lending across IBA, it has neither diminished nor increased.

Senator SIEWERT: It is just how the pie is divided up?

Mr Fry: Correct.

Senator SIEWERT: In theory less money will go back to HOIL because some has been spent on HOP? Would that be an accurate reflection?

Mr Fry: Not necessarily.

Senator PAYNE: That is what I was trying to clarify earlier. I understood you to say that if the HOIL money is required up to the point of \$56 million then that will still be available?

Mr Fry: I have only been in my role for three months. Without trying to use that as an excuse, I understand the intent of the question.

Senator PAYNE: It is confusing.

Senator Arbib: You might like to ask your question again.

Senator PAYNE: I think what Senator Siewert and I are trying to understand is that it is confusing to know where post the Auditor-General's inquiry report the funding for HOIL actually is. It is \$56 million and Mr Fry has confirmed that. But what we want to understand is whether that is the quantum that will continue to be available for HOIL or whether it will be diminished because it is being allocated to HOP. I hate using acronyms.

Senator Arbib: I think we are getting into the policy area, so why don't I seek information from Minister Macklin for you?

Senator PAYNE: Unless the officers can assist.

Ms Bitmead: As I understand the arrangement that has been made with the funding within IBA, the transfer is of the capital amount that was invested at the beginning of the program. My colleagues will express this in different terms, but my understanding of it is that, as money is returned into the accounts as various loans are repaid, we have money flowing in and out through accounts on a regular basis. Rather than have capital money that was allocated initially for HOIL not being utilised to support Indigenous Australians who were ready and able to pursue home ownership opportunities, the transfer of that capital allowed those in urban and rural areas to take up home ownership. As their loans are repaid, that returns that money back to the level where it sat before.

Senator SIEWERT: That is the clearest explanation I have had, thank you.

Senator PAYNE: Perhaps I will put the rest of those questions on notice.

CHAIR: That concludes our session on Indigenous housing. There are significant questions on notice. Senator Scullion has just provided me with the scope of work for the Wadeye area and we will be able to table that, so you can see what he was talking about.

Northern Territory Land Councils

[11:24]

CHAIR: We have a number of senators who wish to ask questions. Do any of you have an opening statement you want to make before we go into questions?

Mr Hill: No. I would just apologise—

CHAIR: That is okay. You cannot control the planes. I wish some of us could.

Senator LUDLAM: I want to go back over some of the evidence that the NLC has tendered to various Senate committees relating to the proposed national radioactive waste dump in the Northern Territory. The NLC submitted to the Senate environment committee a couple of years ago, and then I think referred that advice again to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs a year or two later. That anthropological advice given in relation to the proposed radioactive waste dump site in the Muckaty Land Trust area names members of the Ngapa branch or a group associated with the Lauder families as the only traditional owners of the site. Does the NLC maintain that this is the case?

Mr Hill: Yes, we do.

Senator LUDLAM: Does the NLC also maintain that members of the Ngapa branch or a group associated with the Lauder families have primary spiritual responsibility for the site and that members of other Ngapa groups are traditional owners for other land, as you outlined on page 6 of your submission to the Senate environment committee inquiry of 4 December 2008?

Mr Hill: Since that hearing and the information we have provided to you at that period we now have a court matter in progress—

Senator LUDLAM: You have a what, sorry?

Mr Hill: Court proceedings by an applicant. So, with due respect to the court process, it is inappropriate at this stage for NLC to make comments.

Senator LUDLAM: If you are referring to the matters before the Federal Court or at least in mediation at the moment, matters sub judice have not been held as a public interest immunity ground, so unfortunately that does not get you off the hook. There is longstanding Senate practice since the 1970s that holds you would still be required to answer the questions.

CHAIR: In terms of the process of the Senate estimates, the convention in the Senate is that we have to be very careful about what is being said, but just because it is actually under court proceedings does not mean it cannot be discussed in this hearing. What I have agreed with senators who are wishing to ask questions is that we will take it very clearly question by question to look at where we are going, but it is not a standard preclusion from the requirement to be involved in this process. I can provide you with the convention of the Senate that deals with that evidence.

Senator Arbib: I think Mr Hill accepts that he must answer questions, but at the same time he needs to be very careful given there is a court case in play. Also, I think we should move slowly through this to give Mr Hill time to make sure that he does not prejudice the case.

CHAIR: We are all being very careful.

Mr Hill: In answer to the senator's question, the answer is yes.

Senator LUDLAM: Could you explain for us why the NLC's own detailed anthropological report, which was prepared by three senior anthropologists and submitted to Justice Gray in the Muckaty land claim, going back a couple of years now, concluded clearly and unequivocally that all Ngapa land on Muckaty Station was held in common by the three Ngapa family groups, the Lauder, Anderson and Foster subgroups, and that no Ngapa land on Muckaty Station was owned exclusively by any of the three subgroups.

Mr Levy: Mr Hill suggested I respond to this. I take it you are referring to the anthropological report that was filed in the 1990s in the Muckaty Aboriginal land claim?

Senator LUDLAM: That is correct.

Mr Levy: The NLC does not accept your depiction of the effect of that report.

Senator LUDLAM: For what reason do you not accept it? It actually reads in black and white as far as I can read it.

Mr Levy: With due respect, you need to read it more closely. It does not read in black and white at all. If I could say further—and I imagine you will get to this—my learned friend Mr Hyde, who has not written to me about this, said in the media that he has read the transcript and he has recently unearthed from the National Archives information which was hitherto unknown, he says.

Senator LUDLAM: But you have known of that for years, right?

Mr Levy: Not only us; it was attached to his affidavit a month after the proceedings started.

Senator LUDLAM: Could I just constrain you to the—

CHAIR: Let Mr Levy finish and then you can go back to your questions.

Senator LUDLAM: He is asking questions—

Mr Levy: I am answering, if I could. The point I am trying to make is that the documents need to be read as a whole. It is a great and grave error to take evidence in land claims, which are complex proceedings, including anthropological reports, and pick out one bit or another bit and say, 'I have found the holy grail. That is the answer.' It does not usually work like that. It needs to be looked at as a whole.

Senator LUDLAM: Is it the case that during that claim senior elders gave evidence at Kurrakurraja—I am probably pronouncing that very poorly—which is the location of the nominated site. But it was a sacred male initiation site which belonged to the Yapayapa people.

Mr Levy: Yes, evidence was given about that site, which is proximate to but not part of the nominated land. I do not intend to comment regarding that evidence, because the evidence that was given was restricted evidence.

Senator LUDLAM: I have a copy of it here. It cannot have been that restricted.

Mr Levy: You have a copy of the unrestricted evidence, but as I have said, if an assessment is to be made about restricted cultural matters together with other evidence that is given, it needs to be looked at as a whole. What you are asking is in the context of court proceedings, where those documents have been made available. If the court proceedings proceed, we will be before the court with appropriate orders. It is that arm of government which can make an assessment as to whether the NLC anthropologists made the right decision. This is not the right venue. I appreciate your comments, Madam Chair, but previously before Senate committees it has been recognised that where there are court proceedings, general questions are one thing; it is not feasible to ask us to put our case which will be put before the court if that happens before this committee, which is what you are suggesting.

Senator LUDLAM: In previous Senate committees there was not a court action afoot. That has happened more recently than both of the two hearings that I have referred to. Let us take a step back then, if we could.

Mr Levy: But with respect, it was said in previous committee hearings and in the report—maybe not from the Greens minority one—that if people wanted to challenge it the appropriate place was a court. The appropriate place is a court. The NLC is a Commonwealth entity. It will simply do what the court tells it to do, as the minister has said. It is not appropriate for this arm of government through this committee to subvert the court process, with respect. With respect, your questions are headed towards that, because you are asking for a response about evidence which cannot be before this committee because it is restricted—certainly not in your possession. I have read it; I do not intend to talk about it. The NLC's anthropologists, more importantly, have read it and a range of other information and they have expressed a view. The view could be right or it could be wrong; that is a matter for the court.

Senator LUDLAM: Let us move on. Can you explain the process that led to the commissioning of the new anthropological advice that states that the Lauder family are the exclusive traditional owners of that area? I do not want to go to the matters or the details of that report because, of course, very few people have seen that, but just step through, if you will, the process that led to the commissioning of that study.

Mr Levy: I do not accept that it is new anthropological advice; that is the first point. In terms of the process, it was the same process the NLC always uses. For any development proposed in relation to Aboriginal land we get fresh anthropological advice. Often it simply says, 'You don't need to do anything. We know who the traditional owners are. We were there last year.' People are born, people die, changes happen. When it is a major development or a controversial development, the NLC does very detailed anthropological research. As my CEO has said, the NLC stands by that research, but it is in court. People are entitled to go to court; that is respected.

Senator LUDLAM: But it is normal practice for the NLC or for any other land council, for that matter, if a new development is proposed that you would generally open the book again on the anthropological issue?

Mr Levy: No, it is not a case of opening a book.

Mr Hill: Can I respond from a cultural perspective?

Senator LUDLAM: Yes.

Mr Hill: People are born, people die and people have certain responsibilities with regard to ownership of land, particularly with regard to the land-owning group. They also have cultural responsibility to the group and other affected groups. For example, the reason we go back and seek a fresh anthropological report is that somebody may have died where the father line and the mother line are without children, or a male. For example, the experience we are having now across the NLC, and I think right across Australia, is with regard to identification of traditional owners or native title claimants based on patrilineal rights to land, because ownership of land is through your father. That is why, from a cultural practice, we go back and identify who are the traditional owners and the relationship they have with the land and so forth. So, we work within the land rights act but, importantly, try to culturally match the relationship and ownership of land. That is why when people use the word 'fresh' anthropological report, it is merely to acknowledge that there are deceased—there is that process of handing land down, ceremonial activities and so forth.

I was in the Gibb River in the VRD region early this week and I sat with three old fellas who do not have any voice in their families and they are very concerned about who is going to sing their songs. There are two complexes to the Land Rights Act. One is the administration responsibility, the separational powers; the other is the cultural match and identification of the appropriate people to speak and own land on the country. We have to acknowledge that and work within that framework.

Senator LUDLAM: Just to be clear, a new study was undertaken; is that not correct?

Mr Hill: It is normal process.

Senator LUDLAM: It is normal; okay.

Mr Levy: But it is not an open book. It starts with what was known.

Senator LUDLAM: Yes, of course. I am not assuming you are making it up from scratch. Can we just be clear? Who decided that that report was necessary? I know there would have been 15 or nearly 20 years.

Mr Levy: The report was required by the legislation. There had to be information given to satisfy the Commonwealth minister.

Senator LUDLAM: The land commissioner's report was not sufficient?

Mr Levy: The NLC was required by the legislation to prepare a report regarding that specific area of land to satisfy the then minister. The ANAO has commented about this. It said, 'You are doing the right thing.' Even though you know who the traditional owners are, for example, in a particular area, nonetheless the form is filled out and the anthropology branch formally ticks off. It is a procedural thing often, but nonetheless we always do it. The auditors tell us to, so we do.

Senator LUDLAM: In this instance, was that initiated at the point where the site had been nominated and brought forward? I am just trying to work out where in the chain of events that new study was initiated, even if you could just give us a date.

Mr Levy: If I recall correctly—and I think some of the dates are before previous Senate committees—the government scientists came to the NLC full council in, I think, October

2005. I think the then NLC chairman had a meeting with some members of the Muckaty area later that year. The following year the government scientists went down to Muckaty Station with people that we knew were from that area. There was a visit to various potential locations. When it became clear that a nomination may be possible, it was formalised. I do not precisely know when. I cannot recall at the moment precisely when, but it was early in the process—

Senator LUDLAM: Late enough to know exactly what the area of land was?

Mr Levy: That is right, but it must be remembered that the nominated site is next door to the haulage road from the manganese mine to the east. We had very recently done what we call an LIR, a land interest registrar, a fresh anthropological search based on the previous work only a few years before for the land directly proximate to that road, including the nominated site.

Senator LUDLAM: You said you do not have the precise date on you, but could you undertake to take that on notice and provide us with that.

Mr Levy: Sure.

Senator LUDLAM: Were there requests or suggestions from the department still back in that general time regarding potential sites, that there be access to roads, or were you trying to work out the cause and effect, whether the department came and outlined criteria that would be needed—for example, transport corridors—or were you approached by the Lauders who identified an area that they wanted to nominate?

Mr Levy: We were approached by the traditional owners to ascertain whether the government scientists thought that some land might be suitable to look at. I am not sure when we knew, but at some stage we knew—and I guess we knew before they came to us—that if something is close to a road or some infrastructure it makes the whole exercise cheaper. However, our understanding from the inception from the government scientists was that they did not rule out a site which required a great deal of road construction to get to. I guess that if they had a number of options they would go for the cheaper ones if other things were equal, but they did not rule out large road construction. You would need to ask them, I guess, but that is my recollection.

Senator LUDLAM: Thank you. Is Amy Lauder still a member of the NLC full council?

Mr Hill: Yes.

Senator LUDLAM: Is her husband—I think his name is Jeff Dixon—still on the NLC executive?

Mr Hill: He was nominated by the full council as the executive member for the Borroloola-Barkly region.

Senator LUDLAM: So, that is a yes. He is still on the executive.

Mr Hill: Yes.

Senator LUDLAM: Has the NLC been approached by traditional owners in your region to nominate another site for a radioactive waste dump?

Mr Levy: Once the Labor government came to power, as you would know, they said they were going to repeal the legislation. No-one has approached us. However, prior to the nomination—and I think I have said this to a previous committee—after the NLC executive visited the Lucas Heights reactor in February or March 2006, there were a range of low-level,

if you like—some were a higher level than that—expressions of interest from throughout the NLC's region, but they never went further because the government indicated to us that, of those potential putative locations, the one they thought was the most worth looking at was the Muckaty Station area.

Senator LUDLAM: That one went forward.

Mr Levy: One of those was, as you would know, in north-east Arnhem Land. It was publicised.

Senator LUDLAM: Yes. But nothing since the 2007 election?

Mr Levy: No.

Senator LUDLAM: Formal or informal, high level or low?

Mr Levy: If anyone approached us to say they wanted to make a nomination, we would tell them that the government is not proposing to proceed with any nomination under the current act until it is amended.

Senator LUDLAM: That is hypothetical. Has anybody approached you since 2007?

Mr Levy: No-one has approached us to nominate land since the nomination in 2007.

Senator LUDLAM: That is okay; thank you. That one was a yes or a no. So, you are not pursuing alternative sites, either on the Muckaty Land Trust land or anywhere else?

Mr Levy: No, we are not pursuing anything, but if the legislation goes through then, no doubt, there will be consideration of the Muckaty site. It will be open for people anywhere in the Northern Territory to further pursue it or not, as the case may be. If they do, the NLC will perform its statutory functions; if they do not, the NLC will perform its statutory functions by doing nothing.

Senator LUDLAM: Mr Levy or Mr Hill, have either of you visited Tennant Creek or the parts surrounding that area to discuss the waste dump with traditional owners?

Mr Levy: I have, back at the time of the nomination.

Senator LUDLAM: Anything else?

Mr Hill: I have been in the region with regard to other Northern Land Council activities, not necessarily specifically regarding the waste dump. We have had consultations down there with traditional owners regarding a number of other activities—the optic fibre, the membership of their corporations and so forth—so we do have a presence in that region. We are down there talking to traditional owners and others associated with the Muckaty Land Trust regarding native title matters and claims, so we do have a presence in that region and there is always an opportunity for traditional owners to talk to and consult with my officers regarding all matters which we are to do under the Aboriginal land rights act.

Senator LUDLAM: What would people have to do to get a meeting with you specifically on the issue of Muckaty, because I understand you have been invited to speak about that specific issue a number of times?

Mr Hill: With regard to the specific issues, I believe that we have done what we are required to do under the Aboriginal land rights act and consulted the relevant people. I believe the forum you are referring to in Tennant Creek is a forum which I believe the legislators or the government of the day needs to hold rather than the land council, because it is their

legislation and policy which we need to undertake. The forum you are referring to in Tennant Creek is a forum which we do not necessarily believe is our responsibility. It is the government and the relevant minister who need to address some of the concerns people have. It is outside our jurisdiction.

Senator LUDLAM: So, if people who the NLC does not necessarily believe have exclusive traditional ownership of the site in question ask the NLC, you, Mr Levy or any of your representatives for a meeting, you refer them to the federal government? You do not believe that that is part of your role?

Mr Hill: Again, we do not believe we have the statutory responsibility for the information they are seeking. We have undertaken our duty with regard to the issue of Muckaty. On your earlier questions regarding the concerns people have about the social aspects and so forth, that lies with the Northern Territory government, particularly regarding the management aspect of some of the social concerns people have.

Senator LUDLAM: But don't you have the statutory obligations to represent the interests of all TOs within the NLC region?

Mr Hill: Yes, with regard to their country, not other people's country, we are to seek the informed consent of traditional owners and consult other affected groups—that is, consult with, not seek instructions from them or seek their informed consent. Again, on the forums you have proposed, which we did not attend to, we do not believe that we had the answers to what people were seeking and that they invited the relevant minister and department to provide those answers.

Senator LUDLAM: The people specifically want to know why the land was nominated, but I have run the clock down to some degree, so I will leave it there.

Mr Levy: I do not know of any such request that you are referring to. I thought you were referring to environmental issues. Every letter and email matter, to my knowledge, that has come to the NLC since this process commenced has been answered formally.

Senator LUDLAM: To your knowledge. Could you take that on notice for us and correct the record if that turns out not to be the case.

Mr Levy: I am happy to tell you now, I do not know of any such thing.

Senator LUDLAM: I am not asking whether you know of any. I am asking whether there might have been some that you did not know of.

Mr Levy: I can assure you right now that there is not.

Senator LUDLAM: Nobody has contacted the NLC in three years to try to get a hearing with either you or Mr Hill on the issue of Muckaty Station?

Mr Levy: I do not know of any such contact by any person.

Mr Hill: Can I just clarify? You asked and I responded with regard to myself. The NLC is the council; we are merely the bureaucracy of the land council. It sounded as though your question was more directed to Mr Levy, not the NLC, if I can put it in context.

Senator LUDLAM: No. I am not referring to correspondence directed at Mr Levy. I am not sure why people would write to Mr Levy. But to you, Mr Hill, or to the Northern Land Council in general, has anybody sought meetings, consultations and explanation about NLC—

Mr Hill: To my knowledge, yes.

Senator LUDLAM: People have?

Mr Hill: People have invited me down.

Senator LUDLAM: So, is it not part of your obligation to meet with them?

Mr Hill: It is my obligation to meet with people who are very clear—firstly, I find out what information they were seeking. I will say this again: I do not have the statutory responsibility to respond to some of the questions in which they were asking about the product, being the material. On the discussion: I am happy to have discussions with people, particularly traditional owners, about their land, but not to give other privileged information about other traditional land groups to non-traditional owners who do not have ownership or are part of that process of seeking informed consent, if I can put it that way.

Senator LUDLAM: What you say is an aside in answer to one of your earlier answers that the minister has not taken the time to meet any of those people either, so they have just had nearly five years of this. I will leave it there, Chair.

Senator SCULLION: I have some questions in relation to some of the policies of the land council. Does the Northern Land Council have a communication plan that regulates or stipulates the process of the Northern Land Council making public comments?

Mr Hill: Sorry, can you start again?

Senator SCULLION: You are a statutory authority, Mr Hill, and I was just inquiring whether or not you have a communication plan, as most statutory authorities do, that would regulate or stipulate the process of making a public comment, like you would make a statement? This is what the Northern Land Council thinks, so you would have one of those. Obviously, you do not have one in your top pocket, mate, and I appreciate that, but would you be able to provide it to the committee on notice?

Mr Hill: Yes, with regard to that, the full council has given powers to the executive council to seek and direct both me and the chairman to represent the NLC with regard to media and public statements.

Senator SCULLION: You would have a document of that nature that reflects what you have just said.

Mr Hill: Yes.

Senator SCULLION: If you could just make that available to us on notice, it would be appreciated. You have just maintained that the executive of the council are the ones who make a decision and then that decision in terms of a public statement is for you to make; without verballing, is that correct?

Mr Hill: Yes.

Senator SCULLION: I was very keen to understand that that was the case. You—and, I take it, the Northern Land Council as a statutory authority—called for the sacking of Warren Snowden, a minister of this current government, and Senator Crossin. We just want to confirm that that was a process that was approved by the full executive. They had a process under which each one of those executives will be able to recall that they made a decision for that to happen. Would there be any documentation about how that sort of decision, as an example, would work?

Mr Hill: I consult with the chairman and the executive council. The council has to meet, and does meet, at least quarterly a year to discuss policies and statutory responsibilities with regard to reporting and so forth. The majority of our executive members reside in the bush. They feel pretty frustrated about what is happening, particularly in their regions, with regard to the calling of the sackings of those two parliamentarians. Again, that was a discussion I had with my chairman and my executive members. I liaise with my executive members out of session with regard to other matters. I speak regularly to my council. All I was doing was hearing the expressions of my executives. I think we have invited you to our full council meetings and you have been unable, due to prior commitments, to attend. I encourage you to come to our council meetings and the council members will talk to you directly about how they feel about what is happening in their regions.

Senator SCULLION: The reason many statutory authorities have this process is that often you can go back and say, 'Look, the minutes of this meeting reflect that the will of the executive is to go and do X.' It might not be to criticise parliamentarians. That was just an example. You have to look after yourself in the sense that if you say something, you say, 'Well, this is, in fact, the view of something', and it is normally done by minutes of a meeting or some sort of a meeting. You say you have this informal process, but I am not sure. Perhaps Mr Levy or you, Mr Hill, can recollect whether the document you intend to provide on notice—I am not sure if you can indicate whether or not it is a process that reflects the minutes of the meeting or otherwise. If you are unable to, I understand.

Mr Hill: We are required to keep minutes of our executive meetings that auditors and so forth have a right to actually view. With regard to the day-to-day operations, again, we do have a filing system, we do provide file notes and so forth.

Senator SCULLION: I will just use that as an example. But if you are able to provide it on notice then, when you are providing information about the process you have for making public comments—and if that should be the reflection of the executive—could you also provide on notice what the minutes embargo with regard to the particular decision about that statement. If you could do that, I would appreciate it.

CHAIR: Mr Hill, are your minutes public? Are they published and available to the public?

Mr Levy: No, they are largely private.

Mr Hill: My legal adviser tells me they are largely private.

CHAIR: I was just clarifying that point.

Mr Levy: I may be able to assist here.

Senator SCULLION: You are always very helpful, Mr Levy.

Mr Levy: I try to be helpful. Mr Hill answered the question at the beginning. I am not saying he did not answer it afterwards. The power has been delegated to the chief executive officer; that has always been the case. The rule at the Northern Land Council all the time I have worked there is that only the chairman or the CEO makes public comment. Occasionally, others get to make comment. I very rarely have made comment about legal things, and I hope I do not have to again. It is the chairman and the CEO; that has always been the rule. It is in the delegations more than in minutes. It is not really a minuted thing; it is the delegation which was last done in 1996 and revised last year in a minor way.

Senator SCULLION: So what you are telling me is that the document you will provide to me is likely to reflect that the CEO and the chair do not need to seek the support of anything lower than the two of them or the executive or anyone else with regard to making a public position? I am not trying to verbal you. That is what I understand from what you have just told me.

Mr Levy: I have never seen any CEO act like that, and I have never seen Mr Hill act like that. It is a consultative process.

Senator SCULLION: I am just trying to get to the bottom of the process. The orders that you are going to provide will give us some guidance about how these public statements come to be agreed on. You are saying that it is your recollection that the person the CEO has to speak to is the chair and it is, in fact, not an entire executive.

Mr Hill: It is also stated in my employment contract with the NLC. We will provide you with the documentation which you are seeking with regard to the policy.

Senator SCULLION: If that can be provided, that would be appreciated.

Mr Levy: For clarification, I have misled you. I did not say that the CEO has to talk only to the chair to make public comment. What I was trying to say is that power is delegated to the chair and there is an employment contract that gives the CEO a role. The role the CEO has at the NLC is the same role the head of any department or any CEO has. It includes making public comment on behalf of the NLC. There is a robust process at executive council meetings. The chairman is in the office, often including other members of the executive and full council meetings a number of times a year, and these public comments are robustly discussed—not in a critical way usually but by way of improving them—and I have never heard a suggestion of anything other than a very close relationship between Mr Hill, the full council and the executive regarding all these things.

Senator SCULLION: I am certainly not suggesting otherwise, but thank you for your assistance. Perhaps then, you will be able to go to the minutes of that robust meeting and provide those on notice to the committee.

Mr Levy: What I am saying is that I do not think it is the minutes. This is the employment contract. It is the job of CEOs to be the public face of an organisation.

Senator SCULLION: All other CEOs have a policy document that provides them with guidance about how that organisation, whether it is a government department or anything else, has the capacity to make a statement on behalf of a land council, a department, Centrelink or any other Commonwealth agency. That is what I was going to, and if you can provide that, that is very useful. If what you have provided is subject to a meeting, please provide the minutes of the meeting, and I would like you to do that in the context of that example.

Senator CROSSIN: Could I just follow up with a few questions. Mr Hill, can I just get this right? You have just given us evidence that what usually happens—or is it what may happen?—is that your executive council makes a decision, might come to a conclusion about something and then you would issue a public statement?

Mr Hill: We discuss the pros and cons with regard to making it public. With the executives and particularly the chairman, we discuss the pros and cons of releasing media releases and the current issues and no doubt the possibilities it may have to come back and

bite us later. We have robust discussions about media releases and interacting with the general public.

Senator CROSSIN: On the public comments you made last year that Senator Scullion referred to, were they a matter of discussion at an executive meeting or were they just a matter of discussions you have had with individuals on the ground in the course of your work?

Mr Hill: No, it is more my general discussions from the day-to-day operations, the information I seek from my officers from out in the field—in my relationships with the communities and the executive council. The council members read newspapers, listen to the radio and are involved in council elections and so forth. The question you are asking is very universal, in a sense, because a lot of our people are very intelligent and understand some of the issues, to people's surprise, and they listen to a lot of things that happen in their regions and across Australia. They listen to politicians. There is a general perception in the wider community that you only see our local representatives when there are elections.

Senator CROSSIN: In my discussions on that very day with your chair and deputy chair, they had no knowledge of your public statements, nor did they agree with them. Have they raised that with you since?

Mr Hill: I will have to check my notes and my minutes of the day with regard to that issue. I do not know if they included any of your discussions with the chairman and the deputy chairman.

Senator CROSSIN: I am not sure they would be in your notes, because they were discussions I had with them. The issue I am going to here is whether or not they are fair and reasonable comments to be made by the CEO of a statutory authority of the Commonwealth with respect to a minister of the Crown.

Mr Hill: Again, we have robust discussions with regard to public comments about certain organisations. We know individuals and so forth. Again, I am just expressing an interest, if not representing the council, in the council's discussions that we have. The council itself, particularly the chairman, gets spoken to by various groups and so forth, as you will appreciate—also the deputy chairman. I was not privy to the conversation you had with the chairman and the deputy chairman. You are advising me now. I need to talk to the chairman and so forth. But getting back to your question about my role as CEO of a statutory body, again I am expressing the aspirations—and I have been directed by my council and the chairman. Again, it goes back to the delegation process from the executive council and what is speculated in my contract; I make public statements.

Senator CROSSIN: I just have two other questions on this matter. You made reference to Senator Scullion attending either executive or council meetings. I think I wrote to you nearly nine months ago requesting a timetable of your meetings and an invitation to come to those meetings. I still have not had a response. Do you have a reason for that?

Mr Hill: I have tabled your letters to the executives and to the chairman. I understand that my officers have been in contact with your office and we are trying to find a—

Senator CROSSIN: Yesterday, I might add.

Mr Hill: Not yesterday. I think there was a discussion earlier than that.

Senator CROSSIN: There was an email to me on Wednesday and a telephone call to my office yesterday. I just want to get this clear here about the way in which the NLC is operating at this point in time. I am asking why there has not been a response earlier to my letter, or letters.

Mr Hill: You will be advised in due course with regard to an invitation and a discussion with the chairman and the executive council.

Senator CROSSIN: Thank you, Chair.

Senator SCULLION: I understand from the media and from discussions I have had with people in the Katherine region that the Northern Land Council has been consulting with communities as, from what I have read and from what you have said, part of a no campaign. What action or activities have been supported or instigated by the Northern Land Council in relation to the proposed new council?

Mr Hill: Could you repeat that last bit?

Senator SCULLION: What have you been doing? What actions or what activities have been supported or instigated by the Northern Land Council in relation to the proposed new land council?

Mr Hill: We have undertaken a consultative process to advise people that there is an application before the minister. It is our statutory responsibility to advise people of the process involved for the creation of a new land council under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. The process we have been involved in is purely consultation. People are seeking information in regard to the process.

Senator SCULLION: In an article in the *National Indigenous Times* on 6 February 2011, you said:

But a series of meetings held by the Northern Land Council in recent weeks has demonstrated a lack of support for such a move.

The editorial was in your name, Mr Hill. I have chosen not to table it, but it gives a pretty clear view that the Northern Land Council is significantly opposed, and it gives the view that the land council, in terms of its consultation work, was asking people what they thought about it, and you were reporting that they were non-supportive of it. Following your statement that, under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, you have to advise people that there is a process underway, why did you feel that you should go further than that and speak to people about why perhaps that was not the case? If the land rights act says you have to advise people that a process is underway and advise them of that process, why did you feel the need to run a no vote at the time, which is clearly what the wider community would see it as being, given the article on 6 February?

Mr Hill: We have gone out and consulted people and provided the information to people about the process, along with the relevant documentation. The working group is working towards this Katherine Regional Land Council. We have provided the community and traditional owners information about the press releases and so forth, and people are seeking further information from us about the application, which we have now received. We are providing that information to the communities, and the communities or TO groups for that region are just telling us that they have not been consulted regarding the creation of a new land council. We believe that there is no support. It is not that we are interfering in people's

rights with this call for a new land council, we are just expressing the aspirations of what traditional owner groups are saying.

Senator SCULLION: That is a pretty long bow, Mr Hill. The editorial was devoted entirely to saying that you should never accept that there should be this so-called breakaway land council in Katherine. I think you should reasonably accept that that was the thrust of the full page in the *National Indigenous Times*. It is hardly about consultation or getting people's views. You also expressed a very clear view, and again I am assuming that that was the land council's view, that there should not be a breakaway land council and in fact that others should not support a breakaway land council. That was in the editorial. Quite clearly that went well beyond that purview.

Mr Hill: With regard to the position of the NLC, and particularly the statutory responsibility we have to fulfil in the consultation process, we also have an obligation to do various functions with respect to the statutory responsibility of the NLC. Therefore, some of our consultations in these regions have been sabotaged by individuals who are supporting this application. We also have to fulfil our statutory responsibility in regard to investigating other illegal activities which could be occurring on Aboriginal lands, particularly where there are firearms involves with illegal safari hunting and so forth. We tend to provide what evidence we can provide to traditional owners about this proposal. First, we have told them that people have a right to call and establish their own land council. Secondly, it needs to be based on good governance, and there are questions regarding the governance of this proposal. There are also the financial obligations in regard to who and where. The issues people are circulating about the creation of a new land council are unjust and unfounded. There is a lot of hearsay. There are issues regarding the fact that the NLC has taken too long on a number of issues, particularly regarding economic development. However, it is very complex legislation with respect to trying to protect the interests of traditional owners and seek their informed consent at the same time.

Senator SCULLION: I understand that, without becoming argumentative, you are going to advise people of the process. Quite clearly, the process is that the minister receives a request, and it is quite contemplated under the act. The minister then makes a decision about whether or not it will go to a plebiscite as to whether there is a prima facie case, in broad terms. At that stage, one would normally think that the minister would make the decision. In those few seconds I have described to you the process. I am very concerned that the process that you undertook was not advising people of the process that I just outlined. Could I get some details in regard to the consultation? How many meetings have you held?

Mr Hill: We have had 16 consultations.

Senator SCULLION: How many travel or meeting expenses have been paid?

Mr Hill: For officers?

Senator SCULLION: Just generally. People have to get to meetings; they are at meetings.

Mr Hill: It is in the course of our day-to-day activity. These requests came from community leaders for us to go out and talk about the application for the establishment of a breakaway land council. As you would know and appreciate, to travel around in aircraft is quite expensive in the Northern Territory, so what we tend to do is have a number of other

consultations with the communities regarding proposed leases from the territory government or private enterprise.

Senator SCULLION: If it is going to be too difficult to unwind, it is not that important. You can perhaps take that on notice. Have you allocated an amount particularly for this so-called consultation or no campaign?

Mr Hill: Again that is part of our day-to-day ABA funding. With respect to our consultation costs, depending on transport, you can pay up to \$6,000 from Darwin to Ngukurr for a twin-engine plane. The costs with respect to the chairman, which is a remunerated position, so it is his wage, and the possibility of my attendance—

Senator SCULLION: Perhaps it is an area you can take on notice? You can allocate the funds that have been provided?

Mr Hill: Yes, we will come back with an answer. We do not make any payments to traditional owners.

Senator SCULLION: That is an interesting point. It is not an answer to a question I have asked. I understand that the Northern Land Council is currently proposing to charge a rent or usage fee for the use of community barge landings. I hope you are prepared for the questions. Who proposed to pay such a fee?

Mr Levy: The NLC for years has negotiated leases with payments to commercial operators of barge landings; in fact, for decades.

Senator SCULLION: There appears to have been a relatively recent negotiation, in fact, in September 2010. Who are those people who pay the fees?

Mr Levy: We can take on notice the names of the proponents, if you like. One of the major ones is Perkins, obviously.

Senator SCULLION: How is this fee calculated?

Mr Levy: It is negotiated in the way the fees are ordinarily negotiated. What usually happens is, if there have been pre-existing arrangements and if the licence has come to an end, there is a question whether it should stay at the same rate or whether there are reasons why it should go up. That requires consideration of things such as the value of the land, the value of the business and whether other operators are offering more. If there is competition, that might cause the price to go up or it might not.

Senator SCULLION: As part of the answer, I want to confirm that not all operators would necessarily have the same fee. Should I make that assumption?

Mr Levy: I would have to take it on notice. My recollection is the barge operators are paying the same fee, at least for ordinary barge landings. There might be a difference in Gove or somewhere, but I think it is the same.

Senator SCULLION: The reasons for asking that is that I did not want to step on commercial-in-confidence issues if they were different, but if it is a standard fee, if you could provide those schedules of fees, that would be useful. What is the purpose of the fee?

Mr Levy: To comply with section 19(5)(c) of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act which provides that the terms and conditions of a licence or lease facilitated by the NLC in a land trust must be reasonable, which contemplates that under section 35(4) of the land rights act the payments will be received by the NLC and distributed to or for the benefit of the

traditional Aboriginal owners at the barge landing. In short, it is to provide compensation to the owners of the land.

Senator SCULLION: Who currently funds the construction and the maintenance of the actual landings?

Mr Hill: The proponent.

Senator SCULLION: I can recall many of the barge landings being originally constructed by governments and maintained by governments over a very long period of time.

Mr Levy: That could well be the case.

Senator SCULLION: They may be responsible for them should they start deteriorating in the future? I am not being glib about this. I am just wondering if part of the rationale of paying the fee was that they were now taking responsibility for some level of amenity?

Mr Levy: I would have to look at the agreements, but our agreements are when a proponent takes responsibility for something, particularly exclusively, then they are responsible for it.

Senator SCULLION: If you can provide a framework of those agreements, without the particular proponent, that would very useful.

Mr Levy: Yes, I understand what you want.

Senator SCULLION: Have you done an assessment or a calculation about the price impact this will have on goods? Yes, you can say that this is a piece of concrete between high water mark and low water mark, and that is effectively the level of amenity that is being provided in all of the places that I have visited, and that is always required. The proponents will simply pass on that increase, and the only people they are passing it onto is the community. Have you done any sort of cost-benefit analysis to work out what sort of impact this fee schedule provides to the cost of living in these communities?

Mr Levy: We have assessed the fees as being reasonable in light of the facts as I talked about before. We do not understand it to be the case that any of the operators have difficulty paying those fees. If you mean have we engaged an expert to do an assessment, no, we have not.

Senator SCULLION: I am not saying it is the capacity of the operators; of course they will bear the fee. They just simply pass it on to people who are buying a cabbage in Maningrida. They do not care.

Mr Hill: To answer your question, no doubt you have the barge, the goods come on, it goes to Maningrida, for example. It goes to the Maningrida Progress Association. The question is: does it inflate costs? The price within the shops no doubt goes up because of the fees down at the barge, is that the question?

Senator SCULLION: Yes, absolutely.

Mr Hill: Again, we also arrange section 19 leases or licences to MPA, so we also take into consideration while we are consulting with the proponent for the barge, we also no doubt through our consultations with MPA and the shops take into consideration that those prices are pretty much standard on a commercial basis, and we definitely do not want to see that we carry costs on to the consumers, so we do take those into consideration when we are actually negotiating.

Senator SCULLION: If you could take it on notice, not something completely burdensome, but just a one-page response about how you satisfy yourselves that, when a new barge comes into the business which will increase competition and push down rates, hopefully its impact will not result in passing on the increase in prices. That would be very useful.

Senator SIEWERT: What is your position on township leases, and are you happy with the new approach taken by the government on township leases?

Mr Hill: The Northern Land Council has been participating in a consultation with the executive director of township leasing to selected sites of major communities in the NLC region. We will no doubt have formal consultations with traditional owners in mid-July to again discuss the possibility of township leases with traditional owners in those communities. There are a couple of concerns. There is still a bit of toing and froing between the Northern Land Council and the department regarding the long-term benefits it will derive for traditional owners and, importantly, to the wider community, such as Wadeye or Maningrida, but part of our discussions with the department will be to create corporations for traditional owners for them to look at investment profiles, to be part of the community's growth and share the wealth.

The council's current position is that it does not support township leases. However, there has been another proposal by the minister which we will convene to the council next week when the council sits at South Alligator. We will be putting the minister's proposal to the council. I know that, through this information session the director of township leasing and my staff have done with traditional owners, some want further information. I have been told that the department has offered those traditional owners a visit to Groote Eylandt and also the Tiwi Islands to see what the benefits of a township lease will provide to the community and, importantly, to the traditional owners. I understand that some traditional owners have taken up that offer to visit those communities. We are still working through that. Importantly, the council would give consideration to the aspirations of traditional owners if traditional owners are fully informed of what township leasing is all about. The NLC at its last full council meeting in November 2010 did a record 117 agreements under section 19, and 85 of those were leases in communities, 17 being leased to governments or government entities.

The point I am making is that the Northern Land Council can actually fulfil the role or functions of the director of township leasing. We did it. We have the evidence to prove that we are doing what we are supposed to do under the act and provide leases to governments and to private proponents, or anyone who wants to conduct business on Aboriginal land. I understand that a further 50 agreements will be proposed for council next week, and that involves 38 leases or licences under section 19.

Senator SIEWERT: Is this under your process?

Mr Hill: Yes, under our process.

Senator SIEWERT: Sorry, I interrupted you. You were going through these 50 new ones.

Mr Hill: Yes, 50 agreements will be put to the council for its approval to direct the land trust to enter into agreement with those proponents, being the territory government and other private enterprises.

Senator SIEWERT: In terms of the new proposal on which you understood the government is coming back to you, what is the time line for that? I presume you will have to go back out for consultation with traditional owners on that particular new approach?

Mr Hill: Yes. I understand that traditional owners from four communities would like further consultations with FaHCSIA in regard to the possibility of exploring a township lease. That will commence in mid-July. Again, that is going to compete against a number of other priorities which the government has asked the NLC to do, plus July is the school holidays, so people will be going bush, and we are experiencing very cold weather in the Northern Territory at the moment, so it will be difficult finding TOs in July. We also have the show circuit and the Garma Festival. Most festivals across the Northern Territory operate during July and August, so it will be a busy two months.

Senator SCULLION: I have a number of areas that I have not covered, and I will provide questions on notice for those.

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

[12:23]

CHAIR: Thank you to the officers from the Northern Land Council. There have been a number of questions put on notice, and you have the provisos for those. We will now move to outcome 4.3, employment and economic development. Senator Scullion has just advised that he is going to start with the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Account.

Senator SCULLION: With regard to the supermarkets in Alice Springs, what funding or grant amount was provided to Lhere Artepe Enterprises Pty Ltd for the purchase of supermarkets in Alice Springs?

Mr Chalmers: A total of \$5.852 million was provided.

Senator SCULLION: Were any conditions placed on this grant?

Mr Chalmers: A number of conditions were placed on the grant.

Senator SCULLION: Could you tell me what those conditions were?

Mr Chalmers: Principally, the condition placed on the grant was that an alcohol management strategy be developed, but other conditions relating to the commercial loan that was also associated with the grant were put in place.

Senator SCULLION: The commercial loan aspects are probably nominally what you would expect out of all of the arrangements?

Mr Chalmers: Yes.

Senator SCULLION: The outstanding one is the alcohol management plan. When was the funding provided, roughly?

Mr Chalmers: I am just thinking through. I am not sure that I know exactly when the program funding agreement was finalised, and then the funding was provided. Are you asking when the minister approved the funding?

Senator SCULLION: When did it all happen—a year ago, six months ago?

Mr Chalmers: The grant was approved by the minister 12 months ago, in May 2010.

Senator SCULLION: When did that go into effect? How long ago were the supermarkets purchased?

Mr Chalmers: In December 2010.

Senator SCULLION: In terms of the alcohol management plan—and I understand that the plan would be approved by the Northern Territory Licensing Commission—how are we going with that?

Mr Chalmers: The plan has been approved by the Northern Territory Licensing Commissioner, and my understanding is that that plan has been in place. It required an alcohol council to be formed, and that has been formed to my understanding. It also proposed a number of other measures relating to the type of stock that would be held by the supermarkets and also relating to hours of operation and so on. Those requirements were embodied in a plan which the licensing commissioner agreed and are part of the licence conditions for those supermarkets.

Senator SCULLION: If it is possible, on notice, could you provide the date from which that plan took effect, and if you could provide us with a copy of the plan, that would be very useful.

Mr Chalmers: Certainly.

CHAIR: Is that the only question around the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Account?

Senator SCULLION: Yes.

CHAIR: We will return to the Indigenous Employment Program.

Senator PAYNE: I refer to one of the initiatives from the Indigenous Youth Career Pathways program. I am trying to get some understanding of whether you have any target numbers for that program, how you see that rolling out, over what period of time, and will it be applied across all jurisdictions?

Mr Griew: The program is a commitment to 6,400 school based traineeships over four years to 2014-15, and will be rolled out across all jurisdictions.

Senator PAYNE: What will the particular support comprise for the students to stay in school and undertake school based traineeships? Is it in-school support, is it external?

Mr Griew: An amount of this will of course be developed in each proposal by the local proponents—the school, the businesses that they relate to, the community organisations. But the essence of the idea is the provision of personal mentoring and case management to individual students, the creation of a line of sight, if you like, from their school experience to a post-school pathway through training, employment and community engagement. This is something that has been developed at a lower level within the Indigenous employment programs. We have about 1,900 school based traineeships to date. It is a major taking to scale of that activity.

A number of models are available through our activities so far. A good example in the Illawarra is a project known as Project Murra through which each participant completes 100 days of on-the-job training in addition to completing TAFE modules towards a Cert II qualification. The program engages schools, participants and their families, the local Indigenous community, TAFE and the business sector. The program also provides employment opportunities for students completing year 12 for a period up until they have met the age requirements to enter the police academy at Goulburn. That is one example.

Senator PAYNE: For this career pathways program, who do you expect to be the greater bulk of proponents? Do you expect those to come mostly from schools or from other organisations?

Ms Wood: The program will be focusing on schools with the highest level of need as assessed against a range of criteria.

Senator PAYNE: Do you have the criteria?

Ms Wood: No, the criteria are under development. We will be working with jurisdictions around the criteria to identify schools that have a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and where there is also a high level of disadvantage. We will be engaging providers through an open procurement process to work with schools and support students in schools.

Senator PAYNE: Is it the sort of thing where the schools-industry partnerships might get involved?

Ms Wood: We would expect to see that the providers and the schools would be working with local employers, because that would be the way to create the line of sight pathway for young people. There will be a range of opportunities for industry partnerships to support the program as well.

Senator PAYNE: Do you envisage any process to inform employers about the program to encourage them to push for take-up as well?

Ms Wood: Yes. We will be looking at the engagement we already have with employers, so employers that we are already working with through the Indigenous employment program that may be interested in participating. Once we have got to the point where we have identified the schools, obviously there is opportunity for a more targeted approach to the employers that have a presence locally, which might be smaller employers, but it might be some of the big players who have particular stores or outlets locally.

Senator PAYNE: Does it have any fit with the part of the Learn Earn Legend! program which is encouraging higher retention rates to year 12? Is there any link or planned link?

Ms Wood: Yes. This program has actually grown out of some of those experiences. Some of the models developed as part of Learn Earn Legend!. They are focused on supporting particularly students to complete year 12 and make good transitions after year 12, and there are the learnings from that around the need for the really good in-school support to actually make that work. It is certainly informed by those projects, and there is capacity to continue to grow that.

Senator Arbib: Some of the football clubs have set up school based traineeship programs, including the Titans up on the Gold Coast, the Newcastle Knights and others.

Ms Wood: The Broncos.

Senator Arbib: The Broncos have been doing a good job with it. They employ students on their own premises to work with their organisation, but at the same time, they are still at school. The premise of what we are trying to work towards is that all governments are committed to increasing school retention, but at the same time we need to be providing the pathways from school into employment. The earlier you can start, the better. The work of groups such as the AES, with which I know you have had some involvement, and others

seems to be providing a good model that we can use for other organisations, and we want to see bids coming in from not just the current organisations but also coming out of Indigenous communities themselves plus businesses.

Senator PAYNE: Is this a 1 July start?

Ms Wood: It will commence with the 2012 school year.

Senator PAYNE: So it is January next year?

Ms Wood: January 2012.

Senator PAYNE: In terms of the development of the criteria, which I understand is in process, is that a process internal to DEEWR or do you use external contributions for that?

Ms Wood: Initially we are looking internally, because we have a range of expertise, obviously, across both employment and education, and we already have a lot of engagement with education authorities about areas of need. Primarily we will be looking internally but we will have opportunities to talk to external stakeholders to test those as well.

Senator PAYNE: I probably have a couple more questions that may have come out of your answers, but I will place those on notice when I have a chance to examine the *Hansard*. I wanted to ask a couple of questions about one of the minister's recent announcements concerning government procurement. Is it appropriate to ask those here?

Ms Wood: Yes.

Senator PAYNE: As I understand it, the changes mean that government agencies will be able to contract small and medium Indigenous businesses without conducting a full tender process. I understand that the impetus for that is to develop those enterprises. Does the exemption apply only to SMEs with the 50 per cent Indigenous ownership, or is there also a condition about a percentage of Indigenous employees in the enterprises?

Ms Wood: That exemption, which is an exemption to the Commonwealth procurement guidelines that are administered by the department of finance, is specifically about an exemption from the mandatory processes in the Commonwealth procurement guidelines for contacting with Indigenous business that is 50 per cent Indigenous owned. It is only about the ownership of the business; it is not specifically about the employment in the business. I would say that our experience with our work with the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council has shown a very high rate of Indigenous employment in Indigenous businesses, which is not surprising. Informally, they have indicated that they expect figures of around 70 to 72 per cent Indigenous employment amongst their Indigenous business members.

Senator PAYNE: I understand that. I was just surprised to see that there was not more of a requirement in relation to employment as well as ownership.

Ms Wood: This new announcement I guess supplements the broader policy, and the broader policy of Indigenous opportunities policy is focused on increasing both Indigenous employment and business. So it requires tenderers for major contracts to have Indigenous Training, Employment and Supplier Plans. That will provide opportunities obviously for Indigenous employment in the first instance within the contracting organisation. Most of the opportunities for Indigenous business under that policy, because most Indigenous businesses are SMEs, will likely be down the supply chain, so this new announcement was responding to

feedback from the Indigenous business sector that they also wanted to see more direct contracting opportunities.

Senator Arbib: It is two policies that make it up. You are right in terms of Indigenous employment using procurement. We already have that in place. That is something we had already talked about. This was a new element, and it was in response, as Ms Wood has said, to Indigenous businesses who are requesting that sort of access, because they think it will support them in terms of the procurement chain.

Senator PAYNE: The statement refers to not conducting the full tender process but still delivering value for money. You may want to redirect me to finance in this case, but—

Senator Arbib: They do administer the process.

Senator PAYNE: They administer the side of it which ensures that value for money is still being delivered in this procurement process with these exemptions?

Mr Griew: They administer the whole guideline, because it is a part of the Commonwealth procurement process.

Senator PAYNE: In policy terms, it is very relevant to your department. In terms of ensuring value for money is received, is there a specific part of the guideline that you can point me to that addresses that?

Ms Wood: We do not have the specific pages in the guidelines with us, but the Commonwealth procurement guidelines broadly have two parts. At the front end it talks about the principles that apply to all Commonwealth procurement, which includes the value for money principles. Then it moves into the mandatory processes for procurements over a certain threshold, which is \$80,000. It is that second part of the guidelines that will not be mandatory for agencies contracting with Indigenous businesses.

Mr Griew: But there is still an overriding principle that applies to all procurement, which is a value for money principle. You cannot avoid a value for money—

Senator PAYNE: No, and I was not even suggesting that.

Senator Arbib: This is being administered by finance, not by this department.

Senator PAYNE: I understand. Your name was splashed all over it, though, Minister.

Senator Arbib: Yes, but in terms of questions about the administration, it is for the minister for finance. Her name was on it too, I am pretty sure.

Senator PAYNE: It was indeed.

Senator Arbib: Just checking.

Senator PAYNE: Yes, you did not leave her off, do not worry. Is this the right spot to ask questions about the Indigenous Opportunities Policy?

Ms Wood: Yes.

Senator PAYNE: Does it have a 1 July start-up?

Ms Wood: Yes.

Senator PAYNE: Is it ready to go?

Ms Wood: Yes, it is ready to go. We have invited organisations that expect to be contracting with the Commonwealth to seek pre-approval for their Indigenous training,

employment and supplier plans, and we have had three plans received and approved to date. The word is getting out amongst potential contractors. We are also working with agencies that know that they will have procurement starting soon after 1 July and ensuring that they have all of the right clauses and processes established to apply the policy.

Senator PAYNE: Is this the Indigenous Training, Employment and Supplier Plan?

Ms Wood: Yes, that is right.

Senator PAYNE: Those three plans which have been submitted to date, are they all from government agencies or are there any from external?

Ms Wood: No, they are all from private sector.

Senator PAYNE: Where are they located?

Ms Wood: I will have to take that on notice. I do not have the detail of them.

Senator PAYNE: With respect to the plans, what is it required to tell government they will do?

Ms Wood: The plan requires the tenderer to identify actions that they will take to ensure training opportunities for Indigenous people, to increase Indigenous employment in their own organisation, to create opportunities for Indigenous businesses to be subcontractors to them in the services that they are delivering for government, and also to look at some broader action they might need within their organisation to enable those strategies to succeed. That could be something like committing to a Reconciliation Action Plan, or making other connections with communities. In each of those four areas, they will need to identify action that they will be taking. They will need to report annually against those actions to demonstrate that they are implementing them, and what the outcomes have been from that action.

Senator PAYNE: Have the three organisations that have submitted plans to date already have RAPs in place, for example?

Ms Wood: I will have to take that one on notice, too.

Senator PAYNE: Has any of those three organisations sought any support from the department in putting together their plan? Does the plan have an acronym?

Ms Wood: There will be a website called MyPlan. The process of putting a plan together is quite simple. We have given them some options that can help guide them as to what actions they might take. It is also open to them to add additional actions.

Senator PAYNE: What do you mean by you have given them options?

Ms Wood: We have kept the plan templates quite simple, so we have given them some of the standard things that any employer might need to do to increase Indigenous employment or training. We have actually given them those as suggestions that they can choose.

Senator PAYNE: Can you provide those templates on notice to the committee?

Ms Wood: We can do that, yes. What was the second part of your question?

Senator PAYNE: Have they sought assistance?

Ms Wood: They did not require assistance in establishing their plan, but we are engaging with them after the plan is approved at the local level, wherever they are based, to actually talk to them about whether they need support to implement it. That will be a proactive process that we will work through with all people who have plans approved.

Senator PAYNE: How are you promoting the whole policy amongst business?

Ms Wood: There is a range of ways that we are doing this. We are promoting it to agencies, which is an important step to getting to business, because they have their own regular suppliers that they are able to get through.

Senator PAYNE: Commonwealth agencies, do you mean?

Ms Wood: Commonwealth agencies. For example, the Department of Defence, for whom we have done a lot of work, is active at promoting the new requirements with its regular suppliers. We are also working with the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council to run a range of public information sessions. We did consult; we did look at across Commonwealth procurement the suppliers that would potentially meet the dollar threshold in terms of the contracts they had previously had with government. We actually actively engaged and invited them to participate in the consultation process. We are working through the different mechanisms that we have to talk to the right kinds of private sector organisations that may be contracting with government.

Senator PAYNE: Have any organisations who would fall into that category that you just mentioned, that is who have applied for contracts of this size before, raised concerns about this requirement?

Ms Wood: No. In fact, in the initial consultation processes, we have had really positive feedback and quite strong feedback from some major construction companies and others who are already actively promoting Indigenous employment and suppliers down their own supply chains. Some of them actually are ahead of the game in that respect. There were some administrative issues. We did not have anyone come back and say, 'This is a bad idea, we cannot afford it. It will be too hard.' They came back with some ideas about how the policy could be implemented in a way that works better for business. So we have taken on board those kinds of suggestions. That has helped shape the final templates for the plans and other elements of the policy.

Senator PAYNE: It says in the guidelines that support would be provided to organisations if they needed it to develop a plan. Is that over and above the templates and so on that you have already? What is envisaged in that space?

Ms Wood: We can talk to organisations about the templates and how they can use them and adapt them to their own circumstances. There will be a range of quite different circumstances for contracting organisations, depending on what services they deliver and where they are located. We can help them identify the local Indigenous organisations and communities. We can help them make some of those local linkages they might need to make to actually identify what actions they might take and ensure that they are successful.

Senator PAYNE: Has any thought been given to using business organisations like chambers of commerce and so on to promote the concept at that level of the business community?

Ms Wood: We have consulted with the chambers in developing the policy. We can provide them with information that they can get out to members. We are trying, as far as possible, to target the communications, so we are reaching the kinds of businesses that are most likely to contract with the Commonwealth and that are going to have the most interest. We are also working closely with the Indigenous business chambers as well.

Senator PAYNE: I guess my question from that would be: if you are targeting people who are already in the space, and they are the usual suspects, how does that raise awareness elsewhere?

Mr Griew: It might lead them to improve their performance themselves. Part of the job is to get the people who currently contract to supply to the Commonwealth to have a very big investment in the business—

Senator PAYNE: Okay; I would have thought you were hoping to build the number of people who want plans.

Senator Arbib: We have consulted widely in business, but I think it is a good idea. I am happy to send the information again over to all of the chambers of commerce and ACCI et cetera, to make sure that they inform all of their members. That is a good idea.

Senator PAYNE: Can you specify the target areas for us, please?

Ms Wood: There is a map that sets out all of the target areas.

Senator PAYNE: I do have the map.

Ms Wood: The target areas are defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Indigenous statistical areas. It is any area that has an Indigenous population over the national average of 2.5 per cent. It covers most of the country, but there are some parts of metropolitan areas that are not covered. The focus is where the primary activity under the contract is in one of the areas, the policy applies. Whether or not the policy applies is something agencies have to determine at the beginning of their process so it is clear to tenderers that the policy applies to this process or, no, the policy does not apply to this process, so they do not need to navigate those questions.

Senator PAYNE: Three plans have been submitted to date. Is that more or fewer than you expected?

Ms Wood: The demand was a little bit hard to predict. We are pleased that we have had some plans approved ahead of the actual procurement process, but we did expect that most tenderers would focus on the need to do the plan at the time they are focusing on the tender. The fact that there is only a small number so far is not a major concern.

Senator PAYNE: I was not criticising it; I was just wondering what your expectation was. What is your expectation in relation to Commonwealth agencies engaging in the process if you have three from the private sector so far?

Ms Wood: The plans will all be private sector. It is the tenderers to Commonwealth agencies that need to have the plans. The Commonwealth agencies' role is to make sure they apply the policy in their tender processes and ensure that all their tender documents have those requirements in them.

Senator PAYNE: So the obligation for those agencies is to revise their documentation to ensure it complies?

Ms Wood: Yes.

Senator PAYNE: Is that completed and ready to go across the entire public sector?

Ms Wood: We have consulted extensively, as I said, across the public sector. We have worked with the department of finance to ensure that all agencies understand the requirements. We are regularly providing updates to the department of finance's procurement

forums so they bring together procurement officers from across the public sector. This policy applies to all agencies that come under the FMA Act. We have also had communication at secretary level and across agencies, so the agencies that we know are running tender processes soon after 1 July are all absolutely ready to go. We have worked through and double checked that each part of their tender process has the clauses and the other process elements they need to ensure that the policy is properly applied.

Senator PAYNE: I do not know if that was a yes, they are ready, or we are hoping they are ready.

Ms Wood: I think they are all aware and they all know what they need to do. Some of them, depending on when their procurements will start, might be still doing some of that development work.

Senator PAYNE: I see that organisations—one assumes that means businesses—may face sanctions if they do not report on their outcomes annually. Is there any sanction for the agencies if they do not comply with the requirements for their tender processes?

Ms Wood: It is a requirement for all agencies that they comply with government policy relating to procurement. So Commonwealth procurement guidelines is one; this Indigenous Opportunities Policy is complementary to that. It is an expectation on the chief executives that they ensure that there is compliance.

Mr Griew: We are moving into areas of finance and that department.

Senator PAYNE: I just thought you might know if there was a sanction.

Mr Griew: There is a requirement; there is no specific sanction.

Senator PAYNE: But if the requirement is not met; I understand.

Senator SIEWERT: Can we turn to the Australian Employment Covenant? Can I have an update on the figures? We should be getting close to the 26-week figures. Can you provide some more detail on the 26-week figures? In the past, because of timing, we have not been getting those figures.

Ms Wood: The latest information we have from the Australian Employment Covenant, as at May, is that they have 30,778 job commitments from 233 covenant members, that is 233 separate employers. They have reported 4,300 job placements with those 233 employers. Their reported 26-week outcomes are 635. That is an underestimate of the number of 26-week outcomes achieved for two reasons: first, the amount of time that has passed and we are now at a point where we could be expecting to see more 26-week outcomes; and, secondly, whether or not employers are reporting that information. Some employers are only reporting the placements to the AEC, but some have reported more detailed data, including the 26-week outcomes.

Senator SIEWERT: There is a large difference between the placements and the 26-week outcomes. I do not have the previous figure with me right now. Since February, how many of those are new?

Ms Wood: I do not have the February figures with me either. I have the August figures, if that is any use.

Senator SIEWERT: Okay, August is fine.

Ms Wood: The August figures were 21,671 job commitments, 142 covenant members, 1,179 reported job placements, and 252 reported 26-week outcomes.

Senator SIEWERT: Can we break those down into Indigenous and non-Indigenous? I was quite surprised in the answers that I received on notice from last estimates where they highlighted that it was running approximately fifty-fifty in terms of Indigenous and non-Indigenous jobs. How many of these are Indigenous jobs and how many are non-Indigenous jobs?

Ms Wood: All of these are Indigenous job placements. The issue about Indigenous and non-Indigenous placements relates specifically to the jobs that are advertised on the AEC's jobs board. There is a range of ways that AEC employers can choose to fill jobs once they have made their commitment. One of the ways which AEC encourages employers is to advertise the jobs on its jobs board. When employers advertise on that jobs board, they may or may not attract Indigenous applicants with the right skills. Some of the jobs that are advertised on the jobs board might ultimately, not through any action of the AEC, be filled by a non-Indigenous person. The fact that a particular job is filled by a non-Indigenous person does not impact on the commitment that the employer makes. They are still signed up to a covenant with a certain number of Indigenous jobs, and they will still continue to fill jobs with Indigenous people. They might just have to try different kinds of jobs, different locations and other ways to attract the right Indigenous applicants.

Mr Griew: So the numbers that Ms Wood has given you are Indigenous job placements. That is the key point here. The fact that some of the jobs board jobs get filled by someone else does not impact on those jobs.

Senator SIEWERT: So you can guarantee that the 4,300 are Indigenous jobs?

Ms Wood: Yes.

Mr Griew: That is the AEC's report to us.

Senator SIEWERT: That is based on their figures?

Mr Griew: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Do you track the 13 weeks? Is there any reporting on the 13 weeks?

Ms Wood: No, we do not have 13-week data.

Mr Griew: I guess one of the other implications is there is quite a big step-up in activity in the last six months, so there is quite a lot of new placements in there.

Senator Arbib: There was a pretty big internal change in the organisation as well.

Senator SIEWERT: In the last six months I think you said there were 21,670-odd, and it has gone up to 30,000 in those six months?

Mr Griew: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: When you said there was internal change, what do you mean?

Senator Arbib: They have made staffing changes internally in a number of positions. I expect the job commitments, when we next get a report, will be even higher. I know they have a concerted push on at the moment, and a number of employers I have spoken to are considering and will probably join up to the covenant. The one thing to remember in terms of the commitments is that the businesses that you talk to who sign up talk about commitments

over a number of years—commitments not being filled within 12 months but over years and years. For some it is three, for some it is five; it differs per business.

Senator SIEWERT: Do we know the nature of the jobs that are being filled?

Ms Wood: We do not have detail on the specific jobs. We know the sectors in which they are being filled, which are quite wide-ranging, including construction, community services, business services, mining, transport, employment service providers, banking and retail. There is a whole range of sectors that are covered with employers of a range of sizes and locations.

Senator SIEWERT: Can you provide a breakdown of the 635 into those sectors?

Ms Wood: We will take that on notice to see if we have that level of information. We will provide it if we can.

Senator SIEWERT: That is fine. Are we talking full-time jobs?

Ms Wood: I expect it would be a mix of full time and part time. I do not know if we have that information, but we can take that on notice also.

Senator SIEWERT: When AEC provides those figures, are they providing a breakdown in terms of whether they are part time or full time?

Ms Wood: I do not think so, but I will check. We are counting job placements, so we are counting individual people placed into jobs, whether they are full time or part time.

Senator SIEWERT: Could you take that on notice, please? Obviously we are after full-time jobs as much as possible. I am keen to see if it is possible for you to provide a breakdown of the nearly 31,000 as to whether they are full or part time, and specifically of the job placements, full or part time, and the 26 weeks, full or part time.

Mr Griew: If an employer offers and is seeking a part-time worker and they find someone who wants part-time work, for many Indigenous job seekers, like any other, that would be a very good outcome. We would have standard definitions that we use before we count outcomes in the job services program. I think this outcome, as Ms Wood said, is very much a count of individuals who found a job.

Senator SIEWERT: I appreciate that. Many people want part-time work, but increasingly our workforce is being casualised and is part time, and that is associated with low incomes and disadvantage. If we are trying to address the issues of employment and disadvantage, I am interested in finding out how many of these jobs are permanent full-time jobs, how many are part time, and in what sectors, to see if we are genuinely skilling people up and seeing if we are moving people into being able to obtain jobs that they are after, in terms of full-time employment, rather than leaving them in poverty and low-income jobs.

Senator Arbib: I accept what you are saying. I would add that for many of these Indigenous job seekers, whether they move into part-time employment, it provides them with a pathway into full-time employment and the training and the work experience that they require. As we know, one of the biggest impediments and barriers to employment with Indigenous job seekers is having those employability skills. I accept and I agree that full-time jobs are the goal; at the same time, a part-time job is probably the best thing you can do to transition into a full-time job.

Senator SIEWERT: I accept what you are saying, but I have also seen dozens of situations where people are trapped in low-skill, part-time work because the skills and the

training are not on offer. I want to see where that development is through those part-time jobs, and if people are genuinely being offered that support to move through.

Senator Arbib: I think it would also be useful for you to look at the AEC's website, its job board, because it lists the jobs that it has in place. I have done it myself, and it is interesting, just to understand the sorts of jobs that are being offered.

Senator SIEWERT: I have actually looked at it, but I must admit I have not looked at it recently. When I looked at it, there was a range of jobs available but some of them were high-end jobs and some of them were low-end, low-skill positions.

Senator Arbib: Yes, no doubt there is a broad range of jobs across different industries, that is true. My understanding is that the AEC has done a lot of work on its job site, and a lot of work with Job Services Australia to make sure that the mainstream employment services are integrated with their organisation. I think that has been one of the real limitations in the past, trying to get that integration of a non-government organisation working with thousands of job sites across the country. That is where the work has really been done in terms of the jobs board. It would be good to have a look at it, just to get a new understanding of it.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. I have a couple of questions that I think you will need to take on notice. You provided a table, which I very much appreciate, thank you, from the question EW1013-11, the table of new jobs that were funded in the NT. Is it possible to provide the types of jobs that were the part-time jobs listed and how many hours were allocated for those particular part-time jobs?

Ms Wood: We will take that on notice and see what information we have. It will vary, because with respect to the education workers and health workers, there were some standard number of hours in some sectors, but in others it was quite variable. We will see what we have.

Senator SIEWERT: If it is possible to find that, and the pay rates that people were employed on, that would be appreciated. I am a little confused by the answer to question 193. I asked about the interaction between CDEP providers and the JSA providers. As I understand it, the answer stated that from 1 July FaHCSIA will be enforcing that provision around requiring that CDEP participants, if they are not registered, be removed from CDEP, but that they are not automatically exited from the program. Is that correct? They will not be automatically exited from the program?

Ms Essex: Perhaps if I could clarify our answer a little for you, that might assist. Where a participant wilfully refuses to register with the JSA, they would be exited from the program. Where they are unable to register with the JSA in circumstances beyond their control—so we would think of a time when a community was perhaps cut off from participation from a JSA—it would be inequitable to exit a participant from a program where they could be participating because for reasons beyond their control they could not register with the JSA. Where a participant wilfully refused to fulfil their obligations by registering with the JSA, they would be exited from the program.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you for that clarification.

Senator PAYNE: I suspect this question will need to be taken on notice as well. It relates to an answer to question on notice 241 which was about the number of Indigenous workers employed on oil projects. The answer from FaHCSIA states that timing and climatic

constraints restricted the CDEP training and employment opportunities, but IBA advised that building contractors engaged Indigenous workers as employees for over 2,000 hours during the Wudapuli and Nama projects, and offered ongoing employment to one Indigenous worker at the conclusion of the project. Is it possible, on notice, to get a breakdown of that 2,000 hours—how many employees are included under that 2,000-hour heading and the period of time for each worker?

Ms Gumley: I will have to check with IBA as to whether they can actually break that down. I will take it notice.

Senator PAYNE: Would that not be broken down in the records under the CDEP process?

Ms Gumley: They engaged Indigenous workers as employees.

Senator PAYNE: So it was done separately from that?

Ms Gumley: Yes, they were paid employees, not CDEPs.

Senator PAYNE: Okay, I misunderstood the answer as it was written. I am sorry I did not ask it before, then. I would have tried to ask it earlier. If you could get me the breakdown, that would be great. Because time is quite short, I will end up putting some of these on notice. Can you provide information about the streaming process between the work ready and the community development streams, and where the caseloads lie between the two streams? Do you have that information with you?

Ms Essex: Can you bear with me while I check my briefing. I may have some information about that with me.

Senator PAYNE: If I tell you what I was keen to know? I wanted some understanding of the caseloads for the first couple of years of the existing contract by state between the two streams, and if you have estimates for the next two years?

Ms Essex: It would be probably most helpful if I took that on notice to give you the complete detail that you are looking for.

Senator PAYNE: Where does the balance lie between the community development stream and the work ready scheme?

Ms Essex: The balance lies towards the work ready stream.

Senator PAYNE: Do you have a percentage?

Ms Essex: Not with me, but I will get that for you on notice.

Senator PAYNE: For those who were in the community development stream, are any initiatives being taken to address some of the challenges for those participants, in the numeracy and literacy space and in vocational education, where they have training barriers such as no drivers licence and things like that?

Ms Essex: There is a number of initiatives with different providers in relation to those initial barriers. We could provide you with some more detail on notice. Some providers have programs where they arrange for their participants to have driver education training, to go through the process of getting a drivers licence, and to have allied language and literacy training while they do that. Other providers link very successfully language and literacy training to their Certificate I services. I can think of examples in the Kimberley where

Certificate I in Rural Operations and basic language and literacy around workplace safety are very successfully combined. There is some excellent work in Roper Gulf, also combining youth initiatives with language and literacy learning and providing services within the community. We could provide you with a list of those sorts of activities.

Senator PAYNE: That would be very helpful, thank you very much. If you can provide me with that statistical information as well, that would be helpful.

Ms Essex: Certainly.

Senator PAYNE: Has the department received concerns from providers about the cost of training, particularly in remote communities?

Ms Essex: To my recollection, no provider has raised specifically the cost of training with FaHCSIA. We have had providers raise with us concerns around the difficulty of providing training, particularly in the wet in the north part of the country, and some difficulties with finding suitable RTOs to develop the training that they wish to deliver at the time they wish to deliver it. In most cases where those concerns have been raised, we have worked with our colleagues in DEEWR to find suitable solutions for the provider.

Senator PAYNE: Do you have estimates of the differences in the cost of training from remote areas to non-remote areas?

Ms Essex: I do not have those, no.

Senator PAYNE: You might have to take this on notice, but in terms of the IEP pre-employment and employment places, can you indicate how many of those have been utilised by CDEP participants for the previous financial year and for this current financial year?

Ms Wood: Can I just clarify that? You are asking how many CDEP participants were part of an IEP project?

Senator PAYNE: Yes?

Ms Wood: We would have to take that on notice.

Senator PAYNE: Would that then lead to your being able to tell me what the IEP outcome rates are for CDEP participants?

Ms Wood: If we have that information, yes.

Senator PAYNE: Do you think you have that information, just out of interest?

Ms Wood: I must admit I have never seen that information, so I am not sure that we do. But we will check.

Senator PAYNE: That would be very helpful. Can someone help me with the Productivity Places Program?

Mr Griew: That is actually under a different outcome, but is actually one of mine, so I can probably have a go from memory. I do not have those papers here.

Senator PAYNE: Perhaps on notice could you tell us how many CDEP participants have accessed the productivity places program, training places, since July 2009, and how many Indigenous job seekers have accessed and completed the PPPs since then as well?

Mr Griew: I will take that on notice. The challenge there is the better part of the PPP being delivered through the states will have the data that is on the standard data collection we

get from the states. We may or may not have that, but I will check, and we will take it on notice.

Senator PAYNE: This is a CDEP question that relates to SIHIP but not about SIHIP itself. It is about how many CDEP participants have benefited from participation in the SIHIP? Do you have those numbers?

Mr Griew: While Ms Gumley is finding the data to answer that question, at the last estimates you asked about the post-SIHIP employment experience. We did go away and obtained some feedback on that from our Northern Territory office. We have not managed to get a time with your office in the last few weeks to come and talk to you, but we are happy to provide you with that information.

Senator PAYNE: We will do that, perhaps in the next sitting fortnight, I hope.

Ms Wood: I am sorry, I do not have that information with me, but I am happy to take it on notice.

Senator PAYNE: Okay, thank you very much. I do have a number of other questions but unfortunately for the officers I will have to place those on notice. Thank you very much for your assistance.

Senator SIEWERT: I am not sure if this belongs in this area, but I am after information on the Aged Care Workforce Fund. I understand that some of the programs have been combined.

Ms Wood: That is probably a question for the department of health.

Mr Griew: The only possible connection I can think of is that there was an initiative for training places in the aged care industry in another part of this portfolio in the budget.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, that is where I am going, specifically as it relates to Indigenous.

Mr Griew: As we work with the new workforce agency that is being established that will administer that money, we will certainly, as we did previously with related packages, make sure that there are criteria that preference proposals with high Indigenous outcomes. Certainly one of the advantages we see in that direct work with industry is encouraging a full range of representation of the client groups in the workforce in aged care services.

Senator Arbib: From memory, I am almost certain we have done an IEP project in terms of health workforce and aged care workforce. Is that the one you are talking about?

Senator SIEWERT: You have. As I understood it, there is the new initiative of combining a number of programs to set up the Aged Care Workforce Fund, and part of that specifically relates to provide targeted training strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I am interested in that component. That is why I am asking it today.

Mr Griew: There are many ways of naming programs, and there are many programs with similar names. I suspect that you should try asking that question again of our colleagues from the Department of Health and Ageing.

Senator Arbib: That sounds like a Minister Snowden project, so you might want to raise that this afternoon.

Mr Griew: We will pursue the one I was talking about, but I suspect you are actually after a different program.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could, that would be great, thanks. If you tell me what yours are, and I will get the others from health; that would be great.

Mr Pratt: We can follow up on the question from Senator Payne about SIHIP and CDEP.

Senator PAYNE: Thank you very much.

Ms Gumley: In an answer from Senator Arbib to a question on notice, at 3 December 2010 there were 24 CDEP participants working on SIHIP at three locations: Kintore, Titjikala and Tennant Creek.

Senator PAYNE: May I ask on notice if there is more updated information, could that be provided in answer to the question on notice?

Ms Gumley: Yes.

Senator PAYNE: Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. That concludes this segment of the estimates. We will come back at 2.15pm to go into health.

Proceedings suspended from 13:20 to 14:15

CHAIR: We will resume the hearing with health issues. We will start with some questions from Senator Fierravanti-Wells, who will be looking at issues around mental health and aged care. We will do those questions first because of time constraints and then we will come back into the general sequence. Senator Fierravanti-Wells.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: On suicide prevention and the issues in the Kimberley, I understand there was an announcement made, which Ms Harman alluded to at the February estimates when you made comments about fast-tracking from the suicide prevention package of \$274 million to \$276 million. You were looking at two elements of what you would be focusing on, the community fund and the ATAPS suicide pilot. In relation to the \$6 million that you announced on 14 April, how and when was that fast-tracked \$6 million announced and how was it delivered? Can you talk me through that.

Ms Harman: The \$6 million is part of the \$22.6 million community grants component of the Taking Action to Tackle Suicide election commitment package. The minister's media release related to bringing that forward in the sense of calling for grants for Indigenous focused efforts as the first cab off the rank, if you like. I will hand over to my colleague to talk you through where we are up to with that particular component and then we will go back to the other ones.

Ms Krestensen: An expert advisory group has been set up to advise on the \$6 million which is being brought forward under the measure that Ms Harman alluded to, and also to advise more broadly on the Indigenous suicide prevention strategy, which has been a commitment under the Taking Action package. We are currently at the stage of setting up that advisory group. We expect it to be fully nominated and identified by the end of this month. Its first task will be to develop a funding framework to make sure that funding in relation to this \$6 million goes forward in a planned, strategic and balanced way. This is drawing on advice that we have had from the sector itself, particularly back in March when there was a social and emotional wellbeing workshop where there was a very strong view in relation to Indigenous suicide that it was important to invest at the pointy end in those communities that

are really struggling and also to make sure that there was upstream investment across-the-board to address the risk of suicide developing in the first instance.

The discussion that we are having through ASPAC, the Australian Suicide Prevention Advisory Council, is also helping to advise this measure. In taking it forward, we are very keen to pick up the view of ASPAC and of the sector that it is important to also promote communication between projects and between communities in relation to suicide prevention as well as funding particular projects.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: So, at this point there is no money flowing. You are just in the process of seeing where the money is going to be allocated. The import of that announcement on 14 April seemed to imply some sort of immediate action.

Ms Harman: There has been immediate action. The minister's media release also referred to the bringing forward of \$150,000 worth of ATAPS funding to specifically create a capacity starting in the Kimberley for culturally appropriate service delivery and training. This week we have accepted funding proposals for those measures and that funding will start to flow this financial year before 1 July.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: So that \$150,000 will be used before 1 July?

Ms Harman: That is correct. It will be in contract. We also received a proposal, which we have accepted, from the Australian Psychological Society for the training and education component of that announcement.

Senator SIEWERT: Was that the Australian Psychological Society or the Australian Indigenous psychological society?

Ms Krestensen: It is actually being funded through the Australian Psychological Society. The Indigenous Psychologists Association is a subsidiary of the APS, but they are heavily involved in shaping and advising on this. Dr Pat Dudgeon has been a key informant in how this is going forward.

Senator SIEWERT: I just wanted to clarify the Indigenous psychologists were involved in that. I am sorry I got the name wrong.

Ms Powell: I can add to that. There have also been a number of specific activities in the Kimberley in response to the suicide. We have provided funding to the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Council to support the social and emotional wellbeing workforce in the Kimberley. That is in addition to their normal recurrent funding that they get for that purpose. That is \$326,700. Funding has been allocated to the Billard Learning Centre to assist people to attend the Blank Page Summit, and there will be funding for the proposed suicide summit in Balgo later this year, Stand Up For Life. There has been \$1.9 million allocated in response to flooding in that same region, because it was considered important to support people through other stresses at the time.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: The announcement was targeted to the PM's \$22.6 million announcement of 27 July. It was targeted to groups and communities at high risk of suicide, obviously including Indigenous people, men, gay and other groups. There will be 27 per cent spent in the Indigenous, as I understand it, and so will the rest of the money be spent with other groups?

Ms Harman: That is correct. It will spent on those groups that have been named as priority groups and that are obviously groups at higher risk of suicide.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: How will the remainder be rolled out from 1 July?

Ms Harman: As per the minister's media release of 14 April, the first cab off the rank will be an Indigenous specific funding approach.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: And thereafter?

Ms Harman: Thereafter we have to work out the implementation approach to that. This is an ongoing measure and one that will run over a number of years.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: How will you raise awareness of the program and the funding in relation to these high-risk groups?

Ms Harman: When we advertise targeted funding rounds for other priority groups, such as gay and lesbian people, we would target the advertising, promotion and awareness of that particular funding round to those communities.

Ms Krestensen: The approach to market for this particular measure has not been resolved and we will be very carefully shaping that approach to market to make sure that it adequately targets both groups and location. I do not think we will be going down the track that we did in 2006 of having a broad competitive approach to the market, because we want to target the funds to where it is needed after consultation with the groups themselves and with the sector, rather than just having an open approach to market funding the best proposal. It will be a very targeted approach across the \$22.6 million.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: Is what we have seen in the Kimberley just a spike? Is that something that we are seeing in other remote Indigenous communities across Australia?

Ms Krestensen: It is very hard to characterise any groups of suicides like this in a way in which you can compare it to other regions. From what we hear on the ground and through our colleagues in OATSIH, our state office and from the service providers such as the standby coordinators that we are funding, this is an unrelated group of suicides. It is not a cluster in the sense of a group of people who all know each other, are related or are close to each other. It is a series of independent unrelated suicides which have in common their geographic area and the fact that most of them or almost all of them are young people under 30. It is not what we would call a related cluster of suicides. Of course, incidents of suicide are something that happens in groups in a range of geographic areas, both in terms of Indigenous communities and others. It is very hard to have at our fingertips current information on where all these groups of suicides are. The Kimberley is the one that has obviously received the most profile recently because of the very high numbers that are taking place there. I hope that addresses what you are getting at, but it is not the sort of group of suicides that we can really say is happening anywhere else. Each event like this is quite different and each suicide itself has its own particular circumstances.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: In relation to the announcement in the budget about EPPIC, the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centres that are going to be established, obviously this is going to be between the states and the Commonwealth, so it is not a wholly Commonwealth funded initiative but will be dependent on partnering with the states. In relation to Indigenous communities, can you tell me whether there is any scope there

for EPPIC centres in that area or is that not something that you have thought through yet? Ms Harman, we had a discussion about EPPICs the other day. I have left the Indigenous part for here. Can you tell me where the Indigenous component would fit into this?

Ms Harman: If I recall correctly, the evidence I gave on Monday was that we would not be opening EPPICs up as shopfronts, to use a crude word, in Indigenous communities. There is going to be a national network of EPPICs around the country. It is obviously contingent on the successful negotiation with states and territories. I would also repeat the advice that I gave on Monday that all states and territories are very interested or have expressed interest in working with us to establish this measure. My colleague Ms Krestensen furthered that by indicating that through the 16 EPPICs that we are planning to roll out over the next few years there will be links into and opportunities to reach out and expand the knowledge and referral pathways for Indigenous people.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: At each of them rather than a specific one? It is a long day.

Ms Harman: Yes, much more so for you than me. Those implementation details will obviously need to be negotiated with the states, but at this stage we do not see an Indigenous specific EPPIC.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: In relation to EPPICs, it is going to be framed around outreach with a criteria for Indigenous and other high-risk groups.

Ms Harman: Strong referral pathways for anyone who needs early psychosis support and treatment.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: In relation to headspace, in last year's portfolio budget statement there was a reference at page 324 to improved access as one of the qualitative indicators, points or targets; improved access to Australian government youth mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and development and implementation of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Strategy by all headspace sites by June 2011. Can you tell me what progress the existing headspace centres have made on developing and implementing such a strategy?

Ms Krestensen: The 2009 evaluation of headspace found that approximately 10 per cent of headspace clients are Indigenous. That number is skewed by the fact that there are a number of sites with high proportions of Indigenous people, which is a good thing, for example, the Central Australian one. The most recent service activity data confirms that we are still getting very high numbers of Indigenous people through headspace. The original headspace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy was developed in 2008. They developed an initial strategy and they are currently in the process of establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory group to provide advice to the board on redevelopment and implementation of that strategy and ensuring that within headspace's operations, particularly given the announcements that have been made about the expanded resources for headspace, policy and program resources are allocated in a way that reflects implementation of the strategy and also ensuring that all the headspace sites have appropriate, effective and respectful relationships in place with their local Indigenous communities.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: What is the timing on that?

Ms Krestensen: As I said, they are currently in the process of establishing the advisory group to advise the board on the plan for the implementation of the strategy. I would have to take on notice when that implementation plan is going to be finalised.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: In view of the additional headspaces that are proposed, one would probably think that the strategy would need to be in place before you roll out another 30. If you could take that on notice as well. Would an external audit of headspace have included whether they have met the target in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth?

Ms Krestensen: There is no target as such, but as I mentioned the 2009 independent evaluation of headspace scrutinised the throughput of Indigenous clients. We would expect that the new evaluation framework for headspace would also take into account those kinds of considerations.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: I will ask a couple of questions on aged care. I would like to go to page 163 of the Portfolio Budget Statement. Mr Learmonth, are you waiting for someone?

Mr Learmonth: We are hoping to find out what the topic might be so we can bring someone forward.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: I wanted to ask how the \$16 million is going to impact, particularly in relation to the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander program. I also wanted to ask about the ACFI and the impact. Can you clarify and elaborate a little bit more on those two areas?

Ms Robertson: The viability supplement that you referred to is an extension of an existing viability supplement that is paid to small providers of aged care under the act.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: Can you take on notice the statistics, particularly in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander facilities?

Ms Robertson: Yes.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: I have some more questions in relation to that, but I just wanted a little bit more detail as to how that is going to roll out and in particular how that is going to impact each of those facilities financially.

Ms Robertson: We have not identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care facilities. We have facilities where we have a large proportion or a certain proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, but essentially they are mainstream services under the act. We have flexible aged care services under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care program, and those particular services are a cashed out model. They are a different funding model than those that would be eligible for the viability supplement.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: I am conscious of the time and other senators, so I might put my further questions on notice. Thank you for the indulgence of the committee.

CHAIR: We are going to go to Senator Boyce.

Senator BOYCE: I have a couple of general health questions so I thought I would do those while we are in this area of data on general health. The first ones relate to the TB clinics in the Torres Strait. Could you tell me whether a decision was made to close those clinics?

Ms Powell: I will have a go at some of these questions, but they are covered by the Office of Health Protection, who did not come this afternoon. We did not realise you wanted to cover this area.

Senator BOYCE: I think I mentioned that I would be asking further questions when I asked about this during the inquiry earlier, but hopefully someone here can help me.

Ms Powell: I am sorry I missed that. The TB clinics are run by Queensland Health.

Senator BOYCE: Yes, I know that. When did the department learn that they were going to be closed on 30 June?

Ms Powell: I would not know when the department learnt about that.

CHAIR: You can ask your questions and we will see what the officers can answer, but otherwise it might have to go on notice.

Senator BOYCE: Where you cannot answer them can you assume that I would like them answered on notice?

CHAIR: We will make it clearer than that.

Senator BOYCE: There is \$3.8 million provided by the federal government to the state government towards the costs of treating non-Queenslanders in these TB clinics. At whose urging was it that these clinics be closed?

Ms Powell: I do not know that.

Senator BOYCE: In that case I shall simply table some letters that I have here and that I have asked the secretariat to have a look at, the first of which was a letter of 1 May from the Premier of Queensland.

CHAIR: I will step in here. I do not think the officer can handle this degree of detail. They will all have to go on notice. Do you want to read them into the record, but not the whole letter?

Senator BOYCE: There are only six pages. The first is a letter from the Premier of Queensland to the Prime Minister of 28 January 2011 advising her about the costs of delivering health services to PNG nationals in the Torres Strait, pointing out that Queensland has spent \$18.9 million on this in 2009-10. Given that the federal government only provided \$3.8 million, that left a significant shortfall. It makes the point that this is actually an Australian government issue and not a state government issue.

The second letter that I would like to draw your attention to is a letter to Ms Bligh from the acting Prime Minister, Wayne Swan, on 1 May, firstly apologising for the delay in responding and noting their concern but saying that it is very much a Queensland government issue. It is very clear from these letters that, whilst the Queensland government asked for help to keep the clinics functioning in the Torres Strait and made the point that this is a national public health issue and not a Queensland health issue, the federal government response was to say, 'No, you get on with it and do it yourself.' Given the information I was given by the Department of Health the other day, I am very concerned that it appears to be that the federal government is trying to push this back to the state. I would like you to review the answers that I was given the other day and look at this. I would also like a response from the department on whether you consider this to be a state issue or a federal issue. Can you tell me how you are planning to transition from closing down clinics in the Torres Strait on 30 June, starting a

program in PNG on 1 July and continuing to suggest that Queenslanders' health initially and Australians' health eventually is not jeopardised by this?

CHAIR: That will be taken on notice.

Ms Powell: Yes. We cannot have a useful discussion about that.

CHAIR: Your next question?

Senator BOYCE: My other questions in the general area were around Rob De Castella's project to encourage disadvantaged Indigenous youth to train to the extent that they could run the New York Marathon. This has been allocated \$500,000 over two years in the 2009-10 budget. Could you tell me what extra funding there has been for it to date?

Mr Cotterell: The total funding allocated to date for the Indigenous Marathon Project is \$501,265.50. That was between two funding agreements, one for about \$187,000 in the 2009-10 financial year and \$314,000 in the 2010-11 financial year. We are in negotiation with SmartStart for Kids! to extend the project.

Senator BOYCE: To extend the project for how long?

Mr Cotterell: Until June 2014.

Senator BOYCE: So, you have done an evaluation and found that you regard it as successful; is that right?

Mr Cotterell: That is right.

Senator BOYCE: What would that funding be?

Mr Cotterell: What would it be for?

Senator BOYCE: No. How much funding would that be?

Mr Cotterell: We are in negotiations so I cannot give you a precise figure, but it would be of a similar order per annum.

Senator BOYCE: How do you select participants?

Mr Cotterell: SmartStart for Kids! selects the participants.

Senator BOYCE: How do they do that?

Mr Cotterell: They have had a series of competitions around the country where they have invited young Indigenous people along to exercise their talent in this area.

Senator BOYCE: Could you tell me, for each year that you have run the program, how many people were initially selected and how many people finished the program?

Mr Cotterell: I will have to take that on notice. In this financial year SmartStart has recruited a group of 20 Indigenous runners, 10 men and 10 women.

Senator BOYCE: Is that for the next financial year?

Mr Cotterell: That is for the 2011 New York City Marathon in November. They are hoping that 10 participants will complete that marathon.

Senator BOYCE: As you do not have the figures for the earlier years could you characterise the drop-out rate of the program? Was it one, two or a significant number?

Mr Cotterell: I do not want to mislead you so I would rather take that on notice.

Senator BOYCE: I was told that the 2010 squad started out with 12 and finished with four, so I thought you might remember that, if that was the case, and be able to characterise that as not a terribly good retention rate.

CHAIR: The officer will take it on notice.

Mr Cotterell: I will have to take it on notice.

Senator BOYCE: I guess that is not something that you would remember if it happened. Apparently the people who participate in this receive a Certificate III in Community Recreation. Is that correct?

Mr Cotterell: Some of the people who participate in that—

Senator BOYCE: Is it part of the program that you would receive a Certificate III?

Mr Cotterell: Part of the program is the development of a Certificate III level course for Indigenous people who are interested in working as healthy lifestyle workers, which is the major part of the program from which this project is funded.

Senator BOYCE: How many Certificate IIIs have been awarded since the program started?

Mr Cotterell: The Certificate III program is under development. That is part of the approach. Part of the logic of the overall measure was to develop vocational education and training courses for the workforce that we are rolling out, the healthy lifestyle workers.

Senator BOYCE: How many of last year's squad are people with full-time jobs?

Mr Cotterell: I do not know. I will have to take that on notice.

Senator BOYCE: What about people with university degrees?

Mr Cotterell: From memory, I do not think that any of them have university degrees, but again I would need to take that on notice.

Senator BOYCE: What about the 2011 squad?

Mr Cotterell: I am not aware.

Senator BOYCE: Perhaps you could have a look at that for me. I have been told that the people were graduating from Murdoch with a bachelor of commerce degree, work for a mining company and people who work as liaison officers at a university are amongst the people who are participating in this program and being funded to go to New York to run. There seems to be a fair bit of conflict about whether this was assisting disadvantaged Aboriginal youth or simply a bit of extra training for people who already, by any Australian standards, are succeeding quite well.

CHAIR: On notice.

Mr Cotterell: I do not know whether they have tertiary degrees or their state of employment. One of the purposes of the measure was to prepare and promote role models for healthy lifestyles amongst Indigenous Australians. There was not necessarily a focus on disadvantage in the objectives.

Senator BOYCE: Who did the evaluation of the program?

Mr Cotterell: As part of our funding agreement with SmartStart for Kids! we asked SmartStart to do the evaluation.

Senator BOYCE: Is that publicly available?

Mr Cotterell: I do not think that it has been publicly released, but we could have a look at releasing it.

Senator BOYCE: If possible, on notice. Can you tell me what the general findings were?

Mr Cotterell: I would have to take that on notice.

Senator BOYCE: We are funding it.

Mr Cotterell: It was a positive evaluation.

Senator BOYCE: If you are not able to give me the evaluation per se, I would like as much detail as possible. When would you expect to have an external evaluation of the program done?

Mr Cotterell: I understand that the negotiations for the next agreement include a partnership with a university that would conduct an external evaluation. I am sorry; I do not have that level of detail.

Senator BOYCE: The principle sounds great, but it is just whether it is meeting its objectives. That seems to be a problem, and the fact that there is going to be a significant amount of money spent in this area when there are so many areas of need. Thank you.

Senator SIEWERT: I would like to go back to aged care and mental health.

CHAIR: Do you want to give the officers some indication of the areas that you are going to go to and that might make it easier for them.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, aged care, mental health, the new process with Bringing Them Home, alcohol, Bath Street, dialysis, and hearing health.

Senator BOYCE: I have some mental health questions as well.

CHAIR: That gives the officers some idea in terms of where we are going. We will do aged care first.

Senator SIEWERT: I do not have a lot on aged care. I would like to go back to the issue that I was asking about earlier. Am I in the right area now?

Ms Powell: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: I wanted to follow up on the Aged Care Workforce Fund and the particular comments under departmental outcomes about providing targeted training strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Is this additional funding on top of what has already been allocated and how is the new approach going to work in terms of the Aged Care Workforce Committee?

Ms Nicholls: This is not additional money. It is a consolidation of a number of existing aged care workforce funds into one fund. You may remember that in the 2010-11 budget we consolidated a number of aged care workforce funds. This is a further consolidation.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you for that clarification. Is there an Aboriginal representative and/or representatives on the Aged Care Workforce Committee that has already been established?

Ms Nicholls: We are extending the membership to include Aboriginal representation.

Senator SIEWERT: How many and what is the time frame?

Ms Nicholls: There will be one representative. There is also a representative on our broader ageing consultative committee, and the timeframe for extending that membership is that it is happening now.

Senator SIEWERT: I just wanted to clarify that particular area.

Senator BOYCE: Could you update us on the program to offer support, human and otherwise, to Indigenous aged care centres?

Ms Robertson: We have a number of different support packages for services in remote Australia as well as Indigenous services providing support and care to Indigenous Australians. We have a service development assistance panel, which is almost like a phone-a-friend program where we can provide support around governance, financial claiming, finances in general, locum support as well as clinical support.

Senator BOYCE: What is the funding for that in the 2011-12 budget and what is the increase, if any?

Ms Robertson: In the 2010-11 we have \$1.6 million and in 2011-12, including capital, we have \$11.7 million.

Senator BOYCE: It is \$11.7 million, but that includes capital?

Ms Robertson: Yes, that is right. Of that money, we have \$3.3 million set aside for the service development assistance panel and staffing.

Senator BOYCE: So, the comparison is \$1.6 million to \$3.3 million; is that right?

Ms Robertson: No. It is \$11.7 million in 2011-12 for the capital infrastructure and support, and of that \$3.3 million is for support and staffing.

Senator BOYCE: Is that \$3.3 million not comparable to the \$1.6 million in 2010-11?

Ms Robertson: Yes. It is growing.

Senator BOYCE: What are you going to increase?

Ms Robertson: Each year it increases in terms of the capital support that we provide.

Senator BOYCE: I am talking about the people support.

Ms Robertson: We have only just started to roll out the program. Over the last 12 months we have been concentrating on going out and auditing services under the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care program and providing some minor capital support to those areas as well as people support. The program itself was launched earlier in the year, where we have been going out to not just the Flexible Aged Care program providers but also remote providers to say that this support is available if needed.

Senator BOYCE: What will the capital be for?

Ms Robertson: The capital is for both minor and major works. The minor works are for things like buying equipment in a particular facility, for example, even to buy a bus to take people around. The major works are for things like refurbishment of a facility, to build new ones or to increase the quality of what you have.

Senator BOYCE: Would you be able to give me a list of the centres in existence, the ones you have visited and the outcomes of your audits on notice?

Ms Robertson: We have had a third party carry out the audits. We can certainly provide you with a list of the type of support that we have provided to each of the services that has gone through that process.

Senator BOYCE: Does the third party report the audits to you?

Ms Robertson: Yes, they do, but in terms of what we have available internally—

Senator BOYCE: Are they publicly available?

Ms Robertson: I would have to go back and check.

Senator BOYCE: Check if they are publicly available and, if not, can you give me some sense of what the findings were and what is being done now?

Ms Robertson: Yes. From memory, a lot of it was around making sure that the fire alarms and so on were working, making sure that not just the fire alarms but also where we had fire pits in Indigenous communities that we had proper safety barriers around those fire pits.

Senator BOYCE: There have been more serious issues than that in some of the Indigenous aged care centres so I would like some general information. I have one last question in this area. Do we have anything similar to the Aged Care Workforce program for Indigenous palliative care? I trundled through the budget papers but could not find anything very productive on the topic.

Ms Robertson: We will have to take that on notice.

Senator BOYCE: And, if so, provide as much detail about the programs. Thank you.

Senator SIEWERT: Can we move on?

CHAIR: We can. I might get Senator Adams to ask her question first and then we can go to you. Senator Adams, do you want a clarification?

Senator ADAMS: Yes. This is in the area of primary care. It is funding being transferred on domestic violence from the Department of Health to FaHCSIA. It is on page 243 of Budget Paper No. 2. I am sorry I was not here at the start. It was probably one that should have been asked right at the beginning, but unfortunately I was delayed. Are you aware of what I am talking about with the funding? It is a saving of \$12.2 million over five years. It is being redirected from the Department of Health and Aging into FaHCSIA and to support other government priorities, delivering on the government's commitment to responsible economic management. What are the government priorities? What will the government direct the \$12.2 million in savings towards? I am really concerned because domestic violence in regional, rural and remote areas is a very important issue. I hope you have a good answer for me.

Mr Booth: My understanding of the measure that you are talking about is that it was split between the two agencies. It was split between the Department of Health and Ageing and FaHCSIA. It was looked at and determined that by splitting it into two you were not getting the best value out of it and that it would be better to put all funding into a single agency, so that funding was passed to FaHCSIA. My understanding is that the amount of funding was not decreased, but I will need to double check on that. I will take that on notice to double check the actual figures that were transferred over.

Senator ADAMS: This is about domestic violence. It says on the bottom of page 243 that 'this measure will provide savings of \$12.2 million over five years, which will be redirected'.

Therefore, it is savings of \$12.2 million coming out of domestic violence programs, and that is the issue that is worrying me.

Mr Booth: I will confirm that, because my understanding was that it might be a saving from within the Department of Health. My understanding is that there was a movement of funds across, but I would just need to confirm that.

Senator ADAMS: It does not look like that here.

CHAIR: Mr Booth, will you look at that, liaise with FaHCSIA and make sure we get that information?

Mr Booth: Certainly. We will double check.

Senator ADAMS: How will the transferring of the domestic violence referral points project in DoHA to anti-domestic violence programs in FaHCSIA result in efficiencies of \$12.2 million?

CHAIR: That is in the answer to questions on notice.

Senator ADAMS: We have the department here where the money has gone out of and they must know what it has gone to.

Mr Pratt: If it is a transfer, then it clearly is not a saving.

Senator ADAMS: It says here that it is. That is the problem. I would not have asked the question, but you can have a look.

Mr Pratt: A transfer literally means that the money has shifted from one location to another and I suspect that Mr Booth's analysis is the right one; that it is a saving in the Health portfolio, but a consequent increase in the FaHCSIA portfolio. We will take that on notice to clarify.

Senator BOYCE: We want more than suspicions around that one.

Mr Pratt: Yes. I can understand that.

Senator ADAMS: Yes, to other government priorities. I am very suspicious about this. It is in Budget Paper No. 2.

CHAIR: Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT: Can we move on to mental health?

CHAIR: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: I am sorry we did not deal with all of this before. I want to go back to the Indigenous Suicide Prevention Strategy and the commitment by government to pick up from our committee report. Can you advise on the progress on that? Let us start with that.

Ms Harman: I flagged at the last hearings that we were about to start discussions with the Australian Suicide Prevention Advisory Council. The ASPAC met on 2 March. It had a really good discussion about the strategy and how we should take it forward, including how we should engage with the sector and the community. Out of that ASPAC put together a wonderful discussion paper which summarised the approach that we should be taking, based on their expertise. There were six points to that approach. The first was supporting clear and representative governance and advice through the formation of an expert advisory group. As Ms Krestensen stated earlier, we are at the point of establishing that—and we hope to have it settled by the end of this month—and an ongoing advisory structure which takes into account

the mental health and Indigenous health sectors to ensure the currency and effectiveness of the strategy in the longer term. There was also consideration of the most appropriate forum or mechanism for consultation with Indigenous communities themselves and the sector in terms of developing the strategy. So, there was a governance-advisory part to ASPAC's advice.

The second part of their advice was about offering a clear policy framework which might include key objectives and priorities that are linked but independent from the National Mental Health Policy and Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework. The third part was about providing practical and evidence based resources that provide guidance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and others around the implementation of suicide prevention initiatives specifically in Indigenous communities. The resources are accessible through the Life framework and other avenues that support Indigenous suicide prevention efforts and also include the development of infrastructure to link, enhance and communicate existing activity and knowledge. We can do wonderful things, but unless people actually talk to one another and share that experience then we are not doing our jobs properly.

The fourth part was about supporting alignment across government and across sectors to ensure that the Commonwealth and state activities are integrated and connected. Importantly, the fifth part was evaluation and evidence that supports the development and collection of further data to support, evaluate and inform future efforts in suicide prevention and actually support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities themselves to develop the capacity to robustly evaluate activity. Finally, part 6 involved funding where the strategy should be linked to and provide guidance on the government's investment to Indigenous suicide prevention and mental health.

Senator SIEWERT: I have a couple of questions arising out of that.

Ms Harman: There is another part of the story, which is that the paper that I have spoken to was actually tabled at a Social and Emotional Wellbeing Indigenous Youth Forum that Minister Snowden asked us to convene and Minister Butler also attended. That was held on 14 April. I believe the outcome of that discussion was that this, as a framework, was supported. Our next steps are to finalise the expert advisory committee and we are also in the final stages, as I understand it, of settling the consultancy arrangements that will take the work forward.

Senator SIEWERT: I have a couple of questions arising out of that. The report was tabled, so does that mean it is now a public document?

Ms Harman: The report?

Senator SIEWERT: The discussion paper.

Ms Harman: No. It is not a public document at this stage. It was discussed and tabled at that Indigenous youth forum.

Senator SIEWERT: Do other organisations have access to that discussion paper?

Ms Harman: Not at this stage. We might mention this to ASPAC and see if they have any objections to us circulating it more widely.

Senator SIEWERT: I am sure there were a lot of really good organisations at the forum that you are talking about, but it would not cover the field.

Ms Harman: Absolutely.

Senator SIEWERT: It would be extremely helpful if they had access to that discussion paper.

Ms Harman: We are at the very start of this process and we agree with you. There was good discussion at that forum and there was good representation, but we really are at the beginning.

Senator SIEWERT: I will be following up on that one at next estimates to see how it has been progressed. In terms of the consultancy, do I interpret that to mean that out of the discussion paper and the ongoing process that someone is going to be taken on board to develop up the strategy? Is that the process?

Ms Krestensen: That is correct. Based on this discussion paper and this approach there will be a consultant selected and we are in the middle of getting that consultancy finalised at the moment and ready to go to a selection process. That consultant will be charged with consulting about the strategy, developing up and taking forward the framework for the strategy in the months ahead.

Senator SIEWERT: What is the time frame for the completion of the consultancy?

Ms Krestensen: I am not sure. I will have to take that on notice. We are hoping to have a consultant selected by the end of the financial year. I am not sure how long that consultancy goes. It would make sense to retain the consultant for a period in order to oversight how we go in terms of implementation of the strategy as well, but those issues are yet to be fully resolved with ASPAC next week.

Senator SIEWERT: Presumably the expert panel will take over oversight of the development of the strategy with the consultant; is that the expectation?

Ms Krestensen: That is correct. As I mentioned earlier, the very first task of that expert group will be advising on the spending of the \$6 million and setting up a funding framework for that which will contribute to and be part of the broader framework.

Senator SIEWERT: Within the broader thinking on the way the strategy is going?

Ms Krestensen: That is right.

Senator SIEWERT: Did you say that the expert panel was about to be appointed?

Ms Krestensen: We are in the process of establishing that expert panel. I do not think that I would go quite so far as to say that it is about to be appointed, but we are hoping that we will have it in place by the end of June.

Senator SIEWERT: That is going about the process, and that is imminent in our books. In the process for appointing those people, how are you selecting the people for the panel?

Ms Krestensen: We will be drawing upon the experts that we have been working with through the Social and Emotional Wellbeing world but also through groups such as the Indigenous Suicide Prevention Working Group, which has been advising on mental health and suicide for some time. I would not like to foreshadow or pre-empt what that panel is going to look like. We would be going to the usual suspects, but more broadly, given that there are a range of people within the health sector, the Indigenous sector and more broadly who might be useful to participate on this.

Senator SIEWERT: That is why I was asking. Under the panel that the minister put together to advise general and mental health it certainly went outside the usual mental health

world and had other people and experts in various fields. Is that the same sort of thinking that is going to occur?

Ms Krestensen: We think that is the way to go. We know that these kinds of issues are much broader than just health. They go into all other sectors. Just to clarify, we will be providing advice to Ministers Snowden and Butler as to the constitution or the membership of that advisory group for them to make a final decision on membership.

Senator SIEWERT: I am conscious of time so I would like to go back to the Kimberley very briefly. I am really happy that you are putting in more resources there. The other group that I thought would be receiving some funding was KinWay. Are they getting funding as well?

Ms Krestensen: That might be connected to the Stand Up For Life project.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes.

Dr Walker: KinWay received some of the funding that was provided to camps from OATSIH for additional staff and support.

Ms Krestensen: I need to apologise. They are the partners also in the United Synergies standby service. We always think of it as being Anglicare because it is an Anglicare KinWay partnership.

Senator SIEWERT: When you ask about Anglicare up there they do not know. It is KinWay.

Ms Krestensen: I will know at the next Senate estimates. We are working closely with them and checking on their resourcing. They have two coordinators funded at the moment, one in East Kimberley and one in West Kimberley. We have committed \$435,000 to that project and that funding is continuing. We are constantly checking with them about how they are coping, and at this stage I think they are coping with the resources that they have, but we are in communication with them about whether they need extra resources in the time ahead.

Senator SIEWERT: This question may be out of line here so I might have to put it on notice. With the additional funding that is coming into the package, will the headspace based in Broome get some of that additional funding as well?

Ms Harman: Every headspace will get additional funding under that package.

Senator SIEWERT: Will that bear in mind that they are covering a huge region and that, at this stage, they are not able to cover the East Kimberley as effectively as the West Kimberley?

Ms Harman: Headspace, as a company, obviously decides how much each site receives. They have come up with a business model that has been well developed and based on all kinds of factors such as rent, coverage, demographics and things like that. They have started to introduce a tiered funding approach around small, medium and large sites. We would imagine that they would take Broome into consideration in the allocation of its funding.

Senator SIEWERT: I apologise for this. I cannot remember who made the comment about monitoring the money that is going in, for example for KinWay, and said that they seem to be managing okay at the moment. Can I infer from that that you are keeping an eye on how resourcing is going and you are ready to top up or assist if necessary?

Ms Harman: Our Western Australian office is working really closely with all parties on the ground and gives us regular updates, so yes.

Senator SIEWERT: One of the biggest problems with being able to service the Kimberley is housing, as I am sure you know. You are probably aware that there was a recent study done in Fitzroy Crossing and I understand that for staffing alone there is a need for about 40 new houses. Organisations literally cannot locate staff in Fitzroy Crossing and it is the same for other towns, because there is no accommodation. I am wondering how you are tackling that issue and, if you are engaging with the state government, how to address that issue.

Ms Powell: Housing is a problem in a lot of remote communities.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, it is.

Ms Powell: When we fund new budget measures there is nearly always a housing component built into that, if it fits with the nature of the program. We are also having a lot of conversations with WA state government and conversations with KAMSC and other service providers in that area. We are aware of the problem. There are some capital works programs related to housing, but I cannot be specific about Fitzroy Crossing.

Senator SIEWERT: I am not going to do the organisation in, but I am aware of one organisation that has to fly people in and out to stay at hotels at the cost of \$800 to \$1,000 and they are not being properly recompensed for that. The \$800 to \$1,000 is just for the accommodation. Is that being taken into account when you are allocating resources?

Ms Powell: It depends on what resources we are referring to. I am sorry, I cannot answer without more detail.

Senator SIEWERT: Maybe I should write to you specifically about this issue. It undermines the value of the resources they get if they are having to keep topping up accommodation for people because they cannot keep people in town.

Ms Powell: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Rather than take up time now, I will write to you about it. I am aware that other people have mental health questions. I want to ask about the new consolidated program that incorporates the Stolen Generation and Bringing Them Home funding. Can you tell me how that is going to operate? As I understand it, the resources remain the same for the programs. Is that correct?

Ms Powell: That is correct, yes.

Senator SIEWERT: How will it operate when you roll those programs in together?

Ms Powell: The way it has operated is that both Bringing Them Home and Link Up Services have been run as completely separate measures. Rolling them into a single program provides more flexibility where we will be able to combine tenders and training. There will be a whole range of efficiencies that we can make there. It is not envisaged that it will be hugely changed. It will allow us to respond more flexibly to opportunities in the future.

Senator SIEWERT: When a lot of people hear the words 'responding' and 'flexibly' they get a little bit nervous. Does that mean that there may be money transferred between the two programs and that you will have one tender approach for both of them?

Ms Powell: It means that the money for both of the programs is rolled into a single funding arrangement; that is correct. That is consistent with an approach that has been adopted across all of the Indigenous health programs run out of the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health. About a year ago there was a review looking at the very large number of small specific measures that we had. They were rolled together into several separate accounting units and this is one of the seven accounting units.

Senator SIEWERT: Was there consultation over this process or subsequent information provided to the Stolen Generation Alliance and the National Sorry Day Committee, in particular?

Ms Powell: There was no consultation. It was primarily an administrative arrangement. It will not have any impact on service providers in the short term.

Senator SIEWERT: With all due respect, it is not just administration. You have said that there is going to be a more flexible approach and it is now one fund. So, the approach changes and those particular changes are potentially important to the Stolen Generation Alliance and to the National Sorry Day Committee.

Dr Walker: I can add that we wrote last week to the Stolen Generations Working Partnership asking for their input, comments and ideas on both the recent scorecard put out by the National Sorry Day Committee as well as any ideas and suggestions they have around implementing the new program. There is also a follow-up meeting of that working partnership in the middle of June, so there will be further consultation and discussion at that meeting on the nuts and bolts of how this might roll out.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. I will put the other questions that I have in writing.

Senator BOYCE: I have a few mental health questions.

Mr Learmonth: We need to make some corrections to answers to questions.

CHAIR: Go ahead.

Ms Robertson: In relation to the funding profile that I read out regarding the Service Development Assistance Panel, essentially the money that I was talking to you about being \$6.4 million in 2010-11 and the \$11.7 million in 2011-12 is capital funding only.

Senator BOYCE: You mentioned \$1.6 million for 2010-11.

Ms Robertson: The \$1.6 million was how much we had spent on the Service Development Assistance Panel itself. In terms of the program funds and the profile for the program funds, including staffing and the Service Development Assistance Panel, in 2010-11 there is \$2.3 million and in 2011-12 it is \$3.3 million.

Senator BOYCE: Nevertheless, it has gone up. That prompts another question. How did you spend \$1.6 million in setting up an assistance panel?

Ms Robertson: That was not only on setting up the panel. That was providing services as part of the panel.

Senator BOYCE: I see.

CHAIR: Do you have mental health questions?

Senator BOYCE: Yes. You talked about headspace in the Kimberley. Could you tell me about other Indigenous headspace centres?

Ms Krestensen: As I mentioned before, we have quite good reach through headspace to Indigenous clients. About 10 per cent of headspace clients are Indigenous, according to the 2009 independent evaluation. I do not have the individual statistics for each of the 30 sites with me, but clearly the site in Central Australia would also be a site which would have a high Indigenous throughput. I understand there is also quite a considerable throughput through some of the urban sites, such as central Sydney and so forth, where they have close working relationships with Aboriginal health services. I do not have the site-by-site statistics with me.

Senator BOYCE: You could provide those on notice. There was an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth strategy to be developed for headspace. Has that occurred?

Ms Krestensen: Headspace developed an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy in 2008, and headspace is in the process of establishing an advisory group to plan an implementation approach to the strategy, as I mentioned a short while ago.

Senator BOYCE: I heard the Kimberley headspace questions, but not the others.

Ms Krestensen: I agreed to take on notice advice on when the implementation strategy would be finalised.

Senator BOYCE: Perhaps at the same time you could provide a brief outline of what is going to be different to what is happening now when the strategy is implemented?

Ms Krestensen: Certainly.

Senator BOYCE: My other mental health questions are around men's sheds.

Ms Powell: I do not think that we have anyone from that area here.

Senator BOYCE: Is it DoHA money?

Mr Learmonth: It is, yes.

Senator BOYCE: But you do not have anyone from that area?

Mr Learmonth: We do not. You can have a go and I might be able to answer.

Senator BOYCE: My particular interest was the development of men's sheds and like organisations or activities into Indigenous areas. I understood that there had been an intention to do that, but I could not find any programs around that.

Mr Learmonth: I am aware that there is some money provided to the Australian Men's Shed Association to support growth and development of new men's sheds and I suspect that Indigenous is part of that.

Senator BOYCE: That is part of the money that Mr Snowden mentioned. The last round closed in March or April.

Mr Learmonth: Yes. I am not familiar as to what extent that has been used for that particular targeted purpose. We could provide some information for you on notice.

Senator BOYCE: If you could, thank you.

CHAIR: I thank the officers from mental health.

Senator SIEWERT: Can we do dialysis?

CHAIR: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: I would like to go back to the question that I asked this morning around Bath Street. If you remember, at last estimates we had a discussion about the Bath

Street Lodge and at that stage it was about to open in a couple of weeks. I am reliably informed that it has not.

Mr Learmonth: You are correctly informed.

Ms Powell: I had a conversation with the Northern Territory Health Department last week and this week about that. It is, of course, a Northern Territory Health Department building project.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, with Commonwealth dollars.

Ms Powell: Yes, but not from this department. It is due to open in late June.

Senator SIEWERT: We were talking about it opening a couple of weeks after the February estimates and it is now late June, so to be kind that is four months. What is the holdup?

Ms Powell: I understand that the certificate of occupancy has been issued. They are still finalising the contract with Aboriginal Hostels, who are going to run it, and there is some issue over laundry. I emphasise that it is not funded by this department nor run by the Commonwealth so I am very nervous about answering anymore questions on it.

Senator SIEWERT: I might chance my arm and ask about the laundry.

Ms Powell: I have no more information other than that being the sticking point.

Senator SIEWERT: In the meantime, what is happening to the patients that would be using that facility?

Ms Powell: I am not aware of any particular new issue around accommodation that we have not covered before in Alice Springs. It will have facility for 40 patients, for which dialysis patients will be given priority.

Senator SIEWERT: I look forward to October estimates.

Senator EGGLESTON: Can I ask a question about dialysis?

CHAIR: Certainly.

Senator EGGLESTON: I recently went to the opening of the new Port Hedland health campus, and there is a very large dialysis unit there. I wondered whether you felt we had enough dialysis units to satisfy the need in the Pilbara and especially the eastern Pilbara?

Ms Powell: I cannot comment on that. We have the Central Australian Renal Study, which is looking at services of dialysis in Central Australia, which will have implications for other remote areas, but dialysis is primarily a state responsibility. The states do a lot of planning around numbers coming online, where the facilities should go and all those sorts of things. We do not keep statistics on those sorts of matters.

Senator SIEWERT: I thought that in the budget there were 28 new beds for WA?

Ms Powell: The Health and Hospital Fund provided the state government with funding for a range of renal facilities and other things as well.

Senator EGGLESTON: But you do not specify where?

Ms Powell: I can give you information about the Health and Hospital Fund. There was a capital works project funded through the Health and Hospital Fund in WA called Bringing Renal Dialysis Closer to Home in Remote WA. Some of the details are still being negotiated, but the locations of those were Fitzroy Crossing, the Pilbara at Roebourne, Kalgoorlie, at the

goldfields, which will be Laverton or Leonora, Broome, Port Hedland, Kalgoorlie and Geraldton; and Broome, Derby, Kununurra, Fitzroy Crossing, Roebourne, Kalgoorlie and Carnarvon. That last group was to support patient accommodation units.

Senator EGGLESTON: That is interesting. I was particularly interested in the eastern Pilbara, which includes Newman and goes out into the Western Desert. I know there were facilities talked about for that area, but perhaps that is not your specific area of responsibility to be concerned about their provisions.

Ms Powell: We do not know what plans the state health departments have in terms of where they are putting in dialysis facilities other than when they specifically ask us for money.

Senator EGGLESTON: You mention Roebourne, which has a high Indigenous population. Do you have a figure for how much money was allocated to Roebourne?

Ms Powell: No. I only have a global figure, which was \$45.8 million for all of those.

Senator EGGLESTON: I can ask the state health department where they have allocated the funds.

Senator SIEWERT: Is it possible on notice for you to give us the breakdown of the figures for the number of beds that are going into each of the centres that you just articulated?

Ms Powell: I can tell you the number of chairs going into each of those places. At Fitzroy Crossing it is going to be satellite outreach service with four chairs; at Roebourne it is a satellite outreach service with four chairs; Kalgoorlie is seven to 12 chairs; and goldfields is up to four chairs.

Senator SIEWERT: When you say goldfields, obviously 'Kal' is in the goldfields, so I presume that is where you mean, Laverton or Leonora. How many were there?

Ms Powell: Up to four. The group of Broome, Port Hedland, Kalgoorlie and Geraldton is getting new clinical treatment areas to support regional renal specialist teams. Broome, Derby, Kununurra, Fitzroy Crossing, Roebourne, Kalgoorlie and Carnarvon are getting 46 patient accommodation units.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. As I understand it, there were more beds or chairs in other states. I think there were 40 with 28 for WA and then there were some for other areas. Can you give us any detail on that?

Ms Powell: Through the Health and Hospital Fund?

Senator SIEWERT: I do not know where it was from. It was announced on budget night.

Ms Powell: That would be the Health and Hospital Fund.

Senator SIEWERT: I am sorry, I look at the outcomes sometimes rather than where the money is coming from. I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Ms Powell: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: I want to link it to my next question, which is: how are the Central Australian renal discussions going?

Ms Powell: Just before we do that, there is a renal dialysis unit expansion going in at Bunbury as well.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. How many chairs are there?

Ms Powell: I do not have that information. It may not be additional chairs. It could be an expansion of the unit.

Senator SIEWERT: Could you update us on where the discussions are at for the Central Australian ones?

Ms Powell: Yes. We received the draft final report from the consultants on 25 May, just last week. That is currently with all members of the steering committee, and we are having a teleconference with them on Tuesday to consider if there are any outstanding issues or if that can be accepted as a final report.

Senator SIEWERT: That will go to the minister and we will nag the minister to release it.

Ms Powell: It will probably go to all of the ministers as well.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, of course; the state ministers.

Ms Powell: The meeting is actually Monday, not Tuesday.

Senator SIEWERT: Have we covered STDs and those sorts of issues or do we cover it under this heading?

CHAIR: Anything to do with Aboriginal health specifically is here, so there could well be some people from that area; it just depends. It looks like you have a winner; there are nods. You should actually throw your question out and we will see whether we have the people it needs.

Senator EGGLESTON: My question relates to the incidence of HIV in Indigenous communities and in the north west in particular, but in general I suppose. I was just interested in terms of the north of Western Australia and whether that is going up or down and is it being well looked after and controlled. It is a question I asked a long time ago.

Dr Walker: The rates for HIV for 2009, which I think must be the latest information we have, is that in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population those rates have remained relatively stable over the last decade and are comparable to the rates in non-Indigenous population. The non-Indigenous rate is 3.7 per 100,000 and in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population it is 4.8 per 100,000.

Senator EGGLESTON: That has been static for a decade.

Dr Walker: Yes.

Senator EGGLESTON: That is a good outcome, I guess. What about other STDs?

Dr Walker: The rate for hepatitis C infection in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in 2009 was 131 per 100,000 population, which is three times the non-Indigenous rate of 44 per 100,000 population. Chlamydia has now overtaken gonorrhoea as the most common STI notification for Indigenous Australians, with that rate being 999 per 100,000 population compared with 287 per 100,000 population.

Senator EGGLESTON: What about infection?

Dr Walker: The diagnosis for gonorrhoea in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in 2009 was 668 per 100,000 population, compared to 25 per 100,000 population, which is 20 times the non-Indigenous rate.

Senator EGGLESTON: Have those last three sets of figures changed over the decade up or down?

Dr Walker: I am afraid I do not have trend information. Besides Chlamydia infections taking over from gonorrhoea, I do not have the trend data.

Senator EGGLESTON: Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Senator Adams, I know you want to speak on foetal alcohol syndrome.

Senator ADAMS: Mr Cotterell, I would just like to ask about the stage 2 of the Lililwan Project in Fitzroy Crossing and if the funding has been obtained for that particular project, that is stage 2.

Ms Powell: We received a request to contribute to stage 2 funding in April and we are currently negotiating with the George Institute around that. We are looking for state government to put in funding as well and negotiations are not yet concluded.

Senator ADAMS: As far as I was advised, the second stage was supposed to start on 11 May. If you are successful in getting some funding from the state, when do you think that project will go on?

CHAIR: That is a little bit on the hypothetical side.

Senator ADAMS: Yes, I know it is.

Dr Walker: The department, along with FaHCSIA, has provided to date \$1.05 million for stage 2 of the project. There is still an amount that is required to complete the project, which is what we are in negotiations with the George Institute about. The Lililwan Project team has commenced on the ground the diagnosis of children in Fitzroy Crossing, and just yesterday we had a conversation with them about how that was going. If you like, I could give you some information about what they are finding on the ground.

Senator ADAMS: That would be very good, because our Indigenous committee has visited Fitzroy twice, so we would be very interested in following up just what is going on.

Dr Walker: Certainly. The project team, as you would know, have been working with four community members in the Fitzroy Crossing and have developed a very good relationship with the parents and carers there, which has meant that of the 117 children who went through stage 1, 110 completing stage 2 have been assessed. I think about seven kids have actually left the community. They are doing very well in terms of engagement and maintaining that engagement. The assessment, as I said, has commenced. Over the last two weeks, a team of audiologists and vision specialists assessed the majority of children for ear and eye health and as issues were identified medical assistance was provided or referrals were being made to relevant authorities. The team also mentioned that there are a number of children that were found to have hearing problems and they have been talking with the teachers in those communities and have provided them with microphones to try and help improve the children being able to hear in classrooms.

This week, a team of allied health professionals, including social workers, Aboriginal liaison personnel and translators, physiotherapists and speech therapists are on site, and next week health professionals will be conducting neurological development testing of the children. It is expected that eight children will be assessed each week. It takes around six

hours over two days to complete that testing. It is quite time consuming. They are expecting that these assessments will conclude around 14 October.

Importantly, the clinical team is also working with the local workers in the community and trying to have them shadow some of the work that they are doing so they can get an understanding of the diagnosis methodology and the type of treatment that can be provided. That was a really important part of why we supported the project, because it is about capacity development as well in those communities for the workers. The work is underway. It is progressing well. They still have sufficient funds from the funds that we provided them jointly with FaHCSIA to continue that work for some time, but as Ms Powell indicated, we are currently negotiating with them around the remaining funds for stage 2.

Senator ADAMS: So, that is about \$830,000. Thank you for that. At next estimates we will be able to get an update.

Dr Walker: Absolutely.

CHAIR: Alcohol.

Senator SIEWERT: Can we flow from there into general alcohol issues. Some people will recall I did start asking these questions on, I think it was, Tuesday in terms of where we are up to with further discussion over what to do about some of the ongoing alcohol issues, for example, in the Northern Territory. Has there been any further consideration for other mechanisms the Commonwealth can use in terms of addressing alcohol consumption—floor prices, minimum prices; any other role the Commonwealth can play in alcohol related harm in the Northern Territory?

Ms Powell: I understand the issue of floor price was raised earlier this week.

Senator BOYCE: Raised how?

Senator SIEWERT: I did.

Senator BOYCE: Because I was going to raise it here.

Ms Powell: Someone from FaHCSIA was going to be here to talk about that this afternoon.

Mr Pratt: I will just turn around now and see if that person—

Senator SIEWERT: No-one is jumping up.

Mr Pratt: No, I do not hear the pitter-patter of little feet. If I can just give you a broad response. Certainly, the government is considering these issues in the context of what replaces the Northern Territory emergency response after next year. So, inevitably there will be consultations around those issues—discussions with the Northern Territory government—over the course of this year. That is where we are at.

Senator SIEWERT: That is as far as we can go. I know there is an evaluation being undertaken about the NTER. What I am specifically looking for now is whether there is any separate or part of that evaluation specifically of the prohibitions on the 73 communities?

Mr Pratt: I will look in this very large folder and see if there is something along those lines, otherwise I will take it on notice. Perhaps if we continue with the questioning while I am having a look.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. With the new approach the NT government is taking over the further changes they have just brought in in the Northern Territory, was the Commonwealth engaged in any discussions with the Northern Territory government over those particular changes?

Mr Pratt: My belief is, yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Was an evaluation done by the Commonwealth of their potential effectiveness?

Mr Martin-Jard: Could you repeat the question?

Senator SIEWERT: The answer was, yes, in terms of there was discussion with the NT government over the new regulations they have brought in. Did the Commonwealth undertake any analysis of the effectiveness of those particular measures in isolation from any other measures, such as reducing the number licences or such as price controls?

Mr Martin-Jard: There has been some evaluation going on for some time. I have not got the details here with me now, but I could take that one on notice if you like.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could provide us with any analysis the Commonwealth has done of those particular measures—the effectiveness of the combination of measures of price control, reducing licences, take-away-free days; all those measures that the community are requesting—that would be appreciated. Mr Pratt, you are still looking?

Mr Pratt: Yes, I am still trawling through lots of paper here and nothing is springing out. Inevitably I think these issues will of course be covered by the evaluation. I do know that we are on the ground very much engaged with the Northern Territory government around alcohol management plans and what works and what does not work. Whether or not we have a specific component of the evaluation, I am yet to discover.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could let us know, that would be appreciated. My final question is in this particular area, because I know we are running short of time and I could not stand us not talking about petrol sniffing before we go. I appreciate your comment about consideration for what happens when the NTER finishes next year, but in the meantime there is another 12 months and obviously there is a lot of discussion, particularly around Alice Springs, and the issue around alcohol consumption and alcohol related harm. Is the Commonwealth considering any further measures for Alice Springs in the meantime?

Mr Pratt: Unfortunately we sent away all of the people who were here this morning to talk about the Alice Springs Transformation project, so I will have to take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: I apologise. I presumed it would be discussed in health. I apologise that I did not raise it this morning. Could you perhaps take that on notice for me, please?

Mr Pratt: Certainly.

CHAIR: Petrol sniffing.

Senator ADAMS: Just an update on the Western Australian, through the Leonora, eastern boundary, as to how that is going.

Ms Powell: That would be us.

Dr Walker: You are asking in relation to the goldfields?

Ms Powell: Opal is now being distributed to the goldfields. There are interim arrangements in place there through BP until permanent storage facilities can be built, which we expect to be in the 2011-12 financial year. The interim arrangement has allowed Opal to be distributed from the Kalgoorlie facility and that has been happening since early May. Did you have a more specific question?

Senator ADAMS: Yes. Have you had any problems with any of the roadhouses? I know there was one earlier on that was not prepared to change.

Dr Walker: There are nine sites that are currently scheduled to receive fuel. I am not sure that any have received fuel just yet. The site of the Kalgoorlie facility is ready and stocked with Opal fuel, but the existing service stations are just using up their existing fuel. We understood there was going to be a run going out this week we think, with the first batch of Opal leaving Kalgoorlie to service stations, but I could not tell you how many of those service stations will be receiving fuel in the next few days, but we are not aware of any—

Ms Powell: BP is very reluctant to define them as receiving Opal until they have had three deliveries in a row so that they can be sure of the purity of the product.

Senator ADAMS: Right.

Senator SIEWERT: I have more on petrol sniffing. Are there any roadhouses that are going to be stocking sniffable fuel in the area?

Dr Walker: I think there are three towards the boundary of the area that will not be receiving Opal fuel until the permanent facility is built.

Senator SIEWERT: Is that because you cannot get enough out there?

Dr Walker: I think it is to do with volumes.

Senator SIEWERT: Is there reluctance to stock it?

Dr Walker: I do not believe so.

Senator EGGLESTON: How about along the Tanami Road and the communities close to the Western Australian-Northern Territory border where there has been a bit of a problem with this sort of issue? Is Opal available in the Kimberley, in Halls Creek in particular?

Dr Walker: In relation to East Kimberley, there are three Indigenous communities in the south and one Indigenous community in the north of East Kimberley designated regions that are receiving Opal fuel. Fuel distribution issues have resulted in delays in the rollout of Opal fuel to some sites in northern Australia, including East Kimberley, and there are currently no sites receiving Opal fuel in Halls Creek or Fitzroy Crossing, although this is planned to occur.

The broader rollout in the East Kimberley is dependent on establishing a permanent storage facility in Darwin, because of the volumes of fuel that is required. Getting into those larger centres in the East Kimberley really requires a northern storage facility to enable that to occur. At the moment, the fuel, as you know, comes from Adelaide and the volumes are too high to be able to get that amount of fuel to some of those larger centres.

Senator EGGLESTON: Whose responsibility is the building of such a storage facility or the creation of it? Is it the oil companies or the state government or perhaps the Commonwealth?

Dr Walker: The permanent storage facility that we would like established in Darwin is wrapped up as part of the procurement plan or the procurement processes that are happening at the moment for the distribution, supply and storage of Opal fuel.

Ms Powell: That was part of a budget measure in the last budget.

Dr Walker: The outcomes of that should not only give us hopefully some efficiencies around distribution, but will also provide some storage facilities in the required areas so that we can roll out to the petrol sniffing areas completely.

CHAIR: I think because of the interest in petrol sniffing we may be requesting a briefing for the committee on the progress of this area, so we will put that through your office. Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT: I just wanted to specifically follow up the procurement process, because when we spoke in February it was just starting; it was underway.

Ms Powell: That is right. Yes, the request for tender was released on 13 May to those applicants who submitted compliant applications in response to a previous request for information which was run in February this year. The request for tender closes on 14 June.

Senator SIEWERT: I would just like to ask about the map that you have provided.

Senator EGGLESTON: This is the national map?

Senator SIEWERT: The national map that you provided to us has some red spots I have noticed for refusing. There is more than I thought there was now in central Australia.

Dr Walker: There are seven.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes. What are we doing about them?

Dr Walker: There are seven national—

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, and they are all in Central Australia; a broad definition of Central Australia. I am wondering where we are up to with those particular seven.

Dr Walker: We are attempting to address some of the issues that are the reasons for not stocking that fuel, such as tourists do not like to use that fuel. There is a large communications budget in the most recent budget measure, so we are rolling out communications to different parts.

Senator SIEWERT: I am sorry to interrupt, but these ones here that we are talking about in central Australia; this is not a recent phenomenon, is it? We have had Opal fuel now in central Australia for a number of years and some of these are persistent offenders. While I think it is great that you have got the communication package, particularly for rolling out across the rest of the country, with all due respect I do not think that is going to work with some of these centres that are persistently refusing to stock Opal.

Dr Walker: We are continuing to work with them.

Ms Powell: We write to them, we encourage them, we visit them from time to time, and it is their decision.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, currently it is. You would also be aware of the recommendation to this committee that—and this was made some time ago, so it is more than six months down the track since we made that recommendation—the Commonwealth should look at some sort of mandatory process. Has the department or has the government started looking at that?

CHAIR: I think that is a question for the minister.

Senator SIEWERT: Minister or Parliamentary Secretary, if you could take that on notice, that would be appreciated. It is an issue that we have been pursuing for quite some time.

Ms Powell: The budget decision of last budget was in response to that, a decision to invest significantly in overcoming some of the storage and distribution problems, so that it would be much easier to roll it out everywhere that people were—and supported as Dr Walker said, by a strong communications campaign. We do have staff on the ground that go out and persuade.

Senator SIEWERT: I do appreciate you are making a big effort in that area. As I said, though, some of these are persistent offenders. Can I just double check on the issue that came up with Kakadu and whether that is resolved.

Ms Powell: In Kakadu there are three fuel retail sites bordering the park that we are still negotiating with. My understanding is that they are not resisting, but they are watching rollouts in Katherine and Mataranka and not wanting to be leaders, I think.

Senator SIEWERT: They are waiting to see how it goes; is that right?

Ms Powell: That is right.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. Yalata is targeted to receive?

Ms Powell: That is right. We are currently waiting for final installation quotes and once we have got those, we will assess the proposal in detail and come to some kind of arrangement with the Yalata community.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you.

Senator EGGLESTON: Could I ask about medical manpower and Aboriginal medical services? I was told it was difficult to find doctors to work in AMSs in the north of Western Australia, which is where I know about, but I just wondered what the situation currently was and whether or not there actually was a problem.

Ms Powell: There are typically problems with recruiting and retaining all types of staff in remote locations right across the country, whether they be mainstream or Aboriginal medical services. We fund RAHC, Remote Area Health Corps, to train and recruit temporary medical staff to come in to work at a variety of remote localities within the Northern Territory, but it is a problem all over the country that everyone is aware of and works hard on.

Senator EGGLESTON: Are these doctors paid an agreed salary? Is it subsidised or is it a decision of the local AMS to set a salary and terms and conditions?

Ms Powell: Doctors are employed by an Aboriginal medical service, and then the local service sets their own terms and conditions.

Senator EGGLESTON: Remote area problems apply no doubt in terms of recruiting people, just as they do in any other centre.

Ms Powell: That is right.

Senator EGGLESTON: The original places where I was told about this were Broome and Derby. Broome especially is usually regarded as a fairly attractive place to live except in the summertime. I wondered how more remote locations fared, and obviously they face difficulty, from what you have just said.

Ms Powell: Yes, remote locations do. They enter into a range of different arrangements with service providers in terms of doctors working within regions. The Northern Territory health department has arrangements where they provide their primary care doctors. Often remotely, they make a lot more use of telephone conversations and things like that than you would normally do because that is what works in those locations.

Senator EGGLESTON: To what degree are the state health departments involved in assisting with the manning of AMS services—either at all, marginally or strongly?

Ms Powell: There are community controlled Aboriginal medical services and they are independent businesses and are funded by the government. In many remote places across the country, particularly in the Northern Territory and in Queensland, services are provided by state health departments. Sometimes there are arrangements where the state health department provides the service and has a community controlled advisory board, and there are different combinations of all of those options.

Senator EGGLESTON: Do you have a preferred option?

Ms Powell: We just fund the primary care services. We do not fund the state health departments generally, although sometimes there are different arrangements. Some of them have what are called section 19(2) arrangements where they can bill Medicare directly, and so we contribute to their funding in that way.

Senator EGGLESTON: I would have thought most of them actually direct billed Medicare for services provided, but is that not the case?

Ms Powell: Most of them do. You have to be a registered and accredited practice to be eligible for that and most of them are and most of them do, but I do not think all of them.

Senator EGGLESTON: Have you any percentages?

Ms Powell: Currently 89 Aboriginal medical services have clinical accreditation, which would make them eligible for PIP payments.

Senator EGGLESTON: How many AMSs are there in total?

Ms Powell: We fund 286 organisations, of which 180 are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health organisations, and that covers primary health care, substance use and social and emotional wellbeing services.

CHAIR: Thank you, senator and officers. I thank the officers who attended today. I also want to apologise to the officers whose outcome areas we did not reach because of time constraints and who have been waiting all day. So, our apologies to you, and I promise you you will get questions on notice. We will now adjourn. I would like to acknowledge Hansard, as always, and also the work of the secretariat.

Committee adjourned at 16:00