



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE CHRISTMAS ISLAND TRAGEDY

Incident of 15 December 2010

TUESDAY, 7 JUNE 2011

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

BY AUTHORITY OF THE PARLIAMENT

INTERNET

Hansard transcripts of public hearings are made available on the internet when authorised by the committee.

The internet address is:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>

To search the parliamentary database, go to:

<http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au>

JOB NAME

JobDate

Members in attendance: Senators Cash, Crossin, Fielding, Hanson-Young, and Marshall and Mr Champion, Mr Husic, Mr Keenan, Mrs Markus and Mr Perret

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The incident of 15 December 2010 in which an irregular entry vessel foundered on rocks at Rocky Point on Christmas Island, including:

- (a) operational responses of all Commonwealth agencies involved in the response, relevant agency procedures, and inter-agency coordination;
- (b) communication mechanisms, including between Commonwealth and State agencies;
- (c) relevant onshore emergency response capabilities on Christmas Island;
- (d) the after-incident support provided to survivors;
- (e) the after-incident support provided to affected Christmas Island community members, Customs, Defence and other personnel;
- (f) having regard to (a) to (e), the effectiveness of the relevant administrative and operational procedures and arrangements of Commonwealth agencies in relation to the SIEV 221 incident and its management; and
- (g) being mindful of ongoing national security, disruption and law enforcement efforts and the investigations referred to below, to consider appropriate information from the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (including Border Protection Command) to determine, to the extent that it is possible, the likely point of origin of the vessel.

The committee should have regard to and be mindful of independent parallel investigations into the incident including the investigation by the State Coroner of WA and investigations by the Australian Federal Police, and conduct its inquiry accordingly.

WITNESSES

GRAHAM, Dr Julie, Director of Public Health and Medicine, Indian Ocean Territories Health Service, Indian Ocean Territories Administration, Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government.....	22
HEATH, Ms Leslie, Acting Manager, Indian Ocean Territories Health Service, Indian Ocean Territories Administration, Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government.....	22
LACY, Mr Brian James, Administrator, Indian Ocean Territories	1
MOSS, Ms Belinda, Assistant Secretary, Territories West Branch, Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government	22
MURRAY, Mr Raymond John, Private capacity	35
SOUTHERTON, Mr Ian, Operations Director, Serco	15
SU, Mr Zhong Xiong (Chris), Private capacity	29
THOMSON, Mr Gordon, Shire President, Shire of Christmas Island and Union of Christmas Island Workers	10
WILDERMUTH, Ms Catherine, Director, Indian Ocean Territories Administration, Territories West Branch, Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government	22
YOONG, Dr Ling, Area Medical Director, International Health and Medical Services, Christmas Island.....	15

LACY, Mr Brian James, Administrator, Indian Ocean Territories**Committee met at 08:37**

CHAIR (Senator Marshall): I declare open this hearing of the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on the Christmas Island Tragedy. I advise witnesses that, although the committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, requests to give all or part of your evidence in camera will be considered. Evidence taken in camera may, however, subsequently be made public by order of the Senate or by order of this committee. I also remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence to the committee may constitute a contempt of the Senate. Before the committee starts taking evidence, I advise that all witnesses appearing before the committee are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to their evidence. This gives them special rights and immunities because people must be able to give evidence to committees without prejudice to themselves. Any act which disadvantages a witness as a result of evidence given before the Senate or any of its committees is treated as a breach of privilege. If a witness objects to answering a question the witness should state the ground upon which the objection is to be taken, and the committee will determine whether it will insist on an answer having regard to the ground that is claimed. If the committee determines to pursue an answer, a witness may request that the answer be given in camera.

I welcome the Administrator of Christmas Island, the Hon. Mr Brian Lacy, and thank him for joining us today. I note that the Senate has resolved that an officer of a department of the Commonwealth or of the state shall not be asked to give opinions on matters of policy and shall be given reasonable opportunity to refer questions asked of the officer to superior officers or to a minister. This resolution prohibits only questions asking for opinions on matters of policy, and does not preclude questions asking for explanations of policies or factual questions about when and how policies were adopted. I invite you to make some opening remarks to be followed by questions.

Mr Lacy: Thank you. Firstly, I would like to thank the committee for giving the community of Christmas Island the opportunity to state their case in relation to the events of 15 December and the days immediately following. I would like also to acknowledge and commend the heroic acts of the naval and Customs personnel on the scene, and the volunteers of our community who stood on the cliff face and tried to help in saving the people who were left in the ocean as a result of the wreck of the vessel. A written submission has been given by Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, which I will refer to as the department. It incorporates my submissions, principally in paragraphs 1, 3 and 5 and in attachment A. There is also an attachment which gives the status of the matters that were recommended in the report of the emergency management committee as requiring further attention.

CHAIR: Could you outline for the committee the steps that were taken in respect of counselling those who witnessed the tragic events and the extent of the reach of counselling services that may have been provided.

Mr Lacy: First of all, the issue of counselling was raised in the emergency management committee meetings I think on about the third meeting. The committee met every three hours on the first day of the incident and it met about every five hours on the second day of the incident. The committee members did raise questions about counselling and ensuring that each of their colleagues was in good condition. In fact it was not unusual after the event for people to be heard on the island asking after each other's condition and how they felt.

Apart from that, I had further discussions with the Director of the Indian Ocean Territories Administration, Catherine Wildermuth, who will be giving evidence later on today. She drew up a table of the available counselling or psychological services for the various agencies. In our discussion we decided that we would need some further assistance from psychologists and counsellors from off the island and we requested of the territories division in the department that they provide us with a psychologist and two counsellors to assist in looking after the community on Christmas Island. From there on, I think the evidence of the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service will probably assist the committee better than I can as to what was done in relation to the actual counselling.

CHAIR: I think you are right; we will ask those questions specifically of those witnesses. But are you aware generally of what the take-up rate was from the community and of any feedback from that counselling that they may have given you?

Mr Lacy: I did have a telephone conversation with the psychologist at the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service. He said that there was not a large take-up rate from the community. There were some but not a large number, and the basis of their concern was: why did this happen here and what can we do to ensure that it does not happen again? I do not want to go into the details of what the actual counselling was, and in fact he did not go into the detail, as a matter of privacy.

CHAIR: Are you aware of how the availability of counselling services was communicated to the community?

Mr Lacy: A notice was put out by the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service informing members of the community about the ways in which they could assess whether they needed counselling. Again, I am sure that that document will be tabled by the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service or by the department.

CHAIR: Do you know whether that was posted out or handed out?

Mr Lacy: It was actually letterboxed, so everyone who had a letterbox in the community would have got a copy of that.

CHAIR: Do most people have a letterbox?

Mr Lacy: Yes, because we do not have mail deliveries. That is the only way you can get your mail on Christmas Island.

Mr PERRETT: People keep saying, 'We've got counselling here' and 'We've got counselling there'. The reality is that it was a horrible event and, like all horrible events, people will have those horrible images for a long time and will have to cope with them. What role do you think the counselling is playing? The reality is that people saw a horrible thing. That is life, isn't it?

Mr Lacy: It was a tragic event, and it will live in the minds of many people for years to come. How you can deal with that, I think, is very much up to the individual and to the clinicians who actually counsel them.

Mr PERRETT: It is six months next week since the tragedy, so how do you feel that the community is going? Is there a need for more counsellors? Or are people getting on with it? Are people being lost? What is your feeling on it?

Mr Lacy: From talking to people in the community my feeling is that they are pretty much settled now. There is, of course, that ongoing cohesive support between members of the community. As I said before, after the event people went around asking each other if they needed any assistance. I think that same sort of support is still available within the community. But from the discussions I have had with people in the community, generally I think the community has settled.

Mr PERRETT: But there might be some odd wounded people?

Mr Lacy: Obviously, there will be. Different people have different sensitivities and some will probably be more sensitive than others.

Mr PERRETT: Okay.

Senator FIELDING: I can well imagine that it has been a very difficult time for people who were on the island at the time and since. I know you have played a key role in helping people through the tragedy. On a previous day's hearing—not yesterday, but previously in Canberra—there were some issues raised around the memorial service and inviting survivors to that sort of service. I do not know where this has come from, but there was a concern that there were no survivors invited; was that a concern at the time, do you think? Or is that still an ongoing issue for people who were part of the rescue? Is it something that you have found to be an issue still?

Mr Lacy: It was a concern initially, and up until the memorial service itself. A number of people in the community had expressed to me the desire to have the survivors present. I discussed that with the shire president, Gordon Thomson, and with the community liaison officer from the shire council, Chris Su. I also discussed it with Fiona Andrew, who was the assistant secretary for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. The advice I received from her was that the psychologist did not think it was in the best interests of the survivors or of the community to have the survivors present at the memorial service.

The idea of the memorial service was to be an uplifting event for the people in the community, to try to help them through that process of the suffering they felt as a result of the things they had witnessed, and I took that advice. Right up until the last week before the memorial service, the advice was still that we should not have the survivors present at the community memorial service.

Senator FIELDING: I appreciate the information there, because I had asked that question about what sort of advice was given and it sounds like there was expert advice provided. So thank you for that, because I was not too sure how the decision was made and you have helped to outline that it was advice given that it may not have been in the best interests of both parties.

Mr Lacy: I should say that I also spoke to a trauma counsellor from South Australia by phone, who had been involved in the Queensland floods, to seek his advice on it. His advice, too, was that we should not invite the survivors to the community memorial service.

Senator FIELDING: This is a question that you may not be able to answer, and it is not an opinion or view on policy: if the weather conditions were the same again, and a boat was in a similar situation in the future, I do not think there is anything we could really do if the boat were that close? After looking at the rocks yesterday, and how harsh they are and with the seas as high as they were, I have spoken to a couple of people on the island and they have said the same thing: when you look at the seas of the day and the vulnerability of the boat, there is really not much that can actually be done—

Mr Lacy: No. Everything that could be done was done, in my view. I want to commend the police and emergency services for the efforts that they made and the work they did do. If I could just go back to your previous question, my wife and I actually visited the survivors in the detention centre about a week after the event. The sort of feedback we got then was very disturbing. They were asking 'Why wasn't more done to save my babies?' and one gentleman had lost a brother and he was in a terrible state. He said he could not ring home because he did not know how to tell his mother or the lost brother's wife what had happened. It was very difficult talking to them and you could feel the hurt that they felt, as well as the anger they felt, about the fact that they had lost children and husbands and brothers. Their feelings were understandable but it was very disturbing to see.

Senator CASH: One of the terms of reference that the committee is enquiring into is the relevant onshore emergency response capabilities on Christmas Island. In your briefing paper for the Christmas Island Emergency Management Committee you state that overwhelmingly it was agreed that the response of the agencies on the island was excellent and that the CI emergency plan was effective in operation, but you do then go on to note some issues in relation to communication. Can you elaborate on those issues for the committee?

Mr Lacy: One of the difficulties we had with communication was the fact that there were some people using the radios who did not have any training. We identified the need for training of those people. There was also a problem with frequencies. There were people cutting across other people on the radios. The best way we found to communicate on the day was by mobile telephone. There are black spots around the island with the radios, and that is another matter being investigated at the moment, with the equipment we might need to be able to switch also from UHF to VHF and overcome the problems of black spots with other infrastructure on the island.

Senator CASH: Were those issues highlighted merely because of the extent of what occurred on the particular day, in particular in terms of people not actually knowing how to use a radio? Is that because you had to draw in so many people that you had people who just had not had the relevant training?

Mr Lacy: Precisely. We had a lot of volunteers on the day who were not necessarily members of the Volunteer Marine Rescue Service or members of the Fire and Emergency Services, but they were there to assist and some of them were using radios as well.

Senator CASH: What can you actually do, then, to ensure you would be better prepared if, unfortunately, a similar event were to occur again?

Mr Lacy: We are asking Fire and Emergency Services from South Australia, under their service delivery agreement, to assist us in providing training in radio communications, and we are dealing with Customs and police in trying to get equipment that is common to all agencies on the island and that will provide the relevant frequencies for people to work within their own agency and across agencies.

Senator CASH: One of the other issues you note was that management of the airport was frustrated by lack of consultation about incoming aircraft. What occurred there?

Mr Lacy: In emergency situations like this there is a desire by everybody to help. There were people on the mainland who were organising things to assist us on the island, but they were not going through the Territory Controller—

Senator CASH: When you say people on the mainland, were they departmental?

Mr Lacy: Departmental people, mainly, and crisis control centre. But they were not going through our own Territory Controller, and therefore the information was not being conveyed to the manager of the airport. He was being told about aircraft coming in that had not been brought to his attention by us, and he had to manage it by himself—he had to manage and control the timing of the aircraft coming in. We also had an aircraft fuel shortage problem at the time. If all that had been arranged through the Territory Controller, we may have been able to stop some of the aircraft coming in that were coming in.

Senator CASH: Have you raise that with DIAC, in that they should have themselves been communicating with the relevant authority on the island?

Mr Lacy: It was not only DIAC, it was also the department of regional Australia. As I say, everybody wanted to assist and do what they could.

Senator CASH: Have you raised that, so that they understand that?

Mr Lacy: Yes we have—it is one of the lessons learned from the incident.

Senator CASH: You also raised the resource implications. You say the response and recovery revealed the urgent need for certain additional resources and/or facilities. Why were they not on the island in the first place? A lot of them are actually quite basic resources.

Mr Lacy: Some of those resources are available on the island but not in the quantities that you would need for a disaster of that nature. Hopefully there will never be another disaster of that nature. Basically it was about ensuring that we had appropriate supplies of those pieces of equipment or resources and that they were of the more modern type, such as the grenade type life vests. We did not have any of those on the island—I was not personally aware that there was such a thing until some of the experts told us about it in the review of the emergency management response and in the recovery process.

Senator CROSSIN: Mr Lacy, I want to follow up a couple of issues here, the first being communications. Communications in the IOTs, I am aware, has long been a problem—for more than a decade now. What proactive steps now need to be taken to ensure that these problems are addressed?

Mr Lacy: We need some additional infrastructure to overcome the problem of black spots on the island. We need an approach to equipment that is coordinated for all of the agencies on the island so there are not any disruptions to services because of the way we use the frequencies or because of the type of equipment used. That is, as I said, being reviewed at the present time. There were some AFP people on the island recently looking into it, Customs were conducting a review and Regional Australia is also looking at a communications strategy for the island. I in fact asked the director of the Indian Ocean Territories Administration on Christmas Island to see if we could get a communication strategy developed for the island. That has been passed back to Canberra and is being undertaken by a consultant, engaged by the Territories Division, at the present time.

Senator CROSSIN: What I am hearing you saying is that you have a consultant developing a communication strategy, the AFP doing something and Regional Australia doing something. It still looks to me as if we have a bit of a patchwork quilt happening here. In your view, is there any single department or entity taking responsibility for coordinating all of that activity? There is no point having three communication strategies and four reviews into communications going on if, at the end of the day, we do not come down with one single plan that everyone is aware of.

Mr Lacy: That is a very good point. On the island, I chair an interagency coordinating committee which involves all of the agencies on the island. I understand that set-up is being replicated by the Department of Regional Australia and that that interagency body will look into a communication strategy.

Senator CROSSIN: You say that it is being replicated. Does that mean that an interagency body with representatives from the same agencies as those on the island is being replicated in Canberra?

Mr Lacy: Yes. As I understand it, that is the way it is being done.

Senator CROSSIN: So there is a group of departmental people in Canberra doing what? Are they replicating, mimicking, mirroring what you do?

Mr Lacy: Yes. There will be representatives from the AFP, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Customs and AQIS—these are all the agencies that are on the island that interact in one way or the other with matters concerning the immigration centre or island communications.

Senator CROSSIN: When you get together and meet, you do not teleconference with the ones in Canberra?

Mr Lacy: No. The Canberra agency set-up is just being set up. It has not yet been set up.

Senator CROSSIN: Is there a plan to hook them into your meetings? I can see island people determining what is best for island people and, lo and behold, Canberra people determining what they think is best for island people—and you will get another chasm.

Mr Lacy: The interagency coordinating committee feeds back to Canberra what they believe is necessary for the island. That will be taken up by the officers in Canberra.

Senator CROSSIN: Who coordinates that in Canberra?

Mr Lacy: Perhaps that question is better put to the Department of Regional Australia.

Senator CROSSIN: You talked about communications infrastructure for black spots—that is for radio, not mobile phones?

Mr Lacy: Yes, I was talking about radio, although mobile phone service are an issue as well.

Senator CROSSIN: Who has done an assessment of that? Has anyone done an assessment of that? Do we know what is needed?

Mr Lacy: Again, I ask that you direct that question to Regional Australia.

Senator CROSSIN: I go to fuel supply. This is my second trip to this island in quite a few months and it is not the first time I have heard that there has been a shortage of fuel supply happening here.

Mr Lacy: It is aviation fuel.

Senator CROSSIN: Yes, aviation fuel. We know there has been a shortage of other fuel as well, but let us go just to the aviation fuel supply. What needs to be done here to ensure that we do not get to that situation? Was there a lack of supply because you could not get it off the barge because of the weather? Is that right?

Mr Lacy: Initially, last time, yes. The ship was unloading in November and it had to pull out because of the conditions. They did not get back until about February or March, I think—I cannot remember.

Senator CROSSIN: Do we need to look at bigger and sturdier storage supply capabilities at the airport?

Mr Lacy: As I am advised, that matter is being addressed at the present time. Again, that might be a question that Regional Australia could best answer.

Senator CROSSIN: There is lots of work being done at the present time, isn't there?

Mr Lacy: There has been a budget allocation for fuel issues, so work is being done at the present time.

Senator CROSSIN: The other issue that disturbs me is the follow-up and support for the survivors in the detention centre immediately following the incident and even now, six months on. No doubt through your visits you would have fed your concerns in to DIAC. Was that in some form of written report or was that raised at the interdepartmental meetings that you coordinate on the island?

Mr Lacy: I spoke directly to the assistant secretary about it, and the assistant secretary accompanied me and my wife when we went to visit the survivors. But, apart from that verbal discussion with her about that, there was no written report about it—not from me.

Senator CROSSIN: And you are not aware of what follow-up occurred from your discussion?

Mr Lacy: I understand they were being provided with counselling—in particular the ones that were very, very distressed, like the man who had lost his brother and the lady who had lost her children. I was advised that they were being provided with counselling services.

Senator CROSSIN: Perhaps my other questions are better directed at DIAC.

Mr KEENAN: Mr Lacy, I turn to the resource implications in your submission. The department has accepted most of those, but have they been actioned?

Mr Lacy: They are in the process of being actioned. Again, Regional Australia can provide you with a status report. There is a status document on the back of their submissions, but there is a further update on that which will be provided by Regional Australia.

Mr KEENAN: I think the ones that have not been accepted are the jet ski and the surf RHIB.

Mr Lacy: Yes, that is right, but the jet ski issue—and it is not a jet ski as such; it is a life-saving device—is being reconsidered; I have been advised that it is being reconsidered. The RHIB has been rejected.

Mr KEENAN: Pending further decisions.

Mr Lacy: Yes.

Mr KEENAN: We have heard evidence in Canberra and the coronial inquest seems to have spent a lot of time looking into the fact that at the time the boat on the island was not seaworthy. We understand that has now been replaced by two vessels. Do you think that that satisfies the capability that the island requires?

Mr Lacy: I am not an expert on ocean-going vessels and I do not know a lot about them, but the advice that I have received is that the two vessels that we have at the present time satisfy the requirements of the island emergency services. By the same token, despite the fact that I do not know a lot about seagoing vessels, I doubt very much that anybody could have launched a vessel from land on that particular day in those conditions.

Mr KEENAN: That is what we have been told: that there does not appear to be a vessel that exists now that could have been launched. Of course, that does not mean that the island does not need proper equipment for the future. This question might be best directed at Regional Australia, but do you have any idea when they are going to resolve these issues? The two boats here now are only temporarily based here, aren't they?

Mr Lacy: Yes. As I am advised, the difficulty is getting an AMSA survey. AMSA will not provide a list of vessels that it regards as suitable for Christmas Island. It requires that the department or government purchase the

vessels and then it will do a survey. It is not prepared to provide you with a surveyed vessel or a list of surveyed vessels that would be suitable for Christmas Island. That is pretty unfortunate because you can spend a lot of money on a vessel and then find that it is not up to AMSA's standards.

Mr KEENAN: And that is what happened with the original vessel.

Mr Lacy: That is right.

Mr KEENAN: That seems very unsatisfactory.

Mr Lacy: It does. In my view it is. I did write to the department—because I understand they are responsible as AMSA would not do it—suggesting that they should insist that AMSA provide them with a list of vessels that they would survey for being suitable for Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

Mr KEENAN: Did you receive a formal response?

Mr Lacy: No.

Mr KEENAN: No, just an informal response.

Mr Lacy: Yes, just an informal response.

Mr KEENAN: We can probably explore these issues a bit more with the department.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: To continue with that list of recommendations about resources and facilities, one of the other proposals from your submission that has been rejected is the one for emergency lighting at Ethel Beach. What is your understanding of the reasoning behind that being rejected?

Mr Lacy: Partly because the emergency management committee on Christmas Island does not believe that Ethel Beach is a suitable alternative offloading facility. I think, from memory, that that was noted in the report. But it was said that, if it is to be used for an alternative offloading facility, lights and other equipment should be made available. Quite frankly, I would rather not see it used as an alternative offload facility but perhaps as an emergency offload facility in conditions such as we had on 15 December—but not generally.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: We heard yesterday from Customs that they had already unloaded one group of people at Ethel Beach the day before, so it obviously gets used.

Mr Lacy: It is a decision made by the Navy. We have objected to the Navy using it but they do that in circumstances where they have control of their vessel and they believe it is necessary for them to do it.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: So do you believe that there should be some type of emergency facilities there or not?

Mr Lacy: I would rather not see it used as an alternative offload facility. In those circumstance I would rather not put anything there that is going to encourage it being used as an alternative offload facility. I would rather see a better off-load facility, such as some work being done at Nui Nui Wharf.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Are you in discussions with the Navy and Customs about that or do you just agree to disagree?

Mr Lacy: I have had discussions with the department about that and they are in discussions with the other agencies. In fact, the assistant secretary for Territories West, Belinda Moss, will be here later today. I know that she has had discussions with the Navy and Customs about that.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Can I ask about the mobile phones? You have said that, among the issues with communications, there are black spots in relation to using the radios. There are clearly black spots for mobile phones. For example, moving my phone from here to here seems to make a difference. How often has that been a problem in the past when dealing with other types of emergencies? I know we have not had a tragedy like this previously. Does the mobile phone reception ever go down? Is that a common occurrence or has that happened?

Mr Lacy: It is not a common occurrence, but the mobile reception does go down if we get some interruption to the satellite coverage. But it has never been a problem in the past—before that incident on 15 December. Sorry, when I say it has not been a problem, communications has always been an issue on the island but it has not been a problem in emergency situations.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Do you think that more could be done to try and alleviate those mobile phone black spots due to the nature of the island?

Mr Lacy: A lot of it is the nature of the island, but more could be done from Telstra's point of view to provide a better service. As I understand it, there are ongoing discussions about that with Telstra.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Is it right that on the first day of the protest in the detention centre in March the mobile phones went down?

Mr Lacy: As I understand it, one of the towers went out of service. I know that I sent messages to the emergency management committee by text and a lot of people did not get it because the service was down. But that was in March, that was not—

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: I realise that, but I am trying to ascertain how often this happens. If there were problems in December and then problems in March—

Mr HUSIC: It seems to be like when there is a high traffic volume on the network; it has not been—

Mr Lacy: There was some damage done to the equipment on that day at that tower. And it was not the whole island that actually lost service on that day, it was just one part of the island as a result of the unserviceability of part of the equipment in the tower itself.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: So it was unserved?

Mr Lacy: Yes, and when I say unserved, there was a breakdown in the equipment and it needed to be serviced.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Yes.

Mr Lacy: It took a while before people realised that that was the problem and they got onto Telstra to get it fixed.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Okay. So there could be more done in relation to bringing those issues to Telstra's attention?

Mr Lacy: Yes. As I say, it is a matter that is an ongoing thing with Telstra. But the question is, I suppose, about what investment is needed to fix the problem.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Yes. I guess this comes back in part to Senator Crossin's questions: I am finding it very difficult to get a sense of who really is in charge when we get to an emergency situation. There are so many different groups and there seems to be a lack of overarching management. One of the recommendations from the emergency management systems review back last year—I will get the official name of the report for *Hansard*—the *Emergency management review for the Indian Ocean Territories* of January 2010—

Mr Lacy: That is the Parsons Brinckerhoff report, is it?

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Yes. It says here about coordination:

Emergency management is often an afterthought on CI. As part of the stakeholder engagement process undertaken by this report, many comments were made about the possibility of having a full time role focussing on EM on island. An 'Community Emergency Management Officer', ...

We heard a couple of weeks ago when we had the hearings in Canberra, both from community members and also from the department, that so much of the emergency response relies upon volunteers, obviously. And we heard that again yesterday. The idea of trying to coordinate that and to have somebody actually dedicated to coordinating those people, their training, their ability to respond and follow up support—all of those things—that recommendation has not been taken up, has it?

Mr Lacy: No. In fact, that report came out soon after I was appointed as the administrator of the island. The emergency management committee, which I convene every month, recommended that we actually engage that full-time community emergency management officer. But that was rejected by the department on a cost basis.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: That was their response, that it was a cost issue?

Mr Lacy: Yes. I still believe that we really do need a full-time community emergency management officer because, as you have identified, everybody here is a volunteer—or most people are volunteers—and they all have other jobs. Some people have two jobs, and it is pretty difficult to concentrate or devote the time that is really needed to make sure that everybody is properly trained and that the community are properly informed, and things of that nature.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: I have a final question. Since the tragedy has that recommendation been raised again with the department?

Mr Lacy: Yes, it has. As I am advised, they are reconsidering their position. Perhaps the department could better answer that question.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Thank you.

Mr HUSIC: How long have you been here, Mr Lacy?

Mr Lacy: Since November 2009.

Mr HUSIC: Have you had an opportunity to ask people about the type of weather conditions that affected Christmas Island on 15 December and whether or not that was a regular occurrence?

Mr Lacy: I have, and as I understand it there has only ever been one occurrence that approached that sort of event.

Mr HUSIC: Do you recall when that might have been?

Mr Lacy: I was told. It was not in recent times; I think it was back in the 1980s.

Mr HUSIC: In terms of the tragedy that occurred on 15 December, have there been similar incidents that have affected the island in years past?

Mr Lacy: Not that I am aware of. There was another—SIEVX—at one time, but I was not here then. I do not know the details of that.

Mr HUSIC: So the type of pressures that were placed on the island in respect of its emergency response have not really been needed or activated on a regular basis. Is that a fair statement?

Mr Lacy: That is a fair statement, yes.

Mr HUSIC: In the Office of the Administrator, Indian Ocean Territories briefing paper on the incident, there is a reference to a state of emergency being lifted by Peter Swann in consultation with you.

Mr Lacy: Yes. In consultation with the officer in charge of police, Peter Swann, who is the territory controller, we declared a state of emergency almost immediately when the boat crashed into the rocks. That remained in place until such time as it was declared that the state of emergency was lifted.

Mr HUSIC: What are the implications of that for residents of the island?

Mr Lacy: It means that they are directed by the territory controller in the way in which they should respond and the way in which they need to be involved in recovery. That generally is what happened. I would like to commend Peter Swann for the way in which he managed the whole situation. It was a very difficult situation, particularly as he was managing two sites. That was the site where the incident occurred and the site where they were offloading the survivors and the bodies. He did a magnificent job in doing that, as did medical staff.

Mr HUSIC: Senator Hanson-Young touched on the issue of the volunteers. I am heartened, because I also asked at the Canberra hearings about the training of volunteers on emergency management, so I will take it from your earlier comments that this is now under active reconsideration by the department. Is that correct?

Mr Lacy: It is a matter that I am discussing with FESA and the department has also taken it under control.

Mr HUSIC: The final question I want to ask is in reference to the resource list which you have been asked about, on page 4 of the document submitted to the inquiry, and the list of different items. Has that list been prioritised in terms of issues that are required quickly versus others that are, if you will, something that, with the benefit of time and additional resources, it would be beneficial to have but not critical right now?

Mr Lacy: Again, the department might be better placed to answer that question. They have been pursuing the acquisition of those resources and pieces of equipment, and they have actually set up the priorities for that.

Mr HUSIC: Thank you.

Mrs MARKUS: I have a couple of questions about the mobile coverage, and then I will move to another question about Flying Fish Cove on the day. Obviously with mobile phones there is the issue of coverage; there is also the issue of if repairs are required. You highlighted another situation where there was a breakdown which limited the capacity to text in an emergency. Could you comment about the capacity on the island for a technician to respond immediately to a challenge in terms of mobile coverage? Is that capacity available here or would Telstra be required to—

Mr Lacy: There is a Telstra representative on the island, and he would be capable of responding immediately. Whether or not he would have the necessary equipment might be another question, but I could not answer that. I do not know what equipment he carries for making repairs in the event of some breakdown.

Mrs MARKUS: In an ideal world, if there were better mobile coverage, would it have made a difference on the day?

Mr Lacy: No. I think, as I said earlier, everything that could have been done was done on that day. Communications, although there were problems with it, were overcome by the way in which people used their initiative on that day.

Mrs MARKUS: Yesterday I visited Flying Fish Cove and had some discussions about the conditions there on the day. There is some perception out in the public arena that if the SIEV had actually got to Flying Fish Cove it

would have been a different story, but I heard yesterday about some of the challenges with the weather and that there could have been a further loss of life amongst the community if that had happened. Could you paint a bit of a picture about what it was like at Flying Fish Cove on the day and what could have resulted if the boat had arrived there?

Mr Lacy: Some people indicated a desire to try to launch a boat, but those people who had expertise in that field said it was impossible and that we would be likely to lose lives if we tried to put boats in. So if it had got round to Flying Fish Cove there would have been the possibility of some of our own people being harmed or hurt in trying to go into the water to bring them out of the water.

Mrs MARKUS: The description yesterday was that the weather there was quite bad as well—

Mr Lacy: It was bad.

Mrs MARKUS: Would you say it would have been a better outcome or not?

Mr Lacy: It possibly would have been a better outcome for the people in the boat because they might have been able to get to the jetty or get to the shore themselves, but again it might have put in danger some of our own community members who might have wanted to go in and help them.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Lacy. On behalf of the committee I do want to very genuinely thank you for your assistance with our inquiry, organising our site inspections and other matters. Thank you very much indeed. Thank you for your submission and thank you for your evidence to the committee today. We will briefly suspend while Mr Thomson comes in.

THOMSON, Mr Gordon, Shire President, Shire of Christmas Island and Union of Christmas Island Workers

[09:31]

CHAIR: I welcome our next witness, Mr Gordon Thomson. Thank you for your submission. I invite you to make some opening remarks, and then we will follow with questions.

Mr Thomson: Firstly, I apologise for the late delivery of this written submission. I also apologise if it appears a bit disjointed and repetitive. It was written this morning. I tried to gather a little bit of contextual information. One of the attachments you have is the reporting of the memorial service, extracts from the *Islander*, our fortnightly newspaper, which is published by the shire. I think you have a second extract by my colleague Christopher Su, who is a community liaison officer funded by DIAC and employed by the shire. He wanted to join me in addressing you today. I apologise for his absence. He was here but he has been called away.

The shire wishes to address two of the terms of reference: the afterincident support provided to survivors and the afterincident support provided to affected Christmas Island community members, customs, defence and other personnel. The shire, community organisations and individuals have not been significantly involved in afterincident support to survivors after 15 December 2010. Those support services have been provided by DIAC and DIAC has contracted professional service providers. All of the survivors were accommodated in the detention centre facilities after the rescue and recovery operation was completed on 15 December 2010. Of course many, if not all, have been transferred to the mainland by now.

On 15 December, on the day the *Janga*, the SIEV221, was dashed on the cliffs, many local people tried desperately to save the passengers. One man was helped from the boat onto the rocks. He was saved. That is the photograph. That photograph came from the *West Australian* and it is not attributed. I found the attribution just before I came here. It is on my file. It is marked as from the *West Australian*. They have asked us to identify the people in the photo. The man in the middle being helped was the only man helped from the boat onto the rocks on 15 December. The people on the rocks, the local people who answered the cries for help—and there were many of them—threw lifejackets into the water. The survivors have said that none of them would have survived if the lifejackets had not been thrown into the water for them. The survivors appreciate the fact that Christmas Island people were able to do that for them. Not in the written submission is a description of the horrific sea conditions on the day. I think the photograph also demonstrates that there was very wild water crashing against those rocks.

Throughout the day volunteer organisations, the SES, firefighters, St John Ambulance and many individuals joined with the police and health professionals in the search, rescue and care of survivors. DIAC, Serco staff and IHMS staff also joined in the volunteer effort assisting and comforting survivors. I wish to acknowledge the extraordinary bravery of the Navy and Customs boat crews. But for their work, no-one would have been saved. It was impossible to launch rescue boats from Christmas Island on that day from any point. The only craft that may have been of assistance from the land would be a helicopter. The Howard government built a Sea King helicopter shed at the airport many years ago. It is still there, but we do not have a helicopter. I do not think we ever did have a helicopter; we just had the shed. It would have helped. Any sea rescue is best effected in those sorts of conditions if you do have a helicopter. Operating those boats on the day was very dangerous. There was a lot of debris in the water and one of the boats was affected by the debris in the water and limped back to its mother ship to disembark the people who had been saved.

The community support provided to survivors has included the setting up of a bank account at the Westpac bank on Christmas Island. It was established on the day at the initiative of two Christmas Island women, Khaliesha Amin and Joy Wickenden, in association with Philip Stewart, who had been brought to the island to oversee the making of an environmental impact film for the mine, and Davud Karadag. The filmmakers were on the island making a film. They were on site when the boat crashed. Their record of the boat crash was sold to media outlets and all of the money made from the sale of that footage went into the bank account. That bank account has got four trustees, Khaliesha Amin, Joy Wickenden, Philip Stewart and Davud Karadag.

After December 15, asylum seeker advocates have established and maintained communication with some of the survivors. Support was particularly necessary during the contentious discussion about the funerals conducted on the mainland and the return of the survivors to Christmas Island after the funerals. That advocacy is ongoing work.

On Sunday, 19 December, there was a closed ceremony at Phosphate Hill and prayers for the deceased. The ceremony was conducted at the Phosphate Hill detention centre for the people who perished when the *Janga* sank. It was a closed ceremony for the survivors and asylum seekers in detention at Phosphate Hill. DIAC Assistant Secretary Fiona Andrew asked for limited community representation at the ceremony. The ceremony was

conducted by some of the detainees and five members of the Christmas Island Islamic community, including Imam Gaffar Ismail, his assistant imam and three members of the Islamic Council of Christmas Island, Mr J Low and Mohammad and Ahmad Asbi. I attended with shire deputy president, Foo Kee Heng, Ms Michelle Dimasi, Sister Joan Kelleher of the Sisters of Mercy and the Jesuit Refugee Service, Father John Turner, Kate Jones from the Red Cross and Fiona Andrew of DIAC. The outside involvement of people like myself was limited to those people precisely I think.

I refer now to the after-incident support provided to affected Christmas Island community members, and Customs, Defence and other personnel.

CHAIR: Mr Thomson, we will now accept your formal submission. There is no objection from the committee. So we may take that as read. I know the committee will actually have questions for you about those issues that you are going to talk about, but we now have your submission. We are a little bit pressed for time. If you do not mind, we might just go straight to questions. Can I ask first about the normal forms of communication with the Christmas Island community. You have mentioned a couple in your submission: one is the *Islander* and one is a bulletin.

Mr Thomson: There are four. The *Islander* is a fortnightly newsletter published by the shire. The administrator and the department of regions have a community bulletin that everybody is familiar with. That is distributed by email. The department of immigration has what they call a community update, which is published by email transmission and by inclusion in the *Islander*. The fourth one is the chalkboard at the roundabout, which you have all seen. We have a local radio station, but it does not have a full schedule of broadcasting.

CHAIR: I am interested in the communication to the community about the provision of post-trauma counselling. Can you describe how that was communicated?

Mr Thomson: On the day the Administrator's office circulated a notice from DIAC that their counsellor, Rob Naylor, who was their Employee Assistance Plan counsellor on the island, would be available to community members who assisted in the rescue and recovery operation on the day. That was out on the day, so anybody could walk into the Poon Saan office that the department had set up on the day. Following that, Sean Divine of the Health Service took responsibility for coordinating counselling services for all community members, whether they were involved in the rescue operation or not.

CHAIR: Do you believe that the community was in fact aware of the availability of those services and that anyone who wanted to take up that offer was able to?

Mr Thomson: Yes, the Health Service circulated a leaflet. Serco did its thing for its staff. Every department and agency had counsellors flown in. I think we had lots of counsellors on the island by Friday the 17th.

CHAIR: There has been a suggestion that there was not necessarily a high take-up rate from volunteers, but I have not seen a suggestion so far about what else could have been done. I am just wondering whether there is something else that could have been done in terms of encouraging people to take up counselling or to make sure that everybody actually knew about it.

Mr Thomson: The advice we had was that professional counsellors are very good but perhaps the best form of getting through a traumatic event like this is with your traditional coping mechanisms, whether that be family or friends, or debriefing. For example, at the end of the day of work the volunteer search and rescue people would sit down together and debrief about things. That is very important. In my submission I refer to Zainal Majid, who is on the public record with what he had to say about his recollections at the time of the memorial on 5 March. He had daily recollections of what, for him, was the most distressing part of it—seeing children on the boat who died. I spoke to him yesterday. He takes comfort in his religion. When local people have not taken up the counselling services, I do not know if it is because they are not aware of the counselling services or they have availed themselves of those other coping mechanisms. I think, talking to people, they are using those relationships and rituals to deal with the trauma.

CHAIR: The committee itself made a significant attempt to publicise the fact that we were actually coming and conducting this inquiry. I am advised that we advertised in the *Islander* on a number of occasions, and I am also advised, and I seek your view about this, that it was well-known that we were coming and that any members of the community who wanted to present to the committee would be available. Is that your understanding and your view of that communication?

Mr Thomson: I cannot reassure you on that. I do not know. I have been a bit busy to publicise it personally. I have certainly spoken to people in the last few days and asked them if they are attending. I think some people might avoid it.

Mr PERRETT: Thank you, Mr Thomson. Just going back to that suggestion that, apart from that one gentleman in the photograph who jumped from the bow onto the rocks, of the other 41 that were rescued, it was put to us yesterday, each one of them had a lifejacket on. They got it from you, the military or the boat. I imagine the community must feel that they have saved many lives despite the lives that were lost. The Christmas Island community stepped up and saved lives that day. Is that the community feeling?

Mr Thomson: I hope so. It has been repeatedly stated. It has been re-emphasised every time there is a discussion about it.

Mr PERRETT: I know people would feel regret about the 50, especially when people were within two, three or four metres of people who later perished. Obviously, there is regret but I hope that people feel that their intervention did save lives.

Mr Thomson: I am quite sure they do. I am quite sure that many people are aware of that and they feel that their intervention was very important. A lot of people were keen to meet survivors.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Thank you, Mr Thomson. One of the things that we have been talking about is how the community is being prepared for emergencies on the island. Before you came in, we were talking to Mr Lacy about the need for some type of full-time emergency management community coordinator or facilitator, somebody to try and bring that together. It seems as though a lot of the work that was done that day was done by volunteers, many of whom would have had significant emergency and management skills but some who did not. What do you think in terms of learning from this experience could be done better or improved to try and help equip people—not just in terms of the techniques and logistics but perhaps dealing with that kind of traumatic experience?

Mr Thomson: Dealing with the traumatic experience, I think, is going to be an ongoing issue for many people. With respect to the management of the emergency response, I am not a member of the committee. The chief of police on the island, Sergeant Swann, is in charge of the situation; calls the shots, so there is a structure. I think it is a structure that is modelled on mainland structures whenever there is an emergency situation: the officer in charge of police takes control and there is a plan that is being developed and rehearsed. I think there are frequent desktop exercises and practices.

I cannot comment too much about whether or not it is necessary to have a full-time professional coordinating an emergency response situation. That has traditionally been the role of the officer in charge of police. I think that there may be an issue of our extreme isolation, so if things could be better prepared or better organised, given that backup is a long way away, it may be something that would be very worthwhile looking at. We are not on the mainland, you know. We are half an hour away from significant support if we need it, so perhaps there is something in the suggestion that there should be someone.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: What about the eyewitness accounts we have heard of people hearing the screaming and running out and doing what they could do? Of course it went on for quite a long time; in fact, the retrieval of bodies went on for days. Were there people in the community that were drawn upon significantly that you think perhaps could have benefited from having prior training?

Mr Thomson: Definitely. I think that people were thrown into the recovery of bodies from the wreck. That was not done by police divers, I do not think. I think local divers were contracted to do that.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: We heard that yesterday. They were local divers.

Mr Thomson: Yes, and I guess that is the point of the earlier question—that, if you had had people trained up to expect the sorts of things that people had to encounter with this incident, that would have been very helpful, I am sure. I think many people have not dealt with their trauma at all well, or at all—maybe hiding from it. I reflect on why people are not coming today. Some have told me they do not want to be here. The recovery of bodies from a wreck is a pretty traumatic job, I would have thought.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Absolutely. Could I just move to the engagement with the survivors and the relationship with the community. We heard evidence in our Canberra hearing from a number of people—and it is in the written submissions as well—about the fact that people on the island, members of the community, were not aware necessarily of what they could do to get in contact with survivors. They were obviously brought up here to Phosphate Hill. They were put in detention here. The evidence that we received at our Canberra hearing was that people in the community were unaware that they could go and visit them to try and help that healing process, to see that these people were actually okay and were recovering. There was obviously contention about the fact that they did not come to the memorial service, but that was exacerbated, this evidence suggested, by the fact that people felt as though they had been locked away and the community did not know how to engage with them or if they could. Could you just reflect on that for me?

Mr Thomson: The structure of detention is exactly that—people are locked away, and there are formal processes to go through to meet with people who are locked away. So that is an immediate barrier to contact. It is not as if there are social events organised frequently for people to have casual encounters, or even more structured encounters. We have had some social events here, in this place. We have had a few of them in the last 12 months or so, where the community can interact with asylum seekers. So we do have events, but for an individual who is somewhat traumatised by their own experience, I would think that working out how to deal with the formal process of contacting someone would provide enough of a barrier for people not to try too hard to do that, because there would be mixed thoughts, I would think.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: I know you visited the survivors several times. You have pointed that out. Did you think that there was an expectation both in the community and within the group of survivors that both groups would be able to attend the memorial service?

Mr Thomson: My own point of view was that it was important for the community and the survivors to be able to share that memorial, that occasion. I had been to the ceremony on 19 December at the detention centre next door. It was formalised. It was a ritual, a prayer ritual, and people wept and they did all those things. I think the memorial is a place for that to happen. I think people wanted that. I wanted that. Christopher Su, the community liaison officer, with his contacts around the community, thought that that was what we should do. We took advice from a professional in the field about how the memorial should be conducted and where it should be conducted, and all of our planning was based on involvement of survivors. So we had the memorial here at the rec centre rather than on the rocks where the crash occurred, because we were advised that, if survivors were to attend, it would not be wise to have the ceremony down on the cliff. So the rec centre was chosen as the best place to conduct the memorial.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: As the preparations for the memorial were undertaken they were based on the understanding that survivors would attend?

Mr Thomson: That was our wish. The—

CHAIR: Can we just clarify that, because that is a little bit different from an understanding—

Mr Thomson: There was no commitment that the survivors would attend. The department was attempting to move the survivors to the mainland as quickly as possible, I think. Some weeks before they anticipated—but after the planning had started—that the survivors would all be off the island before the memorial occurred. I think that was their anticipation.

As it turned out, in the week of the memorial and in the lead up before the memorial, the expectation was that the survivors would be off the island. I met with two of them, Hadi and Ramin, who I have referred to in my submission, because they did not expect to be here. Although we wished for them to be here, we discovered a few days before that they probably would not be. We had our meeting with them. They wanted to have their appreciation of the support and treatment recorded and I offered to read out their statements at the memorial, which is what I did.

So, our planning was to include them, but DIAC expected to have everybody off the island by the time the memorial happened. As it turned out, they were not. That happens, I think, quite often—flights are delayed or do not turn up—and some were here on the day. There was a discussion on each of the three or four days before the memorial, I think, between me and Chris Su, the CLO, and Fiona Andrew about what could happen. At one stage she said that would do her best to get people there and that she was keen for people to attend. But the final position of the department, after discussion internally with their health advisers—the psychologists and counsellors—was that it was not appropriate for the survivors to join the community memorial, and that was in their psychological health interest. I think that is what we were talking about.

So, through the week I was happy that we could expect them to be there, but then at the end they were not able to be there.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Has there been any facilitation between the community and the department for people to keep in contact with those who have been moved to the mainland?

Mr Thomson: I have not been involved at all. I do not get involved all the time. Sometimes it could be a bit exhausting. But sometimes, on two, three, four or five occasions in a year maybe I get involved in particular cases. Other advocates are involved frequently—daily—with phone calls, organising—

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: You are not aware of any formal facilitation? If somebody in the community suggested that if they could even write to one of the survivors that this would be part of their coping and healing mechanism—you are not aware of any of that type of facilitation?

Mr Thomson: No, not to my knowledge. There has been no effort made to encourage that or to make that happen.

Senator FIELDING: I would just like to get clarification on that point. Has anyone been denied the right to write to them?

Mr Thomson: No. I do not think anybody—

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: They do not know who they are.

Senator FIELDING: If I was there on the day rescuing someone, and I came to you and said, 'Look, I would like to write to them', I am sure you would help out trying to connect us in some way?

Mr Thomson: If somebody asked me to do that, I certainly would. I have had a very good relationship with some people at DIAC and I am sure they would want to do that, but the system here is that, if you want to see someone and you do not know their name, you cannot. So that is the locked away thing. The structure does not encourage—it is not an individual problem; it is a structural problem. If people are locked away, you must know a number or a name.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Their ID number and their boat number.

Mr Thomson: That is right. Otherwise, you cannot ask to see them. The process is that you ask to see a particular person or number; and, if they want to see you, they will see you.

Mr CHAMPION: In regard to the treatment services, we have heard that there has been a low take-up and you seem to indicate that people are utilising family and—

Mr Thomson: Sorry, I do not know about the take-up of services.

Mr CHAMPION: I think we had an indication that it is reasonably low. I am wondering whether we would be better off reconfiguring treatment or support for people who have witnessed the tragedy to support for families, religious orders—that sort of thing—to provide those services. Is there a mismatch? We are offering psychologists and wot-not, but it is a confronting thing to go and see a psychologist, to walk into someone's office. Would we be better off just trying to strengthen or give some resources to families on the island?

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Community events.

Mr CHAMPION: Yes, that sort of thing.

Mr Thomson: I do not know. I do not know what the take-up is for counselling. My responsibility was to find out what was available, and the professional services that are available I think are more than adequate and more than necessary. I think that people have not been denied counselling. I know of one man who had counselling locally. He was a volunteer and he did not find it useful. But he had counselling from FESA. They provided a counsellor. Maybe it is a bloke thing. I do not know. But he found a counsellor through FESA, who have a contract with the Commonwealth to support the volunteer services on Christmas Island. So I cannot really comment on what works for people. I think the people who would be able to comment perhaps are the health service. I do not know what the take-up is but I did not say that there was not a high take-up.

Mr CHAMPION: No. It is just that we have heard some other evidence along those lines. What I am wondering—you said it might be a bloke thing—I think that is an important point. I think people quite often do not like to seek formal counselling—

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: It is confronting.

Mr CHAMPION: It is a confronting process. I am wondering if these other informal networks—family and friends and that sort of thing—whether we would be better of trying to put some resources into those, if you like, softer services, rather than this very formal process. I guess that is the question I am asking.

Mr Thomson: I have no doubt that, if that were available, that would be a good broadening of services and it might be necessary. I do not know how necessary, but it sounds like a good idea to me.

CHAIR: Thank you for your evidence today, Mr Thomson.

Proceedings suspended from 10:02 to 10:15

SOUTHERTON, Mr Ian, Operations Director, Serco

YOONG, Dr Ling, Area Medical Director, International Health and Medical Services, Christmas Island

CHAIR: I welcome Dr Yoong and Mr Southerton.

Dr Yoong: I represent IHMS which provides health care for asylum seekers on the island.

Mr Southerton: Serco are based in Australia and we are a global company as well. We are the detention services provider for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

CHAIR: I invite you to make some opening remarks about what happened, what you did and your role in this area.

Dr Yoong: I was alerted to the fact that there had been a boat crash at about quarter to seven on 15 December. I was at North West Point. I turned my car around and went to the site. The swell was so high that it was hitting the cliff face. There were pieces of boat in the ocean. There were still a couple of people on what remained of the boat. The Navy was desperately trying to pick people up from the water. There was a group of community members at the lower base of the cliff trying to throw lifejackets and things to people in the water. It was raining heavily and it was misty. Our paramedic was on site. Mr Brian Lacy was on site and declared it an emergency situation. We could do nothing to help the people in the water.

Customs said they could offload those people picked up from the sea at Ethel Beach. I went back to Phosphate Construction Camp and got our responder bag and what we thought we would need for all the survivors. We fronted up at Ethel Beach. The top of the beach was already in the process of being prepared for receiving the wounded. There were red tents, yellow tents and green tents. I had two doctors with me, two paramedics and about six nurses. Dr Julie and I got together and we decided what we were going to do. We were going to send some doctors to the hospital to receive the wounded who were going to be transported there. The Navy also wanted a doctor on their boat to look after those people they had picked up from the sea. So I deployed a doctor, a paramedic and a nurse to go with Dr Gary Mitchell on the RHIB to the Navy boat to look after those people who had already been picked up by the boat but had not yet been brought onshore.

Throughout the day, we received all the people transported to the beach. Bear in mind that the sea was really rough and that people were putting their lives in danger to pick up those asylum seekers. During the day, dead bodies were being brought out. They were not enough body bags, so they were wrapped in black plastic. After everybody, as well as the dead bodies, had been brought up, we went to the hospital to check on all the people who had been processed. It was not until about seven o'clock that everything was settled. I took the doctors and the nurses out to dinner. I went back to the camp at about 11 o'clock and everything was quiet and peaceful.

The next day, the mental health team dealt with a lot of the trauma and, on the evening of the 16th, the psychologists arrived—four of them. I debriefed them on what had happened—they were also debriefed in the morning by my mental health team—and they got right into it and looked after all those people who had been traumatised. Throughout the day, we dealt with the medical issues and the psychologists dealt with the psychological trauma. In the evening, the psychologists came and debriefed me on what had happened during the day. What they recognised was that the most vulnerable period was around five o'clock in the morning, so they were out in the compound at 5 am to deal with all those people who were awake and needing someone to talk to. There was a shortage of interpreters, but we managed to get interpreters for the psychologists to enable them to deal with those trauma cases.

Once we knew there had been a boat crash, the island emergency plan came into place and the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the RFDS, was deployed. That night, the hospital sent a few patients to the mainland, because they were injured. In the end, a total of six people from SIEV221 were sent to the mainland. While on the mainland, they were given psychological counselling. So I think—I believe—that we provided the best possible care for these people.

CHAIR: Mr Southerton?

Mr Southerton: I was also on Christmas island the day that it happened. I was the operations director for Serco. My role has now changed; I am now the regional HR manager for CI and WA. I had a phone call at around 20 past 6 in the morning from a colleague of mine from North West Point, who asked if I had received a phone call, and I said, 'No, I've just been on a couple of conference calls with the mainland.' He said, 'You really need to get down here. You really need to see this.' I said, 'Oh, my goodness, what has happened?' I was advised that a

boat had foundered and that it had broken into pieces. Straightaway I made my way down to Settlement to Rocky Point. The weather was absolutely atrocious. It was misty, there was heavy rain, and I just remember getting to the coastline and seeing a surreal scene. There were people clinging to pieces of wood and women and children screaming and men screaming as well. It was the most horrendous scene I have ever witnessed. I just stood there and there was absolutely nothing that I could do or that anybody who was with me could do. All we could do was just stop. The Navy were trying to save some of these poor, desperate people in the sea. There was very little that they could do.

I had a phone call from another colleague of mine who was the regional manager responsible for all sites on CI. We had a quick discussion and he said, 'I think the rescue effort is going to be over at Ethel Beach,' and I said, 'There's nothing I can do here. You look after the sites; make sure all the clients are safe in the sites. I'll go to the rescue effort and do whatever I need to do there.' I said, 'I'll muster some staff so we can assist with the other agencies.' I did not know what the setup would be at that particular point. I made my way to Ethel Beach. I had to park my car some way away from where the triage centre was being set up. I walked down, and it was literally an all-hands-on-deck effort to assist the other agencies. We assisted IHMS setting up the tents, we assisted DIAC, I called the centre, we brought food, we brought refreshments—not for just staff but for the survivors. We brought blankets, towels, clothing for all ages. We assisted to get the site set up and we were just very clear as to what we needed to do with all our colleagues from other agencies. I think there were eight colleagues of mine from the sites who came down and then we started to assist the police to bring the survivors and the deceased ashore when they arrived. We would literally receive them from Customs, walk them up the jetty and then they would be handed to IHMS services for them to undertake the triaging. We spent the best part of the day also bringing the deceased ashore. A vivid memory of that, as the doctor has rightly stated, is that there were very few body bags available. The sea was still very turbulent when people were trying to bring the deceased shore. I remember being at the bottom of the jetty, and the only way that we could get them ashore was to literally tie some string around the body, drop them into the sea and then pull them ashore and put them to a body bag. That was the only we could do it with any dignity. That was the only thing that we could do. There were children who were deceased, there were adults, and they were taken away to the mortuary. We stayed there for the whole of the day until the rescue effort had concluded. I think we brought 41 survivors ashore. I am not quite sure of the toll for the deceased. Then at the end of the day we basically took all the tents down and assisted all the other agencies in getting everything packed up, leaving the site clean and then we made our way back to the centres and assisted with the care and welfare of the clients.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Southerton. Doctor, do you still have an ongoing monitoring role for the survivors in terms of trauma counselling?

Dr Yoong: The survivors are off island now and they are, I think, mainly in community detention. If they are in community detention, they will still be under IHMS, and mental health people off island will be looking after them.

CHAIR: Is there someone in IHMS that would have overall responsibility for the ongoing monitoring?

Dr Yoong: Dr Clayton Spencer is the doctor on the mainland, and he will have overall—

CHAIR: Thank you. I guess different people left at different times, so how long would the last survivor have been under your care?

Dr Yoong: I cannot remember the date but I think they left at the end of January or in early February.

Mr Southerton: I think it was roughly around that time. The survivors were taken to Phosphate Alpha, which is just across the way here; it is in the centre of Phosphate Hill. They were located there. I think there were 41 in total.

Dr Yoong: Forty-two, and six off island—so there were 36.

CHAIR: I know you have said that you believe medically everything was done that could have been done. Were there enough staff and resources on the island to provide the necessary health care?

Dr Yoong: We were really stretched but I think everybody really got into it and provided the care that these people needed. That includes all the volunteers on the island and the people in the hospital. We could not have asked for a better group of people during that crisis, because it was just extraordinary.

Mr Southerton: Community spirit here was just outstanding. I have never quite experienced anything like it. It really was outstanding.

Dr Yoong: And we had never worked together as a group, but it all gelled together and it was a good example of people working together as a team.

Mr PERRETT: Dr Yoong, could you talk us through some of the types of trauma, the injuries, of the 42. Was it water in the lungs, abrasions from the rocks, diesel in the lungs? What were the types of injuries? For the six who left—without giving individual details—what was the type of treatment they received?

Dr Yoong: There was one who probably aspirated some water who was transferred off island. One thought they might have some diesel fumes inhalation. One had amputation of a finger. One had some scalp wounds and one had some lacerations on the arms and feet, I think. But most of the injuries were not severe, not life-threatening ones that you needed to operate on or deal with immediately. Considering the wreck, I think the injuries were minor.

Senator FIELDING: The way that you have outlined exactly what you saw unfolding, it was definitely really horrific. How long have you been on the island for?

Dr Yoong: I have been here a year.

Senator FIELDING: Have you heard anything in recent months from the community that you speak to about what else needs to happen, from a mental health perspective, for those people that were rescuers on the day? Have you been hearing much at all?

Dr Yoong: Some of the committee members are quite traumatised. We did have an EAP counsellor up to debrief all of us. I think that was really useful, because it is not something you go through every day. It is traumatic.

Senator FIELDING: I can hear that. Is there anything else resource-wise for those people that were rescuers? Is it just time?

Dr Yoong: It is just time. Every time there is a boat out there you worry if the weather is rough. If the weather is really rough you think, 'Is there a boat out there?' because we do not want to see this happen again.

Mr Southerton: For Serco staff as well, there are some staff still undergoing counselling. At the time we had a two-stringed approach. We had an on-site employee assistance program here, which is a dual service: one is an emergency service for counselling and the other is a general service where you can book a counselling appointment. But we also have a dedicated staff psychologist who is responsible for CI anyway. She was off-site at that particular point, but we arranged for a staff psychologist to fly to the island the following day and we also set up a triage service in Perth so that we could capture all the staff that left CI. We set that up for about a month after, so we captured all staff to make sure that they were okay and whether they needed any counselling.

Dr Yoong: And we had an extra psychological counsellor come up because we also realised that our staff needed help but Serco staff also needed help. So we had one of our counsellors deal with the Serco staff who were right at the front line.

Mr Southerton: It is fair to say that at that particular point all agencies shared the counselling resources. I know that our counsellor assisted staff from other agencies and vice versa. It really was a collaborative approach.

Senator FIELDING: Thank you, Dr Yoong, for your work and the work of your team.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: I would like to ask some questions about the ability of the survivors to recover once they had been put into that Alpha compound. Some of the evidence that we have received includes stories of children who had become orphaned. One particular boy who obviously was very traumatised did not comprehend that his parents had died in the boat crash. There were stories of him running to the gate when a new bus load of asylum seekers would arrive, thinking his parents would be on that bus and when they were not that they would be on the next bus. There was a story of a mother with a 10-year-old daughter who was obviously not coping and kept telling her daughter that her dad would be there soon even though the daughter knew that the dad had died.

Mr PERRETT: Is this evidence that we have?

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Yes, it was given to us in the confidential briefing?

Mr PERRETT: Sorry, I have not read that.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Obviously it was a traumatic experience for everybody involved. In your medical professional opinion, do you believe that the detention and the housing of those people in the Alpha compound perhaps compounded that trauma?

Dr Yoong: I think a lot of the things that you have there are hearsay. That boy who has lost his parents had an aunt arrive on the 20th on SIEV222. The aunt was really traumatised. The psychologist worked with her throughout the whole afternoon and late into the night. It was a couple of days later that they united that child with the aunt and it all went really well. After the psychologist left, we had a psychiatrist come up and the psychiatrist assessed that the child is doing really quite well.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Given the circumstances?

Dr Yoong: Given the circumstances.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: My question relates to the added impact of detaining children, families, anyone who has been through that kind of experience.

Dr Yoong: The advice from the psychiatrist and the psychologist is that we need to keep them together for a little while. Once they have gone through the initial grief, then they will need to go maybe to the site, if they wish to, to look at the site of the trauma. Then they need to get off the island, to a place where they can recover. That was the advice. How long should they stay here? I cannot tell.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: In perhaps not such a unique situation as dealing with a group of asylum seekers, if there was a traumatic experience would you be suggesting that people be detained?

Dr Yoong: That is not my call.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: From your medical perspective, what would be the best way of being able to care for somebody?

Dr Yoong: What would you consider 'being detained' means? They are in a low-security facility; they are on an island—there is nothing we can do about putting people on an island. We are 2,600 kilometres from the mainland. Should we fly them off immediately? Probably not, because they need to grieve in this situation.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Was there a sense from the support services and people reporting to you that the survivors did not want people to come and visit them and to see them? How were they coping in terms of managing the trauma?

Dr Yoong: The psychologist was there every day from five o'clock in the morning until about nine o'clock at night. They were there to provide whatever advice they could to these people.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: We have been talking about a lot of the ways that people in the local community have been able to draw on coping mechanisms, and that is not just through the formalised counselling services—

Dr Yoong: But, Senator, if you have trauma would you like people outside coming to talk to you; would you like people outside your trauma interfering with what you are experiencing? I do not think so. How would you feel if somebody say from the community coming to ask you—

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: I would want my family and my friends around me, and I would imagine that these people would feel the same.

Dr Yoong: Maybe—I do not know.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Who would you want?

Dr Yoong: My family.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: From Serco's perspective, was the emotional level of interaction and communication amongst survivors in Alpha compound in any way different to that of any other groups of arrivals that you have had to manage in any of the other compounds?

Mr Southerton: I am not a psychiatrist or a psychologist, but from experience the clients had been through a very traumatic experience. They were shocked, they were upset, they were grieving, there was bewilderment—the whole range of emotions. There was interaction, as the doctors rightly stated, from IHMS and the mental health perspective and there was counselling as well. That was available immediately so those referrals could take place.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: There were extra services available in that facility because of the added understanding of what had happened, in terms of both medical and psychological support. What about the other services that you, as Serco, are contracted to provide through welfare, educational and activity based elements? Did you change any of those elements, based on your contract, from what you would do in other compounds?

Mr Southerton: Those elements can change according to the risk that is presented. We assess the risk at that particular point. There were additional staff flown to the island to assist. We did provide more staffing to that particular site because of the risk that was presented where the clients were concerned. So, yes, it would not be a standard service. It would change according to the risk or the circumstances presented. We constantly review that.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: There are a set of things that you have to provide, though.

Mr Southerton: Absolutely, according to the contract. Yes.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Were there things you needed to do more of, or ask the department whether you could provide, in addition to your standard service provision?

Mr Southerton: I think what was different was that there was a much higher staff concentration to deal with that particular group of clients, based on their needs. For instance, we provide programs and activities, but that had to be slightly different because it was very difficult for those clients to engage, given how traumatised they were. It would not have been appropriate to have gone in with a full program of scheduled activities. We purchased toys and colouring books and so on for the children to act as a distraction for them, because they were clearly upset. We focused as much as we could on their emotional needs, given how traumatised they were. The children, for instance, were crying and may have needed a cuddle from somebody. It was as basic as that.

Mr HUSIC: If Serco made an assumption that it wanted to do something based on its own expertise, would you be able to do that regardless of what the act said? That is, if you made an assessment that it would aid in the comfort of the people in your care, could you do that without reference to—

Mr Southerton: We are the service provider; DIAC is the customer. So we work in collaboration with DIAC. Everything that we do has to be approved by DIAC. That is a contractual obligation.

Mr HUSIC: Understood.

Mr Southerton: I have to say that there is a very productive working relationship with DIAC and, certainly, it was very much a joint approach—as it always is with everything that we do here. That is entirely appropriate, because we are accountable to DIAC.

Mr PERRETT: Your duty of care is the same for every client, irrespective of where they come from or their circumstances. Once they get there you have a duty of care for them—irrespective.

Mr Southerton: Irrespective of site and where they are based, it is the same.

Mr PERRETT: Whether they came safely off a boat or through traumatic circumstances, depending on how they present as your client, you still have to care for them.

Mr Southerton: Sure. But, as I said to you, our services could be altered according to the risks that are presented. So there is a level of care provided at, say, Perth IDC, which is fairly static and constant and works fairly well, operationally. It would be different here. Again, we would make an assessment according to the circumstances. There is always that flexibility, but we would always work very collaboratively with the customer.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Did the asylum seekers in the other compounds know what had happened?

Mr Southerton: Yes. On a particular day I had focused my efforts on the rescue effort and assisting other agencies and the regional manager. I was also working with the staff to make sure that the clients had the information they needed, because it became clear that some of the survivors and the deceased did have relatives that were at other sites on Christmas Island.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: We know that in some cases they were reunited, in the place that the doctor spoke about, for example. Did it happen across the board that, if anyone did have family or people they knew, they were able to make contact?

Mr Southerton: I think as far as possible that happened. Again, it would have been agreed with DIAC as to how that was approached. But as far as possible I am sure that was the case.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: In the end, when people were being housed in the Alpha compound, how many people from the other compounds had been allowed to move in there to be with their family?

Mr Southerton: I am not sure.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Would you be able to take that on notice?

Mr Southerton: I can certainly find out.

Mr PERRETT: Is that a family reunification policy of Serco?

Mr Southerton: Again, we agree any placement issues with DIAC. It is just that I am not particularly sure about the question you have asked. I would rather give a definitive answer.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: But that did happen in some cases, didn't it?

Mr Southerton: I believe so.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: In the case of the orphan boy, his aunt was able to come and stay with him in Alpha.

Mr Southerton: Yes. But, as I understand it, most of the clients were located in Phosphate Alpha until they actually left the island.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Yes, that is my understanding. So, if they were to be able to have their family around them at that time, I would imagine that their family would have had to be allowed to move into Alpha.

Mr Southerton: That is possibly the case, but I am not able to confirm that.

Senator CROSSIN: Dr Yoong, we have quite a number of statements that have been provided in confidence to us from the survivors. Some of them relay that it took a number of days for them to find out whether family members had died or had gone missing and to find out what had happened after they asked questions about suitcases or luggage or backpacks they might have had with them. Are those some of the requests that they pass on to you as well?

Dr Yoong: No. A missing person, and who is connected to whom, took a while because everything was in such disarray. Also there was the situation of having to identify.

Senator CROSSIN: Yes, I understand. So, if they are still asking questions about possessions that might have been on the boat and whether they were saved or lost, do they ask you? Would they be asking psychologists? What is the process? Is that request passed to DIAC?

Dr Yoong: I do not know of any request asking about possessions. If there are any requests at all they are always passed on to DIAC.

Mr Southerton: It probably runs through Serco initially or through their case manager from DIAC.

Senator CROSSIN: Some of them still seem not to have answers, though. Many months later some of them do not seem to have answers, and I am wondering if that is because there are no answers, in which case they should be told that, or whether there is a delay in the process or a lack of attention in the process.

Dr Yoong: It is not the role of IHMS to do that.

Senator CROSSIN: And not Serco's either. They are matters handled by DIAC, are they?

Mr Southerton: They are ultimately. But the query could initially be raised through us.

Senator CROSSIN: Then you pass it on, do you?

Mr Southerton: We would liaise with DIAC. I do not quite know what has happened there.

Senator CROSSIN: All right. The other thing I want to ask is: of those who did survive, how quickly was Serco able to get them a range of clothing or personal items that they could use? Are we talking about 24 hours or a week or months?

Mr Southerton: No. Some of them had no clothes at all because of what had happened. As soon as they arrived off the jetty they were provided with clothing as part of the triage service and then, when they arrived at Phosphate Alpha, if they needed further clothing that was available.

Senator CROSSIN: So there was not a shortage of clothing available for people who needed it?

Mr Southerton: Not as far as I am aware, no.

Mr PERRETT: Just to clarify, when you said they had no clothes, do you mean they had no clothes apart from the clothes they were standing in?

Mr Southerton: Some of them had lost their clothing in the sea. Some of them were naked when they came ashore.

Senator CROSSIN: Did they know to ask for other clothing? In some of the statements we have from survivors they seem to think that they had a couple of T-shirts or a couple of skirts or a couple of pairs of pants and that is all they had for weeks and weeks. Did they know to ask for other clothing or were they offered other clothing?

Mr Southerton: There is an induction process for them, so they would have been advised as to how to apply for clothing.

Senator CROSSIN: Did they understand it?

Mr Southerton: Any induction process would have had an interpreter available at the time, and certainly on a day-to-day basis the interpreters would have been available.

Mr HUSIC: Would have or did have?

Mr Southerton: I am sure they would have done, yes.

Mr HUSIC: Can you clarify for me—I probably missed it in the introduction—your position within Serco.

Mr Southerton: At that time I was a director of operations. That was for all sites across the mainland and also Christmas Island.

Mr HUSIC: What does that entail?

Mr Southerton: Very quickly, that is the delivery of the statement of works, which is in effect the contract that we have with DIAC.

CHAIR: Dr Yoong and Mr Southerton, thank you very much for sharing your stories with us.

Mr Southerton: I hope that it has been helpful to you.

CHAIR: Yes, it has been useful to the committee. Thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 10:57 to 11:09

GRAHAM, Dr Julie, Director of Public Health and Medicine, Indian Ocean Territories Health Service, Indian Ocean Territories Administration, Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government

HEATH, Ms Leslie, Acting Manager, Indian Ocean Territories Health Service, Indian Ocean Territories Administration, Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government

MOSS, Ms Belinda, Assistant Secretary, Territories West Branch, Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government

WILDERMUTH, Ms Catherine, Director, Indian Ocean Territories Administration, Territories West Branch, Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government

CHAIR: Welcome. Thank you for appearing twice, Ms Moss, and thank you for your submission. We invite you now to make some opening remarks to the committee, to be followed by some questions.

Ms Moss: Thank you. We gave an opening statement when we appeared in Canberra, so I do not intend to take your time by making a further opening statement at this stage. I noted, in a number of the questions, the interest in counselling support for the community. My colleagues from the hospital can assist you in that. I also seek your leave to table the information document that was distributed widely in the community, and the secretariat has that.

CHAIR: There is no objection to that being tabled, so thank you for that.

Mr KEENAN: Ms Moss, can I ask again about the situation with the boats on the island. From the information we have got, it does have a bit of an element of farce about it. There was a boat that was purchased by the department for the AFP to use specifically on Christmas Island that apparently was not rated for the waters around Christmas Island. That has now been replaced by two boats temporarily. When would you expect that we would have a resolution so that we can actually have some boats, or at least a boat, appropriate for Christmas Island and able to respond here to an incident?

Ms Moss: We gave evidence in Canberra, of course, on the boat issue. As you mentioned, there are two vessels here at the moment that are perfectly capable of response in the current conditions. There is a boat called the *Tom Reed*, which we have loaned from the Western Australian department of FESA, and there is also an AFP RHIB that was transferred here to the island and that will stay here for as long as required. I think with those two vessels plus the other three vessels that Mr Yates referred to at the hearing in Canberra there is a sufficient response capability at present.

In terms of a longer term capability, it is not an easy issue. We are in very intense negotiations and discussions particularly with the AFP. You are aware that we own both the VMR and the AFP boats but the AFP operates one and the VMR the other, so we are in very focused negotiations with them on how best to move forward in terms of a longer term capability. Mr Yates in Canberra gave evidence that we are moving strongly towards the point of accepting that we need to replace the boats rather than repair the current boats.

Mr KEENAN: You say 'repair'. They have not been damaged, have they?

Ms Moss: Probably I should say refit or refigure the boats according to the issues raised by AMSA when they last surveyed them, in 2010. We had a choice. We could have spent money on bringing those boats up to the standard, according to the deficiencies notified by AMSA. Considering how the boats are about three years old anyway, and the cost of those refits, we are moving to the position that we need to replace the vessels. That is not an easy decision to take. We have to think of the conditions under which they would need to operate here, the survey requirements of AMSA, the types of boats available and, obviously, the wise expenditure of Commonwealth funds.

Mr KEENAN: When would you expect we might get a resolution to that? I assume this applies to Cocos as well. They have had boats arrive at Cocos as well.

Ms Moss: Exactly. It does. The AFP boat on Cocos is exactly the same type of boat that is here, and it is the same boat as the rest of the AFP fleet.

Mr KEENAN: So the boat on Cocos is considered not fit for service there as well.

Ms Moss: I do not believe that is the case. When AMSA surveyed that boat, they did not find it, as far as I understand it, unfit.

Mr KEENAN: But the boat on Cocos is a LeisureCat, like the one that was based here—or that is presumably still here but cannot be used. So it is all right for Cocos but not all right for Christmas?

Ms Moss: That is my understanding, but AFP could give you better clarification of that. That document would have gone to the AFP. Boat replacement would cover, as I understand it, the fleet.

CHAIR: My understanding is that it was initially in survey and was suitable for the island. It subsequently had some buoyancy issues, so it has failed its survey. That is what I understood.

Ms Moss: That is right.

CHAIR: So even though it is the same boat, it is an individual boat problem rather than a fleet problem issue.

Ms Moss: It depends on the conditions under which the boat operates, of course.

CHAIR: We may have to clarify the evidence, because we are doing it from what we have been told of different bits of it.

Senator CROSSIN: My understanding from my recent visit to Cocos is that it comes as a result of the incident off the Torres Strait Islands, where AMSA looked at the quality of the fleet and have upgraded the level of boat that is required right across. It does affect the boat on Cocos Island, as I understand it.

Ms Moss: I may be mistaken.

Mr KEENAN: The reason I am asking is that the problem has been temporarily rectified at Christmas Island because there are two vessels placed here, but it has not been rectified that Cocos where there is still only one Leisure Cat.

Ms Moss: We also have another RHIB from the AFP on Cocos.

Mr KEENAN: That has happened subsequently to 15 December.

Ms Moss: That is right. We brought two AFP RHIBs—one for Christmas and one for Cocos. So there is an operational capability on Cocos, as there is here.

Mr KEENAN: Mr Lacy gave evidence—and I think you were in the room for it, so I am sure you heard—saying that the problem is you cannot get any clarification from AMSA about what might be an appropriate vessel to operate in Christmas Island waters.

Ms Moss: That is right.

Mr KEENAN: He wrote to the department and asked for clarification of that. He has not got a formal response as of yet, he said, but he had got an informal response to say that AMSA were not prepared to do that. Is that correct?

Ms Moss: We are in discussions with AMSA. Part of the difficulty with the boats is around survey issues. That is yet to be resolved with AMSA. They are certainly in negotiations with us as with AFP.

Mr KEENAN: What are you negotiating with AMSA?

Ms Moss: It is a question of when they will certify a boat and how they go about it. There is no certainty of survey until a boat is in the water.

Mr KEENAN: So you will not know whether it is appropriate to operate at Christmas Island until you buy something, and they will come and have a look at it and then they will say, 'No, this is not appropriate,' so the department is exactly back to where it was.

Ms Moss: We would hope that that would not be the case and we will be working hand in hand with AMSA in every step.

Mr KEENAN: But they will not give you something in advance to say, 'Yes, that's the right boat for Christmas Island'?

Ms Moss: Not at this stage.

Mr KEENAN: It just seems ludicrous that you cannot have some arrangement—where they cannot tell you about the boat you are going to purchase, and they can only do it after the fact. It just doesn't seem to make a lot of sense, because isn't that exactly the problem that happened with the Leisure Cats?

Ms Moss: Yes.

Mr KEENAN: All right. Perhaps we should put these questions to AMSA. It just does seem a little unusual in terms of the way it has been handled

Ms Moss: It is a difficult situation.

Mr KEENAN: It is reasonably significant, I would have thought, that you have boats that are appropriate to operate within the environment in which they are placed.

Mr PERRETT: Further to that, the problem is AMSA is the regulator and do not provide advice, I assume. There must be maritime experts who can give the advice that they can sign off on, I assume, at some stage. There must be someone out there that understands.

Ms Moss: This is not my area of expertise. I cannot go into detail on it, I am sorry.

Mr PERRETT: Okay.

CHAIR: The committee may consider formally asking some questions of AMSA. Do you have any further questions, Mr Keenan?

Mr KEENAN: No, I think that clarifies it, although we might get an opportunity to at least write to AMSA to get some clarification.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: I have some questions for Dr Graham. We heard evidence just before you came up to the table from the medical unit within the detention facility that the whole team really pulled together and worked really well throughout the event. I want to know from you what the ongoing support was for the survivors in terms of engagement with the hospital and your staff there. Could you give us an understanding as to what the process was after that first day.

Dr Graham: I will just mention first off that the team work comes about from the health service having an external emergency plan, which had actually been updated about two months prior to the incident. That incorporated IHMS into our plan to provide increased capacity to deal with any emergency that happened on the island. We are a remote isolated island with limited resources and anyone has the understanding that if there is an emergency on this island we will be overwhelmed fairly quickly. So it was pleasing on that day that the response plan actually came together and the teams worked together to provide the best possible outcome on what was an horrific day.

Regarding ongoing services to the survivors, the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service does not provide ongoing primary health care or day-to-day psychological services. We do have a torture and trauma team, but in this particular instance a team was brought onto the island by IHMS to provide specific counselling to the survivors. So we had no input on an ongoing day-to-day basis with the survivors.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: On a regular basis, considering that the onsite medical facilities can only do so much, what types of cases would come to the hospital?

Dr Graham: It is similar to any mainland services that require in-patient care. Day-to-day primary health care is managed by IHMS out at either Phosphate Hill or North West Point. Then, if they need any services that require in-patient care, observation, treatment, monitoring or transfer off the island, they come into the hospital.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: What types of cases would you see?

Dr Graham: As I said, it is similar to anything you might see on the mainland, which ranges from trauma to acute surgical cases to acute medical infectious diseases.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: What about cases of self harm?

Dr Graham: A lot of the cases of self harm were actually dealt with out at the centre. They have a supportive service out there and they have mental health and medical teams. Obviously if the patient needed hospital care they would be transferred.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: And things like spinal injuries?

Dr Graham: We provide imaging services—so, cervical, spine and back—within our capabilities. We have limited capabilities within the service to provide emergency services only. We do not have an onsite radiographer or radiologist.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: If an ambulance were to be called to one of the facilities would the ambulance pick up the client and take them to the hospital.

Dr Graham: Yes. The ambulance is a volunteer service. If they were required to attend the centre they would.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: In terms of other support services provided through the hospital, I imagine that it is a pretty stressful situation, as we have heard from evidence, even just today, for the people working in these facilities. Have you had people from within the facilities coming to the hospital for the services delivered there, particularly in terms of mental health and psychological issues?

Dr Graham: The hospital provides services to the workers at the detention centre—so, Serco, DIAC and volunteer organisations. On a day-to-day basis we provide that service. We certainly have seen mental health issues coming through the hospital from community members, from staff at the centre and basically the whole range of the community. One of the issues that we highlight in the health service is that events, not just based on the incident of 15 December but on the changes that have occurred in this community over the past two years, have had a significant impact and will continue to have an impact as the detention centre winds down or ramps up, depending on what might happen. So an ongoing mental health service on the island is something that we see as an essential long-term need.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: How many mental health professionals do you have based at the hospital?

Dr Graham: At the moment, we have four counsellors. Three of those are psychologists and one is a mental health nurse. We have a social worker who is provided through a service delivery agreement with the WA department of—community health? I cannot remember who they are provided by, sorry. Catherine might be able to clarify that one. We also have three very competent trained doctors on the island who I think sometimes get overlooked in the services that are provided to community members. The health service is part of this community and it is respected by the community.

I would like to touch on a point that was brought up previously, about what was put in place for community members after the SIEV221 event. On the day after the event, we sat down and targeted and highlighted people that we thought might have significant needs. This is a multicultural environment, and different multicultural groups deal with their issues in different ways. We have had a particularly traumatic last 12 months on the island, with the death of two community members in dreadful circumstances. We have set up networks to communicate with and support the Islamic community, the Chinese community and the Caucasian community.

I go back to what Mr Perrett—or it might have been Mr Champion, sorry—was saying before about putting resources into supporting family networks and other support groups, and that is something we try to do through the health service as well. One of the things that I think have been maybe only mentioned briefly is the health service's impact on the community and the support that it provides to the community, without the external counsellors coming in.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: You said that the island has experienced a traumatic 12 months. Going forward, what do you see the health service needs to remain sustainable? Are there gaps that need to be filled? If this is a particularly stressful period for the community, what can we be doing to support them?

Dr Graham: As I mentioned before, one of the things that we are certainly looking at is a long-term mental health component within the health service.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: What do you mean by 'long-term'—because at the moment it is not?

Dr Graham: The torture and trauma team that is provided is actually funded by DIAC—to provide torture and trauma services to those in immigration detention. We also use those counsellors at times to provide services to the community. We have, as I said, the social worker and also a child psychologist who works at the school who provides one day of adult mental health services. Building up the capacity within the health service with either a permanent psychologist or a mental health nurse—within the actual context of the health service—is something that we would look at for the future.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Let me just get this straight. You do have a mental health team based out of the regional health service, but it is paid for and funded by DIAC—

Dr Graham: Yes.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: primarily for DIAC's operations?

Dr Graham: Yes.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Is there a requirement about the amount of time that that team needs to spend within the facilities or dealing with clients or staff? And is that where you try to value-add, based on whatever time is left over?

Dr Graham: We do quarantine time for community. Some of that time is outside of working hours, to fit in with community requirements. It is a flexible service.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: So you are advocating that the health service itself gets a permanent mental health team, one that is simply part of the overall service and not necessarily linked to the funding from DIAC?

Dr Graham: Yes.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Thank you.

CHAIR: I hope you have not already answered this—I was distracted momentarily—but what was the community take-up rate of counselling?

Dr Graham: From the external counsellors who came in, it was minimal, and I think that also needs to be looked at in terms of the timing. This was 15 December and a large proportion of the community leave the island over the Christmas period, and that was when the services were in place. On the uptake for those external counsellors—and each organisation also had counsellors that came on: AFP, Serco, IHMS had their own independent EAP services, but these were counsellors and psychologists brought on for the community—I go back to the fact that quite a few people came through the health service to see the doctors. We referred them on to our counselling team or the school psychologist or the social worker as required. You said there was minimal uptake. I would say that was of the external services provided. There had been quite a bit of uptake within the health service itself and this continues for events like this and the coronial which have stirred up a lot of emotions on the island. We again target the people we know who may not be travelling particularly well or who may be at risk of not travelling particularly well. We have been in contact with quite a few of them in the recent weeks.

CHAIR: This can only be an opinion but are you reasonably satisfied that it is well understood throughout the community that services are available?

Dr Graham: I think so. It was well publicised in the memos that were put out. I go back to the point that we as a health service have quite a good relationship with the community. We had several community members come through us that we then channelled into the psych services on the island. Their first stop was the health service itself.

CHAIR: In your view, was there any more that could have been done?

Dr Graham: In relation to 15 December, the reactions of the community were the normal reactions to a very abnormal situation. People experienced trauma and expressed their response to trauma in varying ways. I think we need to be mindful that the services provided at the time were adequate, but we need to continue to provide services because trauma manifests itself in varying time degrees. Some of the situations that we are dealing with are not related to SIEV221. Memories were brought up about other instances that had occurred previously, so the health service has to play an ongoing role in supporting the mental health of the community.

CHAIR: When you said a lot of people leave the island, what percentage do? Does the whole island pack up and go?

Dr Graham: Almost—it is a very peaceful place over Christmas.

CHAIR: The irony of leaving Christmas Island for Christmas is not lost on me. In many respects it was just a physical non-presence that resulted in a low take-up.

Ms Wildermuth: I would like to add to Dr Graham's answer. We were conscious when we were developing the plans that we put in place that lots of people would be leaving over the Christmas break. In part that was the reason, when we were asking for additional counselling services to be deployed, that we talked to people about timing and continuity—when people might come back, when people were expected back on the island and so on. The second point that the committee may find helpful in its deliberations is that, while there may not have been large absolute numbers for one-on-one counselling, a number of mechanisms were employed by the counselling personnel who were available in addition to providing one-on-one counselling. Those kinds of things included going to community events occurring around the time, having conversations with people in the community to get a sense of how people were travelling, attending a number of meetings that happen reasonably regularly on the island—mothers' groups and so on—and getting in contact with some of the church groups on the island, for example, going along to services in a very low-key way to keep an eye on what was happening. So the point that I would like to make, I guess, is that, while they may not have been involved in one-on-one counselling, they were certainly deployed for the time that they were here doing the kind of work that we had asked them to do. In addition, they were able to provide us with a great deal of advice, as has been referred to earlier, about how we might conduct the memorial service, how we might continue to provide services into the future and so on.

CHAIR: We have canvassed the memorial service fairly extensively, but were you part of the decision-making body that organised it? It was not really the department—

Ms Wildermuth: I was not directly involved as a member of the committee, but I certainly was aware of discussions that were being held, and I did seek on behalf of the committee some advice from a number of counsellors who had been deployed on the island, from our Indian Ocean Territories Health Service and from other people who were on island at the time and who may have been able to provide some useful input.

Mr HUSIC: You said that it was a traumatic 12 months over the course of the 12 or so leading into 15 December. Was it because of the passing of two residents? Did you say that earlier?

Dr Graham: Yes.

Mr HUSIC: Thank you. This is the brochure or flyer that was distributed in all letterboxes—correct?

Dr Graham: Yes.

Mr HUSIC: With the number that is attached at the bottom of the second page, if someone had rung that would they have gone through to a specialist or a counsellor themselves, or is that a generic—

Dr Graham: No, that is a generic hospital number. All they would then ask for is the counselling service.

Mr HUSIC: And then they would just go straight through to them?

Dr Graham: Yes.

Mr HUSIC: Then what would be the process? Would they just set up a time to catch up, or would the psychologists or counsellors be able to go and visit the residents themselves if they needed assistance?

Dr Graham: It depended on what people really felt comfortable with. We had a mixture of people coming up to the health service and being reviewed up there. Sean Devine, our senior counsellor, often went out and met people in their own homes or in a neutral environment where people felt comfortable. So it was a flexible arrangement.

Mr HUSIC: We have had a number of people leave an impression with us that the take-up rate was relatively low. Has any consideration been given to what might have improved the take-up rate, or are you satisfied that people have exercised their own decision and that what has occurred has occurred?

Dr Graham: I think people who needed to use the service at the time used it. Others used other mechanisms on island to provide support, whether it be religious groups, family groups or community groups. As mentioned, people kept an eye out for each other, and that is one of the nice things about a small community: on that day everyone came together. It did not matter what religion or nationality you were; you came together to help. That was seen on the rock face, at Ethel Beach and in the days after, when people were continuing to search for bodies. It was then seen in the recovery of the island in the support that people provided for each other. People knew who was at risk, people knew who might have been suffering and people touched base with them. So I think that, as a community, they pulled together not only for the boat survivors but for the community individuals as well.

Ms Heath: I would just like to add that the brochure was also translated into Chinese and Malay, so we are pretty sure that any member that had a post office box received that brochure.

CHAIR: So that means every postbox got three leaflets?

Ms Heath: Yes.

Senator CROSSIN: Ms Moss, I want to follow up on some of the issues that were raised this morning by Mr Lacy. One goes to the communications. What work is Regional Australia doing in relation to scoping the deficiencies for the black spots on the island and rectifying them?

Ms Moss: This is an issue that is being discussed not only within Regional Australia but with Customs and AFP. It is a whole-of-island, a whole-of-government, in a sense, approach.

Senator CROSSIN: Who is the lead agency? Who drives that discussion and makes sure there are outcomes?

Ms Wildermuth: There are a number of agencies who have an interest in radiocommunications on the island, including Customs and Border Protection, the Navy patrol boats who come through, the Australian Federal Police, Volunteer Marine Rescue, Fire and Emergency Services, St John Ambulance and our own Indian Ocean Territories Health Service. One of the issues is that those different organisations need to be able to communicate both within themselves but also with other agencies, particularly in circumstances of an emergency such as the 15th of December tragedy. We have undertaken a number of things at the recommendation of the emergency management committee and a number of internal reviews by different agencies to try and pull that work together.

Senator CROSSIN: So you are telling me Regional Australia is the lead agency in coordinating this discussion?

Ms Wildermuth: Locally, on the island, we have been pulling that work together. We have—

Senator CROSSIN: This is to sort out the communications problem?

Ms Wildermuth: Yes.

Senator CROSSIN: What is happening in Canberra?

Ms Moss: In Canberra, as you heard, we are in the process of setting up an interdepartmental committee. That has not yet been established; we have all been a bit focused on this committee, coronial and other things.

Senator CROSSIN: You will be the lead agency for that, for driving those discussions?

Ms Moss: We will, yes. That IDC will be chaired by Regional Australia. We intend on that IDC that there will be membership from every agency who is represented on the island, so: AFP; Customs and Border Protection Command; AQIS; DIAC; AMSA; Prime Minister and Cabinet, who are not on-island but obviously have an interest in the issue; the department of environment, through Parks Australia; the Attorney-General's Department; and Defence. Pretty well anyone who wants to be part of it will be part of it. In relation to issues being dealt with here and then again in Canberra, the focus here is basically the operational side of the issues. What we will be looking at in Canberra is a higher strategic level of operation—picking up on whole-of-government issues, securing funding for a number of issues, who will take the lead, making sure everything is linked up at a Canberra side—and we will be informed in that from the discussions that are held here.

Senator CROSSIN: All right. And the aviation fuel supply? It is not the first time this has been a problem.

Ms Moss: No, it is not.

Senator CROSSIN: So what is Regional Australia doing to address a greater storage capacity at the airport?

Ms Moss: Two things. There are three types of fuel, but we are talking aviation fuel. Aviation fuel here is supplied by a company called Air BP. They are a totally independent operator, not under contract to us. We are obviously in close consultation with them at all stages. The fuel arrives by the regular ship. As you are aware, over the period for SIEV221, the port had been closed from earlier in December and was virtually closed almost through to February. So we were in the stage of looking at contingency plans with Defence to actually get fuel in if the boat had not been able to get in finally, which it did.

Senator CROSSIN: Is storage at the airport a problem? If you had a better storage capacity, then you could store more fuel and presumably perhaps the supply would not run as low as it does?

Ms Moss: In relation to the whole fuel situation, you would be aware that in the last budget we received funding for \$19.5 million to focus on fuel storage and supply for the three types of fuel used on-island, not just aviation.

Senator CROSSIN: Sorry, I thought that went to the normal fuel supply that residents are relying on.

Ms Moss: No. This is a more holistic approach to fuel. Obviously, fuel consumption was very much increased at that stage by the additional DIAC flights that were coming in, bringing people and taking people out. What this project is going to look at is the inadequate storage capacity and the lack of integration across the three different types of fuel. We are going to be looking at moving or increasing fuel storage facilities, particularly trying to move them away from the tourist precinct down on Flying Fish Cove, and associated synergies and cost efficiencies. That project is just about to begin. So all I can do is highlight that it is underway and it has been funded over three years.

Mr HUSIC: Picking up on that, I noticed in the submission by Customs and BPC, in paragraph 32, that runway issues at Christmas Island might have an impact on sustained surveillance. Has there been anything raised by Customs with the department about modifications to the runway?

Ms Moss: I am not aware of the exact point you are referring to there. These are the sorts of issues that are discussed regularly. The runway is relatively length-limited. It is unusual in the sense that it contains an upward slope at one end as well. It is I think a challenging runway. But, in terms of pavement condition, I understand that it is fine.

CHAIR: As we have no further questions I thank witnesses for attending.

Proceedings suspended from 11:45 to 12:00

SU, Mr Zhong Xiong (Chris), Private capacity

CHAIR: We will recommence our inquiry. We are now at the position where we have invited members of the Christmas Island community to address the committee, if they wish, and to share their stories or concerns with the committee. I am very pleased to welcome Mr Chris Su to the table, who is one of the residents who has advised us that he would like to come and do that. We are very pleased that you have done so and now invite you to address the committee.

Mr Su: On that morning, at about quarter past seven, I arrived at work at the local shire council. When I got to work I heard that there was an asylum seeker boat crash down behind the police station. My role is that I am the community liaison officer for the Shire of Christmas Island. This position was funded by DIAC last year for the community to be able to have someone to talk to about DIAC operations or about things that happen at the IDC. They give me their feedback, concerns or questions then I go to my weekly meeting with DIAC, get an official response and feed that back to that individual person.

The majority of my job is getting feedback on really mundane things, usually like, 'Some DIAC staff were speeding,' or not being good citizens of the island or stuff like that. It also includes very broad-ranging things like what happened in December and in March of this year.

I made my way down to the site. On my way down an ambulance passed me on the way back up the hill. I later on learned that was for a man who seemed to have got himself onto the cliff face and was being taken back up to the hospital. I did not actually go down to the Golden Bosun Tavern, the area where most of the people were responding. I went down to the Padang—the police station next door to the park. It was raining heavily, and I stopped there and looked at the Navy RHIBs going back and forth across the water. There was jetsam and flotsam about, and you could barely make out people amongst all that.

At about 07:40 am I went down into the Golden Bosun proper, and by the time I got down there it was all over; the RHIBs were not there anymore. I met with David Nielsen. David Nielsen is the works and services manager of the shire, and he was in charge of traffic maintenance for that day. A lot of the first responders had already left, and I believe they went further up the coast. When I reached that point, they were grabbing plastic containers from the garbage, big plastic water containers, to put on the parks truck. I think they were driving up further on the settlement to throw it off the cliff, if there was anybody else down there. We had to go and scrounge through garbage to get things to save people with. David Nielsen told me that they were going to rally at Ethel Beach to bring up the survivors and the bodies. So I said, 'All right; I'll head over towards Ethel Beach now to update them.' He told me that Thompson—who is a council worker; not Gordon Thomson—was up at Ethel Beach junction, between Linkwater Road and Ethel Beach, and I went up there to see him.

By 8.20, I was up at the intersection of Linkwater Road and Ethel Beach, and Thompson stopped me and asked me: 'Chris, do you have to come down to Ethel Beach? I was told to only let in people who were from emergency services.' He asked me if I needed to be there as shire DIAC CLO. At that point, I said, 'No, probably not; I probably wouldn't be any use down there.' I updated Thompson on what was happening and what just happened down at the Bosun. I do not think Thompson was actually at the Bosun at any time. I asked him to keep doing his job. I said, 'Pretty soon, behind me, there will be a lot of spectators coming in and people wanting to help out. Just do what David asks you and turn them away unless they are with VMR or SES or the hospital and so on. It'll probably be better for everybody if you kept on turning them away.' He goes, 'All right. Thanks.'

So I turned back and I went back to the shire, to see Kelvin Matthews, the CEO and my boss, to fill him in on what I had seen during that morning. ABC Radio had already broken the news, and they were talking broad facts, like 'many hands lost at sea' and 'there was a boat crash'. So I filled him in on what I had seen that morning. This must have been at about nine o'clock or 9.30. It occurred to me that we would have to store the bodies somewhere. I had been to the morgue on CI before, and I knew it could only carry 10 people or so, at the very most, I think. We had never really had that much space. I looked at Kelvin and said, 'Where can we store the bodies?' and he goes, 'At the morgue.' I said, 'The morgue is only going to carry 10.' So we called in Colin Wheadon—he is a building inspector at the shire and our go-to guy—and we had a bit of a conference right there and then. We said, 'We have to get a freezer container; that is the only thing we can do to house all the bodies that will need to be housed.'

At that point I called up DIAC. I spoke to a person called Gregory Lake—I think he might have been some kind of director of operations, that sort of role—and asked him, 'Have DIAC thought about where they're going to put the bodies yet?' By the tone of his voice at the other end of the phone, I could tell he had not thought of that either—everything was happening so quickly. He said: 'Chris, we're letting the AFP take care of this one. You

don't have to do anything today in your role as a CLO. We're going to let the AFP and emergency services take over.' I said thanks.

Colin and I went up to the hospital to see if we could assist them in setting up a freezer container. By the time we got up there, at about 10 or 10.30 am, an electrician—Kheong, I think, from Acker Trading—had already set up a freezer container. Obviously, someone on the emergency management committee must have thought about that an hour earlier and got onto Kheong, the electrician, and asked him to get up there, so that was really good. It was good to see the emergency management committee having the foresight to get that done because the morgue is really small.

The rest of the day is kind of a blur. I do remember that I talked to DIAC later that day—I forget who now. They told me that their EAP, which is their psychologist, I believe, at North West Point, was being made available to the broader public at that point in time, not just to the DIAC staff and DIAC interpreters, and that at block 567 or 568, in his house in Poon Saan, he was going to take anybody who came to talk to him from that evening onwards—for the next day and, I think, the day after as well. I got that information and went down to the noticeboards and wrote a message that said something like: 'If you want somebody to talk to, Block 568, Unit'—whatever it was—from now until late at night or any time, come up.' I wrote that up on the board at the end of the day on 15 December.

Perhaps the next day or the day after, I went to talk to Sean Devine, the psychologist at the hospital, to ask him, 'What can we do at this point in time? There is nothing to be communicated except counselling services.' He said he agreed. He asked me to go to people who were involved as the first-line responders to quietly tell them, 'If you want somebody to talk to, we are here in the hospital,' or 'Talk to your pastor or to your cleric. Have a chat to somebody, for God's sake, in the first week after the incident.' So I did that. I went back and spoke to some people who I knew were down on the shore that day and who had to do some work in the days after. One of the dive operators, I think, really needed someone to talk to. I passed on the information to him. I think perhaps he may have gone for a chat; I am not sure. Take-up numbers were very low in that period. Like we said earlier, many islanders leave Christmas Island, ironically, during Christmas time, to see friends and family back home. On the Saturday afterwards a lot of islanders left, and in the following week as well. So we could not catch as many people as we would have liked to have caught. Having said that, I think being able to put some distance between you and the place where something bad happened is probably a good place to start for your recovery and recuperation. When you are going off at Christmas time you are going off to see your parents on the mainland or your grandma, maybe, in Malaysia or Singapore. So it will be good for them to get out there at that time of the year.

I talked to Sean more about the grieving process and how long it takes for people to want to talk about things. He said some might take days, some weeks, some months—it is different for everybody. I also talked to the EAP, the psychologist that DIAC provided, and he said the same thing: you might not get anybody wanting to talk about it for a few weeks and then suddenly they will be stressed out and cannot sleep. Some were going to need somebody to talk to straightaway; some might be months down the track. It was a very heavy hit around about Christmas time. When the media came that following Saturday as well, it did not do anybody any good. Those guys ask a lot of questions very directly and it stirs things up within people. It was a very tumultuous Christmas.

As CLO, part of my role is also to arrange for activities in instances where the community and DIAC staff can interact or community, DIAC staff and asylum seekers can interact. Over the last year I have managed to arrange various events and festivals and invited clients, asylum seekers, to come down as well. Our local Territory Day festival celebrates when CI became part of Australia, and some clients participated in that. I took it upon myself to initiate the memorial service. As we touched on earlier today, even after the event in December we had things come one after the other. There was the fuel crisis, then planes could not come in and the ships still could not come in. So nobody really had time to think about anything else except reacting to what was happening week after week on CI.

The initial draft for the memorial service was going to have it down at the Golden Bosun, near the rocks, but we were advised that that was not a good place to have it for a few reasons: (1) logistically, I had to arrange for sound and tables and whatnot down there, and it was going to be impossible; and (2) the weather system from December to January, February, March—every day was a grey, cloudy day. It rained every day up until the beginning of March. The rain would not let up. Nobody has seen such a bad weather system here before. My father has been here for the last 35 years and he said that that storm at the end of last year that spread all the way up until this year was incredible. I was not going to arrange for a memorial service to take people back down to the same spot, the same location, on the same day that they lost their family, with the same weather, the same high seas. It would have triggered things in them that they would have worked hard, from December to March,

with their counsellors at Phosphate Hill to get over. So we drew up the plan to have the memorial service here at the rec centre, also because they are living next door at Phosphate Hill and so it would be easy for Serco to arrange for the numbers of people to just walk over here to join the memorial service instead of getting buses to go down there. We planned the memorial service for up here, an hour service followed by a flower procession to lay flowers down to the point. I think it was very healing to go back and acknowledge the spot where they fell.

I learned a lot about how people grieve during that time. When some residents found out that it was going to be at the rec centre and not entirely down at Rocky Point they were very upset. They said it should be down at Rocky Point where it happened. They told me that mainland Australians especially wanted it at the site, that if somebody has a car accident on a corner where, say, their son passed away they have a service or something there, and they felt it should be the same thing down there as well. That approach to grieving may give mainland Australians perhaps a sense of closure, but for our people when somebody passes away somewhere we do not go back to there. Last year my friend passed away at the beach. None of us met at the beach for months and months; even today we do not go there for anything because that is where he passed. So a memorial service was held up here.

The conversation we had with DIAC was that we wanted to have asylum seekers come to the memorial service as well because it is not honourable to have a memorial service and not invite the people who lost people that day. DIAC were very indecisive about whether or not I could have asylum seekers come: they said they were not going to be there, then they were going to be there. Then DIAC said they received advice from counsellors regarding whether or not they should all be grieving at the same place at the same time. It was touch and go, and at the very last moment, I think the week before, at the end of February, we had a meeting with the department. There was me, Gordon Thomson and Fiona Andrew, the then assistant secretary, and she said the clients were not going to be on the island on Saturday, 5 March. So then we asked if we could have a message from them to be read out to the island community and she said yes. We arranged for me, Gordon Thomson and Kay Bernard to go to Phosphate Hill to collect a message from two individuals, Hadi and Ramin, for us to read out to the community. While I was there I gave them an invitation to come to the memorial service, written in Farsi, just say could have that and know that we were showing solidarity with them and were thinking about them throughout this time. They thanked us and said that, as best they knew at that time, they were not going to be here. They thanked us for thinking about them over the last few months.

As Trish would know, the memorial service took place at the far end of the rec centre with the roller doors up to let the breeze in. Initially the plan was to have it in the centre of the rec centre under the scoreboard, but I moved it to the far end of the court because when you roll up the roller doors you look right into Phosphate Hill camp, you are not even 10 metres away, so if the clients really wanted to come and they were there but were not being allowed to come out, they could still come to the fence and have a look in—we were that close to them.

I will touch on some earlier points made today. One was whether there were any attempts to bring the community and survivors together between December and March. There were not. Certainly nobody approached me and asked if they could come and see any of the survivors. None of the survivors, of course, saw me; I did not meet any of them except for that day I saw Ramin and Hadi. To see somebody in detention, you need to know their name and identification number. Without those two items, you cannot really request to see anybody. Even if there was an attempt to meet, I do not think it would have been approved by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship because this was a very sensitive time for those survivors. Some of those survivors—not all—were very angry with Christmas Island people. I am not sure if anybody has told you that.

You would have seen the photos and videos of the event that day. If some of the survivors who were in the water, or if they needed help, and they saw us taking photos and videos, they could not understand why we were doing that. I found this out from some of the survivors later. We were motioning some of them away from the rocks—'go that way'—and I found out later that they thought we were telling them to go away and not come to the island. We were telling them to 'go that way; the water is going to be coming that way—don't come to the cliff'. But they could not swim so they made their way onto the cliff and the water's force was too great when the waves came. You would not have had a chance in hell of holding on to that cliff. So they misunderstood what we were trying to say.

Not everybody was angry, obviously, but when you lose so many people in your own family the grieving process in the first stage is disbelief, then anger, and some were very angry. I think some really understood that we did the best. You will see in the submission that we had letters from the survivors to be read out to the community, and many of those letters expressed a deep gratitude and thankfulness to the islanders for what we did that day. But not everybody felt the same way, especially in the weeks immediately after, when the survivors were asking, 'Where was the help? Where was a Navy ship?' or 'Why didn't the big Navy ship come in?'

They saw the large Navy ship on the edge but only saw the two RHIBs come in. They do not understand, I guess, that large Navy ships cannot come in that close to the cliff because that is not how Navy ships work—they need a certain level of depth in the water, I guess.

That was one of the main reasons why there was never any community and survivor meetings. That was actually a very big secret. The community members did not know that any of the asylum seekers were very angry with them, and we also were very traumatised by the event. If it were to have got out in December and January that some survivors were angry at us, I do not know what that would have done to the people who tried their very best. It would have tipped them over the edge; it would have done things—I do not know what—the reaction would have been not positive, so that was kept quiet for a very long time.

I believe—was it the week before the March memorial service—there was a service in Sydney at the end of February that was not a media win for the department. There were cameras about, people wailing and crying. I learnt from people who worked with asylum seekers that when people from that part of the world grieve, they grieve with great energy, which is different to the way we—my people—grieve in Australia where it is much more closed and more sombre. If we had a repeat of that public show of grief in front of islanders who were dealing with their own sort of feelings about that day, that might not have been the best either.

In addition, I think there was always the feeling from the department that the media should not come to the island on the day to cover the memorial service. It was the DIAC policy that the media are not allowed to film asylum seekers and show their faces on TV, and so on and so forth. I think that was also one of the reasons why they decided not to let the asylum seekers come to the memorial service. I think that is it.

CHAIR: Thank you, Chris, very much. Are you happy to answer a couple of questions? We will not go on for long and, when you have had enough of us, just let me know and we will end it there. You sort of answered my question: I was going to ask how long you have been on the island, and you said your father has been here for over 30 years. I was just going to ask about your experience. You talked about your father's. Was it the worst weather period you have seen too?

Mr Su: In the middle of February this year my friend put on Facebook: 40 days and 40 nights, no sun. It was 40 days and 40 nights—from the beginning of January we did not see the sun. We did not see the sun for months. It was really depressing. We had a small break in the weather in the week leading up to Christmas where we saw some blue sky but, after that, we did not see any blue sky again until the first week of March. It was terrible. I suppose you can have a look at various meteorological reports. They are also available at national parks, but we did not see blue sky for such a long time.

CHAIR: On 15 December in terms of the ocean—is that a regular occurrence or is it out of the ordinary?

Mr Su: It was unusual. The water was very heavy. It was like there was cyclone on the island but there wasn't a cyclone at the time officially. It was like cyclonic weather. The waters were terrible.

CHAIR: I am just wondering how you think the community is moving on. We know there have been a lot of support services available and some people have taken that up, and you have talked about people grieving in different ways.

Mr Su: Many people go back to their faith during times of great crisis. I think people talked to the imam or cleric at the mosque and would have perhaps sought solace in the holy book. I went to pray at my temple to meditate on what had happened and brought questions of life and death. Support for people who needed support was always there, and we put out flyers and so on in the days after the disaster so people knew that the hospital was the point of reference.

Our island is very small and we know that our hospital is very good, so everybody, if something is wrong with them emotionally or physically, knows where to go. Talking about something like this, of the enormity, the finality and the impossibility of it happening, in a place so familiar took a great toll on people.

If you told somebody that the greatest maritime disaster in peacetime history was going to happen on Christmas Island, people would say, 'What?' and then it happened. Imagine if people died in your street, you would not believe it. People need to have some kind of block and weeks later perhaps they might snap, especially, at things like this where people wanted to come and talk about it. No-one is going to turn up because they do not want to talk about it.

Senator FIELDING: Chris, thank you for coming and sharing. It must have been difficult to even come and share; we really appreciate that. We are certainly aware of some survivors being very angry and some of their thoughts may be that there wasn't the right amount of help. You went through some of that when people were directing them to move around and they were saying, 'Go away'; or 'Why were the big Defence Force boats so far away?' and those sorts of things. We are aware of those issues. We have had some confidential submissions, but I

cannot go into any detail but we are aware of those issues. In some of the questioning that this committee has been doing with the authorities, we have tried to make sure that we look at every angle. I have come to the conclusion that, once we knew the boat was there, everything possible was done. Certainly the Christmas Island community really were very heroic as well in trying to do all they could to try and save people that were helpless. So we very much appreciate your sharing what you have shared.

The issue of having some of the survivors at that community memorial is a sensitive issue. We have asked quite few a questions along the way in that regard to work out what advice was sought and whether expert advice was sought. From what I understand, in the end there was that expert advice that maybe it was not a good idea. Hopefully that helps relay to you a bit from there, but I suppose we will never know whether that was right or wrong. We have had evidence given that expert advice was that it may not really have been the best.

Do you think there is anything else that we could do for the community? You may have some insights that may be worth hearing. You can take that on notice; you do not need to provide it right now. It was not a test of how good you were; I just wondered if there was anything on your mind.

Mr Su: Inadvertently Canberra is asking the CI community to do a lot of things. When they house, at one point, 3,000 asylum seekers on Christmas Island they have to rely on our volunteer firefighting service, our volunteer ambulance drivers and our volunteer marine rescue. We are staffed by volunteers. We all go out to the centre every time if somebody calls for an ambulance. We will go out every time when somebody calls for a fire truck and assistance. But for us to help Canberra look after the people they want us to look after, they need to give us more things to help do the job, even on a voluntary level. We have had more than 200 boats come in, and they know that the CI cliff face is very sharp and very steep. Without them giving us the things to help people with, it is not very fair for us.

If SIEV221 had made it to the island one hour earlier that day, one kilometre further up the coast, all hands would have been lost because there would not have been anybody there to hear people cry for help. If there were somebody there, one kilometre up is a dead zone for cell phones. It is almost fortunate that it happened where it happened because it got the greatest amount of people who could have possibly been helped on that day. If it had happened one week later, most of the residents on that part of the island would have been gone and there may not have been anywhere near as much help. If people in Canberra are asking us to help look after their people, if they give us the best equipment to do that, that will be for that best, because the island people will never say no.

Senator CROSSIN: Mr Su, as you know, I came up to the memorial service and you were the MC for that day. If you were responsible for initiating it and putting together, then you should be very proud of yourself because it was certainly a very appropriate service. I thought the way in which speakers were collected and organised was to your credit. What people will not know is that on that day everyone was asked to pick up a paper flower. From my recollection there were hundreds of paper flowers that people could pick up and place or keep. Did community members make those?

Mr Su: Yes.

Senator CROSSIN: Did the Chinese community predominantly make them or the Malay community as well?

Mr Su: One young Chinese woman made them for us.

Senator CROSSIN: She made all of those? To me that was just an astounding proof of evidence of the contribution that people in this community have made. In finishing: as members of parliament, this committee will be reporting back; is there anything—is there a gap, is there equipment—from your perspective as the key liaison person between DIAC and the community that you think needs attention and that we should turn our minds to?

Mr Su: There are externalities of having the IDC operations here that have been fed back to various consultants over the last year. I believe Territories West have just finished commissioning a report on the socioeconomic impact of the IDC on the Christmas Island community. If items in that report were addressed and a committee or even one person would spearhead and champion some of the recommendations that may appear in that report, that would be excellent. We are being asked to do many things for Immigration and Citizenship, and we need a few resources back to help complete the job that we are asked to do.

Most of the feedback that I have got from my position, especially in the first six months—up until November, I guess—has been that many people thought that, while they see the IDC bringing a lot of economic benefit to the island, it has also changed the island culturally and some would say spiritually as well. I would say most island people are pretty pro having the IDC here, for various reasons. Some like it because it helps them earn more money or gives their wives or their sons a job or they support human rights in general, but it does put a lot of strain on hip pockets sometimes because a lot of prices have gone up quite a lot. When fly-in fly-out workers

started coming here with, for us, extravagant pay cheques, we were forced to pay high prices for different items. That is probably the No. 1 thing. No. 2 would be housing, but you will find all that stuff in the report earlier.

In terms of support for asylum seeker boat arrivals, I guess there is a series of studies being done now of what types of boats we need and perhaps how many ambulances it would be good to have on the island and what type of staff we need to have here full time in terms of trauma and counselling and first aid. An overreliance on volunteers is not the way to go.

CHAIR: Thank you, Chris, for coming before the committee and sharing your experiences and thoughts with us. We greatly appreciate that.

Proceedings suspended from 12:37 to 13:50

MURRAY, Mr Raymond John, Private capacity

CHAIR: We will recommence our inquiry. Again, we are at the part of the inquiry where we have invited members of the Christmas Island community to address the committee and to share their thoughts or concerns with us. We now welcome Mr Ray Murray—thank you for joining us today.

Mr Murray: It is a pleasure.

CHAIR: We are being recorded on *Hansard* as part of the formal proceedings of the committee, but we will just hand it over to you and you can tell us what you would like to tell us. Just indicate to me any issues that you may have with the conduct of the inquiry. If you are up to answering a few questions afterwards we will proceed on that basis.

Mr Murray: Really, I wanted to make myself available in case there were some questions so you could talk to somebody who was actually there. I have made enough statements to the police so that what I actually saw and what happened is already on record. But that is a very structured way of doing it. This is just more of a personal way, I suppose.

As I said to you, I live right on Rocky Point, and as such was the first person on site on the morning that it happened. I think Brian Lacy had phoned in beforehand; he had seen what was happening in the distance. It is funny: you are half asleep and you hear noises, and it sounded like schoolies to me. I thought it was kids having fun at six o'clock in the morning, a bit loud. I opened the door and had a look—and my balcony is literally from me to that wall over there to the ocean—and it was pretty clear what was happening.

I dialled 000 and got through to one of the local federal policeman—Paul something. By the time I got to him, the call from Brian had already come through. Paul actually said, 'Yes, it's okay, Ray. I'm coming down the hill now to have a look'. My response to him was, 'Mate, this is much more serious than coming and having a look. These people are about to hit the rocks.' He did not know that and Brian would not have known that because of the angle from which Brian would have been looking. But I could tell immediately; the boat was maybe 50 metres off shore in the middle of an horrendous storm, which you already know about. It did not seem to be under power and people were just going crazy.

Within a couple of minutes of that, Paul arrived. My boat was parked there with a few life jackets in it and all I could think to do was to grab them and run down to the rocks with them. Fortunately, one of the dive operators on the island lives behind me and one of them lives just down the other end, so they were there relatively early and could go back and bring jackets. So in a very short time we had a heap of life jackets there.

Without going further into the story, I guess that what I would never like to see happen again is that sort of responsibility and action required from the general public. There should be some sort of system in place where emergency stations could be called to hand and something happens. In your emotions at the time you say, 'Where the hell is the Navy?' But that is more like when you are in an accident and you are waiting for the ambulance and you would say, 'Where the hell is the ambulance?' You are not pointing the finger at the Navy, I realise. Especially once they got there; they were incredibly brave in what they did and all that sort of stuff.

But there was this overwhelming feeling of helplessness. Standing right out on the edge of the rocks, there were times when that the boat was closer than you are to me now. I will never forget seeing a woman holding up a baby, obviously wanting me to take it, and not being able to do anything. It was just a feeling of absolute hopelessness. It was like it was happening in slow motion. A wave would pick the boat up and almost hit the rocks and then go back again, and then finally it was like it exploded.

You would have been told by people who know a lot more than me about how it could be better so that it never happens again, but there could be things like an equipped trailer with all those life jackets on it so that somebody would know immediately what to do rather than standing around going, 'What the hell do we do from here?'

I am a member of the VMR and, again, sort of feeling ridiculous that I am a member of this group that is called the Volunteer Marine Rescue, and we had nothing we could do. The boat was not capable of being launched in that weather, we had no equipment or no nothing. We were a volunteer rescue group by name only.

Senator CASH: When you say 'no equipment', do you mean no equipment or just no equipment that would actually assist you on the day?

Mr Murray: Virtually no equipment. A rescue boat that cannot be put into the water: the conditions have to be nearly perfect to put that boat down that boat ramp. So any situation where you might have needed a boat like that, you did not have it. There is no trailer with all the things you would need in an emergency like that. Perhaps

they were in store, and perhaps they could have been found, but that is what we did—just with general people's stuff. But there was nowhere you could go to. The boat is about to hit the cliff: this is what you do.

We can all get angry with different people and different things, I feel, but I felt let down by the government, really; that they would build a facility here and create the situation—whether you support it or not or whatever is beside the point. Obviously, boats are going to come to this island. We get huge storms here, and to set all that up and then not to follow it through with some sort of contingency or thing to deal with this, when you think about it, it was inevitable that it was going to happen. You do not have to live up here very long, especially through the swell season, to know that something like that would happen; whether it would be one getting tipped over or if it were against the rocks, it was an accident waiting to happen.

Senator FIELDING: You said you were the first person down there and there was no-one else at all who you could see around. No-one else could have given the alarm any earlier, do you think?

Mr Murray: No. As I said, I think there was Brian Lacy. I am right out on the point of Rocky Point and Brian is back here. When he saw it, it would have looked like it was a few hundred metres off the shore. But by the time I saw it from where I was it was the distance from me to you off the shore.

CHAIR: Mr Murray, one of the things that the committee is also interested in is the response after the tragedy, how we cared for people and accommodated them—not just the survivors but also the people who were there and witnessed it. So can you just take us through what you thought of what was provided—what was good and what was useful?

Mr Murray: I actually thought it was excellent. My son was visiting me at the time—he is 21, so he is a young guy—and he got thrown across the rocks during it and got his back cut up. There were people there to take care of him. He got taken off in an ambulance. I stayed until there was nothing left we could do and then went up to the hospital to see him. They were terrific. Somebody came out and spoke to me straightaway to make sure I was okay; they realised I would have been in shock and dealt with it. So I thought that was really, really well done, and how they dealt with Jacob. And then the follow-up was good too. There were professional people you could easily go and talk to. I think that was—

CHAIR: When you say 'easily', did you find it easy because somebody contacted you; was the community generally aware of what was available?

Mr Murray: A bit of both. Because I went straight up to the hospital afterwards, those people came to me. But just generally, in the community, it was on the noticeboard immediately. Everybody would have known that if you needed to talk to somebody or you wanted to debrief in some way, it was there. I think that is something you would not expect in a community this small and this isolated, not if the detention centre was not there. Those staff were probably there dealing with all the problems, psychological problems or whatever, out there. So there were professional people here immediately, which was great—and really important. We came home from that and my son went and had a shower, and I said to him, 'Take a chair in there and just sit under the shower for as long as you want to,' and I could hear him crying in the shower. They were horrendous things we saw. I never want anyone to have to see that or go through that again.

CHAIR: I know you have only been here for 18 months, but I wonder what observations you might have about how the community is moving on as a whole. Do you have any views on that?

Mr Murray: Well, yes, actually: it feels like people are fed up with it. I came here yesterday to put my name down as willing to do this, and there was a lady I spoke to—and, obviously, I knew a few other people who were there that day. I went and saw them, and none of them were interested in coming here. They have all given their statements. I think the community here are fed up with a lot of the stuff. I started coming here four years ago, and when I first came here to live I did not really understand the community resentment or whatever about what has happened here, perhaps because I am a small-scale property developer and for me there are opportunities here and there are financial bonuses in what has happened here. So I did not really understand what the long-term community were expressing that they had lost. There is still—as there was before—this beautiful sense of innocence on this island. I do not even have keys to my house. I have never taken my car keys out of the ignition since I have been here. Those sorts of things are just so valuable. So when you are sitting at a public meeting and the gentleman from the Federal Police says, 'Go home and lock your doors, and take your keys out of your ignition'—and they had to say that; that is the reality—that has a big impact on how you feel about living here.

This is diverging from this inquiry, I suppose, but there is an impact on the community that, to me, makes it a little bit similar to mining towns in the north-west: there is a definite split community here. There are some people who are fortunate enough to have made a lot of money out of the government coming here and doing this, and there are a lot of people here who have gained nothing other than the fact that their lifestyle has changed.

I am also involved in tourism here and I have got to tell you that we might as well turn the sign around and say we are not open for business, and give this some time to settle down. Being in real estate, I noticed a couple of things. Immediately after the tragedy, when I had all that publicity and everything, the interest in the island increased a lot—even about real estate and stuff like that. It was just people's awareness, I suppose.

Mr PERRETT: Sales went up or tourism went up?

Mr Murray: No, interest in sales went up.

Mr PERRETT: Actual sales or interest?

Mr Murray: Interest. I had people ringing me to find out—so it was interest. And then, when the riots happened, the reverse happened. Since whenever that was, in February or whatever date that was, my phone has virtually stopped ringing, and it has really only changed in the last week. I had my first sale in three months the other day and I have another offer today. Part of that is because absentee landowners are dropping their price. They want to pack up and get out. There is a fear of the insecurity here. At the moment you have houses getting \$1,000 a week with no problem at all, but an investor is saying, 'It's not like that's a mine out there that's got a 40-year lifespan; what's it going to be like next year?' It is very hard to plan, very hard to do business.

CHAIR: Ray, thank you very much for coming and sharing that with us. We felt it was important. We did not come to intrude, but there are important lessons that as a government we need to learn about, and that is part of our task. We felt it was important that we gave anyone from the community an opportunity to address us if they saw fit, so thank you very much for doing that.

Mr Murray: I am grateful for the opportunity, and I am disappointed that very few other people did.

Mr PERRETT: Just on that: you said people did not want to come along. Do you mean that they have moved on?

Mr Murray: It is more like they want to move on. They have had enough of statements to police—because the people I went to were people who were directly involved. Between us, sometimes there has been half a day sitting and telling the story again—and then, quite frankly, being hounded by the media. So they have just had enough.

Mr PERRETT: Okay.

Mr Murray: I do not think they have moved on.

CHAIR: I did try to finish, but that brings me back to a point that was raised earlier, and maybe we will just finish on this. A view has been expressed to us that the media were not only insensitive but very invasive.

Mr Murray: I had one woman stand in the doorway of my house—I was on the phone—and when I excused myself from the phone to say no, I did not want to, she just carried on and walked in, almost trying to make me feel like I owe this to the community out there who want to know what happened.

CHAIR: Thanks very much, Ray.

Committee adjourned at 14:07