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SENATE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AND REMOTE
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

**Reference: Effectiveness of state, territory and Commonwealth government policies
on regional and remote Indigenous communities**

FRIDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2008

CANBERRA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

**SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

Friday, 14 November 2008

Members: Senator Johnston (*Chair*), Senator Crossin (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Adams, Moore, Scullion and Siewert

Senators in attendance: (Insert, in alphabetical order, the names of senators provided by committee secretary)

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Arbib, Barnett, Bernardi, Bilyk, Birmingham, Mark Bishop, Boswell, Boyce, Brandis, Bob Brown, Carol Brown, Bushby, Cameron, Cash, Colbeck, Jacinta Collins, Coonan, Cormann, Eggleston, Ellison, Farrell, Feeney, Fierravanti-Wells, Fifield, Fisher, Forshaw, Furner, Heffernan, Hogg, Humphries, Hurley, Hutchins, Joyce, Kroger, Lundy, Ian Macdonald, McEwen, McGauran, McLucas, Marshall, Mason, Milne, Minchin, Nash, O'Brien, Parry, Payne, Polley, Pratt, Ronaldson, Ryan, Stephens, Sterle, Troeth, Trood, Williams, Wortley and Xenophon

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

- a) the effectiveness of Australian Government policies following the Northern Territory Emergency Response, specifically on the state of health, welfare, education and law and order in regional and remote Indigenous communities;
- b) the impact of state and territory government policies on the wellbeing of regional and remote Indigenous communities;
- c) the health, welfare, education and security of children in regional and remote Indigenous communities; and
- d) the employment and enterprise opportunities in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

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Committee met at 9.04 am

ACTING CHAIR (Senator Adams)—Good morning, everyone. I declare open this second day of public hearings for the Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities. Before commencing today, on behalf of this committee, I would like to again acknowledge the traditional owners of this country. The committee is next due to report on 30 March 2009.

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. Any act that disadvantages a witness as a result of the evidence given before the Senate or any of its committees is treated as a breach of privilege. However, I also remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence to the committee may constitute contempt of the Senate.

The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, but, under the Senate's resolution, witnesses have the right to request to be heard in private session. It is important that witnesses give the committee notice if they intend to ask to give evidence in camera. If a witness objects to answering a question, the witness should state the ground upon which the objection is taken, and the committee will determine whether it will insist on an answer, having regard to the ground which is claimed.

[9.05 am]

ALTMAN, Professor Jon Charles, Private capacity

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement. At the conclusion of your remarks, I will invite members of the committee to put questions to you. Do you have any comments on the capacity in which you appear today?

Prof. Altman—I am also appearing as an academic researcher. With your indulgence, I will just make a brief opening statement that tries to cover many of the issues that I think your committee is trying to look at in the future.

Indigenous affairs policy and policy making for regional and remote Indigenous communities is in a maelstrom. I would hate to be out there trying to do business with the Australian government and trying to make sense of the Australian government's policy framework right now if I was living in remote or regional Indigenous Australia. I do not make this opening statement lightly. I have been researching Indigenous affairs policy making for 31 years now and have been making submissions to parliamentary inquiries such as this since 1985. I have never seen anything like this before.

As calendar year 2008 and the Rudd government's first 12 months draw to a close, I have been reviewing what I have been doing during the year, in part because the centre I direct at ANU is going to its annual retreat next week. To date, I have made submissions to 12 parliamentary, departmental or other major public inquiries. I have only one to go—the Northern Territory government's discussion paper on outstations. I am not making this observation because I seek your sympathy; I am making these submissions because I believe that the issues being reviewed are important. However, I would note that many of the issues being examined are addressing common themes, and some thought might be given to how the outcomes from all this reviewing might be coordinated. Although I realise that some reviews are driven by the government of the day, others, like this committee's brief, are multipartisan. But jumping from review to review does indicate the absence of a coherent policy framework and probably an overemphasis in Australian government attention on the Northern Territory, where less than 15 per cent of the Australian Indigenous population reside, although the circumstances of many in the Northern Territory are indeed dire.

I will make very obvious comment at the outset that global and national economic circumstances have deteriorated markedly, even since your first report was tabled on 30 September. I make only two comments about this, although both will have implications for the overarching government aspiration to close the gap, which might, more realistically, be now termed 'reduce the gap' or 'maintain the status quo' at a time when the gap might expand. First, one senses in Australia, in political and policy circles, a strong desire to view the current global upheaval as a short-term fluctuation that will—with time and sensible monetary and fiscal policy applied at the global level—right itself. There is a reluctance to consider the possibility that what we are seeing might be deeply systemic. Secondly, insofar as multibillion-dollar surpluses might be a thing of the last rather than the next decade, national resources to address deeply entrenched shortfall in regional and remote Indigenous Australia might become increasingly scarce and

politically contested. The last decade might, with time, be recognised as a period of opportunity forgone, at least in terms of addressing documented housing, primary healthcare, education, development and community infrastructure shortfalls in Indigenous regional and remote communities.

With your indulgence, I will make a few very brief comments on five of the areas that were raised for future work of this committee in your first report, focusing especially on areas where my research might add value to your deliberations. The government's response to the review of the Northern Territory emergency response has attracted much negative attention already. I will just note that, in hastily rejecting many of the recommendations made by the government's hand picked board, no evidence has been provided for making such decisions. Evidence based policy making seems to be more about rhetoric than reality at present. I personally found the government's response to the recommendations somewhat demeaning of the work of its board, based on visits to 31 communities, meetings with representatives of 56 communities and overall consultation with 140 different organisations over three months. On top of this, the board received 222 submissions, including mine, and commissioned its own consultancy research.

On CDEP reform, I have now made three submissions directly on CDEP and six indirectly on CDEP this year. Clearly, this is a contentious issue that may have delayed publication of the NTER review report. I would like to table a paper copy of my submission to the latest Australian government discussion paper, submitted just a week ago. I will make that available to the committee, if I might.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you.

Prof. Altman—I am partly keen to do this because submissions to departmental reviews might not be made publicly available. In my view, the overarching proposal to abolish CDEP in regional Australia and to fundamentally diminish it to Work for the Dole in remote Australia is appalling public policy. If implemented, such changes will increase the employment gap, create hardship for Indigenous individuals, families and communities and undermine the national interest because so many activities undertaken by CDEP workers in natural resource management, the arts, fire management, border bioprotection and so on are in the national interest. At a time when labour markets will either shrink or ossify, the precautionary principle would suggest that this program should be expanded and strengthened, not demolished.

There has been much written on coordination of services between governments, including in the substantial Commonwealth Grants Commission Indigenous funding inquiry completed in 2001. I will just say that we need to get the fiscal federalism right, something that we may hear more about from the inquiry of the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs on NT Indigenous affairs expenditure. From what one reads in the media, the brief could have been extended to regional and remote Queensland as well and probably remote parts of Western Australia.

On policies affecting outstations and small communities: the truth of the matter is that there ain't any, something that I highlighted two years ago in a paper titled *In search of an outstations policy for Indigenous Australians*. This in itself is unconscionable, given that about 20,000 Indigenous Australians live in nearly 1,000 such small remote communities. Proposed changes to CDEP will potentially destroy regional CDEP organisations that are also outstation resource

agencies, an intended or unintended consequence of this proposed reform. A transparent parliamentary inquiry into outstations is urgently needed.

On enterprises and employment, I note that the recent *Open for business* report, completed last month, said little about regional or remote Australia and avoided discussion of CDEP that underwrites much socially useful and employment-creating enterprise. On employment, the hyperambitious Australian Employment Covenant, also known as the Forrest plan, is looking to target metropolitan and urban rather than regional and remote Australia.

I may sound very critical, but I am afraid I can see little in the current policy framework that is targeting development, and we could debate how that is defined in regional and remote Indigenous Australia. I would be happy to answer questions and engage in discussion about some directions policymaking could take, especially if politicians and policymakers were able to look at some of the success stories rather than being over influenced by the currently dominant narrative of failure, a narrative that we are keen to avoid in our discussions of the nation's overall prospects. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much, Professor.

Senator SIEWERT—Can we go to the outstations comments that you have just made, in terms of not having a policy. I thought the policy was really to get rid of them. That appears to me to be the tenet of quite a lot of the policy directions from the past, and I have not actually see that change much now. Is that not what you see as the policy?

Prof. Altman—I do not think that any policy has been quite that blunt.

Senator SIEWERT—Policy does not necessarily have to be blunt to achieve the same objective.

Prof. Altman—I think that there is an enormous antipathy to outstations, which really began about three or four years ago under a previous minister. I think that the antipathy to outstations has grown and I think that the sort of support that outstations require has been incrementally eroded with a growing emphasis on providing services in the larger communities. But I think that there is also something else happening with outstations. There is a strong discourse of outstations being a failure and that is having some impact on outstation resilience. Nevertheless I think at this moment there are several hundred outstations where people are demonstrating a commitment to live on their country. If they still have access to services from outstation resource agencies, they are getting minimal services in the areas of community infrastructure, basic health services and primary education and that varies a lot from region to region.

I think what you are alluding to is that since 2006—this is at least my interpretation—we have been waiting for some clear Commonwealth position on outstations. When I wrote my paper *In search of an outstations policy for Indigenous Australians* I partly did that to try and provoke an open discussion about outstations at a time when the then Howard government was indicating that they would be delivering an outstations policy in 2006. That was over two years ago.

Since then the only work that has really been undertaken in terms of policy development has been by the Northern Territory government. I think to some extent that has been driven by a

memorandum of understanding, signed last September, that basically reversed the historical responsibility for outstations that, since 1978, had lain with the Commonwealth; it reversed that back to the Northern Territory. This clearly required the Northern Territory government to act because they were basically handed a quantum of money, \$20 million per annum, and told that this is what you have to run outstations. I think that has required them to undertake some very hard thinking about how they are actually going to manage services for several hundred of these communities in the Northern Territory with that sort of resourcing.

Senator SIEWERT—Basically the impact of that has meant that the services to outstations have been diminished to the point where they have become unsustainable. Is that what has happened?

Prof. Altman—I think that the services delivered to outstations vary enormously. I think that robust outstation resource agencies that are generally also CDEP organisations—and that was something that came out quite clearly in the last review of outstation resource agencies which was undertaken a decade ago, in 1998; that, really, outstation resource agencies are CDEP organisations—the ones that are large and the ones that can find or source project funding for their outstations, still deliver very effective services at the moment. But others that are small and do not have scale and capacity to chase all sorts of grants for their constituents are really struggling. There is no doubt that a blow will be struck in relation to the survival of outstations if these changes to the CDEP scheme are implemented. Basically, those changes will disempower CDEP organisations and they will reduce the discretionary resources and the discretionary capacity that they have to deliver local government like services to their outstation constituents.

Senator SIEWERT—Can you go a little bit into your thoughts behind the suggested changes and how they will disempower these communities?

Prof. Altman—In relation to CDEP?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Prof. Altman—I can see it happening at a number of levels. At the level of political power, CDEP participants who are employed by their community based organisations will now be engaged or funded—not employed necessarily—through Centrelink. What they will receive through Centrelink is the equivalent of Work for the Dole. One of the success factors of CDEP since it was established in 1977 has been that CDEP, while it is often referred to as the Indigenous Work for the Dole scheme, is fundamentally different from Work for the Dole because people receive something approaching the equivalent of their unemployment benefit entitlement for part-time work but then they also have the capacity to earn additional income and undertake additional work through top-up. The discussion paper released by the Australian government states unequivocally that top-up will stop. What this will do is undermine the incentive of individuals to undertake work beyond the minimum number of hours. It will also undermine both the incentive and the capacity for CDEP organisations to engage in enterprise development, often of a community development nature and also, on some occasions, of a commercial nature.

If these reforms to CDEP are implemented—and I think the Northern Territory provides us with the clearest statistical evidence—you are likely to see a net 6,000 CDEP participants being

converted from people who work on CDEP to being classified as unemployed and receiving Work for the Dole. That is out of a current total of about 8,000 CDEP participants. The other 2,000 will get what are referred to as 'proper jobs', which will be public sector jobs. So you will basically convert 8,000 part-time jobs to 2,000 proper jobs and 6,000 unemployed people—hence my comment about expanding the employment gap, not reducing it. In the Northern Territory, where the Indigenous unemployment rate at the moment is 15 per cent, I think, you could see that unemployment rate increase to somewhere between 40 and 50 per cent.

Senator SIEWERT—I just want to change tack for a minute. Have you done further work since the paper that CAEPR did a while ago on the ICCs, the Indigenous coordination centres, and the effectiveness of that approach? The centre did a paper a while ago that talked about looking at how they worked and, to me, the take-home message was that you need very high-up, senior people to be doing the agreement for a joined-up approach. Have you done any further review of the approach that has been taken to the delivery of services and the need for a multifaceted approach?

Prof. Altman—I do not think we have followed up that research in relation to ICCs, and maybe we, or the people who did that research, are at fault there because we tended to look at that fairly early on when the model was put in place. I suppose that it would be useful to look at how robust that model has been and how effective it has been in terms of coordination of services. Certainly, the field based observation one makes is that service delivery is not well coordinated in terms of visitation by members of different government agencies, be they federal or state. There is certainly a coordination problem between levels of government but also, I suspect, within each level of government. I would like to emphasise that I differentiate field-based observations from anecdote, so this refers to observations that I have made. I would also make another observation from my own line of research, which is that there is at times a fundamental difference in approach between different federal agencies which must undermine their capacity to cooperate and coordinate their services. If I could give you an example of that it would be some of the tensions that must exist between DEEWR and FaHCSIA and DEWHA, because DEWHA is committed to Indigenous protected areas, to the Working on Country program, and the use of CDEP labour for a number of environmental services that are delivered on the Indigenous estate. At the same time, DEEWR and FaHCSIA are looking to abolish the CDEP scheme under the terminology of revising or revamping it, but, nevertheless, fundamentally changing it, and that will have enormous repercussions for the programs run by DEWHA.

Senator SIEWERT—Have you ever been engaged with any of the departments to deal with that issue or are you aware of how they are dealing with it?

Prof. Altman—It is certainly an issue that I have raised in a number of those 12 submissions to inquiries et cetera, because it is of great concern, and it is of great concern again going back to that whole notion of the narrative of failure. Certainly DEWHA does not share that narrative in terms of its work, and some people might say that it is working in some of the more positive areas in Indigenous affairs, which are environmental management and the arts. Nevertheless, I think that to some extent their approach demonstrates that, if you have a narrative of success rather than a narrative of failure, you can actually get on with doing business, whereas a narrative of failure just gets you looking to continually revise and revamp the policy framework that is blamed for much of the failure.

Senator SIEWERT—I have one last question in that line. How is the money that has gone in now through Caring for Our Country—the increased funding to IPAs—going to pick up the gap when CDEP changes? Is it enough to pick that up? It sounds like there is still a need for substantially more funding to pick up what will be lost through CDEP in IPAs.

Prof. Altman—There is no doubt that there will be a need for more funding. I suppose the question is: to what extent will DEWHA be in a position to convert people who are working on CDEP to Working on Country programs? I should clarify that. Many people who work on Caring for Our Country projects do so under CDEP as well as under proper wages. Again, the truth is that there has actually been very little assessment done of the level of support that is needed for the environmental management of the Indigenous estate. I think that this is a really important issue because what we tend to do is see ranger groups respond to the available resources rather than the resources being made available to actually do the job. I have a project that I hope to undertake over the next two years that will turn that question around. I am planning to look at in Central Arnhem Land and 10,000 square kilometres of land that is relatively environmentally intact but facing enormous threats associated with feral animals, exotic weeds and climate change, because there is some evidence that warmer, wetter wet seasons in the Top End are resulting in a proliferation of feral animals, like feral pigs and buffalos. If we look at these two catchments, what would it cost the nation to deliver the public good of maintaining this 10,000 square kilometre area?

Senator SCULLION—Professor Altman, thank you very much again for your, as usual, very comprehensive submission, and thank you for also providing us with some of the work you have done around this in terms of responding to other reviews. I am interested first of all in where we are up to with a whole range of statistics, benchmarks and our capacity to move to a more evidentiary process across an evaluation in Indigenous affairs, and I know that is your main game. You may want to take some of this on notice. I do not expect you to have comprehensive answers right at the moment. In which specific areas of the review into the intervention have claims been made which you say are not necessarily based on evidence? Would you be able to provide me on notice with a list of those claims that have been made where you believe there was no evidence to support that claim?

Prof. Altman—I should clarify what I said. I think that the NTER review board was quite cautious in saying where they had an evidence base and where they did not, and I think that they were quite critical of the fact that no benchmark was established. My criticism was actually directed at the government that has accepted or rejected recommendations, without an evidence base, to say why they are accepting or rejecting particular recommendations.

Senator SCULLION—Then what areas of the assertions made by government, rather than the review, are not based on evidence? Effectively, I think it would be useful, like a parking lot for this committee. We are always asking questions about things and yesterday we had some discussions about the availability of social indicators—this morning I was told that the last one was done in 2006—and the capacity to speak to people to gather that information and say well, there are a whole range of other bits of information that may be useful to extend that so that we can continue to have some benchmarks.

Prof. Altman—One of the areas which is clearly very politically contentious and where we do not have data, and really never have had good data, is on Indigenous household expenditure. So

in relation to, for instance, the beneficial or deleterious impacts of income quarantining, we actually have no rigorous, statistical information on what difference that has made in terms of household expenditure patterns. You hear claims by managers of stores that expenditure on certain items has increased. We do not know if that is a demand-side or a supply-side response because we know that stores have had to become licensed and have had to stock certain foods that they might not have stocked in the past. Of course, those reports are very positive, so any increase in expenditure on basic items is to be welcomed. There has been reference by the minister to a survey that has been done, but that has not been made publicly available and it is not clear on what basis it was done. There has been suggestion that it has involved ringing up store managers and asking them for their views. Not only do those store managers, in my view, face moral hazard in terms of their responses, but also that is just not rigorous in a social scientific way. I think that there is a real need to consider having an Indigenous identifier in the ABS's Household Expenditure Survey, something that is not there. At least the capacity is there to have an Indigenous identifier, but the sample size historically has never been large enough to cover Indigenous Australia in a statistically rigorous way. One cannot say very much about the cost of living in remote and Indigenous communities, or the culturally specific ways that Indigenous people spend cash without having some sort of household expenditure survey. I would certainly encourage this committee to think about that possibility.

You are quite right that some of the existing statistics are quite irregular. We do have the NATSISS, which is in the field as we speak and which will generate data for 2008, although we probably will not have that data on hand for another 12 months. Certainly during the life of this committee, you will be able to get NATSISS data. Again, one of the very positive developments in relation to the ABS is the publication of annual labour force information on the Indigenous population. For jurisdictions like the Northern Territory, in particular, I think that that actually provides you with quite an accurate picture of what is happening in relation to Indigenous employment, unemployment and labour force participation. In some ways, because of the relative size of its Indigenous population, the Northern Territory does provide us with one of the clearest snapshots of what is happening with Indigenous people, but unfortunately, that diverts too much of our attention to looking at that statistical picture rather than at the statistical picture in other jurisdictions where, unfortunately, the Indigenous population is a much smaller proportion of the total population, so the statistics are not quite as robust.

Senator SCULLION—I think it is important. If we are talking about doing an expenditure survey it will be very useful on its own because it will inform us, but it would be better if we could do a comparative analysis with a similar demographic moving along a similar journey. Are you aware of any household expenditure surveys that have been conducted overseas? There is a need for a survey, but we need to ask the right questions and go about it the right way. As you would be aware, the demographics we are talking about are highly complex. There are different people at different places in their lives, some with very finite budgeting arrangements and some with sophisticated budgetary arrangements and some with absolutely none, and they will be living effectively adjacent to each other. So how do you go about ensuring the sample is representative? Do you break that demographic up? There are a whole range of questions that I think would be very useful, particularly if something similar has been done with a similar demographic somewhere overseas.

I cannot show you exactly where this is in the papers but I am sure you would recall saying that we make a lot of assertions and assumptions that are not based on evidence. An example you

use is the assertion that one of the reasons the CDEP is not worth pursuing is that it is not really fair dinkum and that people do not participate. I think you reflect on the use of the term 'work ethic'. People like me from time to time make an assertion that it is about the work ethic, that people just do not turn up. You say we cannot make that assertion because there is no evidence to support it. What I say is that this is a very complex area, because if I go and speak to the bloke who is running CDEP and say, 'Listen, mate, you've got 200 people on CDEP, it's 11 o'clock in the morning and I'd like to meet just one,' he looks blankly at the door. They are the people who are going to provide me with the evidence that it is working. Of course there is a huge vested interest in making sure that they are saying: 'Look, I'm doing my job. This is all fantastic. Of course everybody's working. They're just not here today, Nige—you came on the wrong Tuesday.' But when I spend the next 10 days in the community I actually understand what is going on, and it is a joke. People do not turn up. It is really difficult. Why don't they turn up? Because if the person who is running the CDEP program says, 'Right, mate, I'm going to be a strict liability bloke, if you don't turn up to work we can't pay you, you understand that?' they will do one of two things. They will walk away from CDEP or, if there are enough of them and there is not a strong cultural support for CDEP, they will get rid of the bloke who runs the CDEP program. That happens continually. The books will show that everybody has turned up, but I happen to know that they were not even in the community at that time. So how, in that environment, are we going to provide evidence that shows whether or not it is working effectively in the way that mainstream Australians would see as working effectively?

Prof. Altman—You are alluding to a very important issue. Fundamentally, all we can do in terms of an evidence base is have broadscale survey data that comes from surveys like NATSISS or from the census, or we can have case studies. There is no doubt that the statistical evidence from the census and NATSISS at a broad scale is enormous positive about CDEP, which is the point that I keep banging on about. The broadscale statistical evidence says that people work more and earn more and are able to mesh that work with other cultural activities. The case studies, which I think is what you were partly alluding to, that are documented in the literature are generally very positive. You are quite right that there might be a real moral hazard issue there—are the negative ones going to be in the literature or are they going to write their story? The answer is probably no. So I think we do have to accept—and I do not have any problem accepting—that some CDEP organisations operate very poorly and that there is a real need for capacity development, particularly on the issue you alluded to of the governance of the no work, no pay rule. That in itself is interesting because, as we know, CDEP does sit alongside welfare.

You do get communities—and one that, as you would know, I am very familiar with is Maningrida—where you have 550 people who are CDEP participants and my understanding is you have over 600 people there who are currently on Work for the Dole. There is one Work for the Dole program that engages about 20 of those 600 people. So you have a situation where people can move between CDEP and Work for the Dole, and this thing called Work for the Dole is actually a pseudonym for passive welfare and the people who are on CDEP know that. So how do you provide incentive for people to actually work when on CDEP, particularly when they have not got meaningful activity, is really difficult. This really is important in terms of the capacity of the CDEP organisation to actually make meaningful and productive work activities available to people. Again I think when things are working well is when organisations have that capacity and it can be a function of scale. If the organisation cannot actually give people an opportunity to engage in meaningful activity of course they are not going to turn up for work. People sometimes say to me—and I can understand that from their perspective—that there are

many other things to do in the community of a cultural or social nature that are better than sitting around doing nothing for CDEP.

Senator SCULLION—It is interesting—and we do not have time for this full conversation—that there seems to be a response that informs the process. Work for the Dole means you actually have to turn up to work or you are not supposed to get the dole. But we send the signal that it is still too hard. We need to say, ‘If you do not come to work you will be breached.’ No-one ever gets breached ever. So they say, ‘Well when you come and wave your finger at me it means nothing, absolutely zilch.’ So the return response for activity is: you do this and this will happen, but it doesn’t. So they know that whatever they do we, as a government and everybody across politics, are seeing this signal that completely disrupts what we are trying to achieve in the first place. I acknowledge the difficulties with breaching in communities and a whole range of other things.

Prof. Altman—Can I just say there that we also know that there are examples of situations, documented case studies and financial accounts that show that in some situations CDEP workers work full-time, generate the equivalent of full-time income for themselves and their families and, in some cases, work more than full-time hours in terms of standard measurements. For instance, they are on CDEP as a ranger for 20 or 30 hours a week and then also practise as an artist for 20 or 30 hours a week. So we know that there is no problem with incentive where the activities are there for people to participate in them.

Senator SCULLION—I guess one of the tragedies that I see, and I speak to young people in many areas that youth frequent, is that they see the CDEP as an aspiration. They see it as an end place. ‘What are you going to do when you grow up?’ ‘I want to be on CDEP.’

Such is the nature of the cultural prospective to the program—the program is not a training process and work experience program for a period of time—that it ends up with those people who have the most power in the community often sitting in those positions because that is the only employment process. If you get to CDEP it is the endgame. What can we do in terms of whether it is a skills audit or an opportunity audit for regional or CDEP areas to actually have a look at and try and have some sort of business incubators? We all pull our hair out about this over time but it seems that CDEP has not taken those opportunities and extended those skills in a business sense. With municipal services, you are up to your fetlocks in rubbish, that is an immediacy and CDEP needs to do some of that. Everybody in Maningrida would be a ranger tomorrow but you do not really need 1,200 rangers. You just do not need that and there is not the work for that. It is very similar wherever you find the ranger groups. There are far more people happy to recruit into a task of ranger. How are we going to deal with the CDEP? The notion was that you would move through this, you would get the skills and from there you would then move into real work or some other appreciation. What do you think the next step is in the reform of CDEP? We also have to have some reform about how we deal with the opportunities. How do you think we are going to take that first step?

Prof. Altman—Firstly, I think that an aspiration to be on CDEP is a lot more positive than an aspiration to be on Work for the Dole.

Senator SCULLION—Do you think that is just in the name?

Prof. Altman—No, I think it is—

Senator SCULLION—Much of that says, when the CDEP disappears, they say: ‘I hate the dole. I’ve got to go on the dole again.’

Prof. Altman—No. I think people recognise that CDEP gives them the capacity to earn more than they can under Work for the Dole.

Senator MOORE—Is that just because of the top-up?

Prof. Altman—It is partly the top-up but it is also because their CDEP organisations are going to give them sort of an architecture, a support—with equipment, vehicles, actual activities—

Senator MOORE—So the infrastructure of the program is better?

Prof. Altman—Absolutely.

Senator MOORE—I just wanted to clarify that.

Prof. Altman—One of the things that I found very interesting out of the NTER review report was the statistic that 1,300 people had exited from CDEP into proper work. So this notion that people will not exit CDEP, I think, has really been debunked. What worries me a little bit—and I have to say this—is that some of this so-called proper work was actually offering people salary that was less than what they could get under CDEP and top-up. So we really have to look into that issue.

But really the target of our policy should be those people who are unemployed and inactive. The only way we can address that issue, I think, is to give CDEP organisations more capacity and more participants. But part of that deal should be, as you say, to attract in more people who are genuinely unemployed. We also have to package in their training, which is again one of the positive aspirations of the discussion paper. But then we have to also incentivate the CDEP organisation to allow exit. But the question is: exit to do what? If, as in the Northern Territory, that exit is going to be limited to 2,000 positions, we know that that is not enough.

So, in a nutshell, what we need to do is to invest in growing local and regional economies so that there are more private sector opportunities there and we are not just dependent on public sector positions. I do quite agree with you that an audit of what is possible at local and regional levels is long overdue. It is a little bit like what I was saying earlier on in relation to Working on Country—the community has said: ‘Here are 10 positions. Do you want them?’ Of course they want them, but nobody has said, ‘Actually this community has got the capacity to take a hundred positions, so let’s make them that offer.’ So we are not matching what is locally possible realistically with what might be achieved in the development sense.

I ended up by making that comment about how we define development. We are still extraordinarily wedded to defining development in mainstream social indicator terms, whereas I think in many of these contexts, where you have got fundamental underdevelopment, we should be thinking much more in terms of a livelihoods approach, where you are actually looking to augment people’s activities, their wellbeing, their incomes. That does not need to be just through

public sector or free market engagement. It can also be through customary activities and in relation to the delivery of community services and in relation to self-provision.

I know that one of the issues that you are looking at is housing, and I think again there needs to be a lot more thought given to how people working on programs like CDEP can deliver appropriate housing to their constituents, their populations, rather than always having fly-in fly-out contractors coming and delivering these things because of financial imperatives in terms of how these contracts are delivered.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you for those responses. You reflected on a minister three years ago—it was probably Brough—and I supported a lot of those comments. One of the challenges we have is about the outstation movement and the homeland movement.

Prof. Altman—It was Senator Vanstone that started the—

Senator SCULLION—I was there throughout that process and probably fomented some of that. People started to look at it—‘What is this homeland thing? What is all that about?’ You talk about the antipathy. I think that same antipathy is about to spread significantly to CDEP. The reason there was antipathy about the homeland movement is that people looked at it and saw the reality as, ‘Why would we encourage children to be so far away from school that they will never get there? Why would we encourage families and communities to be so far away from services like health services and law and order services and all that sort of stuff?’ It had a very negative effect. People were talking quite seriously about that. One of the levers, of course, is to say, ‘We are not going to continue to support that.’ When it was discovered that many people who live on outstations actually now own two homes—there are some nuances in that, but we have to look at this through the prism of Australia.

Prof. Altman—Sure.

Senator SCULLION—If we are looking through the prism of the eyes of CDEP—I have to say that I have some sympathy for the acknowledgement of customary work and all those sorts of things, but if you tell the average Australian, ‘We now want to define “work” as telling stories, fishing and hunting, and about the notion of environmental services,’ we are going to lose the plot. I am not sure how we are going to have to contextualise this argument. I think we are going to see more antipathy towards CDEP in the same way. The environmental services story and the Arnhem protocol and those sorts of things are, I think, a sellable story; people understand that. The real issue is how we move to an area where the wider Australian community see this notion of work, and what segment of that can we do that in? As you said, environmental services is an important one. How do you think we should move? What is the next step in trying to have an appreciation of opportunities within language groups? What sort of jurisdictional level should start doing that, rather than the Commonwealth recommending it for this committee and FaHCSIA rushing off and saying, ‘That’s a good idea; let’s go and do it.’ Do you think that is something that CDEP themselves could do at that level or is it at a state or territory government level? Who do you think should actually be making that appreciation of an audit regarding not only the skills but also the opportunities?

Prof. Altman—I think you raise a really important issue. It is one that we are actually addressing in relation to a research project that we are undertaking called People on Country.

There is quite a bit of documentation about it on our website. The eight sites that we are working with are in your constituency in the Top End. That project is looking to generate a statistical base to show what the well-being and environmental outcomes from working on country and living on country are. It is not easy, because part of what we also want to do is empower the rangers to undertake the collection of that information themselves and, fundamentally, to advocate for themselves.

I think, though, that you allude to many issues. One is, of course, a fundamental inconsistency, possibly in Australian law. That is that, since the mid-1970s, land rights and native title law have provided Indigenous people a means to get legal ownership of their land. Some people have fought to get ownership of their land over decades through the Australian legal system. Once they get land and want to occupy it, we then turn around and say, 'Actually, you have no future on that land.' You can understand that people are reluctant, after a long struggle to get back their land, to just walk off it. I think also, in a policy sense, that we have to be honest about the fact that, in the 1970s right up to the 1990s, we were encouraging people to live on outstations. The larger home communities were seen as being more deficient in terms of health, crime, family stability and political tensions between groups.

Senator SCULLION—So if we are going to have a 180-degree handbrake turn on policy we should be cautious about—

Prof. Altman—I think we should be very cautious. People who work for me, who for instance work on education policy, are not so sure, as you might be, that educational outcomes from outstations are poorer than they are from the larger hub schools. You see some very positive outcomes in relation to education from kids who have their primary education at outstations, then do their secondary education in the hub community and then move on to be the rangers back on country, for example. Similarly with health, I think we have very mixed evidence about whether the lack of health services at outstations is not outweighed by the health benefits, particularly in dietary intake terms, of living at outstations and being active.

Finally, in relation to crime there is very little evidence that there is actually crime at outstations. Again, I think we need to be very cautious. Of course, there is also no policing at outstations but we have to be very cautious about what we suggest about these small remote communities. One of the things that surprised me, when I did a very rough exercise in that work *In search of an outstations policy*, is that many of the statistics in terms of housing infrastructure, people's employment levels and so on in remote areas were actually more positive at outstations than they were in the home communities. Under those circumstances, why would we want to encourage people to move to larger communities where we do not actually have the capacity to service them?

Senator SCULLION—I am getting a terribly savage look from my right-hand side. I have gone well over time. I may take the liberty of putting some questions on notice. Thanks very much.

Prof. Altman—Sure.

Senator MOORE—In view of the time I will just put one question on notice. I have a few questions, but we will not get to them. In terms of the suggestion about effective evidence base

and also the effective way of benchmarking and providing evidence, would you be able to give us some information on notice on how you think that should operate? It is a common theme throughout most of the work in this area. Everyone talks about it, but I would think from your perspective from your job you could give us some idea about how that should operate and what we should do.

Prof. Altman—I would be very happy to.

Senator SIEWERT—Senator Scullion asked the question that I wanted to ask about economic development.

ACTING CHAIR—I have one question that I would like you to take on notice regarding local government and how they deal with the outstations. In the Kimberley there are quite a number of problems and we did have evidence at Fitzroy Crossing of a number of people moving out to outstations in groups of 20 or 30. Then the shire is trying to cope with that problem. Would you be able to provide that for me?

Prof. Altman—Certainly. Again I think you will see great difference between northern Queensland, the Northern Territory and the north of WA in relation to how shire or local governments deal with outstation populations. We could certainly say something about that.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much and thank you for your evidence and for your submission.

Prof. Altman—Thank you.

[10.05 am]

CATTERMOLE, Ms Amanda Jane, Group Manager, Indigenous Remote Service Delivery, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

JAMES, Mr Matthew, Branch Manager, Performance and Evaluation Branch, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

MATTHEWS, Mr Gavin Andrew, Acting Branch Manager, Welfare Payments Reform Branch, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

MOODY, Ms Donna, Group Manager, Program Performance, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

YATES, Mr Bernard, Deputy Secretary, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. As you know, we have said that we will defer our formal inquiry into the Northern Territory emergency response until 2009. However, as you would appreciate, the Northern Territory emergency response is having an impact on policy and services all around Australia, so the committee may wish to ask you questions about that. The committee is very happy for you to take questions on notice if you need to. You are aware of parliamentary privilege. Do you have an opening statement for us?

Mr Yates—I do not have a substantive statement. I just have a few brief remarks to make before then leaving as much time as possible for the committee to put questions to us. I understand that there was an attempt earlier in the year, as the committee's work got underway, to come together and for the department to assist with some background briefing. That, mainly for scheduling reasons, could not occur. I reiterate the department's availability to assist the committee at any stage, including as you move forward to further rounds of visits in other locations. If we can assist with having our local experts provide background support and information to the committee then that is a standing offer and I would invite the committee to take advantage of it.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Mr Yates—We are privy to the initial report of the committee. The terms of reference that you are working with are very wide and it was hard to judge how we could best provide assistance today, so the department has drawn in a number of people from a wide range of areas in the event that you want to pick up any number of topics. We stand ready to assist the committee through the questioning process.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much and thank you to the members of your department for coming.

Senator MOORE—Because NTER has taken so much of the time and effort of policy over the last 12 to 18 months, how is the department operating in terms of allocation of resources towards NTER issues and the division of labour, as opposed to ongoing issues of policy around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicing?

Mr Yates—You would be aware that there was quite substantial additional resourcing made available to support it. Of course we have invested quite a significant body of resources in the NT itself, particularly through the operations centre that was established there but also through our Northern Territory state office. The NT is its core business and the NTER has become a significant part of its activity. Within the national office, a number of different areas of the organisation have played a significant role in supporting the various measures. In terms of broad coordination, Ms Moody has had a major role. In terms of specific initiatives, whether it is CDEP or the income management dimensions, the relevant expert areas of the organisation have been provided with additional resources to play their part in that, alongside the ongoing policy and program work that we continue to be responsible for.

Senator MOORE—So within an area there would be the general ongoing work but there could well be extra resources that are identified for NTER purposes. Is that right?

Mr Yates—In the broad, yes, although clearly you will have people who are wearing more than one hat in that regard. We had to move very quickly. Whilst we were recruiting additional capacity, obviously many of our existing resources were directed at assisting the establishment of the emergency response and the rollout of the measures.

Senator SIEWERT—I would like to follow on from the questions Senator Moore was asking. Could we get a feel for how coordination between agencies is operating. Is it still the approach that ICCs are going to be maintained? How is coordination between agencies now handled for a whole of government approach of delivery of services? Is that still the policy approach?

Senator MOORE—And the model.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, is the model the same or has it changed? If it has changed, could you tell us what that is, please?

Mr Yates—This is across Australia generally?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. The previous government moved to the whole of government approach, with the OIPC; ICCs were established. I would like to know that model is still the model. If it is not, how has it shifted?

Mr Yates—It has been evolving. Since its establishment in 2004 it has been progressively evolving. It is not just the change of government that has caused some further development in the way in which the whole of government model has been applied. It still essentially is a whole of government arrangement but it is changing in a number of respects. We continue to have a focus at ministerial level and also a Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs that exists to provide senior bureaucratic oversight of the progress of the Indigenous affairs policies of the government of the day. That is in turn supported by a number of other mechanisms internally, to

bring agencies together. Clearly a practical example of that very dramatically, I suppose, was the Northern Territory Emergency Response itself, where there is a whole of government project management board that I chair that oversees progress as well as the resourcing that is on the ground and the operations centre led by Major General Chalmers.

With the new government's particular focus around the Close the Gap strategy and the work that is proceeding through COAG, there has been some quite important further development in the whole of government model towards more whole of governments model. Federal, state and territory governments, through a working group on Indigenous reform, have been progressing what is necessary to translate those broad targets into improved action on the ground: what we need to do in order to close those gaps and progress towards those targets. Particularly through the working group on Indigenous reform but a number of the other working groups as well, on housing and health and the productivity agenda, have all been focusing effort on how both targeted initiatives and general programs and services for Australian citizens can achieve better results for Indigenous people. A lot of that work is coming to a culmination, I expect, at the next COAG meeting. That is a very significant major boost in momentum in our whole of government work as a result of that activity with COAG, the reform of the financial relationships between federal and state and territory governments and in particular some specific areas of work. One of which will be of interest to the committee in particular is the development of the reform proposal on remote service delivery to Indigenous people. This is a proposal that has been developed within the working group on Indigenous reform. It was called for by COAG and a proposal has been developed and will be considered at the next COAG meeting.

In terms of the Indigenous Coordination Centres, they still exist, they still operate. Their composition has changed over time partly because machinery of government changes have moved resources and responsibilities between agencies. FaHCSIA, for example, now has responsibility for the CDEP program. Previously it was DEWR. DEWR had a very significant presence in ICCs as a result of that involvement. Those staff are now with our department.

So the mix, if you like, of agency representation in the ICCs has been changing. To some extent, some agencies have been managing their work differently. They have been managing contracts and funding agreements not through staff in the ICC but through staff in regional or state centres. So there has been evolution in the way in which agencies have managed the business.

We have done a number of evaluations of various areas of our whole-of-government work over the last four or five years. They are all now largely published, I am pretty sure, and on our website, including an evaluation of the ICC model which made a number of recommendations about how it needed to change over time. They are things that the Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs is considering.

Senator SIEWERT—They are considering the report on the ICCs?

Mr Yates—Yes. They periodically review the implementation of the model and its effectiveness, and there is focus in particular on the state of play with the ICCs, especially in light of the emerging agenda from COAG and in light of the experience with the Northern Territory Emergency Response, obviously. There has been a very different approach applied there, with a dedicated operations centre, which we are learning lessons from. Doing whole-of-

government is very much a work in progress. What we are doing very now is very different in a number of important ways from what we were doing on day one in July 2004. I expect there will be further change, especially in light of COAG's decisions.

Senator SIEWERT—You said that they were going to the next COAG meeting.

Mr Yates—Yes. All the reform proposals, as well as the reform specific purpose payments, are on the table for the next COAG meeting.

Senator MOORE—You said that that goes back to the interdepartmental secretaries meeting—how the ICCs are going—and they are reviewed. Is that a formal review or is it just the kind of ongoing consideration of how things operate that happens in every public sector organisation?

Mr Yates—It is a mixture. There is periodic review and updating of key information, but we also conducted last year a major independent evaluation of the ICCs.

Senator MOORE—And that was through OIPC?

Mr Yates—Yes. Perhaps I should just elaborate a little bit. When OIPC was initially established, as a consequence of the machinery-of-government changes post ATSIC, it was a very substantial organisation—stand-alone, dedicated. Since its integration into the FaHCSIA portfolio, there is still a dedicated Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination group, but a number of the other functions that were performed by OIPC, including a number of program areas, have been aligned within FaHCSIA to get synergies. So it is more embedded, if you like, in the wider organisation.

We sought, obviously, to exploit those synergies so that FaHCSIA could bring to bear its broader program and policy capability to support the work that OIPC as we knew it was doing, so that the organisation more broadly, whether it is responsible for mainstream programs and policies and payments or whether it is responsible for Indigenous-specific programs, is now marshalled to provide a lead not only in policy and coordination terms but also in terms of its role as a program and policy department in the Indigenous affairs area.

But other departments continue to have critical roles and responsibilities, and we coordinate actively with them on any pieces of policy work that sensibly require multiple agency focus. For example, the CDEP reform progress that is currently in train is very much a joint-venture with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Senator SIEWERT—Which are those areas that you have said were in OIPC that have now been embedded in the department? Does that mean we have gone back to how it used to be?

Mr Yates—No. How it used to be when? What we were concerned to avoid was having all of the Indigenous programs up at one end of the organisation. For example, with Indigenous housing, the Community Housing and Infrastructure Program, what we looked at was how to get better synergies between that program and mainstream housing programs and policies so that they were not operating in a partitioned way.

We wanted to try to ensure that the best of our understanding, knowledge and skills in our mainstream responsibilities of the department were informing and supporting, and being educated by, the area of the department that was dealing specifically with Indigenous housing. That is, again, something that you obviously evolve over time to see how you can get the best organisational arrangements to support the government of the day. But there is still a very strong Indigenous focus in the organisation, both as a whole-of-government leader within the Australian government and, indeed, in our relationships with the states and territories, but also in terms of our program responsibilities as a department.

Senator SIEWERT—You said that you had developed targets for the Close the Gap project.

Mr Yates—The government, supported by COAG as a whole, has announced six targets and timelines towards which its Close the Gap efforts will be directed.

Senator SIEWERT—Is it the OIPC that is responsible ultimately for those six targets and timelines?

Mr Yates—No. All governments are going to be responsible for playing their part in advancing the achievement of those.

Senator SIEWERT—I get that. What I meant was—if I have to be specific—who is responsible for ensuring that those timelines and deadlines are ultimately met? Who do we ping when we come here to estimates and we want to know whether or not they have been met?

Mr Yates—I am sorry to say that there is not a single person to be pinged. We provide the leadership role, so we will be providing the evaluation and progress reports and supports around that. Clearly, if you are looking to understand the contribution that health initiatives are making to closing the gap on child mortality, for example, then we would refer to our colleagues from the Department of Health and Ageing in that contribution. Ditto in terms of closing the gap in literacy, numeracy and reading outcomes. The primary lead, in terms of the drive within the Australian government in that regard will be our colleagues in DEEWR. Having said that, we know that these issues—as your first report properly recognised—are necessarily interrelated. School performance is not unrelated to overcrowding in homes; it is not unrelated to whether the children have hearing troubles, and so forth. We provide a central part of the governance of a whole-of-government approach and we take responsibility for trying to bring the strategy together and to bring the other agencies together on issues as they arise so that they are not just looked at in isolation in what you would have described as the old way of doing things, where individual silo departments look at the thing from their narrow point of view and only view the bits that they think they are responsible for.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to go on to some specific issues. The last time we met at estimates we talked about the new income quarantining approach to child protection. Has any progress been made on which communities income quarantining in the Kimberley will be rolled out into?

Mr Matthews—At the last estimates we pretty much got to the point where we said that we were finalising the communities with the Western Australian government and we would announce those as soon as the agreement had been reached and finalised. Obviously the

discussions have progressed. We are hoping that we are not very far from being in a position to provide all that information.

Senator SIEWERT—How soon do you think that will be?

Mr Matthews—I would not like to predict exactly. We would hope it is fairly soon. We believe we are a pretty reasonable way along that path and pretty close to getting it all finalised and being in a position to provide all the information and announce it. Obviously that is subject to two governments ultimately finalising the agreement.

Senator SIEWERT—Are these also trials? Is the income quarantining in both Cannington and the Kimberley a trial, similar to the trials that are being undertaken for schooling requirements?

Mr Matthews—Income management, in the case of child protection, is essentially a trial. It is in those two areas initially. The government's announcement on that has been around putting those trials in, assessing whether they work and then considering whether they would be extended on that basis.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to go now to assessing whether they work. I am asking similar questions here to those I asked last week of DEEWR on school attendance issues. Who is doing the evaluation of the trials? Is that framework in place yet? Can you give us a copy of that framework?

Mr Matthews—My answers are probably similar to DEEWR's. We do have funding of \$300,000 for the evaluation of that in 2008-09. I think we said at the estimates hearing last time that the evaluation is part of the bilateral agreement, so we are obviously including that from the outset in the discussions with the Western Australian government around that. We will be looking to engage a firm to do that, but a lot of the detail around what information is collected et cetera is the detail of what is being finalised with the Western Australian government at the moment. Probably similar to DEEWR's answer last week, I do not think any decision to release the actual evaluation strategy has been taken, but I can certainly take it back and ask whether it would or would not be. I do not want to commit either way if it is not really my decision.

Senator SIEWERT—In terms of the evaluation, this is a trial process to see if it works. Are you then setting up a comparison with another approach? What are you using to say that this works better than this approach? How do we know that it is actually the best approach?

Mr Matthews—In terms of the child protection income management, it is a tool that we are giving the Western Australian government as part of their case management approach, so in some sense there is not a direct comparator to that particular model, apart from whether the tool has been of benefit for the Western Australian child protection workers. That is essentially the thing we need to measure.

Mr Yates—It is fair to say that, where those tools are not being applied, then those other situations across WA, which may not be obviously comparable in an exact sense, provide a reference point against which to compare and contrast the trial.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry. What was that?

Mr Yates—There are two things you can test the trial against: one is the history that existed in the community prior to the trial and the other is the fact that those communities are now undergoing a trial, whereas other communities that you might compare them with in WA will not be. So you have two points of comparison to assess whether or not the trial is improving things or not—comparing to the history of what existed previously in the same communities, or comparing to other communities in Western Australia which are not undergoing the trial and which are simply continuing to operate according to the historical arrangements.

Senator SIEWERT—Have you had advice on whether that method works?

Mr Matthews—Before answering that question, it is also worth noting that these measures do not work in the same way as in the NT income management, which is on a whole-of-community basis. They apply more to the individual level. Obviously it works on it being triggered by the Western Australian child protection workers making a decision in relation to a specific family or individual.

Senator SIEWERT—My question still stands. Have you sought professional advice or ethical advice on the nature of the trials you are undertaking?

Mr Matthews—Within FaHCSIA there is a research and evaluation branch. It is made up of evaluation and research professionals whom we have consulted with. We have also engaged with the Western Australian department and their evaluation experts. We are also intending to engage an external firm to assist with the evaluation as well.

Senator SIEWERT—So you have not had at this stage any independent advice on the approach that has been taken?

Mr Matthews—If by ‘independent’ you mean external to either our department or the Western Australian government, not at this stage.

Senator SIEWERT—Can you remind me how much the Western Australian side of the income quarantining part is costing?

Mr Matthews—It is \$18.9 million.

Senator SIEWERT—I am sorry for being a bit dense but is this completely separate to the money that is going in for the other trial, the school attendance trial?

Mr Matthews—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. From memory, that is \$17.3 million.

Mr Matthews—It is approximately \$17½ million.

Senator SIEWERT—And this is completely separate?

Mr Matthews—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Can you take on notice what that is to pay for. I know you have told me the detail, I am sorry, but I do not have that here.

Mr Matthews—No, we undertook at estimates to provide you with the breakdown so that will come to you in that package of answers.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. That is just a Commonwealth expenditure, isn't it? Is there a matching contribution from the state?

Mr Matthews—The Commonwealth has announced the new budget measure and provided funding for it. The West Australian government have not made a subsequent announcement in that way; they are obviously managing that within the resources of the Department of Child Protection.

Senator SIEWERT—Has a baseline study been done in the communities—I am thinking particularly of the Kimberley communities—of the causal factors we have just been discussing, like the quality of the housing, the overcrowding, access to education and health care et cetera? With all due respect, Mr Yates, I have some terrible trouble with just comparing one community against another community without actually putting in place a proper evaluation framework, because all those things are causal factors.

Mr Matthews—That is probably why I was pointing towards the fact that the measure works on a more individual basis. Because the numbers within a community might ultimately be very low, we probably will not be measuring the community as a whole, either pre or post. What we are looking towards is measuring whether the measure has had an impact on the individual and the child.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you go in and look at what their personal circumstances are in terms of lack of housing, access to education et cetera?

Mr Matthews—In terms of the theory of the measure, those factors are connected up to open case management of a family by the West Australian Department of Child Protection. So those are the matters that the Department of Child Protection, in actively case managing a family, would have regard to.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand from our previous discussions that the department will make the decision to require income quarantine.

Mr Matthews—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Will Centrelink review the circumstances to make sure that the department has made the correct call?

Mr Matthews—In a broad sense no. Obviously the Western Australian Department of Child Protection are the identified experts in the subject area and have the direct contact with the family in terms of case managing the issues they have, so they are the ones who are best placed

to do that. So in a broad sense Centrelink will not, but the bilateral agreement will set out the framework and the principles et cetera, so there will be ongoing governance and monitoring of the effectiveness of the referral process.

Senator SIEWERT—So the department makes the call. You do not know if they have actually a fully reviewed—

Mr Matthews—I think it would be difficult for a Centrelink worker to be second-guessing the child protection worker. Essentially, as I said, the theory is that we are providing a tool to the Western Australian Department of Child Protection and their child protection workers for them to make that assessment within the framework of the initiative.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you very much again for coming before this committee. Your lives must just be committees, Mr Yates! There seems to be a common thread. This committee is essentially looking at how things are going in the intervention and doing some general comparative analysis with how things are going outside of the intervention, and it has the capacity to make recommendations along the way. Of course, all of those comparisons need a database, and I think we have all acknowledged that whatever database we have should be better. You have just come through a review. Perhaps on notice you might like to make some comments on the following. In what areas do you think we need better baseline data to measure the effectiveness of not only the intervention but others areas of our broad purview, which I do not want to go into describing prescriptively but I think you understand? What general areas do you think we need to identify to start doing some more work in, like asking the ABS extra questions?

Mr Yates—I will take that on notice in terms of a comprehensive response.

Senator SCULLION—If you could.

Mr Yates—In the NTER experience, we have obviously learnt a lot and gained a lot from having improved resources—particularly community-level data and understanding, which either did not exist before or, where they did exist, had not been shared across jurisdictions. The Northern Territory government has been quite proactive here in putting on the table information that it has recognised as integral to our appreciation of how we work together across levels of government. That has been quite a breakthrough, and that is reflected in the monitoring reports that we have now done. Those reports were integral in assisting the review board in its work, because they made available a picture of things at a very disaggregated level, which the review board would have never had from official sources from the past. That is not to say that everything that is important is now being tracked, but it was a quantum leap—certainly regarding tracking of developments in remote communities.

The work that I referred to earlier in Close the Gap is leading to a very significant focus on what it is that we do not know, from whatever source, that it is critical for us to know to be able to effectively track progress in various targets or what you might describe as proxy measures—for example, life expectancy. Only a number of jurisdictions currently feed data through on mortality to inform life expectancy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. We have identified that as a critical gap and we have been working with our jurisdictional colleagues to

say, 'Look, this really now needs to be a priority; we need all jurisdictions to have that data together so that we can look at this issue in a robust way both nationally and at the jurisdictional level and, where possible, on a more disaggregated level.' One of the subgroups of the Working Group on Indigenous Reform is the Building the Evidence Base subgroup, which has been unpacking these issues quite intensively and seeking to identify where there are serious gaps, with a view to making recommendations to COAG next year about what needs to be done to plug those. Sorry it has taken a while to answer that question. That work could inform, and we would be pleased to update the committee on how that work is pointing towards the most serious current gaps or deficiencies in better shedding light on our regional and remote work.

In parallel with that, over recent years we have been working intensively in a number of different communities, including in the Kimberley. To varying degrees we have committed resources for baseline profiling of the communities. That can be incredibly expensive if you go for a Rolls-Royce model and try to get a very comprehensive picture. It is probably not going to be practicable to do that in every location that we may work in, so we have been trying to look at what streamlined community profile it is essential to have as a baseline to measure progress or regress as you apply various measures. We have been putting quite a bit more effort into that, because unfortunately Indigenous data has historically been very patchy and in some areas nonexistent, and the more disaggregated you go, the weaker the database is.

I mentioned that often agencies at different levels of government may have information, say, on educational performance on a community or at a regional level, but historically there has been a reluctance to share that. If you do not get down and dirty about understanding enrolment, attendance and then the factors that may be contributing to weaknesses there, you are really just dancing around the issues. I think the committee is right to say we have to have a much better sharing of the available data, quite apart from investing in new sources of data. There has been an unreadiness to put all of the available information on the table. We need to get some real breakthroughs in that area, but I will come back to your question on notice.

Senator SCULLION—It is my intention to seek the support of my colleagues to speak to organisations who collect data, particularly the ABS, about what their intention is with their 2006 document so that they perhaps make some additions to it. If it looks like we are cutting across something that you are already doing, you might want to let the committee know.

Mr Yates—Yes.

Senator SCULLION—That will be a way to understand what is actually happening at the moment in terms of the database, and if you could do that in between sessions I would appreciate it. I imagine you are doing that sort of thinking in any event, and we do not want to be reinventing the wheel. It is going to be difficult to make a comparative analysis about how well the intervention is going because we did not have much data before it started in those areas. Whilst acknowledging that, Close the Gap is an Australia-wide aspiration. Through the COAG process we are now working on saying: 'Here is the vision. Here is the position specifically. We are going to be there, there and there, and these are the time lines.' Anecdotally, there have been some less controversial measures, such as actually having law and order in communities. I think the health checks are widely accepted across committees with a few exceptions. Insofar as demographics we have only done young people, but perhaps doing aged people as well could be of benefit. Have any of the other governments around Australia indicated that they will be doing

the same sorts of things? So we have a benchmark to start from, are there any other intervention type philosophies, in a non-emergency sense, that could give us some benchmarks about where to start from as part of those COAG discussions? I accept you may not be able to answer that, and there is no mischief in my question. I am just trying to find out where these governments might be going to enact some of these processes.

Mr Yates—Obviously they are best placed to talk about how they are approaching this, but clearly there are some parallel activities to what is being done in aspects of the Northern Territory Emergency Response. The whole issue of extending police presence has been an issue in WA since the Gordon report. We have been working with the WA government to assist them with the rollout of multifunction police facilities and the like. Ditto in the South Australian context in the APY Lands, which has been added to by the recent report of the Commonwealth funded Mullighan inquiry. We have provided investment there to assist with the extension of policing and child protection facilities in those locations, just as an example.

There have been initiatives on health checks that preceded the Northern Territory emergency response, which I believe happened in other parts of the country at a limited level. Again, I would probably have to defer to my colleagues from the Department of Health and Ageing as to whether, in their engagement with the other jurisdictions, the issues of health checks and some of the experiences of the NT are informing how they may be doing business differently. I am sure that will be the case in a number of areas.

Obviously, with where we are going on CDEP reform, we are trying to approach that across country rather than just the next steps in the Northern Territory Emergency Response. I think it is fair to say that, in looking forward to where we go with the Northern Territory, we have been wanting to ensure that we align it much more fully to the broader strategy which is evolving now through COAG, that we link it into the closing-the-gap approach. That way, there will be opportunities for mutual learning across, as well as within, jurisdictions about what is going to work best to close gaps on child mortality or on educational outcomes or on employment outcomes so that we are all moving collaboratively in the same direction.

I think it is fair to say that there has been a lot of good and useful work that has happened over a long time but it has not been driven by a common vision and set of targets and a methodology at a high level with a very strong commitment to measurement and progress and the accountability that comes from that. We need to be honest that we are going to actually measure how we are going. There is also this issue of the methodology of how we work.

This work on a remote service delivery strategy that has been worked up across the jurisdictions is the first time in my experience that governments have worked across the table to try and identify what methodology would be most functional for them to guide their work into the future in remote Australia. So that augurs well. Next year there will be a dedicated COAG meeting looking at the overall approach to closing the gap, to consider an integrated strategy and a number of other key elements of the initiatives that we will be working on between now and then.

Senator SCULLION—You touched on the CDEP. Again, that is not only in the intervention area; it is across the board. I know you were present when I was asking questions of Professor Altman. It is interesting to note that CDEP has come across now from, as some would say, those

terribly nasty, hard buggers in that other department to these really nice, happy and gentle people in FaHCSIA. People used to always tell me that—that it was just terrible and it should come back to FaHCSIA.

I fear the issue about being fair dinkum about sending a consistent message, whether we are breaching people for not turning up for Work for the Dole or CDEP programs and the disfunctionality of that. I fear that, if there is no compliance regime at all, it really undermines the whole process. People feel quite proud about being part of some CDEP programs—proud to wear a uniform, proud to get out. It is a great thing. But, if we as a government and across governments do not maintain that, I think that is a significant risk.

I have travelled recently to a number of communities. I guess the single common denominator is that CDEP continues to be a complete joke, in my view. I have travelled extensively, and I am being very cautious not to offend anyone particularly, but at one place, out of 15 people who were on the program, eight people turned up and the one who stayed the longest stayed for 11 minutes. The coordinator said, 'If I hassle them to stay longer, they'll just leave.' I said, 'Well, what happens?' The answer was, 'Nothing.' There is no breaching. There is nobody to say what has happened. I believe that has been happening over governments over time and it happens differently in different places.

Have you got a bit of a plan to deal with people moving between the Work for the Dole processes and the CDEP processes? Who is responsible for it? We talk about 'desiloisation'. Are Centrelink making the decisions? Who is informing those decisions? What is the linkage between the people who are running CDEP, the GBM? What is the way forward in that particular arena? I know it is a long, tough question, but it is an area of concern. We do need, as a fundamental part of moving ahead in terms of employment, to deal with that disfunctionality.

Mr Yates—I am going to ask Ms Cattermole to speak to that, but I do not think you should draw any conclusions about the transfer of the program to FaHCSIA as going from hard to soft. As someone who has spent 21 years in DEWR, I do not feel any softer than I used to be when I worked there. Indeed, we were very strongly concerned—the mere transfer of the function did not mean that it was somehow moving to a new world. As Ms Cattermole will now outline, this has been very much a strong joint venture with our colleagues in DEEWR.

Ms Cattermole—I am the Group Manager of the Indigenous Remote Service Delivery Group. One of the areas we have carriage of is the CDEP program. As you all know, it is currently under reform. In answer to your question, I will just outline how those proposals are about the way in which the new CDEP works. I will do that by trying to answer the elements you have raised. The proposal is that, from 1 July of next year, there would be a reformed CDEP program—a much more targeted program—which would be focused on two key streams of work, one being a work readiness stream and the other being a community development stream. People coming onto CDEP from that time will be required to register with the Universal Employment Service—I think it is called the employment service now—which is, as you know, the reformed Job Network and Work for the Dole brought together in a new way. They will then be on income support through that system, but they will be able to access, in remote Australia, parallel servicing as part of the services that are offered to assist them with things like moving into a job.

There are a couple of key issues to draw out on that one. One is that everyone will be registered with the UES, which means that that will be the primary way in which the compliance regime will work for individuals. The key vehicle through which that assistance will work will be the Employment Pathway Plan that each individual under the UES will be required to have. That will do two things. It will ensure that the compliance regimes are the same for everybody. There is certainly discussion. I cannot go through the detail of where DEEWR are up to but they are certainly working very strongly on that compliance regime. That will be the same for all Indigenous job seekers. The other key component is that, in remote Australia, there will be CDEP providers, UES providers and, potentially, people working with the Indigenous Employment Program as well. They will be required to enter into service level agreements with each other about the way in which they deliver services to individuals on the ground. Organisationally, they will be contractually required to be linked in that way and to agree on the way in which they deliver services.

Senator SIEWERT—Who is that?

Ms Cattermole—The CDEP providers and the UES providers. Potentially, in certain cases, it might also be someone providing Indigenous Employment Program services. I suspect it is less likely to be all three but, certainly, two of the three in different places is highly likely. They will have these service level agreements. We are working through the detail now, but the intent is about the way in which they work together. That will also be reflected in their funding agreements. They will have to sit down together and work out the way in which they will provide that assistance to individuals. Then the compliance regime, as I said, will be through their registration with the Universal Employment Service and the assistance will be through their Employment Pathway Plan. Organisationally, they will be better linked and the compliance regime will be strengthened and will be the same for all Indigenous job seekers in remote Australia.

ACTING CHAIR—Can I just ask a question on that? Have you had any consultations undertaken since the release of the CDEP reforms? Have you actually been out and had consultation with the different communities?

Ms Cattermole—Yes we have. As a quick background, we have had two sets of consultations. The first was in around May-June of this year. We went out to about 37 capital cities and regional centres and quite a large number of remote communities. We talked to about 2,000 people at that time, asking questions about what works and what does not work for the CDEP and the IEP programs. We synthesised all of that material as well as a whole lot of written submissions, of which we got more than 120. Recently the government released a discussion paper that was a proposed model. We have just recently completed a round of consultations saying: ‘This is the proposal. What do people think about it?’ We are right now in the middle of drawing that material together to provide advice to government on what we heard in that second round of consultations.

ACTING CHAIR—Will the feedback that you get be in the form of a report?

Ms Cattermole—We had scribes at every community and public meeting that we held, so we have details of what was discussed at each meeting. Written submissions closed just last week,

and so far we have at least 50 or 60 of them. It will be about drawing out all the details from that material.

ACTING CHAIR—Would you be able to provide the committee with a list of the places that you went to and also the feedback?

Ms Cattermole—We are still drawing that together, so there may be a timing issue. We can perhaps take that on notice as we work through it at the moment. We are just in the middle of that right now, but we can certainly provide you with a list of everywhere we have been in the last three or four weeks.

ACTING CHAIR—As it comes to hand, we would be very happy to have that feedback. It would really help the committee on that issue.

Senator SCULLION—If I ask you a question for information generally and you have already supplied it through the estimates process, please identify it that way. I am interested in a couple of statistical things that I think will be very useful. In terms of the CDEP, we know Bawinanga may have 512 people registered and we know that they all rock up and get paid, but are you currently looking at what they actually do—have we built 400 miles of fence et cetera—so that we can say in a particular CDEP what the outcome was? We know numbers and all those normal things that we have to look at in terms of transparency, but what about some of the other outcomes? Some of them are a little bit difficult to craft. We talked to Professor Altman about the weirder ones that the mainstream might perhaps not see as work. Outstations have been engaged in a whole range of those customary and cultural activities as part of CDEP. It would be very useful if we could have some sort of document that quantifies that. We are trying to do the CDEP model, and once again we are throwing the same sized net into a creek expecting to catch different sized fish. It would be useful to be able to say: this is a very remote area, so this is the percentage of non-passive activities that were undertaken under CDEP. I suspect that the percentages of customary and cultural activities would change as a function of employment opportunity. I think that would be a valuable piece of information. I know it is a difficult, but it would be useful to get hold of some of those figures.

That is a segue into regional development. My personal view is that the GBMs in the communities have by and large done an absolutely excellent job, far better than I think anybody really expected. Those in that coordination role have had to do, as usual, far more than was intended. They have been very, very useful. When we talk about employment difficulties, the difficulty in those communities really is that there is no employment. There is nothing to do. That is the real issue if you cut to it. In terms of engaging in the future—forget about breaching and all that sort of rubbish—the really important thing is to provide more opportunities. Over the 20 years I have been engaged with many of these communities, people have talked about regional development and having some regional development capacity, but it has flatlined. Perhaps you could take this notice: what role do you think the GBMs could play in coordinating regional development? They have already been well accepted into the communities by and large and are engaging in terms of being desiloesation individuals. Do you think there is a capacity somebody to be responsible for determining an audit on skills and opportunities within that region or coordinating the general issues in regional development and having discussions with the community about what sorts of things they are interested in in terms of employment? Obviously FaHCSIA is responsible for the intervention and the answer will be embargoed to the

Northern Territory, but could there be somebody who gets out of bed every day and is actually responsible for regional development and providing new employment opportunities in these communities?

Mr Yates—Ultimately it is employers who provides opportunities to people, not public servants. But your point is well taken, that the particular locational advantage of having people on the ground day in, day out is a source of significant intelligence about missed opportunities or emerging opportunities that could provide a chance for jobs. So we would see the GBMs as playing a very practical local intelligence role in that respect. You are also right that they end up being jack of a lot of trades because they are a key educated resource, experienced and knowledgeable about government and how it does things. They can act as a broker in connecting people in the community, for example who want to start up a small business, to relevant assistance such as the Indigenous Business Australia business development program.

I guess our view is that we cannot overload the GBM, but in terms of some of the activity you referred to about auditing skills, looking at what opportunities might be there, what jobs are in a community that might be able to be performed by locals rather than people who have come in from outside and so how do we optimise the local jobs for local people. Also governments are spenders in communities and often they contract-in work in ways that do not take advantage of what some of the locals could contribute to that. That has been an important issue in the next steps in our major housing investments in the NT but we look to extend that in other jurisdictions as well, because the way we have done housing historically has just not done anything near enough to create and support opportunities and training for locals who could then become your workforce for repairs and maintenance rather than flying in electricians, plumbers and so forth from capital cities. Ms Cattermole might be able to add to that significantly but, yes, the GBM is a significant investment. It is costly but we have got to get the best result from it.

I expect that the GBM will need to interact with other capacity, maybe at the regional central level, who may come in and help with some of that dedicated work on auditing services and job opportunities and potential. We do need to get down and start doing some more systematic community planning. I know the initial focus of the GBM was on assisting with the roll-out of the measures. I think we have got to go beyond that to looking to the future possibilities for the community more widely, including the way in which we are spending the money that we have been putting through a whole host of other avenues prior to the NTER. That is very much the focus of this work we are doing with the states and territories through COAG: what methodology should we be working to across levels of government in building a better future for the communities, whether it is opportunities for people in the community or it is ways to assist members of the community to become job ready to access jobs that may be outside the community. You are right, even if every job in a community was performed by a local, we still would have a lot of people who in many cases are still without work. We have to find bridges for them to access opportunities for work elsewhere and help them keep connected back to their home communities while they are away. But Ms Cattermole might be able to add to that too.

Ms Cattermole—I was just going to illustrate with a couple of examples. The first one coming to mind, as Mr Yates was speaking, was around the Strategic Indigenous Housing Infrastructure Program, or SIHIP, in the Northern Territory. One of the key elements there, as I am sure you will know already, is the emphasis on ensuring that we get high-level Indigenous employment and training outcomes out of that. The challenge is making sure that, firstly, that is

embedded in really strongly and it is not the thing that falls away when the challenges come for the program; and secondly, that the planning is done very early and upfront to ensure that we are maximising people getting into that space early. So, for example, the way in which the program is structured is such that the taking of an audit and engaging with communities is done up to 12 months prior to anything actually occurring on the ground in terms of construction. That is slightly shorter in some of the areas of construction that will start, say, for example, early in the New Year. But, ideally, with the program there will be up to 12 months between that first engagement where there will be a skills audit taken and there will be discussions with communities about people's aspirations, what kinds of skills and experience they already exists, what kind of training might be needed in the interim period and how we can maximise that. We have also established housing reference groups, which are made up of community members with the skills and experience to help provide that advice and to provide information to the community about the stages of the program, what is coming when, and then make sure that we have built in all of that right in upfront. So by the time construction is ready we have the maximum number of people ready to be involved.

Senator SCULLION—If it is possible, I will put those questions—the dry things about how many houses and all that sort of stuff—on notice. The last issue I want to talk about is this. You obviously have a focus about bringing all those impacts under FaHCSIA in terms of the intervention and through the COAG process, bringing things into the one place in terms of responsibility. There are two areas that have proved to be the biggest opportunities, particularly in remote Indigenous communities, in terms of employment. One is so-called environmental services and the other is art. Art is notionally out there with the department that handles art, but they do not look at it as mainstream employment. It is not their focus; their focus is that it is art, it is wonderful, we sell it, we look at it and it is beautiful. But from the COAG perspective—and the real importance, for me anyway—this is the biggest employment opportunity. So it is more in the work area. What sort of relationship do you have with the government departments that are responsible for art generally? Have you had discussions about trying to mainstream this, as in mainstream employment opportunity, rather than the way art is normally looked at?

Mr Yates—There are two points on that one, Senator. Firstly, it is true to say that embedded in a lot of CDEP work are real jobs. Many of them are government service jobs that we have been cross-subsidising through CDEP. Over the last few years, and intensively now in the Northern Territory, we have been saying, 'We have got to start in our own backyard', both federally and certainly in the Northern Territory government context, to establish regular jobs—not as CDEP—and recognise that they are real government service positions that ought to be properly funded and recognised as such. And that, aside from a due outcome for the workers who are performing that work, we also build within the community a recognition that there are regular jobs here and it is not just all CDEP. We have now, I think, transferred or converted, if you like, close to something like 2,000 jobs in the Northern Territory into regular jobs, both Australian government service delivery and Northern Territory service delivery.

Senator SCULLION—Have you got a way to go on that?

Mr Yates—There are still another 300 to go, I understand.

Senator SCULLION—I was in Yuendumu the other day at childcare centre and they were all still sitting around on CDEP, which was pretty average.

Mr Yates—Yes, we have still got some way to go. In addition to that, you are right, there are also private jobs that are embedded in CDEP. As I understand it, over recent times part of the reform process, assisted by IBA with the transition of CDEP and its ongoing reform, is to assist those organisations who are drawing on CDEP to grow that work into standalone small businesses so that it is not happening simply under the CDEP banner or umbrella. Ms Cattermole might be able to talk a bit about what progress has been made there and the directions in terms of the future reform of the program.

Ms Cattermole—Just to build on that, under the proposed reforms, one of the key elements of what has been called the community development stream is to assist organisations that have been involved with CDEP. That is in two main ways, I guess. One is organisations that have relied on CDEP. The idea or the proposal is that there would be, for example, business assistance or financial assistance or whatever that organisation might need to move out of that space and into a stand-alone business. They just might need some business assistance—some experts to come in and say, ‘Really you’ve got a business here. How can we assist you?’ And that may mean over a period of time that there is some CDEP involved for a period and then it actually becomes a stand-alone business. Secondly, for organisations that have delivered CDEP under the community development stream the proposal is that they might be able to access similar types of assistance to, for example, tender for different services. So they might say, ‘Into the future we are interested in tendering for a different service. What kind of business support or government support or whatever it is might we need to help build that capacity to move into a different space?’ So in a sense it is trying to unpack some of this. CDEP has played a significant role here, but in some cases there has been a substitution role, which we have worked very hard to try to unpack, but also to ensure that we are not stifling what might otherwise be business development in the community, so that it can come forward with that support.

Senator SCULLION—I have one question. The other opportunity I was talking about other than art was environmental services. I will probably offend a few people, but the way I see it is that the ranger programs, by and large, are quite good, but they are quite small. We might have five actual rangers and they are normally moving from CDEP to whoever the appropriate body is, but there are still a lot of people who are really interested in that around those services who still engage with the ranger arrangement through CDEP. A lot of it is a complete waste of time, I have to say.

Perhaps I will give some examples. We say ‘Caring for Country’. Generally in most of Arnhem Land the only impact on country is the Indigenous people who live there themselves; nobody else goes there. It is either eating the environment or burning the environment or doing less of it and saying, ‘We will have credit by doing the right thing for a change.’ The reason I am pretty cynical about that is that they do not have the resources to deal with the real environmental issues that they want to deal with, particularly weeds. It is an emerging disaster. Biodiversity, whether you are in the Central Desert or you are in Arnhem Land, is the great opportunity for tourism and other things. Whatever it is, it depends on a vibrant and rich environment. The biggest threat to that is feral animals, weeds and those sorts of things. With the best endeavours in the world they are only skirting around those issues unless they actually have some serious funding injected into that that is beyond the ken of ranger groups and all those sorts of things.

Fundamentally they seem to engage much better traditionally with the Commonwealth. It was little Commonwealth initiatives through that process. There needs to be recognition that the reason they are fiddling around the edges in bits and pieces is not because of any mischief but because they do not have the resources to deal with the issues that they know are threats to their environment. Again, it is about relationships with the department of the environment. I am not sure you how you are going to deal with that. Have we got some plans? Out of Port Keats we have the ranger group there who have actually got a weeds plan to go and do something, but there is no money under it. They just have a plan. Are there any plans to try to look in the financial sense to make some investment in these ranger programs so they can start doing some work that is real work about maintaining or preventing any further damage to their environment?

Mr Yates—This area has been slowly being recognised as a critical need that is growing. It is not just about jobs; it is about the actual state of affairs on the land in the takeover by weeds or whatever. It becomes a mainstream environmental resource management issue how we actually address it, and the ability to use locals to do that is another issue. Certainly in the Northern Territory context the good news was that something like 200 of the CDEP positions that we have converted are as rangers. There are about another 150 that I know the Indigenous Land Corporation had identified that we could translate into land management responsibilities and activities.

Ultimately it is going to be an issue about how governments apply their resources and whether they recognise that this is a problem that they need to apply a lot more dollars to. The good thing is that at least we have now had some pretty successful demonstrations of how Indigenous locals can play a very active role in delivering such services and improving the management of the land and containing some of those threats that are now being posed. That gets down to government policy priorities of the day, but we now have a pretty sound base in a number of jurisdictions in a number of parts of the country. The NT is going to give a big push to that because a lot of the jobs that have been converted are going to add person power to that activity. In terms of next steps, that is going to be an issue for the priorities of the government of the day, inevitably, and I am not able to talk about that.

Senator SCULLION—Another good example is that the board of Kakadu made a fixed decision that they would make an investment to get rid of mimosa in Kakadu and would keep investing in it until it is gone. And they are right at the end of that program. It is absolutely magnificent that they have done that. Because it was actually a Commonwealth park, the board was able to make a decision that would have an impact simply because they were confident that the resources would follow. I think these other jurisdictions are in the same position—they have a plan—but they just do not have the resources or a jurisdiction that is prepared to commit to these resources. The flow-on will be right across the community in terms of employment and all of the issues that we have been talking about. This is one of the great opportunities at the moment, it appears. It is only lacking advancement because of the need for someone to put their hand up and take financial responsibility for it. Thank you very much, Mr Yates. I will put my remaining questions on notice.

Senator MOORE—I only have question to put on notice but I want to do that on the record. It is to do with consultation. You know that we consistently hear about issues around consultation—how it is done and that there is not enough. Does OIPC have any particular role through the departmental heads group in looking at best practice for consultation and also

looking at models that best work. I would like to have something on record from your department about how you see and define ‘concentration’.

Mr Yates—Thanks, Senator. I will take that on notice.

Senator MOORE—Could we also have a copy of the review that you talked about on ICC?

Mr Yates—Certainly. Of course we will make that available.

Senator MOORE—Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—While we are speaking about ICCs, Mr Yates, I must say that when the committee was in Derby and Broome the ICCs were very, very helpful. On Monday we are going to visit a FaHCSIA leadership workshop in Cobar, so we are going into New South Wales. We will be travelling to Broken Hill, Cobar and Dubbo. A number of us on the committee are involved in the petrol sniffing inquiry as well and were invited to the Yuendumu swimming pool opening. This is obviously a very good initiative, and I know from the research that Professor Fiona Stanley has done over the years on the effect of pools in remote communities that the health and sport relieves boredom and there is chance for young people to train as lifesavers. We saw a great example at Yuendumu of 12 young women who were all qualified and employed. I think that is a great initiative. Is the government looking at any further construction of pools in remote areas and communities?

Mr Yates—I would have to take that on notice. There is not a remote pools program per se. Most of those initiatives have emerged out of working with individual communities and identifying with them key priorities. In the instance that you mentioned, there was a very substantial investment by the community itself. But I will take that on notice because it is an issue that has come up in a number of different portfolios from time to time and they have played a part in this. I will take on notice what else might be in the pipeline in terms of pools.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Senator SCULLION—I was interested to hear the minister say that the original no school, no pool program is now ‘yes pool, yes school’, or something like that, to be positive. I am into rebranding with a new government; there is no drama about that. But is there, in effect, any change to the program? Is there some leverage over attendance to gain access to the pool? Does the new policy mean that we are actually not excluding people if they do not go to school—in other words, we do not have the leverage anymore—or is it simple a rebranding exercise? You might want to be cautious and take that on notice.

Mr Yates—I will have to take it on notice because it may differ in different contexts, as far as I am aware. I hope it is just a rebranding.

Senator SCULLION—Okay. I beat you up at estimates but I will try not to use this committee for that process.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much to FaHCSIA for appearing.

Committee adjourned at 11.21 am