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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

WEDNESDAY, 20 MAY 2009

KATHERINE

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SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON

REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Wednesday, 20 May 2009

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

Senators in attendance: Senators Adams, Moore and Scullion

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Back, Barnett, Bernardi, Bilyk, Birmingham, Mark Bishop, Boswell, Boyce, Brandis, Bob Brown, Carol Brown, Bushby, Cameron, Cash, Colbeck, Jacinta Collins, Coonan, Cormann, Eggleston, Farrell, Feeney, Fielding, Fierravanti-Wells, Fifield, Fisher, Forshaw, Furner, Hanson-Young, Heffernan, Humphries, Hurley, Hutchins, Joyce, Kroger, Ludlum, 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.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 8.30 am

ARNOTT, Mr Gregory Michael, Director, Corporate and Community Services, Victoria Daly Shire

WEGENER, Councillor Donald, Mayor, Victoria Daly Shire

CHAIR (Senator Scullion)—The Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities is holding this public hearing as part of its inquiry into regional and remote Indigenous communities. On behalf of this committee I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land on which we meet. We pay our respect to the elders past and present.

Yesterday the committee visited Milingimbi and talked with the community members and organisations in the community. The committee will also be holding public hearings in Darwin tomorrow and Friday. The committee is next due to report on 15 June 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 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. These are public hearings, although the committee may agree to a request to have evidence heard in camera or may determine that certain evidence may be heard in camera.

I welcome representatives from the Victoria Daly Shire Council. I now 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.

Mr Arnott—On behalf of Victoria Daly Shire, I will give you a bit of background. We have only been in existence since 1 July last year—a relatively short period of time. We have an area of 168 square kilometres, which is basically from the bottom of Litchfield National Park down to Lajamanu and from just outside west of Katherine out to the Western Australian border. We have about six Indigenous communities in that area, the largest being Wadeye—and that is probably our most north-westerly community. We have Palumpa, Peppimenarti, Nauiyu, Daguragu Kalkarindji and Yarralin. The other significant areas in the shire are Timber Creek and Pine Creek. We provide local government services and a number of contract services or community services on behalf of the Northern Territory and Australian governments to all those areas. This includes things like aged care, sport and recreation, child care, night patrol, CDEP, STEP program and some Landcare programs, and we are working in conjunction with a number of other organisations in delivering other services. For example, we are currently talking with National Parks and Wildlife Service about delivering land management services to the national park. The population of the shire is about 8,500 people. The major industries in the shire are cattle and mining. Then there are a number of tourism type ventures as well, particularly in the Daly region and around Timber Creek. There are some areas where that is being developed as well. I think that probably sums up pretty well what we do.

CHAIR—Thank you. In your submission you noted a few challenges, which are obviously not unique to your shire, but some generic ones. One of the challenges you have indicated is the

'unforeseen impacts of decisions made by the Australian government relating to the Northern Territory emergency response'. Could you enlarge on the decisions they make that you are not aware of that will have a consequence on your operations.

Mr Arnott—There are two that come to mind straight away. One is decisions with respect to capital funding. For example, at Wadeye there was funding for the construction of a sport and recreation facility and an ablution block that goes with that. We were not consulted with respect to it. The contract was given to an independent contractor—Thamarrurr Development Corporation—yet the expectation after it was constructed was that we would continue to service those. So there was no operational funding to go with the servicing of those facilities. So that presents us with a problem for financing those on ongoing basis.

CHAIR—Is there an assumption that those facilities are provided gratis for the people who use them?

Mr Arnott—Yes.

CHAIR—It is interesting, because there have been similar issues in other shires—you would no doubt be aware of the 'No School, No Pool' program. Perhaps because it is a tradition, there is a tuckshop, and you walk in the gate and you put a coin in the gate, so there is some income stream to use that sporting facility. I would have thought that there was no difference between one sporting facility and another. So, is the asset then passed on to you? Do you actually as a shire then own that asset?

Mr Arnott—I think, ongoing, we will. Right now, with the five-year leases on the property, they are essentially owned by the Australian government. But I think the assumption is that—even though they will technically be owned by the land trust at the expiration of those leases—we will look after those facilities.

CHAIR—It is a bit odd that a shire would service and be totally responsible for assets that belong to someone else.

Mr Arnott—I agree. Absolutely.

CHAIR—Have you put your mind to how you would resolve that?

Mr Arnott—I think the resolution is still pending—and that is around the land tenure issue and knowing what is going to happen longer term. I think the question that we will be asking is whether we will try and have those assets on a longer term lease. I guess the downside is that, if we do not service them, there is a big question about who is going to.

CHAIR—No-one.

Mr Arnott—And when there is significant investment which is actually going to benefit the community, it would be hard not to take some responsibility to ensure they go. I think time will tell with respect to what will happen to a lot of those assets. They are the new assets that have coming on board; the existing assets are also an issue. The other point I was making was about how the land tenure and the administrative authority being given to different organisations also

has an impact on us in terms of what access we are going to have to facilities that we need to provide services in an ongoing basis. So the administrative authorities that have been given by FaHCSIA cover things on a blanket basis when you request them, but the number of clauses that say 'at any given time you can be removed from those fixed assets so they could be given to somebody else' is also concerning. The concern is that some of them need significant investment and, from our perspective, it is very difficult to justify any investment in an asset that you do not have any guarantee of usage of for the longer period.

CHAIR—What is your approach to this? Currently you do not own the asset. You do not have access to the asset in the same way any shire might operate, even in unincorporated areas in other parts of Australia. What is the tenor of these discussions with the Commonwealth government with regard to—they are saying, 'Look, what we would like you to do is this,' and you say, 'Well, that's lovely. I would love to be five kilos slimmer. It's all terrific.' What is the nature of those things? Is this all being held in abeyance until the end of the five-year leases, when a decision will be made? What is your sense of the timing—about some very clear understanding of roles and responsibilities with regard to the assets and their maintenance?

Mr Arnott—We are currently in negotiations with the Northern Land Council. They are at a very preliminary stage of securing leases over a number of those assets for the longer period. The Northern Land Council has been quite open to that, and I would think that the discussions will be favourable. I think once that is resolved, it will give us a degree of certainty regarding a whole lot of those assets. The difficulty with it then, like I said earlier, is that the expectation will be that we will continue to service those assets which we did not require or ask for. There are also some discussions happening with FaHCSIA about those leases. They are being done in conjunction with the Northern Territory government and relate to the housing that is happening on those community areas. The other issue with respect to land tenure is Nauiyu, which is not on Aboriginal land trust land—it is on Catholic Church land, so that is presenting a whole lot of issues. We are currently negotiating with the Catholic Church and the Nauiyu Nambiyu Land Trust, who—

CHAIR—The land there is actually a lease from the church to the land trust—originally, anyway.

Mr Arnott—Currently there is no lease. There is some argument that the previous lease was invalid because it went for longer than 12 years. Under the development act in the Northern Territory, any lease over 12 years has to have approval from the NTG prior to it being granted. It is seen as being a subdivision rather than a straight lease, so consent has to be given on those leases. Right now, the Catholic Church has it and they are negotiating with the NN land trust, who is talking about subleasing it to the shire, to the NTG with respect to housing and to other parties as well. But that is raising some issues for us, because, again, we do not have certainty of—

CHAIR—For the benefit of the committee, the community we are talking about is on the Daly River. It is notionally subject to flooding, and I understand that there are particular provisions the Northern Territory government—perhaps quite rightly—has about the allocation of funds to houses within flood zones.

Mr Arnott—I understand that, too.

CHAIR—This is just for the benefit of the remainder of the committee who may not be aware of that. I understand that there is another area adjacent to there that is not prone to flooding or that is a bit higher. Is there some consideration about the provision of new houses or about a new area potentially being developed there or not?

Mr Arnott—We have had some preliminary discussions with the Northern Territory government. They have indicated that that is the plan, but I have not seen anything formally about how it is going to be done, when it is going to be done or what have you. I think the only thing that indicates that it is going to happen is that they have moved the power station up there.

CHAIR—Okay, thank you very much for that.

Senator MOORE—I am really interested in the way the discussions operate with FaHCSIA, because, from our point of view, since the whole process began, FaHCSIA has been the leading agency. They are the ones we speak to. In terms of your submission and some of the things you have said this morning, I would just like to know how you talk with them and, more particularly, how they talk with you about all these issues, because there are so many issues and it is integral to the way that this is going to operate. What is the process to stimulate discussion? Do you feel as though you are respected in the process and do you think they really understand? I know that is difficult and that you have to continue working with these people, regardless of what happens, but I think it is a basic block in the way that whole-of-government services are supposed to operate.

Mr Arnott—I think the biggest difficulty we have in dealing with FaHCSIA is that for the bottom half of the shire we deal with ICC at Katherine. For the top end of the shire we deal with Darwin ICC. Katherine ICC and Darwin ICC do work together on some things, but on other things it is obvious that they do not.

Senator MOORE—From your perspective, it is obvious that they do not?

Mr Arnott—Unfortunately, dealing with FaHCSIA can be challenging at times. In some respects it is just the individuals you are dealing with. I find that the senior people at FaHCSIA are really good; they listen and are very easy to get answers from. As it goes down the line, people have so much on their plate that I find that they cannot give you the detail on some of the things that we require so that we can properly make submissions or refine programs. Dealing with the FaHCSIA representatives—the GBMs on the communities—is generally pretty good. I think there are some really good GBMS and some really poor GBMs.

Senator MOORE—And some in the middle?

Mr Arnott—There are a lot in the middle. I think the GBM process generally is a very good idea. My biggest criticism of GBMs as a whole is that they generally only spend 12 months in a community.

Senator MOORE—They turn over quickly.

Mr Arnott—Yes, and in my experience you need a number of years in a community before you really know what is going on. I think some of them come in expecting to change things

straightaway, and I would like to see them get a feeling for the place more before they decide to change the world. Quite frankly, I think some of them just should not be there; they really have very little idea of what they are doing.

Senator MOORE—Do FaHCSIA ask you? I would think the GBM role is critical to the whole process; it is one of the core elements of how the new structure is going to work. Of course, when you are going to create a new job and put people into areas where they have not been before, there are going to be some issues, and everybody knew that. But I am interested in whether you, as one of the key client and customer groups, are ever asked in the whole FaHCSIA process about the performance of the personnel—whether the senior people ever say: 'How are they going? Give us your opinion.'

Mr Arnott—Probably not in a formal sense, but I think they will often ask informally, 'How's Fred going?' I will have quite frank discussions with the senior people about how the personnel are going, and I have to say that when I have given them feedback that is not so positive they have acted upon it. They have probably acted on the feedback I have given them that is positive too; it is just that you do not see—

Senator MOORE—And they offered you the bad people.

Mr Arnott—That is right.

Senator MOORE—Come on, Mayor; you say something. You were just trying to get in there before.

Councillor Wegener—Back before we became a shire, we were introduced to the GBMs, and it astounded me that they had picked some of these people. Some of them, to an extent, did not even know where the Territory was; that is how it appeared when they gave a little spiel to us. We just sat and looked at each other—'Where do these people come from?' I was probably very naïve when I came to the Territory 35 years ago, but you learn and it takes quite a time to learn. To put some of these people in as GBMs who might never have seen an Aboriginal before, other than ones they walked past in the street down south—and those down there are entirely different from those up here—is not fair on them or on the communities that they have been put in.

CHAIR—Just to clarify, Mr Arnott, there is no particular agreement between you and the GBMs in the shire which you cover? There is, for example, in Millingimbi, because it was a COAG site. There is a specific written relationship signed by the shire and the GBM—it is like a contract—so that they work together on everything rather than one doing their own thing. I understood that that is only on the COAG sites, but one COAG site exists in your area, at Wadeye; I know it is a COAG site. I am not really sure what the relationship is there. Would you have a shire manager in Wadeye?

Mr Arnott—Yes, we do.

CHAIR—Okay, so he may have an individual relationship in terms of a signed contract with the GBM under the COAG agreement.

Mr Arnott—Certainly that may have been done prior to the shire coming into existence, but I cannot recall ever seeing a document like that.

CHAIR—We were just speaking to the people in Millingimbi, and they were both obviously working very closely together. It was not only a piece of paper; it obviously worked very well, because everything they did they did together.

Councillor Wegener—I think some of them do work like that, but when you go to some of the other communities and say, 'How's the GBM going?', they say, 'I beg your pardon; who?' I know some of them in the area but, as I said, when you go to ask about the GBM some of them look at you and say: 'Who? Where?'

Senator MOORE—Mayor, your role is in a newly formed council. It was a key part of the Northern Territory process to introduce these new enlarged shires, with local government authority and all the elements of local government services that people everywhere else expect. You seem to have got all that. But, in terms of that process, have you not been formally introduced to and engaged with the local GBMs? That protocol has not happened?

Councillor Wegener—No. I went to a meeting at Palumpa. It was an invite meeting for people to meet me and for me to be introduced to the senior members of the Palumpa community. I sat, say, where Greg is. Our manager sat over there, and there were other people sitting down there. The manager made a comment, and I said, 'What's your GBM doing about that?' and he said, 'That's him there.'

Senator MOORE—That does not seem right.

Mr Arnott—When FaHCSIA have a GBM recall, they invite us to it and we might have half an hour to bring up any issues. I think it has happened twice or maybe three times. In the scheme of things, I do not think that is really adequate to address some of the issues that are ongoing.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you very much for your presentation. I would like to work a bit further with that issue. As representatives of the shire council, perhaps you could go around and meet every one of them just to try and push the point. As Senator Scullion said, we saw a very good example yesterday of the shire and the GBM working very closely together. I think with these communities it is probably the only way. I wonder whether it might help if you were to go to each community and meet the managers.

Mr Arnott—That is something that we certainly try to do every time we go to the communities. I make it a thing that I do when I am there to go and see the GBM. Off the top of my head, I think there is probably only one GBM that I have not met. He is down at Yarralin. He has been there for only a short period of time and I have not been down there in that time. So it is matter of drop in, have a cup of tea and talk about what is going on. If I was not doing that, I would probably not get to know them at all.

Senator ADAMS—Have any of the GBMs approached you as the shire representatives?

Mr Arnott—I have never been approached by a GBM or had anything by way of an introduction during the early appointment of the GBMs.

Councillor Wegener—The GBM at Timber Creek looks after a couple of communities there. He came to the old council and introduced himself. I see him fairly regularly. We have eight GBMs in our area. Some of them have been there for only a very short period of time, but the GBM at Timber Creek is the only one that I can say that I really know.

CHAIR—I understand that they have regional meetings. We were told yesterday that they are now going to have regional meetings. So everyone in your region will meet. I am not sure whether they are the same regions as the shire regions. When GBMs say 'region' I am not sure whether it is a 'region' as in a 'shire region' or some other region. We might try to find that out.

Senator ADAMS—I think you will find that there is a huge opportunity there, especially as progress is made on your meeting with them regularly. You will find out from them exactly what is going on. They are there on the ground, and that grassroots information is pretty important.

I am looking at the list in your submission that you gave to the committee. Something that has come up quite regularly, as the committee has moved around the country, is the education of young men who left school early and did not continue with their education. When they reach 17 and 18 years old and the real jobs become available, they find that they are not able to apply for them because of their lack of literacy and numeracy. In the communities that come under the shire, are there any adult education classes available or any moves being made to try to help these people become literate so that they can get a job?

Mr Arnott—I think that is one of the biggest issues we have with employment. We are currently working with one of the government departments, either DEEWR or DEWR—

Senator MOORE—Whichever one looks after employment.

Mr Arnott—Yes. We are setting up a program through which people who are currently in jobs but who are in jeopardy in those jobs will be mentored. They may not have the skills to continue in their jobs. I do not mean that we would terminate them but often, in our experience, people who are not ready for those jobs resign very quickly because they find it too stressful and they do not have the work culture to continue. So this program will enable those people to be mentored. Part of the mentoring program is identifying their learning needs and working with them through their employment to increase their numeracy and literacy skills. The other part to that is that the new CDEP program will have a training component which will include numeracy and literacy. In our night patrol program all the patrol officers are doing a Certificate in Community Services and, where people are identified who do not have the numeracy and literacy required for those jobs, they will go through a numeracy and literacy program to increase their skills. It will take them to a level they call occupational numeracy and literacy, so it is enough to fill out a form et cetera. So those sorts of things are happening for staff and CDEP participants that we identify.

At this stage we have not developed any programs for people who are unemployed. I think that a number of the tertiary institutions do deliver numeracy and literacy program, with varying degrees of success. I think it is very much about who the trainer on the ground is. some trainers are really good with that sort of stuff and make it really relevant, but others are not so good.

Councillor Wegener—One of the problems has been in the giving of the training, and quite often the wrong people are selected. I know of an instance where an Aboriginal gentleman was doing literacy and numeracy for his plumbing and they sent a woman teacher down to teach him. It was not just him because there were others in the class, but they virtually got up and walked out of it. So there was a big gap then because the training organisation said, 'You have her or you have none.' That is going back a few years now.

They have to be seen to want it themselves. At Timber Creek, through NLC, we have what is called the Bradshaw project, where NLC have a supervisor doing work on the Bradshaw Range, and they have quite a bit of work to do this coming year. He has collected about 12 young men from the Timber Creek region and has them working out there now, and they are learning at the same time. It is virtually an onsite learning for both literacy and numeracy. He said that it is working but, again, it is who delivers the program. You know yourself that, when you went to school, there were some teachers you got on with and learned with and some teachers you did not get on with.

Senator ADAMS—As you stated before about general business managers, some fit in to communities and others do not and never will. I guess that is the same with teaching. This is something that has arisen right through: the girls tend to stay at school longer and they get jobs and the young men have left and are trying to come back. In a number of areas there are just no facilities for them to be taught. We are hoping the shires, or whoever is there, can pick up that and see where they can go with the training. But it sounds as if you are fully aware of the problem and you have people there to be employed, if you can just get their numeracy and literacy up to a standard where they can be employed safely.

As far as the Northern Territory Emergency Response is concerned, can you give us any positives that you have seen within your communities? We get a lot of negatives, but I am a pretty positive person and I really would like to know about some of the positives.

Senator MOORE—We would like to know what you think has been gained.

Councillor Wegener—It is working and it is not working. I think wage quarantining is working in most respects, but it is causing problems. If you go down town here of a night-time, you will see them all hanging around Woolworths and that, which did not happen prior to their money being quarantined. Why they hang around there I do not know. To me that is both a positive and a negative—if we do not get paid it affects us; if they do not get paid they go and sponge off this one or this one and keep doing it. I can talk of Timber Creek because that is where I live. There are people in Timber Creek that are still drunk every day of the week, even though their money is quarantined. They are still just drinking their money and still virtually living on nothing. Timber Creek schoolchildren were originally checked every three months by the clinic. It took them about a week to do the kids. They would bring a few kids over each day and do a health check. That has been stopped in the past 12 months because it is against the rules now.

Senator ADAMS—Against whose rules?

Councillor Wegener—I am not certain. We were up there one day talking about it and someone said, 'We're not allowed to do that anymore; we've been told to stop it.' It is probably

because they have not had formal approval from their parents. I honestly do not know. So something that was a positive at Timber Creek is no longer a positive there. When it was brought in, it was brought in for medical checks on young children, which was never allowed to go ahead. I think that should have been allowed to go ahead, because there are problems out there. We know there are problems out there.

Senator ADAMS—Why was it not allowed to go ahead?

Councillor Wegener—You would have to—

CHAIR—Who told you? Was it the health people? Who actually told you that it has not been allowed to go ahead?

Councillor Wegener—You people said it was not allowed to go ahead when it was brought in, because they did not have the formal approval of the parents for it to go ahead.

CHAIR—So when it went from compulsory to voluntary—so a number of people in the area have decided not to take them.

Councillor Wegener—Yes.

CHAIR—I understand.

Mr Arnott—I think the positives to come out of the intervention include the funding of the night patrol. I think that is very positive. It has had a really good impact. Income management has had a positive impact. Prior to being in this role, I was over in the gulf, on Groote Eylandt, and immediately I saw a very positive impact there from that. Particularly you could see the positive impact with respect to kids. I think the school nutrition programs are very positive. Some more work could be done around those in terms of getting better facilities and the like. But that again has been a very positive thing.

Extra police in communities has been positive. I still think there need to be more police in a number of communities and there are some inconsistencies in the allocation of police resources. It would be good if that could be addressed. Just to give you an example of that, Alyangula, a mining town on Groote Eylandt, has a police station that looks after the island—2½ thousand people approximately—and there are 14 police positions. At Wadeye, a similar sized community, with 2½ thousand people but in a lot smaller area, there are six police. I think there are inconsistencies in those sorts of things.

I think the role of GBMs overall has been positive. Again, how positive that is depends on the actual person. I know the community employment brokers are finishing on 30 June. I do not think they made an impact at all and I can see why they are finishing. There has been a short-term positive with the compulsory leasing, but I think we need to have some more long-term solutions. Frankly, I do not know that longer term leasing is the answer. Longer term leasing and encouraging people to buy their own homes is a very positive thing but, as a lease goes, the value of the property, when it gets closer to the expiration time, actually reduces. If I buy a house, in 10 years time or 20 years time or whenever, when I choose to sell it, it will be worth more, or if I pass it on to my family it will be worth more. For an Aboriginal family the opposite

happens, and I think that is very much to their disadvantage. If you have got a 40-year lease, at year 30 that property is not worth as much as it was—

CHAIR—There is no difference, I would submit, than for 100 per cent of the people who own houses in Canberra. I doubt very much that even when the leases were for 95 years, which has just passed with many of them, the land and house prices went down. In fact, they did not because the nature of the lease is based on the notion that those leases will be renewed. However, that has yet to be tested in that context and I acknowledge it may be a problem, but certainly those long-term leases are not changed over in the conventional way. In the short time available, could you talk to me about the homelands? Is that okay?

Senator ADAMS—Chair, could I just ask one little question on school attendance?

CHAIR—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—What is your observation as far as the areas that you cover? Has school attendance actually improved or gone backwards?

Mr Arnott—Short term it improved, but in more recent times it seems to have declined.

Senator ADAMS—How many of those schools have got the breakfast program and the lunch program?

Mr Arnott—My assumption is that they all do, but we only deliver it to two. We deliver at Palumpa and Yarralin. I am not sure who the other providers are in the shire.

Senator ADAMS—Do those schools have good attendance?

Mr Arnott—I think Palumpa has got a reasonable attendance. Yarralin is probably not as good as it could be.

CHAIR—On the school attendance issue, clearly it is the same families or the same groups that appear, throughout their school life, to have difficulties with attendance. It might be distance; it might be whatever. What role do you think the shires could play in supporting a truancy service? The reason I ask is that we have found the department of education actually doing it themselves to be problematic. They have to deal with the parents in a relationship sense. It has been put to me that it may be useful to have someone in compliance that is outside the school. Do you think the shire could usefully play a role in that?

Mr Arnott—I think so. It could probably work like the way the night patrol service works. I think the night patrol service has been successful because it is community people doing it and it is a way of diverting people out of the justice system. This could be the same with a truancy type role—if it is family members doing it, it could work.

CHAIR—One of the criticisms that has been put to me—not to the committee but to me personally over quite some time—is that the night patrols have become an extended taxi for drunks. They move people from one place to another and they do not seem to have the capacity the community wants to actually deal with the issue. What seems to occur a lot of the time—I

have seen evidence of it myself—is that the drunks will flag the patrol down and they will all move from one place to another. They are still drunk and they are going to another place to drink some more. It was not really the intention—in my mind, anyway—of a night patrol.

Councillor Wegener—Our night patrol coordinator is still into our people. I was earwigging the other day when I possibly should not have been earwigging. She was fairly laying it down to the night patrol in Timber Creek about that issue. I know it has been a problem, and I have to agree with you. I have seen it too much. But in general, in our area anyway, we are trying to get away from that 'being the taxi service' problem.

I was at Nauiyu about three weeks ago and the matter was brought up again there. The night patrol coordinator and the councillor for the area had some discussion about it because the night patrol coordinator did not want the vehicle to go up a particular road. The councillor said, 'It has to go up that road because' and so on. We are trying our best to get away from it, but it comes back again to, 'You're my family.' Quite often they are not strong enough to say no to their direct and indirect family. But in relation to what you were saying about truancy, I would not like to say it to the coordinator, but it possibly is another job our team leader of the night patrol in the area could—and I only say could—do as a—

CHAIR—As a day patrol.

Councillor Wegener—Some of them do work during the day. Some of them have split shifts. Timber Creek, Daly and Wadeye have two shifts. I have seen signs in the shops in Wadeye that say children are not permitted in the shop during school hours. I think there is the same sign at Daguragu Kalkarindji.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for appearing here today. Given the time constraints the committee may wish to provide you with some questions on notice. They will be provided through the secretariat.

[9.11 am]

BROOKS, Mr Geoff, Chief Executive Officer, Katherine Town Council

SHEPHERD, Councillor Anne, Mayor, Katherine Town Council

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been previously provided to you. I now invite you to make an opening statement. At the conclusion of your remarks, I will invite members of the committee to put questions to you.

Councillor Shepherd—Thank you. I would like to separate this into three areas. First, I would like to talk about how the intervention started with the *Little children are sacred* report. For many years I have been very concerned about the abuse of Indigenous children in the Katherine region. I have over the years tried to do something about it. My perception now is that little has changed and many Indigenous women have talked to me recently about this. Sexual abuse, particularly, is still continuing in the region and, as I said, my perception is that nothing has changed. The intervention really has not addressed this sufficiently. It is only recently that Aboriginal women have come to me asking me to do something about it. I have asked them to come back to me. I really wanted to talk to the replacement for Major General Chalmers about this because he promised me that he would come to Katherine at any time that I needed him. I really do not think I can say anything more about that except that nothing has changed and Indigenous women are very concerned about the safety of their children.

CHAIR—I know you are going to take this in a few parts but just on that issue, obviously, we are very lucky, Anne, to have someone of your standing in the community who people feel that they can come and talk to because reporting and being able to talk to someone about these matters seems to have been a very difficult thing. Apart from people who come to talk to you is there any other sort of evidence that we could look to, perhaps hospital reports or figures on juvenile pregnancies and any of those other indicators?

Councillor Shepherd—I have no idea about that. I am quite removed from that I suppose except from hearing from those women who tell me that things have not changed and that the perpetrators are still doing the same things that they were 10, 20 or 30 years ago.

CHAIR—Are the perpetrators reported? I am not trying to verbal you and I acknowledge that you have had a confidential conversation. Have you had conversations about why they have not perhaps reported those incidents and what has happened when they have reported them?

Councillor Shepherd—I think Indigenous women are frightened to report it. I think that is why they have spoken to me. They are frightened for their families and the repercussions that would happen to their families. I know that there are particular Indigenous women that keep their children away from certain areas because they know what would happen to them. They are very afraid for their children.

CHAIR—When they come to you are they asking you to do something because the intervention has not worked or something more generally or are they asking you more specifically to provide them with the information about how they may pass that on? Do you think they have an expectation that you will then go and see the constabulary and report it to them?

Councillor Shepherd—In past years they have told me that they are too afraid to give their names or whatever. Recently—and they have not come back to me—a group of women have said that they are prepared to stand up, but that has not happened yet, because, as I said, they are particularly afraid for their families and the repercussions.

Senator MOORE—The intervention process was very much focused on addressing that issue and it came in with a big—I am trying to think of a good word and I am not going to use 'bang', Senator Scullion. There was a lot of hoo-ha around the beginning of the intervention and lots of publicity and all that kind of thing. Did you notice then that the families were more confident or did they come and talk to you around that time? Did all that focus make any difference to the way they felt?

Councillor Shepherd—The particular women that I am speaking of, no. It made no difference.

Senator MOORE—Their concerns and their fear were still entrenched?

Councillor Shepherd—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Do you have any idea what we could do about it—as a whole community? Everybody has a role to play in trying to work on this issue. Have you given any thought to what anyone could do about this process?

Councillor Shepherd—No, I have not given any thought to the broader concept of community. I have only been concerned about those particular cases and what I could do to help those women if they were prepared to stand up. Recently I have been told, as I said, that they have been prepared to. I spoke to one of them and asked them to organise the others to come and see me, and then I was going to organise the new head of the intervention to come and talk to them so that they would be protected and it would be private. They are certainly prepared to name the perpetrators.

Senator MOORE—There are a range of existing organisations in the region that have been around for a while. From your understanding, the people who came to you did not feel confident talking to anyone else?

Councillor Shepherd—No, definitely not.

Senator MOORE—They were just scared?

Councillor Shepherd—Yes, very scared.

Senator MOORE—It looks like it is going to be a long time.

Councillor Shepherd—I think so.

CHAIR—To encapsulate what you are talking about, with the cultural intimidation that we know has existed for a long time over many things—it might be violence, it might be theft, it might be something that has happened—countrymen are very reluctant, it appears, for some cultural reason unknown to me or simply because they are afraid, to dob in their mates or their family. Often, if they do not get on with their family, they have got nowhere else to go. Do you think there is any way in which we could have a different approach and, in the context of Katherine, provide some other support? The reason I ask this is that this is in a semiurban environment where rural people are often transient, and this is a different environment. In other areas—only some—there appears to be less reluctance after the intervention to speak out, and I am not sure why that is. What do you think we could do? Do you think we could set up somebody in town who was responsible for that or that we could have a better education program about the privacy of those matters? They could talk to somebody about those things and tell them and their names would not be released. Obviously they do not know those things. Do you think that would be of any use?

Councillor Shepherd—I think anything would be of use—anything that may be able to break through that code of silence. I think just anything would be helpful.

Senator ADAMS—I would like to continue on the intervention and ask you the same question as I asked the witnesses earlier about the positives of the intervention as you see it from the area that you service.

Senator MOORE—Can I jump in again there and say 'any views on the intervention'—to keep it nice and balanced.

Councillor Shepherd—The next thing I was going to talk about was the impact on Katherine. I will talk about what I think is positive at the moment. I think the income management is definitely positive. It is wonderful to go down to the supermarket here in Katherine and see Indigenous women with a great trolley-full of food. I think that is very positive. In relation to targeting families that are not sending their children to school—the income management as well—I think it is a very good idea but I have not seen any results from that yet. I think the fact that it has been recognised that we have such a broad problem in the Northern Territory is very positive. When the intervention was first announced, I was so relieved. I thought, 'At least something is going to happen now; something positive is going to come out of this,' and I still hold that hope.

Senator ADAMS—Mr Brooks, is there anything to add from your perspective?

Mr Brooks—Just following on from the conversation that we heard before about the involvement of the government business managers in the communities, in Katherine we have detailed experiences with Binjari but not experiences wider than that, so we are really talking about the situation at Binjari. There are two things I think that have come out of that. One is that there is certainly more funding around for different activities. The other thing is that, depending on the personality of the person—and we are fortunate at Binjari to have a very active and able government business manager—they are providing leadership. That is where it is all going to really come from in the individual communities. The leadership cannot come from outside.

Binjari has an interesting history. Binjari was a community government council. It totally failed in a financial sense. The Northern Territory government, prior to putting the shires together, decided that Binjari would come to Katherine and Katherine Town Council would provide what are called the core municipal services. So the idea was to bring Binjari in, the same as Katherine East, because it is just another suburb of Katherine. In the long-term that is definitely the correct way to go, not make it seen to be different. But, clearly, there are a lot of issues out there that are not experienced in Katherine—and a lot of difficult issues. But if you think of the positives from the intervention it is the money that has been available, some of the investment that has occurred out there—and there is more investment occurring virtually every day—and there is the leadership that the government business managers have provided. That has been done by getting people from the community—sometimes they were the past leader in the previous community government council—and trying to mould it together. So there has certainly been some progress there.

Senator ADAMS—The government business manager out there—I guess it is a 'he'—

Mr Brooks—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—I was just going to ask whether there are any female business managers.

CHAIR—There are—some very good ones too.

Mr Brooks—There are some women. In the short time—I might be wrong with this—he would be either the third or fourth government business manager that has endeavoured to look after Binjari.

Senator MOORE—In 18 months?

Mr Brooks—Yes. It is not that easy to find the right person. The catalyst in the whole thing was that, under the intervention, there was a building put out there that was going to be his office and his accommodation. It is only 15 kays from town. The other government business managers, keen as they were, lived in town and just went out there. That is not a good idea. Living on the site, he obviously has a pretty clear picture of what is going on. It just shows the community that the government is responding to their actual needs. The government business managers get asked to fix everything from leaking taps to—I don't know—the fact it has not rained. It is a big role. But done by the right person it is done pretty well. We certainly appreciate working with the person that is out there at the moment.

Senator ADAMS—So there is obviously quite a lot of interaction between the two of you.

Mr Brooks—Yes. It is a complicated scene though because in Katherine we provide, again, the core municipal services. Binjari effectively is a private landholding as far as we are concerned. It is the Binjari Community Aboriginal Corporation. They have a long-term lease for it. So, as far as Katherine Town Council is concerned, it is like us going on to any other piece of private land and performing services on the basis of a contractual arrangement. We have a contractual arrangement with the Northern Territory government to do that. But we approached it on the basis that it was just any subdivision. We were not prepared to accept substandard

drainage, substandard roads, ovals that were not properly irrigated and all that sort of stuff. So we have come a fair way in what you would call the core municipal services.

Running in parallel with that, you have got Kalano, who provide the housing. So we think of it as an overall block of land. We do the roads, the parks, the oval, the litter clean-up and all that sort of stuff. Kalano look after the houses. So you have those two areas. That is a whole different world in itself. As to the level of service out there, I would have to say that sometimes we and certainly the government business manager are disappointed in how that side of the thing actually works, and the residents certainly are disappointed from time to time. That clearly is a matter for Kalano rather than for Katherine Town Council. It is a complicated area. When you superimpose the Territory government's responsibilities and the federal government's responsibilities and you mix them all together, it really is a very, very complicated area. That would be what I would identify as the positives from it.

Senator ADAMS—You heard me ask the question about the younger men who left school early and then were trying to come back to be educated so that they could get jobs. As far as education in Katherine goes, are there any organisations that are dealing with these people?

Councillor Shepherd—Yes. There are some organisations in Katherine. RRYDS is one that deals with people like that but it is mostly for school-based children. I think there are some other agencies in the town that do look at those but I am not terribly aware of what they are doing.

Senator ADAMS—As a shire council, have you observed a need for this service?

Councillor Shepherd—Absolutely. Any day you go down the street of Katherine you will see children who are not at school on a school day. I think the same thing happens at Binjari. We have been very concerned about the school attendance at Binjari—it ebbs and flows. There is a bus that goes out there and the Smith Family is doing a lot of work there. They are even having food on the bus for the primary school children and schools in Katherine certainly have a breakfast program. The Smith Family helps the MacFarlane School and Kalano themselves have a breakfast program for their Indigenous kids. That does help attendance but it does ebb and flow. A lot of parents were coming to those schools after the intervention and were signing up through Centrelink for lunch for their children as well. That was working quite well, but I do not know that it is working as well as it was initially. Certainly at Binjari there are children who are not going to school very frequently. As I said, on any school day in downtown Katherine you will see children who are not at school.

Mr Brooks—Thinking about the negative impacts and the whole issue of prohibition—this is where it comes into the alcohol exercise at Binjari—I know Anne has strong ideas on the prohibition side. You can go into Binjari any day and there is a sea of green cans right at the front gate—not a good situation. You can go down to the river just behind Binjari and see a sea of green cans down the river corridor. It is not a good situation.

Senator MOORE—This is a dry community?

Mr Brooks—And it is a dry community; yes. It is disappointing.

CHAIR—Anne, you said you had three areas you wanted to talk about.

Councillor Shepherd—It has been mucked up a bit now.

CHAIR—I appreciate that you might want to deal with some of the areas we have not dealt with. Rather than me asking you questions about the impact of the intervention on movements of people and how that has affected Katherine, you might want to make some general submissions about the areas we have not covered, and then we can go to more general questions, if that is acceptable to you.

Councillor Shepherd—Okay. I certainly want to talk a little bit about the impact that the intervention has had on Katherine. I know Major General Chalmers believed that it was just a normal urban drift on Katherine. Certainly it is my perception, and the perception of the community, that it has had a big impact on Katherine, and there has been a very large urban drift to Katherine. There has been an increase in visitors, who often just get caught in the town and cannot get home, although some bus services are starting up fairly soon. So they are caught in town.

We then have the question of illegal camping. Last year we had an enormous number of illegal camps. We work very closely with the police and the Kalano patrol, and we have taken a zero tolerance attitude towards that. We cannot accept their illegal camps, particularly in the river corridor, where they are drinking and can do harm to themselves and harm to their children. Then, of course, they are drunk and come back into Katherine Terrace where they smash windows and break in looking for more grog and stuff. Anyway, we have had a zero tolerance attitude to the illegal camps and we have worked very closely with the police to move those camps on. Of course, that in itself is a big problem because we do not have sufficient short-term accommodation for Indigenous people in the town. We are the centre of the region and these people have every right to come into Katherine to do shopping, to visit family, for medical reasons or whatever. But there is insufficient accommodation for them.

Aboriginal Hostels have a facility here but it has not got a great capacity. At Geyulkgan, formerly called the Warlpiri camp, through the ICC there is funding for demountables—$300,000 or something—which I have spoken against again and again because I think it is quite inappropriate accommodation. However, apparently that is going ahead. But it still does not allow these people to stay somewhere safely where they can look after their families and their children when they come to Katherine. As a consequence, we have this illegal camping.

Unfortunately, because of the prescribed areas, people are coming to Katherine just to grog as well, and that causes all sorts of problems for the police, for us, for the whole community. I believe that prohibition does not work, even though I was certainly in favour of the dry towns through the Northern Territory legislation. Initially I think the perception was that it was working quite well for Katherine. There are certain articles that are prohibited. Big casks of wine cannot be purchased in Katherine, but people have gone to buying—as well as the green cans—spirits in bottles and cheap port. So we have an increased problem in the town with broken glass. We pick up enormous amounts of litter. It does ebb and flow a little bit but it is going up at the moment. Since the intervention our litter has certainly increased, and it is mostly alcohol related. With the litter, we have increased vandalism. I am not saying that is always Indigenous people by any means, because young people right across the board are guilty of vandalism, but we certainly have an increase of that.

Then we get to the rehabilitation services. I have believed for quite some time that we have certainly got gaps there. I ask continually for people to give me one successful case of rehabilitation in Katherine, and they cannot. They cannot give me one successful case of someone who has been rehabilitated and returned to life and to their families as a sober person. So it is not working. The rehabilitation centre is a great facility. The building is great. I think it has got capacity for about 24 clients. I think it has been quite difficult to staff with the appropriate people. We have had a very poor sobering-up shelter but now there is more money coming, through the intervention, for a new sobering-up shelter. I think it is $2.6 million there. But then there is no follow-up to help these people when they come out. There is sobering-up, detox, and rehabilitation and then there is nothing to help them further. They come back into Katherine Terrace, where we have our two pubs in the main street, or they go back to their families, where there is drinking—and there is nothing to help them get back into life as a sober person. I think that is a very big issue. Certainly the perception of the community is that our antisocial behaviour is worse in the town and the alcohol abuse is just as bad as it ever was. I do not think there is anything more to say on that, is there, Geoff?

Mr Brooks—I do not think so. One of the things that the Territory government is going to do is get the Menzies health institute to do a review. It is over 12 months now since the dry zone came in and the supply restrictions came in. These are Territory issues rather than federal issues. The federal impact on it has been bringing extra people to town. The Menzies health institute will review what the impact of that is. If you talk to the bureaucrats in the Department of Justice, they will say alcohol consumption in Katherine is down—raw alcohol consumption. If you talk to most residents in Katherine, they will say, 'We just can't see the effect of it.' On a day-to-day basis we have not seen very much change.

One of the things that is effectively working in Katherine is what is called a TCG, which is a tactical coordination group that the police chair. It gets all the agencies, including council and Mission Australia, sitting down on a fortnightly basis and looking at what is actually happening. One of the initiatives that has come out of that is the placement of a mobile police station around Katherine. That has had probably the greatest single effect that you could see—a much greater effect than dry zones and all that sort of stuff. If we had five or six of those scattered around town, it would be pretty good.

The other thing, of course, is that what we are doing is moving the problem. It is a bit like the old balloon—you push one end and it pops out the other end. That is what is happening here every time. You are just moving the problem. As the mayor was saying, there are people who are very badly affected by alcohol and have ruined their lives with alcohol and yet we have not found the solution to fixing it for them. There are not thousands of people who are causing problems in Katherine; they can be counted in hundreds. We have to come up with a solution that helps those people one by one by one to get out of the cycle that they are in. We do not seem to have been able to. As a community we have not found the formula from what we can see anyway despite wanting to do so.

Councillor Shepherd—Unfortunately though alcoholism is really a symptom of all these other things that are down here—the lack of education, the lack of self-esteem, the dispossession—all those tragic things that have happened to Indigenous people. There are other premature deaths that occur. Most Indigenous people are grieving all of the time because of the

terrible things that have happened to their families. As a consequence, they find some relief in alcohol.

CHAIR—Just going back to some of the women who were talking to you about those events, would it be reasonable to say that most of those events were still involved with substance abuse and alcoholism?

Councillor Shepherd—I would say it would be a contributing factor but not always the case from what the women have told me.

CHAIR—I will just ask a general question in terms of trying to get people out of the cycle of substance abuse, which has been challenging all over the world. There are schools of thought that believe that they should actually mandate a period of time under which rehabilitation occurs. It is not mandated by someone who says, 'You are doing better today, so off you go.' Generally speaking, you would be out within a week because you are sober at the end of a week, so by and large, particularly with alcohol, you might want a drink but you are fine. There are those who say that rehabilitation should be about changing some life skills and trying to deal with the habits and those habits are part of dealing with the social group that you are with, so you need other skills to get another social group. That is nothing new, it happens around the world. As I understand it, the legislation in the Northern Territory at the moment does not facilitate that. Do you think there is any merit in reviewing the legislative framework that deals with people, recidivist presenters who are obviously alcoholics or certainly in the grip of substance abuse. We could start mandating. No doubt that would have to come with resources and places for them to go that are specialist areas. Do you think there would be some merit in having a look at that?

Councillor Shepherd—Nothing else seems to be working. To have it mandated, I think, would be a positive thing. An Alcohol Court has started up in Katherine but Legal Aid does not see the merit in sending their people to forced rehabilitation. I think the clinician who is managing that is very frustrated. She does not seem to be getting anywhere with those court decisions. I think it should be mandated. I think it should be obligatory for them to be forced into the whole process of rehabilitation.

CHAIR—For the benefit of the secretariat we may wish to contact the court to try to ask them some questions on notice even if they cannot appear. Who would I contact in that regard? Perhaps that is something you could take on notice.

Councillor Shepherd—The clinician's surname is Murphy.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator ADAMS—As far as health goes, do you have any idea as to the numbers of low birth-weight babies and foetal alcohol syndrome?

Councillor Shepherd—I am certainly aware of the issue. My background is in nursing and when I first worked as a nurse in Katherine the birth weight was incredibly low for full-term babies. Foetal alcohol syndrome was not was not around then. It has only been recognised in recent years. Talking to midwives and other people, it is certainly prevalent, but I could not give you any numbers or any definite indication about that.

Senator ADAMS—Do you have childcare services throughout the shire?

Councillor Shepherd—We have childcare services in Katherine at the moment. They are in a state of flux at the moment. Another provider has just been hired from New South Wales. There is a private childcare service in Katherine which functions very well, I believe, and there are two others. Those two are going to be taken over by childcare services from New South Wales—a non-profit organisation. But there is a shortage of child care.

CHAIR—I know you were in the room when the previous people gave evidence. We have had anecdotal evidence that the night patrol is of great assistance to the police force and that they play an important role. As I have said, it has been put to me on a number of occasions that it has become, not only in Katherine but in other areas, simply a taxi for drunks—they move people around the place without actually trying to remove the drunks or fix the problem. I am not really sure whether that should be their role or not. From your observation, is there any credibility in that statement? If so, what do you think can be done to make them more effective in what I understand to be their specific role?

Councillor Shepherd—I think in the past that was probably true; that was happening. Kalano runs the night patrol. There are regular patrol meetings with our council rangers and with the police. I think that the patrol definitely has improved in recent times in Katherine. I have not heard a great deal of criticism from the broader public about it recently, so I think they are functioning better than they were. But it depends on the capacity of the people and the training they are able to get, which I know has improved in recent times. They have no powers, of course, and there are a lot of cultural things that stop them from picking up or talking to particular people. They are up against it a fair bit—and they have no powers. If a person does not want to be taken home they do not have the authority to remove that person.

CHAIR—Do they normally then ring the police?

Councillor Shepherd—I would imagine so. I think that is how it is supposed to work.

Mr Brooks—The patrol is obviously trying to help people and to prevent them from hurting themselves. There are two principal objectives of the patrol later in the night as the drunks are unable to look after themselves. The first one is to get them to the sobering-up shelter, and then those who are too drunk to be handled at the sobering-up shelter end up in the police cells. There are many, many people every night in Katherine who go along both those paths. Obviously, if the patrol can get somebody home before they get into that sort of situation that is a plus. You cannot have people lying on the nature strip in the middle of the Stuart Highway. It is a very important function to get them to some sort of safety.

Councillor Shepherd—The police are very proactive with that as well. A couple of weeks ago there was a lot of news around Australia about 100 drunks being picked up on a Friday night—but the police are being proactive. They are actually picking them up before they damage themselves, damage someone else or damage property. To me, that is a positive.

Senator MOORE—I am interested in the interaction that your council has with FaHCSIA. From our perspective, FaHCSIA is the leading agency for the whole process around Aboriginal servicing. They are the people we talk to most. I am interested to know what interaction

FaHCSIA has with your council formally, in terms of regular consultation, and also informally. So, what is the interaction with the council?

The other question is more general. Major General Chalmers was telling us that there had not been a perceptible difference in the movement into the cities. You mentioned earlier that you did not agree with that. In the view of the citizens of Katherine, has there been any impact? Has what has happened outside with the intervention hit their lives? They are two general questions. I would like to get something about them on record.

Councillor Shepherd—We do not have any formal arrangement with FaHCSIA. We deal with them through the task force every fortnight, but we do not have any formal arrangement. We certainly have the capacity to talk with them as often as we can.

Mr Brooks—Our main link with the federal government is through the Indigenous Coordination Centre—

Senator MOORE—The ICC.

Mr Brooks—which obviously gives us access to FaHCSIA and the other departments. If we just had to make an observation it would be that that is certainly a very productive relationship at ground level—at the Katherine level.

Senator MOORE—Because they are located here.

Mr Brooks—They are located here. They are good, hardworking, very committed people. But, as an observation, as an organisation, trying to use some of the funding from the intervention to get things happening on the ground, to say that the bureaucracy is like walking in molasses is being kind. It is unbelievable what has been overlaid over the top of offices, like the ICC here. You would be amazed at the amount of stuff that gets referred back and the amount of stuff that is sort of driven by computers, often in far-flung places. They are not able to change documents.

Senator MOORE—So it is distinctly different? There has always been that kind of bureaucratic process in servicing but, from your perspective, it has actually got worse?

Mr Brooks—Much worse.

Councillor Shepherd—It has made it so difficult for us when the government business manager has been asking us to auspice money or stuff like that. It has just been impossible for us because of the bureaucratic paperwork and the inability to change anything to suit what we are trying to do at Binjari, for example

Senator ADAMS—Like flexibility.

Mr Brooks—Yes, the ability on the ground for the local office to make some decisions. We are currently going through a process to build at Binjari. The government business manager has worked very hard to get $100,000, which, in the whole scheme of the intervention, is a pretty small amount of money. He has worked very hard to get that and he is very keen that we build

some grandstands and some shade structures—Binjari has a very nice oval—to try to encourage some sport. There is virtually nothing happening there at the moment. We are told that, in days past, they had AFL teams and all that. You should be able to sit out there, comfortably, as a family and look at what is happening. We had an experience with the recent Binjari Festival. A lot was happening on that oval and it was obvious that it needed these sorts of facilities.

The government business manager has been talking about this for probably six or eight months. It is a pretty simple job for us. We gave quite a detailed quote for the thing. But it goes on and on and on. Finally, we get a thing called a PPM—a project, something or other—which is about that thick. We are now almost at the end of the financial year. What the system is saying is: 'Do you have to have this done by 30 June?'

Senator MOORE—Exactly.

Mr Brooks—There is no way in the world. We have a procurement process to go through, we call tenders for those sorts of things, it will need the approval of elected members, because it is over the delegation of me—and rightly so. It is a just process to go through. The system just cannot recognise that. We are still holding on with our fingernails, and I think the $100,000 will be there. We will need to talk to the elected members on Monday to get certain things happening. Hopefully, it will all happen but, goodness me, it should have just sailed straight through—give the order to Katherine Town Council, call tenders and away you go!

Senator MOORE—It was not a case of a lack of funds, because we keep hearing about—

Mr Brooks—No.

Senator MOORE—It was not a lack of funds; it was just the process you had to go through to account for the funds expended?

Mr Brooks—It was bad enough for us but, geez, it is bad for them down in the—

CHAIR—I am not seeking to further pain in this particular area, but on notice—there may be some contractual arrangements about which you are not able to provide evidence to us—it would be very useful to have a simple time line with respect to that example. For example, when you first got the application and then the other various things you had to do. It is just to demonstrate to us a bit of a time line.

Senator MOORE—That would be very useful.

CHAIR—I will leave that for your boss. I know he is very keen to ensure that the ratepayers of Katherine get the right bang for their buck. I would appreciate it if you could take that on notice.

Mr Brooks—I can certainly provide that information.

Councillor Shepherd—Senator, I have forgotten the last part of your question.

Senator MOORE—It was about the impact on Katherine. You were going to lead on to that in one of your key points, but I do not think we fleshed it out. The impact on Katherine of the intervention—Katherine as a community. Katherine has been here a long time, it was acting, it had issues but now the intervention has happened. I want to know from the Katherine perspective. You talked a little bit about that, but is there anything else you would like to add on the record.

Councillor Shepherd—Certainly Katherine residents offer suffer at night time from hearing drunken people up and down the residential streets. I am often woken up myself. I live over in Katherine south close to the river. Certainly that is something that people complain to me about. Of course I tell them to ring the police straight away. That certainly is a further impact. I think I talked already about the alcohol, the litter and the vandalism. We have always suffered from those things but we certainly have seen an increase since the intervention because we believe that the urban drift has certainly increased considerably.

Senator MOORE—So there is a perception among some members of your community that that has been a negative impact?

Councillor Shepherd—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you know of any new houses in Kalano or Binjari or around the area you are responsible for—where the provision of houses that was promised as part of the intervention has actually taken place?

Councillor Shepherd—No, that has not happened yet at Binjari. I do not know about Kalano. I do not believe it has happened there—I certainly have not heard about it. But we have not had anything happen at Binjari yet. There is certainly some very poor accommodation at Binjari. In what we call the bottom camp it is very substandard accommodation.

Senator ADAMS—I have a question coming back to the issue of child protection officers. Do you have many based here in Katherine as far as the police force goes? I am from Western Australia so I do not know what the title used is here.

Councillor Shepherd—We certainly have family and children's services here. I do not know what sort of staff they have.

Senator ADAMS—In a number of remote communities, especially up in the Kimberley, we have child protection officers actually working with the police so that they can actually work as a team to deal with some of the issues that you were talking about.

Councillor Shepherd—That is possibly also the case here. I know the police have programs such as the police at home program. I dare say that they work with the child protection agencies.

CHAIR—Thank you. We very much appreciate you appearing today. We may have some questions on notice, which will be provided by the secretariat. Hopefully, as I said, they will not be too long or involved. I have to say that the view from here is much better than from my chair in the Senate.

[9.54 am]

AMBJERG PEDERSEN, Mrs Barbara Teresa, Manager/Coordinator, Mimi Aboriginal Arts and Crafts

CROKER, Mr Jim, Art worker, Mimi Aboriginal Arts and Crafts

NAKAMARRA, Ms Marilyn, Art worker, Mimi Aboriginal Arts and Crafts

CHAIR—I welcome the representatives from Mimi Arts and Crafts Aboriginal Corporation. For Hansard, which is the way that the parliament records all of these meetings, could you please state your full name and the capacity in which you appear today.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—I will start. I am Barbara Ambjerg Pedersen. I am the manager of Mimi Aboriginal Arts and Crafts in Katherine.

CHAIR—It may be useful if you introduce your colleagues

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—I think that would be a good idea.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—My co-workers are Marilyn Nakamarra, an artist and art worker at Mimi arts and crafts and also a recent member of our board.

CHAIR—Welcome, Marilyn.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—And on this side, Jim Croker, who is a recent addition through jobs transition to our arts centre and is an art worker and learning and training in various ways for the job. We are fairly recent add-ons to this hearing. We are also not used to public speaking, and I may have to speak for the two others, but you can address questions to them.

CHAIR—Okay. I just have some other things I have to say, as part of the process. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been previously provided to you—and that means that, because this is a sitting of the Senate, as a witness you can say things to us and that gives you complete protection from anyone maybe wanting to say anything about it or sue you, and that is what is special about the Senate committee. I am not sure how much you understand about that, but I understand we have provided that information to you. I now invite you to make a short opening statement and at the conclusion of your remarks, when you have finished talking or telling us your story, members of the committee will ask you some questions.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—We have not had very much time to prepare and we do not have script writers, or time, to do it, so we will do the best we can. Mimi Aboriginal Corporation is something that started in 1978 as an Aboriginal initiative in the Yulgnu yards, just behind the main street of Katherine. It has had a very good history, an up and down history. It used to cover

the whole of the Territory and into Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. It has now condensed to the whole of the Katherine region, which is just under 400,000 square kilometres—386,000, I think. It covers at least 22 communities and a lot of small outstations. After the floods, Mimi had a very difficult time and closed down in 1999. It was reopened in 2001, and we have travelled from there to here steadily—although we have been on a plateau for a couple of years, for three years, actually, not able to get forward, probably just for lack of good funding and lack of good staff.

We are here to talk about the way the intervention has interfered with or has worked on the region. From our point of view, there is good and bad. But I think the CDEP changes, the shire changes here and the intervention came all the same time, and this caused a lot of confusion and fear and worry in the people that we deal with and, we think, the wider Aboriginal community in the region, because they did not know what was happening with all these things. There were constant meetings; there are still but, definitely in the beginning, the leaders and the people were pushed from one meeting to another, with a plethora of government and semi-government consultants from all spheres. This sapped the energy of the leaders and caused more confusion—and people again lost power. The constant changes lift people up and then it goes along for a little while and then they are dropped for the next government initiative or whatever it is, and that saps the power from people.

People in organisations such as our arts centres became government employees by default with the amount of paperwork that we needed to do for all these different things that have come into what we do. The paperwork increased incredibly and artists needed more and more assistance too in understanding what was going on so that the load for an arts centre increased dramatically. I have been in the arts centre for just on eight years now and the increase in workload is significant. Once upon a time, I could go out to the communities and work with what is our core business. Now I am locked in to the computer and the paperwork and very seldom get out. That is a shame because it is not doing the job that I am there for and that we are there for. So as I said the artists need more and more help with the paperwork and to understand what is going on around them.

Some good leaders have fallen by the wayside because of all of those changes that were just too hard to encompass and take in. I know of a couple of very good men who have gone back to the hidey-hole of alcohol. Many Aboriginal corporations have problems continuing and some are in the throes of collapsing. If you look at statistics, which we do not have, you will find that Aboriginal organisations have suffered over this time. I think that is about all I have as an opening statement.

I have taken a couple of notes from other people which I might just go into now. Alcohol use that was mentioned in the last session is decreasing in the Katherine region. I think that is obvious because the hours for selling alcohol are so short and everybody has to produce their ID. A lot of non-Aboriginal people are not buying their alcohol here. Tourists, for example, do not understand all of this, so they either go without or go somewhere else. In my opinion, and I am not professional in anyway except as an art worker, the reason that people turn to alcohol—and it is not just Aboriginal people—is to leave where they are and go somewhere else for however short a time it might be.

The degradation of the old people in the Aboriginal world has filtered right through and there is the power that is lost, especially, as I might say, for the men who have lost their power almost completely and are trying to find their power in the new world. If you have not got your person power then you want to go somewhere else, somewhere that is more comfortable or where you can hide for a while. That is all I have to say. I will say that I was at a meeting the other day where it was mentioned that arts and culture are getting $8 million, which we should be and we are grateful for. Sport is getting $30 million. We find that disparity rather sad because arts and culture are the backbone of any community, anything that you have. If you do not have arts and culture, your health suffers and everything else suffers. That is all I have to say.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen. I am not sure if any of your colleagues have anything in particular to say at this time, but you may wish to respond to some of the questions if you have an opportunity to provide us with some more information. Thank you.

Senator ADAMS—I would just like to start by thanking you for your presentation. I know that, with the art world, you are dealing with the real grassroots people, which is important. It is very important for us as a committee to get that information. Firstly, on the increase in paperwork, this has probably come about as far as accountability goes. We have had a Senate inquiry into the arts, Aboriginal art and the people who travel around and buy art. Therefore, do you think this increased paperwork is going to help in that way—that the art world will be far more scrupulous than having people come in who might really take you for a ride, to put it in more casual terms?

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Yes. The paperwork does not have so much to do with that, but yes. What is happening with the code of conduct and issues like that will be very helpful with what we call 'carpetbaggers' in the trade—or 'blackbirders' for the people who take our artists to a capital city, have them work there and then either leave them there or drop them back home if the artists are lucky. The paperwork is not so much for that; it is scrutinising the money spent, and that is a good thing, but it might be better if it could be somehow lessened so there are not so many people wanting exactly the same thing or the forms are smaller—something like that. I am sure I am speaking for all of the art centres when I say we welcome the money coming in and we welcome people looking at how we are spending it, but we have to find it from so many different places now that the paperwork is very big. I do not know that I have answered your question properly, but I have tried.

Senator ADAMS—You spoke about two of the elders—obviously the men—going back to alcohol because of their frustration. Could you enlighten us a little bit more on that comment.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Without identifying either of the people I am talking about, I will speak about one—and it will just be one, a person who was very upstanding; he was a religious person and had not touched alcohol in something like 30 years. When all of this happened, and the world came crashing around his ears with all these things happening—he was called on from many different angles to report, talk and go to meetings—he just diminished. He then had big family problems, and there was just too much pressure on him. After all that time, he went back to drink. I have seen it in other people around, but I really cannot speak broadly on that; I just know it is happening, and I can feel it around too. People are losing their power once again and do not know where to go.

Senator ADAMS—I would think that, if that person was singled out to come and answer questions and to help give an idea about the community, that was really a powerful position because he had been asked to speak on behalf of others.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Yes, if there is one instance like that then it sounds great, but not when you have four or five meetings, with people flying into a community—fly-in, fly-out—meeting and then moving on to the next meeting with somebody else. As it was in the beginning of the intervention, people were coming and going all the time, and then there came consultants who were going to do this and that, and then there came certain other people who were going to do things. I just think that it was too much of a fusillade of helpers.

Senator ADAMS—Has it calmed down now? Are the communities happier having their business managers there because they have got someone to help them?

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—I cannot answer that. I would need to have elders here to answer that, people from the communities. I cannot answer that question because I am not living in that atmosphere.

Senator ADAMS—Thanks. Mr Croker, thank you for coming. I do not know whether you heard me before asking about young men of your age that had left school earlier and are now trying to get an education or learn to read and write so that they can get jobs or keep their jobs. Would you be able to tell me about some of your friends perhaps that have been in that position. Are they being helped?

Mr Croker—Not really. They are just getting out of school and getting on alcohol and all these drugs that are around Katherine now. They get into trouble with coppers, mainly at night. They just do not even bother looking for help.

Senator ADAMS—They do not try?

Mr Croker—They do not try.

Senator ADAMS—Could you tell us how you got your job. What did you do?

Mr Croker—I just kept pushing myself and kept trying until I got the job.

Senator ADAMS—How long did you go to school for? When did you leave school?

Mr Croker—Around year 10. I started travelling around down west, came back, settled down and started looking for a job. I tried to push myself and got a job.

Senator ADAMS—That is very good. Well done. Can you encourage some of your friends to do the same thing as you have done: 'I've done it. You guys can do it too'?

Mr Croker—Some of my friends just do not have the time to listen. They just go their own way.

Senator ADAMS—Well done anyway. That is good.

Mr Croker—Thank you very much.

Senator MOORE—Mrs Pedersen, I am a public servant—that is my background—so I am obsessed with paperwork and I really want to get down to your statements about the overload and what you are doing and what we can do to make that better. There is all kinds of rhetoric around in the public sector and government about streamlining and getting rid of the complexities. You have said that in your job over a period of time you have noticed how much worse it has got. Can you give us some idea of exactly what you are talking about—how many different things you have to do. I think it is really important to get that on record.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—An arts centre coordinator wears many hats.

Senator MOORE—Sure. It is a critical job.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—The paperwork hat is only one. Without itemising it down and being able to read it out, I cannot tell you. We have now been able to appoint an administration officer. That is very recent. That has been helpful, but there seem to be people coming in who want information about this and people who want information about that—and 'this' and 'that' is not very good information for you, I know, but I really cannot itemise what I am talking about. I just know that the load is much, much bigger. If you would like me to make some sort of the list and email it to you—

Senator MOORE—That would be lovely. It is more paperwork for you! DCITA is the main funding body for arts centres, isn't it?

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—It is now DEWHA.

Senator MOORE—They are the same mob with a different title.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Yes.

Senator MOORE—So you have to do regular reports to them on what you are doing?

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Expenditure reports and purchasing—

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—It is a quarterly report and then the annual report.

Senator MOORE—And you have to make sure all the paperwork and stuff is right for the artists as well, don't you, because all the funding and transactions go through your position? Sales, the term for making sure it is the right piece of art—you have to make sure you have all that lined up.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—The provenance—

Senator MOORE—That is right. You have to make sure all of that is right.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—And we have to also keep an eye on how other people are using our artists' work, so we have to watch copyright, we have to watch intellectual provenance, knowledge provenance and so on. But we also have to account to Arts NT. We have a lot of information surveys and so on that are run by various different bodies.

Senator MOORE—All trying to help.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Everybody is trying to help, and we appreciate that they are trying to help. But we would like them to put a certain person in to write our scripts for things like this and to do our paperwork. That is just making it very simple. I mentioned it not leaving us room to do the core business that we want to do.

To give you an example of some of the difficulties that we face: we had quite a good computer course come through, but we were not able to do it in Katherine because it had to be done on a remote community. So I took Marilyn and Jim to Minyerri, which is a 500 kilometre round trip, to do this computer course, which was good—it was really good. Then I left there and took the opportunity of being out bush to go to Urapunga and Ngukurr on the same trip.

At Urapunga we opened a very small artists group—the Urapunga artists group. We have been trying to get help for them for five years. It took us seven years to get Lajamanu up and going again, and five years for this one. They have just opened their own little group. They do not want anything to do with the shire. They want to do it themselves, because all these shires and so on bewilder them. So they are tacking together a little shed, and we are supplying them with materials free of charge for three months so that we can see how they go and then we will review it. That is what we are about: we are about getting people up and going and getting income into those tiny communities. I heard on the radio this morning they are going to cut them out, which is going to take more power from the people, but that is beside the point.

Senator MOORE—I have not caught up with that media yet, so I will go and have a look at that.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—The outstations are going to be nullified and the bigger places are going to be turned into towns, apparently. Anyway, that is our core business. We should be out there helping people make their art and market their art. That is our core business—and to sustain the culture and help it to grow so that it can be just like the Greek culture, which is very strong in Australia, and a lot of other cultures. We are looking very much after the Muslim cultures. We do not look after the Aboriginal culture as well as we should. So that is our core business and that is what we would like to do. So, yes, I will get that list of my ideas of how to streamline.

Senator MOORE—Is your organisation part of Desart and the other organisation?

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Yes, we are members of ANKAAA. There are 46 centres across the Top End of the Territory and the top end of Western Australia, and I think there are now two members in North Queensland.

Senator MOORE—So the kinds of things you are telling me are being fed through that network as well. I am sure you are all suffering.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Yes, we would all be suffering. We have not had many meetings with ANKAA for the last 12 or 18 months. I think they are going through a difficult time themselves.

Senator MOORE—I heard they are.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—So we have not had as much support from, or interaction with, them as we had before. They supply us with some of the paperwork to do as well.

Senator MOORE—Thank you for that. I know it is just one more piece of work, but we consistently hear about the complexities and the load. Until you actually see it, I do not think you have any idea. How many staff do you have?

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—We have Jim, who is very new.

Senator MOORE—And you are training Jim, so you are working through the whole range of things—packing, ordering and all that stuff.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Very slowly because we do not have adequate staff or enough time to train. That is another thing I would mention here. The jobs transition is fabulous. We were offered five places. We were able to fill three. One of them for family reasons is no longer with us, but we have very recently taken on a young girl. So we still have three places filled. Before that we were one. Marilyn, who is here with me, has been with us for four years. To take on the workload of training three new staff for three different jobs is really big.

Senator MOORE—And three lots of paperwork.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Yes, and three more lots of paperwork—their training paperwork and trying to get them started. The load is put on us by the government, but we do not get much help to get the job done.

CHAIR—How many artists do you have in the area that you service?

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—We service about 220 at the moment, but there are a lot of other people out there waiting and asking. Because we are the only town based art centre, and we cover the region, a lot of people come in with artwork and sometimes we can help—only from this region, though.

CHAIR—In effect, one of your roles is to provide access to the market: you sell their paintings on their behalf; you provide a shopfront where the paintings can be bought. Do they provide the corporation with a percentage of the money that comes from the artwork?

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—The artists do. Fifty per cent of the wall price goes to the artist and 50 per cent goes to the art centre—which is 100 per cent to the artist because it is their art centre.

CHAIR—You have told me about the difficulties you have with the paperwork and we accept that there is a lot of paperwork involved, particularly from the bureaucracy in applying for grants and those sorts of things. Do you help the artists in other ways in terms of funding? For example,

if they sell a number of paintings in a particular month and they have to make a declaration to Centrelink that there income has gone up to X so an adjustment has to be made, would you help them with any of that sort of stuff?

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—No. They must go to Centrelink for that information. We do not know about that information.

CHAIR—You do not assist them with that?

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Some art centres may. I can speak only about our art centre. We do not have that capacity.

Senator MOORE—Is business good?

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Not yet this year. We are not on the beaten track. We are not able to have good signage because of issues with signs in this town. But we do have good international business. We have a guest book, or visitors book, which is totally full of people and the most recent one was from Alaska, and we have not had one from there before. Most of our customers are internationals and we do send overseas. But our website is not active yet so there is a fair bit to be done there. There is a lot more work to be done for Mimi and the opportunities are huge. We are looking to develop a tourist destination at the Yulgnu yards. I would invite all of you to come and have a look on your way home.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Senator MOORE—It is always a good thing to get a Senate committee to an art centre. It usually does well for them.

Senator ADAMS—The one at Milingimbi did well yesterday.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your presentations here today. I particularly want to thank Mr Croker and Ms Nakamarra. Ms Ambjerg Pedersen, thank you again. If we have any further questions on notice, they will be provided to you by the secretariat.

Mrs Ambjerg Pedersen—Thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 10.24 am to 10.48 am

DEMOS, Ms Suzi, Projects and Communications Officer, Sunrise Health Service

FISHER, Ms Irene Lois, Chief Executive Officer, Sunrise Health Service

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. The committee has before it your submission. I now invite you to make short opening statements and at the conclusion of your remarks I will invite members of the committee to put questions to you.

Ms Fisher—Thank you and good morning. Before I begin today I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and elders for the land on which we meet.

I thank the Senate committee for the inquiry they are holding into the important issue of the impact of the Northern Territory intervention on, amongst other things, Aboriginal health. I hope this day and all the remaining inquiry days mark a momentous occasion—the freedom of Aboriginal people from the confines of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act and its intervention. In particular, I would like to thank you for coming to Katherine. For many of us living in regional Australia, it sometimes seems to us that Canberra is a remote community. So for that reason I would like to welcome you here to Katherine, which is, at least for us living here, the capital of our region here in the Territory.

Sunrise Health Service has forwarded a submission to the Senate committee but I would like to say a few brief words, after which I am happy to assist your committee by answering questions where I am able. It seems to me that the key questions the Senate committee is here to answer are simply the following: did the intervention achieve what it set out to do? If not wholly successful, what are the elements of the intervention that are working and worth continuing to pursue and what elements of the intervention are not working and need to be abandoned or changed?

Firstly, whatever else might have motivated the instigation of the intervention it had very little to do with the new evidence suddenly becoming available in June 2007 to warrant such urgent action. Urgent action had been requested by Aboriginal people, both individuals and organisations, for four decades leading up to the announcement of the national emergency. These requests had covered health, education, housing, employment, enterprise and community safety. They have been the subject of countless reports and inquiries, including by the Commonwealth parliament. They have been the subject of countless fine words and promises but little in the way of positive sustainable action and results. In a sense then there was nothing knew; as Aboriginal people we have heard it all before. If anything in a number of key sectors things have been getting worse over the years. I would make the point then that we have called for interventions on many occasions before 21 June 2007.

Secondly, and as our submission points out, there are good and bad aspects of the emergency response. We welcome in particular the increased allocation of resources into Aboriginal primary health care through the emergency response—which was confirmed in the recent Commonwealth budget. There are other elements of the emergency response which we reject—examples include: the extensive breadth of powers of the Northern Territory National Emergency

Response Act 2007; the associated legislation package including land tenure arrangements and housing, both of which are linked social determinants; the powers of the GBM over community service entities; the proscribing of communities; and the powers over the seizure of assets. Also of concern is the displacement of Aboriginal people into homelessness as the impact of the alcohol restrictions are felt about town. Spot check searches are also conducted by police regularly and routinely. Aboriginal people are constantly stopped and searched. This type of marshalling under a blanket approach will not work.

Today I will speak about the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act and the universal imposition of income management as the two most obvious issues. My reasons for saying this are very simple and not at all ideological—they are, that measures taken must work and must work sustainability. In other words, the measures we take must be evidence based and not based on ideological whim or passing fancy. They must be evidence based and not based on tabloid simplifications or cheap rhetoric. In primary healthcare, for example, we operate on the evidence available to us and take action on that basis. I do not suggest it is that simple. Indeed silver bullet solutions can often be illusory because they cannot be sustained over time. Sometimes, indeed often, the evidence we have is very complex with very complex measures to be undertaken over a considerable time period.

I am not alone in my views on this. A simple Google search yesterday linked the words 'evidence based' with the name of Kevin Rudd 20,500 times and with that of Jenny Macklin 2,720 times. Julia Gillard scored 5,240 hits but was beaten to the post by Malcolm Turnbull with 5,450 hits. Clearly the use of evidence is and must be the basis of policy and practice that works, and our leading politicians recognise this. Obviously the linking of the words 'evidence based' and the politicians I named did not apply to the Northern Territory intervention, which indeed only scored 1,790 hits in that regard—most of them, I might add, in the negative. But it is the linking of evidence of what works and what does not work that will assist the Senate—I believe by answering those simple questions I put to you a few moments ago. What are the elements of the intervention that are working and worth continuing to pursue? And what elements of the intervention are not working and need to be abandoned or changed?

My third point is that whatever might arise from your inquiry in the area of recommendations should look to things that will work sustainably. Short-termism has been the hallmark of so much that has been wrong with Aboriginal affairs policy for decades. Remember that when the intervention was announced it was, as said by the former Prime Minister, to last no more than a year. The then Prime Minister said it would only cost a few tens of millions of dollars. On the face of it the intervention's original design was the ultimate piece of short-termism. But that has not proved to be the case. The evidence, which has been there for all of us to see, has been around for decades. The real task into the future will be to abandon the cheap so-called fixes of short-termism and work for generational change for our people. That has been our aim at Sunrise Health Service. Look around you, Senators. A little over 11 years ago this whole town, and many Aboriginal communities in the region, were underwater with the Australia Day floods. You can see how these places have been rebuilt after that week of devastation. Our job is to rebuild the lives of Aboriginal people after generations of devastation.

Senator MOORE—Thank you. I particularly liked your Google search—I have not done that and I liked it a lot. Certainly the issue about the need for the long-term investment is critical, and I think no-one runs away from that. Do you have any suggestions from your medical centre

about the areas in which long-term focus should be placed? If you had a wish list, which I know it is difficult, then where should it go?

Ms Fisher—I think it as it is as fundamental as you have to empower the people and people have to be in control of the solutions to their problems. That is the current major criticism I have of the intervention—the lack of engagement. There may be some engagement by individual GBMs at community level but to date all I have seen, as the CEO of Sunrise, has been a brief hello from the new GBMs. I have seen no community plans. I have offered to provide copies of our strategic planning and business planning to their committees that meet regularly. And still I have not had an invite. So there has been a total sweeping aside of all the experience and successes that Sunrise have achieved in our region.

Senator MOORE—So how many GBMs should you be working with in your region?

Ms Fisher—None, I think they are an expensive exercise. I think there are seven in our region.

Senator MOORE—Have you read the expectations of the GBMs as set out in the whole process—what their role is supposed to be and how they are supposed to operate?

Ms Fisher—We have certainly tracked down some of that information—

Senator MOORE—I felt you might after your use of Google.

Ms Fisher—They have not included us in the discussions and I really think that is quite remiss.

Senator ADAMS—Have you asked to be included?

Ms Fisher—Yes, we have.

Senator ADAMS—And what was the response?

Ms Fisher—I am still waiting for one actually. A couple of years ago we were encouraged through the ICC to take up an SRA on petrol sniffing program, which we commenced at Wugularr.

Senator MOORE—I remember that.

Ms Fisher—That was running quite well. We wanted to expand it. We are now unable to expand it. The GBMs called a regional meeting to talk about substance abuse and I got sent the minutes afterwards. I gave a formal response that I thought it was inappropriate that they should be discussing such an important primary healthcare issue without Sunrise or any of the other health services at the table.

Senator MOORE—So there were no health services at that table?

Ms Fisher—No.

Senator MOORE—And yet specifically, as you would know from your research, what GBMs are supposed to do is to engage with existing community organisations and processes.

Ms Fisher—I think a major fault is that they continue to engage at the community level, so talking to one of our locums, who might be posted in the clinic, is not the same as talking to the head office about our strategic plans.

Senator MOORE—Were you here when the previous witness was talking about the impact of the process of engagement on some key people in the community? We have heard in different areas that sometimes the way communication and consultation takes place can be an enormous impost on local people. There have to be processes and thought given to how you actually do it instead of just saying, 'We're going to engage and have meetings.' Do you have any views about that? I would be interested to see with your knowledge whether you have some views about that.

Ms Fisher—We did actually contribute to a documentary called *The Intervention* which captured on screen the initial discussions by bureaucracy with the community about the changes. Quite clearly it is evident that you just cannot be plucked from the suburbs of Melbourne to address a remote community about major changes that are about to take place in their lives. There is tumultuous social change in the remote communities as a result not only of the intervention but the restructuring of the local shires and changes to essential service delivery. We have the CDEP issues as to whether it is on or off again. You have also more recently the mandatory reporting changes under the child protection and domestic violence legislation. The NT government has not taken any responsibility to inform people formally and they are putting the onus back onto already overburdened health services.

The intervention has also been very uncoordinated. From our perspective we have Commonwealth agencies, non-government agencies and NT government agencies all with little buckets of money and coming at us from different sides. For example, at Ngukurr one day someone was talking about where we were going to put our self-dialysing dialysis unit. The next day it was where we were going to put the audiology testing thing. It is all uncoordinated. It is still that silo effect of management from the Territory government; it is just putting tremendous burdens on us. At Sunrise we report on 22 different buckets of money with quite detailed reporting. Now we have more pressure on us from different programs and trying to engage when it is not coordinated.

Senator MOORE—How should it be coordinated?

Ms Fisher—It should come through the AMSs where they are established in the region. We have to have Indigenous organisations as a partnership here on any of this COAG stuff or anything that is going to impact. Empowerment is intrinsic to improving Indigenous health. If you are not going to engage properly with people, you are not going to get sustainable change. Of all those hundreds of millions of dollars some of it has trickled down to the community; a lot of it has been siphoned off by bureaucracy. It can only be described as a feeding frenzy!

Senator MOORE—Is this a view that the AMS network has taken across the Territory—a standard view?

Ms Fisher—That has been the one area, because of OATSIH's good relationship and experience at delivering Indigenous programs, that there has been at least some meaningful negotiations.

Senator MOORE—I could go all day but I am going to pass on now because we always have limited time as I explained to you—is there anything else that you want to get on record? It is very difficult in the limited time.

Ms Fisher—I did mention lifting the suspension on the RDA. I think that is a fundamental right that all Australian citizens are entitled to. Any argument that it is done for our benefit will not cut the mustard with me.

Senator MOORE—We know the government is slowly moving towards that. Is there anything else?

Ms Fisher—Compulsory income management. I know people will say this is a good thing, and we are not saying that budgeting is not a good thing, but it is forced compulsory management. Ostensibly, it was done to protect children but many of the people are pensioners who do not have children. So there was a shaky basis to that logic there. It has caused a lot of embarrassment for people in town. When the system was first implemented it caused problems for small businesses around town that had been servicing Indigenous people. It made it difficult for people to buy white goods. They had to get three quotes and then go back to Centrelink and give them the quotes. It just made day-to-day living a struggle and even harder.

Senator ADAMS—I would like to ask you some questions on health regarding the problems you have mentioned in your submission. Thank you very much for your submission; it was very good. Firstly, communication obviously is a problem. Do you have a lot of communication with Katherine West Health service?

Ms Fisher—We are all members of AMSANT. There is a forum there for us to engage.

Senator ADAMS—I have just come from the National Rural Health Alliance Conference in Cairns. They presented a paper, which was excellent.

Ms Fisher—There were also a lot of Sunrise staff there.

Senator ADAMS—It was very good. I was very impressed with that. I wonder, with Katherine East and Katherine West—

Ms Fisher—We had a close relationship at the beginning, in particular, because they grew out of a coordinated care trial and we were in the second round. A tremendous amount of support was provided to Sunrise getting established in a similar way. There has been a tremendous amount of respect over the years.

Senator ADAMS—I was certainly very impressed with that and then, in looking at your submission, I thought, 'Katherine is being serviced pretty well with health services.'

Ms Fisher—It is unique territory wide, because we have three services. We have Wurli Wurlinjang service in town. It is the only region, apart from Borroloola, Robinson River and Pine Creek, that has full primary health care and community control. It is very dynamic and at the coalface with respect to improving Indigenous health.

Senator ADAMS—It is very good, grassroots primary health care.

Ms Fisher—Absolutely. But fundamental to that is the issue of housing. For the record, we have not seen any new housing, apart from housing for the GBMs and community employment brokers. Sunrise has had some funding for demountables and some additional staff short-term accommodation, but the bulk of the housing for community people has not eventuated. We are still being advised that nothing will happen until the community of Ngukurr signs a lease agreement. That is of concern because of the appalling state of some of the current public housing and the close link to poor health as a result of overcrowding.

Senator ADAMS—Regarding low-birth-weight babies and the foetal alcohol syndrome, do you have any statistics on the number of children born with foetal alcohol syndrome?

Ms Fisher—Not off the top of my head. A couple of years ago I mentioned it to one of our medical directors, and he said that we did not have high rates in our region. But I do not have facts on that. I do have facts on birth weights, though.

Senator ADAMS—Another thing is anaemia. I have seen press releases saying that the intervention actually caused anaemia. I am a nurse. I really cannot see how, from 2007 to now, anaemia has been caused through that. I would like to ask you about the availability of food in the stores and the improvement on the food that is available to your communities in relation to the anaemic situation.

Ms Fisher—Firstly, the media sometimes takes things out of context.

Senator ADAMS—That was the headline.

Ms Fisher—I will tell you what the context was. When the income quarantining was rolled out in November 2007, they did not have the systems and processes in place, and people went for up to six weeks without any income. It was just prior to Christmas. If you are not getting any income, it is not an outrageous link to suggest that it could be result in lower anaemia rates. That is what I was referring to.

Senator ADAMS—Have you seen an improvement in what is available in the stores? People able to get more food. Are the children more nourished?

Ms Fisher—There are no good stats at the moment. I can say that I am pleased to see a better range in the stores. The prices are still very high and we are looking at ways in which we can formerly engage under MOUs with the Outback Stores in regard to our nutrition programs and that, and ways to develop more strategies there. But it is a business. It is a one size fits all. They are not really flexible with their range of goods. Now that we are getting some public transport in, there are some issues around the sustainability of that. To date we only know that they are going to be in for five years. What happens after that? Do they just pull out? Do the communities

get left with no stores? Are they planning some sort of takeover at a community level with the stores? We have no knowledge. There was a concern that the prices are too high still and that if the government really wants to improve nutrition it needs to subsidise the freight costs to get the food out there and some practical things like that. As I started to say before, with the introduction of public transport some people will choose to shop in town and that will naturally affect the viability of the Outback Stores. There are a lot of questions around what will happen after the intervention.

Senator ADAMS—There will be an evaluation of the stores. As a business, they will work that out. I am sure that if the businesses are going the way we have heard in evidence, they will certainly keep going. After five years they really will have to evaluate it to see just how it is working.

I would quickly like to touch on the school programs and the nutrition programs within the communities you cover. Are they working?

Ms Fisher—In what way? We know that we have good engagement and that good numbers of people turn up. In terms of it an evaluation, at the moment we are trying to get our anaemia rates down. We have quite a sustained program around that. Probably in another six months time I will be able to more accurately answer that because anaemia is one of those instant, key performance indicators as to whether things have changed for the good or not.

Senator ADAMS—In regard to attendance at school, are more children going to the clinic with problems? Do you have any information on that?

Ms Fisher—I do not have any data on school attendance.

Senator ADAMS—What about as far as visits to the clinic go?

Ms Fisher—We have a 98 per cent coverage rate of our kids. Whether we seek them out if they are due for some sort of recall check or whether they come voluntarily, we have a good connection with all that.

Senator ADAMS—There has been no increase in problems as far as clinic visits from children go?

Ms Fisher—I think there will be more problems around the new mandatory reporting changes under domestic violence arrangements, particularly the child protection act. Underage consensual teenage sex will go underground. Young girls will be too frightened to come for their antenatal check knowing that there are mandatory outcomes as a result.

This is an issue that AMSANT has taken up. Our GPs and nursing staff are very concerned about their professional issues of confidentiality and patient trust. It is such an emotive issue. That is not to say that we are not conscious of the need for good support to be given to those who are needy. The current system cannot cope with identifying emergency cases, so inundating it with a lot of non-emergency cases will further compound the problem when you really do want some intervention to occur for some at-risk child.

Senator MOORE—For the record, was there any consultation with your services or the general services across the NT before that law was changed?

Ms Fisher—No.

Ms Demos—It was written consultation. A discussion paper was released and that was about the extent of it.

Senator MOORE—But in terms of using the network that was around there—and these issues have come out a lot in the media and also through the medical press—that was not fleshed out before the law was passed?

Ms Fisher—No.

Senator ADAMS—Ms Demos, were you asked to respond to the written consultation?

Ms Demos—We were invited to put in a response if we had the time.

Senator ADAMS—And did you?

Ms Demos—I was not actually employed at Sunrise Health Service at the time, but my understanding was that we were flat strap and did not have the capacity to respond in writing. AMSANT did, though.

Senator ADAMS—If you were so concerned about those issues I would have thought that Sunrise would have put in a submission or written back.

Ms Fisher—But, as Suzi said, with the intervention we have got phase 1, phase 2, phase 3. For every phase we had to make a submission. We had to submit—

Senator ADAMS—I realise that.

Ms Fisher—We were quite inundated with work.

Senator ADAMS—But this is something that you have used in evidence today. You say you are really concerned about it and you had the opportunity to reply, but you did not. So why raise that evidence today if you have not actually taken that on?

Ms Fisher—As I said, the voice came through our peak body, AMSANT.

Senator MOORE—You continue to raise these issues now, I believe, so in terms of the process—

Ms Demos—That is right. AMSANT is continuing to take the lead in raising all issues around the mandatory reporting requirements.

Senator MOORE—And could you also take this on notice: how long did you have to respond?

Ms Demos—I would have to check.

Senator MOORE—Yes, just for the record. I think it is important if it has come up as a point. I understand it was quite a tight time frame. So, just to make it all clear around mandatory reporting which you have mentioned in your evidence, could you find out what process was used by the Northern Territory government to engage on that and the time frame you had.

Ms Demos—Yes.

CHAIR—Ms Fisher, there are a number of areas which I will probably not have sufficient time to talk about today, so I suspect you will be getting some questions on notice. I do respect that your business is health and primary health care. I am very proud to be a Territorian. We fly the banner of Sunrise Health as a model all over the place. You do a fantastic job.

As I read this comprehensive submission I got the very clear idea that there is not one single part of the intervention or the emergency response that you really like—or are happy to say that now. I know you are not making a generalisation but obviously there is a thematic issue. I am looking for the motive for that. Given that you have indicated that the motive appeared to be mischievous, as you may believe, or otherwise, we would like to have change in the community, particularly with regard to a number of inquiries—the Mulligan inquiry had quite comprehensive evidence, then there was the *Little children are sacred* report. Whether you would like to question that evidence or not is a matter that I would like you to take up now. Under your child abuse statistics on page 32 of your inquiry, it says:

The claims—

which are the claims of sexual abuse—

for which there was no persuasive data—demonised all Aboriginal men ...

We have dealt with that issue as we have travelled around the country, and it is regrettable. Someone like me, who is pretty well read and understands most of this, certainly would not demonise all Aboriginal men. I am not making an issue about that. You preface it by saying there is no persuasive data. You are somebody who works in the area of primary health, so you would be people who would know—and I am not expecting you to break any confidences—the levels of child sexual abuse and the abuse of women and more vulnerable people in the community as a consequence of substance abuse, and I expect that is something that covers it all. Were these reports accurate? I am allowing some leeway because I am not trying to put you on the spot about any one thing and verbal you. Your claim there has been no persuasive data is one such claim, but I could pick out others. There seems to be a bit of a cynicism towards the documents that provided the motives for government. Can you provide me some other evidence or even an explanation about why you have that view?

Ms Fisher—From the outset, we have welcomed aspects of the intervention. We welcome the attention that the intervention brought to the appalling poverty and circumstances that people

live in. The biggest fault has been the lack of appropriate engagement with the wealth of knowledge that exists in the Territory and Indigenous organisations. As to the stats, one of the issues is about the system and the breakdown. We may make referrals, but we certainly do not get any feedback on the outcomes of those referrals. I could not make any quantitative statements on that because the information goes one way and does not come back. That is an obvious problem with the system.

CHAIR—So, when you provide information to police officers or whatever, you do not get feedback. One would expect that.

Ms Fisher—Good communication should work both ways.

CHAIR—As well as the claim that there has been no persuasive data, you also talk about empirical data and how we have to work to a dataset. I have other things to talk about, so do not worry about googling me on that. We have had a number of inquiries that indicate to the Australian people generally that we have just adopted it. We have said there is a significant issue. Whilst accepting that this is a particular demographic of human beings, in that demographic there is a high level of a number of things, particularly if you are in the cycle of substance abuse. Whilst even that is acknowledged, it would be reasonable to say that either the media or just public feeling about the numbers and the nature of those two reports was what led to the support for the intervention. Do you think those reports were correct? Do you think that a general level of that sort of behaviour in the communities exists?

Ms Fisher—In the Katherine East region there were not high rates. There were a couple of cases of concern, without going into any details. Being a Jawoyn woman and having a lot of family out there, I would hear things—that is the way the grapevine works. When the intervention was announced it was all focused around Mutitjulu. That is not our country, so we did not know what to believe. The media perpetuated negative stereotyped images, so we did not know what to believe and we could only say, 'It's not around here.'

CHAIR—So you are saying, in your experience, there have only been a couple of incidents.

Ms Fisher—That is not to say there are not cases of underage consensual sex. You get that anywhere in society, and they are getting younger and younger.

CHAIR—What ages does it go down to?

Ms Fisher—You can get between 14- and 16-year-olds—a child that is at puberty. Children develop at different rates.

CHAIR—I have a number of other questions that I will put on notice. They are the sorts of questions that will require some time. I was assuming, from the comprehensive nature of your submission, that you would have some of that capacity. If you do not, by all means try to provide us with a shortened version.

Ms Fisher—We constantly overstretch ourselves, with all the things we do.

CHAIR—I acknowledge that.

Ms Fisher—I guess I see advocacy as a fundamental principle of primary health care. People's rights are important.

CHAIR—As there no further questions from Senators Moore and Adams, we thank you very much.

Senator MOORE—We could go all day.

CHAIR—Indeed. I am sorry this time is short.

Ms Fisher—Thank you very much.

[11.26 am]

BERTO, Mr Michael, Chief Executive Officer, Roper Gulf Shire Council

JACK, Councillor Tony, Mayor, Roper Gulf Shire Council

ROBINSON, Mr Barry, Chairperson, Barunga Community, Roper Gulf Shire Council

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. The committee has before it your submission. I now invite you to make short opening statements. At the conclusion of your remarks, I will invite members of the committee to put questions to you.

Mr Berto—Our submission is pretty much based around the intervention. We did not want to broaden it to too many of our issues and tried to centre it on the issues related to the emergency response, or the intervention. You will see in the submission that a lot of the points are fairly brief, but I would like to expand on those points as we go through the hearing.

The first one that we note there is centred on CDEP participants and the issues that we experience with trying to create a learning among CDEP participants in the workplace. The alcohol ban as a result of the intervention is having an impact on their performances. Almost on a weekly basis, we are battling this whole issue, particularly in communities where alcohol is completely banned. People do not turn up for work on Thursday and Friday, particularly. For most participants, the payday is late on Wednesday. We actually press the payroll button on a Wednesday afternoon. For those who deal with certain banks, their pays go in at six o'clock that evening. They know that and off they go and we do not see them on Thursday or Friday.

That gives you a really good example of the sorts of issues we have to deal with in trying to create a workforce that provides good quality services to community people. CDEP for our part of the region totals around 500 people, so it is fairly significant. This happens frequently for a large number of our people—it happens almost every week. Our paydays at the moment are on a fortnightly basis. Even so, this problem still happens weekly. For example, welfare payments come in in off-pay weeks.

Senator MOORE—Thursdays.

Mr Berto—Yes. Shifting our payroll to Fridays is what we are dealing with now through our council, and we will see how we go tackling the issue. I thought I would highlight that as a real example of the detail of the impact of the grog ban.

The other issue relates to the drinking areas that, as a result of the ban, have been shifted, in most cases, further away from communities. That is having a real impact. For example, there are safety concerns around where they actually drink because a lot of the areas are on major highways. From the community perspective, families are concerned about those who do drink and then find it hard to get home. And there are concerns about the safety risks in the areas where they drink. For example, the Ngukurr people have to go right out to a place called Mount

McMinn, which is 70 kilometres from Ngukurr on the Roper Highway. We are also hearing from pastoral station owners who are still our constituents that the situation is getting worse, that safety problems are increasing to the point where it is becoming dangerous for the individuals but also for the station owners because once people become highly inebriated they can do anything and some of them wander into the station homesteads, which are not far off the highways and cause all sorts of havoc. The information has been relayed to me through station owners and managers. One station owner said they were going to be here today to put their case to you. I am not sure whether they will get here. But I might ask Barry Robinson now to give you his views from a community perspective.

Mr Robinson—I am worried about my people from Barunga, Beswick and Eva Valley. During the pay week, they get their grog and go back to Roper Creek and drink their beer all night. At night when they are drunk, they lay on the main highway on the bitumen. They go to sleep just on the edge of the bitumen or in the middle of the bitumen. I am worried about my countrymen. This is the same thing that happened around Mataranka.

I am worried about my countrymen in Beswick, Barunga and Eva Valley. They lie on the road and there is no-one to help them or bring them back to the community. I tried the night patrol but nothing has happened. I am flat out running from Barunga with my little car and picking people up when they are finished with their grog and taking them back—sometimes three or four times, even eight times. I cart them back in my car till daybreak to bring my countrymen home to safety. I have been asking for a safe house in Barunga for Beswick and Eva Valley and Barunga. If we could get a safe house there, the night patrol could go out to the Roper Highway to pick people up and take them back to the safe house and leave them there for the night. That way we would not have to worry; we would know our countrymen were being picked up and taken back to the community. They can be let out in the morning to have tea and they can be sent home and things like that. At the moment, they are lying everywhere on the road. In Roper Creek during the wet season it is an unsafe area. People get drowned and float down the river.

One night I was looking after them people. I had a little torch and I was walking around checking up on everybody till daybreak. I need to get this night patrol out and picking up people. We need that safe house in Barunga. I am asking at this hearing today: I need that drinking place to be moved back to Four Mile Creek. It is closer to walk from there back to Barunga.

CHAIR—I will just take a risk here. Just to be fair dinkum with you, which is what I like to be, as I understood it the idea of the emergency response in terms of alcohol was to stop people being in the community and drinking. So the notion that we would somehow facilitate people who are drunk going back to the community is going to be a difficult one. But thank you for your submission in that area. I often travel past Elsey Creek, where that Jilkminggan mob was for a while. It is very difficult for the police. They ask 'where'. Then it got changed. I understand that is why we had the problem we had.

As you turn onto the Roper Highway there is that big sign that says 'you cannot have any grog any further than this'. It is a bit confusing because there is actually a road easement that does not make it Aboriginal land, which is why we are allowed to do things. These are very complex issues. We might now deal with another matter in your submission that you might wish to speak about—that is, actually having a club where you can have controlled drinking within a

community. I have from you a letter addressed to myself, and I have given copies to the other members of the committee. Do you want to talk about the benefit or otherwise of that?

Mr Robinson—I have already written that down in my letter about an Aboriginal club going into Barunga.

CHAIR—How do you think that will improve things?

Mr Robinson—Some people do not like drinking the light cans. They want to go into town and drink the green cans. I do not drink; I gave drinking away a long time ago.

CHAIR—Thank you. You know the circumstances here. At the moment we have a community you are not allowed to drink in. For a very long time you have not been able to drink in Barunga. But for a long time there have been areas close to Barunga—and this is the same in many communities—where you can drink. Barunga is a bit different from many of the intervention areas because for many of the intervention areas the community is well inside a place where you cannot have alcohol. So there is no gateway there. When you talk about those areas that should be safe for drinking are you talking about areas that might be allocated off the highway? What do you think the solution is?

Mr Robinson—Yes, off the highway. Four Mile Creek is what I am talking about—where we had this first before they put it out to Roper Creek. That is the place I am talking about. It is closer for people to walk back to the community. It is five or six kilometres closer to the community. When they get back there they will be sober.

Mr Berto—Just to add to what Mr Robinson is saying, prior to the intervention the three communities of Barunga, Beswick and Manyalluluk had agreed to having a dry area slapped over the whole three communities. So it was quite a major area. That is the Four Mile Creek area that Barry is talking about. That was still quite close to Maranboy police station. I know the central police are here. It was more manageable for them because the officer in charge at the time had a lot of input into that and worked with the community. They agreed on the boundary where that should be. That seemed to be working okay, and we helped develop a drinking site just off the road so it was quite safe. You are never going to take away all of the risks but I think it minimised it as much as we could. People were kind of getting used to the area and then the intervention hit and of course it got shifted. There was a lot of confusion about where these intervention boundaries are—the land trust boundaries, I should say. It was then decided that closer to the Stuart Highway was where they should be drinking—outside of the land trust area.

Prior to that again there were plans under way, through full consultations particularly with the Barunga community. They wanted their own social club, similar to Beswick—who still have their social club. We were putting together a group of people to go to places like Gunbalunya and perhaps even Daguragu to have a look at their social clubs, which had been in place for quite some time and were having a level of success. They recognise in Barunga that they cannot always live under this prohibition and that they will have to someday learn to live with grog. That is the road they were going to take. Yet the intervention has now put those plans on hold.

CHAIR—Although the intervention has the process to provide for a regulation, which can happen in a 24-hour period, from the minister to approve a place. That has been done in the past

and includes some of the existing places you are talking about. So I do not think you necessarily have to wait until the end of the intervention in a formal legislative sense for that to take place.

Mr Berto—We are not fully aware of the process and whether that is allowable under the intervention.

CHAIR—My next question is: have you had this discussion with the GBM?

Mr Berto—Government business managers have been working very closely with us in the community about these issues as well. That certainly has not come up—that we could still proceed with those plans as a community.

CHAIR—Just in terms of the drinking area, obviously you speak with the police force. But, for example, if you have come up with a much better solution in terms of safety and the other things then as I understand it the GBM would be the person you would go to with that to coordinate a change in the arrangements. Has that been done? Have you spoken to whichever government business manager is appropriate?

Mr Berto—There have been with the shop as well that have to be addressed before some sort of facility can be developed for a social club. We know that Outback Stores have just taken over the management of the shop at Barunga. That shop there was in deficit for a while, and they are starting to haul themselves out of that according to my current knowledge tells me. So they have had those issues to deal with around the shop itself. The committee of the shop—the board, if you like—did have plans also. They have a desire to set up a bistro so that they can control it and those who want to drink responsibly can as well.

CHAIR—What about the road areas? This is not so much about the application of a safe drinking club but what about the road areas on the way in—in terms of saying is it possible to go back to the Four Mile Creek arrangement, which is the next to the police station and all those sorts of things. Have you put that to the GBM?

Mr Berto—No, we have not; because we were under the assumption that anything on the land trust is not allowable under the ban. That is it. Full stop.

CHAIR—I am just informing you that there have been a number of exceptions made and specific applications to the minister. He has made a number of them during the time. What we will do in this case, as we often try to do, is to capture that. I will undertake to write to the minister indicating that there does not seem to be a clear understanding on those matters. Perhaps the GBMs can be informed and they can pass that on. That is the only capacity we have. Rather than try to explain it all here I will ensure that those are out there.

Mr Berto—Thank you, we will follow that up. It is the same situation as I said exists. I think the mayor want wants to talk about the Roper.

Councillor Jack—On the Roper Highway one of the pastoralists there is having that same problem with people from the community coming out and drinking more or less at his front gate. There are rubbish issues and now in the last 12 months there has been some trouble about bushfires—burning the paddocks out and all that. I have been receiving communication from the

pastoralists about this and where we can help. So this is good news if we can head down that track and try and look at maybe going back to drinking where they used to drink in that area.

Senator ADAMS—I would like to ask about the government business managers and your interaction with them throughout the communities that you have under your jurisdiction. Could someone tell me about that?

Mr Berto—I could probably talk to that. We have a lot of interaction with the government business managers and have had since the intervention occurred. That interaction has in many cases been good and in other cases not so good, so it varies. Since they have been in place what we have gathered is that there seems to be a lot of confusion around what they should and should not be going. We do not know their roles and, from our perspective, they do not seem to know clearly what their roles are either. In some cases it seems to be very clear and GBMs are very clear about what they are there for, and we work very well with . In other cases in our experience, some GBMs have gone into areas that we feel are not their business—for example, local politics. That interferes with people that are elected members of the shire council, for example. We do not know how that relates to government accountability in terms of funds, services and what have you. The relationships have often soured in that respect, because they get into areas that just upset everyone, to be honest. We have asked for clarification around roles through their manager, who sits in Darwin. We have raised a number of instances of what we have experienced with, as I say, the not so good operators out there.

Senator MOORE—What do you mean? That could cover a wide range of things. Sometimes just talking can get you caught up in things, but that is a particular issue in terms of involvement in local politics. Can you give us any details?

Mr Berto—I do not want to dob anyone in, but there are examples of a GBM who is just not willing to show any cooperation with the local organisation that delivers services in a community. We have established close relationships with that organisation over time. In fact, the view of the organisation and the community generally is that they want to move forward and be part of the shire—but only when the community feels it is ready, and at the moment it is not ready. We have shown that respect as a shire and we have continued to develop relationships and so on. But the GBM, by his own actions, has shown that there are a number of issues that he will take on that go against what we—that is, the organisation and the shire—want to see for the betterment of the community. The relationship between the GBM and the head administrator of the organisation has become very strained, to put it mildly, and that has not helped anybody. We know from our own observations that services in the community are going quite well. The organisation is a long-established organisation, and we do not have anything more that we could say about that, other than that we support the organisation—knowing full well, strategically, that that organisation in that community will become part of the shire in terms of service delivery. We want to continue that relationship, but we are being affected by what the GBM is doing, which we feel is not very good, basically.

Senator MOORE—Is that a personality thing?

Mr Berto—We believe it could be personalities. We went back to the role statement and we tried to clarify what the role should be with their boss. We get good support from the boss of GBMs in Darwin. That person has acknowledged this as an issue and I understand it is currently

being addressed—and that is just one example. The interaction, as I said before, has varied across the shire, so we get back again to the role statement—what is the purpose of the GBMs? On the good side, the GBMs have actually brought in quite a significant amount of funding through their consultations and their work with the communities as to their needs. We are very thankful for that; otherwise the intervention would not have brought that into the communities. We see a lot of useful, very wanted infrastructure now established in most of the communities, especially for young people. But there are still some gaps, obviously, that will take a lot more time and a lot more money to fill. So there are good points and, to balance it out, there are some bad points as well. The concept of the GBMs is a very good one from our perspective.

Senator ADAMS—Are you having quite a lot of dialogue with the store managers about what is being supplied and if it is suitable for the community? Is there any interaction with the managers there?

Mr Berto—Yes, there is. In fact, the Roper Gulf Shire owns the store as a legacy of the previous government council in the Numbulwar community. But the plan for that store is to transition it away from the shire into its own new entity so the local people can then have control of that separate from the shire itself. That is the longer-term plan. The interaction mostly occurs through the shire's local boards that we have set up. Barry, as he has said, is the chair of Barunga, for example, and they interact very closely with the store committee. Is that right?

Mr Robinson—Yes.

Mr Berto—And the managers of the store as well. We have mostly outback stores—ALPA, the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation.

Senator ADAMS—Mr Robinson, are you happy with the interaction with your store? Can you get things that you or your community wants?

Mr Robinson—Yes. A lot of people go into the shop and do things down there at the store.

Mr Berto—I think Barunga is a little bit different from most of the more remote stores or communities, because it is not that far from town. It has an all-weather access road, so people can quite often go in to Woolies.

Senator ADAMS—Are your people able to handle that now with the BasicsCard? Are they getting more used to using it?

Mr Robinson—They are getting used to using it. They go into Woolies or use the BasicsCard in the community. I use mine there, anyway.

Senator ADAMS—They understand how to use it as time goes on? It is not as confusing as it was?

Mr Robinson—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—Any comments about the BasicsCard, Mr Jack?

Councillor Jack—No. It is working really well. I see a lot of food getting back to the houses, and that is really good to see. They are getting used to it as time goes on, whereas before they were really worried about the money and all that access, but give them time and they will make use of it. It is used better now and is getting the food back to the kids.

Senator ADAMS—Have you noticed any difference with the school attendance of children within the shire communities? Do you have any interaction with the school about the attendance?

Councillor Jack—I live on an outstation, so I can speak for my own community. We have really been pushing school attendance and all of that. We have got to like 99 per cent attendance—really full-on. My council is behind that, also. We are driving it. It is one of those really important policies that we have; kids must go to school. We were driving that ourselves even before the intervention came. I just wanted to point that out.

Senator ADAMS—Is the food program at the schools being supported?

Councillor Jack—That is right, yes.

Senator ADAMS—Good. Mr Robinson, what about your community? Is it good there?

Mr Robinson—Yes. It is going very well.

Senator ADAMS—That is good.

Senator MOORE—I want to expand a little bit on the relationship between the shire, the GBMs, FaHCSIA and the ICCs. The basis of intervention and the post-intervention period was a whole-of-government response so that community would get the best services they could possibly get. What are the interaction, definition of role and the way you operate? My understanding is that in the communities the shire is really the face of the NT government and that government services come through the shire. That is from the little bit I have seen; I could be wrong. Is that right?

Mr Berto—We do not see it that way.

Senator MOORE—I would like to know how you do see it, how it works, whether you are happy with it and whether you have any suggestions for how it could work better.

Mr Berto—As I have said, I think there is a future for government business managers in communities, for a start. Where they have worked well and the interaction has been positive they have played a very key role—absolutely. There are issues around land services where we need that for development. They have been facilitating that as well, and it has been really good. Some of them are picking up the wider issues of community planning and so on. We are feeding these sorts of issues back to the GBM boss, who is looking for those sorts of issues to try and clarify this role as well. I think it has been a learning process for everyone right through since day one—and we appreciate that, too.

Mr Yu and I were part of the review and we have been through the issues. We looked at what we thought the new role for GBMs could be, and that is in the review report as well. I have not seen any of that being addressed as yet. I certainly looked at the GBMs taking on a wider role in community development because they are key players in government services at the three levels. They can add a lot, too. A big gap in communities at the moment is who does committee planning. Does the NT government do that? We do not know the answer to that—neither does the NT government. At the moment, they are responsible through DPI through the community planning process and approvals. Under the intervention, FaHCSIA has that role in the approval process. But who takes on the leadership role in setting a committee on its pathway for the next 50 years or so? We know the NT government's 20 towns policy came out today. Twenty communities have been identified for future development into townships. The planning issue is a big one.

Senator ADAMS—Are any of your towns included?

Mr Berto—Ngukurr and Numbulwar. Most of those townships are aligned nicely with SIHIP funding, the housing and infrastructure funding, as well. It will give it a good kick-start, but that is all subject now to the land councils' blessing—whether the township leases should or should not go ahead—because they will rely heavily on that, obviously.

CHAIR—The relationship between the shire and the government business manager is very important in delivering services. We were in Milingimbi yesterday. The shire representative in Milingimbi and the GBM have a contractual arrangement and they work very closely on everything. They were saying to us—and we had no reason to disbelieve them—that it works much better in a strategic sense.

Mr Berto—Was that Michael Rotomah?

CHAIR—No, it was Troy—

Mr Berto—Sorry, Michael is in Maningrida.

CHAIR—Yes, so this is just the person there. The reason we were given for that being the case was that it was a COAG site and so that was part of the residual stuff—but that is by accident—and that is why it works a lot better. Do you think it would be useful to have some sort of official process that joined both parties at the hip, if you like, or compelled both parties—particularly, I think the GBM—to any of those issues that we are moving ahead with? You can do it in a strategic sense. Do you think that would be a useful thing?

Mr Berto—Yes, that sounds like a really good idea. From what we have seen, as I said before, it just tends to rely on personalities, and that is variable, as you know—everyone is different. So, if we can have something that brings some consistency and clarification to the role, that will solve these issues that we are experiencing. That has not been so good.

Senator MOORE—Has there been turnover?

Mr Berto—Yes, there has been turnover. In our particular shire it has not been all that great, thankfully. Community people rely on consistency a lot—getting to know you and trust you.

Luckily, it has not been a really high turnover for us, but there has been movement around different communities—for example, one GBM going to another community—and that is a good thing. I agree with that, Chair. That would probably be the way to go to resolve those sorts of issues.

Councillor Jack—Michael touched on this earlier. The communities still do not know the role of the GBM. It needs to be clear—and for them, too, because I think they are a bit lost. You have people going into a remote community who have no experience whatsoever. Wham! Bang! They are told: 'You go to this community.' Also, the community does not know their role and what they are there for. It needs to be clear so that they can work together. You get a GBM come in, and he goes in his own direction, while the community could be over here. Somehow we need to bring that together and try to get them working together.

CHAIR—The other element of moving forward together would be some sort of community representation. Without going too much into history, the previous shire, if you like, or the local council often provided leadership for a whole range of other issues beyond roads and rubbish. I think that was one of the tragedies of the shire—and that is not a comment about it being good or bad; that is just one of the losses. I understand that the shire now have not only the representative from the community but a group of people, a reference group, if you like. Could you tell me a little bit about how the shire now consult or move with the community. Who would that be in each community? Do you have a formalised process?

Mr Berto—Local boards have been set up in communities. We have had this experience in the Nyirranggulung regional council—Nigel, you might remember that—and that was an amalgamation, if you like, of three councils being set up very similarly to shires today, and that had local boards and communities. Certainly Nyirranggulung people have been used to that sort of a system of governance, if you like, for some time now, well before the shires, and we are working with that. Today they have a local board that continued on in the shire—and Barry is chair of that—and that is our key formal group that interacts with the community in general. We also have an opportunity for people to set up a different group, particularly around housing issues. A housing reference group, for example is what we are looking at too to make decisions around housing allocation and that sort of thing.

But getting back to the GBMs, as well, they have Indigenous engagement officers in place now. Not every GPM has an IEO. I think there were about 20 funded positions across the Territory. Luckily we have ended up with about four in our region, and they work very closely with the GBM in the community and us as well. So far, our experience—and it has been fairly new since they have been in place—has been very positive, because they are local people, they know their community well and they know their issues, and culturally it is a pretty powerful position to have for all of us to interact with the wider community. We see that the succession planning, for want of a better word, for IEOs to GBM roles into the future is something that should be looked at and considered very seriously. I do not know that it is being considered at this point. It has never been mentioned, but we think, 'Wow, what an opportunity for local people.'

CHAIR—That was part of your recommendations, as I recall.

Mr Berto—It was, yes. What an opportunity for local people to develop into these sorts of important positions if the government wants to continue that.

CHAIR—The reason I wanted to segue into that is it would seem that it is great to have this process where the shire and the federal government organised at a level—if we can get a bit of clarity about this—where it would seem that the only thing that was missing was a direct formalised, what-everybody-could-understand conduit in terms of consultation or whatever you want with the local community. Clearly that would be the way forward, so thank you for that. Sorry; I did not mean to—

Senator MOORE—No, that was exactly the way I wanted to go.

Senator ADAMS—I note that in your submission you speak about the increase in illegal drugs and other substances—it has been noted—and nothing has been done. Has that changed? Is anyone dealing with the issue? Where are we at with that?

Mr Berto—We do not know that it has worsened since intervention.

Senator ADAMS—But it is there.

Mr Berto—We know that substance and alcohol abuse has always been there. It is hard to gauge whether there has been an increase.

Senator ADAMS—The substance abuse is petrol sniffing or—

Mr Berto—Sniffing in pockets. Not every community suffers from that issue but certainly there are at least two communities in our Gulf region and our shire region that have sniffing problems, and we, the government and the police are all trying to deal with those issues.

CHAIR—Do you have Opal available in those places?

Mr Berto—Yes, we do. We have an Opal strategy across our communities. We have introduced that into Beswick. Nothing other than Opal is sold there. Jilkminggan is another hot area there for sniffing. But ganja is really the main issue we are all concerned about. It is the biggest issue we are all concerned about at the moment. It is taking over from grog. It is covert. Most young people do it at night, and it is really hard to do something about it.

Levels of government and police—all of us—are trying to find better ways. The ICC are chipping in with funds to look at ways. We have a youth officer, through Sunrise Health—they are also a major player in this—trying to combat the whole issue. We are just trying to work out what is best—whether we have boot camps. That was one issue we looked at and also talked about. Outstation people, up towards Gove, are offering their outstation area as a boot camp area for the Beswick people, for sniffers, in particular, and for people who are on ganja, to try to overcome those issues and get them away from easy access.

CHAIR—The other issue that you touched on in your submission was gambling. You made the point that nothing seems to have happened. I agree; I do not think there has been any attempt to make anything happen. I often bemoan when I am in a police car and they point to me, and

say, 'That's a casino there, Nige.' Whilst we laugh about it, clearly, there are very good reasons why it is one of the most highly regulated activities in Australia, because it is a way you can tear a hole in a household's pocket. The cycle of addiction applies equally to gambling as it does to other things. Basically, the situation, as I have described, remains the same. It is well known that it happens. It is still done publicly and openly and no-one has started to address the matter. Have you had any discussions about that or do you have any views on what the solutions are and how we start on that particular monster?

Mr Berto—Not really. It is not an issue that is often talked about. It is usually about grog, substance abuse, petrol sniffing and ganja Very rarely do local people discuss gambling issues around the table.

CHAIR—Are most people who gamble aware that it is unlawful?

Councillor Jack—I think some would not have an understanding that gambling is bad. If we can get that message out there, get that across, it might be a start. They do not understand.

CHAIR—With regard to your first comment—and maybe we will fit it in with some other information—you recall the Thirsty Thursday program at Tennant Creek?

Mr Berto—Yes.

CHAIR—I have been informed that, in terms of pay days, you can make application as a community, which Tennant Creek did, to Centrelink and people can actually get all the payments made on one day. The reason why that failed was there was a wider policy which said, 'Because of some particular thing you are not in town that day, you can have your payments made on this day or that day.' Basically, they can be made on any day of the week, without mischief or even without any thought really. That is how it evolved. People just got their payments on different days of the week because things changed—dates of application. I have been told recently that if a community wished to have a rationalisation of the dates of the pays of those people who live in that community then the government and Centrelink are happy to sit down and listen to changes. Again, I can perhaps provide some information to you out of session. If you would like to get in touch, I will put you in touch with the people who can provide you with the technical information on that.

Mr Berto—Just so that you know, we are combating these issues also through a more strategic approach through alcohol management plans. We have agreed to work closely with the Department of Justice and obviously the police on those. Recently, there has been a plan put together at Borroloola. It is in its early stages. Most of the communities, particularly at Mataranka, which suffer from people coming in because they have outlets there, are wanting to hurry up with an alcohol management plan that picks up those sorts of issues to ensure that they are addressed properly and also strategically in the long term. I have worked closely with the plan in Katherine over a period of time with the former Harmony Group. That has now been picked up by the Department of Justice, and the police work very closely with that and are continuing to develop that as well. It is an ongoing, long-term issue. If it is done through a plan, I think it is much better that way.

CHAIR—Could we have a quick opinion on the circumstances in Beswick where you actually had the club maintain their licence. There are rules whereby they only serve light and mid-strength beer. There are rules around how many cans you can have a day. How does Beswick operate, say, compared to Barunga. where there is no plan, and we have the challenges you talked about on the highway? Does Beswick have the same sorts of problems. Perhaps Mr Robinson might be able to help me with that.

Mr Robinson—They do not have that sort of problem.

CHAIR—Because they have a club in the community?

Mr Robinson—They have a club there. Some of them stay and drink their light cans, and some of them want to drink their heavy cans on a day off into town. That is why they get off at Roper Creek and drink there.

CHAIR—There are still some of the challenges but not as many?

Mr Berto—I think Beswick has got more drinkers in it than Barunga. If it did not have a club I believe the problems would be far worse.

Senator MOORE—Mayor, what do you think? You were just going to say something.

Councillor Jack—With respect to the alcohol management plan that we have been working down at Borroloola, there was a big push to bring the 30-pack cans down to 24 cans. Bringing that down was a start. Everybody got behind it and voted for it and all that. It is slow. We are trying to shape it up but, from experience in my area, I know it will take a while.

CHAIR—You are obviously involved right across the social area of enterprise. A lot of people around Australia would not think the new shires would ever be involved in any of the things they are involved in. Obviously, it is a very important element. Thank you to all of you for giving evidence today. We may have other questions that we may put on notice through the secretariat, and you will be informed of those in due course.

Mr Berto—Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Proceedings suspended from 12.12 pm to 1.10 pm

JACK, Mr Tony, Councillor, Mungoorbada Aboriginal Corporation

SOUTH, Mr William T, Chief Executive Officer, Mungoorbada Aboriginal Corporation

CHAIR—I welcome Tony Jack and Bill South from Mungoorbada Aboriginal Corporation. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Jack—I am one of the directors of Mungoorbada Aboriginal Corporation.

CHAIR—Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. The committee has before it your submission. I now invite you to make some short opening statements. At the conclusion of your remarks I will invite members of the committee to put questions to you.

Mr South—Thank you very much. I am going to read a short statement that indicates where we are at and where we are coming from. At Robinson River kids go to school. Even visiting kids to Robinson River go to school. The only time kids miss school is when they are not in the community or are sick with a medical certificate from the clinic. Robinson River clinic has fewer presentations per capita for skin diseases than any community clinic in the Northern Territory; likewise intestinal upsets. Systemic infections, particularly from infected scabies, lead to renal failure later in life. The current generation of Robinson River kids fortunately will not suffer as much as their forebears.

We have few cases of domestic violence. The perpetrator of the one case we did have within the last six years is now in jail. The Robinson River store, which is owned by the Mungoorbada Aboriginal Corporation but managed for us by ALPA, has the highest sales of fruit and veggie as a percentage of the total grocery sales of all stores within the ALPA group. In fact, our meat and veggies are about the same price as those in Darwin and Katherine. I have a graph on that as well.

Everybody at Robinson River works on CDEP. No-one is on the dole. If our CDEP workers do not work, they do not get paid. CDEP projects include civil construction. We are currently doing an $800,000 airstrip upgrade, we have numerous contracts for roads, we clear fire breaks and do mining exploration clearing. This function of CDEP will this year gross the community close to $1 million.

The community has 200 cattle in fenced paddocks and one of our outstations, which is actually Tony's outstation, has about 300 cattle behind barbed wire. These cattle were not bought with CDEP money; however CDEP labour is involved in maintaining them. Our all-women welding team did $120,000 worth of fencing contracts around the community houses and buildings in the first 12 months of their operation. We have about 150 goats, and our people buy these for fresh meat, particularly during the wet season when they cannot get out and get killers. As with the cattle, no CDEP funds were used to set up the project. Mungoorbada bought the goats and the McArthur River mine paid for the fencing.

Our chooks provide eggs to meet the community's needs, and extra eggs are sold to Borroloola. Every child at school gets a boiled egg with a piece of fruit for morning tea. That has happened for the last 3½ years. Our eggs are also sold through the community store. We do not give them away.

For house maintenance and building, we have a plumber and two carpenters who work with our CDEP people to do the house maintenance and any new building works. We plan to build a new shop and we have put a proposal to the education department to build a new classroom, library, staff room and a flat using the federal government schools money.

Mungoorbada support several outstations. Most of these outstations are attempting to develop their own cattle industries and one outstation grows fruit and veggies and breeds chooks. We supplied them with an incubator. Mungoorbada has a power and water contract, Centrelink contract and airstrip maintenance contract. Regular visitors to Robinson River notice improvements on each visit—a new fence here and a new fence there and a concrete batching plant. First-time visitors are always very impressed. Everything I have mentioned was in existence prior to the intervention. Without the intervention, we think we would have been even further ahead.

Members of the intervention task force who visited Robinson River described it as a model community. David Chalmers remarked that if all communities had been like Robinson River there would have been no need for an intervention. Thus, it is reasonable to claim that Robinson River solved the problems that triggered the intervention long before the intervention started, and we did it with no additional funds. The latest government cry is to 'close the gap'. Millions of dollars have been committed to this latest initiative. This money, like the intervention's $600-odd million, will be frittered away with few outcomes. What has been achieved in Robinson River is real. It is not some theory dreamed up by a Canberra bureaucrat. So why don't the policymakers listen to those who have runs on the board?

Senator MOORE—Mr South, why has it worked? What have you done that we can learn from?

Mr South—I have been in the industry for a long time. I started down in the Centre, at the desert community of Aputula at Finke. My local government field officer at the time was a fellow called Bob James—a wonderful man and a very, very experienced person. He told me that my role as council clerk at that community was to improve the lot of the people in that community. All the other stuff was around the edges, but my job was basically people. I was in the people business. We used to have an overall approach, so I had to be involved in anything that happened in the community. I have carried that through to where I am now. So I do not look specifically at one aspect of the community. I manage the community as a whole.

Senator MOORE—Where does that differ from the role of a GBM?

Mr South—GBMs do not manage communities at all, do they?

Senator MOORE—I am just trying to see, in terms of the duty statement or the acknowledgement of what the role of a GBM is, it is to engage and to ensure the wellbeing of the community. That is their bottom line. Your statement indicates that you had the kinds of

issues working in Robinson River, as you state, well before the intervention, and you also know that that is not the case everywhere.

Mr South—Without a doubt. I came from the Centre. You would all have seen the *Four Corners* documentary on Imanpa. That was our next-door neighbour, and a lot of the people from Finke were actually Imanpa people. So I had a lot to do with Imanpa, and that was a very, very, very sad case. You just cannot imagine how sad it was.

The intervention was absolutely necessary in certain areas—I do not disagree with that. I have known of three-year-old girls with syphilis, which they got from their fathers. That is pretty sad stuff. With the intervention, everyone who has been involved in it from the Robinson River point of view were told, 'You are in a position now that we would like other communities to be at at the end of the intervention.' And we said, 'Great; let's now see where we take Robinson River from here. What do we do? How do we develop Robinson River post intervention? What do we do with other communities post intervention?' It was an ideal opportunity to say, 'Right, let's do this,' or 'Let's go down these paths,' but we have had to mark time. That is my first point: the one-size-fits-all approach just did not work for us. There were a lot of communities that it did work for—I know that—but it did not work for us.

Senator MOORE—As I said, can you give us any indication of what you have done as a community, and through the board that Mr Jack is on, in Robinson River to reach the stage that you have been able to tell us about today? You led right in and told us what was happening and, quite cleverly, I think, addressed most of the issues that have been mentioned in the intervention—schools, health, education et cetera. What have you done there that worked and what should be shared with others?

Mr South—Can we start with the school?

Senator MOORE—We sure can.

Mr South—Education is the key.

Senator MOORE—That is exactly what the *Little children are sacred* report said.

Senator ADAMS—You will not get an argument from us about that.

Mr South—Education is the key. We have been arguing that for years and years. In this building here—in this room right here—I actually got down on my knees and begged some people to listen. That would have been five or six years ago. Education is the key. That is the key. If we can get the kids in Robinson River educated and off to high school or university, we have solved their problems forever. So education is the key.

We introduced the nutrition program three and half or so years ago. The council made a decision, a policy, to say, 'We want our kids to go to school.' As soon as the council made that their policy, as the CEO of the council, it was my responsibility to make sure that happened. So we had a community meeting and we discussed it at the community meeting and the community said, 'We want our kids to go to school but they bail out.' I said, 'If they bail out, let me know

and I'll go and grab them.' All I have ever had to do is pull up in front of the house and the kids jump in and we take them off to school. I do not do that any more.

Senator MOORE—You do not?

Mr South—No, I do not do that. But every morning the nutrition program gets the list of kids at school and the list of any kids that might not be there and then the night patrol grabs that list and off they go and pick up the kids.

Senator MOORE—As Senator Scullion suggested earlier this morning to another witness, you have actually used your night patrol, extended their role, and in the mornings they go out and make sure kids get on the bus and come to school?

Mr South—We are only a very small community.

Senator MOORE—You have done that and it works for you?

Mr Jack—Yes.

Mr South—We have little gators—little golf buggy things—that our night patrol is in.

Senator MOORE—Being the Northern Territory, Mr South, I thought you were talking about wildlife. So you actually have little buggy things?

Mr South—Little golf buggy type things. Our night patrol is very low key, because we do not have any of the problems that other people have. We do not have an alcohol problem. We do not have a domestic violence problem. We have had a couple of issues with one person, but that was it. Our night patrol's job is to get the kids off the street and to bed early so they can get up and go to school in the morning. Our pay goes into the banks after five o'clock on a Thursday. We have a gambling problem. It is not a major gambling problem but if we pay it earlier, the get money and they gamble and then the kids stay up and they are not right for school the next day. So there are all those little issues that a community can take ownership of and solve. It is about education. We do not have a grog problem. We do not have grog.

Senator MOORE—Are you a dry community?

Mr South—We are a dry community and that is strictly supervised. If there is a problem then the whole community is in uproar and we do something about it.

Senator MOORE—Do you have a drinking spot that people go to?

Mr Jack—We did, about 15 kays out from the community. When the intervention came, it put them back 40-plus kays.

Senator MOORE—You mentioned that to us in your previous evidence.

Mr Jack—We were enforcing that before the intervention. We were really hard on that, and the community used to get behind council. We used to really lay the law down with people bringing grog in or drunks coming in and making humbug. We went and did it ourselves.

Senator MOORE—So people from your community who do want to drink have to go a long way.

Mr Jack—They have to go into Borroloola, 150 kays.

Senator MOORE—That is a long way, and then they do not come back until they are sober.

Mr Jack—Yes.

Senator MOORE—How big is your community?

Mr South—We have 250 people.

Senator MOORE—How many kids?

Mr South—There are 70 at school.

Senator MOORE—That is a large percentage of 250.

Mr South—Yes, and we have 23 at the creche. That is a really new thing and has only just started. We have 28 houses, so it is only a very small community.

Senator MOORE—Yes, with 28 houses and 250 people.

Mr South—In my submission I said there were 17 families on the waiting list. That is now up to 21.

Senator MOORE—Waiting to get housing.

Mr South—Yes. We are in a situation where every three-bedroom house basically has a family living in each bedroom. We collect rent off people. We have always done that.

Senator MOORE—From those 28 houses.

Mr South—Yes. We buy wholesale soap, toilet paper and house-cleaning materials with that. We issue the toilet paper and the soap on a weekly basis, but people can have as much as they like. There are no limits to how much they can have. We give the house-cleaning stuff out, and then periodically we will have house-cleaning days. We had a situation recently where we had a lot of visitors and scabies got back into the community, so we had a scabies day. We issued the material, cleaned the houses, got all the bedding outside, put it in the sun, washed it, washed all the people and—bang!—we eradicated it again. The fact that they have the soap means they use it, and the fact that they have the toilet paper means they use it. They do not put clothes, cardboard and all sorts of other things down the toilet that block it and cause a problem. We

never have problems with blocked toilets. We do have problems with the other system, with fat down the sink. Occasionally we have to get some fat out, but our toilets do not get blocked. The amount other communities are spending on plumbers bills for unblocking septics would more than cover the cost to us of the toilet paper. If you do not have blocked toilets, you do not have overflows and obviously you have a much cleaner environment, in which case you do not have intestinal problems. There have been people who have said that issuing soap and toilet paper is paternalistic, but the people are paying for it.

Senator MOORE—Through their rent.

Mr South—Through their rent. We buy it wholesale and do not put any mark-up on it at all. It means the shop loses a few sales, but that is all right; we cover that. What it does do is to give the people the option of doing it. If you are a mother with a mob of kids, the kids are hungry and you have limited amounts of money, what are you going to buy? Are you going to buy food for the kids' bellies or are you going to buy a bit of soap to clean them? They buy the food.

There was a situation a few years ago where the local health inspector was going through Borroloola and Robinson River. I asked them to do a survey in one of the top camps in Borroloola to see how much toilet paper and soap were in that camp and then do the same in Robinson River. In Borroloola there was one house that had soap, and none of the houses had toilet paper. In Robinson River everybody had soap; there was one house without toilet paper, but the old lady who lived there used to live in Borroloola and she hid it. She had it, all right, but she just hid it. How simple is that?

Senator MOORE—And it means people are not using their BasicsCard to buy those things; they can buy more food.

Mr South—No, we do not—

Senator MOORE—People who are employed; you said that.

Mr South—Everybody in Robinson River is employed. We have about six people, I think, on BasicsCard.

Senator MOORE—You have done health and education and you have talked about housing, where you have a desperate need, and you are working through that.

Mr South—We have a desperate need for houses, but we are told that we probably will not get any houses in the next 10 years.

Senator MOORE—But you were not on the list.

Mr South—Because we are not on the list. We have not seen today's announcement, but we are not even sure whether we are going to exist in 10 years time; it is that serious. In my submission I have mentioned housing, and I have specifically talked about the cost of actually doing the houses:

Building has not started on the House building (SIHIP) programme. The programme has $647m—$88m goes to the Territory Government to Administer the programme.

CHAIR—Sorry; was that $647 million?

Mr South—Those are the figures I have. It is at point No. 7 in my submission.

Of the remaining $559m, 45% will go in other expenses …

That is the information that I have from somebody inside one of the alliances. That leaves only $307 million, way under half, to be spent on the houses. That is crazy. Do not believe my figures, but please go and check.

CHAIR—We will be able to test those assertions very shortly.

Mr South—Yes, please do that, because if that is the case then I think this country has a serious problem. At the same time, the person is telling me that every house built is going to go over $1 million if you take the overall cost into consideration. That is absurd.

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Mr South—We are also being told that they will employ local people. There was a program called the NAHS program—the National Aboriginal Health Strategy program. That was exactly the same. They said, 'You must employ people.' That was part of the contract. The HIP program before that—the Health Infrastructure Priority program—was exactly the same: 'You must employ Aboriginal people.' It never happened, or it happened very rarely. They actually employed the people and said, 'Go and sit under a tree, because you just get in the road.' That has happened; I know that has happened. We have situations where Nyirranggulung council—Michael Berto of that council was here this morning—built houses with local people and just a few trainers for $340,000 and actually got people qualified. There is something going seriously wrong. We can build houses. Tony will tell you that we have mud brick houses in Robinson River that were built in—

Mr Jack—The early 1990s.

Mr South—They are still there. We are going through and doing a bit of renovation on them. All the building in Robinson River we do ourselves. We are going to build the new shop; we are going to build the new school complex—if they do not buy it out of China, which I heard yesterday is what they are proposing, so we are going to employ Chinese people instead of local Indigenous people. Come on.

Senator MOORE—So you have two builders and a plumber.

Mr South—We have another builder. We have three carpenters at the moment, but one is only temporary. We have an arrangement with the Carey Baptist Grammar School in Melbourne. They send a teacher up for six months of the year to help at our school so that hopefully we will get kids who can eventually go to Carey Grammar.

Senator MOORE—How did that arrangement start? That seems to be quite a positive thing.

Mr South—That was just two teachers getting their heads together.

Senator MOORE—That seems to be how things get done.

Mr South—Yes. Then it came from there. When they put it to the council, Tony described it at the time as a dream come true. It is a dream; we cannot believe that this is happening. Hopefully, one day we will get some kids at—

Mr Jack—We get kids coming up from Melbourne to visit our community—

Senator MOORE—To see what it is like.

Mr Jack—for two weeks to have a look at a remote community and meet our kids. Then we send eight to 12 kids down. So we have a working relationship. They go and see the big school in the big city.

Senator MOORE—And your hope is to get some kids to go there as boarders?

Mr Jack—Yes.

Senator MOORE—I am from Queensland. For my information, how far away is Robinson's Creek?

Mr Jack—From here?

Mr South—Around 950 kilometres. We are right on the Queensland border.

Senator MOORE—So you are almost Queenslanders?

Mr South—We are 160 kilometres from the Queensland border. We are the most remote community in the Territory in terms of distance from a service centre. Not only that, come the wet season we have no access other than through our airstrip, which is just a light aircraft airstrip. So that is anytime from December through to March or April, but it has been known to be from October through to May.

Senator MOORE—Depending on the season.

Mr South—Depending on the season.

Senator MOORE—How far are you from Mount Isa?

Mr South—About 900 kilometres as the crow flies.

Senator MOORE—So you are about halfway between—

Mr South—We are a little bit closer to Mount Isa.

Senator MOORE—That is what I was thinking. So geographically you are slightly closer to Mount Isa.

Mr Jack—We are closer to Mount Isa.

Mr South—But road access is—

Senator MOORE—Hopeless.

Mr South—We have a bitumen road in as far as Borroloola.

Senator SCULLION—Borroloola is their service centre.

Senator MOORE—Okay. And Borroloola has a business manager.

Mr South—We have a business manager.

Senator MOORE—You have one?

Mr Jack—Yes.

Mr South—Borroloola has only just got one. We have had one—

Senator MOORE—I knew that they had one, but I did not know that you had one. So you have done all this work. How do you work with the business manager, seeing as how you had all these pre-existing programs going of which you were rightly proud? You have now been blessed with a business manager. How does that relationship operate?

Mr South—It is in No. 10.

Senator MOORE—I have seen that. I just want to get you on record.

Mr South—We have serious problems. We are working through those at the moment. There is undoubtedly a personality conflict with me—there is no question about that. You know how Darwin has a Berrima line? We have a Borroloola line. Literally nothing came past Borroloola. We fight it all the time. We have come to accept it. But when the government business manager came, we were quite excited about it. We thought: 'Hey: this is an opportunity. We've got somebody else to help us.' We gave him an office in our offices. We hooked him up to our internet. We gave him a house, because the containers were not ready at that stage and then later they were contaminated. We had a community meeting and introduced him to everybody and told him that he was here to help us and all that sort of stuff. The first problem we had was with the housing maintenance side of the community clean out when I mistakenly got given a list of work listed prices on at. I looked at it and I thought, 'Oh, my God.' I showed it to Tony and I think his reaction was about the same.

Mr Jack—We could not believe it.

Mr South—We were thinking, 'What is going on here?' This is serious stuff. A brass garden tap which I replaced six weeks earlier they replaced again. They charged $30 for the tap and $52.50 for the labour. It cost me, or the community, $6.13 and it took me about three minutes to put it on. That is wrong.

Senator MOORE—That was the degree of detail on this list?

Mr South—Yes.

Senator MOORE—It had it all spelled out.

CHAIR—Who was that charged back to?

Mr South—I do not know—whoever paid the bill.

CHAIR—Who did the job; can you recall?

Mr South—Our plumber.

CHAIR—Did your plumber invoice anyone?

Mr South—No. Mungoorbada Aboriginal Corporation invoiced the—

CHAIR—Around how much was that invoice for?

Mr South—$10 or $15.

CHAIR—That is the real issue, isn't it?

Mr South—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Yes.

CHAIR—It is not supposed to be a profitable transaction.

Mr South—Because we do not have an electrician, all of our power problems are dealt with by Power Projects. They have their headquarters here in Katherine and they have an electrician on site at Borroloola. That electrician used to work for the intervention clean up during the day and after he knocked off he would do a bit of work for us because we needed some work done just on our own stuff. We got charged $88, including GST. He was billed out to the intervention at $140-odd. That is a problem.

CHAIR—Let me tell you, Mr South, it is not unique to that circumstance. Invariably if any level of government wants a job done it seems to cost more.

Mr South—The first problem we had with the government business manager was that I raised this with him and that afternoon the document was taken off me. I failed to photocopy it but I did keep a document without the money on it but which still had the times on it. Then I was told that I should keep my mouth shut because if I did anything about it then the community would suffer.

CHAIR—So you obviously think you did not get off to a good start.

Mr South—No.

Senator MOORE—Have you spoken to the head of the government business managers area in Darwin about your concerns?

Mr South—Yes. We had a meeting with him some time late last year. They actually came down after allegations were made about certain things that were out of left field, including reporting that no work had been done on Tony's places when they had just finished replacing 137 panels in the cattle yards with timber panels. It was just silly stuff.

Senator MOORE—So there has been a serious breakdown. What is happening now?

Mr South—We took some very serious action this week. We had a community meeting and there was a vote of no-confidence in the government business manager. We then had a council meeting with all the senior elders in the community. There was a letter written by the council to the head of the gingerbread man people.

Senator MOORE—I have not heard that before—and now I am not going to be able to forget it! Thank you very much.

Mr South—If you have a woman in that position it is a gingerbread man woman; it is not a gingerbread woman.

Senator MOORE—Okay. I just needed to get that right. So there is a process that you have gone through locally and that has now gone back—

Mr South—We have had to take that step. Basically we have said, 'Please give us somebody that we can work with,' because we still desperately need assistance out there. Where other communities have a lot of money, we have nothing. We have a front-deck lawnmower that mows golf courses for $30,000 and we have a bit of sporting equipment that we already had. It looks like we are going to get renovations to a rec hall and a few saddles and things. There are lots of things that we desperately need out there, but I suppose we missed out again. I do not know.

Senator MOORE—Thank you. We will follow up what is happening there. Please let us know.

Senator ADAMS—I was very interested in what you were saying about the containers at lunch time. Can you tell us how many containers you have there and what the process was, going through all the problems?

Mr South—This is the GBM containers you are talking about? We have six living quarters containers, an office container and a kitchen container. Right from the word go there was a contract given to NT Link to put these things in. We said to Major-General Chalmers at the time, 'No, we have a policy here; we do everything ourselves.' He argued for a little bit, but eventually he said, 'No, Bill; you do it.' So our community did it. We built the complex. We actually went a little bit further. We now have a double complex where half of it is government business managers stuff, there is a paved area in the middle and we have our own containers with our visitors accommodation for contractors. That is a work in progress. Ours are fine because they are not contaminated. There was another government business managers complex put in, which involved two demountables that were built in South Australia, and lo and behold they are contaminated with urea-formaldehyde as well, so they are not allowed to be used either.

Senator ADAMS—How can you decontaminate them? What is the story there?

Mr South—They were really bad. I went up to the back of one of them and my eyes shut themselves—'That's it, Bill; we're not looking anymore. We don't like it.' I got out by forcing an eye open. It was serious stuff in there. When we put them in we left the doors open for a month or so. When we put them under cover we got our electrician to go in and put a fan in there. We have an overhead fan in there. So our containers are not contaminated unless you turn everything off and lock the doors, in which case the stuff builds up. There have been numerous tests to try to work out where it is coming from, and nobody seems to be able to determine exactly where it is coming from. We think that it is coming out of the chipboard that is in them and that is also in the new demountables. It looks like it is coming out of the chipboard in the kitchen. We said, 'Righto; let's go into one of these things, rip all the chipboard out and then have it retested.' But no, they did not want to do that. So then we said: 'You pay us $80,000. We'll rip everything out and rebuild them ourselves. Then we can take them over.' That has not happened either.

Senator ADAMS—So this is the business manager that is preventing it, or is it higher up?

Mr South—I do not know where that is.

Mr Jack—Higher up.

Mr South—That is much higher. It is coming in. If it were private enterprise—Senator Scullion, you commented that that is government—there is no way, but at the moment we are very short of accommodation in Robinson.

Senator ADAMS—That is the reason I asked the question.

Mr South—That had been really good for trainers and those sorts of things. At the moment we cannot bring in trainers and things because we do not have the means to do that.

Mr Jack—At the moment our government manager has no accommodation. They had two goes at trying to set up accommodation for him, but, because of the fumes, he is now staying away from the community. He just comes and goes. It is not helping us, so to speak.

Senator ADAMS—How far away does he live?

Mr Jack—He goes to Darwin or back to Brisbane or something.

Senator MOORE—A day trip.

Mr Jack—A day trip.

Senator ADAMS—It does not work. Something I have been following, going through all the communities, is the number of young men who left school at 13 and then came back at 17 or 18 wanting to have an education so that they could get a job. Do you have any problems in your community like that?

Mr South—Marginally. At Robinson River we have one of the best attendances at boarding school of any community. At the moment we have 22 kids—something like that—away at boarding school.

Senator MOORE—Where do they go?

Mr South—Yirara College mainly, at Alice, and Kormilda College.

Senator MOORE—In Darwin.

Mr South—We have other people staying in Callistemon House here in Katherine and attending the high school. There are others at St Phillip's College in Alice. That is about it. At the start of this year, three aeroplanes pulled up on our airstrip to pick up all our kids to go to boarding school. Two kids got on. We discovered later that they had been told that they had the option of staying in Robinson River and going to our little school, with absolutely no facilities for that, or going to boarding school. That is why they did not get on the aeroplane. At the start of this term we reversed that very quickly. The aeroplanes pulled up and all the kids were out there, shiny clean. They jumped on and went off to boarding school as happy as Larry.

Senator MOORE—They wanted to and were keen to get back?

Mr South—Yes, they love it.

CHAIR—They are kids and it is boarding school. That is rubbish; they just go!

Senator MOORE—To the best of your knowledge, Mr South, who told them that they did not have to go?

Mr South—It came from the school principal.

Senator ADAMS—So, to answer my question, the children are all going away to boarding school and you do not have any need for some adult education—

Mr South—No. Most of the kids go to school. We still have a problem with kids who have probably always been a problem at school, with attendance or whatever. We call them day-trippers: kids who are in and out of the community on a piece of elastic. They obviously do not go to school and they have probably never been to school. They are the ones we missed along

the way. All the primary school kids go to school now, but some of those kids missed out. Batchelor College came in. We never had any training before. We just could not get it. We have a community employment broker who did a wonderful job. He was like a little fox terrier—he would get onto it and away he would go. Anyway, we had all of these people getting enrolled in adult education and then we had a problem. Because people could not do their work during the day, because they were at school, they asked whether they could have their classes at night, so at Robinson River we introduced night classes. The instructor who was doing that has now gone and we have lost that as well. But we tried.

Senator ADAMS—That did work. It was very successful, obviously, when you had the right person there to teach them.

Mr South—I got a letter the other day confirming that two of our people are to go to the Batchelor College campus in Alice Springs for two weeks. One of those women has got a six-year-old son. She is not going to leave him for that length of time. The whole thing is slipping away, unfortunately, but we will try and bring that back at some stage.

Senator ADAMS—With that one lady, is there no way that she can come in and her child can go to school here and be looked after while she is doing her studies?

Mr South—No, he is at school at Robertson River and doing extremely well, thank you very much. She is not going to take him out of school for anything. He is a very bright little boy. In fact, she also looks after a nephew who is 11 years old. With the Carey teacher, she runs a little library thing so that the older kids get to take home library books. The 11-year-old took home a library book, the six-year-old read it, and the 11-year-old could not. She came back and asked questions and said, 'Bill, we have a problem here'. And we are in the process of tackling that as well.

CHAIR—Just a couple of quick things, Bill. I note that in your submission you talk about some of the assets that communities got. I will make a couple of assumptions and pull me up if I am wrong. There was $1.8 million in untied funds for community activity. I assume that is from CDEP management over time. Is that right?

Mr South—No.

CHAIR—Sorry, I just made an assumption. You said that at the moment you have $1.8 million in the bank et cetera. I just wonder how did you make that money.

Mr South—At the moment we have $1.84 million in the bank. That includes all bank accounts. That is just in relation to 2002, when the community was broke. We have gone a long way since then.

CHAIR—How does the community create income? I am interested in how you generate income.

Mr South—We do everything ourselves.

CHAIR—This is a profit line from the activities of the corporation and the builder. I do not need to go into it anymore; I just need to understand that.

Mr South—Yes, we are making money.

CHAIR—We understand that CDEP, as it currently is, will change again. That may make a difference to the sort of opportunity that presented itself, particularly in those areas like the women's fencing team. I note in another submission that two line items were approved by GBMs, obviously in other communities. One was for fencing nine houses in Bulman and six houses in Weemol for a total of $105,000, and a second line item was to pay $10,000 for the fencing materials. Clearly, there is an opportunity for FaHCSIA to approve something which is very useful, because we understand the issues about housing and fencing in communities. It is very important. Have you spoken to the GBM, notwithstanding the tension you have to negotiate in that relationship, about the potential for funding fencing for the houses? Obviously you still have some work to do there. You have indicated the school is one. Have you actually contacted him about it?

Mr South—He actually promised the girls that he would get money for them to keep going.

CHAIR—Just looking at this document—and this is from some time ago—one would think that if they have approved line items of exactly what you require, and given that there does not appear to have been a number of funding issues provided to Robertson River, do you know if this may be one?

Mr South—Yes, we would love it.

CHAIR—In any event, I was just seeing whether or not that was the case.

Mr South—With a contract like that, the girls are on CDEP. The supervisor is on a salary, but it is only permanent part-time. We are then able to pay them a top-up out of the income that we earn through that contract. They take on the job as a contract. They may not be as efficient as a fencing gang from Darwin but they get the job done and they do a damn good job—and along the way they make money that they then go and spend at the shop on the healthier items for their kids. We give them the opportunity to have a higher disposable income, and that shows.

CHAIR—This goes to the fundamentals of why, perhaps, your community works better than others. You can respond to that. I have visited a number of CDEP operations around the Northern Territory, and one of the interesting processes is that I can ask: 'How many CDEP coordinators have you had?' They might say, 'Ten in seven months' and I will say, 'How can that possibly be?' I normally hang around the community for a while, as you know. I have observed that the blokes turn up at quarter past nine, they get ticked off the list and the coordinator says, 'Now come and help. We've just got to move this dirt over here.' They say, 'Get stuffed. See you later.' So the coordinator says to the blokes: 'This isn't any good. You can't be on CDEP and not work.' Then they complain to the community council, to the boss in the community, and the community gets the coordinator thrown out. That is the cycle of life with some of the dysfunctional processes of CDEP. It seems to be a recurring event that the person who is running the program does not get the support of the community or the community leadership, so people on CDEP are

allowed to do this. If you want to survive as a CDEP coordinator, which some of them no doubt have, you basically allow them to just tick it all off, and it becomes a game.

So how do you deal with this in the community? How difficult is the sort of leadership that you have shown, Tony? What sorts of processes do you go through with the community to ensure that these programs have some sort of compliance and that people abide by the rules—and that it is expected of them?

Mr Jack—We had a restructure of the organisation. Going back a while our board had 22 members. We brought that down to eight so that it was manageable. We can get everybody together at our monthly meetings, sit down and really lay down the law. We try to have more community meetings. You have got to have links with your community and be really strong. You have got to have really strong administration and try to work together—support the administration with the board. You have got to be able to say no—and I mean 'say no'. You get really stroppy people who come up and step on a few toes along the way, but the next day you get up and you are still working together. You have to be really strong.

Maybe it is because we are a dry community, too. We push that really strongly all the way. As I said before, even when the intervention came on board we were really strong in that area. You need to try and work with everybody. Now we are securing contracts. We are trying to create jobs for local people. We say, 'All right, we went out of our way to get you a job. You've got to work now. We're going to be watching you. You've got to perform.' You try to encourage that person and give them support right through.

It took a long time to get this far. At AGMs you have new board members and you go over all the board training with them. You try to get a lot of people around and you encourage young people to take a step up and come onto the board and learn.

Mr South—Pride and self-esteem. You use work and the development of work ethics to develop pride and self-esteem and break the negative welfare cycle. And CDEP is an excellent tool for that. There is no program like it.

CHAIR—What would you say should be the maximum amount of time people should spend in CDEP, given that it is a transitional program? As you would know, if some people have been on it for 10 years it is hardly a transitional program.

Mr South—I have been involved with CDEP since 1994. That was in the desert, and we achieved all sorts of wonderful things on the community development side and the work ethics and all that sort of stuff. In 1996, the concept of CDEP changed. In 1996 it moved away from remote policy, for remote areas, to being a program that suited the urban and rural communities better. Then the focus moved away from the community development side to job creation.

At Robinson River, we do not have the jobs. Every permanent job that we can get we have got people into it. The only way we can get people into more jobs is to create those jobs, and we are desperately trying to do that. But we are pushing the proverbial up the proverbial with that one, well and truly. That is very, very difficult. We have actually said, 'With CDEP going in three years time, we have three years to develop the enterprises to employ the people.' And we would like to be able to do that. We have 522,000 hectares of land trust that we would like to be able to

use; however, there are barriers in that as well. As far as your question about how long people should remain, they remain on CDEP until such time as we can create jobs for them. But as long as they are doing useful, worthwhile work, we have no alternative short of them going away somewhere else. And they are not going to do that.

CHAIR—Mr Jack and Mr South, thank you very much for the evidence you have provided to the committee today. Should we have further questions on notice, they will be provided to through the secretariat.

[2.08 pm]

GOEDECKE, Mr Barrie, Private capacity

DAW, Mr William (Bill), Board Member, Rivers Region Youth Development Services; and Alderman, Katherine Town Council

McKITTRICK, Ms Haidee, Remote Project Officer, Rivers Region Youth Development Service

CHAIR—Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. I now invite you to make a short opening statement and at the conclusion of your remarks I will invite members of the committee to put some questions to you.

Ms McKittrick—First, I would like to thank you for inviting our organisation to share our opinions and experiences today, and I would also like to recognise the traditional owners of the lands on which we are meeting. To start off with, I will explain our capacity. We work with young people, schools, parents, businesses and local community organisations to help in the transition from school to work. We help young people into meaningful education, training and employment in our region. We do this through structured workplace learning, career transition support, the Adopt A School program and Youth Pathways, which is a mentoring program. The area that we service is basically from Pine Creek to Tennant Creek, border to border, so we work with numerous remote communities. This is our fourth year as a local community partnership for the Katherine and Barkly region.

Mr Daw—Rivers Region Youth Development Services is one of the higher rated LCPs in Australia. We got the—

CHAIR—Acronyms?

Mr Daw—As in a star rating.

CHAIR—LCP?

Ms McKittrick—LCP is a local community partnership.

Mr Daw—Local community partnerships.

Ms McKittrick—One of the first issues we would like to bring up is that a link to transition from education to employment is very difficult. Schools are inundated with lots of duplication. There are numerous programs that are not connected, and there is no uniformity in how they are presented. We hear through different seminars we go to about all these wonderful programs, and it is really hard to find out if they will be available in all of our communities or some of our communities and in what sort of time frame they will be able to service them. For example, there is a work ready program that DET fund, Group Training Northern Territory, but at the moment that is only in Darwin. They have increased their funding but they have not had to increase the

area that they service. Another huge barrier to the successful transition from education to employment is the students' basic literacy and numeracy skills.

The next point is that there is no career focus in the Northern Territory curriculum framework. Career education and transition to work need to be outside the learning areas, like the learning technology, and we believe that career advisers should be qualified, relevant professionals and a specialty in their own right. At the moment, it is a 0.5 position, so they might have half a teaching load and then 0.5 as a career adviser. Presently, career education is hidden inside studies of society and the environment, so none of the high school teachers want to do any of the career transition support transition plans that we have because it is not written in their curriculum area. They want the SOSE teachers to do that. They also have to teach social systems and structures and the environment. Enterprise does not come in till band 4, which is at the end of the middle years, when students are already disengaging, so it is already too late to start talking about career and the transition at that time.

We believe that education in remote locations is substandard, and we do not understand why we accept this. Student-teacher ratios when teaching English as a second language are set at 10 to one, whereas when you are teaching in remote schools you have 25 students and one teacher, so it is more than double the ESL student-teacher ratio.

We are also concerned about the lack of uniformity in the educational system. There are three communities where students travel a lot. At one school they are doing AL, accelerated literacy; at another school they are doing First Steps, which is a Western Australian literacy program; and then at another school the teachers are writing their own literacy programs. We know that the kids are travelling. We know that they move between the communities, and every time they change they go into a different literacy program. It is similar for maths as well.

At one remote school that I visited this year, students were being locked out of the school buildings and locked in the school buildings. If they were more than 10 minutes late, they had to go and see the principal and explain why they were late and get growled out before they could go to class. That is a huge deterrent for kids coming to school and staying at school. If they are a bit too late after recess, they have to go through that whole process.

Attendance is hugely affected by poor teaching practice and a lack of engaging educational programs. It is easier for schools to say that it is all issues happening in the community, whereas a lot of the time it can be issues within the school. I have met many teachers who are suffering from culture shock, have given up or are waiting to retire, and only in extreme cases does anything happen, are there any consequences or are they put on mentoring programs to improve that.

I would like to question whether the education system is relevant to Indigenous students. Are we using the most appropriate styles of delivery? Is a six-week holiday during the wet season a good idea when there is nothing else to do?

Mr Daw—And they are stranded within the community.

Ms McKittrick—And that is when we give them six weeks and quite often provide nothing else. I also question whether the start times are appropriate for young people and communities. I

know there is lots of research to say that adolescents like to sleep in and they do not function until the late morning. We know that, but we still start school at eight o'clock.

There are lots of teacher centred old styles of teaching. I have seen a trend where there are either new graduate teachers or experienced teachers who have come from down south and want to try something different before they retire. Many of the older teachers come up and teach the way they have always taught, even though they are working in a totally foreign environment, and they enjoy their lack of accountability.

On class progression: students' progress through the education system should be based on academic levels, not just age. I believe that students need to achieve a certain standard before they advance to the next level, because there are too many students slipping through the net and leaving school without fundamental skills.

On the apprenticeship system—because we also work with young people who are not at school—we believe that we need to increase apprentices' remuneration level to be comparable to other industry standards. Basically, the base salary needs to be higher. A lot of the time you can earn more, say, at Woollies than if you are on an apprenticeship. We need to review and upgrade travel and accommodation rates when students are on block courses. Our remote students might need to go to Darwin for block training, and the accommodation is far too expensive in peak season. They end up sharing in backpackers' hostels surrounded by international tourists. Not many parents want to send their 15- or 16-year-old into that environment. We also need to bring up the availability and quality of RTOs for remote apprenticeships.

Mr Daw—Registered training organisations.

Ms McKittrick—We believe there needs to be a long-term educational plan and we need to educate local community members to enable them to deliver education in their community. We have seen some best practice for that. Community based Indigenous trainers are getting their training funded. We have also seen the Grow Your Own program working really well. I think it could be spread out. We believe there need to be more short courses on communities. There is a bit of a trend to stop funding the 'soft' skills—they all want to be accredited in traditional trades—and we believe we need to develop those soft skills as well.

Mr Daw—Just to give a bit of background there on VET in Schools, or VETIS: yearly for the past few years there has been $7 million worth of VET in Schools applications to deliver those vocational skills, but there is only $2 million to go around the whole Territory, so there is a vast shortage in delivering those skills within the school and the community.

Ms McKittrick—Our last point is about the Care and Protection of Children Act. The Northern Territory government have recognised that this legislation is flawed, but they have not changed it. Instead of stopping paedophilia, this legislation is creating distrust and reducing access to professional advice, help and medication. We believe that what is needed is more resources for FaHCSIA and the police to do their job properly, rather than inundating them with normal family issues that should be able to be discussed in a trusting environment. That is all we have planned to tell you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Ms McKittrick; that is fantastic. It is tremendous to have somebody appear before us who is under the usual age of those people who appear before us, particularly if you are representing these youth services.

Senator MOORE—Ha!

CHAIR—Wouldn't you agree with that?

Senator MOORE—No.

CHAIR—I note that you have not made a submission.

Ms McKittrick—Yes. I have stuff here to give you—

CHAIR—If it is possible, it would be very useful. We would be more than happy to—

Ms McKittrick—Do you want to have that now to refer to?

CHAIR—No, I have made some notes. The secretary will pick it up and we will all get a copy of that in a moment. I thank you very much for preparing that. It is very difficult to know where to start, but hopefully between us we will cover most of the bases. Mentoring programs seem to have a pretty significant outcome in the community. How do you think they should work? What works well in mentoring programs and what does not? What are the characteristics of those that work well?

Ms McKittrick—The mentoring program that we are funded for is Youth Pathways. We originally received funding for 20 positions throughout our whole region. We have got extra positions for Katherine High School and for Elliott, but basically they offered us 20 positions and there is a far greater need than that. Our funding is dependent on students passing through different stages. If we cannot contact them for a month then we miss out on funding. If they do not stay at school or engage in further training or education, we do not get our funding. That makes it really hard. We would have to take up 40 students just to get our funding for 20 places. That is a big barrier. Also, Youth Pathways is going to change next year, so the government has recognised that the program is not really working—but that did not really answer your question. This is our first year with the Youth Pathways contracts, so we do not have huge experience with it. We have done some more informal mentoring, such as getting the police to mentor students. I guess my response would be that we have not had a lot of experience with it.

Mr Daw—We are identifying people within the community and industry to mentor these kids as they go through.

CHAIR—You acknowledged in your opening remarks that a lack of literacy and numeracy skills seems to be a barrier to VET and a whole range of things. What are the fundamentals of re-engaging the people who do not have those skills? What other things can we be doing to manage that and to increase the number of people who are gaining those skills?

Ms McKittrick—We need quality teachers with engaging educational programs. Kids come to school if they enjoy what they are doing and they like their teacher. I probably should tell you

that I was a teacher at Timber Creek for a year and a half and that I have just moved into this sort of work. It is easy for schools to blame communities for why students are not coming to school. But, if the school is not an inviting, happy place to be, I would not want to go either. I think it comes back to quality teachers and good educational programs.

Mr Daw—And, if you are going to school to be grounded all the time, you would not want to go. We have all been in that situation at some stage, Mr Chair, haven't we!

CHAIR—I do not think any school day was any different for me, but those were in previous times. We heard from a principal down in the APY Lands who said their philosophy is: when the kid gets out of bed he has the choice to go to school or not to go to school. Rather than relying on anything else, they see themselves as having to compete against a day playing PlayStation or something similar. The school actually competes to have the kids at school, which is a different approach to what we have heard before, and you certainly support that.

Ms McKittrick—Yes. Also, at Timber Creek the preschool started later so that the bus did a second run around. We got most of the children, and then the bus drivers could say, 'This is who I am missing,' and then they could go and chase them up on the preschool round. Things like that worked. The main thing is that, if the kids are happy to be at school and they enjoy being with their teacher, they are going to come and they are going to learn.

Mr Daw—As you travel around and visit different schools, you can tell the schools that have a great learning environment because all the kids are there. You walk in and you know it is a great environment, and then you go to another school where it is not the same. I guess that is what Haidee is trying to touch on—schools being somewhere inviting to spend the day and learn.

Senator SCULLION—The Northern Territory government are obviously fundamentally a part of the main core of the business that you generally operate under—they are responsible for that. Have you made a submission, or have you thought about making a direct submission, even if it is uninvited, to the Northern Territory government in this regard?

Ms McKittrick—Our executive officer had meetings with Marion Scrymgour last year. She had promised certain things for our organisation, and because of the changeover we are having trouble getting that followed up.

Senator SCULLION—So, instead of starting at eight o'clock, what time do you think they should start?

Ms McKittrick—I think 11 until four or five o'clock. Maybe talk to the community and see what is going to work for them. As long as they are doing certain hours a day, I do not think—

Senator SCULLION—The teachers are another element. People say, 'We can't have change because we're on awards, so we basically work around what the teachers require.' Do you think in those circumstances the teachers or the unions will be sufficiently flexible about that?

Ms McKittrick—I cannot speak for the unions, but the education system is really there for the students, not the teachers.

Senator MOORE—You cannot have one without the other.

Ms McKittrick—Yes, I know.

Senator MOORE—I have two really simple questions. One is: how do you get the teachers?

Ms McKittrick—I came up as a student teacher.

Senator MOORE—From?

Ms McKittrick—From Victoria.

Senator MOORE—Was there a set program going on there to encourage people to come up?

Ms McKittrick—I studied through La Trobe University and then—

Senator MOORE—La Trobe has links, does it not?

Ms McKittrick—It does—for your fourth year. But I actually came up through Victoria University on a program called SWIRL, Story Writing in Remote Locations. We had teachers and youth workers come up in groups. There is one supervising teacher who comes up from Victoria as well and then maybe four or five uni students. I had a month in a community in the desert and then I went back and the next year I came up for third term—so for three months—to Timber Creek. I was there for a period of time and then I got to go back and think about whether I wanted to come back so that when I chose I knew what I was coming into instead of it being my first experience. I have seen lots of other people come up. It is their first experience, they are in culture shock and they are not prepared practically or emotionally. So I think that is a big part of it. I know that there are programs where principals go down and speak at unis and things like the Growing Our Own program. Lajamanu are working with that and they have Indigenous assistant teachers in every classroom. I think that is really important as well.

Senator MOORE—The information we have had from the Northern Territory government in the past—and I have not got this recently—was quite serious about the need to get more teachers, the difficulty in attracting teachers, the capacity for training, and that the teachers colleges through universities have relatively small numbers. They have been trapped into other forms of work rather than teaching. The partnerships with some of the other areas are great, and we have seen that in action.

Ms McKittrick—A big thing for a uni student is that, if you have to take a month or three months off work, you have no income or maybe just the youth allowance. The Katherine Group School were able to pay for my accommodation and they also paid me $100 or $150 a fortnight. I would have been able to work part time if I was at my home, but I was obviously unable to do that there. I did not have the savings myself, so that helped.

Senator MOORE—And there is no bonding arrangement? There is no minimum amount of time you have to work when you come up?

Ms McKittrick—I came up for a term, but that was something set up by my uni. That was in my fourth year.

Senator MOORE—That is another sensitive issue—bonding with people who commit forward two to three years and they have to do that to pay it back. That has always been sensitive. We still have it in Queensland.

Ms McKittrick—In Western Australia, I think if you work for four years you get the fifth year off.

Senator MOORE—The other thing I would like to hear all of your opinions on is the role of parents. I totally accept your point that school has got to be an interesting place; otherwise it is just hard work, and that is not a good place to succeed. We consistently hear about the lack of encouragement or ownership of parents and the need for their kids to get an education—and that is across the whole of the country, not just here. There have been very sensitive discussions about ways of encouraging parents to get involved in the need for their children to be at school. And we have had quite a divisive debate about penalties for parents who do not encourage their kids—or at least attempt to get their kids into school. I would really like to hear from you about your views on engaging parents to encourage their children to be at school. It is clear that when that does not happen there is a problem. From your point of view, how might we engage parents?

Ms McKittrick—We plan to have a parent information session at each of our communities, where we will make a small presentation and then have morning tea, afternoon tea or lunch, which will allow time to mingle with the parents and for them to ask questions. The aim is to emphasise how important their role is in the students' career development. We plan to hold that in the schools, so we are getting parents to come into school. For some of our schools we are going to do it through the school council meeting because they recommended that. Other schools have set up lots of posters around the community so that community members are informed and can make a decision about coming.

Mr Daw—I can speak as a parent. I understand the need for parents to give that guidance, counselling and discipline to get children to go to school. There seems to be a lack of that within the community that I have been dealing with, and I understand it is the fundamental problem with getting some students to attend school.

Mr Goedecke—One of the issues that I see is that at the moment we need to have parents who are actually involved in the education system. Too many parents, particularly Indigenous parents, are on the fringes. They do not really become involved with the education system for two reasons: firstly, they do not understand it and, secondly, they are made to feel inferior by it. Engagement with those people is a key. If they can get involved in the education system and see the value of education, they are more likely to support it from the point of view of getting their children to attend.

I do not believe the idea of penalising parents who fail to send their children to school is a workable or sustainable option. Parents need to see a value in education. They need to be able to see an end result in education. In many of these communities they cannot on the basis that there is not sustainable employment there. In many cases children who eventually grow up in the community and get educated in the community, assuming they get the education they need, will

then have to move on to employment because there are not employment opportunities within the local community.

But I believe we need to really engage parents in the education process. They need to be a part of that process—part of curriculum development. They need to be associated with the teachers and the problems that teachers have. They need to actually feel part of the system rather than outsiders to the system. Only when they fully understand it and engage with it will they be able to support it and get their kids to school.

Ms McKittrick—I think we forget that these parents are probably disengaged from school as well. I have spoken to people who have said that, when they see the white troopy coming in to pick up their kids, it reminds them of being stolen. It brings back all those memories, so why would they want to send their kids off with white people? It brings up all those emotions. If we penalise them it is not going to help the situation—it is just more negativity.

Senator MOORE—I will leave the questions about adult education to Senator Adams because she is handling that area. I just want to ask about the school nutrition programs. It certainly seemed to be a widening of some work that was already happening in some schools. It was wonderful that the widening of that seems to have had some positive impact. Have you had any feedback about whether it has been an attraction and is something we can encourage?

Ms McKittrick—I have not had a lot to do with that.

Mr Daw—I have. The school nutritional program is an important thing that has happened within the schools. It does encourage the students to attend and it needs more support.

Senator MOORE—And the other good thing is that it often uses community people to provide the meals, so it just grows.

Mr Daw—That is right—it is an extension of the HACC program or the aged care programs where people prepare the food. I turned up at the school at Minyerri yesterday and there was the women's centre and HACC program providing food for all the kids in the school. There were probably five extra people employed doing that.

Ms McKittrick—Also, when the students do a certificate I in hospitality we will organise structured workplace learning, so we are going to have the hospitality students work within the school canteen—

Senator MOORE—Great!

Ms McKittrick—the creche, the aged care centre and the shop. So hopefully, in a year's time or so, they will be able to run those programs, and then I can see it working well. But it will depend on who is running it, I think.

Senator MOORE—It always does, but as a concept that is very positive. Thank you.

Senator ADAMS—In education—and this is a question I have been asking as we have moved around the different communities—there seems to be a problem with younger boys leaving

school at, say, 12 or 13, and then at 17 or 18 realising that they really need to learn to be able to get a job. Could you give us examples from the area that you cover of any adult learning programs that are really successful and could perhaps be a pilot type thing?

Mr Daw—I have a declaration to make here: I am the regional training coordinator for the Department of Education and Training for the Katherine region, so that falls within my area. I have a funding role in delivering vocational courses within the communities. A program called Flexible Response Funding funds both accredited and non-accredited training, and funding depends on community needs and employment outcomes at the end of it.

There have been several great programs that have been funded within the communities. There is one in the pastoral industry, through the IPP and the real jobs program of the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association through the ILC, and that is a pilot that started this year. The ITS or Indigenous Trainee Scheme within the pastoral industry has been going for a couple of years now and they have been placing young men into the pastoral industry, which they have an affiliation with because that is what their fathers and grandfathers used to do and they talk about it all the time. That is an industry which is easily accessible to a lot of these communities because they are surrounded by pastoral property.

The programs that have been funded within the Katherine region have been various and numerous. There have been lots of failures and lots of successes. From our departmental point of view, it is about the job outcomes now; it is not training for the sake of training. I guess it was easy to say that the CDEP was employment when it was not really; it was like a funded program at half pay and so forth. But now we are looking for training that will lead people to full-time employment within the community, or enterprise—that is the other area that we are trying to move on.

Senator ADAMS—With the communities, as to a young man trying to enter this area to learn, what encouragement is given for them to go into an area like that? In some of the places we have been to there have been 20 or 30 young people wanting to learn but no facilities, because everything is stretched—no teachers; nothing.

Mr Daw—That is right.

Senator ADAMS—So this is really what I am trying to get at: is there a need out there—

Mr Daw—There is certainly a need.

Senator ADAMS—and what is being done to actually accommodate the need?

Mr Daw—The career pathways that the Rivers Region Youth Development Services are identifying in those structured workplace things is a good start. That is starting to happen now within the community, as Haidee mentioned earlier. That is where RRYDS is heading. There is a need; there are still a lot of disengaged young people, and not just men, either—there are a lot of disengaged young girls. We have been trying to entice them into further training through some non-accredited programs, to give them a bit of a taster to see if they like it. So that is an area that could probably be extended for those ones, to re-engage them, and then they could make a decision from that point.

Senator ADAMS—In some of the areas that we have been to there has not been any funding for an additional adult trainer or teacher or anyone who could help. Is there anything like that around?

Mr Daw—Currently, the Northern Territory and federal governments have got a program called CBIT—community based indigenous trainers—that they are rolling out so that all communities will have at least one Indigenous trainer with a certificate IV in training assessment, and they will be able to be used in various areas within the community to pick up those sorts of young people and try and maybe give them some extra training as well.

Ms McKittrick—I have an example I have just though of. Borroloola CEC is about to start an auxiliary high school program for those sorts of students you are talking about who have disengaged from school. The principal has recognised that they are not going to come back to school and they have disengaged. So they are opening another campus which is going to be running VET courses, work placements and driver training. So they have recognised that they are not going to come back to school and that they need to make another program. Like I said, it has not started yet but it sounds like it will work really well. They are going to have a coordinator there who coordinates people like me coming in and organising structured workplace learning and who coordinates the VET teachers coming in to make sure that there is always something happening. I think that is a really interesting idea that sounds promising.

Mr Daw—I guess another great thing that is happening, and this is probably up to stage 2, is the trade training centres. Ngukurr, for example, has got to the second stage of the funding application to build a regional trade training centre at Ngukurr. I think having more of those dispersed through the bigger communities around the region will be something great so that we can pass those skills on for those boys from year 9 onwards when they start disengaging and put them into those trade areas, where they are going to have more interest than in the academic area.

CHAIR—The last part of your contribution, which I wondered if you would be able to expand on, Haidee, was the Northern Territory government legislation regarding the care and protection of children. I have assumed from the short statement you made in your opening remarks that this is about the reporting of sexual activity in teenagers. We have taken some evidence from a group of doctors in the Northern Territory on that. I wonder if you could just expand on that short statement.

Ms McKittrick—Where it impacts on our role is through our mentoring in the Youth Pathways program. We are trying to get young people to identify their barriers and build trust with them. We just feel that this is going to put up a huge barrier to building that trust. We worry about access to medical advice—we worry that students will be relying on their peers because they are the only people they can talk to about this.

CHAIR—So you are saying that currently they would normally go to their doctor but if they think they are going to get reported when they go to their doctor then they will not.

Ms McKittrick—Exactly, they are not going to speak to their doctor about contraception or safe-sex practices because then they might have the police knocking on their door. They cannot talk to someone like one of our adults, one of the mentors, about sexually transmitted diseases

and all those things either because again we would have to tell them that we have to report against them.

CHAIR—I guess one of the reasons I would like to scrutinise this further is that as a community we share this challenge. As I said to the doctors, at the age of 15 you have won me—there are some people more mature at 15 than at other ages. At the age of 14 you could probably make the argument in a few individual cases. At the age of 13 you would be getting pretty vague. And at the ages of 11 or 12 there is no-one in the room who is going to support anything else.

One of the things we suggested to the doctors was that, rather than the community being happy we don't want to know about it, we need a level of confidence that those people really at risk are being reported, because they actually really need that support. How can the community feel that we are confident in the process? The suggestion came forward that perhaps rather than having one person, because they are a function of error, the reporting would only help if a doctor and a peer of that doctor—so two doctors—conferred and decided that this person was in fact at risk because of whatever factors existed in the background.

I think you have probably thought about this more than many of us, given your circumstances and your role. Would you think that example might be something that would satisfy the community? So it would then not just be a case of a doctor having an off day, like anybody. Do you think that sort of a process of saying, 'Yes, we are happy to leave the law in place as long as there are two doctors who actually triage it and they would be able to make a decision on whether or not it was a reportable matter'?

Ms McKittrick—Yes, and they are using their professional judgement as to whether or not there is a problem there. I think the greatest problem is that young people are not going to be telling adults or professionals so they are not going to get any support or professional advice.

Mr Daw—I think that is where our issue is with young adults. I think anything under 14, like you said, is reportable anyway. I guess our area of that is the area where they start thinking about it, their hormones are running wild and so forth. That area is different to what you just said about anything under 14 years et cetera. I think that is a different matter and maybe needs to be defined more in that legislation.

CHAIR—I think one of the challenges in terms of this discussion is being prescriptive. At 15 there are a multiplicity of different personalities of maturity. capacity to understand and capacity to be informed when talking about informed consent. It is a very wide brush.

Ms McKittrick—And this is not going to stop any paedophilia or any abuse; it is only going to stop support and discussion. That is my concern. I do not think it is going to change young people's sexual behaviour—just the advice they get about it.

CHAIR—I suspect that the legislation is not actually there to provide for young people's sexual behaviour but is to provide indicators about other people's sexual behaviour.

Mr Daw—And that is the crossover—it is not finite and it is not clear regarding that.

CHAIR—Again, I thank you for your insight. It is a very difficult area.

Mr Daw—We did bring an opinion piece from Dr Andrew Bell who is from the Katherine West Health Board. I spoke to him today and asked if we could submit his opinion regarding the Care and Protection of Children Act.

CHAIR—The secretary will pick it up and we will have a discussion about whether it can be taken as a submission.

Mr Daw—It is only opinion but we wanted to bring it. It was presented to one of the schools.

Senator MOORE—I am wondering what interaction if any you have had with government business managers and people on community about the process. You have obviously got links with the Territory government through the funding process and you have clear strategic goals. What kind of role do you have in discussion at the community level about what is going on?

Mr Daw—In my role I deal with GBMs weekly, almost daily, within the communities within the Katherine region. Their role is important. I have discussions with Indigenous people in the community. Their main concern is that this is only a short-sighted thing by the Federal government as to how this program is going to run—it is only five years and then it is going to be ripped out from underneath them. It is like the CEBs. They were sent in to help. They started getting legs on the ground and then all of a sudden that was ripped out from underneath them. I hear a lot about 'that Munaka mob'—this is just another Munaka, white fella, coming through telling us what to do again and then they will leave.

I think, from my discussions with Indigenous people in the community, they want clarity. They want to know that the support is going to be ongoing and that this is not just something started because of a change of government or so forth that is going to finish when a new government comes in. I have had a lot of discussion about that with community members. But I respect GBMs. They are a very important part of the community. Like any position or any organisation there are good GBMs and not so good GBMs. That is managed internally. I think it has to be more outcomes focused for some of those GBMs. I do know that they get to deal a lot with the day-to-day issues of paedophilia and all those law and order issues that they are dealing with, with the police, rather than being able to spend more time on managing the business side of the community.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for appearing before us today. If we require further information, we will place questions on notice through the secretariat and they will get in touch.

Proceedings suspended from 2.50 pm to 3.07 pm

BATCHLER, Mrs Danelle Caroline, Manager, Expanded Money Management Services, Kalano Community Association Inc.

DOWLING, Ms Carol, President, Kalano Community Association Inc.

HOFFMAN, Mr Rodney Colin, CDEP Manager, Kalano Community Association Inc.

McDONALD, Ms Andrea, Manager, Expanded Money Management Services Kalano Community Association Inc.

WEETRA, Mrs Rosslyn, Team Leader, Expanded Money Management Services, Kalano Community Association Inc.

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mrs Weetra—I am also here as a mother of five and a community member.

Ms McDonald—I am also here as a mother and a community member.

Mr Hoffman—I also come here today as an Indigenous male of the Katherine community and a father.

CHAIR—Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. I now invite you to make a short opening statement or statements. At the conclusion of your remarks, I will invite members of the committee to put some questions to you.

Ms Dowling—Kalano Community Association has been operating in Katherine for the last 34 years. We are the only Aboriginal community organisation with five member communities—of Mialli Brumby, Rockhole, Geyulkgan, Jodeluk and town. We provide community service programs to our members. That includes housing, municipal and essential services, CDEP, sport and recreation, aged care, home care, alcohol rehabilitation and community patrol—which I believe also benefits the entire township of Katherine. Our four member communities of Mialli Brumby, Rockhole, Geyulkgan and Jodeluk are currently prescribed communities.

When the federal intervention emergency response program came some two years ago to the Northern Territory, we continued to make constant approaches to the then task force to discuss our wish to put together a collaborative plan for the ongoing development of our member communities, based on our already known needs and aspirations. We were met with deaf ears, which we at first thought was a lack of understanding. I later concluded that yet again it was a case of 'Government knows best and we will be doing business to you, as we always have.' Never mind that at Kalano we have our own long-term social and economic plans, based on proven community engagement and inclusive practices.

We now have Closing the Gap measures and we continue to ask government for partnerships in order to continue the development of our community and to strengthen our current service delivery of appropriate programs to meet our basic human rights and needs. We continue to be spoonfed servicing only to enhance the cycle of dependency. We still have no consultation and no access to any of the Australian government intervention moneys and are expected to be in competition with big business. We have had our Indigenous housing advisory service taken from us after seven years of delivering the program and it has been given to a non-Indigenous, non-government organisation that has yet to set up service, some four months or so later, leaving our Indigenous people in Katherine without any advisory service in the housing industry. We are currently in a position of losing our Community Development Employment Program, CDEP, to yet another non-Indigenous NGO who have yet to demonstrate their capacity to deliver the program better than we can.

Kalano Community Association has more than demonstrated its ability to deliver appropriate services to our member communities. In the period April 2008 to April 2009 we have provided an additional 412 people with housing. This is without any growth in funding for new houses. An additional 412 people with housing takes our total affordable housing service to meeting the needs of some 980 people. We have continually complied with all government directions, gaining unqualified audits over the last three years and having good governance structures second to none. Our council meets regularly every month. We are a highly functional community but that seems to work against us and not for us. Government continues not to want to consult and partnerships look to be out of the question. We now have the Helping Hands program. We are still wondering where our hands are going to be fitting in.

The governments of today continue poor practices of social justice with a high level of firm rules and a low level of fairness and respect. We continue to struggle in a very non-productive and unjust quadrant with programs being done to us and not with us. We are left wondering when the government might be coming to consult with us and actually develop real partnerships based on mutual respect and genuine integrity. I brought in a copy of the social justice quadrants that I referred to for your information.

CHAIR—We will have that copied so that we can look at it.

Mrs Batchler—When the intervention was placed upon the communities it was a whole-of-community response. There was no consultation and it did not seem to matter—which has come out earlier today—how well communities may have been operating. The support was one-size-fits-all and did not seem to address the areas where we were asking for help. The Kalano organisation did not get a GBM. We got lots of restrictions. We got the rules and regulations. All of our communities are fearing the worst. The girls will elaborate a little on how community people felt. We just recently, it seems, have been appointed a GBM but we are yet to see him and find out what that is going to do for us as a community. So we have had the restrictions but we have not had any extra money for housing or any extra money for help on writing submissions on how we might, in the public arena, tender better for the services that we know we deliver very well.

CHAIR—What sort of restrictions are you talking about?

Mrs Batchler—Alcohol, pornography, those sorts of things.

CHAIR—Was it not a dry community before the intervention?

Ms Dowling—One of our member communities at Rockhole was. Without any consultation it was then slapped over the head with the big signage that we find quite offensive regarding the alcohol and pornography restrictions.

CHAIR—I just wanted to know what actual changes there were within that. So all others, apart from Rockhole, were in effect wet communities. So they are the restrictions you are talking about?

Ms Dowling—Mialli Brumby was our community with social drinking for many of our workers, which we have helped develop over the years. That has all gone.

Senator SCULLION—Okay. I will come back to that. The reason I asked the question was to get clarification on exactly which restrictions you were referring to. Sorry, please continue.

Mrs Batchler—Also with the intervention came income management, and there were no means for somebody to actually show that they had the skills—that they were managing their family budgets well. We are coming across this a lot now with the money management program. Also now, later on down the track, there is no mechanism, nor does it seem there is going to be one, whereby a family may be able to present and say, 'We have the skills to manage our own family household budgets' and to come off income management. With that comes the telltale sign of BasicsCard. So, when you are shopping in town, there is the shame of having people think you are unable to look after your family. Kalano has asked all the way along that there be the opportunity to develop this mechanism so that somebody may be able to say that they have the skills after maybe doing some courses or giving examples of how they are managing their household income.

The program that we have was funded short term—for three months at a time and then for another three months—so we put on some staff on a casual basis because that was all the funding was really allowing for. Unbeknownst to us, somebody came off CDEP and went onto casual but set hours a week. That family then became income managed. When they were on CDEP they were not income managed, but because the rate was casual and not part-time permanent it brought them under income management.

CHAIR—So they went from CDEP to a full income support.

Mrs Batchler—They went from CDEP to a job and became income managed whereas they were not before because both were working under CDEP.

CHAIR—The only way you can be income managed is if you are on an income supplement. That is the only way—

Mrs Batchler—If you have family, and you are entitled to family support from Centrelink to help educate your children, something the government does do well in Australia is give that extra support so families can make sure their children's roof stays over their head and they get their education.

CHAIR—But the fundamental thing is that if you are employed—if you are on the CDEP or if you have a standard job or any of those sorts of things; in other words, if you are not on a supplement from the government—then you are not subject to welfare quarantine. I just want to clarify: are you telling me that in Kalano that is not happening? People have a job and they are still income managed?

Mrs Batchler—No. But I questioned this strongly with Centrelink because it did not seem right. It was because the rate of pay was casual.

CHAIR—Thank you. We will certainly check on that. Sorry. Please continue.

Mrs Batchler—I will let you move on to Rosslyn now.

Mrs Weetra—I am not racist or anything—I was brought up to respect the elders, so you are all my elders—but I am hurt and upset because of the intervention. I will just say what I wrote down. When the intervention was first coming to the Kalano community, everyone was scared of what was going to happen to their children and had no choice but to wait and see what was going to happen. When the intervention came to the community and the organisations, we heard that good things were going to happen for the community and our people on the communities. We heard that our GBM was the person who would help with funding, but we have a GBM who we have never met, and we are still trying to find out if he is still here or not.

In the past we had funding bodies in our organisations, but there was big talk and no action. We are struggling now. We need the CDEP program to stay to run the programs that we lost in the organisations. Programs that were running really well in the organisation were: the homework centre for our children, the community liaison officers, the nutrition program and the women's resource.

CHAIR—Those programs are lost as a consequence of the intervention?

Mrs Weetra—Last year when CDEP was stopped we had five weeks without money and without food. That will happen again if CDEP goes.

Senator MOORE—Which community?

Mrs Weetra—Kalano.

Senator MOORE—I thought Kalano was an organisation.

Ms Dowling—Kalano is a community organisation. It is over the other side of the barbed wire fence here.

Senator MOORE—I just want to know that in terms of the programs and that five-week period without any money, which we have not heard about—

Ms Dowling—That was members from all of our five communities. The program stopped at the end of 2007. We were supposed to go into a transitional period prior to it stopping. We continually asked Centrelink and people at the ICC for a transition date. That did not happen.

They came over towards the end of November and said: 'You've got a week's notice. You're done.' Over the Christmas period we had many families who were without income because it takes longer than that to get onto a Centrelink service.

Senator MOORE—It shouldn't.

Ms Dowling—That transition did not happen like it was supposed to. At the end of the day they turned around and blamed us. All we were doing was following the rules of the game we were given. Children were hungry. I asked the task force that visited early the next year, 'How does that fit into the little children being sacred business?' One of them replied, 'At the end of the day, it doesn't.' I felt that was a pretty cold, cut and dried response.

Senator MOORE—We will follow up on that, not that we can change what happened.

Ms McDonald—In my role I do a lot of work with the other communities too such as the Rockhole community. I and the other ladies do the FAST program after work on Monday nights. I wrote down some of the things we have come across and what we have experienced in our community.

All of this intervention has caused more overcrowding in the communities. The communities are located about 10-minutes drive out of town. Family members who live in communities that are far from town stay with families living in the close communities because it is easier to buy grog because it is not far. That is causing a lot of overcrowding. Domestic violence has risen in the communities. It is also affecting the children going to school because they have to put up with all the pressures building up in the communities because of the intervention.

We are getting no support, because we do not have a GBM. There are people still waiting because all these rules have been laid down. Nothing good has come out of it. People are still out there waiting. What is the positive effect of the intervention?

We hear stories and I have seen family members trying to use a BasicsCard at the school to pay for uniforms or for bills. It does not work like a proper keycard through the EFTPOS machine at the school in town where the children go. You can see the difficulty there trying to do that simple thing. The BasicsCard is not set up properly. You cannot transfer money over the weekend or on a public holiday. You cannot do that because nobody is working on the service line to transfer money from the kitty account to the BasicsCard. You have to wait until a working day. You need to upgrade the BasicsCard properly because it is just making it difficult too.

The intervention is supposed to help people out. There are good things but there are also a lot of issues out there. The communities we get involved with and family members tell us things every day about the pressure that is building up in the communities with no GBM, no support and nobody there to help them structure the community with some kind of positive planning. It has been over two years now and still nothing has happened.

Mr Hoffman—Firstly, being the current CDEP manager for Kalano, I would like to talk about when the intervention was first rolled out. I was a housing officer at Kalano. Just to clarify the confusion around the transition period, when the date was thrust upon us—and I think it was only at a week's notice—there was supposed to be a transition period in which people would

transition over to CDEP payments. At that stage, some people did not receive any of the Centrelink payments. As Rosslyn has pointed out, it took a lot of weeks for many of those families to receive those payments, at which time they were not receiving CDEP payments, as advised by the government. It also went the other way where there were people at one period who were still meant to be working with CDEP but were receiving payments when they actually were not doing anything. So it worked both ways.

In relation to the CDEP currently, I believe there is a real chance that we could lose our CDEP, although we have attended quite strongly. I believe that if we were to lose our CDEP it would lead to the degradation of not only the Kalano association but all the communities involved. Why I bring that up is that the Howard government took CDEP away. It was reinstated by the Rudd government purely because it was a promise and obviously because Mr Rudd and his government believed that it would be a program instrumental in communities developing and continuing on in their own capacities. However, during that transition period of seven months, there was a lot of confusion, particularly around the payment system. Like everybody here has pointed out, a lot of people, including a lot of children, missed out. It was reinstated on 1 July and it had a real impact on the communities. There has been a little confusion around whether CDEP was going to recommence, what that actually meant, whether it was going to be income managed et cetera. Therefore, our numbers have not been good over the past year. We have 150 ACP and we have not been able to meet that purely because of the confusion around the intervention. There are other factors but I personally and professionally believe that the intervention has caused a lot of confusion.

Because our numbers have not been able to get up, and we are only just getting those numbers now, it seems as though that has hurt us deeply. The community may miss out on CDEP and, as Carol pointed out, it may go to a non-government organisation and I do not believe that it would have the capacity or the infrastructure to implement this program. At this point in time we have consolidated our position within the Katherine community. I think we have got a good working relationship with Centrelink and employment agencies and I believe that over the next three years, if we were to get our CDEP back, we would be able to sustain and gain real employment and real outcomes for our community members. As Carol also pointed out, a lot of these real outcomes are not only for the communities; they are for the town of Katherine and for the region—particularly our community patrol program and our other programs that are complemented by the CDEP program.

I am concerned, as a father and an Indigenous male of the Katherine community. I am an ex-FACS worker; I lasted there four years. Apparently in the NT amongst social workers and FACS workers themselves it is considered to be a lifetime to work there for eight months. I think that is the longest the average that most people last. It is a very challenging job, so I have a fair idea of the ins and outs of how FACS works—the outcomes of their duties and their statutory demands. Given that the intervention was rolled out in terms of keeping the children safe and whatnot, I am a bit flabbergasted as to why we have not seen the real results of that; why there have not been more convictions—not that I want to see anybody go to jail, whether they are Indigenous or not; however, if this is to be rolled out in the name of child protection and child safety, we have got to see real results and real outcomes. As we see every week in our local paper, there are plenty of community members who are concerned about that.

It is also very concerning that the Australian government has changed legislation in terms of being able to roll out the intervention. Recently Kevin Rudd has recognised that there may be a real need for a change in the Constitution to ensure that Indigenous rights are protected. I think it is a real kick in the guts when you are rolling out the intervention in terms of something we have not seen real results out of. I think it has been pointed out a lot in articles in the papers and whatnot. In the top of the West there have been a lot of convictions and a lot of real results there—whether or not convictions are real results. But at least we are seeing the results of proactive governance by the statutory bodies of WA. I just think it is a sad fact that the government rolled this out, and the Kalano community and the Katherine community are given all the rules by the government in terms of alcohol prohibition and whatnot but, as the ladies have pointed out, we have not received a GBM.

In terms of community consultation, I have spoken to a GBM and an employment broker, and they have said to me that they believe that most of the community members are happy with the intervention. I have doubts about that. Anybody who has worked with community people would know that they are very prone to saying whatever in the face of authority. Given that these people have been thrown into the communities and given great authority, community people are likely to say whatever will keep those people happy. I could probably go on for a while, but I think I have said enough.

In terms of my role at Kalano at this point in time, it would be a real shame to lose our CDEP simply because of the confusion, fear and whatnot around the intervention being rolled out. Because of that, people have been less likely to come onto CDEP and less likely to engage in a lot of other programs. The confusion has not only been around the intervention; we have also had other programs roll out, like the SEAM program, that have caused a lot of fear as well.

CHAIR—Sorry; what was that last program?

Ms Dowling—The SEAM, the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure. Katherine is one of the trial communities in the Northern Territory.

Mr Hoffman—So those measures have also caused a lot of fear. Anyone who knows our Indigenous people will know that they will disengage—there will be a lot of avoidance of engaging in CDEP and other programs, even mainstream programs.

Mrs Batchler—I would just like to add that the government really needs to be aware, in taking CDEP out of Kalano and giving it to another organisation, that the reality is that different staff members have already been approached by this other organisation, so real skills that we have within Kalano community are going to be poached. The only way they will be able to run it and have any chance of engaging that community is by taking the skilled people that Kalano have. If we are serious about sustainable community, capacity building and support to communities, why would we fund somebody to take those skills out of the community?

Ms Dowling—We have sent a brief to Minister Macklin regarding the possible loss of our CDEP. We are hoping to hear from her within the next couple of days regarding the issue.

CHAIR—So I understand it is not the loss of CDEP—the CDEP will still be delivered in the community—but that it will be delivered no longer by the Kalano—

Ms Dowling—It will be delivered a by non-Indigenous NGO on the other side of the river.

CHAIR—I am just trying to clarify exactly the evidence you have provided to me.

Ms Dowling—Absolutely. I do not mean to be rude, but I have been sitting here since 8.30 this morning and I have endured some pain in listening to our town mayor, for example, in regard to some of our programs. You also need to know that not only are we working as a community and struggling to get our people into real jobs, as they keep being referred to; we are still up against a racist element in Katherine, unfortunately. It is like being back in the seventies. I was born and bred here and I am in my 50s, and not a great deal has changed. So we have to work extra hard to convince industry to take on our trainees, to take on our participants, to get them into the wider sector of the community. We have had a number of missed business opportunities due to the lack of government assistance. As I said, we have gotten no money out of this intervention for the last two years. I would just like to clarify that apparently we have a GBM that has been appointed to us in a very minor way after a lot of hedging that we have done. I believe he has been around for the last three weeks but he is not really appointed to Kalano as a GBM. He sits in the ICC because he has a real job over there—we are an afterthought. My understanding from our CEO—and I apologise on his behalf for his absence today; he is in Alice Springs attending AIATSIS business on our behalf—is that he has spent about 15 minutes of his time in our community, which I would think you would also think was unsatisfactory.

CHAIR—How long do you say he has actually been in the position for?

Ms Dowling—About three weeks ago the appointment was made and, with all due respect, I understand that it is not his first priority.

CHAIR—Perhaps you can clarify this—I heard anecdotally this morning from one of the other participants that he had been allocated to the township of Katherine. Is that right or is it specifically for Kalano?

Ms Dowling—I cannot comment on that either. My understanding is that he is the GBM for Kalano. I am not sure what his wider business is.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator ADAMS—I am just looking at your presentation. Thank you all for coming to see us this afternoon. Just on the Vendale facility—I am very interested in rehabilitation, so would you be able to run me through that? We have had some evidence that people go through rehabilitation, but that the follow-up is not good—that they come out of a facility's rehabilitation area, not necessarily your facility, and there are no follow-up programs for them.

Ms Dowling—We have an alcohol rehabilitation service. It is 32 kilometres south of town on a property referred to as Vendale. Kalano established its alcohol rehabilitation program many years ago on our Rockhole community—which, as I said before, was a dry community and always has been—in little tin sheds with nothing.

At Vendale, we run a 12-week rehabilitation program. We know that the greatest successes have come from self-referral. We get court referrals, but there is no guarantee that the clients will

stay. There are some misunderstandings with the judicial system about whose responsibility it is. They give a court client a choice of six weeks jail or six weeks in rehab at Vendale. If they choose rehab, it is not our job to jail them; it is our job to work with them on their alcohol related medical issues.

There is a sobering-up shelter in town that is run by an NGO and affectionately called the 'spin-dry place'. We have never actually had any referrals from them. They have got a revolving door of clients, many of whom they have barred from being able to go to the sobering-up shelter overnight.

There is a detox unit at the hospital which, I am led to believe, is not staffed adequately for the six beds to be constantly in use. We know that detox is an important beginning point prior to rehabilitation. Over many years, we have constantly approached the federal government for funding around the next phase, which is managed transitional accommodation back in town. From there, we are able to take the next step after rehab of putting our people into programs of employment and other social services that they may be in need of et cetera in order to get them back into being functioning, healthy community members.

We have asked for stage 2 funding for our Vendale rehab service, which is cottages for families to go out there. We surveyed our community recently—some of the members here, employees, were involved. There were five families that were very keen to go out to rehab as a family and undertake the 12-week rehabilitation process, but we do not have accommodation for a whole family. We have one cottage that we might be able to use, but the accommodation currently out there is really for single women or single men. We would be more than happy to show you our facility, perhaps on your next visit when you have more time.

Mrs Batchler—We do not have the facilities in Katherine for that transition. We have not been funded for it, although we have asked for funding. Nor do we have the likes of a boarding house where people can go, be safe, be partially managed and be able to get that ongoing support. When they leave our facility, they are back into the same family situation, the same long-grass situation—all of the other humbug, all of the other pressures et cetera. So we are just unable to provide that follow-up, and it will not work without it.

Ms Dowling—Twelve weeks is not long. To send somebody back to the same toxic environment and expect that their medical illness, which is what alcoholism is, has been miraculously cured—

Senator ADAMS—Have you had any dialogue with government departments about why you were refused funding?

Ms Dowling—We are constantly in dialogue. We are constantly in a state of change. We have been hit with many changes of local, state and federal government initiatives over the last couple of years, particularly with the intervention. We are also dealing with other government issues.

We are not funded accordingly. We have a very underpaid, overworked and stressed out CEO, who does a very good job. We have a council of 13 that works extremely hard as well to assist whenever and wherever it can. We have a couple of monthly community meetings. We try to keep our members informed as best as possible so that together we can make the best decisions.

Our practice is inclusiveness. That is difficult when the government does not give us clear information that we can then pass on to our members. We are an English as a second or third language speaking community as well, because we live on the fringe of Katherine. We view ourselves as other suburbs of Katherine. We do not use the terminology 'town camps' when talking about ourselves, although I understand that that is government jargon used to refer to us.

Our mayor this morning referred to unacceptable demountables to be established. They are short-term accommodation. We have many people from the region who come in for weekends for shopping, for the show or for the races, for example. That was seen as a stop-gap immediate measure. We have these demountables sitting on a truck. They are funded by the federal government and we cannot get the Northern Territory government to come up with the funds that are part of their side of the agreement.

Take yourself to one of their regional council meetings. They are very interesting. We participate because we have to but also because we want to. Kalano injects over $4 million a year into the economy of the Katherine community. We are not going away. We are the sustainable element of this community. Most of us were born and bred here; we will die here. We might journey in and out for short times. We do not come from south of the border. Many of us are the traditional landowners and we are not going anywhere. This is home. We want to make it the best possible place for everybody who lives in it and everybody who visits.

Mrs Batchler—With Katherine, we are all connected. I sit here as the white lady working with Kalana. But two of my grandchildren belong to two very large Aboriginal families from here. Even some of us who look like we are the come and goers or the blow-ins are not. We will be here a long time. This is our community.

Senator ADAMS—I will interrupt you there. I want to go back to the rehabilitation part, because I am very interested in that. You spoke about the detox unit at the hospital. Do you have any dialogue with those people as to why they are not referring?

Ms Dowling—I do not directly. We have processes and a system in place that would ensure that that happens. Our medical administration is through Wrli Wrlinjang, the local Aboriginal health service, in the first instance.

Senator ADAMS—Still on rehabilitation, are there any other places that people can go for rehabilitation in Katherine?

Ms Dowling—Darwin.

Senator ADAMS—Nothing in Katherine? There is not another competing organisation that is providing that service?

Ms Dowling—No. We were talking recently about the fact that we are the only alcohol and rehabilitation service in Katherine. We have grown into what we believe to be a professionally run organisation out there. We have met all the demands of the funding bodies. We have downgraded our risk assessment from medium to low as we needed to et cetera. We still have not yet had any non-Indigenous person referred to us. We are the only alcohol rehab centre there, and we thought that that might have happened.

Senator ADAMS—Can you cope with the numbers?

Ms Dowling—We have a full house at the moment.

Senator ADAMS—Does that occur all the time?

Ms Dowling—We have 20 beds and there are 20 clients currently in house in rehabilitation.

Mrs Weetra—I was not born in Katherine or the Northern Territory. I am from South Australia and a town called Port Lincoln. We have not got a rehabilitation centre there. We have to travel 700 kilometres just to put a family member in a rehabilitation centre to dry out. I moved to the Territory in 1984. I am still here today. I see what is happening. This rehab centre out here is closer in than the one where I come from. Families are still seeing families. It is sad that where I come from we have got to travel a long way to get one of our family members to give up drinking.

Mrs Batchelor—But there is a very strong need. It has been recognised and we have discussed it many times. We have tried to get the funding and it still is large in the dialog with the staff from the rehab that there needs to be that transitional outreach support for it to work.

Senator MOORE—There are many questions and we have run out of time. I am particularly interested in the constant use of the word 'fear' in all your evidence, particularly in regard to the transition, the CDEP and, now, when talking about the fact of people still being afraid about what is going to happen. Having asked many questions at many Senate meetings about what has happened and how it has happened, I know that there seems to be a great gap in people's perception of the fear element. I want to get some comments from you about the fact that if the whole process is supposed to be based on communication, which is what we are hearing—and any change is fearful; it does not matter what it is, if there is going to be a change it is fearful—why has there been such confusion and such fear around systemic changes? All of you have survived many systemic changes. Why is there so much fear?

Mrs Weetra—We have no choice but to try to survive this—for the sake of our children and our families.

Senator MOORE—Why the fear about the intervention?

Mrs Batchelor—For five weeks we have no money.

Senator MOORE—That is just wrong. The other point I want to make about that is that you have a Centrelink office here in Katherine that has been here for 40 years. You are not talking about people 700 kilometres away; it is down the road.

Mrs Weetra—When the intervention got rolled out through the Territory our CDEP was stopped. A lot of our people out there were confused, hurt and scared.

Senator MOORE—And did not know what was going on.

Mrs Weetra—They did not know where to go to.

Ms McDonald—There was no explanation.

Mrs Weetra—No.

Senator MOORE—So no-one came out to talk to you?

Ms Dowling—They came out but they could not answer. There were mixed messages—you hear about quarantine, you hear about income management, which mean the same thing to me, because I have read the paper, and to you but to then interpret it and explain it to our people it is a matter of us needing time. People need time to process it, especially older people. When you talk about the intervention I think about one of our council members who is a surviving, thriving member of the stolen generation and how she became totally traumatised and it took her back to all those years ago when she was a little girl. She is a Christian, church-going, non-drinking, non-smoking great, great grandmother who does not need somebody to tell her how to spend her money.

Senator MOORE—That gets back to the quarantining and I know that is an incredibly sensitive issue and people have mixed views about it everywhere. Obviously you and members of the community have concerns about the whole way in which it was done. If we cannot learn from how that was done every single change is going to be done in the same way. We are desperate to find out—

Ms Dowling—That is why I brought up the social discipline window model for you. We embrace change because we know it is necessary. We also embrace change because it is a good thing.

Senator MOORE—And it is going to happen. Change is always going to happen.

Ms Dowling—However, government has a track record of doing things to Aboriginal communities instead of doing it with us. If it is done with us it is in a restorative way and things happen much more peacefully and quickly. But when we are trying to interpret information that the government does not even understand itself, or their messengers do not understand fully, we have then got to try to understand it and interpret it and get it out there. Can you understand how it can become extremely messy. As I said, the interpretation of language and cultural understanding must happen and it must happen in a good and timely fashion for it to be fully understood, taken on board, processed and regurgitated out so that we can come back and say 'Ok, this is what our community thinks,' if we are really going to be true about it.

Mr Hoffman—I think the three tiers of government have also been involved in the confusion, particularly around alcohol. The Katherine Town Council want to do something in relation to the restrictions, the NT government is saying something different and the federal government is saying something different. In terms of the intervention, we had people coming out to tell us what was going to happen one week, and two weeks later that would change, although I cannot give you a specific example at this point in time.

Senator MOORE—Can you think about that for us? I know there was so much going on, and there continues to be, because there were other changes brought in with the shire changes and with other things that have happened in a short period of time.

Ms Dowling—We are a bit of an anomaly. Because we do not come under the Katherine Town Council, we do not belong to one of the supershires. We are ratepayers to the Katherine municipality.

Mrs Batchler—Council has told me that we do not pay rates but that we pay land tax.

Ms Dowling—It is semantics. We pay rates, just like I pay rates as a landowner on the southern side of the riverbank. A classic example is the housing issue. There are major changes going on around land leases, taking over our assets et cetera. We already have good governance in place around our housing assets. We have tenancy agreements, we have affordable rents being paid on a means tested basis et cetera. We invite them many times before we finally get somebody from the NT government housing department to come and explain to us what those changes might look like. We get told that we will continue to have these conversations, and then a week later the CEO gets a phone call: 'We won't be having this conversation anymore, sorry.' What are we supposed to think?

We still do not have enough information around those issues to properly make the decision that one day soon we are going to have to make in our community. It is a decision that will affect our future generations, and we want to make the right decision but the information is not forthcoming. I do not know if it is because they do not know what they are doing. We have been pushed and pushed. We constantly have to hurry up and make a decision about this or a decision about that. We are under more scrutiny than any other community within Australia that I am aware of. We have so many accountabilities, we have been over-researched and all the rest of it. As I said, we dot our i's and cross our t's and we still get analysed.

Every year we have to fight for funds and every year programs disappear from our community—our women's programs and our homework centres that Rosslyn and Andrea both talked about. We do not get funded on 1 July to start operating a program that we have actually got the nod on—'Yes, you're going to have that program for the next 12 months.' Sometimes the funding comes in three months later and sometimes it comes in six months later. Without an economic base of our own, how are we supposed to survive?

Mrs Batchler—One very real thing that happened with the intervention was to do with people with full-time jobs who went to get a loan from the bank. They were approved until the address was read and the bank saw they were from a community, and this has happened to more than one person. Those financial institutions did not want to lend the money because they did not know how the intervention would affect them being able to enter the community and repossess goods. Regardless of whether they could pay the loan or not, they did not get it.

Senator MOORE—I take it you have raised that with the task force.

Ms Dowling—We did, and we have raised all of these issues over the last two and a bit years at every opportunity. We have gone to the task force, we have gone to a couple of ministers, we have gone to Darwin, we have gone to Alice Springs and we may be shortly going to Canberra.

CHAIR—This is a standing committee that will go for the term of the parliament, so we are not just a visiting committee. If there is other evidence in regard to the evidence you have

provided today, and I know that it may be difficult to elicit the letters from the banks or whatever, in terms of privacy matters—

Ms Dowling—We would like to do that.

CHAIR—If you can organise it, we would certainly be delighted to receive them. We appear never to have quite enough time in these matters. As I said, we will probably be back, but unfortunately we have run out of time today. The committee may wish to have some further questions for you on notice and that would be through the secretariat. So thank you very much for that coming along and giving evidence.

Ms Dowling—Thank you.

[4.02 pm]

BIGGS, Mr Timothy John Wyndham, Team Leader, Agriculture and Rural Operations Studies, Katherine Campus, Charles Darwin University

FITZSIMONS, Mr Paul Francis, Director, Regional and Remote, Charles Darwin University

LARKIN, Professor Steven Raymond, Pro Vice Chancellor, Indigenous Leadership, Katherine Campus, Charles Darwin University

CHAIR—I welcome Professor Steve Larkin and other representatives from the Charles Darwin University. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. I now invite you to make a short opening statement. At the conclusion of the remarks I will invite committee members to put questions to you.

Prof. Larkin—Thank you. I will begin by saying the Charles Darwin University is a dual sector university here in the Northern Territory. When I say dual sector, I mean we deliver both higher education and vocational education and training. Together with the Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education, we are the main providers of those two in the Northern Territory. We are strongly committed to flexible delivery in rural and remote areas and we have got campuses and centres throughout the Northern Territory. You may notice that locally we have the rural college up the road and Mataranka station south. In recent times with our own five and 10 framework and with the initiative of the previous Vice-Chancellor, my position was created last year. It is a new position as Pro-Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership within the university sector across Australia. I guess that is an indication of the commitment that the university is putting into Indigenous education.

In 2009 our census figures show that we have around 270 enrolments in higher education in the university and around 4,000 in VET. Of that 4,000, 17 per cent of all apprentices enrolled are Indigenous. With the VET figure as well, it also meets population share, so NT Indigenous population is around 40 per cent and those 4,000 enrolments are 40 per cent of total enrolments in VET.

I also draw your attention to the recent 2009 budget in which we were fortunate, through the Education Investment Fund, to receive around $30 million to establish the Australian centre for Indigenous knowledge and education, which we will be doing in partnership with the Batchelor Institute. Money has been provided to us to partner with Flinders University to establish a medical school in Darwin and Alice Springs. The Menzies School of Health Research also received an allocation to deliver health and other programs to Indigenous communities.

With your grace and permission, we would prefer to address terms of reference (a), (b) and (c) in a submission. We noticed that submissions are still being received by the committee. No doubt there has been an impact, particularly on areas of teaching and learning in rural and remote areas in relation to those three terms of reference through the intervention, but we would prefer to provide a submission at a later date, responding in detail. However, we can talk to terms of

reference (d) today. My colleagues here today will work directly in the area and they can provide detailed responses in terms of what we do, how we do, and where, why and with whom we do it.

CHAIR—Thank you, Professor. Do we have any other submissions or other comments?

Prof. Larkin—My colleagues could probably outline what we do.

Mr Fitzsimons—It is important to outline just where the university is at, in terms of its relationship with the general community in the Northern Territory, particularly the changes that have come about in recent years. I will go back to the past. Everyone in training has heard the bark 'training for training's sake' and that people in another era actually picked up on what training was needed in many communities by way of an opinion of a bureaucrat or of an educator, and that particular training program was introduced to the community as something of need, but possibly from a perspective of someone from outside the community.

In the last three years, in particular in rural and remote areas, we at Charles Darwin University have changed our approach from a deficit model of delivery and turned it around such that we are seeking to build on the strengths of communities and of individuals. We do that by delivering a relationship with the community and by responding to the community's particular requests. We are no longer going to communities and telling them what they need; we are happy for communities to come to us and ask for what they would like, and we can respond with whatever strengths that we have to assist them in their pursuit. This aspiration approach, or building on the strengths of the community, has had a significant impact, not so much on enrolments, which by the way have increased over the last three years, but also on retention rates and completion rates.

We can note in our formal submission that things have changed because we are now taking the drive of the training and the education and putting it in the hands of the community who desire that particular endeavour to be achieved. We have been able, over the last three years, to establish relationships with communities and with individuals such that they have driven their own aspiration, they have become more able to transparently show their aspiration and their entrepreneurship. We have several examples of that in communities that we can relate to in our submission. In turning the delivery model back to being driven by the learner itself, we are very confident now that we are creating a mindset in people such that they will be conducive to enterprise opportunities and will be more entrepreneurial in their approach.

Mr Biggs—What do I do here? There are two major programs I have had going here. One, for the past three years, has been the Indigenous Pastoral Program, where we work with various organisations in the Northern Territory like Training Australia and CDU and we take people who have expressed an interest to go back to working on the land and becoming ringers again. They come in, they do pre-employment training with us where we give them some skills and the NTCA then work to find employment for them within the industries. From there those who want to are encouraged to continue on with their education and get a full Certificate II in agriculture. We have had probably 10 per cent of intake go through and achieve their full certificates in the last two years. A lot of them have continued to work in the industry; they just chose not to continue on with their education. The second half of this year I have a Defence Indigenous Development Program. I will have 20 Defence recruits coming in to do 20 weeks of training in rural operations, construction, computers, literacy and numeracy. That is driven by the Defence

Force and by DET. That will be starting on 9 June. It is a bit of a pilot program. If it works we will have 40 next year.

I have also had some good relationships with various communities. About 70 per cent of my training has to do with the communities. It is in areas like municipal works, basic skills, tractor driving, welding—things that they can do and go back to use in their communities. We have done a lot with Roper Gulf Shire this year. They have been involved in both rural oriented training and automotive training through the Katherine town centre and us out at the Rural College.

CHAIR—Thank you. I know the other members of the committee today would not be aware, but I have to say that I am nothing short of astounded by some of the outputs you have put out, particularly at Rural College Mataranka. It is a model that I wish we could replicate because there are so many places around Australia that could use that model. It is a thing where people walk in and they walk out with a job. It is not training; it is very employment focused. I remember speaking to a couple of young men who told me that six weeks earlier they were completely terrified of these dirty great horses that they somehow had to learn to ride. Six weeks later you would not recognise that they had not been riding all their lives. They were very comfortable in company. It is isolated and they are doing it together. They do not feel that one of them is going to be left out academically. It moves together. It is an absolutely fantastic program. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to find Matarankas just anywhere. Perhaps Owen Springs, in the southern climes of the Northern Territory, should remain on our radar.

When you are making the submission, I am not sure you would be able but could you get hold of some statistics about the changes in the model derived from talking to communities about what they think they are interested in or statistics about retention? It is very useful when people talk about evidence based programs and systems. I am sure you could find some stuff, because the CDU do that sort of thing so over time you have some statistics. I think that might be very useful in your submission.

Senator ADAMS—You are working with NORFORCE on the Defence program?

Mr Biggs—The program, I believe, is based on the NORFORCE model. At the end of the 20 weeks there will obviously be some recruits who will be interested in going the NORFORCE way and becoming full-time members of the Defence Force. Others may be more interested in going back to their communities. By the time they finish their 20 weeks these people should have the skills to lead the CDU programs—lead the mini work groups—that I know Roper Gulf Shire have, because they get the skills in construction as well as all the basic municipal works such as how to drive a tractor, how to fence and how to weld broken gear and machinery. It just depends. I think it is personal preference as to which way they want to go—whether they want to get out there in the greens or go back to the community and use what they have learnt.

Senator ADAMS—I was just thinking about the role model coming through that, once they have done this pilot program. It is quite amazing. I have spent a week with NORFORCE. We have the Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program, where we join in with them, camp and do all that sort of thing. I was very impressed with Borroloola. They seem to have quite a big recruitment from there. There is the follow-on—three started and the rest of them moved in, and they are still keen. I think they have 15 now and are looking at continuing on.

Mr Biggs—Obviously, if we have a successful program it will certainly lead to a lot more communities wanting to head that way with the young gentlemen. There was quite a good program on Saturday, on the ABC, about this whole thing. I would probably refer a lot of the stuff to Roger Bryatt from DET, as to how it has all been driven. He is the guy who came to me to see what I could do for him.

Mr Fitzsimons—I would like to make mention of other programs that have been conducted at the rural college. One thing that stands out is the real effectiveness of intergenerational learning. To that end, for the pastoral programs that we are conducting with people in South Australia, at the APY Lands, prior to bringing in an intake the elders of the community have been brought to the college. They go through our activities that are involved in the course, both at Mataranka Station and the college. They are able to go back to their communities and convey the message to the younger people of the value of doing this particular course. Also, because they have a building and pastoral industry down there for themselves, they are able to put real input into the course and the outcomes they expect, That is for both the student and communication with the university.

Senator ADAMS—From what you are saying, they would be able to provide an orientation course as to what to expect—

Mr Fitzsimons—That is right.

Senator ADAMS—and how things are going to happen. I think it is terribly important that people do not just get into something and not really understand it. With NORFORCE, they certainly do that. Someone does a fortnight before the young men come in, just so that they know exactly what they are doing. Making beds and things like that becomes very familiar and it is not a frightening issue. Thank you for that. I am certainly very interested to see what goes on. I know it is not here, but at Hermannsburg they are horse mad, so there might be some likely recruits. The community is certainly going very well with its education program. There is a number of young men who are looking at being able to go on with their learning, having left school when they were about 13. That might be an area that might have some potential.

Mr Fitzsimons—We are actually doing a lot of work with Hermannsburg at present.

Senator ADAMS—Great. That is good to hear.

Mr Fitzsimons—It is right across the board. It is a very active community and a good learning community. Interestingly enough, we are able to tap into the background of that community. There are Lutheran links going back to the 1880s. All of those intergenerational values have been passed on and that is certainly adding to the value of people being more responsible for their own learning.

Senator ADAMS—That is very good to hear. We visited Hermannsburg not long ago. Mr Fitzsimons, you were talking about the communities coming to you about what they want to have. What process is used there? Are GBMs involved or is it the community board? How is the first approach made?

Mr Fitzsimons—The structure at the university is such that, regarding regional and remote areas, we have eight centres across the Territory, from Groote Eylandt down as far as Yulara. We have a campus or centre administrator in each of those areas whose role is to be the glue between the community and the university. We also have three field officers who actively act as agents of business and have very good relationships with communities across the Territory. We have traditionally concentrated our efforts on working with the communities themselves and the Indigenous people.

Since the general business managers and the shires have come in, there has certainly been input from the employment brokers, and we have a relationship with each of those that is ongoing. They are variable, I must admit, from broker to broker. Without being negative in any way, churn—the turnover of people—is a bit of a problem. But we have very positive relationships with the communities. As I said, we have been able to form, for instance, formal written agreements and memoranda of understanding of what their training plans are, how they want us to help to deliver training, where they want it delivered and on what terms. So they are certainly having an input into the whole process and that responsibility is resulting in people being retained in their skill building process and completions show every sign of increasing. Certainly employability is going ahead. A lot of people these days do not need the full qualification before they actually get employed. From the university's point of view, we agree with industry that if we get people employed and active and train them from there then we are on a winner.

Senator ADAMS—It sounds very positive.

Senator MOORE—What is happening for the girls? Particularly the courses you have described, are they cross gender?

Mr Fitzsimons—They include everyone.

Senator MOORE—How many girls have you got enrolled in your current ringers courses?

Mr Biggs—Of my current full-time students, I have six girls and one guy.

Senator MOORE—And they are doing the whole range of coursework. What about your army funded course?

Mr Biggs—To the best of my knowledge, they will all be male. I do not know the reasons for that. I am not part of that recruitment process.

Mr Fitzsimons—If we take the statistical breakdown of engagement, females are about 60 to 40 across all the courses that we offer in the VET sector.

Senator MOORE—That is about standard for across the whole country. In terms of the VET skills, do they have any particular favoured areas?

Mr Fitzsimons—Girls are at present finding employment and training particularly in the areas of governance and business.

Senator MOORE—So the administrative type things that are so necessary.

Mr Fitzsimons—There is not the traditional drift towards sewing machines and so on. We are respecting the intellect of the persons we are working with. In fact, most communities are driven by their women, as I think everyone here knows, and the fact that girls have picked up jobs in the shires and are undertaking them and studying at the same time for certificates II, III and IV in business is an indication of the strength of those people and what they can actually do in being able to be entrepreneurial and see results within their own communities.

Senator MOORE—We had evidence this morning from a group that worked very closely with the education sector in trying to make schools a more attractive environment on the basis that it is one thing to say kids should go to school but if they are not an attractive, friendly and enthusiastic environment they will not stay. I asked about teacher training. They actually referred to the Northern Territory process, and there seems to not be that many teacher trainees.

Mr Fitzsimons—I think there are some traineeship programs going that really do indicate that there is a future. CDU have a link with the Catholic education department and we have assistant teachers who have got up to 30 years experience in the classroom now being able to complete their qualifications.

Senator MOORE—How long has that been going, because that is very valuable?

Mr Fitzsimons—It is a Commonwealth sponsored program. It only started at the beginning of this year.

Senator MOORE—That is wonderful. Mainly women?

Mr Fitzsimons—Mainly women—the vast majority, in that case.

Senator MOORE—You see when you go into schools the ones who are sitting with the students. So they will be able to translate those skills into a teaching qual?

Mr Fitzsimons—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Very good.

Mr Fitzsimons—They are doing it now. Just as an extension of that, we have also gotten a cohort of 60 Indigenous people undertaking the certificate IV in TAA so that they can train and assess in their communities. It is the aim of Charles Darwin University to actually employ those people in their own communities as mentors and trainers. They are able to elicit from the community what training they want and also find people with skills in the community who could contribute to the training process.

There are a hell of a lot of people in communities who have done things like certificate 1 welding or certificate 2 welding about seven times in their lives. I can go to women, in particular, who in their earlier lives went off to boarding schools and accomplished quite well at higher levels of education. They could have significant input into literacy and numeracy et

cetera. There are a whole range of skills that they could bring to the learning process within their own communities. Once again, it is ownership and responsibility that will bring results.

Prof. Larkin—We are finding that delivery through senior people has better results in teaching and learning outcomes.

Senator MOORE—Does Charles Darwin University have a sporting program for sports training?

Mr Fitzsimons—Yes, we do.

Senator MOORE—I thought you did.

Mr Fitzsimons—At present we have in the order of 75 students across the homelands who are going through certificate 2 in sport and recreation, and they will actually be able to be employed on those homeland communities.

Senator MOORE—As youth workers?

Mr Fitzsimons—Yes.

Senator MOORE—That is very good. I have about a hundred other questions, but the chair is getting very nervous so I will put them on notice.

CHAIR—I have one last question. I have certainly been very impressed, and I am sure anybody else who has ever been there is impressed, with this rural model. It may be the fact that you are marginally isolated but you still have the support because you do it in numbers. I am not really sure what the model is. I have had a number of discussions with some pastoralists about the structure. Mataranka is where it is and it will continue to do a good job, but we still have people from Hermannsburg and plenty of places down south, the other side of the Barkley, who come in there and then go out to their properties.

I am assuming, through my discussions with people, that if you had another place it would be great; it would be closer. But since there are financial difficulties for us in purchasing those sorts of properties to start with, have you considered being able to mobilise that? I spoke to both of the Gorringe's when we were on Elsey. As you can imagine, it was a fairly intense conversation. Is it possible to use the existing infrastructure of a pastoral property in the same way as Mataranka but, perhaps, where the catchment is away from Mataranka? Is it possible to utilise some properties down there for exactly the same model?

Mr Fitzsimons—We have an ongoing program with the APY Lands. In fact, last year we conducted a three-week program down there. We took down our own mobile yards and our own quiet horses, and stock was brought in from the excisions that was owned by the families of Indigenous people who were undertaking the training.

We have conducted programs in Tennant Creek over the last seven years, particularly with non-interested students, if I can put it that way, in projects where the students have used things like the facilities at rodeo grounds. We have had the support of the pastoralists. They have

brought in stock—and tack as well, for that matter—in order to be able to conduct these programs. I am really thrilled to hear that the idea of getting a particular property in the south of the Northern Territory is on the plate. It is an expensive operation, but if a young person can form a relationship, even with a horse or a dog, that will count for a hell of a lot in his or her ability to relate to people.

CHAIR—Indeed. Thank you very much. Thank you again for committing to putting in a submission. I know not only that these are comprehensive areas which you need to be able to deal with but also that these are really changing times. As I said, this committee will sit over the length of parliament rather than just for one block. We look forward to that submission. After you make the submission, there may be questions of clarification or general questions that we can put on notice in writing. We will put those through the secretariat in the normal manner. Again, thank you very much for coming along.

Prof. Larkin—Thank you.

[4.29 pm]

ALLEN, Ms Marie, Member, Wardaman Aboriginal Corporation

RAYMOND, Miss Helena, Administration, Wardaman Aboriginal Corporation

ROSAS, Mrs May, Chair, Wardaman Aboriginal Corporation

SING, Mr Damien, Treasurer, Wardaman Aboriginal Corporation

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been previously provided to you. I now invite you to make an opening statement at the conclusion of which I will invite members of the committee to put questions to you. Who would like to kick off?

Mrs Rosas—As the chair, I would like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to raise some quite significant and important issues that are affecting all Wardaman people and other people residing on Wardaman land. Thank you.

CHAIR—Would you like to provide us with some insight into the impact, good, bad or otherwise, of the intervention and its various parts? We have health and education—I am not sure how you would like to handle that, but I invite you to make some comments.

Mrs Rosas—Firstly, I would like to raise some issues about the process by which the intervention took place and the poor and inadequate consultation with the Wardaman traditional owners and representatives of the board. Basically, we just had a 10-minute visit where we were told that they were coming in to take part in the intervention and that they were prepared to work with us to make the changes. At the time, we said that we looked forward to working with government to improve and make changes within the community, with our input. Unfortunately, nothing was followed up with that. There was no further consultation. We are talking about land trust and freehold title that they basically took over without consultation with the traditional owners at the time, and there has still been no consultation to date.

There are various issues I would like to raise with regard to that matter. Traditional owners were ignored and not acknowledged and received no support to work with government. We were basically told that surveyors were coming months later after the 10-minute consultation. The next thing we knew, building processes were taking place and GBMs were put in place without any consultation.

I am ashamed of the way the government treated us—I am disgusted. We worked in good faith, we talked in good faith and we trusted them to come back and talk to us. The treasurer here beside me, Damien, and I were part of that 10-minute consultation, and nothing came out of that. To date, we are not happy with the way things have happened and the fact that the government has wasted its money, because there has been very little progress and development in our community, apart from a very small amount that was supporting the school programs—we are talking a very minimal amount of money to encourage kids to go to school and to establish a

nutrition program. I worked very closely with the government reps and the community to select their own people.

Because I believed with my people that we were going to take this opportunity to work with government, to put in place and empower our people in regard to training and for them to start taking responsibility, I as a chairperson did some very hard talking with my people on the ground. I was prepared to work with government and put my head out on a chopping board, so to speak, regarding the issues that came about in the intervention in regard to child abuse.

I am dissatisfied with the way that things have taken place. Basically, I am not happy with the authorities and the fact that law and order and everything else, personally, are not strong enough. We need to strengthen that when we are talking about child abuse. There are inadequate resources and skilled staff within FACS and police, hence the reason why we are now here. It is because in the last four or five months we have had two alleged acts of sexual abuse. To date, we are a still dissatisfied in regard to the way the whole process took place. It is far too slow. From what I am picking up, the skills are inadequate. We are all talking about how it is a right of every child to be safe in their own community, and yet we have authorities that are inadequately resourced and funded to deal with the situation. Sadly for us, it is a shame job that it has happened on our land. We are disgusted, in a way, that the process is not strong enough to support what we want to do to bring about justice for our children. In one of the communities, the alleged perpetrator is still there after going home on bail. There are other children in that community. Let's get real, government. We want to get real with you. We want to be part of bringing about change in our community in a way that brings about positive outcomes for our people and that develops safe communities.

As far as a GBM is concerned, like I said, it is a waste of government money. We are talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars to employ someone to come and work in our community. Haven't we got enough skilled people in the Territory? Haven't we got enough skilled Indigenous people in our community who can drive our communities to be better and stronger communities, to work with the government? I personally would like to see that we are supported. We, as well as government, want the best things for our people and for our community, but we cannot do it in the way that things are happening now. There are too many changes with government policies and too much duplication in services in our community. And we are still getting inadequate support.

It is very bad for Wardaman people. The infrastructure is not there. We are a very small community with approximately 300 to 500 people. For goodness sake, they are human beings. They are like every other person in this country that deserves equal rights and to be given services that they are entitled to. And yet in 2009 we are still sitting here talking and begging government to come and work with us and to bring about change with us. In regard to the GBMs and the shires, we came to this very building to say to the people, 'We want to work with you'. Yet we are in a no man's world where nobody wants to come to us. We cannot reach the services that we are entitled to because of the distance and isolation. And then the intervention hit us.

The sad thing for us is that pensioners, who have worked all their lives—and these are the people who established the pastoral business in the Northern Territory; we are talking about the Wardaman people—have been penalised. Pensioners should not have been penalised. The assessment should have been on an individual basis, case by case. My personal opinion is that

the people who had issues with their children should have been the ones penalised and put through the wringer, not the innocent people trying to do the right thing—pensioners, old people who worked hard in our country for nothing, for flour, sugar and tea.

We certainly need to work together. We have people who have the willingness and the good faith to work with government, yet all we get are talk and promises that are never fulfilled, and we are still sitting here waiting for the help that we have been asking for. I will now pass to the other members because I think I have said enough. But if there are any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mrs Rosas. Mr Sing?

Mr Sing—I have only been back at the Wardaman association for a short period of time. For most of my time, I grew up away from the place, working elsewhere and not being there. At the time of intervention, the amount of consultation had been zero. We were called up at four o'clock in the afternoon to let us know that Brian Stacey was on his way down and he wanted a meeting with us. As May said, it was a meeting for 10 minutes outside in the dirt and the grass at the clinic out at Binjari. All he said to us at the time was: 'This is what's going to happen. This is how it's going to happen.' He just told us what was going to happen. At the time I did not say that it was freehold land and that I wanted to know the issues involved with that and what the complications were around that.

A couple of days later, I rang Brian Stacey's secretary—twice I rang—to try and get him to come back for a meeting with the community and the elders so that we could have proper consultation. Nothing ever happened there and because of this everything is up and down. This is supposed to be one of the most important times for black people and we had to make a very important decision. To get that little consultation before having to make such an important decision, I think, is acceptable. It was a joke. That is what I think.

I do not know what happened at Binjari and what government departments went out there to spoke to the people, but they obviously have not gone to all the Wardaman traditional owners and asked them what they wanted on their land and for their people. They have bypassed the traditional owners.

I was involved with Mission Australia and ITEC in setting up some of the programs. The government put an extreme amount of pressure on these places to start up programs and get them kicking before the deadlines. Mission and ITEC tried to employ me to start up either of their programs and to run around and get the information to start the programs up. These programs were started, but it took another two to three weeks before the funding, work clothes and the safety gear came. I do not know how much thought went into these programs that were started, but we are going back in time to the old rake and shovel crew. Surely there must be more brains about the government to get programs for our communities that get better outcomes. I think there was a total lack of consultation. In that respect, they came up with the wrong decisions once again; they have not come up with programs suitable for our area and for our people. The thought processes went out the door once again there.

With regard to the freehold land issues and Binjari, plus the prescribed community issues as well, I was trying to get a lot of information at the time on what a prescribed community was and

what the go was with Binjari, because, as far as I know, they had been liquidated the year before. There were a lot of things that had been going wrong there as well. Even in our own Wardaman association things were going wrong. There have been a lot of problems and, due to those problems, I think there should have been a lot more consultation but there was not. The Wardaman association was pretty much just walked over.

In that time, I got in touch with Rodney Dylan from Amnesty International. I gave him the information, and I told him that I was thinking about taking the government to court. I said at the time that I just wanted information and advice, which I pretty much wanted from the start, but it was hard to get. I have not spoken to Rodney Dylan at all lately. I left the Wardaman association and started work at Mitre 10 as a storeman, because at the time it was just so frustrating and I was very upset with the whole situation. That is why I left, but I have come back. That is pretty much my side of the intervention so far.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I know there will be a number of questions, but I just thought we might go to the other members of the panel, if they wish to.

Ms Allen—I would just like to raise my concern about several issues with regard to the intervention. I think that, since the intervention, it has gone away from what it actually set out to do. The intervention came about because of the Little children are sacred report on the safety of our children, yet we still see that our children are being abused on communities and we still see paedophiles walking around the streets of Katherine and on our communities, so, really, there have not been any changes. Our children are not being protected. It has gone away from children and now it has gone to affecting adults. The fact is that, with adults and their income management and land, it makes you think: was it just a land grab of Aboriginal land? It did not address the issues. It has not made any of our children safer. You just have to go into any of the FACS offices in town and see the number of children who are being abused on a daily basis. No-one seems to care or anything. People are not being arrested. As I said, abuse is going on.

The other thing is that income management should have been based on individuals and not on everyone. Why should a whole race be punished because some people cannot manage their own affairs or look after their own children? As for CDEP, I think that CDEP was a program that, if it was looked after properly and had people with good vision and ideas, would have been a success, but unfortunately we have had people working out in these organisations and communities who were there just for their own purposes. People look at Aboriginal affairs today and say it is a failure, but people tend to forget that all the money that has been spent on Aboriginal affairs has really been spent on non-Aboriginal people and everyone else that Aboriginal people have to rely on.

So, really, here we are in 2009 and we have organisations that are running communities and everything else like that. When you have got organisations like that that do not even understand what they are all about because of literacy and numeracy skills, you are never going to have a success. That is the way I see it. Education is something that people have to really push, even if it means taking some hard measures. That is what should have happened. The fact is that a lot of people who do not have their children are getting money. This is what the intervention and all these people should be looking at—at these people who are wasting their money and giving a bad name and reputation to Aboriginal people. Not everyone is like that. That is what my complaint is: the fact that no paedophiles have been arrested, and now it just seems to have gone

on to the adults and the adults are being punished in the way of income management and other things.

Mrs Rosas—To add to what Marie said, even with children—there are still children who are not going to school. That needs to be looked at seriously as well. Like Marie said, at the end of the day if our children are not educated, they are not going to be able to have a good future.

Ms Allen—We never really achieved self-determination as they thought we were going to.

CHAIR—I wonder if you could add to that, from the panel. You have said that these are challenges. What would you do to try to get kids to school? If you were in our position what would you do? What sort of changes in approach would you make, if any? How would you get the kids to go to school?

Ms Allen—Prior to the cyclone, I worked for the education department, and I was put on as a liaison officer. I think that is what needs to be done. There need to be more Aboriginal liaison officers, even if it is something like a truant officer or something. When I was a liaison officer up in Darwin, my job was to go around and visit families and find out the reasons why children did not go to school. There are various reasons. It is not always laziness and all that. If parents and kids had support, like if someone was interested enough to see that they went to school—Aboriginal liaison officers at school, in particular areas, is one thing that I would look at. It will not work in all places, but that is how we used to work in the old days. We did not always have success but it certainly—

CHAIR—I have not met a lot of truancy officers. I have heard of a couple but I have never actually managed to find one.

Ms Allen—They are called liaison officers, I guess.

Mrs Rosas—If I could add to that: there need to be some curfews. We have got a lot of kids wandering our streets. That is the reason they are not going to school; they are not sleeping. They are staying up until all hours of the morning, following their parents or just wandering the streets with other young people. We must have rules in place and laws in the Territory and we need to enforce them. We already have rules and policies in place but we need to somehow enforce them.

CHAIR—Do you see a curfew as a framework—

Mrs Rosas—As a framework, yes. Eight o'clock, 8.30 or whatever—

CHAIR—Kids under a certain age should be home.

Mrs Rosas—I have to do that at home. My kids have to go to bed no later than 8.30; otherwise they will never be up at six to have their breakfast, get dressed and go to school.

Ms Allen—Another thing I want to raise is this income management. Why is income management put on old people?

CHAIR—Income management is provided for everybody who lives within a prescribed area. It is not put on old people, young people or whatever. If you are on an income supplement and you live in a prescribed area—

Ms Allen—So it is because of the prescribed area.

CHAIR—Yes, not because you are old or young. If you live within a prescribed area, it applies equally to everybody if you are on an income supplement. If you are working in the prescribed area, if you are employed, then there is no quarantining of the welfare.

Ms Allen—But the income management was established because people were not spending their money on their kids' food and stuff like that.

CHAIR—Part of the motive was not so much that that was the case; the motive was to ensure that people did not spend their disposable income on alcohol. The quarantining is only 50 per cent. Fifty per cent is cash, so you can do what you like with that, and the remainder is for provision of a whole range of things.

CHAIR—Part of the motive clearly was not so much that that was the case; the motive was to ensure that people did not spend as much of their disposable income on alcohol. So the quarantining is only 50 per cent—still 50 per cent is cash, so you can do what you like with that—and the remainder is there for provisions of a whole range of things. We have had enough pieces of evidence on a number of occasions to say that the suite of basics is really insufficient; it covers rent, taxies and travel here—apparently it does not in other places. They are some of the issues that we need to try to sort out. We have also had a lot of evidence about the period of time it takes to have something added. People are concerned and they think this is an important part of what they should have to spend. I was just trying to give you an answer but I am not sure that that answer is complete.

Ms Allen—Yes; I know. It is just that it is not fair. There are people out there in those communities who do not have children, do not drink, and yet their money is being managed. It just does not seem right that—

CHAIR—I understand the principle completely. It has been put to us a number of times that it is just an offence to have somebody come and manage your life so much. We understand that. But in terms of the amount of money, they have said, 'Okay, 50 per cent will be spent on rent, food, rates, clothes' or whatever those whole bunch of things are, do you think it is ever the case that that is the wrong percentage, or do you think it is always the case that it is just simply the principle that applies, that people are offended?

Ms Allen—I think it really should be based just on the individuals themselves. Surely if you have people working out there, they would know who, within the community itself, blows all their money on alcohol and other stuff, and those who do not. I do not know whether I am answering your question.

CHAIR—You are and I appreciate that. I was just smiling because as we hear more and more evidence, we get more nervous, because we have said, 'Well, what you've done is you've stigmatised all these people.' What we do is go into a community and say, 'Righto, you're okay,

you're not, you're okay, and you're not.' So it further stigmatises people who are possibly having most of the problems. Yesterday and in other places people have suggested that we make it voluntary so that it is an opt-in program. But thank you; you did answer my question.

The other principle is that many old people—and I can remember one particularly tragic circumstance that I will not go into—were saying that because they had cash they were very vulnerable. If I have a basics card then I am not. We all acknowledge, as Australians, that this is a very difficult circumstance and there is no perfect solution because no-one is the same; we are all different and we all live in different circumstances. I think that is one of the principle pieces of evidence that has been given. One community is in a completely different place from another community in different ways, and that is why it has been very difficult to apply one set of rules for everyone. Unfortunately it is the Commonwealth purview. When you make a law you cannot make it distinctively within an area—prescriptively for one little community and not another.

Senator MOORE—There are a lot of questions and it seems that the introduction of the changes could have been done a lot better in terms of involvement, engagement and explanation. We hear that a lot. Even the title 'emergency' kind of said that the way the government moved was very quickly, and something had to happen. It is important, though, that we look at what happens next because that is history. It was almost two years ago now when all that process happened, but I get the distinct impression from your evidence that you still think that there is not enough genuine partnership—that the people who now have positions, such as GBMs and shire people who now have stated positions in communities, are still not effectively talking with your group. Is that right?

Mrs Rosas—Yes. There need to be more consultations. There needs to be more sitting down and planning. The government need to be more strategic in what they are doing. There seems to be no strategies or plans—a lot of talking but not a lot of working together. They need to work in with us.

Senator MOORE—How would you suggest that is done, Mrs Rosas? Your group is extremely well established and well known, so how would you suggest the process is done? When you look at the expectations of GBMs and shire personnel on all the duty statements it says, 'The ability to relate effectively with the local community and engage effectively with traditional owners.' What is expected is all there. We are hoping that that occurs. What messages can you tell us that we have to pass on?

Mrs Rosas—From my personal experience, I see that people have got lost. They have got lost in the politics. For goodness sake, let's all forget about the bullshit and the politics. It is always going to be there. But let's get on with it and work together and work with the people who are coming forward. I have put myself forward and yet—

Senator MOORE—No-one seems to be listening.

Mrs Rosas—I have made myself available as the chairperson to deal with my people, because at the end of the day it is us who need to work with my people and deal with my people and deal with the politics. We want the people with government to just come in with their expertise, with their skills, and work with people like me and Damien and Marie and Helena, and let us work together to develop programs, instead of beating around the bush and talking about all the

politics and all the crap that goes on. I am really not interested in politics. I want to get in there and do something for my people. But the policies and the people that government put in place just make it so much harder for us.

Senator MOORE—So you are not happy with some of the placements that have been made?

Mrs Rosas—Well, there has been no progress. There has been no continuity.

Ms Allen—You are talking about the business managers?

Senator MOORE—Yes, and the new shire people. There are supposed to be all these people working together.

Mrs Rosas—There is a lot of confusion within the people.

Mr Sing—I actually do not understand why the government did not come to the Wardaman association and say, 'Who are your people and who's got the skills; so, if we've got a position coming up, maybe we can look at what people you've got within the Wardaman association.' I think, like you said, we just got walked all over when it first happened, and they must have thought that Wardaman did not have anything there. In my family alone, I have got a brother who manages a store up in Winnellie; I am a carpenter-builder by trade—I am working at Mitre 10 at the moment as a store person; I have got a twin brother who is down in Toowoomba who is an air-con refrigeration mechanic and is doing his electrical licence; and my sister is a beauty therapist up in Darwin. There alone are some skills that can probably get a couple of jobs within the communities. But there is a lack of consultation, and people get employed over other people. You have got all the boys in May's family who are pretty skilled in a few other areas. I would like to see CDEP programs or Work for the Dole programs actually benefit the community a lot more than they do at the moment, because I just do not think there is much thought going into them.

CHAIR—Were you aware at all of the fact that these positions were coming up?

Mr Sing—I was aware of hardly anything with the intervention.

CHAIR—The reason I am asking is that I can probably go back to FaHCSIA and find out if, once again, they advertised in the *Australian*, that newspaper that is completely unread in the Territory.

Senator MOORE—Yes, exactly.

CHAIR—But whether or not they advertised here—can you remember whether you knew that they were advertised?

Mr Sing—No.

Mrs Rosas—The process is so difficult—

Mr Sing—It is the process by which they do it.

Mrs Rosas—It was not advertised. They just—

CHAIR—It certainly was advertised but maybe not here. That is what I am saying.

Mrs Rosas—It seems to be an in-house thing; they have people within the system that—

CHAIR—It was a highly competitive process across Australia to employ government business managers.

Mr Sing—But to get the best for the community I think it would be best, as I said, for someone in the government department to come to the Wardaman association and ask who has got qualifications. Instead of going out and getting someone who is better qualified, get someone within the community that you can train up; give them that position on their own land with their own people. That would be more beneficial for us.

CHAIR—We have had a suggestion—and you may wish to comment on this—that, as the government business managers are employed on a 12-month contract, people in communities should now be looking towards the sorts of skills that they think they need to provide the skills of the government business managers. The committee are not sure yet about the process of replacing them or how the contracts work, but we will reflect on what you have said; thank you for that.

Ms Allen—Senator, are you saying that those people who are GBMs on communities are supposed to pass on their skills to Aboriginal people? Is that what you are saying?

CHAIR—No, I am not. I am simply making the observation that they are employed for a 12-month cycle and that it has been put to us—in fact, it was earlier today—that there is an opportunity for people in the community who have those skills. The government now recognise the sorts of skills that are needed. I do not think they really did beforehand; I am not sure anybody did, to be honest. So there is an opportunity perhaps—

Mr Sing—For Aboriginal people.

CHAIR—to ensure that some of the suggestions you have made can be applied at the end of a contractual arrangement. It is not as though they are there forever. I am saying that as an observation; perhaps that can actually be the case.

Mr Sing—I just thought it was quite weird that we have a GBM from Zimbabwe.

CHAIR—I have to say I know some very capable people from Zimbabwe and all over the world and I do not think where they come from makes a difference. They really need to know and understand what happens here.

Ms Allen—So they are not there in that 12 months to pass on any skills or anything. They are just basically there just to see the day-to-day running of the community or maybe paint the house.

CHAIR—I am not sure. We have not had an opportunity to cross-examine the government on exactly what the case is. In all my time of dealing with the intervention and discussions with government business managers it does not appear that it would be one of their principal roles to pass on the skills of their own particular position to anyone. I do not think that is the case and I think you would not expect that.

Ms Allen—Because really they do not have skills themselves, a lot of them. Administratively and all that they may, but in regard to the others you would need to run a community, they have not.

CHAIR—There has certainly been mixed evidence in that regard. Some people say they are absolutely fantastic and others have indicated that they are not so good.

Mrs Rosas—Basically with my community it has got worse. The community were excited at first. They thought they were going to do something about all the ganja problems, the drinking and the domestic violence and all the other stuff that is going on in the community. Just this week I have had people come to me and say they have got petrol sniffing there in the community from another outlying community. So what is happening? You could drive into our community and see green cans all over before you get into the community. There is no enforcement. It is supposed to be no drinking.

CHAIR—Who is there in terms of law and order?

Ms Allen—Just community people at this particular place we are talking about.

CHAIR—Do you have any ACPOs or Aboriginal police aides?

Mrs Rosas—They do not even have ACPOs. There is no police aide, nothing.

CHAIR—So there are no police officers there.

Ms Allen—We are just giving you one case of a community where abuse is going on. The purpose of the intervention was because of the abuse.

CHAIR—So what do you think you can do about it? Has it been reported? Do you know who they are?

Ms Allen—Yes.

CHAIR—So it has been reported to the police?

Ms Allen—Yes. There is a court case pending.

CHAIR—So they have come out and responded but nothing has actually been done.

Senator MOORE—If a court case is going on, they have actually started the process.

Ms Allen—Part of that also is the rights of traditional owners of different country who believe that, if there is someone there that is dangerous or is a paedophile, Aboriginal traditional owners should have a right to remove them. Yet we do not even get the support in that regard from land councils or whatever. Those are the issues that we are facing now because as Wardaman people we have an obligation to ensure that our people who are living on those communities are safe and we cannot.

CHAIR—Perhaps just on notice, Mrs Rosas, you said before that there was some frustration with the time that it has taken from the identification of an offender, if you like, and the time to act even if they are back in the community. This may not be possible but it would be great if we could just have a short time line. Obviously, there are privacy issues and those sort of things but if you could let us know how long that period was from when it was first reported to now because that would be very useful for the committee.

Mrs Rosas—What the community is saying is that it is too long a time frame for any action to be taken. Once people have reported the incident basically the cooling down period of a week or two weeks is too long. They call it a cooling down period because once they have reported the incident, the anger has gone and the emotion has gone. They are talking about family here. They are talking about people that they know and they trust, so when that cooling down period has taken place and nothing has happened—

Ms Allen—Then complacency sets in.

Mrs Rosas—That is it: people are not going to talk. They close down; they go into a little shell.

CHAIR—It would be fantastic if you could provide an example, without names, with a rough timeline—how long it took to go to court and how long it took to respond to. If it is not possible, I understand; I know you are very busy. But, if you could provide something like that, a bit of a timeline, on notice it would be very useful to us.

Mrs Rosas—It took weeks for the investigation and many months before anything was done, before the person was taken to court and put in jail. That is just pathetic.

Ms Allen—And they are out on bail now.

Mrs Rosas—How do we know that the person has not re-offended?

CHAIR—Are they back in the community?

Ms Allen—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—Are there other charges still pending on that person? What is happening?

Ms Allen—No, I think he is just waiting until it goes to court. In cases like that—and this is what we said when people came around for the *Little children are sacred* report—there should also be support for community people. If something happens, the law, the child psychologists and whoever else should all go in straight away and get them.

Senator ADAMS—So nothing has happened in that respect?

Ms Allen—No, and we believe that little girl is back in the community.

Mrs Rosas—Comments have been made that it must be because the person has the money and can appoint their own lawyers, magistrates and whatever. This must be a crazy world if money is to rule. Where is the justice for the children?

CHAIR—We would all hope that was the case. I was just briefly having an aside with my colleague. With domestic violence or these sorts of cases, if somebody is charged and investigated, pending a court case, there is quite often an interim court order to prevent the accused person visiting the community or the home until such time as the matter is resolved. That is normally the case. So that is clearly not the case here.

Ms Allen—That should have been the case, we believe. We believe that they should have made an order and he should not be allowed to go out there if that child is still there. But they have not. People wonder why Aboriginal people do not come up and complain—it is because you are left on your own. When you report a sex abuse in a community, you are treading on dangerous ground. You are not only fighting against the abuser; you are also fighting your own family and his family. There is no safety net for women and children out on communities. When are we going to make our women and children safe? They are the future. They are our future.

Senator ADAMS—Absolutely. Miss Raymond, have you got anything to say? You are sitting there very quietly. Do you see any problems in the community that you want us to try and fix?

Miss Raymond—I live in Binjari and I have lived there all my life. Since the GBM came, nothing has really changed—nothing has happened with finding jobs and that.

CHAIR—So there was an expectation that the GBM would provide some answers for the community, he would provide jobs and opportunities?

Miss Raymond—Yes, but in that way nothing has happened so far.

Senator ADAMS—How far away from the nearest big community are you?

Miss Raymond—About 12 kilometres.

Senator ADAMS—Which community is that?

Miss Raymond—Binjari.

Senator ADAMS—Is that one of the listed ones? That is really what I was looking at.

CHAIR—In today's media release?

Senator ADAMS—Yes.

CHAIR—No, it is not.

Mr Sing—Binjari was not on the one I saw in the paper today.

CHAIR—Binjari's association in a geographical sense is with Katherine.

Senator ADAMS—Miss Raymond, what are the main issues that the younger women in your community are unhappy with or think need fixing?

Miss Raymond—More jobs: office work, teaching kids how to read and write—school, education and so on.

Senator ADAMS—They would like to be involved in that.

Miss Raymond—Yes, and in arts and craft.

Senator ADAMS—They would like more to do.

Miss Raymond—Yes, especially younger girls who do not like going to school.

Ms Allen—My community is part of the Ngaliwurru Wuli CDEP scheme that is based at Timber Creek. I do not know whether Aboriginal organisations are given a charter about what to do, but one of the biggest problems is that a lot of Aboriginal people in remote communities do not know about new changes in laws or rules, like the promise-wife business—a lot of them did not know that those rules came into being. One of the other problems is that a lot of Aboriginal people out there do not know where the shire fits into this, where this fits into that and where the GBM fits in. All of that is not clear to people out there. It is clear to all of us, who can read and write, but none of the people out there know, and no-one ever even takes it upon themselves to go out and inform them.

Some of the Aboriginal organisations have also failed in the giving of information in regard to new laws, changes and so on. None of those blackfellas read the *Australian* or anything like that, so no-one knows what goes on. Even when Aboriginal people make rules and changes, the poor blackfella out in the community does not know what is going on. Surely the legal aid service and others like that should be going out and doing their bit to inform people about new rules, laws, land councils and whatever else. There has been a lot of failure of Aboriginal people—everyone has failed us. That includes all the government departments and all the Aboriginal organisations. Because Aboriginal people have not had the skills, a lot of us have picked the wrong people to run our organisations. A lot of organisations have gone down for that reason.

Senator ADAMS—Your Aboriginal organisations are not letting the knowledge out but are keeping it for themselves. Is that what is happening?

Ms Allen—The Aboriginal organisations?

Senator ADAMS—You are saying that they have failed you as well, so they are not actually going out to the people and telling them.

Ms Allen—Yes, a lot of the organisations are failing their own people. Look at a big CDEP scheme like the one Ngaliwurru Wuli has, where you have about 17 communities under the Timber Creek umbrella. That is a $6 million organisation, yet a lot of people out in the community still miss out on information and a lot of other things. That is why there has been such failure of Aboriginal people.

I would like to say another thing about the intervention regarding communities where people are not allowed to drink. I wonder if the people running the intervention are aware that they are putting people in danger with what has happened. In the case of Timber Creek, they used to have an area outside some of their communities where there was a drinking area—a place where they would throw their cans and whatever. Now people have to drink at Big Horse. Big Horse is about 20 kilometres away. It is also part of the Gregory National Park. You have tourists going there. A lot of Aboriginals go there and drink. You are putting them in danger when they are walking home. There are big transport trucks coming over from Kununurra and all those sorts of things. Even here. In some ways, a lot of people were safer drinking in their homes than they are on the streets out here.

Mr Sing—That is why you get the antisocial behaviour increasing in Katherine. Because the intervention has come out to their community, a lot of these people do not feel they have a home anymore and they come to Katherine. All they do is come here and drink, and there is antisocial behaviour and you wonder why. If they had a happy home they would be all right.

Ms Allen—If they were allowed to drink at home they would be all right.

Mr Sing—Yes. A lot of them do not think they actually have a home anymore. The white policy has gone out, taken it over, made laws in front of them and said, 'This is how you're going to do it.' They will leave it; they will come into town.

Ms Allen—It is the same at Binjari. They drink on the road. If not, you have families in Katherine and communities that you have named as being part of this intervention. They all go to their families in the township and drink. That creates problems with the housing commission. It just goes on and on.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your evidence. It has been great. We are over time by a considerable amount, but it has been very important that you provide that information.

Mrs Rosas—Mr Chairman, could I make a last-minute comment, please?

CHAIR—Indeed.

Mrs Rosas—I would personally like to see more input in education in various areas and getting more Indigenous people in the communities involved with developing programs and look at all the areas we talked about. Once upon a time there used to be a lot of education and that has been pulled out from underneath us. I would like to see more improvements in education in various areas.

Senator ADAMS—Are the children going to school in your community?

Miss Raymond—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—Are they really encouraged to go to school? Is there much truancy?

Miss Raymond—People still do not go to school. There is the nutrition and breakfast program as well.

Senator ADAMS—Is that going well?

Miss Raymond—Yes.

Mr ADAMS—That is good. What about lunch? Do they get lunch, too?

Mrs Rosas—Yes, they make their lunch and take it down to the school.

CHAIR—Are there is still some kids who do not go to school?

Miss Raymond—Yes, some do not go to school, especially the high school kids.

CHAIR—Obviously there is no high school in Binjari; they have to go to a high school in Katherine?

Miss Raymond—Yes.

Mrs Rosas—Why are they not going to school? Are they drinking?

Miss Raymond—Because of drugs, going back home and making noises et cetera.

Senator ADAMS—Is there any petrol sniffing in your community?

Miss Raymond—No.

CHAIR—Again, thank you very much for the evidence you have provided today. If members of the committee require questions on notice for clarification, we will provide those to you through the secretariat. Again, thank you very much for taking the time to give evidence today.

Ms Allen—Thank you for having us.

Committee adjourned at 5.24 pm