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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

MONDAY, 24 AUGUST 2009

FITZROY CROSSING

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON

REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Monday, 24 August 2009

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

Senators in attendance: Senators Adams, Moore, Scullion and Siewert

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 9.35 am

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. The committee will be taking evidence here in Fitzroy Crossing today followed by hearings in Halls Creek on Tuesday, 25 August and then in Broome on Wednesday, 26 August. On behalf of the committee I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land on which we meet and we pay our respects to the elders past and present. I would particularly like to thank Daisy Andrews for her welcome to country this morning.

The committee is next due to report to the Senate on 26 November 2009. It welcomes submissions from interested people and organisations. Before the committee starts taking evidence, I advise 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 a contempt of the Senate. These are public proceedings, although the committee May agreed to a request to have evidence heard in camera or may determine that certain evidence short the heard in camera.

[9.46 am]

ROSS, Mr Joe, Member, Fitzroy Futures Governing Committee

CHAIR—I welcome Mr Joe Ross from the Fitzroy Futures Forum.

Mr Ross—First I will give you a bit of background about myself. I was born here in Fitzroy Crossing. I belong to the local traditional owners—Bunuba. Our country is a little bit over the river but extends west of here up into the Gibb River road. I do not know if you have been to places like Windjana Gorge, Tunnel Creek. Our history has been quite chequered. Bunuba is quite a small language group here. Its most prominent member that people know nationally is Jandamarra. The whole Jandamarra story was born out of our first contact with the passing of people is travelling from Derby going to the Halls Creek goldfields, which was a wagon road. Halls Creek was the first goal strike in Western Australia and the three supply points were Derby, Wyndham and Victoria River. Unfortunately for us the wagon road basically went right through the guts of our country. Out of three major language groups that were on the track there is only one of us left. The others, like Gooniyandi, are still around.

I do a couple of things for the Commonwealth government. One I have been working on for a long time was the instigation of the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program in the Howard years. That was when you were the incumbent member, I think, for regional development. The Indigenous Youth Leadership Program is about offering choices to young Indigenous people throughout the country to education providers and we are not defined by boundaries. I chair that group. It is now a recurrent program within DEEWR.

The other major task I was invited to do was to chair the Northern Australia Land and Water Task Force post Senator Bill Heffernan. We are currently on a march to provide a report to Gary Gray, the parliamentary secretary by 16 December. As to what the government does with our report we will soon see after 16 December. But I suspect members like yourself and others will be made aware of this process post 16 December. That has been my current role—traipsing around Northern Australia. I have just come back from Darwin, of all places, with the task force, looking at the slow progression. We went out to the Douglas Daly and places like that.

I wanted to talk today about our Fitzroy Futures Forum, which has been in the mix and was developed about nine years ago. It was in response to the state government Department of Housing and Works wanting to implement a large capital works program. I have given you some background notes and I can give you an electronic copy before I leave. I will talk to that and also to a couple of slides that I have on this computer.

I suspect that everybody has been to the Kimberley. Just to give you an idea, in relation to your terms of reference, there is one COAG site in Fitzroy Crossing. It has been gazetted in legislation as Fitzroy Crossing and neighbouring communities, which we have a bit of a debate about at the moment. The other one is on the peninsula. At the moment they are positioning their GBMs in One Arm Point in Beagle Bay. The third site in the Kimberley is Halls Creek and is specific to the township of Halls Creek, where I am going at 11 o'clock today. They are the three sites. I have just come back from Canberra, where FaHCSIA have been running the first regional

service delivery workshops. They brought together the leaders of the 29 sites to begin the first rollout of the new version of—

Senator ADAMS—The consultative committees—

Mr Ross—These are all Aboriginal people that have been identified from the 29 COAG sites for regional service delivery. Fitzroy Crossing is a township but we like to think of the Fitzroy Valley. You can see Fitzroy Crossing is about here and the Fitzroy Valley extends from Noonkanbah right across to a community on the other side of the screen here, which you will pass along the way to Halls Creek. This is the highway. On that screen you can see the different colours, made up of the identified language groups. What we call the Fitzroy Valley is made up of blues—the Walmajarri communities, outstations; red is the Gooniyandi language group and my little group, north of us, is Bunuba. Most of my people are sitting inside Fitzroy Crossing at places like my community and Junjuwa and Burruwa.

Being in the Fitzroy Valley, our specific aim has always been to get recognition so that governments do not just see the town site of Fitzroy Crossing, that they respect the town site of Fitzroy Crossing servicing three to four language groups. Over the last thousand years it has been the meeting point for our language group culturally. The challenge we had here in the Fitzroy Valley was to try to articulate to the state and Commonwealth governments the value of having our cultures respected and recognised with any proposed government system here. We like to think that culturally we are one of the most stable regions in the Kimberley. We have great protocols here, great ceremonies and great relationships between all our language groups. It has really been the underpinning foundation of why this town was created in 1974. The town site was built in 1974 and the old town was built in about 1850. It was only a very small place, with a post office, a police station, a hospital, a pub and a mission—a Uniting Church mission.

Up until 1974 everyone used to live out on the stations, out on country. As an indication of what disruption you can cause in moving people in this place, from about the seventies right through to the eighties, it was quite a violent society when everybody got moved into the missions, got moved into the community next door. In the late 1980s to the early 1990s people got moved to these outstation communities. You can imagine what happened when the Commonwealth government and the state Department of Housing and Works came to our community and started talking about a 50-kilometre rule for where services and housing were going to be delivered when you have got very strong people sitting here who literally still spear people, especially this desert troop down the bottom here. We have to be very careful as leaders in this community as to how we include people. That was always going to be our biggest challenge in developing a town site like Fitzroy Crossing but keeping the relationships with our families, culturally and ceremonially, together so that they are not seen to be excluded. That was the idea of the Fitzroy Futures Forum.

It started off with a large capital program that was proposed for Fitzroy Crossing, and our initial sponsor, until today, was the state government's Department of Housing and Works. We basically work with them. This paper describes that relationship but also describes a couple of key initiatives that the WA government supported us in. One was the establishment of a governing committee, which I will talk about in a moment, and there was also the Fitzroy Futures Fund, where we secured a fund of $500,000 a year for five years. I think it runs out in 2012. Basically, the governing committee has an opportunity twice a year to roll out

opportunities for people to put together ideas and get funded for social or economic objectives that will enhance the wellbeing of this community. We manage that in partnership with the Department of Housing.

The governing committee is shown in this section of these papers, and there are, as I said, dynamics in the challenges that we face here. Firstly, there are three major native title claims, which will eventually end up in a prescribed body corporate framework trying to respect the cultural dynamics, the cultural protocols, the desires and the aspirations of our language groups to maintain their own order and work out how to bring them into the Westminster system. The other history of this place is pastoralism. We have had 100 years of pastoralism. The whole pastoral industry was born on the land of the three groups here—Walmajarri, Gooniyandi and Bunuba. We had to respect the pastoralists that were here and we have a large pastoral community of non-Aboriginal people.

Also, if we were to deal with the states we had to try and get the three tiers of government. Our local shire is based in Derby, 265 kilometres away, and for all intents and purposes we are basically a poor cousin of the Derby community. Derby is struggling and has its own challenges about its role and where it sees itself in the Kimberley community, but at the same time we are a community of Aboriginal people that is sitting out here. They try as much as they can to support this place, but when it comes down to shire meetings and the processes in Derby it is basically about Derby. We have set about trying to create a new government system here, but we knew we had to include the three tiers of government. This little diagram gives you an idea of the three language group prescribed body corporates that are going to be established. The Shire of Derby/West Kimberley, the Department of Indigenous Affairs of Western Australia and FaHCSIA are the representatives on governing committee. We also have expressions of interest for what is called the Fitzroy Valley community. At the moment, the Minister of the Department of Housing and Works is Troy Buswell. Expressions of interest are invited every couple of years for community reps to be on the governing committee, and we hope that will be the avenue to get non-Indigenous residents opportunities to be on the governing committee. We already have three non-Indigenous people who are second and third generation Fitzroy Valley residents.

Mind you, this was all developed nine years ago, not with any sort of focus on the looming COAG process. At the backs of our minds, we had the idea that COAG had to be redone at some point in time, in the next decade or in the future. The struggles they had with the implementation of Yirralallem was probably something to learn from, and it has been our good fortune that COAG has now identified this community. Why has it identified this community? As I said, there are cultural protocols and we have great leadership here, but the key trigger for the Commonwealth, FaHCSIA, in recognising Fitzroy Valley was the whole debate and leadership shown by the women's group, primarily June Oscar and Emily Carter, who is the chair of the women's group, and the implementation of the alcohol restrictions on 1 October 2007.

That has given us an opportunity to rationally discuss this with the government. This was implemented in the last days of the Howard years and we owe a fair bit to the sorts of dynamics that were created in the Northern Territory and elsewhere, in Cape York. Support was given to us by the Commonwealth government to have that argument with the local licensees. We had to bring the Western Australian government kicking and screaming to the table about having restrictions here. Ultimately, post 1 October 2007, it has proven to be one of the greatest godsends we have ever known, a circuit-breaker to give our community an opportunity to sell

ourselves and ultimately have one of the COAG sites secured for Fitzroy Crossing and the neighbouring communities. What those neighbouring communities are I do not know yet, but we will soon find out. Are there any questions so far?

CHAIR—I will kick off with a question with regard to the outstations and the homelands. I think we all know that this is a very difficult tension to negotiate. I think everybody acknowledges that it is so important that people remain on country, but it is also important, in my view, that they have access to education at all levels. Often the critical mass of the size of the outstations and the disparate nature of them does not allow for that to efficiently take place. Certainly in the context of the Northern Territory and many other places that the committee has visited one of the issues is really transport. It might be down to a place not having culverts across a creek or not having all-weather roads or any local transport for education and, if you could resolve that, it would resolve the majority of the issues. Can you talk to me about how you think the resolution of this particularly difficult issue will take place. Whether it is 50 kilometres or whatever, it is clearly going to exclude communities where it should not.

Mr Ross—We are quite fortunate. Running through the spine of the valley is the highway. Having access to the highway is not a problem other than in some of these communities down the bottom here in the desert, which are probably cut off for about two or three weeks of the year, in the main wet season. The communities with primary schools are Yungngora, Noonkanbah, Koorabye, Kadjina, Djugerari, Yakanarra, Wangkatjungka and Yarri community. The central high school is sitting in Fitzroy Crossing. You can see Bayulu community near Fitzroy Crossing there. It has a primary school. Muludja community is up the top there. They are all primary schools. That is the current network.

CHAIR—Do you think those primary schools are currently seen by the department of education as sustainable?

Mr Ross—Yes, as we understand it. We have not heard anything else. Their whole strategy—what they call local area planning—is based on Fitzroy Crossing, where they have just built a Taj Mahal, of $34 million, to be the secondary provider, if not the primary provider, with a hostel system. But it is to service the secondary requirements of the department of education predominantly, and there are five independent schools.

CHAIR—Do you think that will work?

Mr Ross—It is working now. Linking all that together, to come into Fitzroy Crossing from a 100-kilometre radius, is the bus system. There is an actual contract for that.

CHAIR—Who is going to pay for and run that bus service?

Mr Ross—The Western Australian government, the Department of Education and Training.

Senator SIEWERT—Bringing the high school kids to the school?

Mr Ross—They bring high school kids from right out here. Because that is an independent school there, they go as far as here.

CHAIR—Are the people who go to high school from the catchment down to the south-west also connected to the bus or does the bus only go along the main arterial highway?

Mr Ross—At the moment, the bus just goes along this section on the highway. The challenge with these communities here is to bring them into the mix. The proposal in Fitzroy Crossing is to have a hostel system to service the desert troops, who are two-thirds of the community. Much has been said about the hostel system. In the eighties we had a hostel system and it worked very well. You would bring children in on Monday and you would pick them up on Friday. If you wanted to come and visit them during the week or camp over, that was all organised. It ran for about seven or eight years. Somehow our hostel got mixed up in the stolen generation debate in Perth, and the department totally scrubbed all the hostels throughout Western Australia. Here it was working very effectively. The cohort that went through those years are predominantly our young leaders. They would be about 10 years younger than me. They are a very strong little group that have come through the system, gone away and completed year 12 or gone and got trades. You see them in council structures now. You see them taking on university pathways.

CHAIR—So the clear intention of the department now is to continue building a hostel system under this Taj Mahal process. Will the transport in and out from those areas be the responsibility of the parents, or is that also being provided?

Mr Ross—The WA government would like a hostel, but FaHCSIA are the ones they would look to to fund it.

CHAIR—Has anybody looked at the transport? A big challenge remains with regard to the capacity and the types of the vehicles that you would need to be able to collect your children on the Friday and drop them off on the Monday. That is still, I would have thought, a pretty significant issue.

Mr Ross—That is being managed by the Department of Education and Training now. It would just be an extension or a refining of this system of bringing children in for their secondary schooling. There is an acceptance throughout the whole valley that not everybody can have a secondary school. This one only goes to year 10, mind you—it is a district high school. It only goes to year 10, and then you do distance education. Some people believe that it is an appropriate way to go. My view is that, at the moment, the short- to medium-term objective for the valley should be to send young children away—the ones that can reach their potential in boarding schools. We do not want to take the whole cohort out of the community but we do want to really give choice and opportunities for young people to access some of the best education in the country. Our primary providers for the valley, where most of our young men and women go, are Presbyterian Ladies College in Perth and Hale School in Perth for boys. They are our target group. They work with us. They come up and do interviews. The bar is set pretty high. You cannot just turn up at Hale or PLC. Not surprisingly, the majority of children that have gone down to Perth to boarding school have been through PLC. They have been young ladies. They are coming through the system now. You see them in all our administrative structures. You see them going to university. You see them taking up hairdressing trades or things like that.

Senator ADAMS—Do any of them go to St Brigid's still?

Mr Ross—Not from here, though you might meet a woman later today whose daughters are all St Brigid's girls. There have been three people from here, about my age or older, who have gone to St Brigid's.

Senator ADAMS—I have quite a lot to do with St Brigid's, and they are running a very good program now for Indigenous people from the Kimberley.

Mr Ross—St Brigid's is one of our education providers in the IYLP, the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program. If I were here, I could go to St Brigid's from year 7 to year 12. I would get $28,000 from the IYLP and I could access ABSTUDY. St Brigid's is not a high-fee-paying school, but, if you wanted to go to Geelong Grammar School, PLC or anywhere in the country, you have got literally $40,000 from year 7 to year 12 to support you. Attached to that are external, extracurricular leadership development opportunities. That is nearly $3,000 per year that a student can negotiate with their teachers and principals. I am a bit passionate about it given that we instigated it.

CHAIR—It seems to be working well.

Mr Ross—It is a big argument. What do you do with a bright young lady or a bright young man here? Do you try and work with a system that is struggling with a whole heap of other dynamics in this community or do you give them an opportunity to go to PLC? My daughter, my nieces and so on have all gone to PLC. They are all bright young ladies and they have come back and done something. But that is not a choice for everybody. That is education. Shall I move on?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Ross—On the back page of your papers is this. One of the key things for our community to get ownership in the process was to slowly work over the last nine years on what people want to do here. DHW engaged GHD and consultants and a man called Tony Wally from the Department of Indigenous Affairs, who has been working over the years to slowly put together the sorts of strategic initiatives under these headings that would make our society a healthy place—grand dreams, a lot of initiatives and, resources-wise, a multimillion-dollar effort over many years. Currently the Fitzroy Futures governing committee is going through a process about revisiting this. This list would have been established in about 2006-07. That was the time we started crystallising this. During that process, there was always the important process of trying to get some structure. You can see the right-hand side diagram. We had to work very strongly to get some structure and process so that you could get two societies on the same page.

Our big challenge is that we have got people from the desert, in their 50s and 60s, who either got dragged kicking and screaming or walked in off the desert. My people had contact 100 years ago, with properties and that, and you have got a town that was literally only built in 1974. You are trying to get that history, and you have people like old Daisy and co. who have made that transition from the desert into Fitzroy Crossing and who put a lot of value on culture, whether it be Walmajarri culture, Bunuba culture or Gooniyandi culture, and at the same time you have this overarching wave of having to fit into the Westminster system, whether you want to go to the juvenile justice system or whether you want to participate in the COAG process.

We have come up with this structure which we think is quite simple. People like Bert, who is here, would be sitting on the left or could be in the approvals process or could be in this partnership stakeholders group. That is basically the very simple structure that we see for the Fitzroy Futures process. In our minds, our Fitzroy Futures Forum would be serviced by an external relations manager with the appropriate secretariat support staff. This was done well before the intervention process and well before our talk now about local area coordinators or GBMs. The big dynamic this Friday is when Di Hawgood and co. will come to Broome. We are beginning to negotiate. If they want us to do an implementation agreement on COAG, we do not want to be talking about a partnership; we want to talk about a negotiated process by which we get what we want.

CHAIR—Where do the GBM sit on this?

Mr Ross—They would sit in this square here. The challenge and the tension lives in that at the moment the government sees this person off to the side. We want to bring the GBMs and their appropriate support and resources to be directed by the Fitzroy Futures Forum and ultimately by the governing committee in a partnership, us delivering a service to the Commonwealth government. In public service speak, we would see a simple secondment of that person if we were to constitute the governing committee. It would be a simple secondment coming in with strings attached as to accountability and transparency but the direction of this person should be done by the governing committee and nobody else.

CHAIR—So there will be a number of them within that box, because there is not only one for the region, there are a number of them within the region.

Mr Ross—You see in this little area here. When we did this, you have obviously got a lot of Aboriginal people also here with their little fiefdoms. One of the biggest fiefdoms in our community is the women's. So we immediately went to the women's group and the emerging men's group, and I will tell you a story about this men's group, but we went to the women and said, 'Look, we are not cutting across your patch, we are not going to try and steal a little bit of cake off the Commonwealth that you are after. If we are going to work this governing committee as the portal or the entry into our community, we need to be aware of what is in your strategic directions and planning.' So the governing committee sat down with them and came up with this structure and we agreed with this structure with them. That is in their strategic planning as an example of men's and women's, and that is an example of those initiatives you see there. One of them should come up as women's and a few youth and men's in it. We pick up three or four initiatives in this strategic framework and we have mutually agreed that this is the framework to go by with the women's group so we do not get humbugged or have a big argument when we get home and that sort of thing. Anyway, you can see the structure is like this. We slowly worked through those initiatives and who is driving those initiatives and who actually put them on that list. Of course, when you tell someone like the Commonwealth public servant in Canberra that you either listen to us or you can take your money home, we do not want your money, it raises a few eyebrows. Any questions on that?

Senator ADAMS—I see on the back page as far as local governments fits in that you have got a representative there. I could not see it on the chart.

Mr Ross—This is a more detailed version on this one here, probably the more up-to-date.

Senator ADAMS—Yes, that is what I was looking at, but I could not see—yes, I can now. It is just the acronym.

Mr Ross—The encouragement when they talk about local government is to have the local representative, so our local representative turns up as Andrew Twaddle, a non-Aboriginal person and one of the shire reps. He has equal say on the governing council.

Senator MOORE—When you say if you do not get this as the structure you can tell the Commonwealth government you do not want their money, and the Commonwealth money is withdrawn, what is left?

Mr Ross—We just go work with the state, as we always have. The state has given us $500,000 a year and we have been working with the capital works program and we happily work with the Department of Health to have the first hospital in Western Australia to have bulk-billing.

Senator MOORE—That is all state.

Mr Ross—The message to state and Commonwealth is basically, 'This is our structure. We have been working on this for the last decade. We see it as an entry point, and show some respect to what we have done in the last decade. Don't try to impose something on top of it.'

CHAIR—So FaHCSIA would be the principal warhorse coming down the path. What has been their response to that approach?

Mr Ross—The recognition that we both need each other, and from FaHCSIA's point of view I daresay that something like this gives them some credibility as to getting some momentum about the implementation of the COAG process.

CHAIR—It is just an opportunity. We will be quizzing FaHCSIA as well as part of our process constantly, and it would be a very important question to put them about what level of bureaucratic acknowledgement are they giving to whether they will use this process to get access to Fitzroy Valley processes.

Senator SIEWERT—What are FaHCSIA saying to you at the moment about how they want the COAG process implemented? How far apart are you?

Mr Ross—We have it verbally that the adoption of this structure is quite appropriate to the implementation of the COAG site for Fitzroy Crossing and the neighbouring communities. We got that about two weeks ago. We heard it anecdotally. I called a meeting in Broome this week. We are going to negotiate a time frame with Di Hawgood and see what is on the table. This is a negotiated process by which we come up with an implementation agreement. Then we will start to see in black-and-white what FaHCSIA are prepared to allow our community to do to control and drive on behalf of Fitzroy Valley. To me the tensions lie in the relationship between the GBM and the resources that are brought to bear to support the COAG site. The second area is: will FaHCSIA and our process be strong enough to marry with our initiatives and provide a block funding process for the initiatives across the Commonwealth? At the moment we are dealing with one silo.

Senator SIEWERT—You are dealing with one silo. Are you saying they should then deal with all the other silos to do a whole-of-government response?

Mr Ross—When I talk about the negotiation process, at the moment it is FaHCSIA. They are offering FaHCSIA and the Fitzroy Futures Forum—those are the signatories to the agreement. What I am saying to them is that we want to see DEWR on there, as well as the department of health, the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts—the keys ones that would cover the initiatives. We would also want to see Climate Change there, because we are also thinking beyond welfare. They are just examples of signatories to this process. We are not comfortable with the idea that FaHCSIA is going to be the lead agency and Brian Gleeson is going to police subsidiary departments to help us. We want to have that direct relationship.

Senator SIEWERT—You would have a direct relationship with the health agencies. Let us talk about the department of health, because obviously that is delivering a lot of resources. You would have a direct relationship with them on the basis that you described?

Mr Ross—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—The issue that comes up repeatedly is the number of grants and things that everybody is working on and having to sign off on. You would be comfortable still running all those different processes?

Mr Ross—I do not think it is a dream; it will become a reality at some point in time. It is just about the Commonwealth and the states accepting it. The WA government and Treasury, in particular Tim Marney, talks to us about the concept around a block grant. You can imagine a block grant that came in under a strategic plan—strategic initiatives that are costed—whereby we buy services from the government or privately buy services. They would be the ultimate objective of this process.

Senator SIEWERT—And meet the outcomes under each of the areas that you—

Mr Ross—Yes, meet the outcomes. The biggest issue that comes up at the moment is how robust would our governance system be to be able to manage that. If you took a picture of the Kimberley, it is getting up to about $250 million in government service delivery at the moment. A region like this has state and Commonwealth government programs, and housing. Take housing out, because that is a bit of a distortion, but for service delivery you would be talking about $60 million or $70 million. Why would you do that with a scattergun approach? That is the real question. Common sense would say: why would you do that in a scattergun approach? Why wouldn't you have the localities defined and a governance system defined? Reconstitute the governance system, block fund it and then get the governance system to buy services from that point.

Senator ADAMS—So, with the housing, if you pull out of the COAG agreement, where are you going to go with that, because that would be one of the most expensive components?

Mr Ross—That will roll on anyway. The only influence on this will be the allocation and where the housing goes to. Our housing process in all these three sites is driven by a national

partnership agreement between FaHCSIA and the Department of Housing and Works, and we are the client sitting out in the paddock under the shady tree.

Senator ADAMS—At the moment, what is the situation with the housing here in Fitzroy Crossing as regards availability for government workers plus the community people?

Mr Ross—Absolute shortage. I think they are talking about another 27—I know there are 11, and there is a tender out for 16, so you are talking 27—government houses that are going to be built in the next 18 months. That is government housing. But you go to some of these communities and you find 20 people living in an old asbestos hovel. They are houses that were built in the seventies—asbestos, of all things.

Senator ADAMS—This is of course where the outstation situation comes into it and the agreement there as to what is going to happen, as to which ones are going to be serviced and which ones are not. Are you going to try and deal with that under this?

Mr Ross—Have a look at this slide here. See all those scattered communities there? Other than the three up top, and maybe that one, they are probably the most vocal. If people wanted to work together, those would probably be the places where we would say we need housing. There is a recognition by the Department of Housing and Works that that is the case. They see it happening out of Fitzroy Crossing in waves. The waves could be in decades, or it could be in a managed approach.

I have been giving it some thought. I think we need to negotiate to try and literally stop being speared from the bottom group, because they currently see that Bunaba—because there are traditional lands there—Gooniyandi and the town site are stealing the cake from them. Those are the rumblings in the community at the moment. Through the Fitzroy Futures process, we have slowly been trying to settle that down and say, 'We are yet to negotiate,' and DHW tentatively say they want to negotiate the process. Logically, I reckon the refurbishments could happen across all of those communities. Do you understand that there are two parts to the housing process, refurbishments and new housing?

Senator ADAMS—Yes, we are fully aware of that.

Mr Ross—Refurbishments should happen to all of those communities. The cost is negligible. Access is easy. Building companies can either go out to Noonkanbah, on the far east over there, or be in Fitzroy Crossing at the same cost. They turn up here with their caravans and dongas and just feed themselves, so it does not matter about cost. You would do the refurbishments right throughout the community.

New housing has to have scale in it and costs, so you would probably pick the big ones—Wangkatjungka, Yiyili, maybe Noonkanbah, Yakanarra, Bayulu and a couple or three in town here. You would use them as the epicentre for new housing, to get scale. But we have to push very hard, because the process is being currently negotiated in Perth. We hear snippets of it at this end. At some point in time, someone is going to be turning up here to refurbish the houses, but they do not have any directions as to where to go other than a rule of thumb or a set of indicators that have been established by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure. You should ask for that, request it—

CHAIR—We will.

Mr Ross—because that is the guiding line for the question that the public servant uses—not this public servant behind me but the public servants from the Department for Planning and Infrastructure and the Department of Housing and Works. That apparently is the guiding tool at the moment, and a very coarse tool it is.

CHAIR—Mr Ross, we are well over time, unless there is some other particular piece of evidence you would like to provide us.

Mr Ross—I will just provide a summary. Our relationship with the state government and the Commonwealth government has been quite good since we started the Fitzroy Futures process. The test is going to be this next few months negotiating the implementation process and the agreement both over housing and service delivery. We could do it quite well and better here than what has been done in other places and really be an example both here and in Halls Creek. Our relationship is good. We are hoping to see you maybe in 10 years time when you are back in government, Nigel—you could be the chairman of the new economic development Senate inquiry that is looking at the wealth and wellbeing of this community.

CHAIR—No chance at all, Mr Ross—that is, of me being here in 10 years time.

Mr Ross—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Joe, before I close, there may well be questions that we may need to ask you on notice. The committee may well do that. Also if you could just hang around for a while so Hansard can get some clarification on some of those exotic names of the wonderful Kimberley you have provided to us. Thank you very much again for the provision of your evidence here today.

[10.21 am]

DORGELO, Mr Bertus, District Manager, Western Australia Country Health Service

HAWKES, Miss Genevieve Susan, Senior Physiotherapist, Western Australia Country Health Service

CHAIR—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. The committee will be taking evidence here in Fitzroy Crossing today followed by hearings in Halls Creek on Tuesday 25 August, tomorrow, and then in Broome on Wednesday 26 August. On behalf of the committee would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land on which we meet and pay our respects to the elders past and present. I particularly acknowledge Daisy Andrews and her welcome here this morning.

The committee is next due to report to the Senate on 26 November 2009 and it welcomes submissions from interested people and organisations. 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 proceedings, although the committee may agree to request to have evidence heard in camera or may determine that certain evidence should be heard in camera.

The committee welcomes Mr Bert Dorgelo and Miss Genevieve Hawkes from the Fitzroy Valley Health Service.

Mr Dorgelo—My role is operations manager, more commonly called district manager, for both Derby and Fitzroy Crossing health services. I have been here for the last four years as manager of those services.

Miss Hawkes—I am a senior physio up here in the Kimberley servicing both the Derby Health Service and the Fitzroy Valley Health Service. I am representing a team that has the unique opportunity to provide allied health services not only in town but going out to all the communities in the Fitzroy Valley and the surrounding areas to Derby.

CHAIR—Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been previously provided to you. 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 Dorgelo—Thank you. I did provide a briefing paper or an overview paper from some of the perspectives, which I will talk to briefly. What has been significant in the last few years has been a community that has been experiencing profound health concerns making some changes that are starting to have an impact on and address some of those profound health concerns. It has

been exciting to be a part of that process and there are some valuable learnings that can come from that process. There is no suggestion that the profound health concerns have gone away. It is a journey. A few humble first steps have been taken, but some significant traction has been made through the community taking a lead and then the organisations that support the community falling in behind the community lead and supporting their approach to it.

When I first came to the Kimberley, and particularly to my role in Fitzroy Crossing, it was in the middle of a series of suicides. There were 13 completed suicides in 12 months, which left the community reeling from one set of sorry business to the next. It was also having a profound impact on the hospital staff, who had to be the ambulance providers and health service providers for each one of those incidents. So it was profound from both sides of the equation. We were also involved with a community that was reeling from one payday to the next, to do with alcohol consumption. We have seen some dramatic changes occurring there.

In that same time period, new hospital has been built. There has been a complete infrastructure change and a new school has been built. There is other infrastructure going on. A set of liquor restrictions has been put in, according to the community will. The immediate short-term impacts are the lowering of accident and emergency presentations and the number of alcohol related incidents that we were managing. We are now starting to see some longer term results from that. One of the great values has been the ability to retain staff because people are feeling that their work is valuable. In the times when there was a lot of alcohol being consumed, people felt they were just stitching up and supporting an ongoing melee. Now they feel as if they are making a contribution towards a health gain. That is really what attracts people to work in these places. We are now in a situation where we no longer have any agency nurses in the hospital and only one of the four doctors is an agency doctor. All have a longer term commitment to the situation, which is vastly different to the one that we had a couple of years ago. That has been one of the quite unintended but neat outcomes of seeing that social and environmental change.

The other outcome is that the community is more interested in health and there is an earlier intervention profile occurring. So the uptake of medications to do with chronic disease and staying with those medications is occurring now. In earlier days, we were seeing a far lower compliance and therefore a progression of disease. Chronic disease refers to diagnosed mental health as well as diabetes and the more classic description of chronic disease. These are indicators, but we are seeing a significantly positive trend. What we are seeing in our hospital statistics is a reduction in the number of inpatient stays and greater outpatient and emergency activity. There is a shift towards an earlier intervention profile, which is exactly what we want to see to get some traction across health care. That sets the scene from my perspective. There will no doubt be a lot of issues teased out in the next 15 or 20 minutes or so. I will hand over to Gen.

Miss Hawkes—I do not really know where to begin. This is my first time doing something like this. As I said, I had the opportunity to work with people on the ground, in their houses at home, in their communities, in community clinics and in the hospital. I see people across the whole continuum of care. I represent a team that does the same. I know the purpose of today is to also talk about some of the things that are working well and some of the changes that have happened. I have been here for three years. I came into a department that had not had any physios for six months or so, so it was a fairly dire situation. We obviously cover a really huge area and have a massive wait list and workload.

One of the issues that I want to discuss is the rate of disability up here and the number of people who are affected by things like cerebral palsy and brain injury and other things. I also want to discuss some of the flow-on effects of being in communities like the ones out here, such as disability access to key services, such as the hospital and the school having appropriate pathways and things like that. As a team, one of the things that we look at is the maintenance schedule for equipment. That is huge, with the demands placed on that equipment out here. I know that the normal replacement schedule for a wheelchair is every four years or so. Here, we are looking at a wheelchair wearing out every 12 months or so. We also look at things like home modifications and access to that sort of thing. There are children and adults in communities who have been waiting up to four years for the modifications necessary for them to do well in their house and their community.

Looking at the chronic disease profile, physios are able to provide a lot in the way of primary health by engaging in communities and encouraging physical activity and all those sorts of things, as well as things like pulmonary rehab, cardiac rehab and education to do with diabetes and things like that. What we find is that we are so incredibly stretched with just the bandaid management that we do not have the capacity to give as much to those sorts of things that we would like to.

We also look at the profile of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and other developmental delay disorders in the community. That includes some of the issues that speech pathologists and occupational therapists would see. Some of the kids who are affected need more input from those kinds of people. As we know, a high number of children have these sorts of conditions. There are only two occupational therapists, two physios and one speech pathologist for 104,000 square kilometres, so we cannot give the intensity of help that we would like to give in those areas. That is something that we would really like to work towards with the FASD strategies and task force that is coming through. Hopefully, there will the establishment of a strong diagnostic team to support some of these kids.

Looking at some of the things that are working well, we work really closely with lots of different agencies and network closely with people. We engage with the community on how they would like services to be delivered. Some of the things that are working well include that collaborative practice, the capacity building within the community and the linking in with the community nurse, the school teachers and other key people in the community to help support some of the programs. We are functioning a little bit more in a consultative way and trying to build those skills. The community is responding really well to that, because they like being able to support themselves. It is empowering.

Another thing that is working well is the collaborative practice with the Nindilingarri partnership. That is all about cultural health. We encourage all staff to engage in that and work together with the community. We are setting up joint paediatric clinics—when paediatricians are available—so that families do not have to travel kilometres to access those. They can come in and see the paediatrician and we can set up out on the lawn and have a clinic running and flow through so that those kids are getting what they need. Engaging with the community and being able to provide the continuity of service has really been embraced positively. That has also flowed on to staff retention. Having said that, there are huge staff retention issues. We are trying to deliver services in so many different areas with a small number of people.

One of the barriers to accessing these services that we see time and time again is not having ready access to interpreters. There are strong language barriers up here at times. I have had experience in bigger hospitals, and there you would have access to an interpreter in Italian to help with that person. That is not always available up here. Travelling really long distances for specialist consults is something that people find a real barrier, especially in the wet season when often we have visiting specialists coming in and people are not able to access them because there are five rivers between them and the specialist. Travelling a long way causes disruptions to families. Obviously, with the chronic disease profile there are people who have to travel a long way for different sorts of services.

Another barrier is the foreign nature of the big cities and the processes to many people. It is very scary sometimes for a person to get on that plane and difficult for them to know where to go at the other end. There are a lot of people who opt to not attend appointments at times that are really crucial to their health and well being. There are geographic and vehicle access barriers that I have already mentioned. There are also communication breakdowns in appointment notification procedures. When a specialist is coming and we send out appointment cards and things, people do not necessarily know what those appointments are for or what their value is.

Another thing that has been working well has been attending things like the orthopaedic clinic, where we, along with the ALO staff, can help to fill the gaps for that specialist, who very rarely comes to this part of the world. That means that we can make sure that that specialists knows what particular patients are encountering at home in terms of challenges and what the plan is from here. We try to plug those gaps and make sure that they do end up receiving the service that they need.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I have one question to Mr Dorgelo. You talked about benchmarks and how we are going. It is very important to try to measure how we are going. What sort of benchmarking are you doing? You said that these are small steps on the journey. Prioritise some of the benchmarks that you think would really give us an indication of direction and pace down the better health journey, outside the principle ones. Obviously, if you have had 13 suicides, one every month, that is a clear indicator. But it is hardly transferable.

Mr Dorgelo—Staying with mortality and overall morbidity is relatively crude and will not give you many easy indicators. There is a burden of disease within the whole population group and the early wins will not be apparent in those morbidity and mortality statistics. It is important to track them, though. The ones that we are focusing on at the moment are the shift to do with declining in-patient and increasing outpatient numbers and the number of transfers out of the region to tertiary hospitals. We have an economic driver to look at that one as well, but that gives a bit of an indicator to do with the level of sickness, because we do not transfer out unless it is absolutely necessary. If we are seeing a decreasing number of transfers, we would be seeing that as an indicator that we have lowered the level of disease, particularly when you break it down by disease categories.

The alcohol management group is a collective that has been put in place since the restrictions were put in place. They have instigated a couple of bits of research that will be very valuable to keep a handle on it and to keep following through. One of those is a cohort study to do with births and birth metrics. That is looking at a cohort that was born prior to the introduction of the ban and a cohort that had its whole gestation period post the ban. We are getting the birth

biometrics looked at to see if there is a significant statistical difference between them. Then we are going to track those same cohorts, looking at them at three years when FASD is diagnosable. We will then try to attract the ongoing resources to track that cohort over much of the course of their lives. Because we are taking a whole population slice over a particular period, that will be valuable data to keep informing policy through the course of life comparisons, because it is comparing one set of conditions and another set of conditions.

Also, at the moment most of our energy is going into child and maternal and early childhood as well as chronic disease management. We have deliberately strategically chosen those as focus areas. Paying particular attention to that data, tracking that data and having regular reporting across that data will be quite informative in showing how well particular strategies are working. Does that help?

CHAIR—That is excellent.

Senator ADAMS—It certainly helps me. One of my questions was on foetal alcohol syndrome and spectrum disorder. I was very impressed with the presentation we saw last time we were here. I have certainly followed it up—being a nurse, it is something that interests me. I have discussed the data with the department in Canberra during estimates. Hopefully we are going to get a lot more statistics coming from the department and also health statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. They were very interested too, so they may be of help with that. With the nine months gestation and only a three-year gap before you can find out whether the child has a problem or not, it is probably easier with those statistics than with something more substantial. Could you give us an update on the A&E presentations since the alcohol ban began and how it is going with the community as far as the hospital goes.

Mr Dorgelo—I am happy to. I will just make one other point about FASD, because we were also aware that there was the huge potential of a dual impact through both drinking in pregnancy and also children being affected in early childhood by violence. The strategies and the investigation are quite deliberate to pick up the impact of violence as well as of foetal alcohol syndrome. The community are not that interested in the data; they are more interested in the best resolution for this affected population. So we have formed a collective that is working very strongly with the community and supporting the community to enable that direction.

Senator ADAMS—Last time we heard about the grandmothers being left trying to deal with these children and there being not enough assistants at the school—as far as assistants go—especially in some of the smaller communities. It is a huge problem, so that is something the committee has taken on board.

Mr Dorgelo—I am not saying we have got there yet, but we are getting that process engaged.

Senator ADAMS—It has been recognised and identified; that is the main thing.

Senator MOORE—Could you tell us on notice who is on the collective? That would be useful.

Mr Dorgelo—Sure.

Senator ADAMS—Moving to chronic disease issues, are your community members having to go to Derby for renal dialysis or are there chairs here?

Mr Dorgelo—There is quite a profile of end-stage renal disease. The successes we are having are in chronic disease management. People are managing better, so hopefully we are delaying the onset of the full end-stage renal disease. Currently, when people have kidney failure they will start their renal dialysis in Perth. We turn to Broome or to Derby for ongoing renal dialysis, unless they are judged suitable for home dialysis. There are four home dialysis chairs available through Nindilingarri, but those chairs are reliant on the person having a carer to assist them to manage their dialysis. They are not fully supported chairs. At the moment there are two people from the community receiving renal dialysis in the community. Funding and support has been announced for a dramatic expansion into the Derby facility. A satellite centre is being established in Derby which will bring it, from the four chairs currently available, first to 12 and then likely to 20. That is the projected growth linked with the requirement. Funding has been announced and is available for a satellite unit to develop in Kununurra, which will be strategically the next key centre in the Kimberley to increase its profile. Those larger communities are deliberately chosen because they have the hospital support to underpin the Aboriginal health service based dialysis units. The hospitals in the tiny communities here are not quite capable of that same level of assistance, so, from a risk profile, it is more difficult.

Senator ADAMS—How are you dealing with aged care?

Mr Dorgelo—Ageing in Place has been a profile and a strategic direction for some time. Until relatively recently Numbala Nunga Nursing Home in Derby was the key ageing site within the Kimberley. Numbala Nunga is undergoing a rebuild. It has gone from a 55-bed facility to a 26-bed facility. That difference has been through a distribution of beds to other sites within the community. So Guwardi, as part of Nindilingarri, is providing the ageing service within Fitzroy Crossing and has a higher number of higher-care beds than they previously provided. We work very strongly with the hospital in supporting that additional care that is required. Kununurra has gained 12 aged-care beds, where it did not in the past have any; and a few have gone into Halls Creek. So there is that deliberate strategy to do with Ageing in Place. There has also been quite an increase in ACAT, HACC and Meals on Wheels support right across the Kimberley to enable more people to age in their homes.

Senator ADAMS—On the issue of PATS, has the new funding helped? Are you using it more? How do you feel about that? PATS is a bad word, I know, but I am a bit passionate about it!

Mr Dorgelo—PATS is key to our business here. Last year we spent $4 million on PATS for the Kimberley alone. Around half of that amount was within-region travel and the other half was to support people going out of the region. In the last 12 months we have seen the growth of the use of six beds in Darwin hospital, which has reduced some of the RFDS costs and has also reduced a lot of the travel time involved, particularly for East Kimberley. That has been a changing profile. It is something we monitor, but it is part of doing our business. To gear up to provide that extra level of service locally is not feasible, so it is about trying to achieve the right balance. We are seeing a growth in the usage, but for the last two years Fitzroy Crossing has remained constant. There has not been a growth in PATS in Fitzroy Crossing—or in Derby, actually—but there has been in Kununurra, Halls Creek and Broome. We are still doing a closer

analysis across that data as to what the drivers are. It may be that the effect of the alcohol intervention has reduced the number of people that we are moving. I am not confident about that; it is just an early hypothesis.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to go back to the alcohol management group collective. Is it the same group that is doing the FAS follow-up or are there two different groups?

Mr Dorgelo—One has been spawned by the other.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. So the FAS group is a subgroup of the other group?

Mr Dorgelo—No, they basically stand alone and have equal priority. But the alcohol management group was really focused on managing the implementation of the alcohol restrictions and trying to understand the impact of those. It was always thought that, following those restrictions being put in place, there would be some need for additional activity and additional focus. They have primarily driven the additional counselling support that has been locally available and have supported the alcohol institutions—the Crossing Inn and the Lodge—through the changes they have had to take on board. They have also triggered some of the research and some of the questions.

Senator SIEWERT—What are the key things that are most needed now that we have seen some of the positive indicators? What would be the best investment and mechanisms that you would say we should be pushing the government to do?

Mr Dorgelo—As much as I can say.

CHAIR—Give us the whole thing.

Mr Dorgelo—I am happy to talk about this but I am wondering where to start.

Senator SIEWERT—I am sorry it is such a big question; it is a matter of where we go from here and how we make the most of it.

Mr Dorgelo—The next biggest gains are in housing, employment and education. The health service is the safety net that a population needs, but for the population to thrive it needs good housing, employment opportunities and it needs the skills and access barriers addressed to enable the uptake of that. In saying that, there are some particular things that can be working in synergy to achieve that outcome. We have an ill population that is going to require a large number of carers to support that population as it ages and as it goes the course of life. So there is an opportunity to provide education for carer and support-worker work. If that was a more highly remunerated opportunity it would actually give an opportunity of engagement in meaningful roles, which would also have the benefit of those individuals thriving through their engagement. That option is there.

On a microskills level, communication skills, the ability to articulate, the ability to resolve conflict in a better way and the ability to be able to communicate about health and wellbeing are all key things that currently underpin some of the lifestyle choices, or the poor lifestyle choices, that are prevalent. If people's communication skills grow through their learning opportunities or

their engagement in more diverse activities, the ability to resolve conflict will improve, so you will see a reduction in violence in the home and you will therefore see a flow-on of a reduction in mental health concerns, or ill-health choices or people needing to manage their emotional distress in unhealthy ways. That is an incredible challenge and it is hard to visualise.

I think most of the best-practice approaches to address that challenge are not culturally set. One of our key learnings is to look at how we address some of those challenges in a culturally appropriate way and pick on the few indicators that we have that are working well: indicators like project HAN—I do not know if it has been talked about—and also where young people are engaged in their community in cultural activities and/or in looking after country-style activities. So I think there would be some opportunity to redirect schooling and employment opportunities to maybe ranger-style things that tie into cultural things, but there is a real need because the country to redress things like the increasing profile of feral animals and feral weeds and those sorts of things. A win-win could emerge through that approach, which one again would give the hope and strength that is required to underpin growth and change there.

Then there are some specifics. I mentioned in my briefing the matter of high levels of oral health concerns, high levels of hearing impairment, which reduces school performance, the prevalence of chest infections and rheumatic heart disease, which is seen here in kids but is basically not seen in our major population centres at all. They come about through repeated childhood infections, which also have infections on the heart valves and will therefore seriously affect the course of life.

Senator SIEWERT—That's good, thank you.

CHAIR—Thanks very much, Mr Dorgelo. We probably have time for one last question, from Senator Moore. There are a number of questions I have put on notice but we will be providing those to you.

Senator MOORE—You mentioned, Mr Dorgelo, in your opening comments, staffing in the health system. It was a big issue when we came here last time, in terms of keeping staffing up. It is also really important that we get you on record, Miss Hawkes—I do not think at committee has actually had a physiotherapist from a remote area talk to us before. I think it is really important that we hear about the whole concept of the multidisciplinary team, which we talk about all the time in health and which we know in remote localities is not going as well as it could. Could we get something from you on record—and you can add to it later—about the importance of your role in remote areas and how physiotherapy can work. I think that is really important. Could we also get a bit on record about staffing, housing, allowances—all those things—and about attracting and maintaining staffing across the whole of health in these areas. So it is not so short, Chair, but we have been following up on these issues for a while.

Mr Dorgelo—Staff housing is the limiting factor to do with adding to services. Services could be easily funded, but staff housing is the limiting factor. So we are short of staff housing—I make no bones about that. I think that, on our last count, access to an extra 11 houses would see another significant change there.

Senator MOORE—In this area alone?

Mr Dorgelo—In Fitzroy Crossing.

Senator MOORE—It is a big number.

Mr Dorgelo—It is a big number. We try to be as creative as possible. For instance, we try to employ couples, because there is only one house involved, and all that sort of thing. The other thing that I think is relevant to retaining staff is the work ethos, the team environment, the way people work together, and how happy the workplace is. That is something that we can manage, and we certainly do put a lot of energy into that. One of the things that is happening here, and which we are leading the way in here, is that we have lately declared Fitzroy Crossing as an integrated primary care site. Genevieve mentioned the Nindilingarri partnership. That is an innovation that is there. But also population health, mental health and the hospital are working together with us. It has been suggested we look at moving towards changing the way that health services think, and that has been very much paramount in what we are doing. So when an inpatient stay occurs we do not just look at the acute thing; we look at the chronic disease profile, we look at the lifestyle changes the person needs to make to be able to manage their changed status, and we look at a whole range of stuff in the way that we do business. And that has been profound.

We have just achieved the 19(2) exemption for Fitzroy Crossing, which is the ability to Medicare bill for activity. In any other larger town there would be private GP practices and there would be a range of community providers. There are not any of those. The state is funded particularly for emergency and acute care. That early intervention profile of business was being missed. We have just achieved that, and we are seeing that as our next area of growth—that primary care profile. That money has to be reinvested into primary care into the Fitzroy Valley.

Senator MOORE—Miss Hawkes, could you talk about physios, to get it on record, because it is so important.

Miss Hawkes—I would like to talk about the importance of allied health as a whole, and I will cross into physio as well. I feel very privileged to be in the position that I am in here, just being able to work across so many different areas of health and across the whole continuum of care, and to build those strong relationships with people on the ground, to be able to see them in hospital and for them to feel comfortable because they know that someone is going to be able to follow them into their home.

As an allied health team we cross over so many national priority areas, such as chronic disease, paediatric early interventions—maternal health even—and antenatal interventions. But we also look at aged care and keeping people at home or at least keeping them at hostel level rather than progressing to nursing homes and so on. Then there is rehabilitation, and that is a really big challenge in this part of the world. With the prevalence of chronic disease, you get a lot of people who have strokes and all sorts of things that require rehab, and they just do not have access to the same level or frequency of service that they would elsewhere. So we are really key members in, hopefully, facilitating them to be successful in getting back to their own homes.

We are also involved in preventing chronic issues. I can paint a picture: here in Fitzroy I have got over 200 patients and I am only here four days a month. When you want to do well for every single one of those people—

Senator MOORE—Where are you based?

Miss Hawkes—I am based in Derby.

Senator MOORE—And you just go on a circuit around the area?

Miss Hawkes—Yes. So when I come to Fitzroy I have at least a solid day in town and I will try and fit in the aged-care facility and get out to the community to see people at home who might have trouble accessing me, and get to the school or have a paediatric clinic—that is usually towards the end of my week. But the rest of the time I will spend in the air, trying to go out with the RFDS to the clinics or the communities, or on the road getting out to see people. So when you have got someone—

Mr Dorgelo—Can you also mention the Aboriginal allied health assistants?

Miss Hawkes—Yes. We have some fantastic Aboriginal allied health assistants that work really closely with us, and they make a huge difference to our practice out here. One particular lady comes out every trip. We try and split up our allied health trips so that OT and speech people come together one fortnight for their four-day trip, because they work quite closely together, particularly in the schools, and then we have a trip where I come out on the alternate fortnights with, hopefully, a couple of supplementary days from the OTs coming out and working together with our joint disability clients or aged-care clients. Our therapy assistant comes out on each of those fortnights for a four-day stint and is able to cross over between all of us and continue on with programs in the community to help support those people. That is really essential for things like keeping people at home and them doing well. If I have set someone up with a program but they have hurt their shoulder or their back or something, that is something that could turn into a chronic problem that causes presentation to the health service over and over again and costs a lot of money. Equally, with a longer term CBA client, if they are not doing well at home then they will be in hospital as well. If we can keep them at home, that helps.

I can give an example of a 90-year-old man who, two years ago, had a CBA. He was in Broome Hospital and, because of the demand for beds, he was given the opportunity of only two weeks for rehabilitation. But it is well known that a window of six weeks is really needed to get a picture of where that person is going to end up. He was discharged on a full hoist transfer to the nursing home. He and his wife—they have 10 children together—still live together in the same home in a community out towards Halls Creek from here, so he was separated from her. She is sick with renal disease. He was just distraught over being separated from his family. I went down to visit him at the nursing home, expecting him to be really debilitated, and in the week he had been there he had actually spontaneously recovered quite well and I was able to stand up. He would have passed away in there very quickly because of his distress. But he was able to go into hospital for a couple of weeks, and he has been successfully at home in the care of his 10 kids and all his grandchildren and great-grandchildren for two years now without having to have another hospital admission. So it is just really important to have those links.

Senator MOORE—You have got a committee here of health fanatics, so I was really keen to get something on the record—although I know the chair is keen to finish—from your perspective.

CHAIR—As I have indicated, there are a number of questions that will be put on notice and provided to you, but thank you very much for the evidence you have provided today. The committee will have a short break.

[11.10 am]

FITZGERALD, Ms Helen, Family Support Worker, Mobile Playgroup Support, Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre

GRAY, Ms Christine, Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre

CHAIR—I welcome the women's resource centre mobile playgroup.

Ms Fitzgerald—I support the mobile playgroup as a family support worker employed within the women's resource centre with the family violence prevention and legal unit.

Ms Gray—I am the manager of the family violence prevention and legal unit. I support Helen, who works for that program in the mobile playgroup, which we see as an early intervention program for little kids.

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

Ms Gray—Has anything been short?

CHAIR—You can make it as long or short as you like but we have until midday to fit in a lot of people.

Ms Fitzgerald—I suppose I am telling a bit of a story. This is a last-minute opportunity to speak today so I will tell a story. This is my last week working in support of the mobile playgroup because I do not have anywhere to live. It sounds like a really sad story! In the last five months I have been in five houses. That is because we do not have any housing that is permanent. Because of that, at the end of this month there was no housing to move to and I could not face the thought of where I might be next—it could have been a caravan or a caravan park!—so I have had to resign from supporting this mobile playgroup.

I am working very closely with an Indigenous woman who has just been brilliant. In nurturing and mentoring her, together we have started running this fantastic program that we have been taking out to the communities. I brought some photos along to paint the picture. We go out on a daily basis. It is not really a playgroup; there is a whole picture of what we take with us. We take educational materials for children but we also make sure that we bring in a cultural aspect to the program. We have the women doing the cooking. We take some food out and they choose a recipe from the *Deadly Tucker Cookbook*, so nutrition happens at the same time.

Ms Gray—There is bonding and attachment stuff that happens with the mums, carers and children. That is the thrust of the program.

Ms Fitzgerald—Yes, that is the really key thing. There is that and the cultural aspect. We take them out in the troopy, usually back to their country, for the day. It might only be a couple of

kilometres down the road but we might look for bush tucker or show the children some aspect of their culture. There is usually traditional language being exchanged. Now we have added to it another aspect of the family violence prevention unit, which is an art therapist. She comes out with us as well. She sits with the women, sometimes while we are working with the children, and does art therapy.

So it is really a one-stop program that goes out and makes a difference to women. They look forward to our coming. We incorporate rhymes and songs that build on the whole idea of attachment, bonding and caring for kids. There are a whole lot of messages that we embed in what we are doing. It is very casual. Nothing is forced onto the women. If they do not want to attend they do not have to but they are given every opportunity to be involved. So it is a sad thing that Patricia will now be on her own. She is feeling anxious and concerned that she cannot continue.

In an effort to try to look for other ways of continuing this work, Christine and I looked at a couple of ideas last week in desperation. One idea was that the Resource Centre could continue to pay me to consult from a distance, so I might do the reporting to government—DEEWR and the Attorney-General's Department are our funding bodies. I could be involved in doing the reporting from a distance and offer some phone support—perhaps weekly. The other idea that we recently discussed with two other mobile services that are running from Derby and Broome was that the three organisations with Commonwealth funding could employ me collectively to continue to support the services, so I could rotate between the three programs. That would involve some logistics, as far as the three organisations go, but they are all funded by the same Commonwealth organisation. Housing would still be a problem.

Senator MOORE—How would that help the housing?

Ms Fitzgerald—That is it. It would not help the housing from the Fitzroy Crossing, but it might mean that there is housing in Broome or Derby, where it might be more centrally placed. So I could still continue to support the program here as well as the other two programs that also struggle with the same issue of lack of support and mentoring.

Ms Gray—Historically it has been like that across a lot of these programs; hasn't it Helen?

Ms Fitzgerald—Yes.

Ms Gray—That is something in which we have seen a great difference with Helen being involved, because the local women have had someone to help mentor, support and encourage them and keep it going. That has been the beauty of having somebody else around. They have picked up the skills and they really love the program, and the local people love the program as well, as do the kids, of course.

CHAIR—What sorts of skills have you particularly noticed the participants picking up?

Ms Gray—For Patricia it includes organisational skills, communication—

CHAIR—I did not mean the staff; I meant the participants in the program.

Ms Fitzgerald—There are a whole range of things and often it is at a really subtle level. It includes engaging with their own children, enthusiasm for going out bush and parenting skills. Sometimes the women, when they are in the community, are very distracted by all sorts of things that are going on, whether it is family business, the shop, the food or interruptions to their day, and there is no smooth consistency happening if we run a group in the community. A really interesting thing that we always notice is that as soon as we get out to the bush, the women's instinctive parenting skills come out of nowhere. They are alert, they interact and it taps into what is already there but is a bit lost in the distraction and chaos that is going on in the community. It is really just them tapping into the skills that are already there, which is just fantastic. But then it is the craft, sitting down, feeling calm, feeling relaxed, talking, and the forum for discussion, talking and parenting. Elders will come to the group. They love coming and taking any opportunity to get out into the bush, so they are sharing their culture, which does not always happen in the community itself and it certainly does not happen if you are in a building because that seems to bring in another level of stress somehow. So when we run a group in a building it is never as effective as when we get out. I find that what I am actually doing is tapping into what the women and children already know, but unfortunately, mainstream western ways have led them to think that it is more important to get your kids out of the bush and into a building and have this 'childcare centre' that is not actually supporting the women in their parenting role. So they are actually just recontacting with their instincts.

Ms Gray—What we have seen happen when it is in the building is that women seem to think that, like white fellows, you take your kids, dump them and go—it is a childcare centre—and that is not what this program is about at all.

CHAIR—That is notionally how a lot of us see childcare, tragically.

Ms Gray—Yes.

Ms Fitzgerald—Yes. And there is such a need to build on the parenting skills rather than get parents heading off to work. If we are looking at the next generation, we have to look at the fact that these kids feel really attached to their parents in the first place, and feel strong and confident enough to actually get into formal education. So we are really trying to make a difference to those early years, but not in a way that we are going to hothouse the kids into a formal education program; it is more about making them feel strong in their own culture and their own knowledge and ways, which is what we are able to do when we take them out on our playgroup gatherings.

Ms Gray—Going back to the housing situation, which you will hear over and over again, once Helen Fitzgerald goes, if we are to encourage somebody else to come into this program if it is not a local person, and we certainly want a local person if we can, the local people too want alternative housing quite often. They want to come in from the community, they want to be in town. But if we were to go further afield and try and advertise all over then we would need to house those people. We are quite limited because of the housing. We have tried every possible avenue: partnerships with other organisations, Homeswest, we have done GEHA, the whole issue. The only thing we have not got to yet is having enough funding to be able to buy other housing, and I am not even so sure that is possible.

CHAIR—How do you deal with the issue that Patricia is obviously a fundamental building block for this program? Is she provided a house?

Ms Fitzgerald—She lives at Bayulu, yes.

CHAIR—So is she provided a house by the department?

Ms Gray—No.

CHAIR—So why should it be that somebody who comes from outside would be provided a house, like yourself, an expectation to be provided with a house, yet somebody with perhaps the same or better qualifications, simply because they come from the place would not be? Why would that be reasonable?

Ms Gray—That is what we keep saying too. Local people ask us that too: how come you are looking for housing for everyone else and it is not for us? We absolutely agree with that. There is no housing available to offer anybody.

Ms Fitzgerald—There are two issues there. Patricia, who is working alongside me, is crying out this very day to say she needs her own place because of all sorts of conflicts and issues going on in the home as well. She needs a quiet space she can work from. I also need somewhere to live so that I can support her in the work that she is doing, and for her to continue to eventually get to a point where she will manage that program on her own she needs support. So there are two needs there—her being comfortable and safe in her own home where she feels at ease and, and knowing that she has got somebody here who is supporting her in her work.

CHAIR—So there are not only your particular circumstances but the circumstances Fitzroy Crossing that it does not matter whether it is rental, purchase or whatever, there are simply no other houses. Perhaps that is something we can put to the shire. We will ask some other people.

Senator MOORE—You mentioned nutrition. In the parenting programs that are part of the whole family development area that is coming through, which I am sure it is a funding body that you are funded under, one of the elements is learning how to work as a parent, particularly nutrition, the options of having people working with families and cooking and so on. In terms of the take-up of that and growing your own vegies, all those kinds of things, is that all part of your work?

Ms Fitzgerald—Not us specifically. Nindilingarri is another organisation that looks after the health promotion side of things as well. What we try and do where possible is work in with the other organisations. At the moment Nindilingarri does not have a staff person who is supporting women's and children's health promotion, but previously we worked in with them as well. So it is as if we are all trying to bed the same theme through the work we do. We might be specialising in our work but we also have the baby health nurse come along with us and she actually does some of her health checks while she is out bush as well. Kathy's role is sexual health and she was coming along and supporting us at different times too.

Senator MOORE—That is through Health again. We are talking with Nindilingarri this afternoon with another hat and I will probably ask the question then because you are looking at your program. I am interested in how, in Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing and other places, all the different services work together. There are all these little buckets of money that people have been able to get for different programs and I am never really convinced about how they operate

at communities. I will put that later because you are actually from the centre. From your perspective, looking particularly at women, in terms of men as parents, is that picked up by your service at all?

Ms Fitzgerald—We attempt to, but men generally not that to interested in staying.

Ms Gray—They come and check it out.

Ms Fitzgerald—Yes, they look, and we might get them in for a moment, and then they will wander off. Occasionally you will have a hit and someone will come in and really enjoy sitting down with their little ones, but it tends to be women.

Senator MOORE—So is it marketed particularly at women, or is it at parents?

Ms Fitzgerald—We always say it is parents. We never specify.

Ms Gray—There have been some local dads who have attended with that sort of push to try and encourage others, but they are more likely to have other things happening, employment or whatever, so off they go.

Senator MOORE—Which is good.

Senator SIEWERT—You said funding for the program comes from DEEWR. Is it secure funding or do you have to keep reapplying for it?

Ms Fitzgerald—No, it is quite secure.

Senator SIEWERT—How long have you got the funding for?

Ms Fitzgerald—It is ongoing. I do not think there is an end to it. Obviously when there is no-one in the program, and this has happened in other programs, the funding is taken away for a time if they are not able to recruit staff.

Ms Gray—The Attorney-General's Department fund the family violence prevention and legal unit. We employed Helen in that family support role but she then teams up with mobile playgroup. So we see it as a good marriage, a really good tandem way of working together.

Senator MOORE—You seem to be taking a very collaborative approach with the other organisations. Is that formalised?

Ms Fitzgerald—It is more informal really. It is part of the networking with key organisations and the workers that are on the ground that are doing similar work. We make sure we have discussions with each other and make sure that each other knows where we are going to be the next week. They are always made welcome to come along, so long as it does not destroy the nature of the group either.

Ms Gray—There is no need to reinvent the wheel. If someone else is doing nutritional stuff then they come in, et cetera. That has worked really well. It is a small place and there is enough work.

Senator ADAMS—On reporting lines, how do you get on as far as your funding goes and you have got to report back? How much time does that take?

Ms Gray—It is really just quarterly reporting and it is not a huge amount of time. We probably look at two or three hours or half a day of reporting at the end of the quarter, but also Patricia and I are doing ongoing statistics daily and weekly so that we are making sure that our records and attendances and so forth are caught.

Senator ADAMS—Do you have a set of guidelines you have to work under as far as the global playgroup goes?

Ms Fitzgerald—To a degree, but they are very generous actually in the way they do fund us. They like us to work with the communities, so we look at community need and we get a lot of input from the community as to how things are going. So the guidelines are pretty good. They just want to make sure we are listening to the community and doing what they are happy for us to be doing.

Senator ADAMS—The new guidelines that are coming out for childcare groups, which is probably the best way to describe it, as far as people being able to actually access the children and all the restrictions there, say that if a child is at playgroup rellies cannot come in or someone else cannot come unless they have been checked out. So you have not had any problems like that under your guidelines?

Ms Fitzgerald—Under our guidelines we do not. Because we are not a childcare service, because we are deemed a playgroup and there is always the idea that parents and carers will be in attendance, we have not had any problems with that so far. And we have not seen any new guidelines yet, so if they are coming along that could really change the nature of what we are doing.

Senator ADAMS—That is maybe the difference between a playgroup and a childcare centre.

Ms Gray—There will still be safety guidelines about who can come and access the group and the child et cetera. We would be aware of that.

Ms Fitzgerald—But one of the problems has been this communication about the difference between childcare and playgroup. We have kept talking about how we can change the name of what we are offering, because we want it to demonstrate that we have got adults and children coming together sharing language and stories and a whole lot of stuff. We do not want it to be painted as just a place for little kids to come and play on their own.

Senator SIEWERT—It does sound like much more than a playgroup, so what have you come up with?

Ms Fitzgerald—We call ourselves the 'Bush Turkey Mob', which just means that we come out and do stuff.

Ms Gray—The CEO wants the name to be in language, so we are going to have a look at what fits and what rolls off the tongue so that it is easy for people to remember who we are. We are going to have to do some more work around that.

Ms Fitzgerald—We are constantly talking about that.

Senator SIEWERT—Are the playgroups running out of Broome and Derby similar in nature to your group?

Ms Fitzgerald—They have the opportunity to be. At the moment the one in Derby is not running, because they do not have any staff, and the one in Broome is off and on. You probably know more about it than me, Judith, because you have been in contact with them recently, but I think they might be up and running again. The other thing we should mention that we have just started doing is that, in three of the communities we visit, we are now employing a key person in the community who has shown signs of leadership and of being interested. The resource centre is paying them for one day a week so that, when we go out there, they are there, they are prepared and they are gaining the skills too. If there is a week when we do not go out there then they are still able to be employed. It is making it more enduring for the community, it is building their capacity as well, which is a really beautiful new development that has happened just this term.

Ms Gray—It may be that Patricia continues on alone but will go to those key people and run the groups there. That might be how it ends up. She really need someone else to assist her with all the gear and the logistics of it all. So we are hopeful that another local person will be employed and get started soon.

Ms Fitzgerald—One day a week we are able to fly out to some fairly remote communities with the flying doctor when they have spare seats. We take the equipment out there and run it in collaboration with the clinic. So it still supports that idea of wellbeing, but we are doing it at the clinic.

CHAIR—I am sure there will be some other questions on this matter. Through the secretariat, we will provide you with some questions on notice so that you can provide some more details on your activities and outcomes. Thank you very much for coming to give evidence today.

[11.34 am]

LAWFORD, Mr Gerrard Edward, Member, Kurungal Council

WILCOMES, Mrs Rhonda, Chief Executive Officer, Kurungal Council

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses has previously been provided to you. 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.

Mrs Wilcomes—We had a phone call and were invited to this today. I believe it was to discuss things on community and how community life is. We have a couple of issues that are in all of our communities and we would like to discuss them today.

CHAIR—Would you like to move into some of those issues?

Mrs Wilcomes—Yes. One of the issues is the rubbish dumps. I have photos for you so you can understand what we are talking about. Our municipal services are run through the Centre for Appropriate Technology in Derby. They handle the funding as far as the rubbish tips and stuff go. We have been trying to get our rubbish tips fixed up. I have been there over a year and a half now and nothing has been done about it. They are totally full. Kupartiya is really bad. We only have one very small Bobcat to do the three communities. Kupartiya is about three-quarters of an hour away from Wangkatjungka, so we cannot easily get the Bobcat to Kupartiya even to push the rubbish away. Ngumpan has no fences and ours is totally full. There is no funding for any of that.

CHAIR—Who do you see as notionally responsible for the rubbish in those communities that you oversee? Which jurisdiction is responsible for rubbish?

Mrs Wilcomes—I think it would be the health organisation; I am not sure.

CHAIR—Health organisations are not usually responsible for rubbish.

Mrs Wilcomes—No.

CHAIR—Is it the shire?

Mrs Wilcomes—They have no money either.

CHAIR—But who would you see as responsible for it?

Mrs Wilcomes—I do not handle that side of things; CAT does.

CHAIR—It is fine if you do not know; we will ask some other people.

Mrs Wilcomes—Yes, the Centre for Appropriate Technology, which is in Derby, handles all that. We had one health inspector come out and he said that we were not to burn the rubbish, because the rubbish dump is too close to the community houses and that is a health issue. We said there was nothing else we could do, because if we do not burn the rubbish we are not going to have enough room to fit it on top. Theoretically the dump should not even be there, because as soon as you start burning it the smoke goes into the community.

CHAIR—Did the health inspector make any recommendations about the repositioning of the facility?

Mrs Wilcomes—He gave a couple of places to put it, but the trouble was that there was no funding to do it.

CHAIR—Was that provided to you in writing?

Mrs Wilcomes—No. Wangkatjungka has fences, Ngumpan does not have any fences and in Kupartiya the rubbish is blowing everywhere as well. So the rubbish dumps are a really huge issue. The Bobcat really is not made to go dozing all the rubbish into the holes, either, but that is all we have to use. Another huge issue we have is the fire hydrants. We have fire hydrants at Wangkatjungka but no hoses, so if there is ever a fire we virtually have to aim the fire hydrant and hope it reaches the fire. We asked for fire trucks. There, again, CAT tried their hardest to get funding. If Kupartiya ever caught on fire, we would never get there in time to put it out. We have had a couple of fires at Wangkatjungka, but we were lucky enough that Christmas Creek, the station next to us, came out and helped the guys put it out with their little trailer. But it was not a huge fire. If ever anything happened that was bad, we would never put it out. We had a fire in one of the houses. The men put it out with garden hoses, which really is not adequate either.

CHAIR—So you say you need a fire trailer? Is that always accessible within your catchment? Is it one or two?

Mrs Wilcomes—It would definitely service Ngumpan and Wangkatjungka because Ngumpan is only 19 kilometres away from us. It would not take us too long to get down there, but Kupartiya is about three-quarters of an hour away, so that is a bit longer.

CHAIR—So it would require its own to say you have a level of safety and amenity to look after fires.

Mrs Wilcomes—Yes. The only other option is through Christmas Creek Station. If we can get access between us and Kupartiya it is only 15 minutes away, but they have closed the gates and will not let us through. I thought that might be an option—we could barter with him to let us go through there if there was an emergency.

CHAIR—You always get a bolt cutter moment when lives are at risk.

Mrs Wilcomes—True. So that is an issue coming up. CAT tried their hardest to get us a truck last year, but they said that because our guys were not trained in using a fire truck it is not appropriate. We had people saying to us that they would train our guys in that. I do not care if it

is a trailer—it does not worry me—as long as we have something to put fires out, because we are surrounded by stations and grass. I think it is just lucky that nothing has happened so far.

CHAIR—Do you maintain any fire breaks around either the dumps or the communities?

Mrs Wilcomes—Yes, we have a fire break there.

Senator MOORE—Who maintains that?

Mrs Wilcomes—The shire.

Senator ADAMS—What approaches have you made to the shire about digging you a proper pit to bury your rubbish? I know it is a long way to bring out their machinery.

Mrs Wilcomes—We have left that up to CAT because that is their side of things. We have given them information, photos and things. As far as I know, they have tried every avenue and cannot do anything. When I spoke to Craig, who is the environmental officer, the other day, he said that they had money and have been able to get some rubbish dumps done, but ours and another community have not been done yet, because they have run out of funding. He is looking at funding now to see if they can manage something for us all.

Senator MOORE—Who collects the rubbish?

Mrs Wilcomes—The men do.

Senator MOORE—In your photos we saw rubbish bins out side the houses. So you do a regular rubbish collection but there is then nowhere to put it. That is the problem?

Mrs Wilcomes—That is basically it, yes.

Senator MOORE—Are they weekly collections?

Mrs Wilcomes—Yes. Sometimes it is twice a week; it depends on how much rubbish is there. Then they go down to Ngumpan on Wednesdays and do Ngumpan. Kupartiya collect their own rubbish.

Senator MOORE—Who funds those teams? Is that a shire responsibility?

Mrs Wilcomes—For the men?

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Mrs Wilcomes—It was a CDEP project and at the moment CAT is looking at it.

CHAIR—What are the other issues?

Mrs Wilcomes—The clinic is another problem we have. It is only open from 10 o'clock or half past 10 till 2 o'clock in the afternoon Monday to Thursday. They do not stay there 24/7. What happens is that if we have an emergency at night time or in the afternoon we have to handle it ourselves. We had an instance where we had a baby during the wet season and we could not get through. There were no telephone lines at that stage, so what I ended up doing was emailing—luckily, we are on satellite—our accountant in Perth. He rang up Fitzroy Crossing Hospital and we did it that way. Nobody could come to us, and in the end the dad drove through the flooded river and got the little one into hospital. She had pneumonia. That is not acceptable. You are looking at little babies' lives.

CHAIR—So the clinic is there. The reason is only opens between those times is that someone comes into the community, opens it and leaves the community again. I assume from your evidence that they do not actually live in the community.

Mrs Wilcomes—No, they do not. We have patched up cracked heads. The Fitzroy hospital is pretty good. If I ring them up and say that we have got somebody to come in, most times they will meet us halfway in the ambulance.

CHAIR—Do you have an ambulance at all?

Mrs Wilcomes—No. Fitzroy bring it out for us. Also with culture, it is very difficult. If something happens to somebody and they pass away, then a person is said to be responsible, so it is very awkward for us as a team and for my staff because there is a risk, and that is just a cultural thing. But we should not have to put that risk factor into being involved. It is a matter of people's lives and I do not know why they are not there 24/7. I have been told that it is because of money, but I do not know.

CHAIR—How many people, do you think, actually rely on that clinic? And then there is your catchment. You might want to take that notice, if you are not aware now.

Mrs Wilcomes—On our community we are probably looking at about 120 or 130. Then you have got Ngumpan, and there are probably 70 there on a good day. It is just that we are not really trained in medical things. We have had kids with broken arms and cracked heads—

CHAIR—So there would be crisis. So between the hours of 10 and two the clinic is open and there is someone there, so you go up there.

Mrs Wilcomes—Except for Fridays and Saturdays and Sundays.

CHAIR—Is there a sign on the clinic that says, 'When the clinic is shut, this is what you have got to do'? Is there a number? Is there nothing at all at the clinic?

Mrs Wilcomes—I do not know. The guys just know that they come on up to us.

CHAIR—Every other clinic around Australia that has limited hours has some instructions about where you would take a medical emergency outside of those hours. There are actually some clear instructions no matter where you go in Australia. So what you are telling me is that

there is no advice on the door or information that is well known in the community about what you actually have to do.

Mrs Wilcomes—It is well known in the community: they come to us. Most people do not have cars; we are probably one of three that have cars. They need us to get them into hospital anyway.

CHAIR—Notionally, you just simply contact the medical authorities?

Mrs Wilcomes—I ring the hospital straight up and they—

CHAIR—And they are coming to you just to ensure that they get some communication with the hospital.

Mrs Wilcomes—Yes.

CHAIR—Would it be reasonable to say that Fitzroy hospital would be responsible for the provision of emergency medical services during the closed hours of the medical service—

Mrs Wilcomes—Yes. You are looking at an hour and a half from us to them as well, which is a long time if you have got somebody who is not breathing well or whatever. Over in the NT they have 24-hour services. I do not know why WA does not. It does not make sense particularly on remote communities. I understand that for Bayulu, for example, they are pretty close, but when you are an hour and a half away and you have also got flooded rivers that come up in the wet season and so on, I just do not think that they should be playing with people's lives like that. A lot of these guys have got problems—diabetes and all that sort of stuff as well—so when they get sick that can come into play as well. So it is really quite dangerous.

Senator ADAMS—How often is the road graded?

Mrs Wilcomes—We got the road graded only about three or four weeks ago. Usually it is twice a year, if we are lucky.

Senator ADAMS—Who does that?

Mrs Wilcomes—Derby shire gets people in to do it.

Senator MOORE—When we visited some communities, at some stage one of the things that we talked about was equipment on community—either it was not there or it was broken. In your community what kind of equipment do the guys have for doing their jobs in terms of trucks and graders and all that kind of physical stuff that I would imagine Mr Lawford and his team are actually working with? Also, do you have a mechanic on site? I always ask that question and I always get told no. Mr Lawford, what kind of equipment do you have for your team to work with in your community?

Mr Lawford—We have a garbage truck, a tip truck, a bobcat and a tractor with a slasher.

CHAIR—Do you drive that equipment?

Mr Lawford—Yes.

CHAIR—Do a lot of countrymen drive that stuff?

Mr Lawford—Yes.

CHAIR—How many people would work with you doing all that work?

Mr Lawford—Quite a few.

CHAIR—Do you go and do courses to get a truck driver licence or one for your backhoe? Do you do some training in that area?

Mr Lawford—We just drive them.

Mrs Wilcomes—Some TAFE people have come out in the last two months. We have had a lot of trouble with TAFE in the last 12 months and they are having a lot of trouble trying to get trainers as well, so it is a catch 22. When we spoke to the construction guy from TAFE the other day he said that he is going to get some trainers in. They will hire some equipment for us and get the guys certificates, which makes me pretty happy. On the mechanic side of things, I have been asking for ages but it is pretty hard because you have to have a group and it is all about numbers. We cannot get a mechanic in to do the training, which makes it a bit difficult.

CHAIR—Do you only have TAFE, or are other registered training organisations available?

Mrs Wilcomes—We have only been going through TAFE, but it looks like we might have to go a bit further than them and look at other RTOs.

Senator SIEWERT—In terms of where you are up to with the rubbish tips, is CAT trying to negotiate getting some pits dug?

Mrs Wilcomes—Yes. Because it has taken such a long time to find something, CDEP was going to move the fences and do all that. But because CDEP has changed we cannot do it that easily anymore. They are not allowed to use CDEP for such things, so that is probably going to add a little bit more cost and make it a little bit harder for CAT as well. But they are still trying to find the funding.

Senator SIEWERT—Before it changed in July, were a lot of community members on CDEP?

Mrs Wilcomes—Approximately 85 were.

Senator SIEWERT—How have the changes impacted on the community?

Mrs Wilcomes—At the moment it is fine. We have been lucky enough to get positions out of all the funding bodies. I have a bit of a problem with the hours they have given them. They are saying it is a full-time job, and it is 20 hours. Twenty hours is not a full-time job, and every one of them is 20 hours. Our guys are used to working 30 to 35 hours a week, so it is going to be a drop for them, which is going to make it hard.

Senator SIEWERT—So they used to get topped up?

Mrs Wilcomes—Yes. Because not all the CDEP people were working, we were able to use that money to top up the other guys that wanted to work. They were taking home good money and buying their tables, chairs, fridges, freezers and all that sort of stuff. But 20 hours is a big difference, and they are saying it is a full-time job. It is not a full-time job. They want these guys to go out and work. If they get used to 20 hours work and then go into the mainstream somewhere and are told, 'You've gotta work 37½ hours,' they will say, 'That's a bit more than what I usually work,' so it is not really training these guys.

CHAIR—But it is just doing the same thing for longer.

Mrs Wilcomes—Basically.

CHAIR—If you are used to a 20-hour week and you have to go to a 37-hour week, you are almost doubling the amount of work. I understand that could be a bit of an issue, but I know many Aboriginal men and women who work 40-hour weeks.

Mrs Wilcomes—Our guys do too, the ones that work. But it is not teaching them that it is 37½ hours. It is teaching them that a 20-hour job is full-time, and it is not.

Senator SIEWERT—Are you saying if it was part-time it would be different?

Mrs Wilcomes—Maybe they should change the wording, because these guys all think it is a full-time thing.

Senator SIEWERT—And they are being paid part-time wages presumably?

Mrs Wilcomes—Yes. I would rather they be full-time jobs and be done with it because there is plenty of work on communities. As I say, for a lot of these guys, their pay is going to go down.

Senator SIEWERT—Are the jobs that the new system is providing the same jobs as previously under CDEP or different?

Mrs Wilcomes—The majority of them are the same because they have been trained to do what they are doing. With HACC, they are doing exactly the same thing. With municipal services, they will be doing the same thing, with housing—we have a housing maintenance team—

Senator SIEWERT—They will be doing the same thing, but being paid less?

Mrs Wilcomes—Yes. When I had a look at the contract it was $15 25 an hour. CDEP is $15 85. There is a bit of a gap there. We have been able to change it around a little bit. Our accountant has had a look at the figures and he has taken it up to $18, but to do that we have had to drop some of the training. You cannot expect someone to work for $15 25 an hour. I am very appreciative that the government has given us money for these jobs; otherwise, they would be doing nothing and be on Centrelink but, at the same time, it does not seem right that it is less than CDEP money.

Senator ADAMS—How well is the housing maintenance going? Are the houses in good condition?

Mrs Wilcomes—Not great as you can see from some of the photos. We had an issue because a lot of the houses we were told had asbestos in the walls and so for over 12 months we did not touch the houses because of that. The housing guys have actually taken parts of the walls and had them tested. The inside walls are not asbestos; the outside walls are. I was told that they are not a bad asbestos.

CHAIR—I am not sure there is such a thing as good asbestos.

Mrs Wilcomes—Apparently one dissolves in your body and the other does not is what they told us. We have been waiting 12 months for the certificate II in construction for our guys and they are all doing that. They put on the doors and that sort of thing but they will be able to do more once the course finishes.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for giving evidence here today. There may be some questions that we will think of later and the secretary might write to you to seek some more information on those matters.

Proceedings suspended from 11.58 am to 12.45 pm

ARCHER, Mrs Elsia, President, Shire of Derby/West Kimberley

BURGE, Mr Shane, Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Derby/West Kimberley

KOGOLO, Ms Annette, Councillor, Shire of Derby/West Kimberley

TWADDLE, Mr Andrew James, Councillor, Shire of Derby/West Kimberley

CHAIR—Welcome. 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 your remarks I will invite members of the committee to put questions to you.

Mrs Archer—We have come in not quite knowing what this is about, so it is a bit hard for us to say anything. It would be nice if you could give us a bit an overview.

CHAIR—In effect, the committee is looking at a whole range of issues associated with Indigenous communities and government policy at all levels of government. As we travel across the country we are looking at different policies and how they have an impact: whether there is a poor impact, whether there is a good impact, how investments are made and whether they are good or not so good. We are trying to have a comparison. Obviously as a shire you are responsible for the delivery of a number of services across the range, which we have had people reflect on in evidence earlier this morning. It might be useful if you could tell us what you are actually responsible for and how you arrange those programs. It might be a good start.

Mr Burge—With regard to Indigenous communities, the main involvement that we have is from an Aboriginal environmental health program, which also includes dog control, some planning, some community layout plans, and also some building control in some of those communities. The Aboriginal environmental health team visits communities generally once every three months, and we try to visit all those communities. I think that we have some positive involvement in those communities. It depends on the communities as well as to what sort of involvement they wish to have. If they have some Aboriginal environmental health workers on the ground, it makes the job a whole lot easier. That is from an Aboriginal environmental health perspective.

CHAIR—Would that cover the rubbish dumps in your area?

Mr Burge—We have some minor involvement in those.

CHAIR—Who would be responsible for them?

Mr Burge—Generally it is the communities themselves.

CHAIR—One of the challenges that I have is to try to have an understanding of who is actually responsible—who you actually go to. In most places in Australia, environmental health issues and recycling facilities—I think that is the new politically correct name for dumps—are normally controlled by local government. That is generally speaking; there are some exceptions

to that. Are you aware of exactly how that works here? I take it that you are local government, if you say 'the communities take care of it'. Is it because nobody else is doing it so they are sorting it out themselves? Could you talk to me a bit about the history?

Mrs Archer—The communities have always done it themselves. Just recently there have been a couple of consultancies done on municipal services, and that is really where you are coming from, and saying that it is local government that would take that up. I can tell you that local government do not have the money at this point in time to do that; so, if that were going to happen, we would have to be funded correctly. I would go back to the CEO, because they are the ones who are going to have to put this in place. We all sit and agree with it if it is put right.

CHAIR—The answer is that it is a bit of a convention. It has just always happened that way, and that is the way it has always been.

Mrs Archer—Yes. So there are a whole lot of issues that are coming out of municipal services that they are saying would be a local government responsibility. Some of the communities today are saying that it is local government that should be doing that. Nobody has told local government that we should be doing it, and nobody is paying us to do it. So it is a catch-22. I feel for the communities, but we just cannot take that on.

CHAIR—I will just ask a quick question with regard to the relationship with your communities. Many local governments have an assumption that they would provide these services. That assumption is based on a rating arrangement. For example, in some place in Brisbane with local government, you would pay the rates, the rates would go to local government and, in exchange for those rates, they can deal with the garbage et cetera. That is why, I suppose, there is an assumption in the general community that that is your responsibility. Are there any rates collected in the communities within your area that you are aware of? You may not be aware of them.

Mr Burge—No.

Mrs Archer—No, there are no rates. Some of the roads are pastoral roads, and on some of those roads are Indigenous communities. With all the pastoral rates we, the shire—and we are probably a bit of an anomaly when it comes to doing what we do—grade those roads three times a year. That is what the pastoral rates go into, but on a lot of those roads are Indigenous communities. So those roads are done.

CHAIR—Excellent. What other services are provided?

Mr Burge—That is about all that we have involvement in. We do not get any other funding to do anything else.

CHAIR—But that is only in the communities. What else do you do? Obviously that is not what the shire does; it is a very small portion of what it does. So what other things do you do in the region?

Mr Burge—In gazetted towns?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Burge—We do the full range of community services: ovals, public open space, maintenance, public toilets and swimming pools. In Derby we have childcare centres. We provide rangering services.

Mrs Archer—We have a partnership with Garnduwa to do sport and rec, and that is across the board in our shire.

CHAIR—You are responsible for the roads. We have heard people say that you grade the roads. It was done three weeks ago, someone told us. They are all very happy with that. Is that something you do because no-one else does it, or is it part of a funding arrangement—you get funds and do those roads and they say, 'There's this much money; there's the map and there are the roads you are responsible for,' and you put in a tender?

Mr Twaddle—The roads that the shire does are gazetted shire roads, which are mainly the ones going to pastoral stations—to their front gate. If those roads happen to have Aboriginal communities on them, the shire will do it past their gate. Off the gazetted shire roads—if you have a community that is, say, 10 or 15 kilometres off those gazetted roads—over the years it has been coming out of the funding through Marra Worra Worra and that sort of thing to look after those Aboriginal community roads.

CHAIR—But you simply invoice them for the differential between the front gate, if you like, and the community? Would you still do those roads or do they do it themselves?

Mrs Archer—Shane, do you want to explain how the funding is done?

Mr Burge—Generally we will only do the roads. If it is a pastoral station, it might grade its own road.

CHAIR—I was talking specifically about Indigenous communities.

Mr Burge—I am really not sure how they do it. We do not invoice any of them.

Mrs Archer—But we do get grant funding to do things like the Noonkanbah Road and the Camballin Road, which are Indigenous roads, and Wangkatjungka. So there is grant funding that comes in to do that. That is all in that grant funding, isn't it, Shane?

Mr Burge—Yes, there are dedicated roads that you get Aboriginal funding for, but it is not necessarily all of them that may fall under that.

CHAIR—So it would be reasonable to say that there are no gazetted Indigenous communities that would fall under your auspices because they are gazetted?

Mr Burge—No, there are not.

CHAIR—If there are no other issues you would like to talk to us about, I will go to questions from the committee. Senator Adams?

Senator ADAMS—Last time we met with you, in Derby, the issue of the outstations and servicing the communities, as we have just discussed, was raised. Have you had any extra funding in any direction following those comments that somehow these services had to be provided to the communities but at that stage the Derby/West Kimberley shire had not had any funding? Has that changed? It is a year ago since we met with you.

Mr Burge—No.

Senator ADAMS—So nothing has changed?

Ms Kogolo—Nothing.

Senator ADAMS—My second question is about rubbish. We had some photographs tabled of three communities and their rubbish dumps, showing the mess that is lying around and the rubbish blowing all over the place. In the shire do you have earthmoving or ditch-digging equipment that could dig a large pit to cope with that?

Mr Burge—No. We would contract that if it was required.

Senator ADAMS—Are there contractors around that could deal with the quick fix of digging a large hole?

Mr Burge—Yes, I assume there would be.

Mr Twaddle—There are contractors around. They come from Derby or surrounding towns like Halls Creek, Broome and so forth. On an annual basis or when funding is available they do go out to these communities and tidy up their tips. Some of it is on the recommendation of the environmental health officers from the shire. Somehow the information filters from the shire, through wherever, to the company that provides the regional services for most of the Aboriginal communities here.

I work on the lot of the communities around the place. Looking at their tips and how they are managed, some of them are fairly poorly managed. Some of them could quite easily be cleaned up through a bit of self-help by members of the community instead of just throwing things around the flat. They do allow us to put a small amount of builders' waste within their tips so we are not clogging up their tips. During 2007-08 we did 14 house upgrades at Ngalingkadji community and we had to get a dozer out there to dig a hole for all the builders' waste.

CHAIR—But as you would have seen for yourself, Mr Twaddle, and according to the information we have received, their biggest and angriest thing is a bobcat. You can see from the photos and the width of the hole that it has been done by a bobcat. It is a little scrape, basically.

Mr Twaddle—Yes. Sometimes, depending on the funding, we get 30-tonne excavators or a D6 or D7 dozer out there.

CHAIR—So what we have heard in some of the evidence may not be representative of all the communities? Are you saying they are different?

Mr Twaddle—Each individual community have their own different ways of doing things. I know that over the last couple of years the regional service provider that comes around the communities has been doing a lot of work in cleaning these places up—power, water, sewerage and so forth.

CHAIR—Do you know who would be a regional service provider?

Mr Twaddle—KRSP from Broome. They are called the Kimberley Regional Service Providers.

CHAIR—Do you know who pays them, who they are contracted to? I know it is difficult because we do not have it in front of us, but it would be very useful.

Mr Burge—Through FaHCSIA.

Mr Twaddle—It is coming through either the Commonwealth or the state.

CHAIR—We will ask them. It is just good to get an indication. Thank you, Andrew.

Mr Burge—The other one within the shire of Derby is CAT, the Centre for Appropriate Technology. It does municipal services as well.

Senator ADAMS—I want to go on with the health and environmental issues—the rubbish and everything else. If that is reported, do you send someone out from the shire to visit the communities?

Mr Burge—Yes. As I said before, our Aboriginal environmental health officers visit Aboriginal communities about every three months and they assess some of those things. I guess they would report back through the Department of Health. Whether that goes through to FaHCSIA I am really not sure.

Mrs Archer—We do not actually do it ourselves. We do not go out and dig the hole.

Senator ADAMS—No, no. I am trying to come back to the health and environmental issues. All the rubbish around can cause a problem for the community's health, so someone really should be fixing it. I am trying to get to the end of the trail. So it is reported by your health and environmental person and that written report gets sent where?

Mr Burge—I would need to clarify that.

Mrs Archer—It would go to the ICC, the Indigenous Coordination Centre, where they have FaHCSIA and all those different organisations, in Derby.

Senator ADAMS—We will have to follow that up.

CHAIR—We will. It is interesting. So you are responsible for health inspection. The health inspector would come out and say, 'This is awful. We will write you up and it will go to the ICC or the Commonwealth department.' So what happens if it does not get done? I understand that

you are also responsible for compliance. If you do not do something, normally you get a pink slip from the council or they come around and steal your dog or fine you, or whatever councils do. Are you responsible for compliance with regard to environmental health?

Mr Burge—I would need to find that out.

CHAIR—Could you take that on notice. The reason we are asking that question is that if the Commonwealth department are failing to comply, if it is their responsibility, we are very keen to test them on that. The council may be reluctant to take the Commonwealth on on a matter of this sort. If you could take that on notice, I would appreciate it, Mr Burge.

Senator ADAMS—I think we have got the answer there. If it is taken on notice then we can find out where the information is actually going.

Senator MOORE—On the same point, I am interested in the chain. Mr Burge, you said it is your health and safety officer who goes out and has a look and then writes a report. To whom does that report go and who has the responsibility for that report from there on? I am interested to know whether it is a FaHCSIA problem or a state government problem. Is the complaint made by the council? Your officer says that there is a problem with the rubbish dump and that officer's report would go to someone and then there would be actions arising from the report. Does the complaint about the rubbish dump go with a signature from someone in your organisation saying, 'We have received information that the rubbish dumps need work'? I am just interested in the chain of command.

CHAIR—Mr Burge, could you provide an example of the paper trail of where there has been some non-compliance cited by the council—and quite rightly so—and it has been sent off to someone, just so that we can find out where that goes. An example of the paper trail would be very useful.

Mr Burge—Yes.

Senator MOORE—I am also interested in how your council operates. Do you have councillors elected by region, or is it just a whole bunch of councillors from the area? The structure of local government is a big issue in Queensland. I am wondering whether it is the first nine people—or whatever number—with the highest vote who become your councillors, no matter where you come from, or whether you have councillors designated to their own electorate.

Mrs Archer—We do not have any wards.

Senator MOORE—So it is just the first nine or however many.

Mrs Archer—Yes. It is first past the post. There are council elections coming up and there are four seats—

Senator MOORE—When are they?

Mrs Archer—On 17 October. So it will be the first four past the post.

Senator MOORE—Across the whole region?

Mrs Archer—Across our shire.

Senator ADAMS—So you could have everyone from Derby and no-one from here?

Mrs Archer—You could. We went out for public comment on wards and nobody wanted to do it, so it has not happened.

Senator MOORE—There is no right answer. I just wanted to get a sense of it. In the quick look I had at the website it did not make that clear. Thank you.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to go back to environmental health workers. Mr Burge, you made a comment that they go out to communities and where there are Aboriginal health workers in the community they work with them. How many communities are you aware of that do have Aboriginal health officers?

Mr Burge—I do not know off the top of my head, but it is not very many. I could clarify that.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could, that would be appreciated.

Mrs Archer—We service 53 communities.

CHAIR—In the context of those 53 communities, could we have some details about the communities which have them—how long they have been working with the youth?

Mr Burge—We put a number through training in the last year or so. I am not sure how many of them are now employed.

CHAIR—If you could, include that in your general answer.

Senator SIEWERT—How many environmental health officers do your employee?

Mr Burge—Directly for Aboriginal and Indigenous communities we have three. So we have one environmental health officer and two Aboriginal health workers.

Senator SIEWERT—So three officers and two workers?

Mr Burge—No—one Aboriginal health officer and two Aboriginal health workers, three employees altogether.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Senator MOORE—In your branch of environmental health which covers your whole area, what is your full structure?

Mr Burge—We have a manager of environmental health, building and rangering services. He is also an environmental health officer. Then we have two environmental health officers who sit under him. One goes through the Aboriginal Environmental Health Program and the other is more town-based for Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Camballin.

Senator MOORE—That goes back to the same three. Take this on notice because I can talk about structures all day. In the whole shire I want to know how big is your environmental health area. I am sure the whole environmental health is not looking after Aboriginal communities. You have three who were looking after Aboriginal communities. I am wanting to get a structural map of how many you have in total.

Mr Burge—In total we have a manager, as I was saying. Then there is another one who sits under them who looks after town-based. That is all we have. The other stream then looks after the Aboriginal Environmental Health Program.

Senator MOORE—So you have two who look after mainstream and three who look after Aboriginal areas?

Mr Burge—No, I would not say that because the manager of environmental health and building and rangering services also looks after the Aboriginal health side of things—and rangering and building.

Senator MOORE—One manager and three underlings.

Mr Burge—They sit across all those functions—rangering, building and environmental health. What sits under them is one environmental health officer and then the Aboriginal environmental health team.

CHAIR—Clearly, you would have a fair bit of plant involved in grading and you have indicated that you get someone in for other big works. Do you own the plant you do the grading with or do you contract all that?

Mr Burge—It is all through contracts.

CHAIR—Do you have anything to do with fire control and fire breaks around the community?

Mr Burge—No, not as such.

Mr Twaddle—Not so much in the remote communities but we do around the town base—like Derby, Fitzroy, Camballin. We do our yearly breaks around town-based communities. We do not actually get out into remote areas and put breaks around. When the corporations like Marra Worra grade their roads, if they can they do a quick lap around some of the communities, but as for the shire going out and doing the communities themselves, no. If they are town-based, yes.

CHAIR—So it is Marra Worra that does it. In answer to evidence today—I am sure they were not being mischievous—when I asked who does the roads they said, 'We think it is the shire.' Obviously, it is someone else.

Mr Twaddle—Yes. Marra Worra being the bookkeeping management agency for most of the communities around the area, things fall back into that perspective. That is what happened in the past. Change is afoot, I think, with what is going on with the government wanting to buck pass a little bit here and there and push a little bit to the local shires and so forth.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator ADAMS—While we are on the fire issues, we had evidence today about fire hydrants being available in a community but they do not have any hoses. Does the shire have any responsibility for fire safety within any of these communities?

Mr Twaddle—Over the years the shire has not had responsibility. It is the responsibility of the communities themselves. I am also a volunteer with FESA here as well. We have gone to several communities throughout the years, offering training in bush fire awareness. At some of the bigger communities, if they are keen, we offer structural type firefighting training so that they can deal with house fires and so forth within their communities. A lot of these communities did have hydrants and hoses and, until recently, one community did have a light tanker which they had bought second-hand. The Fitzroy volunteer group had a member of the SES with the Yungngora community. He was one of the coordinators out there and got a few of the guys to come in on weekends or for training courses and so forth over a period of two years, which worked well. But, of course, once those sorts of people leave these communities that aspect dies off and no-one is keen enough to keep it following on. So there are a few guys out there that we have trained up.

Senator ADAMS—Do you collect the FESA levy when you do the rates?

Mr Burge—What rates are those?

Senator ADAMS—Any rateable properties that you have in Derby.

Mr Burge—On rateable properties there is an ES levy, yes.

Senator ADAMS—Do you retain that yourselves or does it go through to FESA?

Mr Burge—It goes through to FESA.

Senator ADAMS—Therefore, really, there is no-one who is responsible. If a part of the community cannot afford to have some sort of vehicle or trailer or hoses for their hydrants that community just sits out there and, if a fire comes, it just burns. Is that really what is happening?

CHAIR—It may not be useful to compare directly but, just for our benefit, your relationship with the communities would be a bit similar to your relationships with the pastoral properties, for example, wouldn't it? There is no responsibility for you within a pastoral lease; they can do what they like there with their infrastructure. Is it pretty much the same in the communities? You say that there is no responsibility for the shire for anything that happens in those areas outside of a gazetted town. If it changes in the future it will have to be on the basis of some financial arrangement; is that right?

Mr Burge—That is a fair enough comment. I know that FESA is trying to do some fire management plans for some of those communities. I do not know whether Andrew knows anything about that.

Mr Twaddle—They have been working on it over the last 12 to 18 months. They have been trying to get management plans and so forth together for some of these communities. It all takes time, but it is getting there slowly but surely.

Senator ADAMS—How many councillors do you have outside of Derby, apart from Mr Twaddle and Ms Kogolo?

Mrs Archer—That is it.

Mr Burge—Mr Burton is a pastoralist.

Mrs Archer—But he does not live in town, does he. He lives out of town on one of his stations.

Senator ADAMS—Does the shire ever have a council meeting at Fitzroy?

Mrs Archer—We have several a year.

Mr Twaddle—Three times a year we meet out here and once a year out on a community or a pastoral station.

Mrs Archer—We have been meeting at Looma.

Senator ADAMS—And are the general public invited along to a session?

Mrs Archer—Yes, always. There is a forum at the beginning of each meeting so that anybody can come and talk to us and ask questions.

CHAIR—As there are no further, thank you very much for attending. After we have read your evidence there may be other questions for clarification, and the secretariat will provide them to you on notice. We would appreciate it if you would get back to us on those. Having said that, Senator Siewert has a final question.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to follow up this issue of finances. If the communities were paying rates, the rates would either be unaffordable or could not cover the cost of the services, so you would need additional funding besides a rate base from communities anyway, wouldn't you?

Mr Burge—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—We have a report in here from the Halls Creek shire that they have done an estimate of the provision of services for some of their communities. I am wondering if you have looked at that. Have you done any costing on what it would cost to provide services to some or all of these communities? Have you ever looked at that?

Mr Burge—No, not directly. I know we had a study done looking at a regional council to deliver municipal services across the Kimberley and I know that it looked at some individual councils. That was generally in comparison with similar sized towns or shires in the wheat belt, for example, that might deliver local government to 400 people the size of an Aboriginal community. I guess they just made a comparison straight across to those local governments.

Senator SIEWERT—And what did that show?

Mr Burge—It showed we need significant amounts of money.

Senator SIEWERT—And how long ago was it? The Halls Creek submission is useful because it gives you a ballpark figure for what sort of funding we are talking about. I am wondering how long ago that was done so we could have a look at—

Mr Burge—That was done in the last year.

Senator SIEWERT—Is it possible for you to provide us with the report, or even with the summary, so that we could get a ballpark figure on costs?

Mrs Archer—WALGA have done a great big thick paper on it.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay, we might chase them when we go to Perth.

Mr Burge—Local government have set up a local government advisory board to look at full municipal services. There are a number of recommendations; there is something like 50 recommendations in that report. That was all part of the bilateral agreement that was originally signed, which has now been superseded by the COAG. I am not sure as to where everything is sitting right now. This local government advisory board was released in the last two weeks.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay, and that has looked at all of that?

Mr Burge—I guess it has looked at a way of delivering municipal services to Aboriginal communities. I guess that is the state's perspective and not necessarily the Commonwealth's. I am not sure.

Senator ADAMS—Just on amalgamations of the shires, have you done your report? Where have you come to with consultation with the other shires around?

Mrs Archer—We have had a head of strategic planning meeting with the other three shires, so the four shires have had a strategic planning meeting. We have had several meetings. We have done our submission that will go to council this week. We do not agree with amalgamations because of the distance and all that that goes with it. I guess our four shires in the Kimberley do not see amalgamation as an answer.

Senator ADAMS—But you do work together, don't you?

Mrs Archer—Yes, we do share; there is stuff that we do together. We do not have a regional council; we have a zone, for which we have a president. But we do a lot of sharing. There is a lot

of staff sharing and that type of thing. In their markings, in the 1, 2, 3 ratings that local government have done to assess these shires—how they come to those markings is beyond me—we have come in at a 2. So 1 was good, 2 was not too bad and 3 was amalgamation, I guess.

Senator ADAMS—Regionally, do you look at how the more outback communities are serviced? Is that an issue that comes up with the other shires when you meet in that regional group?

Mrs Archer—There is only Halls Creek, Kununurra and Broome in our zone so I guess we all have similar problems.

Senator ADAMS—But it is not discussed? I would have thought that service provision especially—

Mrs Archer—Yes, that has been discussed.

Senator ADAMS—And has anyone come up with any better idea?

Mr Burge—That is why we did the study on looking at a regional council.

Senator ADAMS—I have seen the first study that was done. That is the reason why I was asking.

Mr Burge—Essentially, all of the councils then considered that, but there is no funding coming forward. Nobody is putting their hands up to provide funding as to how any of these things can be delivered. Until we can see a way that it can be funded, all the Kimberley shire councils are very hesitant about taking further responsibility.

Mrs Archer—Dare I say it—they might say that they will fund you for three years and at the end of the three years say bye-bye, and you are on your own and there is no funding. We just cannot take that. We just do not have that type of ability to do that. I am not saying we would never do municipal services, because I know that some of the shires have left the door a bit open. We have not said no, we will not do it, but it has to be done right and it has to be funded correctly because as a shire we just could not do that. It would be impossible. We are battling to do what we have to do now. Our rate base is $3 million. So we are reliant on grants and that type of thing. The door is still ajar, if you know what I mean.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. There are no further questions for you now, but we will provide you with further questions on notice through the secretariat. I really appreciate your taking the time out of your obviously busy schedule to provide us with evidence today.

[1.23 pm]

DAVIES, Mr Patrick Brendan, Health Promotion, Nindilingarri Cultural Health Services

GRAY, Ms Christine, Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre

KNIGHT, Mrs Olive, EIPP worker, Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre

MUIR, Mrs Patricia, Director of Services, Nindilingarri Cultural Health Services

YUNGABUN, Mr Harry, Chairperson, Marra Worra

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. I invite you to make an opening statement. At the conclusion of your remarks I will invite the committee to ask you some questions about your submission.

Ms Gray—I want to thank you for accepting this joint submission. I think the three services are really happy to be able to present here together today. Even though there are different aspects to all of our roles we felt that there were so many that were the same and that we are doing similar work—we work together—and that this was a great opportunity to present together.

Mrs Knight—I would like to thank you for the opportunity of giving us a hearing this afternoon. This is a vital time, an important time, for you to listen to us and to hear what we have to say this afternoon.

Mrs Muir—From Nindilingarri's perspective, I would like to say that we took advantage of the opportunity to provide a joint presentation because we work very closely together. A lot of our service areas overlap. There is such a significant level of need in the community and we would like to demonstrate that we work together. The need in the community is what we are all here to address. We might be able to get that message through by having a joint submission.

Mr Davies—Thank you for giving us the opportunity to talk to you. There is a lot of need in the valley. A lot of the community based organisations have historically been the only ones on the ground that have met the grassroots needs. These organisations are interlinked—all the community based ones always have been. That is why this town has survived.

CHAIR—Perhaps I could ask some questions. It is difficult to see where to start. I appreciate that. There has been a lot of media and speculation about the values or otherwise of some of the alcohol restrictions at Fitzroy Crossing. It is very interesting to note, as I have read, that your charter shows that it is basically a cultural health service. There are a whole range of areas, from actual culture to cultural health in a more specific sense. I am not sure that you have a specific view on this, but I would be very keen to hear about the difference those restrictions have made on your work and on interaction with the community.

Mr Davies—Basically, the Nindilingarri fully supported the restrictions. On a personal level, I support the restrictions. It has not changed everything. It was never meant to change everything. It was meant to give families and that the community some respite. I think we are all sleeping a lot better and have a little bit more hope about achieving some of the things that were set up to be achieved. With the high level of consumption of alcohol here, there was no chance for anybody to do anything, really. In the first week you could notice a change in the town—just the noise level was gone. People who lived here prior to restrictions noticed that straightaway. It has all been good, as far as I am concerned.

CHAIR—Mr Yungabun, do you have an opening statement of any sort?

Mr Yungabun—First of all, I would like to thank you for coming. I was away last week in Canberra. We went through the same thing—a COAG workshop to learn more about the changes and what is going to be happening to our community. We went to see and learn about government policy and changes coming in. I am the new chairperson of Marra Worra Worra. I was elected earlier this year. I have taken on a big role, having responsibility for our community and seeing what we can get out of this meeting by putting our view to you and seeing what you can take back.

CHAIR—What we are very keen on hearing about is what you think is working well with government policy, what you do not think is working at all—things that you think are a complete waste of time. We will probably not have enough time today to talk about all those things. It is sometimes difficult to speak clearly and have time. We are a standing committee of the Senate and there will be plenty of time to write to us in the future and talk to us about things as they evolve. Today will not be the only opportunity for you. Do you feel that you knew what was happening? You are obviously a pretty significant member of the community. Before these changes took place, I know there was a lot of talk.

Mr Yungabun—There was a lot of talk beforehand about chasing this new opportunity. But we get pushed from one policy to another policy, and it is like starting all over again—from the old policy we are starting a new policy. From my side, I would like to look at stopping this, because we are shifting whole proposals to other places.

CHAIR—You think stability is the way to go. You should just settle on a policy for a while and see if that can work.

Mr Yungabun—Yes.

Mr Davies—Government funding and changes throw us out of whack. It can take you up to two years to get that kind of understanding here right across the valley and the communities. Just when you are getting that understanding on the ground and getting something happening, another government comes in, shifts the goalposts and we say, 'Guess what, team? We've got to kick the other way now.' That just throws the whole process of trying to establish anything in this valley right out of whack. It takes the wind out of the sails of the people who work hard out in the bush. It takes the wind out of the sails of the community, I am sure. We are tired of it. We want longer term planning and funding of programs and projects. We have a lot of issues here with our client base because they cannot read English as well as the average Aussie out there.

We still have young people coming out of school who cannot even read and write properly—something is going wrong. You have all these issues—

CHAIR—Why do you think that is the case when we have teachers and classes and they spend 10 years in the classroom? After 10 years at the Fitzroy Crossing school some of them do not have the basic numeracy and literacy skills at all.

Mr Davies—It is about clear pathways and the non-existence of any pathways really in communities. If you look at the communities, there is very little opportunity that would make anybody want to stay. There have to be clear pathways for why kids go to school. You go to school to get an education, to learn how to read and write to be able to get a job—all that is stuff is not reality in a lot of cases out here. There are families who have never been employed—mums and dads who do not know any real employment—so how do you pass on that stuff? We need to look at opportunities that are here. There are many opportunities available looking after communities. With the infrastructure services that are provided to communities right now, there is big business in it and very few of our people are actually involved in that. There are many opportunities to engage and employ our people in just servicing our own selves. A lot of that has not been realised or set up in a real way here. The way things have been done is not working, and I think we all agree on that. It has been said by the federal minister herself that we need to find new ways of doing things.

I have some hope in this COAG thing coming here. Hopefully we will be able to all work together and change some of those things—but it requires a lot of change and I think more so on the government's behalf. Fitzroy is a pretty strong place; it has a clear idea about where people want to go with things. It is just about trying to get governments to realise that and support that. A lot of services here are stretched. A lot of services are inadequately funded. Housing is a big issue in the communities. We have new houses being built in communities, but they are only replacing the old, worn-out ones that were built in the seventies or eighties. There are no maintenance plans in place at a grassroots community level. Of the environmental health workers who have been trained in the valley, very few of them are actually employed other than the ones under Nindilingarri. There is a great opportunity in environmental health work in the communities—looking after sewerage ponds, the water supplies, the septic tanks and the housing. The overcrowding is causing all this extra stress and wear and tear on hardware in the houses. You need that constant maintenance in place. Who better to do it than the Aboriginal health workers who live in the community? We need to engage them and employ them properly. They have been training them for over 20 years in the Pilbara and the Kimberley in this state. It has got to the point where a few years ago Nindilingarri gave $50,000 to Karrayili to set up environmental health worker training here so people did not have to go away to Hedland to do it. A lot of people find it hard leaving home to go train somewhere else. We ran that program for about four or five years. If you are going to talk about environmental health training anywhere in this state, it was happening here in the Fitzroy Valley in a big way. We had 20 to 30 students training every time we went out training in the bush, and none of them have been employed.

Senator SIEWERT—That is the problem. None of them have been employed. There is no funding for employment.

Mr Davies—Yes. We are training our young ones, but training them for what? They are training for another job? That does not work in anybody's language.

Senator SIEWERT—A very common complaint is that the policies keep changing. I am not defending the policy changes, because I can see that that is a pain. But, when a policy is wrong or it is not delivering, surely you would not want to lock it into place. The point is that we are not getting the right policy.

Mr Davies—I heard the discussions earlier with the shire about rubbish tips. The situation with rubbish tips is a joke. When I first started with Nindilingarri, each individual community used to have its own funding for rubbish tips. With very few dollars we were able to get a loader from the office of Aboriginal health. Through Marra Worra Worra, we used to approach each community and utilise that funding for their tips so that we could run the loader and have an operator. The best that we ever did was 30 tips in one year. ATSIC got canned. The ICC came in. The ICC got CAT. There was no consultation with the valley. Fitzroy Valley demanded a meeting in this very room with CAT board members. They were not even aware that it had been done like that. We said to them, 'You mob being Aboriginal people should understand. There was no consultation about them coming into this area.' The first guy that came here was based in Derby. He was an old timer.

Senator SIEWERT—Is this the ICC guy?

Mr Davies—No, the CAT guy. He was stationed first in Derby. Once he had set himself up, he came out here for a visit and realised that most of the communities were out here. He said to me personally, 'We should have been based out here.' But it was too late by then because they had already made the decision in Derby. Sadly, this old man passed away. Another man named Marc Seidel came along, and it was in Marc's time that we had the meeting with CAT. Since then, the ICC has shifted that money from CAT to the Department of Housing and Works. The Department of Housing and Works approached the shire. There is not enough money in the budget to adequately cover the need for all the rubbish tips. So the shire refused it. Now it has gone back to CAT. They have had it for the last year. Recently, two staff from CAT came out from Derby. They had to link up with me and Harry to be able to network. We had to show them where the communities were. This kind of stuff is just ongoing and ongoing. There need to be local solutions. The opportunities for jobs from constructing and maintaining those rubbish tips and from the rubbish collection in the communities belong to the people from those communities, surely.

Senator SIEWERT—That explains why people are complaining. I think you were here earlier, Mr Davies, when we were talking to the shire about complaints going to the ICC. Complaints go to the ICC because they are the funding body. I can understand why you are confused.

Mrs Muir—A little bit of the confusion for us is that we work very closely with Marra Worra Worra but the funding moves around between service providers and there is no communication with us, for instance, so we do not actually know who holds the bucket of money that looks after the tips or who holds the bucket money that looks after sewage ponds and those sorts of things. Then there is a breakdown because, while our team do their work, they do not know what the pathway is to get those services done. That has been a significant problem for us, especially over the last two years, because funding has been moving around between service providers but nobody seems to know who is—

Senator SIEWERT—Why does it keep moving around?

Mrs Muir—The government seems to be moving things around but nobody tells us where the money is and who is actually doing the job. As you were saying, we might go to the ICC and complain, thinking the ICC is responsible for a certain thing. I had a meeting with a CAT lady last week and she clarified something for me that I thought had been in place for the last 18 months. She said, 'No. CAT has had no responsibility for that over the last 18 months.' Yet, we very clearly thought that they did.

CHAIR—It sounds as though there is no-one in the room who is not confused. On that basis, as a committee we will inquire—and you might want to add something on notice—about the tips outside of the gazetted areas in those particular communities. I think we are talking about some 53—

Senator SIEWERT—You are not just talking about the tips, are you? You are talking about general funding.

Mr Davies—For the services.

CHAIR—The secretariat, I know, are scribbling madly here. That is what we will do. We will not wait until we come back. We will make sure that the letter back to us goes to you. We will provide a copy of that letter to all the people who are giving evidence here, and if anybody else wants it I will leave it to you to pass it on. We will at least do that but within the letter, as Senator Siewert has indicated, we will say there seems to be a wider malaise of not much understanding about the roles and responsibilities of a whole range of service provision and coordination. I know it sounds like a long time ago, but it was the Indigenous Coordination Centre, the ICC, which had the responsibility to ensure that none of this happened. We all turn up at estimates and have an Indigenous Friday where we have the department sit in front of us.

Senator ADAMS—All of the departments.

CHAIR—I am not so sure how smart that is now. In any event we will ensure that we bring this issue up in relation to those specifics. We will immediately write to the minister and get some clarification on those matters for you and directly return that letter to you.

Mr Yungabun—One of my main arguments with shifting the money to Derby is that it further minimises the amount of tips that you can actually maintain because of the extra costs incurred to move equipment from Derby out here. It is just crazy and makes no sense at all.

CHAIR—I am not sure about where it is maintained but the funding is based on simply the purchase of services. You would not purchase a service to drive all the way here; it would cost twice as much. You would simply purchase a service here.

Mr Yungabun—Contract a service.

CHAIR—Obviously there is an Indigenous organisation that does much of those things, and one would have thought commonsense would be saying that we would be engaging with that

organisation to do some of that. In any event we will all see what they have to say on that matter. Sorry to interject but I think it is useful to catch that.

Mr Yungabun—Another thing is about water quality in the remote Kimberley areas. It is a council problem. People that live around the Kimberley limestone country and other remote communities have poor quality water, and it is not really suitable for drinking but people still live there in the community. We have ingested that water for a very long time and no-one seems to take any responsibility for it.

Mr Davies—You have situations in areas where there is a lot of limestone—Mt Pierre, some of the Bunuba communities—where toilet bowls were known to have clogged up with calcium in two years; this is in a brand new house. We have photographs of waterlines that are clogged with crystal and calcium. We question whether this is actually healthy for the people living in the communities. I do not think anybody has really inquired far enough into it.

CHAIR—I think there has been some work done on it, but I do not know to what level. Could we get some further information from the shire? Unfortunately they have already gone but we might just drop a note to the shire because I understand they would be responsible notionally for environmental health and water quality would come under that. We will see if we can get some information from them.

Mr Yungabun—We work under the shire of Derby.

CHAIR—Mr Davies, you are shaking your head.

Mr Davies—The communities are on ALT lands. I have often had it said to me by shire people that they are on ALT lands and are not our responsibility.

CHAIR—But the shire has said to us today in evidence that they go to the communities and say that the rubbish tip is no longer acceptable as it is their responsibility for environmental health. I am just assuming that it may also be their responsibility under environmental health to check the water because this notionally comes under the same area. We will try to seek some information about that. It would be great to get some evidence. We will try Derby and we will try the shires that gave evidence earlier today.

Mr Davies—To be fair to them too I do not think there is adequate funding for them to come and do it.

CHAIR—It would just be interesting to see if they have some data on the water quality which would be useful for the committee to consider.

Mrs Muir—The other thing that would be useful to know with the smaller communities is: who actually takes responsibility for supporting them in terms of tips, water quality, sewage ponds and things like that. I am in my fourth year now and I am still not clear, for communities under 50 people, whether anybody takes any responsibility for those environmental aspects of those communities. In actual fact health statistics show that the Indigenous people that live in those remote communities are far healthier and mentally much more stable than those who are

forced to live in town. But if there is not support for those communities then they either live in substandard conditions or they are forced to move into town.

At the end of the day it is not really a good long-term perspective for the Indigenous people living in those communities, because if they move into town their health will deteriorate. So, in terms of saving health dollars, it would be better that they remain out in remote communities and those communities be supported.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator ADAMS—Seeing we have a number of the community members here, I would like to go back to hear whether improvements have happened in the communities since the alcohol ban. Ms Gray, could you start off, seeing that it was your organisation involved in it.

Ms Gray—Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre, yes, was the lead agency, I guess. The calls for the bans came from the women's bush meeting and that came from women in the communities who talked with all of us about the misery that was happening in their families and wanted something to change, wanted something to happen and wanted the grog to cease. It came out of that bush meeting.

We see with the family support unit—the Family Violence Prevention and Legal Unit and the shelter, the EIPP program—there is a lessening of injuries. We see that at the shelter over and over. When I first came here 4½ or five years ago the injuries of the women who came into that shelter were horrendous. I think that is borne out by the hospital and the police as well. We are seeing not a great lessening of the numbers at the moment. We did initially, but those numbers have come up again. But the injuries are different. They are quite a lot less. We are not seeing the same horrific degree of injuries that women were coming in with. Women are leaving earlier—as soon as there is grog around they are gone and they are into the shelter and they support each other.

That is something that we have seen that has been quite huge since the alcohol restrictions—apart from the fact that the place is a lot better to live in, as you were saying earlier, Trish. I know for me when I first came—I came from working in sexual assault and family violence—I was shocked to the back teeth that people were complacent, I thought, about the number of deaths that were happening, the suicides that were happening here, on a regular basis. It just seemed like this was something that everybody was used to. It was the fact that people were trying to cope with their lives and cope with those numbers of deaths. They just tried to get on with things. That has changed dramatically. There still are those suicides, unfortunately, but not to the level that they were.

Just the sheer noise level that used to happen when I first came here—you could not go to sleep at night without hearing screaming and arguing and that awful stuff of children screaming in the background. I was forever ringing the police saying, 'You've got to go and do something.' But I think the police humoured me at that point because it was always me who was on the phone again. That stuff has changed a lot. I do not think anybody in town can say that it hasn't; it has changed a lot. When it starts again is when there is lots more grog around. Then it is like, 'Oh, no, this is like going back to those old days.' There has been a lot of difference there.

I think Olive, who works out on the community with Jane and with Rodney in the EIPP program, which is a mediation program, is seeing a lot of work happening out there. Olive will talk about some of that. Rodney and Jane also work in that program. That is funded through the Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Unit as well. Marninwarntikura look after that program, too, but it is run on the community of Wangkatjungka. Perhaps Olive would like to speak to that.

Senator ADAMS—Mrs Knight, would you like to comment.

Mrs Knight—May I just begin by saying that I would rather see a lot of partnerships between the governments and the communities. My background is with education. At the moment we are creating partnerships with education and the community. But I would more or less stress the fact that there needs to be more partnerships between the governments and the communities and that policies are clearly stated—that this happens. I am a trained mediator with the EIPP program out there. I and my two colleagues have begun a mediation process where we are now connecting families. Previously there was not this connection because the families were divided and were foreign to each other because of alcohol and all that.

At the moment we are trying to bring the families together again—the mums and dads with their children—as well as deal with the other issues that we have with people who have drunk to excess and who are now getting over the alcohol. There is huge evidence that these people need to be heeling again and need to get back their own status and identity and begin to be more cooperative in the community. Since then we have seen quite huge results in this.

Another thing that is close to my heart is foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. That is one of the things we have to deal with, which is quite rampant within our communities because of the excess of drinking previously. The results are children born with abnormalities and brain damage. I think you have seen in the submission that these are the children who will not be able to function in the future, brain-wise. A lot of their cognitive skills have been removed. That is why I would stress that education change now and begin to take an alternative approach where children who have this dilemma are catered for. The type of education I received in my time was quite thorough. It was at a time when my mind was clear and there was no alcohol involved. But there has to be a sea change where the education begins to be more flexible and cater for children of this nature. One of the things I have noticed beginning to emerge is that psychologists and other people have noticed a lot of behavioural problems in children of FASD. These behavioural problems have gone unnoticed in the past and there is a high level of incarceration within our prison systems.

Unfortunately I get very emotional about FASD because it has incarcerated a lot of my people and seen them gaoled without being noticed, and all of these things have gone unnoticed. Australia is behind the times and has not seen this very fact. Overseas, the United States and other people have gone ahead, studied FASD and begun to research it, but Australia has been lacking in all the research. I am not sure why this is so but while it has been happening our people continue to flood the prisons because of unrecognised psychological behaviours, possibly through excessive drinking previously.

I would also like to talk about the interventionist methods and practices that are being brought into our communities. We have gone backwards with these interventionist policies. There are

people within our communities who are flooding our horizons with interventionist practices, and I would like to demand right now and ask for your help in putting a stop to this, because the people's voices have been lost, especially in the isolated communities, where I come from. There is no longer respect for councils and chairpersons. I believe that the interventionists have done a lot of damage to our people, to our respect and to our status. Children are still being removed now, and let me say that these children should never have been removed in this day and age. I would suggest that these government agencies who are removing children should take on an alternative role and create workshops and other methods that will begin a parenting approach and provide more support for the parent who is struggling. They should leave the children there but come in with their services and support the parent instead of removing the children, because that is an easy way out. I feel that they have taken a coward's way out by removing children from their parents. I firmly believe that the parent ought to be supported within their own home and within their own environment.

Senator MOORE—What do you mean by 'interventionists'?

Mrs Knight—Interventionists are what were created by the previous government, I believe, in the Northern Territory where, because severe problems in the Aboriginal communities were noticeable—sexual abuses and all that—the government thought it wise to come in and begin a more heavy-handed practice which took away the rights of people and created victims.

Senator MOORE—Has that policy impacted here?

Mrs Knight—Yes, it is impacting. The practice has been conveyed to our area here from the Northern Territory by individuals and anyone who has worked in the Northern Territory, and they are beginning to use the same practices here.

Senator MOORE—We would like details if you would like to provide information to the committee outside this hearing—and it will not go any further—of how you see that impacting. We would like to know. It is certainly our understanding that there is a rollout but to the best of my knowledge the processes that are in the Northern Territory have not been translated fully here. You may well say, 'What is interventionist?' and there is a whole list of things that happened. Your submission did not actually mention that so it would be useful, as you have raised it in such detail, and we would like to hear more from you if you would like to put that to us outside.

Senator SIEWERT—Are you talking about things like the way income quarantining has been rolled out in Western Australia, for example?

Mrs Knight—Not particularly that, because income quarantining is something that I suppose is welcomed in some communities because of particular issues such as elder abuse and neglected children and all that. I mean that is just one of the good things.

Senator SIEWERT—How many people in the valley here that you are aware of have actually taken up the voluntary quarantining processes? In WA it is voluntary.

Senator MOORE—That is what I thought. There are a lot of comments in the notes around intervention and I do not know whether we have got the time to go into those. But if you want to give us more information now, fine.

Mrs Knight—The number is quite minimal because of it being a voluntary practice. I would say that we are not sure of the number of individuals.

Senator MOORE—We will ask around—

Senator SIEWERT—There are situations where the department can require income quarantining in cases of neglect but I do not think that that has been applied very much so far, has it?

Ms Gray—I think quite a number of shelter clients have voluntarily taken this up and have been happy with it because it stops them being humbugged. They do not get their money taken away from them and if they are not happy they can go back and re-sort it.

Senator SIEWERT—So in that situation, people have a choice.

Ms Gray—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I do not have a problem when people have a choice.

Ms Gray—No, it is the other bit—

Senator SIEWERT—There are other areas that I want to ask about in terms of the intervention. I have received a number of complaints from WA people around the requirements for leasing when new houses are built. There are requirements for 40-year leases. It mirrors what is happening in the NT to a certain extent. It is not quite the same. Is that an issue here?

Ms Gray—Not that I am aware of.

Mrs Muir—No.

Mr Davies—It hasn't reached here yet, has it?

Senator SIEWERT—That is a point: you do not have any new houses yet.

Mr Davies—There is a lot of anxiety around it. We all watch the news and you see what is happening in the Territory and you are not sure what the government is doing exactly. Even government people cannot tell us what is going to happen.

Senator MOORE—You hear what is being reported.

Mr Davies—Yes. It creates anxiety. People do worry when they are not sure.

Mrs Knight—I am looking at it as an overall thing. One of the things I have noticed is the paternalistic approach or attitude of interventionists who come and take away the power of the people to make decisions for themselves in the community. We have been practically treated like victims and third-rate citizens in our own country. We are talking about closing the gap and that is yet to be seen as a practice between the government and us. Partnership is the way to go.

Ms Gray—One of the things I want to mention is that there are quite a number of women, clients, from the shelter who have mentioned to support staff that there is a great deal of fear amongst women who are in situations of family violence—fear about reporting to police. Police have to bring the DCP, the Department of Child Protection, if there are children involved. The Department for Child Protection will always be there for the welfare for everyone around here, and everyone knows they take away the children! It does not matter how many times we hear, 'We don't take the children. We do what we can to support you,' people have evidence forever that that is not the case. That is a great worry: women are not reporting because they are worried about their children being taken away.

We all know how difficult it is for women to leave a situation of family violence. In the submission we have tried to convey that a lot of women are even more stuck when their partner threatens to suicide. That is a huge way of keeping her under control. She will not take the risk. What we have talked about with other agencies is that we need to support men across the valley to help them and talk to him about other ways of sorting stuff out. Women can talk until they are blue in the face. Women know how to communicate and will do the stuff well, but our men have not been that good with us. There is the Men's Shed, and people like Patrick, Harry and the other blokes here, including Rodney, who are able to go to men in those positions—when they are already violent with their partners, threatening suicide or whatever. Men can do something about that situation. Police can go in and apprehend him, take him out and put him in the holding cells. He is only there overnight and then he is back home with a partner who is more terrified and concerned about what is going to happen next, and he is more depressed, without hope—the works. We are very strong at Marninwarntikura about being able to have men assisting men. That is one of our big pushes from now on: to be able to have that happening. With our partnering with other services we are hopeful that that will be the case.

Mr ADAMS—Ms Gray, do you meet with the police and talk about these issues and how to handle them?

Ms Gray—Yes. Only the other day I was talking to one of the police officers. We will do more of that. This has only been a recent revelation, if you like—that this has been really happening and staff at the shelter have been talking to me about it. We are hearing more and more about this. I talked to the sergeant of police here and we will be getting together with him and some of his staff and other workers around town, other counsellors et cetera and men around town who can do some of this work. The police can only do so much. They cannot be there with the family 24/7. We need to put other support mechanisms in place for him. That man needs to have support from other men; he can come to the Men's Shed and meet a group. Rodney wants to get a group up and running at Wangkatjungka for men, so they can get together and look at work opportunities—all those sorts of things. A lot of men have no hope. They are out there with nothing and they need some of that support. So, yes, we meet with the other agencies and we will be meeting with more of them.

Senator ADAMS—Mrs Knight, just going back, last time when we were here we were talking about foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and the problems with help at the schools for these children. Has anything happened in that respect, as far as the education department is concerned? Do you have more Aboriginal assistance to help with the children?

Mrs Knight—Unfortunately, this is a very slow process with the education department because of the slow understanding of this dilemma and, as I stated, this country is very slowly in catching on with information et cetera, with research and other things. So a lot of this information has not been passed on to the education sector at all. I think that the education sector is, more or less, relying on individuals such as me and other people who are communicating with them. We are planning things such as workshops and that sort of thing and bringing in experts from overseas and other people who are more versed in these areas. The education department is catching on, but it is done in a very minimal way. They are now creating positions where the education workers are kind of chosen and a particular education worker is given the care of an individual child, so it is happening in a very small way. There are school psychs who are now doing extra work, managing behavioural issues and problems, checking on the children at school. I am involved, because I am caring for a couple of FASD children. It is close to home for me.

I have, practically, been going on a journey with them, looking for answers as to how I can best work with these children, because these two boys of mine are my teachers. That is what I say, because I have had normal children but these children have come into my life as my teachers. I am beginning to work towards making life more comfortable for them education wise and so on, practically banging on the doors of the education department. I am working with the partnership project out of Wangkatjungka. I have a friend in the audience who I am working with on research on country learning, which might minimise a bit of the stress that they feel within a classroom situation. There are many stressors that a closed classroom can create for these children. So country and open learning is best for a lot of our children. Getting Education to work together within that framework would be very ideal for us. I think that would create a better world for our FASD children.

Mr Davies—I would like to add to that. Since alcohol restrictions have been imposed here, there has been a lot more awareness. A lot more people have been talking about it, that alcohol is not your mate and they are starting to realise that more. I think the FASD stuff is in its infancy stage. The extent of the damage that is there needs to be gauged. I do not think that has been properly done yet. People throw figures around, but they are not really accurate. I think until it is gauged you cannot talk about the level of support that is needed. Families do need it. Children will need it from teachers in school and perhaps it will require extra training for teachers to be able to handle kids like that. I do not know how well recognised they are under disability services. When we talk about these services, as they are they are very minimal here on the ground and stretched.

Senator ADAMS—The reason I raised it was that Mrs Knight raised with us the problems she was having with two of the children and how she could not get help because they had not actually been diagnosed. They were getting out of control. But why were they out of control? These are the things that really made everyone look at the issue and say, 'What's going on?' Fitzroy is now being looked at in that respect so you will get some help. I was just wondering about whether the school had been given a bit more assistance.

Mrs Muir—Nindilingarri are currently working with the Women's Resource Centre and the hospital to develop a FASD strategy for the valley. One of the problems with FASD is that it is not actually recognised as a disability. So we cannot gain assistance for the school and families like Olive's who are dealing with those sorts of children. Because it is not a recognised disability, that assistance is not out there. In terms of how well children here do at school, it has been put out by Kimberley Population Health Unit that something like 40 per cent of the children here are affected by FASD or early life trauma. Those children's ability to learn is severely inhibited by the disability they carry with them. Obviously the ability for those children to learn locally is limited.

Senator MOORE—The Aboriginal health service at Cherbourg in Queensland are doing similar things. It is in its infancy, but people up there are doing some very good work on the impact in that community.

Mrs Muir—It is our objective to have a list of indicators recognised across Australia to diagnose FASD in children and then to approach the responsible government department and have it recognised as a disability. That would be the first step forward in helping a lot of these people. There is actually some preliminary data being compiled in the valley at the moment, partly as a consequence of the alcohol restrictions. Part of it is just to determine the level of FASD that prevails here.

CHAIR—I do know that there is quite a bit of work done in that area of disability. A young man who has been sniffing petrol, for example, may get an acquired brain injury, and an acquired brain injury is a clear disability that comes with a whole range of things. There is no doubt at all that foetal alcohol syndrome has many of the same clinical impacts in terms of schooling and education as many other acquired brain injuries. We will all certainly be keeping an eye on that space. I am not a member of the government, but, rather than just knocking them, I do understand they are making some resources available. It is just about where you put them. The practical reality is that people with FASD need more resources because they have an acquired brain injury. It is not a genetic condition; it is an acquired brain injury. Of all those classifications, that is where I suspect it will end up, and hopefully sooner rather than later.

Mrs Muir—Certainly in the Fitzroy Valley it is not only the children but a generation of young adults who are affected by this disability.

Senator SIEWERT—I was reading the report the Notre Dame university have done on the progress following the introduction of the restrictions. One of the comments was that there is:

> … a general sense that there has not been the expected follow through of targeted government services to deal with the problems of alcohol dependence;

There are a number of similar comments throughout the report around there not being enough resources to back up the progress that has been made so far. Can you comment on that? This report was released not long ago, but the research was done a little bit earlier. Has there been further progress, and what are the key areas that we should focus on putting resources into?

Mrs Muir—Nindilingarri Cultural Health Services have a drug and alcohol service. We are the only one in town. We get $350,000 a year to deliver health promotion, disease prevention

and all of the alcohol and drug services here, in a valley that has around 50 communities spread over a 150 kilometre radius. We currently have four people working in that service. Obviously there is not much left in the way of resources once we pay wages, accommodation, transport and things like that. And that is all that there is.

Mr Davies—Prior to that that building was a sobering-up shelter. That was a recommendation from the deaths in custody report, as we all know. I think it is the same budget that we are playing with right now. It was at the insistence of local people here in Nindilingarri that we changed that service because it was just catering for a handful of people. It was like having a revolving door; it was like a hotel. We wanted counselling services and we wanted staff looking at developing rehabilitation services because they were needed. It is only in its infancy stage too and that service is very stretched. The sobering-up shelter is still operating on the same budget.

Senator SIEWERT—So there has been no increase in the budget since before the restrictions?

Mrs Muir—There has been no increase at all despite us canvassing the drug and alcohol office consistently. We are now asked to focus our attention on particular communities that have elected to go with section 175, being Wangkatjungka and Noonkanbah, at the expense of the rest of the valley. We have raised this as an issue with them consistently. They have said there is a limited number of dollars and we have to pick our target, so I quote them as saying that. Our concern is that we serve all of the people of the valley. We want to give everybody an equal opportunity and we cannot do that with that miserable little bucket of money that they give us.

We do not even have four staff; I correct that. We have got 3½ staff. The issue for us would be this. Even if they gave us more money we could not employ more staff if we do not have money for houses. We have got no houses. Not only are community members suffering because of a lack of housing; service providers are as well because we are at capacity. Even if all of our positions were filled we could not take on an additional staff member because we could not house them.

Senator SIEWERT—That means communities suffer twice. There is a lack of housing for themselves and also a lack of services that they need.

Mr Davies—Yes. Apparently the hospital is nine houses short. Since the restrictions Andrew Forrest has come in and offered his help here in the valley. Harry and I have worked with him.

It has been slow. This year, so not long ago, we had the coordinator hit the ground, so he is here. We are starting to have some discussions, in his early stages with us, about men's stuff and trying to pick up the men's stuff. We do this outside of our current roles within Nindilingarri. A lot of stuff is really stretched in this town. There is a lot of promise in that by having that place we are hoping that somewhere along the line we can have some kind of mediation stuff between the women's place and the men's place with regard to domestic violence. There is a lot of thinking along those lines, but it is not possible without the dollars.

Mrs Muir—It is our understanding, through Men's Shed and the Country Health Service, that a dentist has been located to come here. However, he will not come here unless he has an assistant. I believe I have found an assistant but there is no house so we are still stuck. I believe

there is a house for the dentist but not for the assistant, and the dentist will not come without the assistant. That is my understanding of the situation.

CHAIR—On the issue of housing, I am not talking about the provision of public housing, because there are some risks associated with that with private investment, but I am talking about the number of people who have given evidence and have said, 'Look, there are just no houses whether you are a copper or a nurse. It doesn't matter. If you are a government employee, you're supposed to be provided with a house, but there aren't any.' In many places private enterprise gets into it. Governments are good payers: they pay for a couple of workers and it does not matter. In many places people make that investment. So what else is there? Is it about land being available to build houses on but no-one is building houses? What other issues are there?

Mrs Muir—It is put out there that land is not available, but from Nindilingarri's perspective we have land. All we need is the money to build the houses.

CHAIR—Have you done anything in terms of a private partnership? If you want to get someone to build houses there, at least you could have houses to rent and you could rent one.

Mr Davies—One of the problems here is that there is a flood area and the town is then up on an island. There is limited land available on this island.

CHAIR—Mrs Muir indicated that there may be some land available that is within the parameters of your not getting your knees went.

Mrs Muir—This land is actually other's land. I do not know if they would actually let us do a deal with private enterprise. It would have to be under their conditions that we actually did that. I do not think that they would agree with that.

CHAIR—I am just simply asking the question if it is a matter that we cannot get someone to build houses. I just wondered if you had actually engaged the private sector. They build houses all over the place. For them it is just a matter of making money: 'There's a market and we know it's going to be filled by government employees and the government are good payers. Why wouldn't we do it here?' I understand the rents here are pretty astronomical. I am just surprised that there has been no engagement of the commercial world. Is that a fair assumption?

Senator MOORE—Working with Andrew Forrest is the first real little test of that, isn't it? He is the first large private enterprise person who has come and said, 'We're going to do a partnership.' I think people are watching that to see how that is going to go.

Mr Davies—Yes.

CHAIR—Anyway, I was just trying to get that clear.

Ms Gray—We have been doing some work as to philanthropy where they are willing to invest money—so it is all slowly, slowly.

CHAIR—Here is a piece of advice. A commercial business enterprise straight down the line will get you a house built quicker than by government or philanthropy. It will guarantee it. That is only my own view of course.

Mr Davies—For a long time this town never had a town plan. We have got one now as part of—

CHAIR—To clarify some of that, perhaps we can write to town planners or find somebody who may have some historical stuff. We know what the answer is: we need more houses to put people into. I am still unsure about the suite of issues that are in the way of that at the moment.

Mr Davies—If we are talking about closing the gap we need more services. If we are going to expand services we need more housing for the staff.

CHAIR—And planning.

Mr Davies—Yes, there is all that planning stuff.

Senator SIEWERT—I think Ms Gray was trying to answer. Early on, Ms Gray, you looked as if you wanted to make a contribution on services.

Ms Gray—Yes. When the restrictions first happened we had a number of people come to us. They wanted to go to a drug rehabilitation centre but what we found initially, right there and then, was that they were chocker and so people had nowhere to go. I think we got one woman in and lost a few along the wayside because they could not get in. They could go to Wyndham but it was too far away. Women did not want to leave all their support networks and their families. Sometimes they can take family along but that is not always possible. That is a real difficulty. I think, as we have been saying, that we need to have services here close by so that people can access them and do that with no shame. So it is having something by which we can funnel people into and they know that those services are there and available to them.

Mr Davies—I came here in 1994. One thing that I have noticed in this town is that there are very few government services. I grew up in other bigger towns which had a lot of these government services in town. Being able to physically walk into these offices and find out how you can get help is quite important. You cannot do that here. Over the years a lot of people have grown up here not knowing how these services really work, because they are not physically here; they are visiting. It is hard. In other towns you could walk in and find out, and it was easy. That is something that is still prevalent here.

Ms Gray—When somebody visits you are never quite sure when that visit is going to happen—is it this fortnight or next fortnight or whatever? We have a couple of lawyers coming in through a private arrangement with a law firm down in Perth. Next year we will have two lawyers that have been allocated to us through the Attorney-General's Department. They will be here full-time if we can get housing. Attorney-General's are saying, 'If we can't get housing'—and they have investigated; they reckon they have tried everything—'they might have to be located in Derby or Broome.' That is ridiculous, because they will come in for a few days, the same as we have now, and all the action happens after they have gone. People say, 'That lawyer

who was there has gone now.' You cannot wait for that sort of stuff. You want it now. It is like with the dental service: you want it now.

Mr Davies—Transport in the valley is a big issue too. When our road safety laws came in, they changed the ability of people to be able to transport large numbers of people on the back of trucks on time. That was the way people got around. That is how they moved a lot of people in and out of town to access services. After the road safety changes very little was put in place to actually fill that gap. People are stuck without transport. There is a need for a transport system, especially when specialists come to town. Communities have a lot of difficulty in the area of transport.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry, Ms Gray, but did you finish?

Ms Gray—I was just thinking when you were talking, Patrick, that our shelter accommodates patients for the hospital because quite a few of those women have got nowhere to stay when they are waiting to see a specialist. When I first came, I thought, 'This is ridiculous; we can't have women in there who are sick and waiting for an appointment.' For me to say no meant that those women had nowhere to go, so we are back in the situation where we do house women who have got to have some sort of treatment at the hospital, because there is nowhere else—there is no choice.

Senator MOORE—There was a report that came out—I think it was done by one of the universities in South Australia—looking at the number of grants that various Aboriginal health organisations have at any one time, and I think the average was 42 or something like that. It was a huge number. Do you carry a large number of grants or have you got a relatively simple number of grants? This is from state and federal governments et cetera.

Mrs Muir—We have a big mob of grants that are all onerous in their reporting requirements—just little bits here, there and everywhere to do little bits of anything and everything. But you still have to do the same level of reporting, regardless of whether you get $300,000 out of them or whether you get half a million dollars, $800,000 or $900,000 out of them. So, yes, we have multiple grants and we have to report on them all, which is really onerous for the staff—isn't it, Patrick!

Ms Gray—Yes. In terms of the funds of the family violence prevention legal unit, they are our main funding body, but we have got other programs that are all funded here and there and all have to be reported on—thankfully, through each of those programs, through managing those. I don't know about you, Trish, but for me the thing is that, even if you have got a grant that is very small, the reporting process is no smaller usually. You can do so little with such a small amount, but you have got to report such a lot.

Mrs Muir—Yes. As a matter of fact, the smallest amount of funding we get is the most onerous.

Senator MOORE—In terms of reporting?

Mrs Muir—Yes; it is shocking.

Senator MOORE—Federal or state?

Mrs Muir—State.

Senator SIEWERT—This may sound like a facetious question, but there is a reason behind my asking: do people actually read the reports when you put them in? Do you have evidence that people read the reports and get back to you, that they take on board what you say?

Mrs Muir—No.

Mr Yungabun—No, I do not think they do.

Ms Gray—No, because I have put a few little things in there that they have never commented on!

Mrs Muir—I think the most frustrating thing is that you send the report in and half the time you do not even get an acknowledgement that you have sent it in, and you never get any feedback on it, or rarely ever get any feedback on it, so it just goes off into that big black hole. And you have put a whole lot of work into it.

Ms Gray—But Attorney-General's are actually changing that for us. They are going to be contacting eight services, whoever, around the communities and town and asking what we do. They have got a list of questions that they will be giving each of those services and the communities, and they will want their feedback, which I think is fine.

Senator MOORE—A quality assurance thing.

Ms Gray—Yes.

Senator MOORE—I want to put one question on notice, because of the time. You said earlier, Mrs Muir, that something had happened and you did not know. One of the things that governments are always struggling with is the best way of consulting: what is the best way of finding people, listening to them and making sure that the messages are getting out there? I just want to leave that with you, and maybe you can think about it and get back to the committee—because we know that people did not know today's committee hearing was even on, but we know people did a lot of work to ensure people did know it was on. Still, I spoke to one gentleman earlier who did not know it was on. It is never going to be perfect, but because each of your organisations is very active in the community, is of long standing and would be part of the communication network I would like you to have a think about how you would best like to communicate with government in terms of messages and issues, getting feedback and all that kind of stuff. I think that is somehow the heart of a lot of the issues, that people are trying to communicate but just not getting their message across to each other. I know the chair is going to look at the specific issues of the rubbish dumps and the other things; more than likely, they are going to find letter after letter after letter somewhere about how you actually make that work. So would you mind having a think about that and getting back to us.

Mrs Muir—Certainly, something we find is that, when government contacts us and asks to come and visit and use our facility, there is nearly always a request attached to that that we notify all of the key people who would be—

Senator MOORE—So the onus is put back on you.

Mrs Muir—Yes, so it is actually the hosting organisation that has the responsibility of doing that, and I know we have had to do that numerous times. We know the onus is on us to do that. Sometimes, however, it is government's fault. For example, obviously through COAG there have been significant changes in the reporting on the OATSIH funding. Our OATSIH report was due in on 15 August, and I sent our report through on 11 August, only to receive an email back from our project officer to say, 'Your funding reporting requirements have changed; you will no longer be reporting this way.' Attached was a letter, dated 11 August, to advise us of the change in the reporting.

Senator MOORE—With a due date of 15 August?

Mrs Muir—The due date was the 15th, and it was sent in on the 11th. It was a response letter, mind you.

Senator MOORE—Can we get a copy of that?

Mrs Muir—You certainly can. She said that these letters should have arrived; however, the letter from Canberra arrived two days later, which was the 14th—the day before the report was due. That is terrible, because I believe we are now expected to do that reporting again in a different form.

Senator MOORE—And you went through blood to get yours in by 11 August.

Mrs Muir—Absolutely.

Senator MOORE—Your organisation went through blood.

Mr Davies—They could have waited for next year with the changes, I reckon.

Mrs Muir—But there was the expectation that, if a report were due on the 15th, we would be starting to do it around the 12th. But we had not received notification anyway.

Senator MOORE—It would be great if we could get a copy of that; that would be really useful.

Mrs Muir—Yes, absolutely. I will send it through to Bill; I have his email address.

CHAIR—With regard to the housing, Mr Yungabun and perhaps anyone else—I am not sure exactly who to ask or whether you would have the specific details on this—I just looked briefly at the history of your organisation, Marra Worra Worra. You have a history of land management. You own properties. The background of the organisation has a lot of things that I would have thought would have lent themselves to some development. I notice that historically you have

done quite a few of those things and have been quite successful at them. Do you know whether or not your organisation might look at providing accommodation commercially? Obviously there would be circumstances. I am not sure if you have even looked at it or would consider it, but would your own organisation consider providing houses in terms of commercial housing for government workers? It is pretty buoyant. There is potential that more people would be employed in the management of those, as your organisation has done over time. Do you think that would be something within your ambit?

Mr Yungabun—It is something that we can have a look at. As I said, these are the early stages of my time as chairperson. I can have a real look at that.

CHAIR—I appreciate that. I am putting you on the spot.

Mr Yungabun—Another thing is Closing the Gap and the issue of getting good services for Aboriginal people. Look at Fitzroy Crossing. With Closing the Gap there are services within 50 kilometres or so of Fitzroy Crossing, but not outside Fitzroy Crossing, and that is going to really affect our community. Look at Bandrarl Ngadu, which is the Fitzroy Valley in our language group. That gives services to all of the Fitzroy Valley. The services coming are going on within 50 kilometres or so, but not outside that area. I do not know, but it looks as if our community is going to miss out on a lot of services. We will wait for a couple of years to get our services.

Mr Davies—Harry is talking about COAG. Apparently it is coming here to the valley in two stages, and there is a bit of anxiety because nobody is really clear on how that is going to work, and some communities that are outside are worrying about their situation.

Mr Yungabun—We are really terrified.

CHAIR—All I can say in response, Harry, is that if there is some anxiety in the community—I am not sure what is being done in terms of consultation—perhaps what we can do is, with the support of the committee, to write to the minister and just ask if it is possible to get a couple of pages in simple language about the timelines of the rollout of COAG and what that means about what happens outside the area within 50 kilometres of a particular spot, which is one area they have discussed. I know we have some people who have a great interest in Western Australia, and they may know more than I, but what I understand—and I am from the Northern Territory—is that they have said that the first tranche is to increase services for those areas that have a large service centre available to them. In other words, they want to ensure that those people who can access health and education services are okay. They certainly made statements to the effect that they were not cutting services off from those other ones; they simply were not going to build on those at this stage. But I think it is a question for which you need a specific answer from the minister. I will undertake again to write to her immediately. We will ask for it to be provided in an encapsulated form. We can provide that to you, Harry.

Mr Yungabun—I have clarified it with my people—the Djugerari people—and they said they really understand.

CHAIR—About what the future is for them in a timeline, and exactly what that means.

Mr Yungabun—Yes.

CHAIR—I will write a letter and get that to you as soon as possible. Ms Knight, I listened to your contribution in terms of an intervention. I suspect the word 'intervention' means a lot of different things for different people. 'The intervention' is the common term we use for the Northern Territory emergency response. It came with the 'emergency' bit, which has now passed. Then there was the stabilisation stage, which we are still in. Then we are going to the normalisation stage. That, notionally, was how it would move.

For clarity, there are a number of first steps of the intervention. One of them, as you have identified, was alcohol. In exactly the same way as here, it was not a choice. There are very strict regulations about alcohol in the prescribed areas; it is banned in the prescribed areas. There is a whole series of increased offences for trafficking of alcohol or other substances of abuse in the prescribed areas. It is really quite draconian. There is no doubt about that. There was quite a bit of kickback about it. It is something I still support.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I just say that it was not the same as here. The community made a decision here.

CHAIR—If you would let me finish. I am actually asking a specific question. So that is part of what we call 'the intervention'. I just want to get it clear that when you are talking about 'making an intervention' it is people—it is an intervention. We go in and we say, 'We are not doing that any more; we are doing this and that.' I am not sure if you are able to help me, but there are two terms: the intervention refers to some legislation that was in the Northern Territory and then there are other interventions. I see an intervention here recently in the alcohol legislation here. Everybody said, 'Right, that is going to be they way it is done.' It is an intervention. Could you separate those for me? I was not completely clear about that.

Mrs Knight—The intervention that recently happened with alcohol here, as Christina stated, came from the grassroots. It came from a bush meeting where the women felt that enough was enough because we were the sufferers. Our children suffered and we suffered through domestic violence. We had to say, 'Enough is enough, so let us intervene in this situation.' I know that it was not a clear-cut choice for a lot of people. But it was a choice that came freely from our heart.

CHAIR—So an intervention to you means that someone else comes and does it rather they you doing it yourselves?

Mrs Knight—That is right. When someone else comes in and says, 'We ought to do it this way or that way,' and they begin to impose their paternalistic attitudes and approaches on us it creates a victim mentality amongst us as Aboriginal people, that is wrong intervention.

CHAIR—I understand the difference now. It was just for clarity because we were using the same terms in slightly different areas. I think it is useful to have that better understood. I guess the challenge we all have is that not all communities can stand up for themselves. Not everybody is as strong as your community. When the whole community knows that things are happening—that people are being oppressed and bad things are happening—how long do you wait. Some communities are very strong and lucky to have leadership. Others are not and they need other people to help them out. That is the balance and it is a very difficult area that we deal with all the time. I can assure you that we have different views across the committee on that matter. Thank you for helping me to understand that.

Senator SIEWERT—Mrs Knight, you talked about education earlier. Is the education system meeting the community's needs here in the valley?

Mrs Knight—I will bluntly answer that. It is not meeting our needs. It is different from how I was educated because all of our literacy and numeracy were defined and clearly put out. You learnt your A, B, Cs and you spelt out your words and you learnt your times table. But children's education now is more general. They have to learn the sounding of words and this sort of thing. I think the education of our children has clearly failed us. As someone has already stated, our children are coming out with poor reading and literacy levels and the workplace will practically shun them because of this very fact. Their education needs are not being met and catered for. I suppose I come from the old school, but the old school was better than what it is now.

CHAIR—Thank you for your evidence. There will be questions from us over time. We will write to you with those questions and I know you will do you best to help answer them. Mostly they will be points of clarification when we go through the evidence. But there may well be things and issues that you would like to bring to our attention. Please don't wait for us to call for submissions. You can write to this committee at any time—we are a standing committee—and we will consider as quickly as we can the evidence you provide to us. We are not government; we are a committee of the parliament. We will do our best to answer questions and to take on board your evidence and include it in our deliberations.

Proceedings suspended from 2.42 pm to 3.07 pm

DAVEY, Ms Carolyn, Principal, Karrayili Adult Education Centre

JIMBIDIE, Ms Irene, Lecturer, Karrayili Adult Education Centre

SHAW, Mr William, Director, Karrayili Adult Education Centre

VESTERGAARD, Miss Tamela Dagmar, Coordinating Lecturer, Aboriginal Environmental Health Work, Karrayili Adult Education Centre

CHAIR—I welcome witnesses from Karrayili Adult Education Centre to the table. Thank you very much for hosting the committee proceedings today. A statement on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been previously provided to you. I 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.

Mr Shaw—At Karrayili Adult Education Centre our aim is to look at education and training. In the Fitzroy communities, where I come from, we have a shortage of resources. That is why I put my hand up for adult education. When I came back to Fitzroy I saw a lack of education in the Fitzroy Valley, especially in the communities with CDEP—even with those on contract on the station and the mines. It is very hard on the communities. We do not have the resources for education and training.

That is why I came back to adult education. I am a student as well; I am studying computers. I see the value in doing a computer course, because of all the government changes. Even in the newer constitutions—every organisation has them. How do we understand that constitution? Coming from my corner as a chairperson, being involved with stations, organisations, retail and things like that, how do we understand that? Coming back to Karrayili, we are looking at training and education in numeracy and literacy and driver ed. They are the programs in this organisation, which are important.

Ms Davey—I would like to put into context some of the issues we are dealing with, especially in relation to different government policies and programs. William was talking about Karrayili being committed to providing training and employment, but we are more than that. We are an Aboriginal directed organisation and we provide social support as well as training. We are extremely responsive to community needs and wants.

Karrayili has been operating since the early 1980s. This goes beyond training and education but because we are a training institution we will focus on it. Increasingly, the ability for the community to have input and to control what is happening is being diminished because of the different and increasing administrative demands of different programs. I have listed some of these issues and we all have some examples we could share, but one of the things that really brought it to the forefront for me the other day was when William came into my office to talk to me. He had just been out at his community, Gilarong, and he said: 'This government's confusing me. There are people coming from everywhere. What's happening?' He said: 'Back in the 1980s we were told, "You get the training and you'll be able to run your own organisation." That is getting increasingly difficult to do. It is further away.'

There are some specific examples of what is happening that illustrate that for me. I know that for me the most immediate thing is the recent reforms in CDP and the Indigenous Employment Program. I do not like doing it this way. We did not do a prepared five-minute thing. I prepared a bit of script but there is just so much that we want to talk about.

CHAIR—You have talked about an example—that is, the frustration with bureaucracy and reporting times—and those sorts of issues.

Ms Davey—I prepared a bit of a document with some notes to sort of prompt us. There has been a diminishing of community control and involvement.

Senator ADAMS—Perhaps you can list the main issues for us.

Ms Davey—There are many issues. Karrayili as an organisation works with people and with groups of people to help them with whatever is needed for their lives, whether that is specific training, getting a job or social support, which includes a lot of areas. A lot of the programs that we have run—

Senator ADAMS—Are they coming to an end because there is no recurrent funding? Are these the sorts of issues that are worrying you? We have been before, so we have a pretty good idea of what you do here.

Ms Davey—The problem is that I spent far too much time trying to prepare for this and now there is too much. Someone else can talk.

Mr Shaw—I am confused. The government brings in service providers, but only a handful. I am in a corner. The government pulled the rug from out from under me. The government said, 'The resources aren't here in Marra Worra Worra.' There is a resource centre in the Bayulu community, for example. I cannot run the trucks. I cannot create employment now, because the mining company has closed. This is what I said to Malcolm Turnbull and Andrew Forrest: the government has left us high and dry; they have pulled the rug out from under us. We were on cloud nine. Where do we fall to? I am going to have to go back and train my people. This is the organisation that might help shine some light on this.

CHAIR—I understand that you recently went through an accreditation process through ORIC, which is just another layer of accreditation to make sure everything is going okay. That was supposed to be completed by June of this year, which has passed. But I understood that you went through that whole process. While that is another bureaucratic step, not every organisation gets through it. It is not an easy process to get through. But clearly, according to ORIC, you have met all the indicators and you are well on the path to being accredited as full directors and all those sorts of things. That is very impressive. I understand that the organisation principally delivers to people who wish to enhance their education in mid life; halfway through life; not of school age anymore. These are people who would like to get some more life skills and those sorts of things. But it also plays what I think is a very interesting and essential role in that it is a conduit for communication between government and individuals and government and organisations. As a member of parliament—I am not a member of the government now, but I am a member of parliament—I get stuff from various levels of government and I have to say that it is pretty confusing for me. Do you help a lot of organisations and individuals with that sort of work?

People may get some correspondence from the government. Do they come in and say, 'Look, what is all this about?'

Miss Vestergaard—We help people deal with a lot of bureaucracy outside the training area. We support people with everyday life issues so that we can break down the barriers to accessing training so that people can engage in training. That encompasses so many things. It might mean that people have breakfast when they come here. It might mean that people need assistance with a letter from some government department or a breakdown of it into plain English. It can be so many different things. It can be renewing a vehicle registration. None of these things come within the training—they do, but they are bigger life issues.

CHAIR—It is almost a section of a recruiting profile. People come here saying, 'We don't understand this' but at least they are in the same place where they can learn to understand in the future. I suppose there is a real connection.

Miss Vestergaard—Yes.

Ms Davey—That just does not feel comfortable for us. Also, because we are a registered training organisation we deliver accredited training, but we do it in a particular way. Rather than teach discrete units of a particular training package we work with people to provide whatever it is they want. For example, if somebody comes here because they want to get a job we will work with them to do their duty statement, find the job and follow them through to the work and then we will also support them in the work—maybe supply some workplace training. Some people might come to us because they want to use the computers. They will do a few units and then we find out that they are interested in developing a business—that goes on.

People come with different needs, which we have to fit into the accredited training, and what we get paid for does not always match the way we work with people. For example, one of our strongest programs is driver education. Irene has a lot to do with working in the driver education program. We match that against a general education course. There is a lot of extra paperwork that the staff are required to do in order for us to get paid to run driver education, which is not directly related to supporting people with whatever is needed to get their ID and to learn about the questions. We include all the associated literacy and support—for example, if you need to pay a fine—everything that goes with getting a driver's licence when you are not au fait with the system. We do all of that, but in order for us to get funded to do that we have to match it against accredited units.

The other thing about getting paid to deliver accredited units is that you only get paid for nominal hours, and we work with people for as long as it takes for them to be skilled or move into whatever area it is that they need to or want to move into. Here is an example of training that came from a need. There was a group of women who were working in a childcare program and they wanted to get a vehicle to take the kids out bush, so they approached Karrayili and asked for help with writing a submission to Lotterywest rather than getting somebody else to write it. A teacher spent a year working with them. They learnt the process, they got the submission in, they did the literacy and oracy associated with writing the submission, approaching people for support and finding out about the vehicles. It took a year. They were successful. They did it themselves. They learnt all the skills on the way through and they got

their vehicle. But to get paid for working with that group the staff member who worked with them went through many, many hoops fitting it into the programs that we have.

One of the examples I was going to talk about in terms of taking things away from the community and individuals having control over what is happening with the new changes to the CDEP and IEP, Indigenous Employment Program, relates to training. I was sitting down with one of the employment service agencies the other day, and what happened previously with the job networks and now with employment service agencies is that they come to us and say, what training can we pay you for? We do not need money for training. They are looking for discrete units or discrete programs, whether it is in business or computing or environmental health or driver ed. So suddenly there are more agencies and individuals that people have to deal with in their pathway. We provide that ongoing support but we do not get paid for it. We also make the training work so people do become skilled and it is meaningful and it does follow through to whatever they want, if what they want is there.

One of the best models for training that works possibly not just with Aboriginal people but certainly has been a very successful program here is our environmental health program. I will get Tamela to describe how that works. One issue with that which comes to another one of our issues is how effective that program is. You just had a presenter before, Patrick Davies, and also Harry, who have come through this program, but what is at the end of it for people? So the issues are how we can bring everything back to being able to provide holistic, flexible, responsive training where people can say what they want, they feel comfortable with the trainer and every part of their life is dealt with as the training is provided, and then have something at the end of it where support is continued. Do you want to describe how the environmental health program works?

Miss Vestergaard—People come together from across the valley through the 42 different communities to one community, which is always out-of-town, always community-based. We do an intensive workshop where people are practising their skills on real environmental health problems and working through to the resolution of those problems, and working with community members in increasing the awareness of environmental health means and involving children and adults from communities as well as students in the whole workshop. So it is far more widespread than a classroom-based activity. A lot of it is where you try to make it as practically based as we can, a lot of practical skills and people bringing their knowledge from station work or other work areas. Because we are bringing people together from all over, we need to get rapport building really fast amongst people, so we do a lot of hunting and looking at country so everybody has a chance to show what they are good at and people start to feel good about the training and being involved in it.

After a workshop, people go home with a number of jobs that they need to do in their own communities. We have two environmental health teachers who assist in the follow-up of those fieldwork tasks so people are working on projects in their own places. The task might be house-plumbing assessments and repairs; it might be building rubbish bin stands or spraying the weeds around a sewage pond—the sorts of things that are essential to the health and wellbeing of the community. Because we are community based, our responsibility goes far beyond the training package requirements and moves far more into community responsibilities.

There are still a huge number of environmental health issues that we are dealing with, and a lot of bureaucracies are very obstructive when we are trying to ascertain who is responsible; for example, for rubbish tip maintenance. There is no ongoing rubbish tip maintenance. There is no ongoing funding; it is sporadic, haphazard and uncoordinated, and people are not given the opportunity to be involved in the selection of people who do those jobs. There are plenty of good grader drivers and loader drivers within the valley who could be employed to do this work themselves. We teach people basic plumbing tasks, but there are no jobs at the end. The department of housing and works issues job orders all the time for plumbing repairs, but our trainees cannot access that employment. There are many jobs that we could have at the end of this training that are not happening.

CHAIR—We have heard people talk about environmental health officers and people going out to communities and saying, 'There should be a rubbish dump here and there isn't'—those sorts of things. Are there any Indigenous environmental health officers working in the valley now—that is, working and getting paid; I know a lot of them do the work through the communities?

Miss Vestergaard—We have a visiting service from Derby shire with an environmental health officer and two field support officers. One of them is an Aboriginal man. And there are eight positions based at Nindilingarri. But we need positions that are community based—not Fitzroy community but based on communities—because there is such an interruption to service provision by outside agencies, even if they are just coming from Fitzroy. It is better than making people spread too thin across a big area, but there are still problems.

Take the dog program. If we get outside people to do the dogs in communities and they work with whoever is available in that community at the time then they are not going to know which dogs belong to which people so that a contraceptive needle can be given to the dogs to stop the puppies and the massive increase in animal numbers that affects health. Unless we have on-the-ground workers from those communities saying, 'That dog belongs to that woman; she is over there,' then we will never track people down. That is the case for a range of issues. Environmental health is often a really personal thing, and we need to have people working within their own communities and supporting their own communities—not just being given a job but supported and mentored in that position for a long time, because it is a huge transition from CDEP.

CHAIR—We talked to the council today about the communities we are talking about and they said, 'It's nothing to do with us because they are not gazetted towns.' That is fair enough; it's what the council do. But in the area of environmental health the council, presumably for the larger reason of compliance under the act, see themselves as being responsible for going into communities—they certainly gave evidence to that effect today—to look at rubbish dumps and that sort of stuff. I do not understand quite how far they have gone into the area of environmental health. They may have gone there only through a complaint about the rubbish tips. Generally speaking, around Australia environmental health officers are employed by the local council or local government. Given that they are not going to cover the communities in this region in the near future, who would the environmental health officers you were suggesting—and what you were suggesting sounds very sensible—work for? Would it be the department of health?

Miss Vestergaard—I think it should be a health based thing but perhaps it can still come under local government.

CHAIR—Perhaps funded from FaHCSIA or some other arrangement. We will have to speak to some other people about that.

Miss Vestergaard—We need to have enough support for people. We could give any number of jobs if we had the money to do that. If we are just giving out a job, then we are setting people up to fail because there is no support, so it would be whatever methodology can provide the best onsite support.

CHAIR—Perhaps it could be the local resource centre. It is another decision that should be made rather than just assuming it would be local government.

Miss Vestergaard—As long there is a strong skill base within the organisation to provide it.

CHAIR—Marra Worra Worra or somewhere like that.

Ms Davey—The likely place would be Marra Worra Worra, and it used to happen like that. Marra Worra Worra was first established because communities were taking control and were developing their own enterprises and Marra Worra Worra was set up to support the administration for those communities. Over the years, once again, with increasing funding compliances and programs it gets taken away from the community base.

CHAIR—It would seem from the evidence we have heard today that an opportunity exists but no-one is really responsible for it in the communities, and I am pretty clear about that, apart from some compliance regimes. Perhaps the ICC or FaHCSIA, given there are a number of people in the stream, would see what they are going through and could call a tender for someone to auspice that. It is clearly not happening at the moment. There are a wide number of communities. The issue of preventative health is obviously mainstream. This is right in the middle of where we need to be. In any event we will undertake to try to find out exactly what that process is. We will find out where that is up to and what is possible there and we will write you a letter shortly. It does seem that there is an opportunity of some form there.

Senator ADAMS—Can I just ask about the mentoring because it seems to be happening in a number of communities where people are trained up and, as you say there are no jobs but some may have a mentor behind them. Do you have any retirees or people that come here visiting who are in a trade, like a plumber or an electrician or those sorts of people? I come from a very small rural community down south and we have a lot of farmers retiring to let their sons take over the property. We had a program that started off with mentoring the year 10s who did not want to go on and do their year 12. Being a sheep area, they were taught different things like shearing and rousing and all that sort of thing. But they had a mentor who actually stayed with them and they taught them a lot of social skills as well. Those people became part of that extended family because it gave the retired person a real interest in taking a young person on and helping them. It seems that we have had a number of people go through and they have cert I or cert II or whatever, but where are they in 12 months time?

Ms Davey—I think there needs to be a shift in the training or education paradigm in going from the start with the individuals through to the training with the mentoring which is all part of the whole. You do not have a trainer separate to a mentor, separate to employment and following a case management person. So you have multiskilled people like the old-fashioned community workers used to be where you provide the social support alongside the training and the follow through and mentoring. On-the-job training is also effective therefore mentoring and support should be included in it.

CHAIR—You gave evidence a little earlier about the process that uses actual student contact hours, rather than the outcome, as the principal currency. I think most committee members would agree that across the board it seems that any Australian with lower levels of literacy and numeracy who is entering into a scheme where the only currency is based on face-to-face contact in hours is going to fail that particular demographic. Substantially it seems to have done the same here.

Ms Davey—Another thing is that a lot of people with so-called lower levels of literacy come from different language and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, in this scenario you need people who can really tune in and understand the people they are working with, because it is not just about becoming literate or doing a training program. It is about learning how to negotiate, deal with the mainstream, what it is all about and how to operate within mainstream while retaining strength in your own culture and language. It is a particular and special training that people need to have in order to be effective trainers. You can call it case management, working with people, community development or whatever, but increasingly it is being split up. You have the employment service providers providing case a management program. You have trainers from all over who can do a bit of training here and a bit of training there. You sometimes have other people in organisations or communities providing a mentoring role, but that is probably the weakest one in terms of what does already exist.

There needs to be a much more holistic approach. I think that there are a lot of community based organisations that could set this up and could provide that kind of support with training inclusively in it. That would be facilitated if community based organisations could have, let's say, three-year recurrent funding, where the outcomes are based on strategic plans developed by that organisation—by the directors, staff and members of an organisation—rather than having benchmarks and outcomes that are determined by training organisations or employment organisations.

I talk about the need to do away with all the complexity, and somebody else was talking about it before, with all the different grants and processes. Admin here has tripled over the last 10 years. People do not get enough time to do the work that is effective. So when I say, 'Give us money to operate for three years,' and you come back and say, 'Where would the accountability be?' I would say, 'We'll give you benchmarks from a strategic plan developed from that organisation, from the directors and the people in the community.'

CHAIR—I am from the Northern Territory and I am very jealous. We do not have a drivers training program in the Northern Territory as you do over here, and many young people—particularly young male Aboriginal people—meet their first police officer through the window of a car because they do not have a licence, and they cannot ever get one. I have heard much about your program. How long have you been working in this program?

Ms Jimbidie—I have been involved with Karrayili for a very long time. I started here in 1987 and worked for Karrayili for 12 years. I started off as a teacher's aide then went to do my diploma in Batchelor. After 12 years I left for nine years, and I came back last year to work for Karrayili again. I moved back then. During all those years that I was working with Karrayili we would go to Perth and lobby for funding to run courses that people wanted here in the Fitzroy Valley. Coming back last year, after nine years, I found that that is still going on.

CHAIR—Who actually does the assessment of the driver training? When you have finished doing the drivers licence training, who actually does the assessment? Do you do the assessments? Do you do the test as well?

Ms Jimbidie—The written test?

CHAIR—Any of the tests.

Ms Jimbidie—Yes, we do the written test for the L-plates, then students get a certificate which they take to the police station to say that they have passed the 30 questions. Then the police issue them with the L-plate and logbook.

CHAIR—And then they go from there.

Ms Jimbidie—Yes. William was the first driver instructor, many years ago.

Mr Shaw—Yes, back in the eighties.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to go back to the issue of CDEP. It seems to me from your comments that people are looking for square boxes to tick, to say, 'We want this training for this particular issue,' rather than taking the holistic approach that you were talking about. Is that what you meant?

Ms Davey—The issue here is all the changes to do with the programs in the employment sector. Training has been separated.

Senator SIEWERT—But is it the case that training is not then matching the needs of people looking for employment?

Ms Davey—Yes. What is happening is that people who are on CDEP or with Centrelink have to register with an employment service provider. It is the employment service providers who are given the task of doing the case work with individuals to ascertain what training they need.

Senator SIEWERT—Doing their employment pathway plan.

Ms Davey—Exactly. So they are working with that individual and they say, 'This person wants to do business training or computer training or driver education or environmental health.' Or they might come to us and say, 'What training can you offer?' Then they say, 'Can we enrol this person in certificate II in business? When do you start the program? When does the program finish? Please don't enrol them until they are registered with us; otherwise, we won't be able to get money for them.' They also ask, 'What do you want to charge us for it?' Then we find we are

providing training that is divorced from all the other needs of individuals and there are time constraints put on it. We used to do that initial stage, where people would approach us and say what they wanted. We would work out what would suit them best, they would go into training and we would follow them through. We would do all of that, but now other agencies and organisations who are not necessarily connected to people have the job of doing that too.

Senator SIEWERT—So now you are at the end of the process.

Ms Davey—We are separate. We are in the middle.

Ms Jimbidie—What is happening is that all these organisations are doubling up, doing the same thing. We are doing training and then there are people over in another organisation doing training. Karrayili has been here for many years. Since all these groups have started, such as Kimberley Group Training and ITAC in the west Kimberley, we have not really got together. We are all doing the same thing—providing education and training services to the Fitzroy Valley area to lead to employment—but no-one has ever got together. It is like everybody is doubling up. We do not want them coming to us and saying, 'We'll pay you to do training for this,' or 'Don't do training with that person, because he or she needs to do this.' Where is the freedom for people to come and do training? We are a training provider and we need to be used as that. So we need more funding to employ more staff.

Ms Davey—The most effective training is training that is meaningful for the people and tied to what they are doing. Take for example our business course. William is developing his own business and so the training is built around that. If somebody is on their pathway and they are heading to work in an office, we would work with that person in the office and provide them with the training. So they would do the office work unit, without—

Senator SIEWERT—Without all the other stuff in it?

Ms Davey—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I get it.

Mr Shaw—With TAFE training, there are lot of courses happening in Broome. What I am saying is: why send 20 students to Broome when we can have one teacher come to Karrayili?

CHAIR—Who do you think makes those decisions, William?

Mr Shaw—That is the story I am trying to tell TAFE. I am confused.

CHAIR—Do TAFE generally recruit students from your catchment and generally tend not to deliver courses here—in flexible delivery? So they have to go back to their facility in Broome? Is that right?

Ms Davey—It varies. We actually work closely with TAFE. For some of the programs you have to go there. There are some programs that would operate better if we ran them here. Some TAFE lecturers come and teach here and sometimes people have to go to Broome or Derby to do the courses. We work very closely with TAFE. Sometimes where students are enrolled in a

course, we provide extra support for those students because we are on the ground here. But even with them, it is separate from the employment sector.

CHAIR—Thank you very much not only for providing evidence here today but also for your wonderful hospitality. It is a place where people obviously feel very comfortable in being, which is very important. If you have any questions or submissions for the committee, you can provide that through the secretariat, who will provide you with the details. If we need some confirmation or clarification of issues or evidence that has been put to us, we will seek that clarification. We may also have some questions on notice that will be provided to you through the secretariat. Thank you again for providing evidence today.

[3.53 pm]

HAMS, Mr Philip Edward, Private capacity

CHAIR—Welcome. For the *Hansard* record, could you please state the capacity in which you appear today?

Mr Hams—I am representing Gogo Station. It is a pastoral operation adjacent to Fitzroy Crossing on the eastern side. It is quite a large cattle operation and, within its pastoral lease, there are some 1,000 people on eight communities. That is my first interest. My secondary interest is Fitzroy Crossing itself, because that is where I live. The third one is the Fitzroy Valley.

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

Mr Hams—Would you mind if I quickly went through my working sheet?

CHAIR—That would be fine. But I would just remind you, Mr Ham, that the committee can often get the best out of questions rather than from information provided, and you have provided a submission. So, with that in mind, please go ahead.

Mr Hams—I am here to pick up on point (d) of the terms of reference, which goes to employment opportunities. I will lead off by saying that the West Kimberley region has the potential to support sustainable, well-considered small farming enterprises. I am developing an enterprise on Gogo Station. It is an irrigation of 100 hectares of cattle fodder. I have been three years in the process of getting it through the bureaucracy, getting the necessary paperwork through. Whilst I have been here I have noted the interest and the need of the communities to get themselves involved in some sort of employment opportunities. I think that agriculture can assist in generating those employment opportunities.

In the case of the community I am thinking of small-scale horticulture and vegetable growing. Down that list you will see where we have been talking with the chamber of commerce, in particular with John, who manages the supermarket. If people grow produce, and some of that produce is surplus to their daily needs, John believes that he can undertake to market at a central location in Fitzroy. That could well be a model that others could use elsewhere. On my daily work I would travel past probably 10 or 15 per cent of the people on Gogo. It really concerns me that they have nothing to do. There is nothing to do. I see a serious problem looming in five or 10 years time. I know the journey is going to be a long one—it could take 10, 15 or 20 years to turn the situation around—but, unless we start somewhere, it is never going to get started. I am suggesting that agriculture can assist in that process.

What agriculture can do is at least bring in a work ethic. Some of the problems I see in the region, where there are people who have not worked for a good number of years, go to the fundamental things like getting out of bed in the morning, preparing lunch and getting yourself to work in a timely fashion. It is a serious issue. There is plenty of training over and above that

but, if you are in an agriculture industry, and you know damn well the sun is going to boil you by about 10 o'clock in the morning, it is a good idea to start early. If you cannot get started early, and you rock up at nine o'clock and it is starting to hit 37 or 38 degrees—later in the season—it becomes an issue. So it is those basic things that agriculture can teach people. And a later stage those people can move on, whether they get involved in the mining industry or something else. Agriculture is a bit of a soft industry, but it is starting to employ people, and it can give people the opportunity to get into the work ethic and move along.

There is also quite a lot of gardening activity up at Christmas Creek, or Wangkatjungka. I have left some information for you from the ABC, who have reported there quite frequently lately. Mr Chairman, from the Northern Territory, where you are from, I notice that there is a community gardens program. I have met up with the chap who runs that. He is coming back here today or tomorrow, I think, and I will be following the community gardens program through further. I also think that it does not need a heck of a lot of government support. It does not need too many dollars at all; there is enough goodwill out there amongst private operators. I am talking about pastoralists, who could help make land available, if you can get it through the system. And I am talking distributors of irrigation equipment et cetera. I think they would gladly give hardware and advice. To pick up on Senator Adams's thoughts, I think there are plenty of people out there who are willing to go into a community for a few days every so often to keep it moving forward.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for that. I have had a bit to do with this in the Northern Territory, as you are aware. Normally it is on Indigenous land or shared land at least, and one of the challenges seems to be—particularly if it is not just for your own house and your own backyard but for a communal area—getting some sort of a process to work out who does the work, what the reward is, what happens to the produce, who gets reward from that, who owns land and whether they get some reward from it. I have seen on a number of occasions it ending up starting a feud and really not adding anything to the community. I can point to a number of abandoned community gardens, two of them in Alice Springs. There was a lot of investment and they were abandoned not because nobody wanted to grow vegetables but because the politics and the tension within the communities were not dealt with before someone went into the enterprise. Have you thought much about dealing with some of those issues before you go in? Have you had much experience with that?

Mr Hams—I spent the best part of 30 years in far western New South Wales in agriculture. During that time I would have had 12 years in public life in councils, various employment committees et cetera. So I have had a stack of experience dealing with people. Up here I meet regularly with the Gooniyandi people, who are the traditional owners of part of Gogo. I am probably up to my seventh or eighth meeting with those people. I meet some practically on a daily basis and discuss these issues with them. I am well aware of the drama in getting 25 hectares out of a pastoral lease and putting another name on it. That is why I have been here three years rock solid just getting a diversification through—not a change of purpose, a diversification. But that land tenure aspect of it is changing quickly. I definitely hear what you are saying: you have to take people with you and you cannot impose your views on them. Rest assured that a lot of legwork goes into taking people with us.

Senator MOORE—You have said how long it has taken you to get this far, working through processes. What is the future?

Mr Hams—I think it is just around the corner. We are over the biggest of the humps.

Senator MOORE—What were they?

Mr Hams—Various government departments. This area in particular has been used to nothing happening for about 40 years. Lots of things have been happening in town: supermarkets, resorts et cetera. Mining do their own thing and are strong enough to do their own thing. But, when it comes to the pastoral world and the water asset, the sunshine asset et cetera, nothing has been happening in the Fitzroy Valley for 40 years, so there is no-one with too much experience. The other problem you have is the tyranny of distance. The bureaucracy is up at Kununurra, 700 clicks away. There is the odd one or two in Derby, which you can get at fairly easily. There are some in Broome. The rest are 2½ thousand kilometres away in Perth. When I was in western New South Wales it was seven or eight hours to Canberra or seven or eight hours to Sydney, so you could be knocking on doors real quick. The tyranny of distance is something that holds you up here in getting your message across.

Senator MOORE—You have given us a bundle of papers with lots of media coverage and people being positive. You truly believe the program can be established in a structured way in a very short period of time.

Mr Hams—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Is your aim that it would have a focus on employment to start with?

Mr Hams—Yes. We have made an undertaking and committed it in writing to the KLC and others. With a hundred hectares we cannot employ a lot of people, but we have guaranteed that local Aboriginal people will get the first cut of it. Then we said we will have people come in and pinch the ideas. One thing I learnt over in the farming game in the east is that you get out and pinch ideas. We will trade those ideas and people will pick them up—and away they go.

Senator MOORE—So it involves the constructive sharing of ideas.

Mr Hams—Yes.

Senator MOORE—What is your long-term plan?

Mr Hams—The long-term plan involves cattle. What is happening right now with the cattle industry—the main industry around here—is that the bulkier cattle are going to Indonesia. The market is getting tougher by the day. There is a necessity to have fodder here to bring cattle up to a certain weight before you can quit them. At the moment you cannot do that, because the last lot of hay came from Perth. So you have not got the capacity here to hang onto cattle and bring them up to the required weight. So the grand plan is to be able to have that fodder on hand so that you can manage your cattle better and you can orchestrate your cattle to meet the markets. Once we get started, then I think other pastoralists will follow suit.

The other thing of real concern is the unemployment in the valley. When people see irrigation happening here, it will generate their interest and they will start doing things themselves. Hopefully, it will take off from there. That is what I am hoping for.

Senator MOORE—It is a three-year plan at this stage?

Mr Hams—It will probably be 30 years!

Senator ADAMS—The water for the irrigation project will come out of the Fitzroy. Do you have to pay for water rights or anything like that?

Mr Hams—No. There are very few mechanisms in place. On the first 100 hectares, we will use subsurface water and that comes out of a bore field at Pillara mine. The Pillara mine is about 35 kilometres from here. It closed down and is now going through a rehab process. We will take over the bore field and use that water. As time goes on and when we have proven that we can do it, we may well be looking at diverting tertiary creeks into water storages and that type of thing.

Senator ADAMS—What about the evaporation rate?

Mr Hams—I think it is all to do with timing. If you are growing fodder, you do not try and carry yourself through the worst months, which are October and November. You plan to run out of water in September, early October, to shut down and then to wait for the rains to come. You do not try and carry through the harshest period.

Senator ADAMS—That was what I was thinking. What are you going to grow?

Mr Hams—At the moment, because there has been no agreement between the department of agriculture and the DEC, we need to stick to a fodder that cannot reproduce. Unfortunately, there is one or two of them about. Hopefully, there will be an agreement some time in the near future between the department of agriculture and the DEC on a list of acceptable plant species. But right now we are going for the variety that cannot reproduce.

Senator SIEWERT—Have you got permission to use the bore field?

Mr Hams—We are making an application right now. It is all being done very correctly.

Senator SIEWERT—But you have not got it yet?

Mr Hams—No. But we are only two or three months off.

Senator SIEWERT—I am trying to link that back to your comments around building employment in the Aboriginal community. Are you talking about working that 100 hectares or about replicating that operation in other areas?

Mr Hams—We picture that, once we get it off the ground and it is going, there will be opportunities for local employment to be directly involved in it. The people are there. There are communities only 20 kilometres away, and our relationship with them is good. So we will employ them directly. But—

Senator SIEWERT—On that operation?

Mr Hams—On that operation. We cannot give an absolute firm commitment, but you can rest assured that at least they will think we are smart enough that we want to encourage people to work. You do not want a whole heap of people who do not have jobs on your doorstep. What we do as time goes on a bit is contract. A suggestion has been made through the KLC that we give some of the work away on a contractual basis, whether it is the baling of the fodder, the carting of the fodder to a shed facility or any of that sort of stuff. We have put a lot of thought into doing that.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I appreciate your very practical submission. Good luck with that; any submission that creates real jobs is something we all support. If there are other questions for clarification after we have had a look at the evidence, we will provide those to you on notice. If you have further submissions you would like to make, please contact the secretariat.

Mr Hams—I think I will do that.

[4.11 pm]

BROWN, Mr Joe, Coordinator, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre

CARTER, Mr Neil, Coordinator, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre

DAWSON, Mr Matt, Elder, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre

MORRIS, Mr Wesley John, Coordinator, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre

CHAIR—Welcome. Is there anything you wish to add about the capacity in which you appear today?

Mr Brown—I am an adviser of Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre.

Mr Carter—I am currently the repatriation and cultural heritage officer with the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre.

CHAIR—Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. I invite you to make a short opening statement, after which the committee will ask questions of you.

Mr Morris—We wish to thank the senators for coming to Fitzroy Crossing again. I say 'again' because this is the second opportunity we have had to meet with the Senate committee. This is the first opportunity to give formal testimony. The previous occasion was a less formal process, and the chair at the time was Senator Johnston. I do not think, Senator Scullion, you were with us on that particular occasion.

CHAIR—Indeed, I was not, Mr Morris; very observant.

Mr Morris—We look forward to the opportunity of providing this testimony today. We have submitted a couple of written submissions and we foreshadow submitting a couple more, but I will not drench you in paperwork today. We will just try to give a brief overview of those four submissions.

In September last year, I think about a week after the committee was with us last time, we sent through a fairly short submission. It is fair to say that the thrust of that particular submission was something that was very topical to us at the time and it related to Neil Carter's position. We have, not 200 metres from where we are at the moment, some 130 human remains and 600 secret and sacred objects. Neil worked for us for 10 years, but when ATSIC went out and ICC came in, no one government agency would continue the wages for that position. So we were left with a quite untenable situation where we continued to bring back things from overseas and accumulated all of this important material and had no way of returning all of that import material to the Kimberley. We are pleased to report now that Neil is working for us and that that job has now commenced. But our concerns are that we only have funding for Neil's position for 12 to 18 months, and we also have no capital works funding. You will understand and appreciate that

these sensitive things need to be returned to places in the Kimberley, and once they are in those places they need to be stored in a safe place. While we have funding for Neil for 12 to 18 months, we have no funding beyond that and we have no capital works—nothing with which we can build things or storage places to put these things into. That was the submission that we put in in September last year.

A couple of weeks ago we put in a submission in relation to alcohol. In that we said that this organisation strongly supports alcohol restrictions, but you would have to think that the state government thinks that alcohol restrictions in and of themselves are a magic bullet and a solution to all the woes and all the ills in Aboriginal communities, and clearly they are not. We were aware then that on 7 November last year the Queensland government, at the cost of $109 million, instigated a Queensland Indigenous communities alcohol management plan. On 19 November last year, we wrote to the state and Commonwealth governments saying that Western Australia, and the Kimberley, in particular needs a whole range of support programs and mechanisms to support and to build on the positive gains that have come as a result of those alcohol restrictions.

You may or may not be aware that the education and health standing committee of the state parliament about 10 days ago closed their public submissions to their current inquiry into the adequacy of alcohol and drug treatment services in Western Australia. One of the submissions to that state parliamentary report, just 10 days ago, was from the Director of Liquor Licensing in Western Australia. The man who is going around the state imposing these alcohol restrictions said just 10 days ago to that parliamentary report the same thing as I have just said to you now—that is, the positive gains that have been made as a result of those restrictions need to be consolidated by a whole range of support programs, just as we saw in Queensland in November last year. They are the two submissions that we have put in so far to you.

I would like to foreshadow, if the Senate will indulge us, two further submissions which we will send through electronically at a later date. One of the themes for this next submission is the role of culture. KALACC is a law and culture organisation. That is what our mission is, to maintain a culture that has been continually practised for 20,000 years. That is our core business. Major General David Chalmers, on resigning from his post as the head of the Northern Territory intervention, said to the *Australian* newspaper these following words, 'The single most important thing that Aboriginal people can do to create a future for themselves is to maintain their culture.' This is the man that the Howard government and Mr Brough charged with responsibility for the Northern Territory intervention. At the end of his post he came to that conclusion. The single most important thing: it was not health, it was not education; the single most important thing that could be done was to maintain your culture because without a culture you have no framework and no compass for living your life. That was the conclusion of Major General David Chalmers, and I foreshadow a submission in relation to that particular theme because that is our core business, that is what we have been striving in the Kimberley to achieve for 24 years.

And, lastly, government engagement. We all know about COAG, we know about these seven building blocks. We know that there were meetings in Canberra last week in relation to remote service delivery, and some people who have spoken to you today were in those meetings in Canberra and they have given us positive feedback in relation to that. We know that there is remote service delivery; we know that there is a lot of money going to housing. But do you

know what? I just used a Ruddism, 'you know what?' There are seven building blocks. We know there is housing, we know there is remote service delivery, but I ask you: safe communities—where is that building block? We have been calling since November last year for a regional alcohol management plan. That sounds to me like safe communities, and we have not got any positive reaction to that since November last year. If you want safe communities, you want to begin with alcohol restrictions and controls. There is another one there called 'governance and leadership'. Elders like the gentlemen with me here today are looked up to and respected across the Kimberley, but where is that respect in the government engagement process? Young leaders went to Canberra. Young leaders were engaged in those processes. But at what point is the government—Commonwealth and state—going to sit down with the actual cultural bosses and engage in discussion with them, with translators and everything? At what point is that going to occur? We have not been told anything about that. I thank you for that opportunity.

CHAIR—I just want to get this clear: your last question was about the nature of the discussions in regard to the COAG meetings and their proposed movements around here?

Mr Morris—Yes.

CHAIR—Mr Morris, I think we all acknowledge what you say about the silver bullet. I do not think there will be another in my lifetime, but to me the silver bullet was Opel fuel. I saw that as a silver bullet. But we still saw the lack of diversionary programs when people came out of the haze of having sniffed petrol for a long time, and the longevity and sustainability of that program would have been better—I think it has still been much better than any of the alcohol programs we have had had—had we had those diversionary programs. But you say that the Western Australian state government believes that alcohol restrictions are a silver bullet. Why do you say that? Is that what they have said to you?

Mr Morris—We had a meeting with the state minister, who has portfolio responsibility for this, Dr Graham Jacobs, just two weeks ago. He came to town two weeks ago, and the reason he came to town was to release the results of the 12-month evaluation of the alcohol restrictions at Fitzroy Crossing. That was his main business in town. But following that official duty, he then met with a number of different organisations, community groups in town. He was with KALACC for an hour. He made it abundantly clear to us just two weeks ago that the state was months away, if not years away—certainly he said months away—from developing a regional or a state alcohol management plan.

CHAIR—So from that you have gleaned that they believe that that was the end of the story, rather than it just has not happened yet? There is a long divide.

Mr Morris—We see the enthusiasm with which the state embraces the alcohol restrictions. Elders like Mr Brown have been quick to support the women of the valley when they first called on these restrictions some while ago. They came to the men and they gained the support of the elders, and so we see the benefits of those restrictions, we see the investment that the state government is putting into those processes associated with putting in place those restrictions. But we struggle to describe any process to you in relation to how a broader alcohol management plan is being conceived and developed.

CHAIR—In your discussions with the minister you say that he said it would be months to years before that is implemented. Can I take it from that that there was to be an alcohol management program sometime in the future?

Mr Morris—Yes. In fact we have written correspondence from the Premier from 26 November last year. Dr Hames wrote to us in February this year and Minister Jacobs wrote to us in April this year. All three of those gentlemen have written to us confirming that. Indeed, Senator Macklin also wrote to us saying the same thing in about March or April this year. So we have four letters all saying that there will, at some indefinite point in time, be an alcohol management plan, but we do not know what those words mean. We do not know what things, what sorts of programs, would be brought within the compass of such a plan. We can describe what happened in Queensland and we think that what happened in Queensland is a tremendous outcome, but we do not know what the state or the Commonwealth mean when they use the words 'alcohol management plan'. We do not know what those words mean because we have never had any detailed discussion.

Senator SIEWERT—You are not saying, though, to wait till the plans develop before we get additional services? They can still provide additional services in the absence of a plan being ticked off, can't they?

Mr Morris—Absolutely. We have put any number of business cases to them. We are not trying to own the whole alcohol management plan. We are a cultural organisation, and within the range of services that you might provide within an alcohol management plan the two that this organisation has been particularly calling for are youth diversionary programs and building on our cultural Yiramin program. The other thing is in terms of governance. What we saw were two Kimberley inquests. We all know about the larger of the inquests, the NT 22, but what about the smaller one—those five unfortunate young people who died in Oombulgurri? What did the coroner find there? What he found was that that happened as a direct result of the lack of any leadership and governance within that community. So unless you invest in governance at the local level you will have the kinds of terrible results that the coroner found.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to go on from where you have just left off. We were talking also to the previous witnesses about the fact that resources have not followed the implementation of the restrictions. We were talking about rehabilitation, for example. We have also been talking about resources for FASD et cetera. You are adding to that list youth diversionary programs. As Senator Scullion was saying, in our community affairs committee, of which many of us are also members, we have been talking about and doing a lot of work on petrol sniffing. Of course, one of the key things with petrol sniffing is the youth diversionary programs. It is not rocket science. You do not have to prove yet again that that is what we need. What response have you had from either the state or federal government to your request for funding for youth diversionary programs?

Mr Morris—We received on 4 August a letter from the Commonwealth Attorney-General, Mr McClelland, which reads as follows: 'FaHCSIA and DIA are the Commonwealth and state government lead agencies in Indigenous affairs and relevant agencies in relation to the Kimberley youth at risk diversion plan.' So the business case which we presented in March last year has been responded to by Mr McClelland. He points out that we currently receive a sum of $81,000 from his agency and says that beyond that investment of $81,000 in terms of a

consideration of a whole-of-government and bilateral response to our quite considerable funding request we need to continue our dialogue with FaHCSIA and with DIA. It is interesting that Minister O'Connor on 25 June put out a joint press release with Minister Snowdon. They welcomed the release of the report by the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee, *Bridges and barriers*, which you may be familiar with. In that particular press release they say:

Through COAG we have joined with the States and Territories, and committed $4.6 billion to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage in life expectancy, health, early childhood, education and employment.

But the curious thing from my perspective is that there is not $4.6 billion for youth diversionary programs. My understanding is that the Commonwealth Attorney-General has a sum of about $7 million for diversionary programs, not $4.6 billion, and of the $7 million that they do have we receive from that agency a sum of $81,000.

Senator SIEWERT—What programs are you funding with that? $81,000 would not buy you much these days.

Mr Morris—I will hand over the Western Australian Department of the Attorney General's newsletter for the chair and other members. As I say, it transpired earlier this year over the Christmas holidays there were a number of young people in town who committed a number of offences, basically burglary, break and enter, and we entered into a partnership with the Kimberley magistrate. I will draw your attention to the front cover there. This is the most recent newsletter and you will see that the Kimberley magistrate is describing our justice diversion initiatives between January and April this year. But the curious thing about all this is the following. The state government gives us not one cent towards this program and yet sees fit to put us on the front cover. This strikes me as very odd.

CHAIR—I assure you it is standard practice on both sides of government over time.

Senator ADAMS—Have you had any contact with them?

Mr Morris—Perhaps a thousand times.

CHAIR—I think it is very important if you could just talk briefly about where you actually spent the $81,000. What diversionary program did you spend that on?

Mr Morris—What you see there was perhaps a departure from our core operating program. The program that we were referring to is a cultural youth program called Yiriman. The basis of Yiriman is that the trouble with Indigenous youth today is their disconnection with culture, their disconnection with their elders and their leaders and their loss of identity. They do not know who they are and in the absence of a strong sense of identity they turn to drugs and alcohol and, when under the influence of drugs and alcohol, they come into contact with the justice system. What happened in the first four months of this year was that we operated in an intensive mode that we have not operated in for the previous seven or eight years. With this particular program, which we ran for four months, we were with those particular individuals 24 hours a day, seven days a week for four months which is not the mode that we have operated in previously. The $81,000 was all used up in terms of that—if you want to use the term case management—intensive behaviour, working on country, with those groups. What happened was as you will see from that

article was that there were two Indigenous owned cattle stations in the Fitzroy Valley. One is called Kupartiya and the other is Mount Pierre. What happened basically was that the magistrate saw fit to entrust these young people into our care and to send them to those pastoral stations for four months.

CHAIR—Sometimes doing things for the first time is the most expensive. It is harder to understand what you are doing. Obviously, $81,000 is a lot of money, and I appreciate that, but do you think there has been a lot of learning here? Could you streamline it and get more people through the program for the same funds? Do you think there could be some greater efficiencies in the future?

Mr Morris—I am reticent to almost acknowledge the question. The magistrate and the chief justice are keen to see these kinds of programs rolled out but there is no similar political will from the actual politicians and so, in the absence of that, we are at a bit of a loss as to how we can in fact roll out those programs in future instances.

CHAIR—To be blunt the reason that I asked the question is that if it cost you a hundred thousand dollars to get one person to behave better, you have to convince everybody on the street that that is a good investment. What I am simply saying is if, as you go through these programs, we can make them more efficient it is easier to sell them to people. Whether you are a politician or in the justice system, dollars are getting harder to get. Everything you have told me and what is on the front page of the newsletter are fantastic things, but again you have to convince people that you get bang for the buck. The reason for my question is that I was hoping from your learning experience and through critical mass—maybe you could have 10 people, not two or three—you could do it better and we could demonstrate that there are some efficiencies in this.

Mr Morris—On 23 July last year we put a business case to the state Attorney-General who at the time was a Labor politician. Of course the Labor Party lost government and we now have the conservative government. Nonetheless, the state government has had since 23 July last year to consider our business modelling in relation to this and we have not received a response.

CHAIR—How much were you applying for and how many people did you say you would rehabilitate?

Mr Morris—It depends on which of the two models you go with. If you go with the model that we have just described, the intensive model, then we need that intensive level of funding. In a less intensive environment you need a whole lot less money—

CHAIR—So ‘intensive’ is only about scope of time? That is the only other consideration?

Mr Morris—No. The program throughout the seven years has basically worked with young people for perhaps two or three weeks at a time. They were taken out bush, on bush trips, they were taken off drugs and alcohol and worked with for perhaps two or three weeks at a time. There were some follow-up mechanisms, but we had not worked with them continuously for a full-month period.

CHAIR—So that is the level of intensity.

Senator SIEWERT—We do not just want to talk about helping people once they have had contact with the juvenile justice system. Diversionary programs are also about making sure people do not enter the juvenile justice system.

Mr Morris—That is what we have done for seven or eight years. That has been the standard operating procedure for seven or eight years—getting to the problem before it occurs. It is just so happened that, over the Christmas holidays this year, 10 or 12 young people appeared before the magistrate and we had a need to deal with that appropriately.

Senator MOORE—Mr Carter, we received a letter from you very soon after we visited last time. There was a stream of issues around repatriation. Many of us discussed with ministers about what should happen—mainly with Minister Garrett—in terms of process. We got a response. I got a letter saying that they were looking into the issue and they would be in contact with your organisation. They have been. We want to get the current funding arrangements really clear so that we can follow this up again. You have been given 12 to 18 months for the kind of work and contract that you were on before. When we met with you before, your contract was uncertain. You thought you were finishing. You now have that. To whom do you report?

Mr Carter—It is eight weeks since I started—

Senator MOORE—That is quite recent.

Mr Carter—Yes. I have done reports and sent them to FaHCSIA. So far, those are the only people I have been reporting to. They are funding my position. As you know, it is only for 18 months. For the last four years I worked for a job networking service. Since last year, the elders have been asking whether I could come back and work with them on the repatriation stuff. All of this ties together. What we are talking about here is youth, alcohol restriction and culture. If you do not have a strong culture, you do not have a sense of identity. That is why the old people feel that a lot of our young people have gone onto drugs and alcohol—loss of identity; loss of their culture and sense of belonging.

With the repatriation work we are doing, we have a sea container with remains from Sweden and all over Australia, from museums. They have been sitting there all the time I have been away—four years. The elders want those remains taken back if we know exactly where they come from—put them back into country—and have those sites registered. We want the young people involved in the whole ceremony side of things when we are putting the remains back. It is about passing on the cultural importance of bringing back Aboriginal remains. The old people believe that the spirits of those remains will not rest until they are put back into country.

Last week or the week before I saw on the news that Kevin Rudd was talking about how the remains of Australian soldiers were brought back from Vietnam. He said, ‘These remains belong to our people.’ The Aboriginal people feel very strongly along those same lines. I do not think we can finish that work in 18 months. It means taking some of the remains 300 kilometres out on a dirt track at the back of Mount Barnett and carrying the remains and putting them back in the cave. We want proper ceremony to go with it—women, children and men together. After you put the remains back there is going to be ongoing visitation and respect for the people put back into country.

I am the only repatriation officer here in the Kimberleys working with KALACC to do the whole of the Kimberleys. We have got remains from Kalumburu and from One Arm Point and from all over the Kimberleys. The elders are thinking of using this repatriation program as a wake-up call to our young people about drugs and alcohol. The grog restrictions here have worked. When I worked for Job Futures after the restrictions I had people coming into the office looking for work.

But it is not the end of the whole alcohol problem. Once these people have got through the haze of alcoholism—and alcohol has been stopped here—while they are in that situation the elders want to be able to say, 'We will get these young people and start giving them some of their identity and culture back by getting them involved in repatriation,' and what Wes is talking about, the Yirimin project. I am there for 18 months but after that I do not know what is going to happen. The elders have been waiting for four years to finish the repatriation and now I can see that that funding is not going to be enough to do the whole job.

CHAIR—Obviously it is not just as though there is an end to it. There is still material arriving—and it would be too difficult and I am not going to go into how much that is. Would you have any idea about how much you deal with in 18 months? With you as the resource, you are not saying that you cannot do anything about this. Clearly, you can, and there are some resources there. But what is your estimate roughly—half of it or—

Mr Carter—We had a meeting last week up at KALACC, a men's meeting. It was the first meeting where we got elders from half of the Kimberleys. We started talking about the process and how we were going to do the work. When the elders meet they do not make decisions right there. They do not say, 'Right, we will do this right now, or we will do it this way from here.' They go away and talk about it. So what will happen in six weeks time when we have the AGM up at One Arm Point is that there will be elders represented there from all over the Kimberleys, from the desert and elsewhere. We were trying to get some the Kununurra elders down but they could not come this time. These old people do not make decisions right there if somebody else is not their representative. After that we are planning to start with the Bidyadanga people in putting remains back. And we are only talking about human remains here; there is a whole lot of other stuff we have got—secret and sacred items. We still have to consider how we are going to put those back.

CHAIR—Would it be reasonable to assume from that that the human remains are your priority? Would you do them first?

Mr Carter—At the moment, yes. But work out the process for one funeral. If Bidyadanga are going to have their remains back there, there will be what we call sorry business, where they have a period of mourning and then they have the funeral, and even after that there is a thing. So you are talking about a week there.

CHAIR—Mr Carter, with respect, FaHCSIA have organised a facilitator for these to be returned, and one would expect that. There are some practical issues, and I understand the commentary about not having some funds for capital works, for practical containers and that. But surely you would not just wait for one to finish before going on. It is your role, I would have thought, to be a facilitator. You would be able to organise a number of things at once, notwithstanding that perhaps some decisions have to be made overall.

Mr Carter—I will be doing that, but I work under the directions of the real bosses, who, for me, are these guys here. I have to work in time with them. You are sitting in Canberra and we are up here. This is what I told the international conference on repatriation in Brisbane just recently when I went over there, when they asked me how long this is all going to take. Up here, you have got to consider the distance, the travel. We get the wet season up here; that is going to cut things down. We get sorry business. If someone from Wangkatjungka dies, I am not going to take remains out there; you have got to let them settle down and have their sorry business. Then we have got the wet season, as I said. We have got the law business coming up soon—that is Aboriginal law business; that is what we work for. So there are all those things. I told the FaHCSIA people from Canberra who were in Brisbane, 'Look, I can't tell you when it's all going to happen; I'll do the best I can.' If we are having something happening here, I can always organise a repatriation process up in Kununurra, for example. It can be done, but it has got to be done in step with the elders, and they want the young people fully involved in this.

CHAIR—Well, I hope in 18 months you can make a start on it, because I know what FaHCSIA will say: 'You haven't done anything in 18 months, it's a waste of time. We're not going to do it again.'

Mr Carter—I will be making a start straight after the AGM—

CHAIR—Yes, I know you will. We acknowledge it is often from a Canberra perspective. I am from the Northern Territory as well and I acknowledge that there are issues that affect the north of Australia, such as wet seasons and all the normal dramas for us, that many would not understand. We will follow that with interest, Mr Carter.

Senator MOORE—Mr Carter, I wanted to ask if you had any funding for the actual mechanics of the process. That was another complaint you had when we met with you last year—that it was one thing to have your position but there was still the travel and the work that had to be done. Did you get any money for that?

Mr Morris—Yes. The short answer is yes.

Senator MOORE—Great.

Mr Morris—FaHCSIA have basically given us a funding agreement which covers Neil's wages for up to 18 months; and there is a strange arrangement where three or four different agencies consolidate money into the Museum of Western Australia, and the funds channelled through that source pay for the program costs—but again for 18 months and no capital works.

Senator ADAMS—So that was the budget that you gave us last time—that covered most of that?

Mr Morris—We have received perhaps a third of that budget.

Senator ADAMS—Because that was $200,000, if I remember correctly.

Mr Morris—No, that is the amount we have received.

Senator ADAMS—I thought that was the budget amount that you gave us.

Mr Morris—We have received that, and that will keep us busy for 18 months.

Senator ADAMS—Mr Carter, with all the elders going to One Arm Point, have you got anything that has to go back there?

Mr Carter—I will be at One Arm Point.

Senator ADAMS—I realise that, but is there anything that has to be repatriated to One Arm Point?

Mr Carter—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—Well, because everybody will be there, would it not be appropriate to perhaps take those remains back and do the ceremony then?

Mr Carter—I will be talking to the One Arm Point people before I do anything. I am in constant contact with the elders all over the Kimberley.

Senator ADAMS—But, if they were all going there for a meeting, to me it makes a lot of sense. This might be able to initiate the whole process, show everyone what it is really about and get a lot of young people to go there as well and mix with the elders. So perhaps you have that window of opportunity to get those remains repatriated at that stage.

Mr Carter—Yes, that is part of the plan.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. There are going to be, I know, some further questions that we have not got time for today. Again, thank you very much for your submissions. As you would be aware, Mr Morris, this is a standing committee, so you can provide us with submissions at any time—or even an update, Mr Carter, from you. You may be having some particular challenges with funders or something. So by all means feel free to drop us a letter in the context of an update. We would be delighted to receive that. So, Mr Carter, Mr Brown, Mr Morris and Mr Dawson, thank you very much for your time in coming here and providing us with evidence today.

Mr Morris—Thank you.

Mr Carter—Thank you.

Mr Dawson—Can I provide you with a summary of that.

CHAIR—Certainly.

[4.51 pm]

GREEN, Mr Patrick, Managing Director, Leedal Pty Ltd

RODRIGUES, Mr John, Chief Operations Officer, Leedal Pty Ltd

CHAIR—I welcome representatives from the Leedal group. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been previously provided to you. If it has not, we will make sure it is provided to you soon. I now invite you to make some opening remarks, and then I will put questions for the committee.

Mr Green—All I wanted to share—I have met with the Senate once in the past—was that, first and foremost, I am an Aboriginal person who still lives in my community, Junjuwa. I just wanted to talk about some of the areas that help, particularly housing and employment.

CHAIR—Mr Rodrigues?

Mr Rodrigues—I have been involved with the company for nine years. When I started here, the company then owned 100 per cent of the supermarket and the caravan park—the one that just got burnt down.

CHAIR—Perhaps you could also enlighten us, for the *Hansard*, on what the organisation owns and what its principal activities are.

Mr Rodrigues—We used to own—we still do own the land there—the shopping centre, 100 per cent, and the caravan park. We own the Crossing Inn hotel—that is 100 per cent as of 30 June this year—and the Fitzroy River Lodge, 70 per cent. I have now been involved in that organisation for nine years. My role came up as that of a supermarket manager. We have managed to improve the conditions, including food conditions, that were in this town previously. I believe we have done a good job. Now people complain about our prices, but there is only one way that we can get food up the Kimberleys, and that is by truck. With the fuel prices in the last few years, it has been a bit of a battle for us. We have been investigated for pricing and stuff like that, but we have come out clean. Unfortunately, there was an incident that happened about seven weeks ago, and we are dealing with it. My job at the moment is to try and get a supermarket fully functional up here. We also run the post office, which we also own—the Fitzroy Crossing Licensed Post Office, which is being operated from the tourist bureau at the moment.

Senator MOORE—It is just there; that is the one.

Mr Rodrigues—Yes. So my role is going from being one position to going all over town. It is getting pretty busy, but we are doing it for the community. Since we have been up at the rec centre—it has been five or six weeks—we have been broken into eight times. I was talking to the officer in charge on Saturday, after my trip—we had a trip to Perth last week, dealing with insurance and going forward with our planning to build a new supermarket for the town. Obviously, in our view, it would be for the next 20 years. We will get a brand-new shopping

centre in town, so it is good for the town. I was talking to the sergeant on Saturday after my return. At our meeting he told me that these figures are going to skyrocket now that the supermarket has burnt down. I do not know the reason why he was telling me that.

CHAIR—What sorts of figures?

Mr Rodrigues—The women's resource centre cannot take any more women in, break-ins—

CHAIR—The numbers relate to criminal activity in town.

Mr Green—Supposedly the alcohol ban and the reduction—how peaceful Fitzroy is supposedly perceived to be. On the other hand, you have got Justice Martin saying that the court appearance figures have skyrocketed. Yes, the sobering-up shelter has closed down because we did not have many people using the services. But the problem still exists.

Mr Rodrigues—We have dealt with the alcohol ban for the last 2½ years. It has been in place since August 2007. Prior to that we have had crime meetings and all that sort of stuff. I am very proud and Leedal is very proud, being an Aboriginal organisation owned by six communities in the Fitzroy Valley. The biggest shareholder is Junjuwa community on 40 per cent, and the other communities own 12 per cent shares in it. My role is to look after their business interests for the future of the communities.

Looking forward, I am really over talking about the alcohol ban. I sat here all day listening to other people's comments. Everybody has got their views, and I understand that. My role at the moment is to get the supermarket built. Even though these people have problems with housing, we know there is a big problem with housing; there was a big problem with alcohol, but we never concentrated on the people that had the problems. The problem with housing now is: do not wait for the government to build it, because it is not going to happen. We have got to get up and do it ourselves. People are waiting for a magic wand that is going to fix everything. I am really over the alcohol ban. My focus at the moment is to build a new supermarket because I believe that these people need nutrition and food. I was talking to Phil Hams regarding the future of fruit and veg. It is grown in Kununurra and goes all the way to Perth. It is just a waste of time and means a loss of life in those vegetables. My goal for this government is to move the company forward, build the new supermarket in town and just go from there.

CHAIR—Do you think it is going to be viable under the current arrangements with the alcohol bans and things?

Mr Rodrigues—To rebuild the supermarket?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Green—We did not realise what the supermarket meant to the whole community. When the supermarket got burnt down, the next day when we had a local area emergency meeting, and we did not realise how much people wanted us to start the very next day. The question to us was: 'When are going to open the doors again?' We did open the doors 5½ days later when we secured a premises. In securing a premises we managed to get a supermarket up. We were lucky the shire was looking after the community and utilised the communal facility as a hall and the

tourist bureau. Now, after hearing the discussions of today, there is employment, there is housing. I have heard the wish list. We have freehold land there.

CHAIR—Have all the shareholders decided to move ahead to build the new supermarket? Has that decision been made?

Mr Rodrigues—Yes.

CHAIR—That is great. When would we expect the supermarket to start being built?

Mr Green—You have got to go through the process, I guess—the insurance—

CHAIR—Are there any potential activities that have been fielded by Outback Stores in the town?

Mr Green—We are exploring partnership arrangements with the different bodies—IGAs, whoever else.

CHAIR—Outback Stores have had a habit of moving in anyway.

Mr Green—Yes, I am talking about Outback Stores. IBA is a partner in our venture down the road. They have not moved in heavy-handedly on Fitzroy.

CHAIR—That is really good to hear.

Mr Green—I do hear of a number of Outback Stores elsewhere in the Kimberley where they were not so happy. I have to say we have been in business for the last 20 years and we have survived to date.

Mr Rodrigues—One of the reasons we started so quickly with the other supermarket is that after the shop burnt down, people felt sorry for us and we had those meetings, and we found the other two garages in town were putting their prices up. So people were coming up and saying, 'We can't live like this.' Being an Aboriginal owned company, there was more of an urgent need to start putting something down.

CHAIR—That is fantastic—really good news.

Mr Green—Having the freehold land and hearing about the housing, I do want to take on some of those opportunities. We have explored it and we want to go ahead.

CHAIR—My comments may appear to be self-evident. There is one place for sale today in Fitzroy Crossing and that is an industrial estate block. That is just from some inquiries I made at lunch time. It is very interesting to see that sort of demand. It is a commercial outlet. If you are in the commercial business, great stuff. If you can provide housing to assist in meeting the demand, that will be great.

Mr Green—I do live in my community. My community was once fully functional and provided a lot of income to all the individual members. Now their jobs have been taken away. It

has gone elsewhere. Our administration has been moved elsewhere. We are talking to other people and trying to create partnerships where we can also offer traineeships. We have offered a number of positions in a number of our ventures. We are committed to employing 45 of our members each year, providing we can get training in a number of areas. We have provided the instructor. Yes, there is TAFE, there is Karrayili, and there are a number of employment agencies around us. If and when we can get a group of members that want to work in any of our ventures, we are quite prepared to pay for the instructors to come to Fitzroy. We have done that with the security. We have paid for an instructor to come. If our members want jobs, just give me 10 and I will get an instructor here for you and I will give you the job.

CHAIR—That sounds very encouraging. We have completely run out of time today. Thank you very much for providing evidence to us today. Senators will provide you with questions on notice, if necessary, through the secretariat.

Committee adjourned at 5.03 pm