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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities

MONDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2003

CANBERRA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Monday, 13 October 2003

Members: Mr Wakelin *(Chair)*, Mr John Cobb, Mrs Draper, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Dr Lawrence, Mr Lloyd, Mr Melham, Mr Snowdon and Mr Tollner

Members in attendance: Mr John Cobb, Mrs Draper, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Mr Tollner and Mr Wakelin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Strategies to assist Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders better manage the delivery of services within their communities. In particular, the committee will consider building the capacities of:

(a) community members to better support families, community organisations and representative councils so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities;

(b) Indigenous organisations to better deliver and influence the delivery of services in the most effective, efficient and accountable way; and

(c) government agencies so that policy direction and management structures will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 10.11 a.m.

HAWGOOD, Ms Dianne, Executive Director, Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce

PATTERSON, Ms Michelle, SES Officer, Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce

RICHARDSON, Mr Geoffrey, SES Officer, Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce

CHAIR—I declare open this meeting of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and welcome representatives from the Indigenous Communities Taskforce. I invite you, Dianne, to make a brief opening statement. We have some understanding about the general focus, but maybe a quick update on where we were up to would be good—with apologies for our abrupt conclusion last time. As it turned out, it was very poor judgment on my part because there were no further divisions.

Ms Hawgood—Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee today. I will make a brief statement and use that to outline the rationale for our work, who we are, and to provide some insights from our engagement to date. Then, of course, we are happy to answer questions.

In April 2002, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to trial a 'whole of governments' cooperative approach in up to 10 communities or regions to underpin the commitment to reconciliation and to drive future work. The stated aim of the COAG trials is to improve the way governments interact with each other and with communities to deliver more effective responses to the needs of Indigenous Australians. The lessons learnt from these cooperative approaches will be able to be applied more broadly. The approaches should be flexible in order to reflect the needs of specific communities, build on existing work and improve the compatibility of different state, territory and Australian government approaches to achieve better outcomes.

This whole of government approach builds upon COAG's agreement that all governments would work together to improve the social and economic wellbeing of Indigenous people and communities, and their agreement to a reconciliation framework based on three priority areas for action: investing in community leadership and governance; reviewing and re-engineering programs and services to ensure they deliver practical measures, particularly to support families; and forging greater links between the business sector and Indigenous communities to help promote economic independence.

Can I just flag that, one year into developing this whole of government approach with communities, the priority areas nominated by COAG come up time and time again in each of the trial sites as first order issues. They are the issues that people raise that they feel must be addressed; otherwise other attempts at change and progress will fail. So COAG was pretty spot on in those three areas.

The Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce, which is where we are from, was formed in May to July 2002 to support Australian government ministers and their heads of departments to progress the whole of government trials. Information about Australian

government structures developed for this reason is contained in our written submission of October last year. I will not waste time going into that now but, again, I would be happy to take questions.

As I mentioned, the development of the trials is now a little over a year old. A significant chunk of work in the first year has been taken up with seeking the necessary community support for the identified trial sites. Trials have now been publicly announced in all but one jurisdiction. So Queensland in Cape York, Western Australia in east Kimberley, Northern Territory in Wadeye or Port Keats, South Australia in the AP Lands, Shepparton in Victoria, a site in Tasmania, and New South Wales in the Murdi Paaki region have been announced. The only one remaining is the Australian Capital Territory, and the ACT Indigenous community has agreed to that announcement now following meetings a couple of weeks ago.

In all jurisdictions, intergovernmental forums have been established but the work of better coordinating government services is only at an early stage. Within each trial site, forums to enable communities and governments to engage with each other are being established— sometimes from scratch but also refreshing existing mechanisms. Some of the different models include: Wadeye, which has a traditional clan based model, the Thamarrurr Council; Murdi Paaki, which is built around the ATSIC regional council and is operating more along the lines of contemporary local government; Cape York leaders have formed a regional leaders forum; Shepparton has a facilitation group bringing together the many Indigenous organisations; and in the east Kimberley a reference group has been established, which includes local leaders and government representatives. This is an important and time-consuming element of the relationship building process.

One of our key insights goes to the importance of governments and communities developing effective and productive working relationships as a foundation to developing sustainable solutions. Relationships are important—in fact we think absolutely critical—and we might flesh that out further in questions. Implicit in this is the need for governments to support activities that help to strengthen the capacity of people in the communities we are working with so that they are more able to deal with us as equal partners. Shared responsibility is how we are describing and underpinning the philosophy of working with Indigenous communities—as partners, enabling Indigenous people to take responsibility with government for making things work; not, as many people in the communities are saying to us, government doing it for them or to them.

Part of the implementation of shared responsibility includes developing and setting out agreed actions around agreed priorities. A way of capturing this in a shared responsibility agreement has been devised. These agreements can be small and local or can cover regional level concerns. Basically, they set out priorities identified by communities and agreed outcomes and benchmarks. They establish the partnership arrangements, describe each party's responsibilities and support local governance and decision making.

I mentioned earlier that some of the issues identified by COAG in its reconciliation framework—leadership; governance; tackling the critical social issues of grog, drug abuse, violence; and strengthening and rebuilding families—in tandem with economic development, particularly tapping into the experience of the corporate sector, are being raised by most communities as issues which need to be addressed before anything else. It is pretty obvious why these things need to be dealt with quickly and in a joined-up way.

It is necessary for bureaucrats to focus not only on joining up services as a priority but also on generating innovative and flexible solutions that enable communities to be in the driving seat. It is unhelpful to focus on process rather than outcomes simply because this is easier, more comfortable and familiar. As Noel Pearson commented recently 'What is the point of all joining up if what we are joining up is a top-down passive approach?' Here he is talking not only about welfare payments to individuals that create passivity but also more broadly about the way governments interact with Indigenous communities. So he is also talking about how we deliver programs.

Working these concepts up is one of the fundamental learnings we need to develop through the trials, and we are still at the beginning in terms of how to do this better. Following on from this, I note what Peter Shergold, the Secretary of PM&C said, said about doing business in a whole of government way:

We need commitment to public policy. We need a risk management approach, not a risk averse approach—because whole of government is fraught with risks. Being risk averse is about being in control. Whole of government is about relinquishing control. Aversion to risk can be a feature of the way government programs are designed and delivered. There are reasons why this situation occurs, but we need to break through this and develop bottom-up or inside-out—which I think is the new term—responses to what is most needed in the trial sites.

To do this requires not just the authority to trial something new but bureaucrats and others with a set of skills that enable them to do this and to learn. In a way, it is as much about bureaucrats developing their capacity as it is about building community capacity. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thanks very much. Could we just understand where Michelle and Geoff fit into the picture?

Ms Hawgood—The task force is made up of a number of people. It varies usually from about eight to 10 people from key agencies across the Australian Public Service. Michelle and Geoff are from DoTARS and ATSIC respectively.

CHAIR—Thank you. In terms of the whole of government approach, and particularly from the federal perspective, what other models exist that bring all the secretaries together in other government attempts at bringing a whole of government focus to an area? Is there any precedent? I guess there is. I suppose they come together in a whole range of ways.

Ms Hawgood—They do, but not related to Indigenous specific issues.

CHAIR—No.

Ms Hawgood—All of the secretaries come together in a portfolio secretaries group. I think they meet once a month or once every two months and, out of that bigger group, smaller groups operate in relation to things like IT and a number of other issues. So there were some precedents, but there had been nothing existing that had a particular focus on Indigenous affairs before this one.

CHAIR—And I suppose the states and territories, too. What linkage previously would there have been to having the states and territories included in a whole of government approach to an issue?

Ms Hawgood—Below COAG is what is called a senior officers meeting, which is the heads of premier's departments and Prime Minister and Cabinet. Again, that is broader. But obviously Indigenous issues have been coming up in COAG for some years now. Senior Aboriginal Affairs officials, Commonwealth, territory and state, also meet regularly and that underpins the ministers for Indigenous affairs.

CHAIR—This would be the first effort that we know of in terms of from an Indigenous perspective.

Ms Hawgood—In terms of linking Australian government and state and territory government people, yes. I think there were a couple of attempts early in the 1990s. The difference is that they did not have the very senior commitment from Premier, Prime Minister, minister down to heads of department and they did not involve all portfolios across the board.

CHAIR—It may or may not be fair to say that, with the trial sites, the real initial stage is yet to be fully determined because it is not applying to the whole issue. It is seeking, one presumes, to establish some ground rules on where we might go forward from. Would that be a fair comment?

Ms Hawgood—I think that is a fair comment. If we underestimated anything, it was how important the need to build relationships of trust is with the people that we are working with. We had anticipated some cynicism, obviously, and there was plenty of that. We worked through that. The commitment of our secretaries in the Commonwealth and of directors-general in some states to take on that role of sponsoring or championing a particular regional community really helped, I think, to convince people that this was a different level of commitment and a different type of commitment.

Underneath that, there has been a real need to establish relationships of trust—simple things such as following up if you say you are going to do something. What we discovered was that people had been let down in very simple ways time and time again. It has taken the first year really to build those relationships of trust. Some sites are different from others, of course. A number of sites have moved along and have actually developed strategies that are now coming into place.

Ms Patterson—In addition to the trust, we also had to build a structure or work to find a structure that would enable a productive government engagement with communities—a structure that communities were comfortable with. In some places there were structures already there; in other places, there was no kind of ready engagement mechanism to enable a dialogue and a relationship to develop beyond simple relationships.

CHAIR—The issue of the states and territories in the working of the federation being independent sovereign bodies in their own right: could you just isolate a couple of issues that have arisen there? In 100 years since Federation, this is not a new debate about what the roles

are. Is there something with a positive focus that we might learn from that relationship? Perhaps the communities themselves might be helping to provide that. In other words, it is not easy.

Ms Hawgood—It is not easy. I am just trying to think through and I should have an answer for this—

Ms Patterson—Perhaps part of the answer is the strength of the methodology that underpins the approach here, which is about working with a natural community of people and the political structures that go around that—Commonwealth, state—and however they intersect. There is an onus on those structures to find some resolution in terms of how that works with communities. So there is a bit of a natural pressure on the Commonwealth and state or territory governments to work it out, because the physical reality of a group of people who embody all of those differences is that you cannot walk away from it. There is a continual discussion there. If things are not working, you just cannot hide from the fact that this is this person's responsibility or a different government's responsibility. Those governments have to find a way to work through that, and I am sure that has probably been the case with many things in the past. If we keep the community very much in mind and at the forefront, which the methodology has, it is unmistakable that you need to keep coming back to that.

Ms Hawgood—One of the positives for some states and territories—and this has not been all—has been that in some ways they have had a much more difficult time of it than has the Commonwealth. They are much more on-the-ground service deliverers working daily with people in Indigenous communities, and in some ways some states have much more baggage, if I can put it that way, in terms of the past.

I think having the Commonwealth come on board with this has been a chance to refresh some of those relationships between state governments and communities with the help of the Commonwealth government. As I say, it has not happened everywhere but, if you are looking at the states in terms of their role, some states and territories have actually found that very helpful.

CHAIR—Looking at the resources that are allocated to this, the expectation resource and the issue of who is paying for what, even for such basic things as secretarial backup, someone who is coordinator—or whatever the roles might be: what is the general definition of what should happen there?

Ms Hawgood—Again, it is learning and testing what it should be. As well as having people here coordinating across the Australian government agencies, we have started with having someone on the ground in each region. That is working quite well in most places and in some places better than others, as you would expect with different people. We think that is probably the least that you would need.

One thing we have identified is that we have put those people there basically to manage the coordination or the joined-up process with government agencies and to be the link to communities, particularly at the regional level. We think there is a need for there to be people on the ground in communities—the old development type person, if you like, with those kinds of skills—who can stay there with single communities and work with families and others in those communities in an intensive way over a reasonably long period of time.

We have seen some of that happen in Cape York where a number of organisations in the corporate sector—the Boston Consulting Group, Westpac and the Body Shop, for example—are able to have secondees and volunteers on the ground who know how to transfer skills and who also know how to look beyond the problems that we as government people often see and we stop there. This is a place of problems; we need to find a way to resolve the problems. Some of these people have much more of a social entrepreneurial type bent than government bureaucrats normally have. They are able to see the positives and the assets that people have—things like the mothers' aspirations for their families and how you build on a mother's aspiration for her family and draw that out as a positive and an asset—whereas service deliverers, as we tend to be, have a different approach and a different job to do. We have identified a need for more of those sorts of people, who could come from government but who are probably more likely to be found in the corporate, philanthropic and non-government sectors. We have also found major corresponding interest from those sectors in being more involved in that way.

CHAIR—That really hits the mark to me in terms of the corporate sector being more inclined to be offering solutions than the government sector, so it suggests to me that there is the potential for a revolution in the way it is done. I find it quite remarkable and I just offer that. I just want to come back to one more quick question on the resource. Is that a shared dollar value from the Commonwealth and states—who pays?

Ms Hawgood—I was talking there about the Commonwealth's contribution. In most of the sites, state governments also have someone on the ground. For example, in Cape York, they are housed together in a unit; in WA, there is a combined secretariat, not co-located; in New South Wales they are co-located; and in Victoria they are quite close. In most sites there is a parallel contribution.

CHAIR—I am mulling through Peter Shergold's comments on the risk averse versus the outcome based. Does it offer the hope, therefore, that from within government some may be prepared to surrender to this outcome based model? Would the model eventually suggest that we should at least have the corporate sector in there alongside the other sector and competing, and committees make a decision? Is that what we are headed towards?

Ms Hawgood—I think there are different models for it. But, yes, there is hope that governments are prepared to take on board that more outcomes based flexible approach. Certainly, in terms of our secretaries within the Commonwealth, they are very keen to work more closely with the corporate sector. To that end, we are currently developing with corporate sector organisations what we are calling a framework for those partnerships between government, communities and the corporate and philanthropic sectors just to see if we can get that whole thing a bit more strategically balanced and work out who does what best. We think we have some idea of that, as I have mentioned earlier. The balance may be that the dollar resources continue to come from the government, but more of the on-the-ground work is done in an in-kind way by the corporate, philanthropic and non-government sectors. That is certainly not something that has been discussed as a policy, but we are exploring the better relationship there.

CHAIR—This committee is aware of the Cape York work, so we are interested and find some of it quite exciting. 'Inside out': what does that mean?

Ms Hawgood—It was just a term that I heard someone use recently and I think it came from Britain where they have been doing joined-up work for a while. They decided that neither top-down nor bottom-up properly described the amount and extent of change that was needed. It was rather turning whole processes inside out.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Ms HOARE—Dianne, you spoke about people being let down over the years with simple things. You said that some of the projects were more advanced than others. But it has been 18 months now since the first trials were introduced. Has there been any of that feeling of 'we are not getting anywhere yet'? There is the reference group in the east Kimberley, the leaders group in Cape York and the council in Murdi Paaki, but that is a structure rather than action, solutions and responses. What is happening in those communities? Has there been a feeling of despondency, of being let down, of people saying, 'The government told us this was going to be great for our community, and nothing has happened yet?' Can you give me a response to that?

Ms Hawgood—I think in most places people realised that it would take a while to work through that initial stage. But in most of the sites there are things that are happening. In Cape York, which is probably the most advanced—that is partly because we were working there off the back of Meeting Challenges, Making Choices, which the Queensland government had been working on for a little while—the leadership group had developed a number of key strategies over the last two years, which both the Queensland and Australian governments have now agreed to support. There has been some media about some of those strategies.

An institute for Cape York policy and leadership, where the board is starting to meet, will be up and running early next year. There are a number of other things such as work towards a fishing company, a multipurpose employment and training facility in Weipa, and a number of other strategies of that nature that have been developed by local Aboriginal leaders where both governments have been able to come in behind and support them and where the corporate and philanthropic sector is also involved.

In the Northern Territory in Wadeye, a really key piece of the puzzle there was that the leadership group wanted the Thamarrurr Council to be up and running and properly bedded down and wanted the support of both governments to do that. That happened some months ago, and work has progressed. That group identified priorities, which were around kids—giving all kids a chance, families and so on. A number of things have started there such as work towards a local construction company, a number of things around the women's group and child-care centres, as well as the gangs in Wadeye.

In New South Wales in Murdi Paaki, work progressed on what was an identified priority there, which was getting refreshing community working parties in each community so that there was not just a regional presence that we could work through. That has led to a different way of using CDEP across the region: recruiting support people for these community working parties, providing jobs for some local people in doing that and setting them up in full-time jobs supporting the working parties.

There is also at the moment in Murdi Paaki some work going on to identify a possible school, or perhaps two or three schools, where the community, the Australian government and the state

government might work together in a microcosm, if you like, to work through the issues. In that region they have clearly identified school retention, strengthening families and family support for the kids at school as being absolutely critical. They have now worked towards an approach where they will identify one to three schools and work through those in terms of what the community, Australian government and state government involvement will be.

In Victoria, there had been a focus, I suppose, on some employment activities as the facilitation group got up and running. There is a major employment activity going on, involving the Australian government, the local government in Shepparton, the community and the state government that will over three years result in around 100 jobs for people. The facilitation group there, now that they are up and running, have also identified strengthening families as a key issue. They are now starting to do some work around what they want to do to get that moving.

While, except in Cape York, Wadeye and Murdi Paaki, you may not be able to point to tangible, 'Yes, we can tick off this and this; we've done this,' in all of the sites, they are at the point now where they have gone through that initial process, have identified at least some priorities, have agreed on some outcomes with government and are working towards some things that are key for them. The WA COAG site in the east Kimberley is very keen to have a focus on justice and law and order. There has been quite a bit of work going on there over the last few weeks on some of those issues.

Ms HOARE—Do the trials encourage the sharing of information? A lot of these are remote communities and do not have any contact with each other or even a lot of contact with other communities in their region. Do the trials support any kind of sharing of information, sharing of what has worked in one particular area and maybe why?

Ms Hawgood—Yes, it does. Just to give one example of that, the family income management trial that was running in Cape York over the last year has been very successful in helping people to save money and to purchase things for their house, vehicles et cetera and to pay the rent regularly. We have now taken the lessons from that and are going to expand the trial to other communities in the Cape and also in the Northern Territory. That is one example already through the trial that has enabled us to have a look at what has been happening there and broaden it into other sites. There are other things like that that are starting to emerge.

Mr Richardson—In addition, we have developed a web site, which was launched last week and which will be linked to web sites in each state and territory—specifically about the trials, of course. That is a way of people understanding what is happening in other sites. That is online now.

Ms HOARE—Just to get it clear in my own mind, the Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce is the coordinating body and support body for the Secretaries Group?

Ms Hawgood—Yes, it is.

Ms HOARE—And for the coordination of the trials?

Ms Hawgood—Yes.

Ms HOARE—Monitoring of the trials?

Ms Hawgood—Yes.

Ms HOARE—Benchmarking?

Ms Hawgood—Yes. Initially, we did a lot of the on-the-ground work until what we call our lead agencies were in place. We have now pulled back from that quite a bit. Our focus really is on the lessons from the trials, the monitoring and performance in the trials.

Ms HOARE—Do you have a life span?

Ms Hawgood—Well, we thought we did. We have probably done pretty much all of the things that we were set up to do initially but, because this is about learning, things keep coming up. There have been a number of discussions about the continuing work—not so much the task force. You do not necessarily need a task force to continue this work. But certainly there is that work about the lessons learnt, the monitoring, what happens after the trials and whether we can expand into other sites beyond the trials—all of that sort of thing. There is continuing work on reviewing and re-engineering existing programs, both mainstream and Indigenous specific—major pieces of work that need to continue somewhere if the task force does not continue.

Ms HOARE—Thanks.

Mr HAASE—Thanks, Dianne, for coming along and telling us all about it. This is something that we have needed to have be effective over perhaps the best part of 200 years. I am very interested in any way you can explain that what we are trying now is different from what has been tried in the past, how it might be effective in the long term and how it is not just a re-run of the past by different people under a different banner.

I am particularly concerned about the period of time that you imagine will be required before you can really hold up some enduring—I will not call them solutions—processes that continue to achieve the aspirations you have set out with. I am concerned that it is a very long process, a process that is perhaps longer than your best visionaries could imagine.

I want to know what you are doing to make sure that your personnel involved remain motivated, because that is always the problem. Burnout is the greatest problem. As you said yourself, relationship is vitally important. If you move in with one set of personnel and you do not meet their aspirations in the appropriate term, so they turn over, you then have to start again in relationship building. They are the things that I am concerned about. I am prepared to repeat the questions if you would like me to at any stage.

Lombadina and Bathurst Island are two marvellous examples that should have been looked at in absolute detail—I wonder if they have been. That will just about answer most of my questions, if you can do justice to that.

Ms Hawgood—Okay. Why different? There have been, as I mentioned earlier, some attempts at joined-up processes at the government level before. What I think is different at the bureaucratic level this time is the commitment across the board in a large number of key

agencies of people at the top. There is a continuing and really strong commitment. People see that, because it is very visible. Secretaries have sort of put themselves on the line, I suppose, with communities in terms of being the person identified as their champion.

The other thing that I think is different about this is that we have not just gone into this as a joined-up government approach. We have recognised, because communities have told us, that it is important that government get its act together and let us work together. It will cut down confusion and be easier all round in terms of community time consuming. However, we came early to the view, again after discussions with people in communities, that, if that was all it was about—if this was just about joining up government—you could do that and you could still be a government that delivers holistically but delivers to or fixes things for and still basically does everything.

So we recognised that that had to be underpinned by something else, and that something else is what we called shared responsibility. People in all the trial sites call it different things but they mean the same thing. It is about working with them in a way that allows them over time to take responsibility for managing these things. That is the really hard part of it. Again, we are only at the beginning of that kind of process. But that I think more than anything was what convinced some of the Indigenous people in the trial sites to come on board with this, because they could see that this had some depth to it beyond just joining up the processes. That is what convinced people that this would be different, that there was a genuine desire by government—and Minister Ruddock, when he was the Commonwealth minister, said a lot about this sort of thing—about sharing responsibility, transferring responsibility and coming in behind what the community wants to do.

The need to do that is how we have come to this view about the sort of people we think are needed on the ground working with communities, because you will only get that level of sharing and taking responsibility if you are starting with the families and individuals on the ground. You will not get it if you are only working with the community councils, government to community council. That is the key thing about this approach that is different from other approaches that might have happened in the past.

Mr HAASE—I am not going to interrupt you but I need to add: are you aware of the number of people in communities in roles that are important to the community, and viewed by the community as such, who are very happy to continue the interaction process for as long as they all shall live?

Ms Hawgood—Yes, you mean people like teachers, nurses and health workers?

Mr HAASE—No, I am talking about Indigenous people within communities in responsible roles, viewed as such and enjoying the prestige as being responsible, who will spend their lifetime negotiating the solution without affecting it.

Ms Hawgood—Sorry, different issue—yes, absolutely.

Mr HAASE—The humbug is enormous, and many do it very cleverly. I would love to hear the degree of insightfulness you have in order to circumvent those sorts of problems. You are aware of my electorate, are you?

Ms Hawgood—Yes.

Mr HAASE—I have some hundreds of communities, so I see all too often this problem of the interaction with agencies. It is considered a game; it is not considered a means to an end by any means.

Ms Hawgood—Yes. Geoff might want to make some comments here. It is why we have come to this conclusion that we must get down below those people; we must get to the families and individuals. That, again, has been partly a lesson that has come out of this family income management process where real gains are being made because there are people on the ground who are working directly with the individuals, the residents in those communities, rather than through the councils where, unfortunately, a lot of those sorts of people tend to be.

There are some good councils, some progressive councils. But, as we all know, there are quite a lot of councils that have those interests at heart that are about power and stopping—the 'Aboriginal industry', I guess, which is partly government but partly Indigenous people in these positions of power. Geoff, do you want to say anything?

Mr Richardson—I do. We have spent probably the better part of a year trying to work through these sorts of relationships; hence the comment Dianne made about relationships. Historically, governments have worked through the existing power structures on the ground, as you are probably fully aware, in existing organisations. This approach is not about bypassing them; it is about trying to get to families and individuals working with organisations.

However, we must recognise that there is a great deal of tension and some conflict on the ground—in some places a great deal of conflict—between organisations with the power dynamics. We have spent a lot of time trying to work through different groups, recognising that there are not only formal structures but also informal structures that can and do take responsibility but are not maybe recognised by outsiders. They are probably recognised inside the communities as legitimate structures.

We have been trying to sort through the maze of relationships that have developed over time and we, as governments, have created some of those through our funding requirements, legal entities and stuff like that. The most difficult part of the task force work has been trying to get agreement amongst a broader group in the community of where they want to head to, recognising the roles different parties play in both formal and informal structures. I do not know whether I have explained that very well, but trying to work through the complex on the ground—

Mr HAASE—You have confirmed my belief in the problem. I am not sure that you have given me a solution. I would like to hear from you collectively, for instance, as to whether or not there is any shift to circumventing the problem by simply making a conscious decision that to always address that formal and informal internal power structure is going to be counterproductive to the extent that you need to circumvent it. From a personal perspective, that is what I am looking for, because I have seen too many years wasted in trying to accommodate the intricacy rather than to circumvent intricacy in a meaningful way. I am not saying in some temporary way but in a meaningful and permanent way circumvent the intricacies of the power structures, formal and informal, within communities.

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Mr Richardson—It has been part of our government creation. Shared responsibility agreements is the way that we are trying to deal with this, where we negotiate more broadly with the community—with all the players. One particular geographic region we currently call a community could have actually 10 or 20 communities within it. What we are trying to do is introduce this negotiating framework under the banner of shared responsibility where all parties—government, individuals, families and organisations—clarify their roles in addressing a particular issue. This negotiation that is going around in communities within the trial sites between governments and communities under the banner of shared responsibility is how we are trying to tackle this, rather than just directly with the peak organisation in the community.

Ms Hawgood—We have not, though, made a specific decision to circumvent the community councils, for example, or the organisations, and we probably cannot do that.

Mr HAASE—I accept that.

Ms Hawgood—We probably have to try to work with them. As I said, there are some that are doing good things, and you would want them onside and involved if they are going to be constructive.

Mr HAASE—Dianne, have you looked at Lombadina or Bathurst women's group?

Ms Hawgood—I have not, no, but I definitely will after this. It is not a solution but it is why we are starting to work seriously with other groups within the communities—we say the families and individuals, but also the women's group, the men's group and the youth group, if they are there—to try to find other ways of tapping into those people in communities. That is the key thing that we are doing.

You asked about a long process. Yes, we certainly recognise that. Our secretaries signed up to this initially for five years. I really believe that it will take five years for us to see some measurable changes. There will be things that happen in the meantime but, in terms of real systemic change, if you like, within communities, it will be five years at least before we start to see that happening.

Mr HAASE—I agree with you.

CHAIR—I have four quick questions and we will sum it up. With regard to your comment and Geoff's addition to Mr Haase's questions about what might be termed 'career solutionists' for a whole range of reasons below these people, no-one has yet defined how you connect. You are trying all sorts of models, you have acknowledged, in the 10 sites and a whole range of progressions, we hope. That remains a key issue about how you motivate people. Mr Haase mentioned about motivating individuals in the task force or within the Secretaries Group; but how do you motivate individuals to see value in it? I could suggest some methods but I will not do it here just yet. That is for the committee to work on as well.

There is this issue about a presumption that there is no solution or there is the status quo almost forever. With the CDEP program, which has existed for some 25 or 30 years, evidence of previous inquiries tells us that there was significant success in employment in a particular region, but not one person came out of CDEP. So there is a whole history of inertia here, of

implanted no result and no outcome. There just have to be ways and there are ways. That is why we perhaps in desperation look to the corporate sector. That is my little piece.

Let us come to the skills of the Public Service, and in your introduction you about talked about the skills of the public servant. You have touched on an answer, but let us just restate it by reading from the transcript:

Although there is all the rhetoric in government at the moment about forming partnerships, when it comes to it, everybody is still in their silos thinking about how to do things.

Another quote:

I would say that it seems from the outside, from the community sector, that most government departments want to do the capacity building and have joined up government themselves, so you end up with joined up government happening in a silo kind of environment.

In other words, it is just the same old theme, the same old stuff. You have endeavoured to identify where you see the new progress may come from. That is to be applauded and encouraged. That is clearly the attitude: that it is just another name for the same old presentation.

The skills of the Public Service in how senior bureaucracy actually sees these issues and deals with these issues is, it seems to me, at least as important as anything else in the community. The question then becomes: at some point it is our responsibility as the committee and as parliamentarians to ask the Secretaries Group what skills they see within their system that are critical—the top three. I do not expect an answer at the moment, Dianne, but do you believe the Secretaries Group has a top three urgency about where they might see their skill development from within our system of government?

Ms Hawgood—I am not sure they have identified the top three at this point.

CHAIR—No, that is a bit tongue in cheek—the top 10 or the top 45.

Ms Hawgood—Certainly they are forming views, and that would be around things such as this ability to manage relationships in your interactions with people in communities and also the need to have a sort of strategic vision in terms of policy development. I think if we have identified a gap or a deficit, if you like, it is in terms of people's ability to think holistically. It is obvious but it is not obvious.

People are able to see opportunities for joining up particular programs at particular points, I think. There are some phases to this. We come from an environment where, over the last 10 years, government portfolios have been fairly competitive, I suppose, and that has lifted performance and so on. Now we are saying, 'Well, look, that is not really the essential ingredient here. We need you to put that aside and think in a joined-up way.' So as a first step people can come to terms reasonably easily with this idea of joining up particular programs, or if an idea comes up from the ground they can see how to put contributions in to making that work. What we are missing are people who are actually thinking of the whole all the time, not of, 'Well, here are the existing programs; how do we join them up?' That is part of it. But, starting from nothing, what is it that we need and how do we get that holistic picture?

CHAIR—It is a bit scary to me that it has taken this long in this whole investment by the Commonwealth government to start realising that, but then I come from a very small community. It is a bit scary.

With regard to remote, regional and urban service delivery, can we get any definition or anything emerging about different models? Just a quick answer would be appreciated on remote, regional, urban service delivery—governance in the broader context. Is there anything there that we are noting a particular difference about? You are pretty well in remote and regional, aren't you?

Ms Hawgood—We are pretty well in remote and regional.

CHAIR—I did not know whether there was anything emerging there.

Mr Richardson—There are trials in Tasmania and the ACT. In the ACT the week before last, community leaders came together and agreed to form a coalition of organisations, which is a relatively urban construct. In Wadeye, a more traditional community, they have a traditional governance committee. It may be in an urban situation where indigenous service delivery organisations come together—they have agreed to do that here—to look at the whole question of holistic approaches to issues. I do not know whether that answers the question. There are different models.

CHAIR—I did not have anything particularly in mind; it is just that I needed to put the question on the table. My final question is to do with governance: what do we mean by governance? Everyone will have a slightly different definition in this whole issue around community capacity. We struggle to know exactly what we think—we want a better outcome but where do we go after that. I am trying to get to a governance type definition. For example, ATSIC is going through the review, which seems a critical part of it as well. You might have some comments to offer about this word 'governance', because to me a key part of community capacity, if not the key part, is what I think governance is—that is, effective outcome, effective input.

Ms Hawgood—And decision making.

CHAIR—Yes. In terms of the ATSIC review, do you have anything there that is cutting across your work, Geoff? We are expecting some recommendations from that review in the next few weeks, I would expect.

Mr Richardson—Yes, my understanding is that it will be in the next week or so. ATSIC is one of the major players in the trials. Communities recognise that they are a player given their legislative mandate. Governance in the simplest term to me in my experience is effective community leadership which is accountable—but not just administrative leadership or administrative accountability; it is governance that enables the wider community to have input into the decision making on decisions that affect their lives.

CHAIR—What about the governance from the government itself, from the Commonwealth or state?

Mr Richardson—We have the whole of government approach, having particular secretaries taking a leadership role. They represent the Australian government when they go to the site; they do not just represent their department. That has been a critical factor. There are still some issues to iron out between secretaries. For example, when the secretary that is dealing with the ACT trial, Roger Beale, goes to the table with the ACT government, he represents the whole of the Commonwealth government—all the agencies. That is something that is new. He is not just representing his portfolio. That gives us a lot of opportunity because, if he is required to make decisions, he is making them on behalf of all the agencies.

CHAIR—That is different, isn't it.

Mr Richardson—That makes a great deal of difference, yes.

Ms Hawgood—We await the outcome of the ATSIC review with interest, as does everyone. The ATSIC regional councils should be a really important part of these trials. In some areas they are at the centre; in others, they are more of a support mechanism; but everywhere they are keen to be involved and to get more involved. Depending on what comes out of the review in terms of what happens at the region, that is the key level of the ATSIC structure from our perspective.

CHAIR—That is very interesting. Obviously, Murdi Paaki has views about that as well.

Ms HOARE—Dianne, earlier you talked about shared responsibility and, Geoff, I think you spoke about shared responsibility agreements. Along with the shared responsibilities and individual responsibilities, do you talk about rights as well—rights to be free of violence, rights for all children to be able to go to school, rights to a decent environment, decent housing and quality health care? A lot of people are thinking, 'Well, this is our responsibility. Governments are putting it back to us, and we need to make the decisions,' but are they also thinking about rights?

Ms Hawgood—Yes, they are. In fact, even the shared responsibility thing was more about their right to take responsibility. That was not something that came from us; it came up to us from the people on the ground. So, yes, that is very much a part of how people speak about these things.

Ms HOARE—Thanks.

Mr HAASE—This is not really a question, Chair, and I know it ought to be, but it dawns on me as we are talking about trying to crack this situation and give some future to these communities that, whether we ought or not, we do recognise there is something lacking—there is a lack of a future for some of the children in those communities today. It all seems to be dreadfully negative in many ways.

It strikes me often that one of the eras of Aboriginal advancement or one of the eras that Aboriginal communities survived—that is about as good as I can get—was the era of the pastoral station. Some of the finest bondings I have ever seen between European and Indigenous people were between the station owner/manager and the group working for him, and it was always him. My observations and take-out from that relationship has always been that there was

a fine cross-cultural respect, because there was a very strong interaction of getting down and doing the job. The boss worked with the boys during muster.

The apparent lack of respect that exists today between members of communities and agents from government and the resultant aspirations of community members for only doing the administrative decision making et cetera, where no-one actually wants to do a job—and I am sure you have observed that—maybe it is because the agents no longer roll their sleeves up these days but simply give verbal advice and administrative process advice. They are never seen to be doing physical work. We have now a situation where no-one in communities wants to do physical work. Everyone wants to be like that government agent. If you crack that with a solution, you will have gone a long way to providing a future for communities again. That is not a question. Thank you for your indulgence, Chair.

CHAIR—Dianne, Geoff or Michelle might like to respond.

Ms Hawgood—Again, I know I keep coming back to this, but that is why we have moved now to try to get to the families and individuals. It is on the basis that, if you can actually make some changes at that level by drawing out the positives, by being on the ground with people over a number of weeks or months—or however long it takes—you might be able to help people to realise their potential and just make sure that the kids get to school every day and that they do they have to do as a parent to make that happen. But it might also be, if they are an artist, drawing out their skills and getting them set up—or some other kind of economic venture.

CHAIR—That goes back to your fundamental point earlier about the right to take and accept responsibility.

Ms Hawgood—And the hope that if those people then at that sort of level can build some self-esteem and get that kind of activity going, that will then roll over the top of some of these councils and people who are in power. It will force the issue from the bottom up; it will force changes to governance and so on. The trouble with that is that it is a long, long process. That is the very reason why we have come to the conclusion, as you have, that governments cannot continue to keep working just with the people in power. Somehow or other, we have to get to those people who can be the catalyst for change firstly within a family and then more broadly out into the community.

CHAIR—Michelle, would you like to make any final comment?

Ms Patterson—No, but I did want to quickly go back to the issue raised earlier about service delivery remote and say this: with the assistance of some consultants in the Kimberley region trial, they are looking very carefully at different models of service delivery around that region, including how you might rationalise and get better economies of scale out of smaller service delivery mechanisms that are there at the moment that offer a more sustainable and transparent kind of solution. Those kinds of hard decisions and discussions are taking place at the community level with consultants on our behalf.

CHAIR—That implies slightly smaller structures in terms of being more locally based?

Ms Patterson—At the moment they are quite locally based. They are quite remote, very small communities—sometimes 70 people in a community up to around 200—looking at how they might come together to get a better scale, that sort of thinking, to help build bureaucratic skills within communities.

CHAIR—It is only my interpretation here, but the Lombadina issue raised that—

Ms Patterson—Another thing we have found—this is a similar finding from the Harvard study of the communities over there—is that we have all the bureaucratic skills, and that bureaucratic base is harder to come by in communities. Perhaps getting a greater economy of scale, you can then have some resources to put into building that capacity that supports those sorts of things. It is actively being looked at at the moment.

CHAIR—Geoff, did you want to make any final comments?

Mr Richardson—Very briefly, I do have some comments. There is a school of thought that capacity development work or community development work is best done by NGOs and that governments should support and understand that work but governments should look at the work they do and more efficiently deliver services, join up and work together more closely. Our experience is that we just cannot spend the amount of time as bureaucrats on the ground. No department officer can.

This development work that is necessary, and it is necessary, needs to be done by appropriately skilled people. We need to have a good understanding in the bureaucracy—hence the need for training and skills development—but at the end of the day there still needs to be, in my personal view, external people with that expertise on the ground for long periods of time.

CHAIR—Good comment and thank you. Good luck to all.

Ms Hawgood—Thank you, and same to you.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Hoare**):

That this committee authorises publication of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 11.22 a.m.