



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities

MONDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2002

MANINGRIDA

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS
Monday, 25 November 2002

Members: Mr Wakelin (*Chair*), Mr Danby, Mrs Draper, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Mrs Hull, Dr Lawrence, Mr Lloyd, Mr Snowdon and Mr Tollner.

Members in attendance: Ms Hoare, Mr Lloyd 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.

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Committee met at 11.47 a.m.

BOND, Mr David, Chief Executive Officer, Maningrida Council

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DOUGLAS, Ms Felicity Jane, Human Services Coordinator, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

GEINBARABA, Mr Morris, President, Maningrida Council

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HORGAN, Mr John, Council Clerk, Maningrida Council

KOHEN, Mrs Apolline, Arts Director, Maningrida Arts and Culture

LAMERTON, Mr James, Chief Executive Officer, Malabam Health Board, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

McCALL, Mr Scott, Executive Officer, Maningrida Jobs Education and Training Aboriginal Corporation

MACHBIRRBIRR, Mr Gordon, President, Maningrida Health Board; Executive Member, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

MUNRO, Mr Ian Ross, General Manager, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

NARDIKA, Mr Norman Winter, Treasurer, Malabam Health Board

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WILLIAMS, Ms Helen, Worker, Women's Centre, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

YIBARBUK, Mr Dean, Coordinator, Indigenous Senior Ranger, Djelk Rangers

CHAIR—Good morning. We are now in the formal part of our hearing. We are here today at Maningrida to talk about community capacity and community governance and anything else which is relevant. It is a pretty broad inquiry to see basically how things are going. Scott has a very broad experience and, Peter, I am sure you would have some things you would like to say about how it is going. All I need to do is to welcome everybody and remind you that these are official proceedings of the parliament. Peter, do you want to make an opening statement about

how long you have been going and what is happening in the community and how you see it, and anything that government is doing that we should do better, and things like that?

Mr Danaja—Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation had humble beginnings in 1972 or 1973, when everybody started to go back to their homeland centres. That is how Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation was born. It grew from humble beginnings into a very big thing. At the moment we are doing a lot of good things. We have a ranger program. Many of them do a bushfire program and crocodile harvesting programs. The job of the executive members is to look after the outlets of the community—servicing their needs. We have some other programs that we are trying to put into our program. For example, we are still negotiating a bush-planting project to harvest oilseeds and sell them from our outlets. We are still negotiating some of the issues that we still have to address.

CHAIR—Thank you. Mr Machbirrbirr, would you like to explain what your organisation does and how it is going—any little hassles you are having?

Mr Machbirrbirr—Our organisation has just started. It was a long process to get an administrator in. We have a CEO now. We are slowly developing our strategic plan and talking to traditional people about what future health needs to develop, plus in the homelands.

CHAIR—You have a number of homelands, I guess?

Mr Machbirrbirr—Yes. We have a big mob of homelands. Maningrida Health Board also stands for the out-stations—the homelands—as well as the centres. The biggest health issue we are looking at is how much it is going to cost to improve health in the community as well as in the homelands. We are slowly trying to develop a relationship with Commonwealth and Territory Health and the community itself. We are talking to the traditional owners about what health services they want to see and what we need help with to make that happen.

CHAIR—Are we talking about the framework agreements and the new pooling of money—the Commonwealth money and the Territory money? Then you would have to deal with the issue of the extra cost of running health out here and all that sort of stuff. Are you working your way through all of that?

Mr Machbirrbirr—Yes.

Mr Lamerton—A major issue for us now is to pick up the Primary Health Care Access Program. I have to be up-front and say that our relationship with the Commonwealth in the Territory is not good. If you have a look at Maningrida, particularly in terms of the Primary Health Care Access Program, it has been capped at a population of 2,000. If you take the balandas out of Maningrida, you have a population of 2,000, so it is the perfect size for the Primary Health Care Access Program. The area has a zonal consciousness because of the work that Bawinanga has done over the years. People in their homelands think of themselves as part of Maningrida, so we have a pretty solid self-identity as a zone. We are a remote community, but access to Darwin is pretty good. We have two flights per day and three barges per week to Darwin, as well as road access there for between six and eight months of the year.

CHAIR—Could we just home in for a minute on the weaknesses with the relationship with the Commonwealth. What do you, as a Commonwealth health representative, see as the issues and problems there?

Mr Lamerton—The major problem is with OATSIH.

CHAIR—Is the problem with the representation or with the general policy?

Mr Lamerton—The representatives, I think. The issue is that OATSIH wants things to be streamlined and, unfortunately, Aboriginal health in a remote area is not streamlined; nor is capacity building. The idea that I have gotten from the board since I arrived is that if you believe in community capacity building then it is a matter of allowing committee members to make their own mistakes and to learn from those mistakes, not to come here with some overarching idea of what one thinks community development is and impose it on people.

CHAIR—I think you have come to the hub of the inquiry in your opening comments. That is what we are trying to understand: what gets people going and why it is not working as well as it should. I welcome Mr Nardika.

Mr Nardika—I am a community landowner on the north side of the airport.

CHAIR—How far away?

Mr Nardika—That airport over there. I am a TO for that area. I am originally from the Maningrida area.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Machbirrbirr—I want to comment on what my CEO has been talking about. The problem we are having is that the executive board members are made up of tribal language groups. Those groups are giving support where health is needed in their tribal areas. The tribal groups gather together and instruct the CEO and me, as president, to carry out our duties as well as report what needs to happen in this community. These are the guidelines and aims that the community needs to see at work. When we write to them we sometimes get rejected. Sometimes they say, 'No, do it this way, do it that way.' We are developing through our culture way and our culture way needs to be balanced with what the community needs in the culture area. We say, 'All right, you put your balanda away, we'll put ours away and this is the strategy, the plan; that's it, take it,' and they say, 'No, no, you've got to go this way, you've got to follow us.' And I say no.

CHAIR—Was there any consultation—'Maybe this, maybe that'—or did they just say, 'That's it'?

Mr Machbirrbirr—A lot of consultation was done, but then they would still say, 'Tough!' My board, my CEO and I are still trying to put that to the Commonwealth and say, 'Look, we are trying our best to develop a plan so that both cultures can be balanced.'

CHAIR—How long has it been going on, Gordon?

Mr Machbirr—It has been six months.

CHAIR—What is the expected time line? When did you want it signed?

Mr Lamerton—We have a tripartite agreement that has been in existence for about six years. It has just been resurrected over the last seven months since the board has been operating. The whole point of that tripartite agreement is to see all health and aged care services in Maningrida transferred to community control and ownership through the health board. The health board and the Territory are steaming ahead with those negotiations. There has been some dragging of feet by the Commonwealth. The strategic planning is a particularly interesting area that demonstrates the contradictions between both approaches.

CHAIR—Is it about money or is it about the way you do it?

Mr Lamerton—They way you do it.

Mr Machbirr—I think it is both. We want to do it one way, then we find out that this month they want us to do it another way. It is about both. We cannot make a program run without dollars. You have got to support us with dollars so we can make this program work. In a way, the strategic plan in place is to balance both cultures and the needs of traditional owners from each tribal group.

CHAIR—That is excellent. I will make a note of it. We cannot resolve that, but we can at least highlight it, and it is important that you explained it. I hope we can come back to that. I welcome the President of the Maningrida Council.

Mr Geinbaraba—My name is Morris.

CHAIR—Over to you, Morris.

Mr Geinbaraba—I am the president of the council and I am also the community banker and a board member of the progress association. There are other things that I am in as an executive member—all three: Bawinanga, the councils and the agency as well. I am also the Northern Land Council representative.

CHAIR—You wear many hats.

Mr Geinbaraba—Yes, many hats. That is why I have got big hair. I just dyed my hair on the weekend! It is good to have you here in my chamber. I welcome you on behalf of the council.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. We appreciate your hospitality and are pleased to be here with you today.

Mr Geinbaraba—We will try to make you comfortable while we have this meeting on whatever the issue is.

CHAIR—Thank you. You have had a lot of politicians here. You had Wilson Tuckey, the minister, here about a month ago—who opened the transaction centre. We are talking about how

it is all going, the issues to do with health, how well or not the Commonwealth is going and what it can do better. Because Peter, Apolline and Scott have been waiting patiently, I would like to ask them some questions now, unless you have anything you need to say—maybe we can come back—and ask them to think about those issues where the government can do better and what needs to improve. I have been talking too much, so Kelly and Jim will ask some questions as well. Peter kicked off the discussion with a few things, and we have done a bit on health, so I will ask Scott to talk about training. As we go on, you may have views about how we can do things a bit better.

Mr McCall—Is there anything in particular you want me to start with?

CHAIR—No, just an overview on how you think it is going. Although it is not easy, you have got wider experience in other regions and I guess that is part of the reason you are here.

Mr McCall—Essentially, this morning when I was trying to work out what you meant by capacity building—

CHAIR—We are all trying to work that out!

Mr McCall—It seems to me it is really about community empowerment, assisting the community to take responsibility for itself. The image that I have is of an inverted pyramid in the breakdown of things. How we support commercial enterprise, the community council and families are the three at the top. Under that is commercial enterprise, which in this situation are Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation and Maningrida Progress Association. It is a matter of looking at enterprise development and the businesses that they can develop and run successfully. Under the council are predominantly essential services and building and construction. Under families is a social support network that supports families.

Coming down to the next step, the commercial enterprises and the council rely on human resources—people or workers who can provide the labour to see these things come to fruition. For families to provide the labour, a big issue for them is child care. All of these sit on top of education and training. Education and training sit on top of literacy. People have to have literacy before we can start moving forward with them. All that sits on top of your infrastructure for the delivery of education and services within the community. That is probably the key area.

CHAIR—What do you estimate the literacy rate might be?

Mr McCall—It is a difficult thing to estimate. As these gentlemen would know, there are generational points at which there can be very high levels of literacy and other points at which it is not so good. We had 14 teenage students from the school who were over 16-years-old and who did their drivers course to get their learners certificate. Of the 14—and I am not saying they are not literate—only three were confident enough to tackle the exam unassisted.

Ms HOARE—Was that a written English exam?

Mr McCall—Yes. That is one way of doing it. We also offer to do it orally and we have translators for people whose English isn't good. We have a number of ways of working out whether a person has absorbed the information that we are teaching. Obviously, the main proof of evidence that the person is competent, which balanda are looking for, is exam papers. So they

are our first port of call. If that is not happening, then we will look at oral testing, video recording of the person and that sort of thing.

Ms HOARE—Thank you for that overview. When we were discussing the different training programs on offer, and you were talking about capacity building as community empowerment, I was wondering whether there were any courses for empowering women to take strong leadership roles within the community.

Mr McCall—We are about to launch an Indigenous elements training course, which is available to all the people in the town who wish to attend. Specifically, we are targeting the major committees and they have a mixture of male and female members although it is probably male dominated. In terms of training courses that we run predominantly for women, we run literacy courses specifically for women, we have a horticulture program about to start specifically for women rangers and we also run a consistent program through the women's centre in textiles—screen-printing and sewing and that sort of thing. I mentioned families before and, again, women are the dominant family carers and there is no child-care facility in Maningrida so that makes it very difficult for women to attend training or to sustain the training over a period of time. It is difficult with a lot of family commitments.

Ms HOARE—So there is no child care at all in Maningrida? When we come back to you, Morris, I might ask you about the women's centre and possible child-care facilities if that is okay, but we will continue to talk about training now.

Mr LLOYD—I have a number of general questions to ask Morris and Gordon in particular. I am interested in the relationship between Maningrida Council and the BAC. Do you work together or are there difficulties there? Are you trying to do different things or the same things in different ways or are there set roles for both the council and the BAC?

Mr Machbirrbirr—Generally, operationally it is separate. Each organisation runs its own operational areas, but we have slowly built relationships through committees. Some of the committees are in the other organisation as well and those committees link together to develop the relationship. Each organisation has their representative who is also on the council as well as Bawinanga, as well as the health board, as well as on the JET centre committee. So each committee is developing first before the management comes together. It comes from the top to the bottom.

Mr LLOYD—In my community, which is a white urban community, we have the same sort of duplication of committees all trying to do the same thing. I wondered whether there was duplication of that in your community.

Mr Machbirrbirr—When it comes down to a bigger issue, like putting up a tender or something, the committee looks at it and chucks in and then the community comes together to share the operation and the workload and labour and all that so the money stays within the circle of organisations. Each organisation developing the relationship looks at the committees because the committees are in those other organisations as well. When a big thing like a tender comes in, say a building tender, we say, 'Let's come together.' As Scott said, the training will be developing as workplace training. So the training comes into that thing. So that is the way the organisations link and bind through that relationship and the community respects it.

Mr LLOYD—Does the council or the BAC have the contracts for CDEP and training?

Mr McCall—Bawinanga has the CDEP.

Mr Machbirrbirr—Bawinanga oversees the CDEP operation, but in terms of building a relationship with the council participants I say, ‘This is my participant who works for me,’ and the other organisation says, ‘This is my participant that works for me.’ The Bawinanga itself builds in that relationship in overseeing the CDEP operation.

Mr LLOYD—So Maningrida Council does not have any CDEP contracts?

Mr Machbirrbirr—From my understanding, previously the council had its own CDEP. Because of its management in the past, lack of operations and all of that, they handed it over to Bawinanga to look after it. Apparently, council has a number of participants under the Bawinanga umbrella.

Mr LLOYD—So it is better for one organisation to run—

Mr Machbirrbirr—It is better because, looking at the payment and costing side and at other areas, Bawinanga already had experience, expertise and resources in the operation. It has been great.

Mr LLOYD—Morris, did you want to say something? You look like you wanted to make a few comments.

Mr Geinbaraba—Yes. Gordon was saying about the cooperation and communication with Bawinanga and the council. It is not the matter of who can do it best but how to communicate with one another. We have executive members as well from the councils. Bawinanga has representatives on the council. Actually, you could look at each corporation and there are executive members from each office representing their corporations to communicate how we could look after this community as well as look after the job itself, and how we could deal with these problems. There is no misunderstanding so far because of being a council. It has not been misused. There has always been an ongoing job.

Mr LLOYD—What is the council’s relationship with ATSIC?

Mr Geinbaraba—There are a few things we are looking at through ATSIC. There is housing and also the programs that we need around here. ATSIC provides that for us as well, and other activities that can keep this ongoing.

Mr LLOYD—Do you get to see your ATSIC commissioners very much? Do they visit?

Mr Geinbaraba—Yes, they usually come and visit each month and some other days that we need them for the cooperation to keep this job ongoing.

Mr LLOYD—In relation to training and CDEP plans, and maybe Apolline with the artists and Scott with the training, is there a link between the CDEP plans and other government

funding bodies to link into training? Is there any sort of structure in that way? Apolline, how can you encourage the artists? What happens in that way?

Mr McCall—We have recently completed a series of meetings between all the major organisations in Maningrida, identifying the enterprises they are developing and the training and skills they are likely to require over the next few years. We sat with the executive officers from each of the organisations and compiled a community training plan from that. The Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training funds most of our training at a state level. The Commonwealth provides support to a number of initiatives through the STEP program. Maningrida has a population in excess of 2,000. Essentially, what came out of the process of identifying the training needs is that most other communities in Australia that have a population of that size have a reasonably substantial TAFE or other training facility available to them, whereas here we are struggling with an old single-room adult education centre. We are presently delivering courses to close to 300 students and there is a massive constant rotation of churning these people through this one building. It is limiting our ability to expand our programs and meet the training requirements that the organisations have identified.

Mr LLOYD—How are students who are coming through supported? Are they working, are they on welfare, are they are on CDEP, Austudy or Abstudy?

Mr McCall—Some people who come through are on unemployment benefits. Quite a number of our students are on CDEP wages. Assistance would predominantly be provided in those two forms.

Mrs Kohen—We have some Indigenous art workers helping to run the arts centre. Some of them do attend some of the courses that Scott has put together, which is really good for us because they receive literacy and skills improvement and can take more control within the arts centre. The arts centre services more than 350 artists in the region. We are one of the only enterprises which makes non-governmental money for the artists. It has come to more than \$700,000 this year of non-governmental money.

Mr LLOYD—\$700,000?

Mrs Kohen—That is in sales coming back to the community. It is non-governmental money, so it is quite important.

Mr LLOYD—That is a very significant amount of money.

Mrs Kohen—Yes. Apparently 75 per cent of non-governmental money is coming into the community. That is why the arts centre needs to be supported.

Mr LLOYD—How much of that money goes directly to the individual artists and how much is lost in administration or goes to other areas?

Mrs Kohen—Part is coming back to run the arts centre and the rest is coming to the artists. Our policy is that we pay the artists up-front and then it is up to us to manage the money, because we have a lot of production and high-running costs and we are still not making a profit.

CHAIR—Are you able to cover costs?

Mrs Kohen—Barely.

Mr LLOYD—So you buy the works from the artists and then you market them?

Mrs Kohen—Yes. We market and sell them through exhibitions, shops, the Internet and to visitors who come here.

Mr LLOYD—Who runs the arts centre? Is it independently run?

Mrs Kohen—We are working under the umbrella of the BAC.

CHAIR—Scott, I would like to discuss the training and the structure which was on the piece of paper that I had before describing some of the efforts that are occurring. As an example, you would be aware of the Work for the Dole program and the \$800 training grants. What I am endeavouring to understand is CDEP and its operational approach compared to other programs. How does it relate and link to your program? How are the add-on costs for CDEP and the actual capacity to run it going? For example, how would Work for the Dole compare with a training voucher situation?

Mr McCall—Firstly, to clarify, the Work for the Dole program has not been particularly successful in Maningrida because people can get to see—

CHAIR—But it has been tried.

Mr McCall—It has been tried. We have had people coming out here touting the \$800 training voucher. People do not pay for training here; it is all provided by the government. So the \$800 training voucher is of absolutely no value whatsoever to people in Maningrida.

CHAIR—But if it could be transferred into some additional asset, it might have a benefit.

Mr McCall—Perhaps. With regard to the CDEP, for example, they have a team of welders that are producing the out-station toilets, some frames for buildings, security mesh and this type of thing. We work with that team for two afternoons a week, taking them through an accredited training package in metals and engineering to improve their welding skills, developing occupational, health and safety, and basically building on the skills that they already have. We do that across a broad range of Bawinanga and Maningrida council activities.

CHAIR—Earlier on you developed the leadership program but through an analysis of the needs of the community. Do you have a full-time mechanic, for example?

Mr McCall—Yes, there are two mechanical workshops in Maningrida. They have a couple of Indigenous staff working for them.

CHAIR—Are there any apprenticeships in that?

Mr McCall—We did have that but it is not something that the young people have taken up with gusto. There are a few areas where perhaps there is a perception, because of the number of balandas that are doing these jobs, that it is not necessarily a really positive job for a young

Aboriginal person to do. These have been some of our difficulties with the building program and the mechanical program.

CHAIR—So the same thing applies across what would be called the trades areas—electricians, mechanics, builders?

Mr McCall—Yes. People who want to be electricians, plumbers or things like that cannot do those courses in Maningrida. They have to go to Darwin and do block training. It is very difficult for people to be away from their family. They are exposed very strongly to balanda culture and there are the language issues. There is not a huge success rate in people leaving the community and doing TAFE education.

CHAIR—That has been my experience throughout Australia. You have experience in other communities, so what is happening here would be consistent with other communities, I would expect.

Mr McCall—That is why we are pushing for the training facility here. A training facility here would allow not only people from Maningrida and the out-stations but also people from Ramingining, Gapuwiyak and Bathurst Island. Rather than flying these people to Darwin—and this is what is happening with Batchelor—and getting the lack of success rates that they are getting, it would be better to offer Maningrida as a place where these people can come. They could provide some accommodation and deliver training in an environment that is not hostile and that is culturally appropriate, that sort of thing.

CHAIR—And there is a large enough population base.

Mr McCall—At the same time, the business enterprises that can develop from a facility like that are quite substantial in terms of the women's centre developing their commercial kitchen and providing meals. Then there is the construction side of it, the employment of Indigenous trainers and mentors, the employment of people involved in developing Indigenous training resources. It really has massive job-building potential.

CHAIR—My last question—I have concentrated on you to a significant degree—is: what is the main blockage to that sort vision, particularly from a federal perspective? And you might have two or three.

Mr McCall—Our main difficulty is that our application seems to have hit a brick wall in that ANTA is offering only \$1 million to the Northern Territory this financial year for Indigenous infrastructure. The decision on which applications will go to ANTA is being made by the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training. It appears that, because of the amount of money involved, they have prioritised in a different way. So it seems most likely that ANTA is not even going to hear about our idea, which involved many weeks of community liaison and people putting their heads together.

CHAIR—It has gone nowhere.

Mr McCall—It appears to have stopped with the office in Darwin.

CHAIR—Are there any other major blockages that come to mind? You made an interesting point earlier about a perception of trades and traineeships perhaps not being appropriate.

Mr McCall—We are focusing on training that people are responding to, and it may just be a cyclical thing.

CHAIR—A number of people have come into the room. I would like to offer you the opportunity to give your point of view about what you would like to see happen in the community. Indeed, what is ‘community’ to you? How do you define it? What is important to you and how does the Canberra government get in your road, or how can it help you better? That is what we are here to talk about. That is a big question, but just break it down to what annoys you the most or what you think Canberra does better—or what you think the government does well. I know a number of people have not had a chance to talk, so just step forward. Cyril and Kim, did you want to say anything?

Mrs Short—I wanted to mention the child-care facilities, our kitchen and the training. Training is one of those big things that Scott McCall was talking about. One of the most important things is bringing training to the community. There are a lot of women that work in the women’s centre who have children and family and, with all the responsibilities they have here, they are not going to leave Maningrida. They want training here. We want to bring the trainers to the women’s centre.

CHAIR—Were you involved with Mr McCall in terms of this development? Are you familiar with what is happening?

Mrs Short—The women’s centre works with the JET centre in applying for funding, and we do a lot of our courses through them. They are doing a fine arts certificate with their art work. We also apply for flexible response money to start people off in courses—for instance, screen-printing—so that they learn all the basic skills. Then we can get an accredited course going. The women really enjoy their cooking, so we would really like to have the kitchen expanded and use it for health and nutrition training—and open up the cafe. We have a playgroup that is funded through JET creche. It has been going for a few years. There are women there that we would like to see being trained a bit more in that area. Eventually, they would really like to see that developed into a child-care facility.

Ms HOARE—What has been the progress towards a child-care facility?

Mr Bond—The child-care facility is very difficult for us because of the rules and regulations that go along with it. We have to have a fully trained nurse and we have to have certain hygienic conditions et cetera. We have never been able to fund that in the past. We have had to start from scratch; we had virtually nothing. So whenever we have needed to go into a child-care facility situation, we were immediately up for new toilets and new buildings et cetera to meet the standards demanded by not only the federal but the state regulations as well. We have had to concentrate on playgroups and being involved with the kindergarten type set-up rather than a full-on child-care centre.

Ms Williams—As David said, with child care there is too much paperwork, licensing and all that. There are too many things. I have attended child-care conferences in Darwin. We had one workshop there with maybe 1,000 people from all over the world. The workshop was called

Playgroups in Remote Aboriginal Communities. That is why we need the mobile equipment, to take it out bush and then we want to have it back at the women's centre. We try to get more funding for our community to set up a proper toilet and all that to help our area.

Ms HOARE—Has the situation of family based day care been pursued rather than having centre based day care?

Ms Williams—No, not really, because in our community grandmothers and aunties can always be there looking after the children, so we do not need it. But to look at a better future for us, we will need more funding to set up the programs the right way. At the moment with child care, it is a licensing thing. It is really hard with too much paperwork.

Mr Bond—As Helen was saying, it also impacts on employment for women as well because it is difficult to get child care. Women who do have professional qualifications and want to come into the work force will often find it really difficult. I realise it is the same all over Australia: it is very difficult for women to maintain a full-time job without some form of child care. We do try; the women's centre often acts as a sort of de facto child-care unit but it is important for Aboriginal women's employment as well to be able to do that. We have not been able to raise the funds, up until now anyway, to put a centre in place.

Ms HOARE—Helen, while you are still here: we have spoken about employment and training and women. Who wants to talk about the children?

Mr Geinbaraba—I would like to comment about the children and the trainees. We have ways of being traditional as well but we have enough funds coming in to run what Aboriginal people want to run. There are times when there are new laws in our hands from the government, which we are concerned about. It is very hard for us to communicate and follow those laws and the rules. But there are ways in our culture that we could teach young people who are being trained in such a way that they would grow up and remember those systems and our culture as well. So far, in my experience as a chair and as a leader of this community, we have learned from the white society but we have not learned enough from our society. We get some support from ATSIC and from the Northern Land Council so that we can continue to keep that going.

We have these funds that we can use to satisfy our children's needs. I was thinking that we have been sitting on CDEP for all these years and even the top-up that we heard about from the government. There is probably some way that we can come up with an idea about those people and trainees who have been going to Batchelor all those years and who have received certificates. When children finish at college they do their exams and then come back and just run around. They are not getting enough jobs in the area. That is what I am trying to get to. Those are the difficulties that we find here.

Ms HOARE—From the brief time that we have been here and the material that we read before we came, it seems that there are lot of good enterprises happening here in Maningrida. Morris, it is a great goal to build up those enterprises, not to rely so much on CDEP, and have your children and your grandchildren trained here in Maningrida and employed here. I wish you all the best with it.

Mr Geinbaraba—There are options because there are a lot of corporations here. There are three main corporations. But there is more that we would like to do. There are ways that we

could develop and keep this going in the future. Those are the things that I am concerned about as the leader. There are a lot of problems. There is a lot of conflict between those corporations but there has been no war or real argument. We find a way and we continue to communicate with one another. As I said before, we have executive members in that corporation.

Ms HOARE—We all want to get on with our neighbours.

Mr Bond—To carry on from what Morris was saying about the job situation, economic development is really the key. As a community, we struggle with that all the time. We are trying to develop small craft jobs. In fact, in terms of outside government funding, the arts and craft centre generates something like 75 per cent of all outside income that comes into this community. That is a direct result of the labour of Aboriginal people—their knowledge and skill. We would like to continue to expand that. The skill base here with Aboriginal people is land, language and knowledge of environment, species and animals et cetera. That would seem to be a sensible way of exploiting what people have here in terms of generating employment and income. There are big stumbling blocks and one of them is that the licensing regimes of federal and territory governments act as a brake on those things for us. We have things like professional fishing licences in this area being operated by whitefellas who actually put nothing back into this community. They do not even come and buy fuel. There are barramundi professional licences and crab fishing is another one.

CHAIR—Do they have to come to your council to get approval?

Mr Bond—No, under the Torres Strait Fisheries Act they do not have to. Providing they do not put their foot on shore, there is nothing we can do. The view of landowners here is that they own all that and all the resources belong to them. It does not belong to whitefellas who come from Darwin or Broome or Cairns.

CHAIR—It is an opportunity to have an additional industry.

Mr Bond—Absolutely. But there are no barramundi licences available unless we go to the open market and buy one. At the moment they are between a quarter of a million and half a million dollars. Crab licences are the same. We cannot catch our own crabs here and even sell them to our own community because we do not hold a professional crab licence. Tre pang is another one.

CHAIR—Yes, that is very valuable.

Ms Williams—There is a tre pang mob from Tasmania who come all the way up here. They launch their boat from the island in the middle of the two headlands. They do not bother about anybody. We own that area, the sea and the seabed. They should not be coming up and touching our area. With the tre pang they do their own marketing and that money goes back to them. It does not come to us. Our people get nothing and it is very disappointing.

Mr Bond—We would not mind if we could compete but we cannot even compete because we cannot get that piece of paper from government which allows us to operate in the industry.

Mr Yibarbuk—One of the things that I find most annoying is that we are also under the Northern Land Council and the forced amendments to the Land Rights Act are going to take

away that power for Aboriginal people that are already on the land. They do not even consider the sea rights that should be amended to the Land Rights Act.

Ms HOARE—Why can't you get a fishing licence?

Mr Bond—We can. In theory if we have \$1 million and we go and bid on the open market, somebody in Darwin or Tasmania may allow us to buy one of their licences. At the moment there are no more licences available from the government—they are not issuing any new licences—so we have to actually persuade someone to sell us one.

CHAIR—That is understood.

Ms HOARE—Sorry, I did not understand.

Mr Geinbaraba—I want to comment on what David said. We waited all those years. We are looking forward to those sorts of contracts or enterprises.

CHAIR—That employment and enterprise development are the basis of strengthening and improving your community.

Mr Bond—The real nub of it is that the knowledge for those enterprises exists in this community. People know the species and they know the country, so it is not a matter of having to train people, except maybe in minor things like hygiene. Otherwise, the knowledge resides here and we are not allowed to develop the enterprise based on that knowledge because we cannot get licensing to do it. In fact, that is not true, we can get licensing through the open market system.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Danaja—The problem for us blackfellas is that we live in a system of change. What goes around always comes around. Therefore, when the barramundi come along the coast to go and breed, most of those fish get trapped up there anyway. By the time the fish get up there, there are not many left for the next year. That is the hardest part at the moment. For us, we believe in a system where we live with and adapt to seasonal change. However, for you guys, when you do something it is all dollars and cents. You see everything as dollars and cents. For us it is like a system of sharing—

CHAIR—It is about sustainability and keeping it going.

Mr Danaja—That is right.

Ms HOARE—Fishing would be the natural industry here.

Mr Bond—It is also an insult to the traditional owners in lots of other ways. One is bycatch. Barramundi fishermen come here and want only one or two species and any other species they happen to catch is discarded. They will not even bring that discard into the community and say, 'Look, we are not going to use it.'

CHAIR—I presume that it has some value, though.

Mr Bond—Yes. Then they just throw it overboard and it washes up along the shoreline, which encourages extra crocodiles into the area.

CHAIR—That is bycatch?

Mr Bond—Yes. So there is a really insulting aspect to it as well.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Horgan—The council is responsible for providing a lot of services in the community. Probably the largest single thing that we do for the community is provide housing. We try to build those houses ourselves, but it is not always possible to do that for various reasons, which are not at issue here. Unfortunately, we are still running at approximately 14 people per house, which seems to indicate that there are a hell of a lot of houses yet to be built for Maningrida to go back to a nice balanda standard of two people per bedroom. That is what they like to base all their projections on. Of course, we will never catch up, because the population is expanding very rapidly. That expansion is not just by natural increase, but Maningrida becomes a larger regional centre with the more services that are provided in the community. The Northern Territory government wants it to do this; therefore, it attracts more and more people and the housing problem is exacerbated accordingly. If we got funding to build 100 houses tomorrow morning and then we stopped the population from increasing somehow or other, we would still bring the average down to about 10 or 11 per house. One hundred houses cost millions of dollars, which they are never going to give us anyway.

Mr Lamerton—I would like to reinforce what John is saying. Regarding this briefing note that I handed to you, a lot of the diseases and a lot of the illnesses that occur in Maningrida are environmental. Rheumatic heart disease, tuberculosis, shingles and a lot of the gastrointestinal conditions that occur in children are directly attributable to overcrowding. If we could reduce the amount of overcrowding and increase sanitation, we would eliminate a huge number of the illnesses that affect our community.

Mr Horgan—While what James says is true, we do have a high profile maintenance program for all our houses. But it boils down to gross overcrowding. You cannot do much about it. It does depend on where they are geographically but certain types of houses really only have a lifespan of 10 years. They are supposed to last for 15 years. As I explained to you before, we have just gone over to block construction, which at least has the ability to go beyond 15 years. They are pretty solid, they are easy to maintain and they do not rust out or anything like that. We have a maritime environment here, so it is a problem.

CHAIR—The comparative costs are not too great?

Mr Horgan—That is right. We are finding that now, because we are able to source our own gravel for the pads and sand washing and gravel washing for the production of the concrete.

CHAIR—You are keeping the cost of freight down?

Mr Horgan—Yes. By the way, I found out how much it was. I will tell you later.

CHAIR—Good. John is referring to the fact that we were talking about the rate for freight per tonne. Coming from an electorate which joins the Northern Territory, I am acutely aware of the issue of freight and how it impacts on your costs. It is something that the central government does not understand—or it understands and it gets terrified by the cost factor. It appears that these are issues which are important to your structure. It is understood that building something at Maningrida is different from putting it in Sydney or somewhere else.

Mr Horgan—Because we are able to basically provide everything ourselves locally, we have managed to bring the cost of the block houses down to a level comparable with the steel frame ones. In the long term that is better value because they last a lot longer and they require less maintenance. So that is good. All we need is a hell of a lot more.

CHAIR—What is the structure of your work force and what is the local input into it?

Mr Horgan—It is mixed. There are balanda tradesmen. Not all of them, but most of them, are subcontracted by council.

CHAIR—Do you bring people in from Darwin?

Mr Horgan—Yes, on a semi-permanent basis. We provide the housing for them—which is admittedly at a fairly basic level—because they do not want to live in camps. The advantage of that is that, because they are subcontractors, it is like turning a switch of a machine on. They start at 7 o'clock in the morning and they go until 7 o'clock at night if necessary. And they do it six days a week. There is a tremendous output because you can get things done very quickly. In the case of the particular housing program we are doing at the moment with IHANT we have six block houses to construct. We are trying to get at least the walls up and the roofs on before the wet starts. Once you get the roof on you can do all the interior work, no problem at all.

CHAIR—Are you going to make it?

Mr Horgan—The way we are going at the moment, I think so—especially as they are all predicting a late wet this year.

CHAIR—There is a little bit of luck needed?

Mr Horgan—Yes. Everyone else is praying for rain and we are saying, 'No rain thanks; not until January.'

CHAIR—There are other issues that you might like to come to but we will need to start winding up in a little while.

Ms HOARE—I was interested to read that about a third of the population of Maningrida live on out-stations. We have been talking about delivery of health services, the delivery of training, the women's centre and the women's courses. I am interested to hear how that one-third of Maningrida's population accesses those services.

Mrs Short—We go to them. The women's centre do bush trips, so we take the playgroup, all the equipment, the women and all our artwork out bush. We camp through the week, mostly in

the dry season, and take all these things out bush and work through the week on the out-stations with the women.

Ms Douglas—We are currently developing a CACP—an aged care service. The community at the moment is developing aged and disability services for Maningrida and the out-stations. That process has been going on for probably about three years and it has been slow going. It is important that it is slow. From my experience, I can say that time is needed. I have outlined a lot of the issues in the briefing paper, and I will talk peripherally about them now. Basically, we have funding for 10 community aged care packages and those clients are all old people who choose to stay on their out-stations. There are a couple of them who need to spend a lot of time in Maningrida, because they need access to the clinic, as they are not well.

The service has been operational for about three months and the greatest focus is on making it relevant for the old people. It is quite different from the service you would find in an urban situation. We are very focused on bush food for the old people. I had to laugh before when you were talking about the fishing licences. Those licences would enable us to give the HACC and the CACP clients in this community the kind of food that they want. They cannot stand spaghetti bolognaise and whatever. A core focus of all our development in this area is about tucker. It is central to so many things. I am sure that has been mentioned before. We will continue to struggle to incorporate that as part of the menu in our aged care service. The CACPs are mainly about transport, enabling old people to get to and from town if they need to come in for whatever reason or they need to go out.

CHAIR—You might remind us of some of the distances that are involved.

Mr Bond—The furthest community would be a distance of about 150 kilometres.

Ms Douglas—The ride is quite rough and mostly closed during the wet season, which is when we look at air travel to get things there. The actual service that the CACP clients are receiving is around transport. They are gradually getting to know that this is their service and they own it. Part of the development of a CACP service is about sitting down with the old people and their families and coming up with a care plan. We are currently in that process at the moment. Another really strong focus is about team building. For us, that is ultimately going to be one of the core things that makes this service a success in that we have got the right kind of people working in the job. We link very closely with the JET training centre to look at different training options. This is all in my paper, so I will not go into too much detail.

It has been a really exciting three months because people have approached us to work with us and there is a really nice momentum around the whole issue of aged care—looking after the elders and supporting family carers to do that, and finding appropriate ways to deliver a service that is relevant to their daily lives. There are types of services that the Red Cross do in town that are not needed here, so we are looking at spending that money in other ways. With the CACP it is quite flexible and that is the beauty of that funding; with the HACC service it is obviously quite different. We have a small amount of HACC funding as well which we are developing in conjunction with some flexible aged care funding that was allocated to this community a couple of years ago. That ties in also with the day respite centre that is going to be built out there just next to the barge landing.

CHAIR—Could you draw out for me the HACC specific problem—why is it too rigid?

Ms Douglas—I will give you an example. We conducted a camp-out for the old people and their families at a coastal out-station not far from Maningrida. We stayed out there for seven days and it was great in getting people out for fresh air and the breeze. Some people just do not get to leave Maningrida and some of the old people do not even leave their house. There were some really lovely outcomes for the families and the old people that were there. We worked with the women's centre and just about every organisation in town was involved. The women's centre team were there cooking, we had a camp kitchen set up and the rangers went hunting. It all came together really well and we actually produced the Meals on Wheels, for the people that were in town, from the camp kitchen that week and delivered it back into town. I find it quite obscure that, in the data reporting under HACC, the meals side of that needs to be recorded as zero for that week. It was the most magnificent outcome but we can only report that anecdotally. At the end of the day, the data does not stand up in terms of the number of meals provided to old people that week. That is an example of what I am talking about.

Mr Bond—Following on from what Felicity said, obviously the road network that we try to maintain is critical to the delivery of these sorts of services. We have yet to convince any government of any colour that that is the case. Your electorate would obviously be similar.

CHAIR—You get a bit more rain; it would probably do more damage to you.

Mr Bond—That is right. The Territory government insists that there is not enough money and the federal government says that it is a state responsibility, and the only money we can get from the federal government to fix and build roads here is flood damage money. I understand that you will have heard this road story everywhere, but for the out-station and other residents it is crucial. In the wet season there are lots of places we cannot get to by road, so we go by air or sea. But for those bush people to access this community and the resources of this community, such as the clinic, those roads are essential. The most productive way for those people to access this area is with their own transport. If they can maintain their own vehicles, they are not reliant on vehicles going out from here. In any suburb anywhere in Australia, you jump in your motor car and you go and access the local supermarket. Here, of course, the local supermarket might be 150 kilometres away, which might take you three hours to get there, and then you might damage your vehicle on the way. The only vehicles that really stand up here are four-wheel drives. They are very expensive to maintain and operate and Aboriginal people in the bush are on a very low fixed income. So, whichever way you look at it, the road network is very important to us and we cannot maintain it with the current level of funding from either federal or state governments.

Mr Lamerton—Aside from some disparities in the incidence of anaemia, people on the out-stations are demonstrably healthier than people living in town. It is in the best interests of the community to encourage people to live on the out-stations. We made an application, some five months ago, to the Commonwealth government for the replacement of the out-stations ambulance, which enables clinic staff to do that primary health community work. We were told in August, 'Yes, you will get an ambulance.' It has still not been sighted. The out-station ambulance that is operating now is finished; it cannot continue in its service life. So we have people healthier on the out-stations and we have roads that are now open but, because of intransigence by local Commonwealth government agencies, we cannot replace the ambulance to allow access to the out-stations.

CHAIR—Even though they have indicated that there should not be a problem?

Mr Lamerton—I think that it is a matter of cost shifting. The Commonwealth government tries to shift it to the Territory government and the Territory tries to back-shift it to the Commonwealth. It is the people on the out-stations who are paying the price.

Mr Bond—Has anyone mentioned communications generally? Bowen under represents the people who are living in the bush and communications generally are really important—telephones, roads et cetera.

Mr Horgan—I reinforce what David has said. With respect to mobile phone networks—Telstra produced a very nice map—I asked the manager of Telstra in the Northern Territory, Danny Honan, last week if there were any plans for a mobile telephone service in Maningrida. He emailed to say that, as far as he knows, there is no government department talking about putting a network into Maningrida in the foreseeable future. However, he did let slip that Oenpelli is due to come online in one year's time in December 2003 and Ramingining is due to come online in December 2004. Both of those communities put together are not as big as Maningrida. I asked him, and it is not his job tell me that because he does not know himself, where the logic is in having quite small—Oenpelli is not that small, but Ramingining is relatively small—communities putting in very expensive mobile telephone systems when the places that really need it badly, as David was saying, are places like Maningrida.

CHAIR—Has anyone spoken to the Telstra CountryWide manager?

Mr Horgan—Yes, that is who I was talking to, and he is trying to flog us—

CHAIR—Is he based in Darwin?

Mr Horgan—Yes; he knows all about Maningrida, don't worry—

CHAIR—It still has not changed the decision?

Mr Horgan—I only asked him because he was the manager of CountryWide. It may not be up to Telstra; they might be putting out bids for a tender. He said that Telstra won the tender to put them into Oenpelli and Ramingining but my question is: why don't they put out a tender to supply a service to Maningrida?

CHAIR—This is a very good point because a lot of that may be initiated through Networking the Nation and accessing that may have depended on who was putting in the submissions to Networking the Nation from those other communities. The obvious question is: has Maningrida endeavoured to access Networking the Nation? I have to tell you that the fund is drawing to a close, as you would you probably well know. That is another aspect of it; nevertheless, it does highlight that issue of population base. You would think that Maningrida should be in there somewhere if those other places are.

Mr Horgan—It would be logical and of course it would make life easier for most people in this community and on the out-stations. They have got some big towers out there on the hill.

Ms Williams—We have been talking about aged care. In Maningrida we had this housekeeping program over at the JET centre to train people how to look after their house, but I do not know what is happening now, and home help is important. We need more training. We

want to see more women being trained because, if we have our respite centre set up, they have to be able to look after the old people. Otherwise, as James said, out-station people come and destroy our community every wet season. It does not mean that everybody is healthy but everybody needs to help each other out.

Mr Horgan—That is true—the backlash does explode during the wet season.

Mr Hereen—We can get 600 or 700 people coming in during the wet season and then that creates extra pressure.

Ms Williams—We all have to be open to one another.

Mr Hereen—It creates more disturbances and fights.

CHAIR—I need to bring up a difficult issue. I need your help because it is cultural, it is to do with community capacity et cetera and it is to do with the issue that Maningrida received publicity on in recent months about so-called child brides or whatever. I do not blame you if you do not want to comment because it is a difficult issue. I have to be careful; I am not even sub judice—and obviously there are still some issues between the courts, and your own Attorney-General, Peter Toyne is looking at it as well. I am asking about this in the sense of the community and if you say, ‘Leave it, we do not want to talk about it,’ then I respect that. But I am interested in how the community feels. Morris, are you able to speak—or someone else—to guide me on cultural challenges like this which the nation and your own Territory government have a view about? I will respect it if people say, ‘No, we do not want to deal with it here; it is difficult enough trying to deal with it.’ If somebody wants to comment, then I would appreciate a comment on the general points.

Mr Geinbaraba—I remember years ago that council came up with this idea about forming the council in a traditional way. Elders could have places as board members and they could stand and have the power to look after the whole community and the whole corporation—not by taking over the jobs which the community would do but by giving them advice on how we could communicate with the white society as well as Aboriginal society. We came up with this and we were looking at some way that we could form the traditional elders council. We were thinking about how we could set up the program for them to go ahead with those activities for young and old. We were thinking about where we could get the funds from, how we could set that body up and which office we could use—whether it is Bawinanga or the council. The only problem that we had was the budget. There were many difficult things here that we needed to sort out, so we came up with that idea.

CHAIR—Do you think that would help to solve the issue?

Mr Geinbaraba—I believe it would help in a white men’s society and an Aboriginal society. It is about culture, you know. We could work as a team in such a way that we could learn. It is a future for our children as well and for our community.

CHAIR—It is very important for the children, isn’t it?

Mr Geinbaraba—Yes.

Mr Munro—The body that Morris is talking about is representative of a larger jurisdiction than would normally apply in cases of customary law. It is often more of a family affair. The North American indigenous people have come up with a very neat addition to the legal system there which prescribes a number of crimes that cannot be dealt with by customary law—the principal crimes being things like murder and rape. They must be dealt with under the mainstream legal system. I would suggest that as a starting point that would be a very good way of dealing with issues of customary law in this country.

CHAIR—Are we talking about the body that negotiates this and defines that which is customary and that which is left to white?

Mr Munro—Yes. And there are other agencies like the Northern Land Council, which has a legal department that can be a great resource in making a contribution to that process.

CHAIR—Yes. I am really grateful for the response by Morris and Ian because it is a difficult issue for us. People are concerned about it.

Mr Yibarbuk—I think the most disappointing thing about this whole business has been that the media has misrepresented one side of it. When they said that the family and ATSIC were constantly in agreement with that particular customary law matter, that was presenting only one side of the story and not the other. In some respects I suppose the mainstream balanda law has to be taken into account, but in other respects the culture will still stand strong. I grew up down south, in Victoria, and the Aboriginal people and culture down there are a little less strong than they are up here. Up here they still uphold customary law strongly. I find it hard to make a personal choice in this particular thing. Basically, I am just a little bit disappointed with the media misrepresentation.

CHAIR—I appreciate that, Dean. That is very important. We all know so well the imbalance that can grow from the media, for whatever reason.

Mr Geinbaraba—We were looking at forming a council in this community as well as the out-stations. Understand that in each out-station there could be council representatives of Maningrida to take advice from the older community and get some more ideas of how we could look after this community by law and have it recognised that we are in the government body. So we are just looking at that as well.

There is another comment that I want to make. We have many government agencies in this community. I am just trying to get to the point that sometimes we have problems with government issues like meetings. When there is a meeting, the agency has to attend that meeting and we do not have enough funds in the corporation to support our agency from here. That is one of the things. If there could be some way that the government could come and deal with that, together we could go on from there, share our problems and come back to give advice to our communities.

Mr Horgan—With the exception of ATSIC—which the council really does not have much to do with at all—from the community council's point of view there are so many different government agencies, both Territory and Commonwealth, all supplying funding in some form or other and all wanting totally different acquittal processes and having totally different

expectations. I think what Morris is trying to say is that it would be really nice if we just had one government agency that did the whole bloody lot—but that is a bit of a dream, I think.

CHAIR—No. This is it, I think. This is what this inquiry is about, I think. It is exactly that. It is about your community telling us what some of the weaknesses are—and some of them are all too apparent. But this is about how you see it and how do we do it better. Equally, from the other way around, as Scott was saying, do we have the pyramid this way or the pyramid that way? So it is very much about the government getting its act together in a way that delivers services without all these silos sitting there and making great demands of one person.

Mr Yibarbuk—One of the biggest problems with the distribution of funding from funding organisations is that, for us on the ground in the communities, most of us will have other committees and other organisations and will have to put our loyalties to one side. Which area do we belong to? It creates a lot of community conflict and it can be quite difficult for the community to progress at any stage. We have MPA but that is a self-enterprise—it generates as much of its own money as it can. But when you talk about BAC and the council and now you have got the health boards, they are pretty big and they are going to be pretty powerful organisations. When you start distributing funding in one area and not another, it creates a bit of envy and a bit jealousy, which makes it difficult to be able to walk past people—particularly when the communities are only small—or run into people at the shop or the petrol station. You do not want to have that sort of conflict. There is one last thing. While we are talking about culture, we forgot to introduce this old man here. He is a traditional landowner of his particular country. I would just like to introduce Mr Willie Neimugini.

CHAIR—Hello, Willie. Would you like to say something, Willie?

Mr Neimugini—No, thank you.

CHAIR—I think we have met before; thank you for coming. I would like to thank everybody. The committee accepts the following documents as evidence to the committee's inquiry into capacity building in Indigenous communities: the document entitled 'Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation human service projects', presented by Felicity; the annual report from Peter Danaja; the document from the Maningrida Council, presented by Morris Geinbaraba; the document from the Maningrida Health Board Aboriginal Centre from James Lamerton; and from Scott, the Maningrida JET Centre submission, which is very comprehensive and is appreciated.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Lloyd**):

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

Committee adjourned at 1.30 p.m.