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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

Reference: Review of state-specific migration mechanisms

FRIDAY, 21 JULY 2000

TOWNSVILLE

BY AUTHORITY OF THE PARLIAMENT

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

Friday, 21 July 2000

Members: Mrs Gallus (*Chair*), Senator McKiernan (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Bartlett, Eggleston and Tierney and Mr Adams, Mr Baird, Mrs Irwin, Mrs May and Mr Ripoll

Senators and members in attendance: Senator McKiernan, Mr Baird, Mrs Gallus and Mrs Irwin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To review and report on the suite of State-specific Migration Mechanisms and the extent to which these meet the needs of State and Territory governments for skilled and business migrants with particular reference to:

- The adequacy of consultations with States/Territories on the mechanisms that have been developed;
- The level to which State and Territory Governments have utilised these mechanisms;
- Steps that might be taken to increase take-up; and
- Other mechanisms that might be developed.

WITNESSES

BINGHAM, Ms Jean, Community Literacy and Numeracy Tutor Volunteer, Mackay Regional Council for Social Development Limited 229

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Committee met at 9.04 a.m.

CHAIR—I now open this public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's review of state specific migration mechanisms. These mechanisms relate to the issue of bringing overseas migrants to regional Australia, so it is appropriate that the committee is holding a public hearing in the regional centre here in Townsville. This review was referred to the committee in June 1999 by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. The purpose of the review is to examine and report on the range of state specific migration mechanisms and the extent to which these meet the needs of state and territory governments for skilled and business migrants. At the conclusion of the review, the committee will table its findings, conclusions and recommendations in the parliament in a report which will be publicly available.

The committee has received 51 submissions from state and territory governments, migration agents and people with interest in these issues. The committee normally authorises submissions for publication and they are placed on the committee's web site. If you would like further details about the review, please feel free to ask any of the committee staff here at the hearing.

[9.05 a.m.]

KUCHLER, Dr Deborah Alice, Member, Business Advisory Panel, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

CHAIR—Welcome, Dr Kuchler. Although the committee does not require witnesses to give evidence under oath, you should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of parliament. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. You have given us a very good, full submission, Dr Kuchler. Would you like to make any corrections or amendments to that?

Dr Kuchler—No.

CHAIR—The committee prefers to take evidence in public, but if you wish to give confidential evidence to the committee, you may request that hearings be held in camera and the committee will consider your request. Would you like to make an opening statement before we ask some questions?

Dr Kuchler—First of all, welcome to Townsville, Madam Chair, senators and other committee members. I am interested in giving a submission to the group because I work in an area which involves technology based skills and professional skills. I also work in an area where I am entrepreneurial in getting regional projects established across the regions within Queensland. Those projects would be induced faster, or enabled significantly, by the presence of skilled or business migrants. Business migrants, particularly those who work in technical areas, would be a significant driver to developing those projects.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. You have made a number of points in your submission. The one I would like to start with is that you feel there is a lack of promotion of the program in the regional areas. In fact, I think you actually go on much more than that and say that the trouble is that state governments tend to focus on the state capitals and do not give enough consideration to the regions. Can you expand on that at all? Do you have any examples, or is this just a general observation?

Dr Kuchler—One of the biggest problems that we have in the regions that I generally observe is trying to get technical people here—as scientists, for example—into our major institutions, like CSIRO, the Australian Institute of Marine Science and James Cook University. One of the problems is that they may be able to identify somebody who has the qualifications, but the perception that that person has of the regions is very poor. I am suggesting that the promotion of migrants coming to regional Queensland, at least, needs to be coupled with the promotion of the regions as a destination.

It may not be traditionally the responsibility of DIMA to promote the regions as a destination, but I am suggesting that that needs to be an additional responsibility of the program; otherwise the perception of the regions will stop potential migrants from coming here. For example, they believe that they are coming to the bush. They think, ‘Gosh, if I go to the bush, I will be eaten

by snakes, and in the bush there are terrible fires that burn your house down,' so they think it is a very unsafe environment to migrate to. Our institutions suffer because they cannot get quality migrants to come here to work in our knowledge based areas and our technical sector.

I do not think it is a problem we have only overseas; it is a problem we have in Australia as well. Just trying to get someone to come from Melbourne to 'the bush', which is what Townsville is perceived to be, or Rockhampton, is also a major problem. It is not something that relates only to overseas migrants. You can go to the CSIRO here, for example, or to the university, and when they are negotiating with an overseas professional to come here they can attract them by their skills alone, but the moment people find out where they are coming to, it becomes a major stumbling block.

CHAIR—Is it the responsibility of DIMA to promote the regions, or is it the responsibility of the regions or of the state governments?

Dr Kuchler—I would argue that it is not the responsibility of DIMA, but I would argue it is the responsibility of DIMA to try and couple with other agencies to come up with a total solution. The problem we have is that the DIMA product cannot be implemented because there is not a total solution in place to allow that product to be absorbed into the community. In some ways it is their responsibility, because it is a bit like a commercial company designing a product but then not looking at the route to market or trying to solve that route to market. The problem is in the route to market pipeline, and I believe it is partially DIMA's responsibility to try to build alliances with other departments with their products. As you are suggesting, the Department of State Development may have a product, or the local community may have a product, which promotes the regions, but that needs to be coupled with the DIMA product in order to get the route to market correct.

CHAIR—Do you see any opportunity for DIMA to work more closely with the certifying bodies to do that?

Dr Kuchler—Yes, it may be the role of the certifying bodies, with the exception that it depends on who the certifying body is. They are not always the local promotion body. If you take Townsville, the local promotion body is very tourist focused. If you just took a video on Townsville you wouldn't think we had any scientific institutions at all, and yet we have perhaps the highest occurrence of scientists per head of population in the country. We have seven knowledge based institutions in a population of 120,000, which is extremely high. Because of that, we are the second highest public service town outside Canberra, but nobody in Australia or outside Australia would know that. If you got a video on Townsville, it would be all reef and rainforest: 'Come walk on our beaches and lie in the sun. Don't come and enjoy our science or our technical resources.' This is the problem. If you coupled with the local regional development organisation, these people would get the impression that, from a knowledge point of view, it is quite a desert.

CHAIR—From what you are saying, it almost sounds like there is a need for the regions to have a sort of migration body that looks at importing people, maybe from around Australia as well as overseas—a sort of special local body whose job it is to move this along.

Dr Kuchler—The problem is that most of the migration into Queensland, and I suspect into the other cities as well, is done through Brisbane. There is quite a bit of migration that goes in through Brisbane, but we do not see it up here. That is mostly because the people in Brisbane have the same perception of ‘the bush’ as our migrants have. If you ask someone in Brisbane what they think of the bush or the regions, they think it is great. They come up here in the winter and think it is terrific. Then you ask them if they would move to the bush. You ask, ‘As a professional, would you move to Rockhampton or would you move to Townsville?’ And they say, ‘Oh, no, no. That is a completely different matter. I wouldn’t live there.’

CHAIR—Before I pass the questioning over to the deputy chair, I just want to note that Brisbane is not a designated region, so it cannot get the special treatment that the regions can.

Dr Kuchler—No.

CHAIR—Does that mean that the state governments are not even bothering to focus on a lot of the aspects of this program?

Dr Kuchler—Yes. If you look at the performance of the Regional Skills Migration Scheme, it is very poor compared to the quality of the product. It is an extremely good product, and it is more favourable than trying to migrate into a capital city. It is much easier to get into Australia through a regional migration product, but it is not performing as a product.

One of the reasons I believe it is not performing as a product is because of the image of the regions. I do not know if it is a case of DIMA simply doing a video that sits in their overseas offices which outlines that in our regional areas we do have major institutions. For example, in Rockhampton there is a university that actually has seven campuses. In Townsville we have a large knowledge base, asset base. Our asset base in terms of knowledge resources is very great. But that information is simply not getting out to Australians and it is not getting out overseas.

Senator McKIERNAN—Thank you very much for your attendance, Dr Kuchler. Yesterday at the hearings in Brisbane we had some officers from the state offices of the department with us at the table. I had intended to ask them some questions about your submission but at that time they had not read your submission. They were given a copy and will come back and respond to us at a later time. We might have to come back to you again after hearing from them. I thought yours was a most interesting submission. Of the five particular categories to come within the designation of state specific migration mechanisms, which one are you most familiar with?

Dr Kuchler—Probably the RSMS.

Senator McKIERNAN—How many times would you have had to be involved in using RSMS?

Dr Kuchler—I personally have not used it myself but my client base involves CSIRO, and they will say to me that the biggest problem is trying to convince people that they are not coming to the bush. It is the same with James Cook University. It is the same with the Australian Institute of Marine Science. I talk to people and say that I am on the migration board. I ask them what is their biggest problem. They say, ‘Getting people here; getting people to come to Townsville to live.’ That is both an Australian one and an international one. When I talk to

the Brisbane based Department of State Development, it is clear from the way they speak to you that they think that really in the regions there is nothing there for people to go to; that is their perception of the region. When you speak to them they do not have this passion of, 'Okay; let's try and get people into the regions—it will boost the regions; it will help projects.' You do not get that passion coming from them and you can see that they do not have a clear understanding of how to get them into the regions.

Senator McKIERNAN—You perceive the problem as being regional input into the competition to attract migrants to the regions rather than—and I ask this as an alternative—the filling of skilled vacancies within a regional area?

Dr Kuchler—I would say you need both, plus the third one which is the pipeline solution which I am suggesting. I have not seen the figures for a while, but the number of skilled and business migrants—mostly business based migrants as well that we are getting to regions—is very poor.

Senator McKIERNAN—Because of a lack of promotion of the schemes?

Dr Kuchler—One of the things I have said here, if you are concentrating on trying to get a migrant from, say, Cape Town, to come to Queensland, is that you have very little chance of them coming to any area outside, say, the Brisbane area, and that is fair and reasonable because they are coming from a capital city and they want to live in a capital city environment. Even someone coming from, say, Hong Kong would go to Sydney and say, 'Where is the city?' It is the bush for them because of the relative size of the economy and how they are used to doing business. They do massive deals with lots of people, so you cannot expect people from large metropolitan populations to come and live in a small country town. I think that is unreasonable and I think you are trying to push something up a hill. But I think you can take someone from a regional area in, say, South Africa—someone who lives maybe 400 kilometres outside Cape Town—who may want to come to Australia and who may be a very successful business person and bring them into regional Queensland because they are used to the regional economy and the way regional economies work, so they would be a better fit in terms of trying to get them to settle down.

Senator McKIERNAN—We heard some interesting evidence yesterday about Toowoomba and how they are promoting themselves and attracting migrants to that region to settle on a permanent basis and invest as well. That is important. Your criticism about Townsville was that what has been promoted is all related to tourism. Would it be feasible from an education or information technology point of view for the Townsville region to seek to market itself as a destination?

Dr Kuchler—This is where I say your product has a problem. The pipeline that gets it into the marketplace is not in place. Toowoomba has been known for about the last five years to be highly aggressive in turning the city round to market its knowledge based assets. It is unique as a city in that way. Cairns is starting to get that way a bit. They are starting to try and be an IT hub. We have only just had the Gold Coast calling itself innovation city. You are starting to get that rise of that type of culture in the local cities trying to market themselves in that way. In the meantime, your product is languishing and not getting any performance, which reflects on the minister. It is whether you want to speed that process up. If you go to Rockhampton, do you see

it as a place of knowledge, with a lot of knowledge assets or is that the case with Mackay or Bundaberg?

Senator McKIERNAN—They are all in the bush, I am afraid. You comment about Cairns.

Dr Kuchler—You are lucky in Western Australia. There is only Perth and nothing else.

CHAIR—Well said.

Senator McKIERNAN—You should not listen to the propaganda. Your comment about Cairns is interesting. Unfortunately, we are not able to hear from anybody from Cairns. Hasn't Cairns got a reputation as being the city with the largest per capita foreign investment in this?

Dr Kuchler—Probably yes. But that is mostly tourism.

Senator McKIERNAN—I think it was exclusively tourism. They were thinking about marketing the city in English as well. I had probably better leave it.

Dr Kuchler—Now that the bottom has fallen out of the tourism market for them, they have realised that they have had to diversify their economy, and in that process they have said, 'Let's go IT.' The other cities have not had such a dramatic downturn in the economy to say what other assets they could market.

Mrs IRWIN—Getting back to the question of promotion, with the number of people that we have spoken to, that is a very big problem. I noted that you have put in your submission that you would be—and I quote:

... interested in developing a mechanism for targeting such people using migration agents in Australia who also have migration agent offices overseas (eg. PricewaterhouseCoopers, KPMG etc) ...

That is because they have offices overseas. Have you spoken to these people?

Dr Kuchler—I have spoken to KPMG in Brisbane and Pricewaterhouse in Sydney. They are the two main ones. I am in the business of building technology parks in regional Queensland. In building those we are looking for investors to assist us to get those projects up. It is quite a mighty ask to do that. We are looking for migrants who may want to come to live in regional Australia and have successful technology based businesses overseas whereby they can either set up a new business here and have that as an overseas link or want to invest in a long-term project. These projects take 20 years to get them up right from the beginning. You start from the beginning and then you grow very gradually. You are looking also at someone who may want to take the project over. But it has to be somebody who comes from a knowledge or technology based area.

I was working with them. I am actively looking for these types of migrants. I went to them and asked if they could help by working with me and if they had any interest from people in regional areas overseas—it would have to be an English speaking country, maybe South Africa or Indonesia or places like that—who want to come and invest in a major long-term project and also be a champion for it. But we would need them to come from a regional area to settle in a

regional area. There would be little point bringing them out of Hong Kong and into Townsville, because within six months they would be gone. It just would not be exciting enough for them. The economy would not be exciting enough. In building a technology park you really need to have strong international links. We almost need to import business because, locally, we do not have sufficient scale in our business base. That is why the migrant is one critical driver to induce market activity and to get scale into the project. There are a number of other drivers but that is the critical one.

Mrs IRWIN—So you are virtually saying that promotion is the key to all of this.

Dr Kuchler—Yes, but it must be targeted promotion. There is little point in going to Cape Town and promoting a technology park project in Townsville. The chance of getting a migrant who is prepared to come and settle here and be happy would be smaller than the chance of getting someone from a regional area overseas who would come to a regional area, settle here and be happy. You do not want someone coming to Townsville, staying for two years on a 20-year project and then leaving. They have to settle in and be happy to stay here and commit for quite a long time. That fit must be right.

Mrs IRWIN—In your submission you were talking about wealthy business migrants and that they are the sorts of migrants you want to target. Do you not feel that if they were that wealthy, if they have that type of money to bring into Australia, they would want to go to, say, a major city and set up a business? But, again, that goes back to the promotion side, doesn't it?

Dr Kuchler—Yes. It is their concept that we are in the bush, that our health services are not all that good—yet, if you talk to someone who lives in Sydney you find that it is extremely difficult to get an ambulance. If you are dying you are lucky to get an ambulance within two hours whereas here you can get an ambulance in five minutes.

Mr BAIRD—That is bush mythology. We will let that one go through.

Dr Kuchler—It is the quality of the health services, of the schooling—everything. You are degrading your quality of life by coming to the region. The biggest thing is safety. A lot of people believe they will be bitten by spiders and snakes: is it safe living here?

Mrs IRWIN—That is the word you want to get out. In your submission you also mention that state governments put little or no effort into getting migrants into the regions. I do not know if it was your submission—it could have been someone else's—that quoted ministers as well.

Dr Kuchler—In any performance program the public servant is there to service a minister. Providing they get a migrant in, they are rewarded. It does not really matter whether the migrant goes to Toowoomba or Townsville or wherever. Given that it is easier to get a migrant into a metropolitan area, they tend to target what is the quickest route to satisfaction, so to speak.

Mrs IRWIN—Do you feel that state governments are not doing enough?

Dr Kuchler—Yes. I do not think they are doing enough. If you ask them, 'How many business migrants have you placed in regional Queensland?'—

Mrs IRWIN—You most probably will find it hard to get an answer.

Mr BAIRD—We asked them yesterday.

Dr Kuchler—And if you asked them how many business migrants are in the technical sector—in other words, in the knowledge based sector, which is what makes Australia smart and what Premier Beattie says makes the ‘smart state’—or how many of those have been placed into regional Queensland, without guessing, I would say the answer is nil.

Mr BAIRD—I find your submission really interesting. You have a combination of experience, having worked on one of the DIMA committees and having a knowledge of regional areas and of setting up the technology parks. It is particularly interesting.

While you have been talking, I have been trying to think in my own mind how you improve it. I want to switch it around and say, if you were the minister responsible for it—obviously there are many challenges that you would have in that portfolio—you would come in with your advisers in relation to regional migration programs and, wanting to really do something about it and make it start to work, what would you do in that role?

Dr Kuchler—What I would do is set up a pipeline type system in the migration project for migration agents, or some system to invite project proposals that they are looking for investment on. First of all, I think the image thing has to be fixed. You are not going to get anybody to come here unless that whole image is fixed.

Mr BAIRD—Let us deal with that one first, because it is always difficult. How do you fix the image one? Even in the tourism area there is always criticism when the Australian Tourist Commission does its ads because, whatever it does, each state that is not included will say, ‘This is outrageous. We were not included in this shot. It is a Queensland beach. Where is a South Australian beach?’ or whatever. People tend to be fairly parochial. You can imagine trying to do a promotional video with every regional area in Australia: even if you did do a comprehensive sweep, you would miss them out. Given the fact that you have thought quite a bit about it, how do you really envisage that that would happen?

Dr Kuchler—I am on the Queensland Innovation Council and we are addressing this very issue. We say, ‘If you go to London and look at a video on Queensland, all you see is beaches, sun, surf and sex.’

Mr BAIRD—Sounds tough!

Dr Kuchler—People would think we were a dumb state, and yet the Premier is trying to market us as a smart state. We are trying to get that marketing thing to include some knowledge based industries, but maybe at the state level the minister could work with the premiers to try and get them to include our knowledge assets, given that the minister is on about importing skills. So they need to try and include some of our knowledge assets in their promotion.

Then maybe DIMA itself could do a video which was available in their offices overseas which was simply on Australia’s technical base. At the moment if you go to DIMA offices I suspect it still only advertises Australia as the land of sun, surf, freedom and space. Maybe there

could be one which is simply for professionals or somebody with a technology based background. Let us say you have run a very good IT business somewhere in South Africa. There are millions of IT businesses in South Africa. In fact, I use software and if it breaks down I have to email South Africa to get an idea of how to fix it. So maybe DIMA could be a little bit proactive while the states catch up, because that process is going to take some time. It could even be an eight-minute video or a 10-minute video that people could take away, or they could even have it running in the foyers, which promotes our knowledge base. That could be four minutes on the cities and four minutes on the regions in general. It does not have to be every region, but our regions are also smart regions.

Mr BAIRD—What about also the idea of having missions, for example? The Queensland minister with responsibility for industrial development or regional development could actually bring a group of people from different countries with an interest in technical skills to come and meet people.

Dr Kuchler—Or even intending migrants.

Mr BAIRD—Yes, that is right.

Dr Kuchler—That is what South Australia do. They are very active in going and almost headhunting and they have been very successful, I believe. They were doing that two years ago. I know there were a few problems, but they were actively going out and trying to headhunt specific migrants.

Mr BAIRD—It is such a worthwhile activity in terms of trying to decentralise Australia. I can see by what you are pointing out that the information that people get is pretty minuscule, and it is no wonder that they end up in the cities.

Dr Kuchler—Yes.

Mr BAIRD—After you have left this meeting today you might want to think about it and exercise your mind about what is the best way—with that idea of the states becoming more involved in setting up programs. Maybe the regions that have a strong interest in this need to specialise. Maybe one year someone could go off to Europe and the next year to South Africa or wherever. In terms of the pipeline process, you were talking about potential investors. Could you just flesh that out a bit?

Dr Kuchler—Yes. It would be good if there were some system whereby I could put a project forward. This is what I was going to do. I was going to do our projects up that we are trying to build and either go over to migration agents in South Africa or selected countries and go around and hock them. In other words I would say, ‘Look, I’m looking for a migrant who may be interested in investing in this project.’ I am pretty determined in that process. I think that idea could be expanded for other people who have not thought of it. There could be other existing projects in regional Queensland that are being held back because of the lack of an effective champion or the lack of capital over a sufficient period of time.

If a migrant had some capital—they have not even got to be wealthy; let’s say they had \$2 million to spend—and they were looking for something to do and also to buy their way into

Australia, they could do amazing things to, say, Townsville. We are not talking about a lot of money. For someone out of Hong Kong to have a spare \$2 million—that is like petty cash to some people.

Mr BAIRD—In terms of the accounting firms, what have you got them involved in doing for you now? Are they looking for potential investors?

Dr Kuchler—They are not yet, because I have not got the project ready. You would have to come with a full investment document—all the figures and everything. It would have to be sufficiently prepared to entice a potential migrant to come over and have a look at it. They would then have to double-check all your figures and it would have to be a proper business investigation for them. I say to the firms, ‘Can I get into your pipeline,’ because they have migrants all over the place, and I tell them that I’m looking for a regional migrant.

Mr BAIRD—It is an interesting idea, because these major accounting firms have got offices everywhere.

Dr Kuchler—That is right. I am on the case advisory body, which is a special body that looks at special cases for migration into Australia. Some of the people have so much money. I think, ‘Gosh, this project would fly if I could find someone with a spare \$2 million.’ And \$2 million is nothing to these people. It is not a big ask; there must be heaps of people out there who have a spare \$2 million or \$3 million. These are people who are trying to migrate to Australia with cash sitting in a bank. When you look at the size of the bank account, it is almost criminal.

Mr BAIRD—In summary, from your views of the whole program, it is not that DIMA is not processing them properly; it is more this whole question of promotion and making knowledge available. Are you trying to tie it up with investment programs, et cetera?

Dr Kuchler—Yes, and getting the product to market. The DIMA product, I believe, is high quality. I have no problems with the way DIMA processes it. Often the slow processing is a result of the applicant anyway. We could sit here and argue whether it was DIMA or the applicant, but there are so many processes in that. It is getting that product to be effectively utilised and into the market that is the problem. We could sit here and argue whether that is DIMA’s responsibility or some other agent’s responsibility. Given that over the past five years it has been some other agency’s responsibility and the product has not performed any better, I am suggesting that DIMA needs to be more proactive and try to get their product through, because the other agencies are either not interested, do not have the capability, or do not understand.

Mr BAIRD—The other thing is in relation to your concept of matching. You are probably right in relation to if you take someone out of London or Paris or wherever. It is probably remote to expect them to settle in a regional area. Perhaps we should actually look at that as well in terms of that whole question of attempting to match.

Dr Kuchler—Yes, because on DIMA we have been around quite a lot speaking to migrants around Australia. One of the biggest things they complain about is market size. They have come out of London and into Sydney. They say: ‘Where are the people?’ They find Sydney very tiny.

Senator McKIERNAN—At our hearings in Darwin we heard a good news story of migrants coming in from Germany and settling and being very productive and constructive. The business that they were coming into was just growing. It is a contrast in part to what you are saying.

Mr BAIRD—Germany is very decentralised. It does not have many cities with populations over one million.

Dr Kuchler—Was this in Katherine?

Senator McKIERNAN—No, it is in Darwin itself.

Mr BAIRD—Germany is a bit unique in that way in being so decentralised as a nation. It would be interesting to see where these Germans came from.

CHAIR—They came from the one area. He was recruiting them from people he worked with. They all knew each other and they all had this expertise.

Senator McKIERNAN—The contrast is coming from a highly developed society in Europe into regional Australia. Although Darwin is a capital city, it certainly is regional Australia, so it is a good news story. I only raised it to say that it is possible. It is working in at least one little niche in the northern part of Australia, and probably in the bush as well, if you believe the colloquial talk.

Dr Kuchler—But Darwin has been very proactive. Darwin is like Toowoomba. It is very proactive in marketing all their resources and their assets. Darwin has been fantastic in doing that.

Senator McKIERNAN—They have particularly targeted the South-East Asian region as well which has paid dividends in a whole number of areas. In terms of the business migration area, there are a number of checks and balances in the system. For reasons of the past those checks and balances have to be there. Do you think that those checks and balances are at a proper level or are too tight or too stringent?

Dr Kuchler—I think they are too tight for the regions. You get points if you are 45. I am 44 now and I am thinking, ‘I’m over the hill in terms of trying to migrate somewhere. I have 12 months. I’d better hurry up.’

Senator McKIERNAN—I am not entering into an age debate!

Dr Kuchler—My only lifeline was if I have a significant project and found someone who wants to come here and invest in this region but they do not get the points, I will go straight to the minister and say, ‘Can you give special dispensation to get this person in on this regional project into this region?’ I am sure that I would not get a no.

Senator McKIERNAN—You have identified the age barrier. There are other barriers in terms of the amount of money that has to be transferred to Australia, amounts that have to be

put into investment accounts and left there rather than being transferred to another bank account back home and another person using the same money to come in. That has happened in the past.

Dr Kuchler—I do not have a problem with those. The type of people we are talking about would find them very easy, except for the age barrier, and would find the money thing very easy to cope with.

CHAIR—For my own information here—and you might not be able to answer this—if somebody had \$2 million, what sort of project would you place them in? If I called you from wherever and said, ‘I want to migrate to Australia; I have \$2 million’, where would you be directing me that I would be investing that sort of money?

Dr Kuchler—There is a technology park in Maroochydore that needs \$2 million. There is a technology park in Gladstone that needs about \$2 million and one in Townsville.

CHAIR—As this hypothetical migrant, if I say to you, ‘Tell me what sort of return I’d get on my investment,’ would that information be there? Would you be telling them that?

Dr Kuchler—Yes. For each of those projects what we are doing is a feasibility study, a full-blown business plan, a concept plan of what the thing looks like and what it is going to roll out like. We are getting the whole project fully prepared as an investment project.

CHAIR—And what sort of return would you be telling them? Do you have any figures on that?

Dr Kuchler—No, not yet, because we are not at that stage. We are still at the feasibility stage with Gladstone. We are at the business planning stage for Maroochy.

CHAIR—The reason I asked that is because there are people with a lot of money around, as you have noticed, who do not know where to invest it because of the uncertainty they are seeing. They have got something in the stock market but they do not want to put everything there, so there is this matter of saying, ‘Where do I put the money?’ A lot of stockbrokers have said to me, ‘Look, we have got these people with all this money and they do not know where to put it.’ It is interesting that you are saying that we need the people with that money so I am wondering if there is a lack of sufficient return that is not getting them there.

Dr Kuchler—No. A lot of investment brokers have money to invest on behalf of their clients but often their clients do not have a knowledge based background so they are reluctant to invest in knowledge based enterprises. On top of that, you have a regional project.

CHAIR—And they think the regional projects will not give them the return that city based projects will?

Dr Kuchler—Yes. Essentially we are looking for someone who wants to migrate to Australia, who needs a job when they get here. So they become either the full or the part champion. They invest their money; they are the person whose hip pocket will hurt if it does not work out. They partner with a local champion as well who will work with them.

CHAIR—So you are looking for people with just the money or the money and the skills together?

Dr Kuchler—They definitely need a knowledge based industry background to understand the project because, in building technology parks, with the investment money that goes in, we say there are two types of investment money. There is dumb money which is money that just comes from somebody who has money they need to invest. They might have made it in hotels or in the tourism industry. They cannot value add or contribute to the project in any way. Those types of investors in the US have been proven to detract from the project. So what we are looking for is what we call smart money which comes from people who have actually worked in knowledge based industries and understand how you grow these industries and the constraints that are on them and the types of networks you need. In fact, that particular person might use their own particular business to build the networks that you need to get scale into the project. So we are looking for smart money.

CHAIR—That is important. It is not just skills you are looking for and it is not just money you are looking for; you are looking for people with a combination of both, which is highly specialised. I would have thought, to get that sort of group, you would almost need to go yourself to these other countries to promote these projects. It appears to be not something that DIMA could do or that just a general video from the state could cover because what you are looking for is so specialised.

Dr Kuchler—Probably, but with the exception that a migration agent, I assume, would get many different types of people coming to them so what we are saying is that we want someone who manufactures IT equipment and has excess money and wants to come to Australia—someone from a knowledge based industry, someone who is a biotechnologist or works in the pathology area or has a business in pathology or some knowledge based thing like that and has money, having done well in an area, who wants to migrate to Australia, to a regional area. So all a migration agent needs to look for is somebody who has made their money from knowledge based businesses, whether it be biotech or IT, rather than someone who has made their money from tourism or hospitality.

CHAIR—Dr Kuchler, thank you very much for coming today. You can see by the response of the committee that we do appreciate what you have said. Many of the things you have said I think we will take back and think about further. Thank you very much for appearing before us today. You will get a transcript of the evidence. If you wish to make editorial changes to that, or if you have any inquiries, please get back to the committee.

Dr Kuchler—Thank you.

[9.50 a.m.]

DALIRI, Mr Farvardin, Manager, Migrant Resource Centre Townsville Thuringowa Ltd

CHAIR—I now welcome the witness from the Migrant Resource Centre Townsville Thuringowa Ltd to give evidence. Although we do not require our witnesses to give an oath, these are proceedings of the parliament and they are to be treated with the same respect. To give false information is equivalent to misleading the parliament. You have given us a submission, which we have not yet read. As it is a very short submission, we will now take a minute to read it. Then you can make an opening statement if you like.

Mr Daliri—We are responsible for the settlement services under the service agreements that we sign on an annual basis with the department. We provide services to immigrants on arrival. Our main role is to help the immigrants to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers. Also we run a number of projects in employment, training, child-care services and mental health issues as well as consumer relations and education along the lines of justice and consumer awareness issues as well as women's issues. They are all different and separate projects that we run. We cover from Bowen to Ingham and Cardwell—that is the area that we operate within—as well as Charters Towers and Hughenden. So we, as a settlement organisation, are only at the receiving end of the immigration outcome. We have been aware of the changes in the immigration priorities and legislation, but we are not participants in the processes in developing the policies.

The regionalisation was a good idea from the beginning. It was promising because, from our observation and from our day-to-day practices, we realised that the region could take more and needs more. An outstanding example of that is the seasonal labour force we receive in the region. For example, in the Bowen area, we have got this notion of seasonal labour. People from Victoria come for the fruit industry. They spend about six to eight months of the year here and for the rest of the year they go back. You are talking about quite a substantial number of families from Turkish and Vietnamese backgrounds who come on a seasonal basis. That is just one concrete example. That means in those specific areas there is a dependency on the labour force from the other states, but they are not permanent residents here. They come here and participate in the fruit picking and then they go back. So they operate in two states. That is basically my opening statement.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Daliri. You were saying that there are people here who come and pick fruit from overseas?

Mr Daliri—No, they are seasonal; they are from interstate, from Victoria. They spend about six to eight months of the season in the region here and then they go back to their place.

CHAIR—Where would they mostly come from?

Mr Daliri—Victoria. In the specific example I made about Bowen, they come from Victoria. The people who operate like that come from Turkish as well as Vietnamese backgrounds.

CHAIR—If they spend so much time up here doing the seasonal work, why do they go back to Victoria?

Mr Daliri—I do not know. It is probably because they all come from the region at that time of year. They are not settled here. I know of many scattered and individual cases where people just come here for part of the year and hire a caravan. They start working, and then they are gone for the rest of the year. So it is probably family ties or maybe their property and investment. I do not know. I could not say.

CHAIR—Isn't there also a very big Turkish community in Victoria?

Mr Daliri—Yes. The biggest communities are in Victoria, as well as in New South Wales. I do not know the exact figures. I cannot make any specific statement.

CHAIR—I am interested in what you say, because I am also aware that in a New South Wales town—I think it is in Griffith, if my memory is right—a similar thing happens. A very big Turkish community comes up to collect the harvest in Griffith and then returns to Victoria. It seems to be a tradition amongst people of Turkish background in Victoria to do that.

Mr Daliri—Yes. That could be interpreted like that. But from my point of view, this is an area where the human labour force is needed and it gets filled. I gave just one example but there are obviously other examples around the region such as the refinery and mining industries and other areas that still have a long way to develop.

CHAIR—Do you approach the workers when they come up here about staying here for the whole year?

Mr Daliri—We have been in touch. In Bowen we have been trying to run some consultations with them about their settlement needs, as well as some specific issues such as the absence of a female doctor. They could not access a female doctor for the women.

CHAIR—The Muslim women would need a female doctor.

Mr Daliri—Exactly. So that is an example of one issue that was raised when we used to meet. If it comes to the issue of helping them out, yes, that is what we are here for. But we cannot force people; we can only make our services available. We also had a consultation meeting with Centrelink. In one instance, we ran a cross-cultural training for the Centrelink employees in Bowen to familiarise them specifically with the people of Turkish background so that they would be well equipped and confident in dealing with them. They are the sorts of activities that we do. So most of the information that we get comes through that type of activity. We only deal with the basic symptoms at the receiving end. We are not usually involved in these things. It is a bit daunting—overwhelming—for me, anyway.

CHAIR—Recently 47 refugees were released from Woomera in South Australia and were sent to Adelaide; they were either Afghan or Iraqi. You have suggested that we need to target the regions more. If you were suddenly aware that DIMA were sending 50 refugees to the Townsville area, would your organisation be able to cope with that?

Mr Daliri—The way we operate is not by looking after each individual, although we do casework for different individuals—they have different problems and we have social workers and community workers that work with individuals as long as it is needed. But we have been working very successfully in developing a large network of services, all from general services in different areas, and we have been engaged in doing these cross-cultural awareness and training courses for many years. Only last year or so—a little bit more than a year—we were able to provide cross-cultural training to 400 people in human services from all categories, covering teachers, police, and people in health services as well as in other industries.

Having said that, we have been preparing the background here, and we have been working not just inwardly looking with one immigrant in terms of head-to-head person contact but also across the board to prepare for the larger community and generating services to be able to cater for the culturally diverse intake. Given that you suggested that it was a possibility, we were the first people to put our hands up and say, ‘Yes, we would welcome hosting these refugees.’ But we will also be able to work through the network of other services and start the process of referring them to other services. That is something that we are able to do—referring to other services and working with other services.

As well, we run a training program for people that are hard to place, people that are not able to get employment because of linguistic backgrounds. People that are FLEX 3 come from Centrelink to us. These are people who are long-term unemployed from any ethnic background. We recruit these people in numbers of five because that is as much as we can take. We train them and we put them back into employment positions. We have been able to secure employment for about four out of five—that has been our success rate. So that is another area that we work at with different funding with different packages. So, yes, we did put up our hand last time when the matter was raised a few weeks ago but, unfortunately, it was said that MRCs are not supposed to participate, so we had to sit back. I cannot imagine how, without our participation, such a thing can happen.

CHAIR—Why were you told MRCs cannot participate?

Mr Daliri—I think this was a decision from the department.

CHAIR—Is it because if you participated in, let us say, 50 refugees coming, then you would expect funding to cover English classes and things like that?

Mr Daliri—I do not know. At the moment, we run English classes and we charge \$2 per head. We cater for the people that are not covered by any sort of funding and are falling through the net; the TAFE college is not catering for them. We cater for those people. We run English classes on a weekly basis for them. I do not think that was the issue from our end, but it might be one of the factors that were considered that I am not aware of.

The types of activities that we have done here in the past have enabled us to be able to cater for the people in larger numbers. As I said, we have been networking and raising awareness. For example, one of the events that we organise here through lots of sponsored money, which is not directly from the department—it comes from the different levels of government and from corporate as well as other sectors—is a cultural-fest which involves about 30,000 people from the region, coming for three days and celebrating cultural diversity. We do not have those

30,000 people from any particular background; they are mainly from the mainstream backgrounds. It has been a tradition for the last six years that year by year it adds more people on. This type of activity provides a good context as well as good receptivity on the part of the host community to be more receptive. As well it contests the stereotypical view of immigration to enable us to perform better as a host community. So I would like to see that these abilities that we have developed get utilised in some way.

CHAIR—Let me re-ask that question: if you were to get no extra funding but the next lot of 50 refugees who are released from one of the detention centres were sent direct to Townsville, do you think you and the other organisations in Townsville could cope with that? They would be given the usual equivalent of unemployment insurance, through special benefits, and access to Medicare, but no access through the federal government to extra funding for English classes. If they arrived on that basis, do you think this community could absorb them, look after them and get them into work?

Mr Daliri—I cannot give you a yes or no answer. With reference to that number of 50, we were told initially that they would come in lots of 10, not in lots of 50.

CHAIR—Okay, let us bring it back to 10.

Mr Daliri—It is lots of 10. Secondly, we did have a consultation meeting on this issue. I was the person who called all the services in one meeting. We had people from the department here to run the session. I was told to sit aside and not talk because it is not the MRC's business at this stage—which was fine. The conclusion of that meeting was that the community—those people from church and other services as well as MRC non-DIMA funded workers and volunteers—would be able to receive them. This was in addition to our commitment to do whatever we could with our non-DIMA funded projects that we run—50 per cent of our projects are not DIMA funded and they do not have any restriction on that.

CHAIR—That was passed to DIMA but you did not get 10 people?

Mr Daliri—No.

Senator McKIERNAN—To give me a better perspective of the region in which we are: how many migrants would have settled here in the last 12 months—in the last financial year?

Mr Daliri—I cannot give you the figure because that is a departmental figure. The people that come through our doors to receive services vary from the immediately arrived as well as from the last two years. They are also from interstate arrivals. I cannot give a figure of exact entrants or people that were issued visas, because we do not have access to that figure. You would be able to receive that information from the department.

Senator McKIERNAN—I am somewhat confused: when you spoke earlier, you talked about these interstate people coming through and you were providing settlement assistance to them.

Mr Daliri—No; I said that was one example. That was one incident that happened in Bowen, which I could quote because we visit that area. We were approached by Centrelink as well as by the job centre indicating something was going wrong. We had some incidences of clashes taking

place at the counter because of the race relations issue as well as cultural barriers. We had to go in and find out what was happening, then we got involved in the whole issue. That is not a general pattern. That was only an indicator of the fact that the region can still absorb the work force, whether it is skilled or non-skilled. That is our observation.

Senator McKIERNAN—That is not your primary work throughout the year?

Mr Daliri—No.

Senator McKIERNAN—In terms of your primary work for migrants who are settling here—and obvious you are focusing on the recently arrived migrants—you are not able to give us an indication of the numbers. What about nationalities?

Mr Daliri—I can give a list of the nationality groups that we deal with, as well as the individuals. We cover quite a wide range—the Philippines, PNG, Somalia, Middle East, South America, East Asia.

Senator McKIERNAN—These are recently arrived people?

Mr Daliri—Recently arrived, under different categories. We get them under ‘skilled’ or ‘family reunion’. We get them from the established communities like Greek, Italian and Filipino.

Senator McKIERNAN—I am trying to get to what changes are occurring at a regional level. Are migrants actually settling in this region? If they are, what nationalities are they coming from? What nationalities have settled here? Somalis would be a recent group. How many are we talking about?

Mr Daliri—We are talking about, say, 10 families here and there last year—not 10 families, because we have Sudanese and Somalis as well as other African families. They come in bits and pieces. They come as a family unit, not as a large group. We have large established groups here.

Senator McKIERNAN—I am really interested in the most recent ones.

Mr Daliri—The recent ones are very diverse. We do not get clusters. We get individuals from different categories and different countries of origin. I cannot give you the exact figures. We get about 40 to 50 calls in and out per day, and that includes the newcomers as well as the established ones, intrastate migrants or somebody coming from the United States who is having trouble translating their licence. It also includes people who have been sponsored, are having trouble with the sponsors and who are left on their own and need to come and connect. There are some people who have been here for five or six years, or sometimes 10 years, who still cannot speak English and who do not have any support network or who are in trouble with the legal system. They cannot access services. They come here and they want to find some way of managing themselves and accessing the service. So it is quite a mixture that we are dealing with. We are not sitting here only for new arrivals. That is not the picture we have here in this region.

Senator McKIERNAN—As a centre, do you get involved in the sponsorship of people where an employer cannot find a particular skilled person and he or she might be looking to bring a person in from overseas? Would they come to you looking for advice on employer nomination?

Mr Daliri—No, we do not get involved in that area. We do not give any immigration advice and we do not get involved in the processing at all. Although our office is used by the department as a base for immigration processing, we only make appointments for people to meet the DIMA officers on a monthly basis. We do that because this area does not have a DIMA office.

Senator McKIERNAN—Is that mainly in the humanitarian area, in the settlement?

Mr Daliri—No, it is in all categories. We do not have a DIMA office here in Townsville, and that is another issue. There is a DIMA office in Cairns and the next one is down in Brisbane. So our office is being used by the department. We take the bookings, respond to the calls and we make referrals to the department. We have all the forms available, whether they be for a tourist, a refugee, an asylum seeker, a skilled migrant or a sponsor. We have to cover for that side of DIMA as well.

Senator McKIERNAN—In the provision of the settlement services which you said you provide, is that mainly provided to the humanitarian entrants who are settled here?

Mr Daliri—No, not necessarily. Our terms of service agreement includes everybody who enters with the intention of permanent settlement, excluding tourists.

Senator McKIERNAN—Yes, of course. Thank you.

Mrs IRWIN—What employment or business opportunities are there for newly arrived migrants in the region?

Mr Daliri—It depends on the level of skill. People who come with acceptable qualifications are easily absorbed. Some people who come find it difficult to get their qualification recognised: they are in the wrong age category or they come with a bit of an accent, and they find it a little bit harder. Again, that is something that covers a whole range. From memory, some people get placed on a reception board, some people get into police force training, some people try to get into the Army and some people get into the retailing business—it is quite wide ranging. For a region like Townsville, the dynamics are very much different from what we observe in Sydney and Melbourne, because we do not have clusters and ghettos here; it is very much an interwoven fabric and it is still developing. The presence of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds is quite impressive. I think the last census showed that around 10 per cent of people have at least one parent of non-English speaking background, and it is more along the coast, which is quite impressive.

Employment opportunities also are very varied and somewhat seasonal. For example, the fruit picking is a seasonal operation, especially with mangoes. That absorbs a lot of workers. A lot of people who are waiting for training or proper employment, once the season comes they get absorbed into that and when they come out of that they get to university or to the proper

jobs. So that is another area which exists. According to our observation, it is very much unpredictable who gets where. We have got people who come straight into the hospital for their medical positions as a GP. We are very short of them. Some come from Arabic countries, they come from Indian backgrounds—

Mrs IRWIN—You are virtually saying you have a shortage of doctors in the region?

Mr Daliri—That is something which is a very well known fact. You need to give the general manager of the hospital, Dr Kennedy, a call; they have even been giving public interviews on TV.

Mrs IRWIN—What are the other skill shortages in the region?

Mr Daliri—I am not able to make a specialised comment on that, but in the health area it is a well known fact that the hospital always strives to bring doctors into the region. One of the hopes of the region is that the medical college that has been established here will resolve the issue. But still there are people that come and fill those vacancies as well as people who come very much into the unskilled labour force. People get into the house painting industry, people get into the taxi driving industry. Last year there was a student who came in on a permanent visa who was doing a PhD at university in aquaculture and started driving taxis, so that pattern is very mixed. That person could get a job as a lecturer or could be a permanent taxi driver. He could go either way. So it is anybody's guess. At this stage I think he is still struggling, but he is about to finish or has finished his PhD in aquaculture.

Mr BAIRD—Is your funding for the centre government funding?

Mr Daliri—Yes.

Mr BAIRD—Is it 100 per cent?

Mr Daliri—It is 100 per cent. We do have a cultural festival that we organise. We raise minimal funds through it. It is very costly, so we do not make any profit out of that. We are 100 per cent funded by DIMA as well as by the state health department, the justice department, and the federal government's department of youth and family services. We have a project funded through them, as well as the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, a state department. So we have got across-the-board cover.

Mr BAIRD—In relation to fruit pickers, do you have many of those on working visas, the backpackers who come to this area?

Mr Daliri—I do not have information on that because tourists do not turn up to our office, so we do not cater for them. The only time that we see them is when they want to extend their visa or they have a visa issue and we make a booking for them. But backpackers have been given the same working privileges. In some of the rules they have made that very specific to backpackers. I think they can get a work permit and they can do that as far as I am aware, but we do not get in touch. I cannot make a comment on that.

Mr BAIRD—In terms of assisting regional migration, which is what this committee is about, would your main recommendation be to encourage more of the refugee status people to be sent to areas such as Townsville? Is that what I see from you?

Mr Daliri—That is one, yes. That is one easy area where it can happen. When you look at the patterns of family migration and family reunion, usually there are more families down south and once the family member comes they stay down there. That is what happens. It is a natural pattern. The refugees who are being sponsored by the government can be directed towards regions with very minimal hassles. Also, if we received people consistently then we would be able to retain them within the region. Also people in the independent skilled migration category can be fast-tracked and given preferential status when they come to the region.

But the question is the numbers and the processes, which are very slow and which do not come in significant terms. For example, if that category were to replace the family reunion category, you would still have the same story. You have less family reunion and more skilled migration. Again, the trouble would be with the people who are sponsoring the families from the region—they have more capacity to retain their relatives here than the independent skilled migrants, who come here and within the next year or two find a better job somewhere else and go. It is something that very much needs to be looked at in terms of who would stay, remain, in the region. That is my personal layman's point of view.

Mr BAIRD—That is a very good point, Chair, when you think about it. If you want to encourage regional migration then family reunion is more likely to have the refugees relate to and identify with those who come from regional areas or those who have families in regional areas. How many refugees in that category have you had here? Have you had many—or any?

Mr Daliri—No, we do not get them because Brisbane wins over. Always when we put our hands up—

Mr BAIRD—That is wrong because we could control that.

Mr Daliri—It is very hard. We have the church organisations, groups and people who are always asking for refugees to sponsor and they are happy to help them. That is under the old regime, meaning that now we are in a new era with these tenders and the privatised humanitarian settlement processes. Before that we used to have the CRSS groups, church based groups, that sponsored one or two families per year. At this stage it has been privatised and tenders have been put in nationally. We also put a tender in for settling 40 refugees a year, but that tender was not successful. We got a letter last week saying that we lost our tender. Basically, someone else somewhere else will be receiving those refugees if they come. These are the nitty-gritty issues.

CHAIR—Is there any way you could identify where they went? I would be curious to find out where those refugees actually ended up.

Mr Daliri—Which ones—the Afghan ones?

CHAIR—The ones you are talking about.

Mr Daliri—These ones. This is the process that the government, the DIMA, started last year. They started calling for tenders to settle the refugees. We are talking about a tender process. The refugees have not come here yet.

CHAIR—Do you know who won the tender?

Mr Daliri—The letter that came did not say anything. The letter told us, ‘You have not been successful, but we do not want to turn you down at this stage. You will be kept on stand-by until September so that, if any other major tenderers have any problems, you will be called.’ These are the areas where we lose the battles. If we had won that tender, for example, we would be consistently receiving 40 refugees over the year.

CHAIR—Obviously, the problem you have is that most of the families tend to be in Sydney. Would it be possible and would there be any point in representatives of Townsville, which needs this sort of population, going to Sydney and targeting families in Sydney to move up here, so you start to get a family base in Townsville? Would that be reasonable or would it be just too far?

Mr Daliri—It is a nice idea, but it would not work because people have a very negative idea of Townsville: the weather is hot, it is isolated, there is only the Army base and nothing is happening there. I have about 100 or 200 relatives in Sydney and Melbourne.

CHAIR—You have, personally?

Mr Daliri—Yes.

CHAIR—You cannot get them to Townsville?

Mr Daliri—I had two families here. They stayed here for a couple of years and then something happened down there—somebody married or somebody died—and everybody rushed down there.

Senator McKIERNAN—You might look at the records saying that you have got two families here. It might read differently from what—

Mr Daliri—Yes.

CHAIR—Mr Daliri, I think that with 200 relatives you could probably end up populating the whole of Townsville. If you move them all up here and they bring their relatives, we could have a very—

Mr BAIRD—We could call it Daliri City.

Mr Daliri—I think I am having a very easy, fun life here—not too many relatives to worry about. But, seriously, relatives from my parents’ side and my wife’s side are in Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra and Adelaide—right down there. In the last 10 years that they have lived here, it really has been a good life. We could succeed in bringing them up here to stay and

establish a business, but they went. The families that are already here—and they are striving to bring their relatives in—are the ones that should be targeted to be given priority over those that are down south. The families down south have much more power and a bigger lobbying group, so they usually have more success in bringing relatives over than the people here.

CHAIR—But you do know that those families that are here who want to bring relatives from overseas can get those relatives in in a lower skilled—

Mr Daliri—Yes—slightly. But still, that is not sufficient. A relationship with a spouse is something that is very hard. Even people of an Australian background have trouble. They come to our office and sit there and cry for hours because they have been married for two years and cannot bring their wife in. You get those stories as well. It is not that easy. I am saying that, unless there is some substantial concession, as well as the numbers, that does not happen. But, at this stage down in the metropolitan centres they are beneficiaries of the population base, and they capitalise on that and they get more. In regions like this where they do need infrastructure for development for the future, they still have to import people from interstate. It is a very slow process. That is my personal observation.

CHAIR—Sorry, Mr Baird, I interrupted you.

Mr BAIRD—I am happy with that. I think it gives us some other ideas to pursue. The most significant contribution is getting us to focus on the refugee groups as well.

Mr Daliri—Yes. The story of the refugees is very sad. No matter how much we try to present ourselves as being good guys and being able to care, when it comes to small numbers, Brisbane is always the furthest that they come, so the region is basically missed out. The general complaint made bitterly by all the former resources groups is about us not getting them here. It is not just me. We have a number of people—I can actually quote their names—who have been saying the same thing. Under the refugee and humanitarian category, it is very easy to allocate them. The challenge would be ours as to whether or not to retain them and to properly look after them. But the fact that they are not allocated numbers, and they come in very small numbers, makes it hard. So, you get one family from Somalia; you get one family from a very isolated country, and that is it. It stops there. If it were, say, five or six families—

CHAIR—Then they support each other.

Mr Daliri—Then you would organise a community group; you would organise social activities and that becomes the hub. A similar thing would happen interstate.

Mr BAIRD—I think that is a good point.

CHAIR—Mr Daliri, thank you for coming here today. I think you have raised some important issues that we might pursue back in Canberra.

Mr Daliri—Thank you very much. I did not know that I would be of any value. I was taught to be shy. I do not know why I am here, but I do have something to say and, although it is not very professional, it is from the grassroots community side of it. So I hope that my contribution will be of some use.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 10.29 a.m. to 10.47 a.m.

BINGHAM, Ms Jean, Community Literacy and Numeracy Tutor Volunteer, Mackay Regional Council for Social Development Limited

CARLETON, Mrs Luz, Community Settlement Services Officer, Mackay Regional Council for Social Development

CHAIR—I welcome witnesses from the Mackay Regional Council for Social Development. Although the committee does not require witnesses to give evidence under oath, you should understand that these are the hearings of the parliament, and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the parliament itself. Giving false or misleading information is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. Are there any corrections or additions you wish to make to your submission?

Mrs Carleton—How do we address you?

Mr BAIRD—Sir or Your Highness!

Mrs Carleton—I am just clarifying it. I was thinking that we might have to say what we say in court—Your Honour.

CHAIR—Unfortunately, I will not say we are not honourable but just do not call us names. Our names are there. Mrs Gallus and Senator McKiernan is fine.

Mrs Carleton—Can I just address Chair or committee secretary?

CHAIR—Yes. Although you do not address questions to the committee secretary. They do all the work but they do not get to say anything.

Mrs Carleton—There is one in our supplementary documents on the first page on population and area. In the fourth paragraph I have stated:

There is no mechanism or sufficient data to identify the number of migrants moving from interstate to Mackay and Region. Data on the newly or recently arrived migrants in Mackay and Region is not available to the Community Settlement Services (CSS) in Mackay.

Could I add that these particular two sentences may not be appropriate because of confidentiality—they are just add-on information— but I want the committee to be aware that this is actually happening. That is why, in my position, I am not really aware of who the newly or recently arrived in Mackay are. Usually people access me only when there is a crisis. That is why I wondered whether I would have to put it in there. It still relates to population, although not necessarily by numbers or statistics. That is a big problem in my role.

CHAIR—I can imagine it would be if they come to you only when they have a crisis.

Mrs Carleton—Very much so, yes.

CHAIR—Would you prefer to target them before that crisis happened?

Mrs Carleton—Yes. If I knew, I could follow up without their ringing me first. I could be a follow-up support for them—being new in the country. They could possibly be in a business or a skilled category, or they could be in a spousal category—that sort of thing. Being new in the country, even if they are in a business or a skilled migrant category, they still need support to keep the family together, because they are in an adjustment period.

CHAIR—They could not have their names given to you because of privacy reasons, but I would imagine that they would be given information that you exist when they arrive? Don't they get a pamphlet saying that you are there to help?

Mrs Carleton—Recently I have learnt that the settlement information was actually on the call centre messages. However, nowadays when people ring the department of immigration they get a message such as, 'If you need this information, press button No. 1 or button No. 2.' Somewhere in those manuals—in No. 3, I think—it says that if you need settlement information, ring, and all the community settlement funded by the department of immigration will be named.

CHAIR—But to do that, you obviously have to be competent with the telephone system and also competent in understanding the message.

Mrs Carleton—That actually is an issue. The department of immigration had a cultural diversity conference in Cairns, and it actually produced a brochure. People are complaining they actually have to access that brochure and fill in their complaints. Those people with complaints should access the department and then the department will have to send them the brochure. They could be outside Mackay, because the Mackay region is actually composed of seven local government areas. I have mentioned that in my regional submission so that you can actually visualise it. The distance is actually always the big problem.

CHAIR—Although you do not know who are coming in as migrants, how many migrants would you be getting into the area on an annual basis? Do you have an estimate of that?

Mrs Carleton—I rely only on the ABS. As I have actually mentioned in my supplementary submission on population—

CHAIR—Yes, you have the projected growth.

Mrs Carleton—Yes. I have also mentioned in the supplementary submission where all this information comes from. Some of the information comes from the Mackay community profile, which was produced by the Mackay City Council—in particular, information on the Mackay region and the percentage of the population based in the City of Mackay alone.

Because this our first time for this type of activity, I actually thought how can we present something so that people who live outside Mackay can visualise the distance, not necessarily the population, because we always just look at the population number and that is nothing. I thought that would be more helpful for us to convey our message. Recently they have conducted WHAM 2015, which is the Whitsunday hinterland and Mackay regional planning. Actually they included Bowen, but Bowen is included in Townsville. The Mackay Migrant Resource Centre covers Bowen. I thought to myself, no, we have to include only the seven local

government areas which are recognised through the office of the government statistical regional profile, so we put that in. It is regional planning which was funded by the departments handling communications and information, local government, planning and sport. I thought that that would give you also some sort of vision on the industries of the region and our strengths as well as our weaknesses.

CHAIR—From your own personal experience, what countries have the migrants who have come here more recently come from?

Mrs Carleton—I have recently gathered information from the department of immigration in Brisbane. I am also a member of the Queensland Migration Planning Committee in relation to interpreters. I have not got it in detail—

CHAIR—Just roughly.

Mrs Carleton—Roughly, I think it is 4,000 to 5,000. The top group now apparently is from the Philippines. We have Maltese.

CHAIR—Maltese?

Mrs Carleton—Yes, Malta. We are talking about the population base, not the newly arrived.

CHAIR—Not the newly arrived.

Mrs Carleton—Yes. The statistics I am giving you are not necessarily the newly arrived but probably the recently arrived. We have Filipinos, Germans, Maltese, Dutch and there is another one, Italian. They are apparently the five top groups in Mackay. We have also got Thai, Pakistani and Bangladeshi. They are all small and scattered all over the region.

CHAIR—Small groups?

Mrs Carleton—Yes.

CHAIR—Thinking of the ones that you see, the ones that have come more recently, what brings them to the Mackay area? Why do they decide to settle in that area?

Mrs Carleton—One thing that I actually encounter is because they find jobs. Most of them are actually coming from cosmopolitan areas and most of them are business or skilled. They could be an engineer, they could be a medical specialist. Most of them are health people, skilled and business.

CHAIR—Are they coming as an independent or are they being sponsored by an employer?

Mrs Carleton—There are some that are actually sponsored by the employer. It could be Queensland Health, it could be sugar research or it could be mining. They are the three big industries we have got. One thing that I actually encountered recently was that three or four specialists came to Mackay, and the husbands are actually orthopaedic scientists or doctors.

They left Mackay seven months ago because not only the husbands but the wives as well are professional and the wives could not find a job.

CHAIR—Really?

Mrs Carleton—It always puts me in a very difficult situation because all I can give is support by giving them information or a referral. When it comes to upgrading their skills, it should be to an Australian standard and we do not have that in Mackay. They have to leave Mackay and go to a cosmopolitan place.

CHAIR—To upgrade their skills to an Australian standard.

Mrs Carleton—Yes.

CHAIR—That would be a problem, wouldn't it?

Mrs Carleton—Yes.

CHAIR—Where is the nearest centre where they can upgrade? It depends on the skill, I would imagine.

Mrs Carleton—Brisbane. If there are a health specialist, they have to go to Melbourne to upgrade. In my experience, it is not necessarily the NOSSR—the national overseas recognition—

CHAIR—We know the program.

Mrs Carleton—But it is always the professional bodies. When you talk to NOSSR, it is completely different from the professional bodies. So that is why they have to go to Melbourne to upgrade and be accepted into their professional organisation.

CHAIR—You mentioned a couple that had to leave: what was the wife's speciality, do you remember?

Mrs Carleton—A radiologist, but specialising in scanning.

CHAIR—And to get that college recognition so she could work in Australia, she had to go—

Mrs Carleton—To Brisbane or Melbourne.

CHAIR—Presumably her husband came under the program where he is allowed to practice here without going through that.

Mrs Carleton—Yes.

CHAIR—She did not, so the problem was that she had to go to either Sydney or Melbourne to be accepted into that speciality.

Mrs Carleton—To her professional body.

CHAIR—The system, in bringing out the husband without looking at the wife's needs, was pretty damn stupid.

Mrs Carleton—Yes, that is right. Aside from that, there is no support system. There must be some relative from their country for moral support. Even though there is childcare, if the wife is a professional in the country she came from and she ends up at home, the family gets a bit wobbly.

Senator McKIERNAN—In terms of your primary recommendations, the first one makes some interesting reading where you are talking about providing incentives to people. How do you think those incentives would be accepted in a regional place like Mackay, or regional Australia generally?

Mrs Carleton—I will ask Jean to explain.

Ms Bingham—Do you want me to read the first recommendation?

Senator McKIERNAN—No, I have got it in front of me. I want you to develop it and further explain it and say how the local community would accept such a proposal.

Ms Bingham—The recommendation says, 'To formulate economic viability by providing incentives.' For example, at the meeting they mentioned that goods in the Mackay area are more expensive than in the metropolitan areas—the cost of petrol, for example. They are probably looking at bulk-billing, higher wages and salaries for medical specialists and doctors to settle in regional areas like Mackay. So those are the incentives coming from those people.

Mr BAIRD—Housing would be far less expensive than, say, Sydney or Melbourne.

Mrs Carleton—We actually have a housing issue in Mackay. When it comes to rent, I think the average is \$125 for a one- or two-room flat in Mackay.

Mr BAIRD—Per week?

Mrs Carleton—Yes. It is a private rental. The average that you can rent for is \$125 to \$150—that is for a decent two-bedroom flat—and a house is probably ranging from \$190 to \$250 depending on how far the house is from the urban city. Because I work closely with the housing network, I know we have a shortage of housing for our people in Mackay itself.

Senator McKIERNAN—Are you talking about the general community and the general cost of housing in Mackay, rather than an incentive just to that migrant coming in?

Mrs Carleton—I was not absolutely at work; I was away for seven weeks. I was actually working in mental health. Jean was the locum at that time and I directed her in the process of getting people to input into the issue, so the things that we will be raising with the committee are not necessarily coming from us. What they are actually saying here is that it is probably

impossible for there to be an increase in wages unless we have some sort of dealing with the employer. What they mean here by an increase in wages is probably more like—

Mrs Bingham—If I can comment on wages, Moranbah, for example, is a mining town. It is not mainly so, but I think a high proportion of the miners are married to migrants. Because of the downturn in the industry there are lower wages. Also, a lot of miners were put off from their jobs and relocated somewhere else, so in that regard we are losing migrants in the region, especially those who are skilled and professional. They have to leave the area to go somewhere else. Probably by economic viability and incentives we have to look in that regard as to how we can address that situation so that skilled and professional migrants will stay in the rural areas

Senator McKIERNAN—So you are not suggesting that I, as a migrant, should get more in salary than my colleague Bruce Baird, who was born in Australia? That is not what you mean by incentive, is it?

Mrs Bingham—No.

Senator McKIERNAN—That is what I was trying to get the clarification on. With the greatest of respect, I am not so sure that does come through in your proposal. As I read your proposal, you were saying that migrants ought to be given an increase in wages, ought to be able to buy petrol at a lower cost and ought to be given cheaper rents. That was the interpretation that I put on this when I read your proposal in the first instance.

Mrs Bingham—I understand that the first recommendation addressed the general conditions of the area, not just migrants, commensurate with the general existing conditions, not just specifically to migrants. If the general conditions are lifted in a way, then migrants are all included anyway.

Senator McKIERNAN—Some of the economic circumstances you are talking about affect locally born people and people who have moved into the area as well as migrants. In terms of Community Settlement Services, could you be specific as to what your service actually does in delivering them? You have answered some questions on the numbers of migrants in the region.

Mrs Carleton—Are you asking us to tell you what is the role of community settlement?

Senator McKIERNAN—What you actually do.

Mrs Carleton—According to our funding direction, I support through referral, advocacy and, generally speaking, providing information. It is a very, very broad role because you can say that 'support' could actually be supporting someone.

For example, we have cases of migrants who have newly arrived, migrants who are even being sponsored, who sponsor themselves and are not really supported. They are not actually entitled for two years to have any benefits. The sponsor might have their own financial difficulties so the one who has been sponsored usually shifts to Brisbane and finds any job there that might not necessarily align with their profession. For example, they could be a civil engineer and end up as a dishwasher in Brisbane, or end up in hospitality. They could end up as a labourer. That is what happens. So my support can come in and just provide them with a

contact person within the community. I can link them up and say, 'If there is any job there that might help this person, would you arrange it in some way?' For example, I have people I have put in two private hospitals because they needed it instead of shifting to Brisbane. So they might get some work in linen or in maintenance or something, although that is not their profession. It is more word of mouth. You have to actually take them because of their accent, and the way they understand is completely different because the system they come from is completely different to ours here in Australia, so sometimes you really need to be in between those two people. For example, in universities, some migrants actually miss out. When you say to them 'orientation', they have a different understanding of what orientation is, although they have been accepted in the course they want. So I have to be in between. I usually ring the person to whom they went and ask for all their paperwork and ask them what is happening and that sort of thing. That is some other work that I do, aside from information.

Senator McKIERNAN—What nationality would be the main group that you would be serving?

Mrs Carleton—Are you saying the main one?

Senator McKIERNAN—Yes.

Mrs Carleton—It all varies across the board. When it comes to linking them to immigration, they come because they see community settlement as a de facto department of immigration. When it comes to immigration, most of them are from Asiatic countries like the Philippines. It is a mix; it is across the board. They could be Scottish; they could be coming from southern Europe; they could be from the Middle East; they could be South-East Asian.

Senator McKIERNAN—I find that a bit surprising because Queensland has a reputation of attracting mainly migrants from Britain.

Mrs Carleton—Could you say that again, please?

Senator McKIERNAN—In terms of the number of migrants that the state of Queensland attracts on a yearly basis, the majority of those people come in the main from Britain. There is less of a multicultural mix than perhaps there is in New South Wales, Victoria and the other states, with the exception of Western Australia which I think would have the greatest mix. That is why I was directing a question to the mix of people because I think something in the region of less than 20 percent of the overall intake comes into Queensland each year.

Mrs Carleton—To me, even the statistics and data that shows that, I do not know that.

Senator McKIERNAN—That is fine. Thank you for your help.

Mrs IRWIN—I notice that you called a public meeting on 14 April regarding input for state specific migration. I was very interested to see some of the recommendations, especially to create a comprehensive web site to promote the scheme. What have you done with these? Have you sent these recommendations off to any departments, or to the department of immigration?

Mrs Carleton—No; only to this committee.

Mrs IRWIN—So this is the first time that anyone has seen these recommendations?

Mrs Carleton—Yes, this is the first time anyone has seen them. Actually, the only reason we were able to send all these recommendations and issues was because our federal member wrote to me and said, ‘Luz, this is an issue that you might be aware of because you are at the coalface.’ So it is really good.

Mr BAIRD—Who is that member?

Mrs Carleton—Mrs De-Anne Kelly. She wrote to us. I was not even aware that this was on.

Ms Bingham—The web site information is very interesting. We are not saying that there is no web site information on the profile of Mackay. I went through the Internet and I found two: one is a commercial profile of Mackay; the other one is the Mackay regional economic development site. I would say they are in their infancy at this stage, but they are at the forefront of development. When I went through these web sites, there was not enough information that would lead skilled and professional migrants outside Queensland or within Queensland to say, ‘There is something for us in Mackay,’ in economic or professional terms.

I am aware that the people who are responsible for the web site information are updating the sites. I was talking to one of the people who is directly working on one of them. They intend to update that site. Of course we would like to see them include things that will be useful and beneficial for skilled and professional migrants to persuade them to say, ‘At least there is something for us in Mackay.’

This was raised in the meeting. It was considered very important. For example, if they have relatives in Darwin or Perth and there are web site profiles of all the regional areas in Australia, they can just use the Internet. We have Telstra Big Pond Internet in shopping malls, so they can just access it, and say, ‘Oh yes, there what we want.’ They might have to go through a migrant centre that is far away from them or they might not drive, so web site information would be more accessible to them. That is why I thought it should be included as one of the recommendations that we forwarded to the committee.

Mr BAIRD—I think, as Mrs Irwin and I were discussing, that this is probably a very significant contribution. We saw it as a subset for DIMA, to provide migration information on all of the key regional centres. It is a way of getting it out easily. I think that is a very good idea.

Mrs Carleton—That is identified in the WHAM regional planning as a weakness: the information technology industry is still in relative infancy.

Mrs IRWIN—Is there a high level of community awareness about state specific migration in your region?

Mrs Carleton—No. Even I, myself, a community settlement officer having an ongoing communication with DIMA in Brisbane and the last boundary to the south under Cairns DIMA, did not know that there was such a thing because that is not my role.

Mrs IRWIN—So you thank your federal member for writing to you to let you know.

Mrs Carleton—Yes. I did not know all those things.

Ms Bingham—Me, too. I did not know.

Mrs IRWIN—We will have to let Mrs Kelly know that.

Mrs Carleton—It is very difficult. I always query: what is really my role? Although, in my funding agreement now there is a moral obligation for me here, I query how far I can go. I keep ringing them and asking, ‘Please tell me in relation to this role of mine,’ because my role is so broadly defined.

Ms Bingham—Actually, that is very interesting because when I rang representative Steve Dyer I said, ‘What is this state specific migration?’ I wanted to get the whole idea before we have to relay this to the migrants, before we raise it at the meeting. When we got the papers, I said to Luz that it was a very good opportunity for us to participate since you people funded the service. I think it is good. That created really a very interesting scenario.

Mrs Carleton—It is important to be aware that we might not have an insight and when we communicate the department of immigration is there and we are here. The department of immigration should come here so they can communicate on a line to our frame of reference so the communication will be effective. It is not only the department of immigration. This is my learning academically in Australia and in real practice. It is like a teacher and student. If you do not go down to the level of the student, the communication is not really there.

Mrs IRWIN—They never meet.

Mrs Carleton—Yes, it does not meet, because we all have a different frame of reference.

Mr BAIRD—It is a good point.

Mrs Carleton—We find that if we put it in a positive way there will be no problem. To come down and meet with what is our frame of reference to each other is what happens with migrants as well.

Mrs IRWIN—It is a very good point that you are making. Do you feel that this scheme would work for your region?

Mrs Carleton—The scheme will work in our region as long as there is more support to the migrants, particularly where they are. Most of the time in my experience the public servants wait for the people to come. I do not wait. My role is to give information or refer. I do not wait for them. I ring them or call on them. It is not my role to organise social activities and make it comfortable for people. I invite them. It could be a cooking class, but from there I will be able to promote my service. Although the mechanism that I use is not really aligned to my role, it makes them comfortable, and from there it starts. Word of mouth is stronger than advertisements on radio or in the paper. Word of mouth is always very strong.

Mrs IRWIN—I would like to get back to an earlier comment that you made about this doctor in the region. Did he come out as a skilled migrant? Was he sponsored by Queensland Health?

Mrs Carleton—I am not quite sure.

Mrs IRWIN—It was very distressing to hear how his wife has got skills and she had to go to either Brisbane or Victoria. Speaking to them personally, were they aware of the region that they were coming to and what resources were in that region?

Mrs Carleton—I am not sure. I can speak about a person from my country. She is a Filipina. She travelled from the Philippines to New Zealand because her husband is a civil engineer and got a job there. She is a psychiatrist by profession. She was not working there and it was not like that where she came from. So she went through the Internet apparently and applied for a psychiatrist's job in Mackay. She did not even know what Mackay was like. They do not have any visualisation of what Mackay is. Now she is working. She is categorised as a senior medical officer, not a psychiatrist yet, because she had to work that out with the professional body. That couple felt it was so isolated. The husband, the civil engineer, is the one staying home.

You usually find these things in an informal way. It could be in the supermarket, it could be when you are going somewhere else and you meet them. That is why I only knew seven months ago that this couple, who are specialists, left Mackay. A colleague from their community, an engineer, asked me if I did not know that that particular doctor and one other doctor had left. I said no. The last time I saw them they had invited me to their house to find out what information I could give them.

Mrs IRWIN—You are virtually saying that you think the scheme has got to be promoted more, that people who are looking at coming to Mackay, or to your region, have to actually know what is there for them and what resources there are.

Mrs Carleton—It is not necessarily by words only. It can be a picture of some sort. I found this book in one of my bags. I was away for seven or eight weeks, and someone provided this book, called *Journey to a River City* and it focuses on Mackay. I would like to give that to the committee. Also, I put together a newsletter, which will give you an example of what we do.

Mrs IRWIN—How long has the community settlement service been operating in Mackay?

Mrs Carleton—As far as I can remember—because I was only a volunteer when it started—it was started in 1990 or 1991. It was sponsored by another community based organisation, not Mackay Regional Council. I think they have been sponsoring it since 1994 or 1995. Then they wanted to return it to DIMA because it was poorly funded. I have been working on a health project funded by Queensland Health with another community development worker from Mackay Regional Council. We actually wrote the submission to the department—

Mrs IRWIN—So your group is state funded. Do you get some federal funding?

Mrs Carleton—It is federally funded.

Mrs IRWIN—So it is fully federally funded?

Mrs Carleton—Yes, it is fully federally funded. The funding structure has changed. It used to be funded depending on the qualification of the work, the salary. The funding went with it. However, now it is completely different. Across the board, CSS gets less than \$50,000. I used to hitchhike because I did not have enough money—that is why they laugh at me. If you look on the map and see how far Mackay is, where I am based

Mrs IRWIN—I was actually looking at the map earlier with Mr Baird, and we were talking about the distances.

Mrs Carleton—I have a good working relationship with Queensland Health because I worked on a project for three years. I usually hitchhike with Community Health when they go Belyando and to Moranbah Base Hospital, which is the administration and staff development unit of Mackay Base Hospital. I hitchhike with them so I do not have to spend money, because I have not got money for travel. And that is the difficulty. Although I cover those areas I am lucky if I can go there twice a year. Usually I work by telephone, but I cannot reach people physically to develop a good working relationship with the target groups. That is the difficulty.

Now, because of the restructure under Queensland Health, the boundaries are updated. So if do not take a bus, which takes a whole day, I usually hitchhike with whoever is going there—it could be the domestic violence resource service, because they have two cars, or it could be the Mackay sexual assault worker—so I can get to the people.

Mrs IRWIN—This next question has not got much to do with the scheme that we are talking about now but is mainly out of curiosity. How long have you been in Mackay? Did you migrate there as a skilled migrant?

Mrs Carleton—Yes.

Mrs IRWIN—How did you find out or hear about Mackay?

Mrs Carleton—I actually married an Australian. I live on five acres, 27 kilometres outside Mackay. I can talk from experience because I came from a densely populated area. I thought overseas was all this really good land. I ended up in Mackay. I had never lived in a place surrounded with cane fields and snakes and I thought to myself, ‘Goodness me! I want to go back home.’ My perception of overseas, like everyone in the Philippines who goes overseas, was that it is a gold mine. But it is not. My professional background is more in business. I have kids. When I came to Australia I thought, ‘What am I going to do with these kids. I’ve got nobody and they can’t understand my accent.’ We speak English from primary school, but my accent is completely different. I have to go along with that. We lived 27 kilometres from the hospital. I am lucky because my husband is off work. He works at the local newspaper.

I did not know. I thought to myself, ‘My goodness me! This is Australia. Where are the buildings?’ I came from Manila. When my son was growing he said, ‘Mummy, what tribe did you belong to?’ I said, ‘You know, in the tribe I came from, our supermarket was six floors.’ When I first came and we drove here, I said, ‘Are there any NPA there?’ I meant the people’s army, the rebels. I did not have any perception.

Senator McKIERNAN—When did you come?

Mrs Carleton—In 1982.

Mrs IRWIN—Thank you for your honesty. Speaking to you, I am sure that you love Mackay now.

Mrs Carleton—Mackay is much better now. That was 19 years ago. I went back to university here in 1982. Before I went to university here they had the preparatory university. I thought to myself that, even though I was not supposed to go there because I have a university background and this was for year 10 only, I wanted to know how they think and how they do their academic learning. I had my study skills. I went there to see how they do university in Australia.

That is why I recommend to migrants, ‘Don’t jump that far.’ To us from the Philippines, English is a second language. How about those people who come from Thailand, Hong Kong or the Middle East who have never had English in their studies? That is why I say to them, ‘Before you jump in—’. They may have the study skills or have been a teacher or somebody in their country, but when they come here everything changes. You adjust to where you live and at the same time you adjust the way you think and the way you say the words—how you phrase things—because they understand you in a different way. That is the issue. In the hospital, the doctor will tell you, ‘Hop onto the scales,’ when you understand ‘hopping’ literally as ‘jumping’. It is simple but it can grow to a big problem.

I am very lucky that I do a 15-minute talk in their monthly orientation. I fought for five years to have a 15-minute talk on culture. I talk just a little bit on cultural awareness and at the same time promote my job and role. I fought for five years to get that 15 minutes to talk.

Mrs IRWIN—Thank you very much for your insight.

Mrs Carleton—That is the reality.

CHAIR—Thank you very much Mrs Carleton and Ms Bingham for coming here today. If there are any matters on which you need additional information you can contact the secretariat. You will receive a transcript from Hansard if you would like to see what you have said, to see if you want to make any alterations.

Mrs Carleton—Good; it is really very important because we are the representative of an organisation. We have to disclose that to the committee.

CHAIR—You will have the transcript and you can make editorial corrections to that. Thank you very much for coming today. We especially appreciate your long trip from Mackay and hope you have some lunch before you return.

Mrs Carleton—This is a good learning experience for us, too.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Resolved (on motion by **Senator McKiernan**):

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

Committee adjourned at 11.37 a.m.

