



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
AFFAIRS**

**Reference: Review of the Auditor-General's report No. 26 of 1996-97—CDEP phase
2 audit**

CAIRNS

Thursday, 8 May 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Members:

Mr Lieberman (Chair)

Mr Albanese	Mr Marek
Mr Campbell	Mr Melham
Mr Dondas	Dr Nelson
Mr Entsch	Mr Pyne
Mr Holding	Mr Quick
Mr Katter	Mr Tony Smith
Mr Lloyd	

Matter referred:

Review of the Auditor-General's audit report No. 26 1996-97—Performance audit—Community Development Employment Projects Scheme—Phase two of audit—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

WITNESSES

**ASPINALL, Mr Richard Edward, Regional Manager, Cairns Office,
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 111 Grafton Street,
Cairns Queensland 4870 22**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Review of the Auditor-General's report No. 26 of 1996-97—CDEP phase 2 audit

CAIRNS

Thursday, 8 May 1997

Present

Mr Lieberman (Chair)

Mr Holding

Mr Marek

Mr Katter

Mr Tony Smith

The committee met at 1.35 p.m.

Mr Lieberman took the chair.

ASPINALL, Mr Richard Edward, Regional Manager, Cairns Office, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 111 Grafton Street, Cairns Queensland 4870

CHAIR—I declare open this hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and welcome Mr Richard Aspinall. We said when phase 2 came in that it would be referred to us and we would have a look at that. You are virtually the first person we have spoken to on phase 2. I thought today I would simply ask you how you feel about what you have seen of phase 2. Is there anything you think is going to cause problem?

Mr Aspinall—No, I don't think so. The majority of things that were raised through phase 1 and our discussions last time seem to be leading towards some of the conclusions made in phase 2. I think it is quite good to focus on a number of areas we talked about last time; that is, performance indicators and indicator reporting where there is a problem with perceptions of what is actually happening in the communities and what actually can be quantified. A lot of the impact CDEP is having on communities is not quantifiable. I think the audit report covers a lot of the responses.

CHAIR—As you saw, we are very supportive of the CDEP program. I think all the members of the committee feel that they are doing a wonderful job and we should do all we can to encourage people. So you are on track in that regard. How is the feedback from the regional office to the state office? I was a little bit troubled by the layers of bureaucracy—the head office, state office and regional office. It seems to me that you have three separate organisations or parts of organisations administering in some way or other the delivery of that program. I know that is inevitable. I wonder, frankly, whether it was appropriate to consider whether the state office should be involved at all, whether it should be just the regional office and the head office.

Mr Aspinall—Particularly talking on behalf of Queensland—I have also been a regional manager in New South Wales—I think there are some specific state issues which are extremely useful for a state perspective and a state approach on it. The way in which DOGIT communities are administered is very much a linkage between us and the state government and their management of the act.

In terms of policy development and policy change in Queensland, it is certainly very useful to have a state perspective. It is a bit difficult for me as a regional manager to go directly and access state government. It is much easier for a state office to talk with their colleagues in the state departments administering DOGIT communities. There may be some duplication at the state level in the amalgamation of performance information and policy development, but certainly there are specific state issues that really require an overall state perspective.

CHAIR—I know that these problems leading to the audit office's report of phase 1 occurred before your term of office commenced here. You were in Wagga?

Mr Aspinall—Yes.

CHAIR—It seemed to me very obvious that there were people in the regional office, state office and head office of ATSIC who responded only when required to do so, rather than taking a leadership role. So you had people in the region doing their best, but were inadequately trained for some of the complexities of CDEP. It was only when it got off their desk, and then it was too late. That was troubling me a little bit in the whole format of things. I had to be guided by the audit office eventually. They seemed satisfied that if these measures recommended were introduced we would be back on track again.

Mr Aspinall—We are just about to start both a performance review and an administrative review at Wodgil Wodgil, just up past the Daintree, which is a reasonably large CDEP. It has been running for quite a number of years. It is extremely useful for me to bring some state office CDEP operatives on to that review panel so we have more independence and the state perspective as well. I suppose there are all different levels. Certainly it is my view that the more the state operatives are out in the field and getting a feel for what is happening in communities, CDEP communities particularly, the better the policy development. Often in regional offices we are very much involved in the administration and development of projects on the ground and we do not have the opportunity to feed into policy development so much. So I suppose it is good to have that linkage.

CHAIR—One other aspect you may have noted in the report we put to parliament on phase 1 was that we highlighted the fact that the Commonwealth audit office was unable or had no jurisdiction to completely audit the CDEP programs where state, local government and other organisations, in addition to Commonwealth, were involved. They could only audit that Commonwealth component. They could not audit the whole program. There is quite a lot of action taking place on that. I believe another parliamentary committee is looking at that too. Have you had any feedback on that at all?

Mr Aspinall—I think there would be probably a general view. We are trying to do things cooperatively with ATSIA here in Cairns. We are doing a number of joint reviews of the operations of councils per se, CDEP being one component of that review. I think there is certainly a mood at the moment for greater cooperation between ATSIC and the state departments dealing with certainly community groups on Cape York.

CHAIR—We have some time problems with the other group. Because of the time constraint—you have always been very helpful to me—if we left with you some issues that we were going to raise in a dialogue like this, could you mull them over and let us have your comments on those parts of it that you feel, as a state manager, you could make a comment on? We would be grateful. We wish you well in your work. Congratulations on the progress you are making. Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned at 1.45 p.m.

