



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
communities**

TUESDAY, 31 MARCH 2009

MASIG ISLAND

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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

Tuesday, 31 March 2009

Members: Mr Marles (*Chair*), Mr Laming (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Abbott, Ms Campbell, Mr Katter, Ms Rea, Mr Kelvin Thomson, Mr Trevor, Mr Turnour and Mrs Vale

Members in attendance: Mr Katter, Mr Marles, Mr Turnour and Mrs Vale

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The operation of local community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with a particular focus on:

- food supply, quality, cost and competition issues;
- the effectiveness of the Outback Stores model, and other private, public and community store models; and
- the impact of these factors on the health and economic outcomes of communities.

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Committee met at 3.44 pm

CHAIR (Mr Marles)—I declare open the meeting of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

Mr John Mosby—Community families, parliament of Australia, House of Representatives committee, as a Torres Strait Island councillor representing Masig I welcome you to my community. I say thanks for the presence of my community to be here to witness before this inquiry into remote community stores. I think it has been a long time coming. Everything has a timing and a purpose, and I am grateful that it is happening in my time. In front of me as our witness is our former long-time serving chairperson of the community and an ex-service manager of IBIS stores. I welcome the chair, Richard Marles, and your committee team to Masig. Thanks for being here. I must say thanks to everyone who did the setting for this place. Thank you to the island manager and the CDEP workforce. I now hand back to you, Chair.

CHAIR—Thank you, John. Thank you very much for that welcome. I welcome everyone here to this hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and our inquiry into remote community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to the elders—past, present and future. The committee would also like to acknowledge the present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in this area. The committee would also like to thank the members of the Masig community for having us here today and receiving us, and allowing us to conduct this public hearing in this space. Also, thank you for presenting this space so wonderfully with the beautiful flowers on the table. We are very touched by what you have done.

There is a formal part to these proceedings. Everything that witnesses say in these proceedings need to be factual and honest, and it can be considered a serious matter to attempt to mislead this committee. I invite all of those who want to give evidence to make comments that will assist us in our inquiry with the intention of making some improvements to the current government administration in relation to community stores. This hearing is a public hearing and a transcript of what is said will be placed on the committee's website. If you would like further details about the inquiry or the transcripts then please ask any of the committee staff, who are around this space today. At the conclusion of the formal part of the hearing, we will be conducting an open forum, after we hear from those witnesses from whom we have already arranged to take evidence. That will be an opportunity for anyone in the audience who would like to make a contribution to this discussion about how we can better administer community stores in remote Indigenous communities. I would encourage you to take that opportunity. If you would like to make a contribution at the end then please approach one of the committee staff and they will to take down your names so we know who is intending to speak.

I would like to make special note of Jim Turnour, who is your local member. We are here in large part because of the commitment he has had to this issue and his advocacy on this issue to improve the situation in relation to community stores. Jim has done a great job with that.

[3.50 pm]

MOSBY, Mr John Joseph Simeon, Private capacity

MOSBY, Mr Joseph, Private capacity

CHAIR—I welcome John and Joseph Mosby. I understand that both of you are appearing today in a private capacity. Would either of you like to make an opening statement? We will then ask you some questions.

Mr John Mosby—In my welcoming I mention that we as a community are grateful to have an opportunity for you to visit us and have this hearing. I will say some things we always complain about. Yesterday, in our preparation for this, I made mention that down south people were crying about fuel rises from 90c to \$1.10. Our fuel is about \$2.80, walking up to \$2.85 at times, and that is what we live by. Fuel is a part of life for us up here. We live by what we get up here. We have no choice; we just accept what services we get.

CHAIR—I have some background questions to start with. What is the population of Masig Island, roughly?

Mr Joseph Mosby—It could be around 300 to 400.

CHAIR—Am I right in saying there are two stores that are based on Masig Island?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes, two stores.

CHAIR—One of them is an IBIS store, which is just next to us, and there is another store which is run by Island and Cape. Is that right?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you have any comments to make about the prices of the products that are in the stores?

Mr Joseph Mosby—IBIS today, 2009, started in the 1930s as IIB. IIB was started in 1930 after that Badu store, the Papuan store. The prices used to be cheaper, but now it is too dear. A tin of flour, say, at that time was five shillings. It used to be pounds, shillings and pence. Dollars and cents began in 1967 or 1968. A big tin of flour used to be five shillings, but now everything has changed.

CHAIR—The stores are supplied by a barge that comes weekly; is that right? How often does the barge come?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Can I tell you this, my friend: I have been here from DNA time to this day. We had four vessels running cargo every fortnight. From where I sit it seems that having them coming here on a weekly basis is good. But I do not know about the forklifts and this and

that. In DNA time there were four boats. They took cargo and put it in your lap—put it instore. There were not deliveries like this weekly service.

CHAIR—So it is a weekly service at the moment?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes, a weekly service. But before it was every two weeks—a fortnightly basis—and we had four boats serving the Torres Strait. It was really good.

CHAIR—What day does the boat usually come?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Every Monday or Tuesday. Sometimes Monday, sometimes Tuesday.

CHAIR—Do you have a comment to make about the breadth of the products that you can buy? Are there lots of products that you can buy in the two stores?

Mr John Mosby—I would say we have a lot of products but not a variety. We get the same ones all the time. There are not many choices in what we can buy, I guess. In our parents' day the wages were high and the food costs were low, but today maybe the food costs are high and the wages are low. I think that is because of the high cost of living for our generation in our time. In the time I have lived here, that is the trend and turnaround I have seen in food costs in the shop.

CHAIR—Can much fresh food—that is, fresh fruit, vegetables and meat—be bought in the stores?

Mr Joseph Mosby—We get vegetables and meat.

CHAIR—Is that expensive?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes, very expensive.

CHAIR—Do you only get access to the fresh fruit and vegetables when the barges come in?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes, when the barge comes in we get vegetables and fruit. Meat can be kept in the fridge.

Mr John Mosby—Even though you have a weekly service you can still find problems with quantity and quality. At one stage you might have quality but you do not have quantity. Then you might have quantity but quality is a problem, especially around fruit and vegies. From living here, that is what I would say.

CHAIR—Has there been any attempt that you are aware of to try to make the prices of the fresh produce lower? I am talking about fruit, vegetables and meat. Are you aware whether there has been any attempt to make that in particular cheaper?

Mr John Mosby—Not that I am aware of.

CHAIR—Is it still quite expensive?

Mr John Mosby—Yes. I do not know if they could get a subsidy or something else to make them cheaper. I hope this inquiry can assist us in getting that.

CHAIR—Is there much dialogue between the council and stores? Do you talk to the stores about the quality of the produce, the frequency and the cost?

Mr John Mosby—There is, but it is difficult to make the time to meet with each other. I know a couple of times they wanted to visit the stores and they asked to meet with us, but I might not be on the island. I say we could have the dialogue to improve areas.

CHAIR—Do the stores ever conduct surveys or do research about what items people want in the stores? Are you aware of that every occurring?

Mr John Mosby—No.

CHAIR—Do you feel there is a sense of competition between the two stores?

Mr John Mosby—I do not think so.

CHAIR—Are the prices the same in the two stores?

Mr Joseph Mosby—The prices can go down. The main thing is price.

CHAIR—For most items, are the prices the same in both stores or is there a difference?

Mr John Mosby—I would say they are similar.

Mr TURNOUR—One of the things we are looking at is governance in terms of some of the community stores. You have both stores—an Island and Cape store and an IBIS store. Do you see any differences in the quality and quantity of product in the different stores, and how do the different stores compare?

Mr John Mosby—Probably the same.

Mr TURNOUR—Have you had any problems with the fuel supply here or has it been regular? I know we have breakdowns on other islands.

Mr Joseph Mosby—Fuel is the main problem.

Mr John Mosby—The price of it is a real issue. I think IBIS run the bowser. Going back to the stores and the prices, you do see differences but on different products. Some may be higher in one and less in the other, besides fruit and vegies. Pricing is of great concern and the quantity can be a concern too with weather like this where 3,000 litres can go in a couple of days. Our local community has many great fishermen with lots of vehicles. Even though it is \$2.29, and sometimes \$2.65 or so, 3,000 litres can still go in a week. We buy what is there for us and price is not an issue when it comes down to it. If it gets to \$1.10 we are happy, but it is still of great concern for us. I think last week they only brought in 1,400 for us and we were out of fuel for a

couple of days. It was only yesterday that we got more fuel. In a week, 3,000 litres is not enough.

Mr TURNOUR—Is this a trial island for the TSRA horticulture project? Is it Masig or do I have the wrong island?

Mr John Mosby—Yes.

Mr TURNOUR—Will the stores look to utilise some of that produce? How would that be distributed through the community?

Mr John Mosby—I think it will. We are getting to that fruit and garden stage. We are not there but we are getting to that stage.

Mr TURNOUR—Thank you both.

Mrs VALE—One of the aspects this inquiry is looking at is to try and ascertain exactly how much fresh fruit and vegetables are available for the people on your island and I would be interested, when it comes to the open part of the forum, to hear from some of the women, who could actually tell us how much fruit and vegetables they are able to give their children because it is pretty important that we understand that. John, do you have any tradition of market gardens at all on the island? Does anybody grow their own fruit or vegetables?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Can I answer this one? Before, we used to have gardens.

Mrs VALE—You used to have gardens, did you?

Mr Joseph Mosby—We used to have a garden. I was a gardener.

Mrs VALE—You had gardens?

Mr Joseph Mosby—We had gardens. We would grow anything.

Mrs VALE—And what did you grow here?

Mr Joseph Mosby—We would grow corn, watermelon, pumpkin, you name it—everything under the sun.

Mrs VALE—Could you grow any leafy vegetables?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes, we grew cabbage or whatever—I do not know the names.

Mrs VALE—So nobody grows vegetables today?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Not today, no. You know what? AQIS stopped all those things. Bang! No more.

Mrs VALE—And what about other produce like chickens and fresh eggs?

Mr Joseph Mosby—We always had chickens.

Mrs VALE—You have chickens?

Mr Joseph Mosby—We had them before, but not now. We had chickens inside there.

Mrs VALE—So you have chickens inside the IBIS store now?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes, everything.

Mrs VALE—Frozen chicken?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Even cow!

Mrs VALE—Even cow in there now? Did you have cows on the island?

Mr Joseph Mosby—No, no cows—only pigs!

Mrs VALE—Okay! And you do not have any pigs now?

Mr Joseph Mosby—No.

Mrs VALE—No pigs now?

Mr Joseph Mosby—No.

Mrs VALE—No chickens now, and no fresh eggs—you get your fresh eggs from IBIS?

Mr Joseph Mosby—I do.

Mrs VALE—All right. What about the mothers, when it comes to feeding children vegetables? Do they come to IBIS?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Well, perhaps if there are any mothers here who might like to tell us afterwards at the open forum—

Mr Joseph Mosby—They could put the price down, too.

Mrs VALE—who might like to tell us about how you access your vegetables and what kinds you give your children and what kind of fruit is available, it would really be interesting to the committee. Thanks very much, Joseph. Thank you, John.

Mr Joseph Mosby—Thank you.

Mr John Mosby—I thank you and I would say that, at the open forum, you are quite right that questions that relate to fruit and vegies and stuff should go to mothers and ladies because they are the best ones to answer them.

Mrs VALE—I think they will be the very best ones to answer!

Mr John Mosby—You don't find many gents shopping, no!

Mr KATTER—Joe, did I understand you to say that AQIS stopped all that?

Mr Joseph Mosby—All those things that you might get from another country or whatever—like a leaf or that sort of thing.

Mr KATTER—But it was AQIS, not IBIS?

Mr Joseph Mosby—No, AQIS. You know, they take all that craft or whatever, if it comes from another country—or maybe marijuana.

Mr KATTER—Very bad people; they have made a lot of unhappiness in this country. Joe, was it better under the IIB days? Has the service provided by the store here gone backwards or forwards?

Mr Joseph Mosby—I will tell you this: the best days were the days when we had the other boat. We were never ever hungry. I and my wife went for 41 years to that store. In that store in the DNA's time there was frightful service. Today, we have gone back to square one. Then, if you wanted petrol, you could get a boat to bring petrol to the island the same day. Today, you cannot.

Mr KATTER—Are you saying it was a mistake to sell the *Melbidir*?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes, a mistake.

Mr KATTER—Is the biggest problem due to sale of the *Melbidir*?

Mr Joseph Mosby—I could give you a quick story about the *Melbidir*. On Yorke Island, we were hungry and there was only dried coconut; there was no food in the store. The *Melbidir* was in Weipa. I got on the radio and talked to TI and John Buchanan, the manager. I said, 'All my people are eating dried coconut now.' The *Melbidir* said, 'We are in Weipa.' My radio from TI went straight to *Melbidir*, 'Turn the *Melbidir* from Weipa.' From Weipa they were ready to throw a bowline. The *Melbidir* came to TI and six trucks were waiting at the wharf with cargo for Yorke Island. This is called service. They sailed from TI to Yorke Island. If people slept on the beach, they could buy tucker from the beach from the boat. That is service. Today you cannot get that service.

Mr KATTER—Can you put a date on when things went bad with the stores and the food supply? When I was minister I cannot remember anyone ever complaining about IIB—maybe they did but I did not hear it. It was not perfect but people did not complain. People have been

shrieking over the last two days of this inquiry. You are in a unique position to know when things went bad. Was it the late 1990s?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Maybe people from the department complained about this and that. Maybe they were afraid but now it is open air—you can go anywhere and hear it.

Mr KATTER—But you were not backward in giving me a bit of stick from time to time, but I did not cop it over IIB. For the sake of the committee, I am trying to establish where it went bad. It strikes me that the sale of the *Melbidir* created a serious problem.

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes, deadset, I tell you now.

Mr KATTER—Was the IIB meeting the cost of the *Melbidir*? Did you pay something for freight to get it from TI out to here?

Mr Joseph Mosby—No, I don't think so. It was free.

Mr KATTER—Free?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes, free.

Mr KATTER—For the sake of the committee, the government owned a boat called the *Melbidir*, which was quite a substantial boat. It was 500 tonnes, was it John? What tonnage would it take? Twenty tonnes?

Mr John Mosby—I do not know.

Mr Joseph Mosby—More, I would think.

Mr KATTER—It kept circling the islands on a permanent basis and it was a service owned by the government, and the delivery of food was free.

Mr Joseph Mosby—It was really good.

Mr KATTER—It was owned by the Queensland government.

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes, it was really good. The Joh Bjelke-Petersen days were really good. The other board was there at the same time.

Mrs VALE—Do you think there is a need for a similar vessel to service the Tiwi Islands like that again? Do you think we need a new *Melbidir*? Would that help?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes, that would be good. For carrying cargo now, you use a forklift. Before, we carried cargo on our shoulders. You would never get one thing damaged, never ever. With forklifts and five or six tonne davits, that is why the costs have gone up. When you carried cargo on your shoulder, you did the trip from the reef outside here to the IBIS store—slave driving, we call it.

CHAIR—Is there local fishing? Are people's diets supplemented by fishing?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes. We have a freezer here.

CHAIR—But is a lot of fishing done on the island?

Mr John Mosby—Yes.

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes.

CHAIR—Would most people eat fish on most days—fish that you yourselves have caught?

Mr Joseph Mosby—Yes. I am a top fisherman.

Mr John Mosby—Fishing is done, too, to subsidise the CDEP wage. I think currently we are in a system where one week a team goes to work on CDEP and the other comes home, then one goes back on. So when the fishermen come off CDEP in the off week they basically do the fishing. That is their means of income. I guess that is what helps us to survive. That is why I said that, at times, 3,000 litres of fuel does not last.

Going back to the boats, I think it comes back to not having competition in this day and age. There is one freight company. We live with what we get. So when the managers and directors want to increase the cost of freight, we just live with it and just take it, whatever they charge. There is no competition, and today we well know that if you have competition then you get other services. You can support them and get a cheaper rate for getting your own freight up here.

CHAIR—I understand that there is a fish factory on the island?

Mr TURNOUR—A freezer.

Mr John Mosby—A freezer, yes.

CHAIR—But fish is taken off the island and sold down south?

Mr TURNOUR—Yes.

CHAIR—But is any of that fish consumed on the island?

Mr John Mosby—Yes. Whatever does not go in the freezer goes home.

CHAIR—Right. Very good. Joseph and Councillor John, thank you very much for giving us your time today. We very much appreciate it.

Mr Joseph Mosby—Thank you.

Mr John Mosby—Thank you. I hope our voices go all the way.

[4.18 pm]

MOSBY, Father Ned Dick, Assistant Manager, Island and Cape

MOSBY, Mrs Jessie Sania, Manager, Island and Cape

CHAIR—Welcome. Would you like to make an opening statement about managing the store? Then we can ask you some questions.

Father Ned Mosby—I have been managing the store for Island and Cape for almost eight months, and it has been a challenge, working in a private company.

CHAIR—Do you both have a background in managing stores?

Father Ned Mosby—Yes. My wife managed the IBIS store for 14 years before moving over to Island and Cape.

CHAIR—Do you have a sense about whether your prices are cheaper than the IBIS store?

Father Ned Mosby—In different varieties of goods. We match up with IBIS on groceries. The price of sundries is a bit higher than IBIS. I think this all comes down to the costing of freight. Island and Cape is a private company, and the freight blew sky high.

CHAIR—Your produce is packed for you in Cairns, is that right?

Mrs Sania Mosby—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you have a sense of how much the cost of freight adds to the cost of the products that you are selling?

Father Ned Mosby—That needs to be discussed with the CEO in Cairns. We just manage the store.

CHAIR—Do you have a sense of whether the store here runs at a profit?

Father Ned Mosby—I believe so, yes.

CHAIR—Do you ever do any communication with the community about what items you are going to stock in the store?

Father Ned Mosby—Yes. We sit with customers and ask what goods they wish us to sell at the store. Prior to that, when my wife was working at the IBIS store, I was part of that, as well, working with my wife. We did the same when we were at IBIS. We asked people what variety of goods they wanted. The stuff that we order is based on the facility that we have. You have to

order stuff that the shop will cater for. People ask for different varieties of goods, but that needs to be dealt with through the facility of the shop.

CHAIR—Do you ask people on a regular basis, or is it just that when people come through the store you have a conversation about what items they want?

Father Ned Mosby—I have done that when people come to the shop, yes. We are all family; we sit down and we talk about it.

CHAIR—Do you do anything to try to keep the prices of the fresh produce—the fruit and the vegetables—and the meat down?

Father Ned Mosby—We would love to but, as I stated, all of our goods match up with the freight. The freight alone, for example—when there were two companies, Jardine and Sea Swift, I bought a dinghy. I asked Jardine how much it would cost me, and he said \$900 from Cairns to Yorke. I went to Sea Swift and they were \$700, so I went with Sea Swift. Two months later, an in-law of mine went to Jardine and bought up his dinghy. It was \$1,600 for freight in two months! God!

CHAIR—Since Jardine have stopped operating, have you noticed that the prices in your store have gone up?

Father Ned Mosby—Yes.

CHAIR—On the issue of the fresh fruit and vegetables and the meat, do you do any cross-subsidy? Do you try to make less profit on those and compensate for that with more profit on other items?

Father Ned Mosby—Like I said earlier, we are managing a store. All the prices are coming from down in Cairns, and we just abide by them. To be honest, we have met and talked about prices.

CHAIR—Explain how that works. The pricing on the products that you have is all set from Cairns?

Father Ned Mosby—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you have any influence over that at all? Are you able to ring up and suggest a difference in price?

Father Ned Mosby—We have talked to the CEO in Cairns.

CHAIR—Can you vary a price if you have that conversation with the CEO?

Father Ned Mosby—We mention it to them but we leave it with them.

Mr TURNOUR—Just to get this clear: Island and Cape lease the store, do they not? Is the store still owned locally? Is that how it works, or do they actually own the local store?

Father Ned Mosby—They own the shop.

Mr TURNOUR—So they establish the price and send the food up, and you basically manage and sell that.

Father Ned Mosby—Yes.

Mr TURNOUR—If we get the horticultural things like gardens up locally, would there be an interest in the shop buying that, or would that just be distributed to local people through the garden? Has that been talked about at all?

Father Ned Mosby—That can be talked about. I think, from what people talk about at meetings with the council, they want to come up with a community garden or something like that. That will benefit the community with fresh vegies.

Mr TURNOUR—The competition between the Island and Cape store and the IBIS store would basically be set out at Cairns, because it is my understanding that the IBIS store similarly has their prices and produce set in Cairns.

Mr KATTER—I do not know if you should answer this. Why did you leave IBIS and go across to Island and Cape?

Father Ned Mosby—Personal.

Mr KATTER—Righto.

Father Ned Mosby—That was nothing to do with them. It is personal—family.

Mrs VALE—Do you have many problems with the fruit and vegetable deliveries that come from Cairns?

Father Ned Mosby—We have fruit and vegies come up here frozen. We have got frozen lettuce.

Mrs VALE—I did not know you could freeze lettuce.

Father Ned Mosby—That is when it has been shipped from Cairns to Yorke on a boat. It is good when you get frozen lettuce.

Mrs VALE—Is it? I have never tried that one! Do the women of the island express to you any concerns about the quality of the fruit and vegetables, or are they reasonably happy with the quality?

Father Ned Mosby—We have never been approached.

Mrs VALE—The fruit that we are having today is beautiful. Where is that sourced from?

Father Ned Mosby—It comes from my garden—down at the convenience store!

Mrs VALE—Your garden is the convenience store! You did not grow this yourself?

Father Ned Mosby—No.

Mrs VALE—How come it is so beautiful? Have you just had a delivery?

Father Ned Mosby—We just had a barge, yes. When the vegies come, we try to get the stuff out so that it is all fresh. We try to get it to the customer firsthand.

Mrs VALE—How long do the fresh fruit and vegetables last you after the barge has arrived? How long is it before you have no stock of fruit and vegetables again?

Mrs Sania Mosby—I suppose one week.

Mrs VALE—And the barge comes every—

Father Ned Mosby—Every week.

Mrs VALE—So you have enough, you think, to cope from one week to the next?

Mrs Sania Mosby—Yes.

Father Ned Mosby—Like I said, with the facility we have at the shop we have stuff there ready for next week. We can make sure there is stuff there.

Mr TURNOUR—One last question I meant to ask before: do Island and Cape provide any training?

Father Ned Mosby—They do.

Mr TURNOUR—Could you outline the sort of training that you have had?

Father Ned Mosby—Some training in computers.

Mrs Sania Mosby—There is no training.

Mr TURNOUR—But you have a computerised operation, in terms of the till and everything. Did they come up and introduce you to the store and run through how it works?

Mrs Sania Mosby—We have a regional manager based at Darnley. She comes around to show us the computer. My daughters and my co-workers know computers very well.

Mr TURNOUR—Island and Cape have got a regional manager on Darnley; is that right?

Mrs Sania Mosby—Yes.

Mr TURNOUR—How many people work at the store?

Mrs Sania Mosby—There are six of us.

Mr TURNOUR—Are any of them on CDEP and top-up?

Mrs Sania Mosby—Only two.

Mr TURNOUR—In terms of workplace health and safety, food handling or any of those sorts of areas, have Island and Cape provided any training in that area?

Mrs Sania Mosby—No.

Mr TURNOUR—Thank you.

CHAIR—When the fresh produce arrives—the fruit and vegetables—how long has it been on the barge?

Father Ned Mosby—Three or four days from Cairns.

CHAIR—Do I understand right that it comes in a frozen form?

Father Ned Mosby—Sometimes they mishandle stuff. One day there were vegies that were in the freezer.

CHAIR—That is not meant to be frozen?

Father Ned Mosby—No.

CHAIR—What state does it come in? Is it normally in a pretty good state by the time it reaches here?

Mrs Sania Mosby—Yes.

Father Ned Mosby—Sometimes there is mishandling. Sometimes they are unloading down the ramp there—at the end of the airport where you came in—and the stuff is down here and you have got goods sitting up there in the sun for an hour or two waiting to be delivered.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for giving us your time today. We really appreciate it.

Father Ned Mosby—I am going to be back here for the open forum. Don't you worry about that. I'll be back.

CHAIR—We look forward to that.

[4.33 pm]

WARRIA, Miss Elizabeth, IBIS Manager, Islander Board of Industry and Service

CHAIR—Welcome, Elizabeth. Would you like to make an opening statement about how the store runs, and then we might ask you some questions.

Miss Warriia—I have been a manager for nearly eight months. We buy our supplies from Cairns. We have got different suppliers. They send our supplies on the barge. When the barge comes in, my job is to receive all the fruit and vegies and also the dry goods and fuel. Then I put them into the computer system and get my workers to carry all the cargo into the shop and put it on the shelves.

CHAIR—Do you order the products yourselves, or does that come from what goes through the computer?

Miss Warriia—On the computer, from the people down in Cairns doing all the orders.

CHAIR—So when somebody purchases a product that is recorded on the computer and then people in Cairns know how much they need to supply you.

Miss Warriia—Yes. In the shop I make a catalogue and if people want to order a TV or furniture then they just have to fill out the customer order form and pay for it and then we just fax it down and they send it up on the barge.

CHAIR—How many people work in the store?

Miss Warriia—There is me, my 2IC—second in charge—two casual workers and two CDEP participants.

CHAIR—Do you ever run out of particular product lines?

Miss Warriia—Yes, sometimes we do.

CHAIR—Does that regularly happen or do you normally manage to get through the week?

Miss Warriia—That happens regularly.

CHAIR—Are there particular products which tend to run out? What are they?

Miss Warriia—Rice, sauce, milk.

CHAIR—Do you have any sense of the freight costs associated with the products you sell? Is that all done through Cairns?

Miss Warriia—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you have a sense of whether the store is making a profit or not?

Miss Warriia—Not that I am aware.

CHAIR—It is not making a profit, or you are not aware?

Miss Warriia—I am not aware.

CHAIR—How often do managers from IBIS come up here to have a look at how the store is running and to help you with running the store?

Miss Warriia—After every three months. We have another fly-around visit next month, I think.

CHAIR—Are you provided with training to do the role you are doing?

Miss Warriia—Yes.

CHAIR—How much training is provided?

Miss Warriia—There was one this year but I did not attend it. There are probably two training sessions a year.

CHAIR—Have you done any training yourself yet?

Miss Warriia—No, not yet.

CHAIR—Do you do any communication with customers about what products they would like sold in the store?

Miss Warriia—Yes. We have catalogues to show them.

CHAIR—Do you ask people whether there are other things that they would like in the store?

Miss Warriia—Yes. Some people came and asked me to order certain things.

CHAIR—And when that happens you do your best to try to source it?

Miss Warriia—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Thank you very much, Elizabeth, for joining us. We must look very intimidating; we are really not. We are trying to ascertain the amount of nutrients that are available to people in their food choices. I was wondering whether it is possible, in your capacity as manager, to tell us this: do you notice whether the things you run short of might be things like

potato chips or sugary soft drinks or things like that? Have you been able to observe that? Are all your fruit and vegies the first to go? Do you sell potato chips?

Miss Warriia—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Is there a great demand for them? Are they one of the things that you might run out of?

Miss Warriia—Yes.

Mrs VALE—What about fruit and vegies? Do you find that people are inclined to enjoy fruit and vegetables?

Miss Warriia—Yes. In IBIS we have posters everywhere telling people to eat healthy choices. We have stickers on the shelves. Yellow star represents healthy items to buy.

Mrs VALE—When we were over at Badu the school there had a program of eating healthily. Does the school here have a similar program?

Miss Warriia—I do not know.

Mrs VALE—The program encourages children to eat vegetables—celery sticks, carrot sticks and stuff like that. Do you know if the school here has a similar program?

Miss Warriia—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Thank you.

CHAIR—The fresh food that you get—is there an attempt made to make the fresh fruit cheaper? Do you cross-subsidise some items with the fresh food?

Miss Warriia—Yes. Yesterday we had lots of fruit and vegies in the chiller. My regional manager was here so he asked us to put half-price on the fruit and vegies to sell all the old stock because we had the new stock sitting in the chiller.

CHAIR—Where is the regional manager from? Where is that person based?

Miss Warriia—Thursday Island.

CHAIR—Does the fresh food tend to come off the barge in a good state?

Miss Warriia—Sometimes.

CHAIR—Are there ever problems?

Miss Warriia—Yes.

CHAIR—Are they regular? What kind of problems?

Miss Warria—As Ned mentioned, we had the frozen fruit and vegies the other time and sometimes there is damaged stock, especially the potatoes and onions. On the barge they put all the fruit and vegies, especially the onions and potatoes, in the yellow container.

CHAIR—Does all the meat come frozen?

Miss Warria—Yes.

Mr TURNOUR—You said that you had the regional manager here yesterday from IBIS. Was that a planned visit or was that one that popped up in the last little while.

Miss Warria—Popped up!

Mr TURNOUR—That just popped up, did it, with the committee coming here to day?

Miss Warria—Yes.

Mr TURNOUR—And yesterday there was a decision made to halve the price of fruit and vegies and have the new produce out for us, no doubt, to have a look at today. That is interesting. It was not a scheduled visit; that visit yesterday popped up recently.

Miss Warria—Yes.

Mr TURNOUR—Where is the manager from? Thursday Island?

Miss Warria—Yes. He is based Thursday Island.

Mr TURNOUR—So they chartered out and chartered back yesterday.

Miss Warria—Yes.

CHAIR—So we will try to come every week. That might be the solution. Elizabeth, thank you very much for giving us your time today. We really appreciate it.

[4.43 pm]

WHITE, Ms Robyn Kirstene, Clinical Nurse Consultant, Queensland Health, Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Health Service District

CHAIR—Welcome. You are from the Masig health centre. Would you like to make an opening statement and then we might ask you some questions.

Ms White—I am here as the local representative of Queensland Health. I have been at Yorke Island for 17 years during which time I served the central group. Recently I covered Yorke and Yam Islands. Shortly I will be going back to covering Yorke and Yam Islands. I have certainly seen a lot of changes with health and food products since I have been here. I can relate a lot of stories about the build-up of the changes in food and store products that have occurred while I have been here.

CHAIR—Could you explain those changes?

Ms White—When I first came the island was run with diesel generators. Barges came once a fortnight so the vegetables had to stretch for 14 days until the barge arrived. Progressively we have seen a lot of changes in the shops. We have seen build-ups with the generators. Now we are on the main generator for the island. It was a struggle. Not many people had fridges and so forth as we do today. There have been huge changes in the environment, housing, sewerage and so forth for health improvement. Certainly they are all backup systems for good health, and certainly food products have changed over that time. Our role in health has changed tremendously with the ongoing support from Queensland Health that we get. People do have a choice in relation to food products. Yes, we have seen a huge change in health with all those environmental and food issues that are going on.

CHAIR—A change for the better or worse?

Ms White—It is a change for the better. But also we have to bear in mind the high cost of living up here. Certainly, I have seen a huge improvement in health here. We do have health programs going with Queensland Health. We start from maternal health and go through with all the support that has been generated up in the Torres Strait Islands. There is still a long way to go but certainly we are on the move with it at the moment. With limited resources and staff we try to do our best to maintain and run programs. There is a lot that we would love to do but we just cannot manage it. We do struggle but we can only do our best with that. Given that we have more resources and more staff we could manage it even better.

CHAIR—Just so I am clear, you are an employee of Queensland Health?

Ms White—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you talk to the other health officers around the Torres Strait? Is there much communication between you?

Ms White—Yes. With the technology we have today we do have access to a lot of those people. A lot of them come around the islands and give us support. For example, we have telecommunications, teleconferences, video conferencing, emails and computer systems running. Communication systems have certainly improved a lot and we are better at keeping up to date with the outside world at the moment.

CHAIR—Some of the evidence we have received in relation to the state of health is that there is certainly a prevalence of some chronic diseases such as diabetes. Would that be the same here on Masig?

Ms White—It is very high.

CHAIR—Is it getting worse or better?

Ms White—We are aiming for it to get better. Regarding food products, the issues are affordability and more education. At the moment we run a clinic and it can be very busy. We try to maintain health with modern day medications. We have a doctor that comes here, currently about every three weeks. The doctor usually comes overnight so we refer people through to the doctor. Certainly, we have far better systems now with medications. It is much easier now for people to take their medications. But I do believe that we need to do a lot more education about food products—provided people can afford to buy them. That is the hard issue.

I also bear in mind and certainly respect the traditional values and try to make sure that they are combined with current day food. There are certainly a lot of products in the store that have improved but there are a lot of products that people do not know about that they could relate to. I know that when certain families who have moved down south come back to visit the islands, people often comment that they look healthy. It is only because they have a wider and better choice of food down south compared to what people get here.

On a personal level, I would really like to see somebody like a nutritionist come into the community and work with the people, with families, and talk to them about foods—if we can get the foods and if we can get the costs down so that they can afford it—and give them better ideas about how to cook and about the value of food. Food certainly is important for health. However, you need to bear in mind that the IBIS store is a meeting place for a lot of people. People utilise that because it is a survival system for them. We have the store down the road so we do have a choice. If they do not have it in IBIS, we can go down the road and get it if they have better quality fruit or vegetables. We do have that small choice in buying those products.

CHAIR—What proportion of people's food intake comes from the stores compared to, say, from fishing?

Ms White—A lot comes from fishing. People can only buy from the stores what they can afford to buy. They have to consider feeding their families. There are lots of extended families with lots of children. They do not have a great choice because they can only afford what they can afford. I know that a huge part of the diet comes from fishing. But, again, it is a matter of being able to afford the petrol for the boats to do the fishing. When I talk about health, I mean that health begins with maternal health and goes through to children's health at school. A major focus is on maternal and children's health. I must say we do have lots of healthy babies here. But we

find that it does boil down to the financial issues with families. I am proud of the mums and a lot of the babies and children at school here. But, at the moment, we really do have some sick children.

CHAIR—Really sick?

Ms White—I can speak for the silent, yes.

Mr TURNOUR—You have been here 17 years. That is quite a while, though I am sure you are not a local yet. I am sure you know a lot of people. You spoke about changes in health generally but specifically in relation to diet and diabetes. Can you speak about what you saw 15 years ago compared with five or 10 years ago? Have you seen any changes in that time?

Ms White—Yes, we have seen a lot of changes. When I first came here, not a great deal was known about diabetes to that extent. There were many people with high sugar levels in their blood and we had a lot of people who lost limbs. Now people come to the clinics because they are familiar with the symptoms and they come straight down. We are on it like a tonne of bricks because we do not want them to have to lose limbs. I cannot remember when we last sent somebody to have a toe off. It was a long time ago.

Also, with modern medications we tend to get firm with people who, understandably, sometimes go off their medications because they get fed up with it, but we persist with them. We do routine monitoring of blood levels—we try to get everybody in about four times a year just to follow through on blood results and to alter medications. But, also, of course it gets back to the food products they eat and trying to fit in more exercise because of lifestyle changes in these modern times. People do make those efforts. They do make that attempt. But we need to have something that can sustain it. I think it relates not just to up here but also to the mainland as well.

Mr TURNOUR—I gather from that answer that there is better diagnosis of diabetes now. There may have been a high prevalence 15 years ago but it was not diagnosed as much and therefore we were not necessarily as aware of it. Is that what you are saying?

Ms White—Yes—well, we were aware of it but we have better programs now. For example, we have the chronic disease programs. We manage to keep an eye on people so that they can have a much better quality of life through the chronic disease programs. We run a number of programs. They coincide with us working with other teams. For example, we have in TI people who are diabetes educators. We have nutritionists who come out periodically. We have different representatives that come out and support programs that we run. Also, we have people in child health.

Mr TURNOUR—Have you seen an increase in consumption of fizzy drinks and those sorts of products, particularly with young people? I am thinking in terms of diabetes.

Ms White—Sorry?

Mr TURNOUR—Over the period of time, has there been an increase with modern days, television and all of those sorts of things in people drinking more fizzy, sugary drinks?

Ms White—Yes. The modern times and fast foods reflect up here as well. Although we try to encourage reducing consumption, it is their choice. It is their health. We can only give them that advice or that education for their health. We have noticed, with the adult health screening we do every year, that there tends to be a higher incidence of young people coming through with high cholesterol. We are picking that up. The purpose of the adult health screen is, amongst other things, to identify at a very early stage people with chronic disease, to work to reduce that incidence and then to talk to them about their health.

Mr TURNOUR—Do you have any thoughts about what is driving the increase in cholesterol?

Ms White—I think it gets down to lifestyle—cigarette smoking, drugs, fast foods—and what they spend the money on, what they can afford. Those are changing with the current-day era. Those are the sorts of new issues that we have to look at and address.

Mr TURNOUR—Thank you.

Mrs VALE—It is almost a reflection of what happens in mainstream Australia. Where there is a great abundance of food choices, it is about education and encouraging people to make the right choices. Robyn, have you heard of this program? It is a health promotion from Queensland. It is called ‘Eat Well Be Active—Healthy Kids for Life’. Badu Island is one of the pilots, I understand. Are you aware of that program?

Ms White—Yes. I have just received information on that.

Mrs VALE—The teacher and the other health professional we spoke to said that, since it started, they have noticed a huge difference in the food choices that the young people—and the young children especially—make. They are now happy to have carrot sticks, celery sticks and stuff like that, whereas once upon a time they would find that on the ground. When it comes to food choices—and you mentioned the choice of fast food, which contributes to cholesterol—what kind of fast food is available here? Are you talking about frozen, processed food?

Ms White—It is a combination of both. There is a fast-food outlet at the convenience store, although they are now cooking a choice of foods for people rather than having chips, chicken and chips and those types of things. Certainly attempts have been made to improve on that, even though whatever is cooked it is a person’s choice as to what they buy, as is the case everywhere else.

Mrs VALE—If you had your druthers and you could wiggle your nose and have everything exactly how you think it should be in an ideal world, what would you like to do? What would you like to see happen here on this island?

Ms White—I would like to see an active lifestyle. If we could get back into gardening, for example—you read a lot about people going back to those traditional times—to maintain the fishing, to grow and hunt and share their food. Given that we have more staff, I would love to be able to get out there and do far more preventative stuff than just stay in the clinic. How could I describe it? Repair work, basically—to get out there, to do far more promotion, to get more health workers in, to visit families and encourage families, to look at better and different sports

activities for all age groups, to work with the school and having the community force behind it all. Certainly, as far as health is concerned, on top of it all, is the provision of better education, whilst respecting their traditional background but accepting modern times and moving with that.

Mrs VALE—Joseph spoke this morning and said that, once upon a time, they could grow anything in the garden. Would you like to see perhaps a return to private home gardens or a market garden that could be a community garden home, if that were possible?

Ms White—From my personal level, yes, particularly home gardens and market gardens where you could employ more people to generate interest and health. I relate to an elderly couple on Coconut Island. I used to sit on their veranda and chat with them. They actually had a garden. Every morning they went past the clinic on their buggy and they went down to till their gardens. The man said to me, ‘Young people today are not healthy anymore.’ I said, ‘Why do you say that?’ He said, ‘You see my wife and me go down to our garden. We till the garden, we grow things in the garden, we share what we get from the garden and we are healthy.’ He said, ‘These young kids go down south, they go to hamburger shops, they buy fish and chips, they smoke drugs. Times have changed, but they don’t share like we do.’ He said, ‘We’re happy with what we’re doing, we are happy with our garden, we are happy with what we grow, we are happy with sharing.’ It was a very simple message in the health sense. That message has always stayed in my mind.

Mrs VALE—What kind of exercise is done here? Is there any sort of organised sport up here like football, soccer or is it rugby league which, I think, is very popular for young men?

Ms White—Every now and again we have a sports and rec officer. We have had a few through. I believe there may be one in training now. They organise sports like volleyball, netball, football. They have a field down there where they play. Some people make efforts to go walking in groups, but it is all stop and start. We need something that can sustain it.

Mrs VALE—Is there any regular weekly activity? Is there a football competition on a weekly basis?

Ms White—Periodically. We do have fierce competitions around the islands. When it does happen, everybody starts to train and practice. They have school sports, of course, and everybody gets involved with that. Those are big events in the year, and inter-island school sports are another big event in the year. Everybody joins in with those.

Mrs VALE—Is there a swimming pool available so that people can swim for exercise?

Ms White—No, not with the big ocean around the island. There is no swimming pool.

Mrs VALE—But you can swim in the ocean? I thought there were crocodiles.

Ms White—Not around here. The odd one does drift around, but you can swim in the ocean.

Mrs VALE—With crocodiles, one is enough, isn’t it? But people do use the ocean to swim in here?

Ms White—Yes, if they do decide to go swimming. A lot of them go out fishing and jumping in and out of boats, and they go around the islands—diving or whatever.

Mrs VALE—Thank you very much, Robyn.

Mr KATTER—I was told by one of the health officials that there is 60 per cent diabetes up here, and it suddenly occurred to me that I have never seen any amputated limbs up here. I have been coming up here over a very long period of time. I am wondering just how serious the problem is. Maybe we are wasting our time a bit coming up here and that diabetes does not have the bad effect that people are saying that it has.

In my office last year, we had seven people working there, two of them part time. Of the seven, four had diabetes and two of their husbands had diabetes. Two of them were very bad; they had to take insulin all day long. They had regular needles four, five or six times a day. One of the husbands had lost all of his toes. If you are comparing Masig with Bob Katter's office, you are coming off pretty good. Do we really have a problem here? Are we wasting our time?

Ms White—I would say it is a problem but we do not have a problem, because if we are on top of it, if people present to the clinic or we follow through with people, it should not be a problem if we try to maintain their health to the best that is possible. We work with that. I am more concerned about kidney diseases than I am about amputated limbs. When we get to that stage we try to monitor the health as best we can. That is probably a much greater worry for me than limbs.

Mr KATTER—I did not think that diabetes could be controlled. I thought that ultimately it just gets worse and worse.

Ms White—If you are talking about type 1 and type 2 diabetes, type 1 is a little bit more complicated because they depend on insulin. Whereas with type 2 we can maintain them much better than we can type 1. Type 1 is very rare up here; we mainly have type 2, with the lifestyle changes.

Mr KATTER—It is not so bad.

Ms White—It is not so bad, but it is easier to monitor type 2.

Mrs VALE—It is a lifestyle diabetes, isn't it? It is because of bad food choices and no exercising.

Ms White—Yes. It is just to do with lifestyle. You certainly have to educate people with type 1, and they have to depend on insulin and give themselves insulin. There comes a time when we cannot manage type 2 on medications, but we then introduce them to insulin and that maintains people. They become very skilled at giving themselves insulin. Through coming regularly to the doctors we can monitor that with their health. Occasionally there are a few people who go off the track, for whatever reason, but given that that is their choice we cannot do much about that. With other people we try to maintain their health as best as possible.

Mr KATTER—Robyn, the impression I am getting from you is that it is not really that serious a problem.

Ms White—No, it is a serious problem but, as I say, we do our best to keep it from being too serious.

Mr KATTER—We are up here because there is this gap in life expectancy of 17 years in these sorts of communities. I am not too sure whether that figure applies more to Aboriginal communities than it does to Torres Strait Islander communities, though I am beginning to suspect it does. We are supposed to be closing the gap and that is why we have made the effort to come up here. It does not seem to me that there is a gap between here on Masig and, say, in Brisbane.

Ms White—I acknowledge that there is a gap. I have worked in Aboriginal communities and I find that people here are becoming more compliant with their health as they receive more education. Certainly there is a strong move to improve it. We are very conscious of that gap, but it all gets back to food, the quality of food and what people can afford. It gets back to the cost of everything. We can only do our best with our limited resources and the health care up here. I can only speak for Yorke Island, Yam Island and the central group. It may be a little different around the islands depending on the staffing situation. However, I can see huge inroads in the health care up here.

Mr KATTER—When you say inroads, do you mean improvements?

Ms White—Yes, definitely. I cannot speak for the whole of the Torres Strait.

Mr KATTER—It seems to me that you are doing a very good job. Is life expectancy on Masig and Yam lower or higher than in Brisbane?

Ms White—That is hard to answer. I would say that life expectancy is lower but we are working to try and improve that. It is improving. I cannot say it has improved but it is improving. It will take a long time to close the gap, particularly for people in remote and rural areas. That is where it is harder. Getting back to food products, if we could afford better quality food we would see a huge improvement. I really do believe that if we did far more health promotion and health prevention work and if we had more staff to do that work then we would see a huge improvement.

CHAIR—You say a lot of it depends on the quality of the food. Do you have any comment about the quality of the fresh food—that is, fruit and vegetables and meat—that you can obtain at either of the two stores on the island?

Ms White—It is variable. The quality of the food generally at IBIS is poor. I do not know if other people would agree with that. For example, with apples you do not have a choice. I know there are more food products in IBIS at TI than what I can buy from the stores here that are to my liking. What you can buy in TI should be available on the islands; the foods of your choice. TI has a delicatessen where you can buy fresh meat and fish products. You cannot do that here. In particular meat is extremely expensive. A lot of people will not buy meat because it looks dark; it is not well presented.

From my understanding, what puts the cost of food up is the products it is sold in. A lot of meat just sits there because it is too expensive for people to buy. Some vegetables, by the time they come here, are pretty much shrivelled up. One of the biggest things that you notice is that as soon as the barge comes, everybody is down to the shop, mostly just to buy fresh fruit and vegetables. Sometimes the fruit and vegetables are stretched until the end of the week. So, if they are not out there fresh, people will not buy them. By the time it gets stretched to the end of the week people then have to buy them because they have run out. Certainly the products need to be sold as soon as they come in because that is what everybody goes for. I buy what I need or want for the week and then wait for the barge to come in. But if the food is not fresh then it is hard, because it loses its nutrients over time.

CHAIR—You made those comments in relation to IBIS; do you think that the other store is better in terms of the fresh food?

Ms White—I find that the other store puts the food out because if it is not at IBIS people will go down to the other store and buy the fresh food, like I do. People do not understand what some of the food products that come through are. They will go up to the counter and say, ‘What is that?’ For example, leeks or, in those very rare moments when herbs come, coriander. I have eaten all sorts of foods from around the world—for example, coriander. I love coriander but these people do not know what coriander is about because they do not know how to cook it or they do not know the taste of it. Some people have been down south and have tasted it. But that is just one example and one reason why I believe that you could improve the quality by having somebody out here to do cooking lessons and to look at what food you can buy, what you can add and what value there is for people.

You will see that a lot of families eat a lot of rice and sort of traditional tin hamper food which they have on top of rice with tomato sauce. It is a filling food and it is all that they can afford, bearing in mind that hampers can have a high salt content. That, again, looks at the kidney problems that they have. So they need to be able to have better choices and to look at nutritious and cheaper ways that they can feed their families. At the moment we are getting the message through to eat more vegetables and rice. You need to get into it in more depth—for example, talking about alkaline and acid foods, like bread being high in acid, and the types of filling foods. What adds to that is the fact that they can go out into the ocean and catch fish, which is high protein as well. So there is certainly a lot to think about. I always bear in mind traditional factors as well as modern day factors.

CHAIR—Do people have a daily intake of freshly caught fish?

Ms White—In general. It depends on whether they can go out and catch fish. Some people freeze fish nowadays. I do not think that they have to go out and get a fresh catch and eat it, but now you have the choice. It basically depends on the family.

CHAIR—You may not have a sense of this, so if you do not that is fine. There has been a lot of evidence from people describing a perception that AQIS or perhaps the Queensland health department frown upon keeping pigs and chickens. Indeed, some people even talked about there being a limitation on growing vegetables and fruit. We have actually had AQIS officials come and tell us what the rules are. From a Queensland health department point of view, are you aware of any regulations that prohibit the keeping of pigs or chickens close to human settlements?

Ms White—Pigs went out when Japanese encephalitis occurred. That was back in the 1992-93 outbreak. A lot of people panicked and killed their pigs. Pigs are now being monitored by AQIS. People have had pigs on the island but now they keep the pigs away from human dwellings. When I was at Yam Island there were pigs all around the island. The clinic that I worked at during that time had pigs next door. The smell got a bit high, because Yam Island is a small island. Certainly there were a lot of pigs around when I came but now you do not see them.

CHAIR—Is that to do with that particular outbreak of Japanese encephalitis? Are there any regulations that prevent people from keeping pigs?

Ms White—I cannot fully answer that. I would have to get Hilda from AQIS to answer that question. Certainly pigs were kept during certain times for feasting. I do recall having pork at one feast and thought that it was absolutely beautiful pork until I was told that the owner of the pig had killed it for the feast. That was a very common thing. As Joseph was saying, chickens went out when IBIS came in. From the local level, carpet snakes used to come in and kill chickens as well. I guess that someone from AQIS could better answer that question.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for giving us your time this afternoon, we really appreciate the evidence that you have given us.

[5.22 pm]

BILLY, Father Douglas, Private capacity

GAMIA, Miss Nazareth, Private capacity

KABAY, Mrs Daisy, Private capacity

McCONNELL, Mr Glenn, Private capacity

MESSA, Mr Collin, Private capacity

MORRIS, Mr Jaina, Private capacity

MOSBY, Mr Daniel William, Private capacity

MOSBY, Mrs Glorianna, Private capacity

MOSBY, Ms Hilda Denise, Private capacity

NAAWI, Mr Simon, Private capacity

NAI, Mr Gabriel Au, Private capacity

NAI, Mr Michael, Head of Campus, Tagai State College, Yorke Island Campus

CHAIR—That brings us to the open forum, but we do have one witness who we will kick off the open forum with, and that is Hilda Mosby. Is there anything that you would like to say in relation to the community stores and then we can ask you some questions?

Ms Hilda Mosby—Thank you. Having lived up here for the last 30-odd years, I have seen the costs compared from back then until now. I know that the cost of living is too high. When we talk about cost, it is not only food costs. There is freight as well as the cost of airfares. The cost of living up here is humungous.

CHAIR—Do you have a comment on the quality of the fresh food that you can buy from the IBIS store and the mini-mart?

Ms Hilda Mosby—As far as the quality of the food goes, I have been working for IBIS many years ago in the old days when we had the generator stores. The quality then compared to now has improved.

What is on offer here is not a lot compared to markets down south. It is fairly poor. It is not as fresh as down south. It takes four days to get up here. It is not like in Cairns where you can go to Rusty's and get fresh produce from the markets. Up here we live by what we get, our income. The cost of living for a family is a lot, taking into account the freight cost. There is no

competition. There are no other freight services up here. As previous speakers have said, there used to be two freight companies servicing the Torres Strait; now there is only one.

CHAIR—Have you noticed an increase in prices since the second freight operator stopped?

Ms Hilda Mosby—Yes. I have noticed a lot of changes. I cannot really compare the prices in the two stores. It is what you get offered and how much you have got. You either take it or not. At the end of the day if you need to eat two fruit and five vegetables then you have to pay for what is there. But the cost! It is not only what is here; it is what is given to us from management down there.

CHAIR—Is there a lot of competition between the two stores here? Do the prices seem to be different?

Ms Hilda Mosby—I buy dry goods from one and fresh fruit and vegetables and meat from the other.

CHAIR—Why do you do that?

Ms Hilda Mosby—I find the fruit and vegetables a little fresher at one of the stores than at the other. IBIS at times do offer specials. But I do not know how true the specials are because it is not like specials down at Coles, Woolies or Bi-Lo.

Mr TURNOUR—Is that because the prices do not show how much the special is—you just get told that it is on special but not by how much?

Ms Hilda Mosby—It is whatever they advertise. But I do not know how true it is. One fortnight to another you have live.

Mr TURNOUR—Are you suggesting that fruit and vegies are fresher at IBIS or at the Island and Cape?

Ms Hilda Mosby—I would say Island and Cape is a little bit fresher. I am not being biased in any way; I am just being open and honest. You get to see it every day. I would prefer that before the next barge comes that you have no fruit and vegetables left so you have fresh produce on the barge.

Mr TURNOUR—We heard that yesterday IBIS had their fruit and vegies cut to half price to clear them. Is that a regular thing? That is not a regular thing? Normally they do not put a special on at the end of the week or cut the price of their fruit and vegies to move them on before the next barge comes in?

Ms Hilda Mosby—That is not necessarily the case because I have only seen that myself yesterday as well. I said to their regional manager when he came—I told him what I thought, that it should be happening all the time. It is no good trying to put fruit and vegetables on sale the day before the standing committee arrived.

Mr TURNOUR—Obviously this is run through Cairns and the system that they have in place, but when the new produce arrives on the barge do they put that out straightaway or do they wait for the older product to be sold.

Ms Hilda Mosby—As far as that goes, I do not control the management of the store so I only get to buy what I see.

Mr TURNOUR—Have you observed whether the new product is put out? If you were in the shop a few days before the barge arrived, say on the Monday, you would obviously see what product is around. Then if you came in on the Tuesday, after the barge had arrived, do you notice whether the new fruit and vegies are out on the Tuesday?

Ms Hilda Mosby—Yes, most time yes. It depends on what time the barge comes in. If it is late in the afternoon you will not see it until first thing next morning. You cannot expect them to stay here late.

Mrs VALE—Thank you very much, Hilda. The questions I was going to ask you have already being asked, but thank you very much for your time.

CHAIR—Thank you Hilda for giving us your time today. Would anyone else like to say something?

Mrs Glorianna Mosby—I am pleased that you have come because we have an understanding. Yesterday we had a meeting about your arrival here. I prepared myself to say something to the committee about the store. I grew up here and I am a former chair and branch manager here. Joe spoke about what we went through. I am 68 years of age. How hard it was then. We carried cargo and it was good fun but we have lived through changes. Right now we talk about the high cost of living. My vision is not much good. My daughter Hilda goes to the store. They come home and they yarn about the cost and the high prices—especially petrol—and the cost at the mini-mart, the convenience store, the differences and all these things. Like they said, we live through that. Besides the high cost of living, they talk about the airfares and all that.

I think it is right for me to say something because you are here to inquire about this. I told some of them that I wanted to say something to this committee about the ATM at the store—it is a St George's ATM. I do not know whether that is okay because most of us have National FlexiCard accounts. I am not an accountant but I talked to some of my family and they know and they understand. They said it would be good if we had a National ATM then we would save our pocket. We are talking about the high cost of living.

Even when we went to school we kept in the back of our minds what we learnt, such as to save our pennies and the pounds will mind themselves—how you spend for your living and try to save for airfares et cetera. That is one part I want to clear up and I am happy to mention it. Before, we bring our passbook, we sign our pass paper and get cash payments at CPS, but with all the current changes of income I just wonder why there is a St George's ATM in the IBIS store there.

CHAIR—Thank you, Glorianna. What would you like to say to the committee, Daisy?

Mrs Kabay—I have this thing in my mind all the time and, every time I want to say this, something stops me from saying it. We are talking about the high cost of living and I want to talk about the fuel card. When we go to the store we buy a fuel card. We go down to the bowser, we get fuel and then when we come back we have to give them the card back. Sometimes people do not give it back; they keep it. Someone will say, ‘Where’s the card?’ I think, ‘I’m not going to give you the card, because I bought the card. If I want to throw it away, I can do that,’ which I didn’t. I have that thing about the card in my mind all the time.

We had another change here a while ago. If you go to buy a fuel card you have to present \$10, then we go down to the bowser and we get fuel. When we come back and present that card we get the \$10 back. I should not have to give the \$10 back. If I bought the card there and they want the \$10, I should not give the \$10 back. If I had taken the card back—they said it is from IBIS, but it is not from IBIS; it is money from me when I present there. They do not give me that money back. So I want to talk about that. I do not know what people think about this. You put the card there and give them \$10 and, after a while, we put the card back, then they give us the \$10.

We buy 44-gallon drums of petrol at the shop and they always tell us to take the drum back. So when we take the 44-gallon drum back they give us \$30. I can understand why we have to give \$10. I think IBIS should give us the \$10 if we bring the card back, because we bought the card there. If I want to throw the card away—no. We would take the card back. All the time in my mind I am thinking this is not right about the fuel card. You understand me?

CHAIR—Yes. Thank you. Is there anyone else who would like to make a statement to the committee?

Mr McConnell—I am a mechanic on the island, employed by the Torres Strait Regional Council, but I do not speak on behalf of the council. It is appropriate that I talk now as I can respond to Daisy’s concerns about the fuel part, because I am responsible for that deposit being charged. It took me three years to make that happen. I suggested to Richard Bowler, who is the CEO of IBIS, that that deposit be charged to overcome the problem whereby when you went to buy fuel from the IBIS bowsers you could not because there were no cards on the island. They had all been thrown away or left in cars or were in someone’s pocket. By charging \$10 deposit, at least the cards came back and could then be recharged. It is also a considerable cost to IBIS. If they lose that card they then have to replace those cards and that cost then gets passed on to the consumer, or the purchaser, of the petrol. That leads to another problem that I have had since I arrived four years ago: the quality of the fuel and the lack of fuel storage. 3,000 litres, is totally inadequate.

There has been a considerable increase in the council vehicles on the island, let alone boats and private cars. Two came on the barge yesterday. That is two more which will be purchasing unleaded fuel from our facility. The system of ordering is such that on a Tuesday afternoon after the tanks have been topped up, IBIS fax to the Cairns branch how much fuel is in the bowser. Ideally, the tanks should be full and they supply according to that fax. But if there are 2,000 out of 3,000 litres left, they only send one top-up—that is, 14,000 litres comes back. Consequently, we are often running out of fuel. It is even worse at Christmas when there is a break in the delivery of fuel because of the lack of barge services. You have the best weather, the cray season has just started so there is an opportunity to go out and catch a lot of cray, but you can’t because

there is no fuel. The problem used to be overcome when there was a fuel barge anchored out in the so-called 'Crab Pot.' *Captain Tom* supplied a lot of fuel to the island. I bought all the council diesel and unleaded fuel from that fuel barge at \$330 for a drum of unleaded. Two weeks ago the price from Sea Swift per drum, delivered, was \$494.70. So you can now see there has been a large increase in the cost of unleaded fuel to community members who want to go fishing.

The main reason I did not use the IBIS bowser is that when I first arrived here all the vehicles were breaking down and had leaking fuel tanks, and I thought 'Why is this? Some of these vehicles are only two years old?' I went to the bowser and took delivery of fuel from the bowser the first time Sea Swift delivered to IBCs. I got approximately 75 ml of water in the bottom of a two-litre coke bottle and a considerable amount of red sludge, like Weipa dust. I sent that sample to IBIS in Cairns. It was analysed and not only was there water in the bottom of the coke bottle but 70 per cent of the fuel in solution was water. The last thing you can afford to be doing in this environment, when people depend on boating, is giving them water in fuel and sludge that very quickly blocks up carbies. At the workshop I often see people accessing my air supplies, blowing out carbies because they are full of water and sludge. It is a serious problem. Fuel is at a high price, \$2.29 a litre, and has been for an eternity. It has been up to \$2.60 plus, and now that there is no more fuel available from the *Captain Tom* fuel barge this will have a major impact on the cost of living on this island. We were the only island that I know of that was fortunate enough to have access to cheap unleaded fuel. I will leave the fuel issue alone for now, other than to say it is of insufficient capacity. Here, we need 6,000 litres minimum; we have 3,000 litres. What do you do?

CHAIR—Could you explain what has happened with the fuel barge? When and why did that leave?

Mr McConnell—The fuel barge was owned and operated by Portsmouth Fuels from Cairns. Its primary purpose in the 'Crab Pot' was to service trawlers—to provide diesel to the trawlers and supply alcohol and some fruit and veg. That was serviced by a mother ship from Cairns every two weeks. That barge has been sold to Sea Swift, and at this stage it probably will not be coming back. It was Portsmouth Fuels's own decision to sell unleaded fuel to the island.

CHAIR—So they were primarily servicing the fishing fleet, but the fishing fleet happened to be near the island and they allowed you to purchase from them?

Mr McConnell—That is right.

CHAIR—You have raised an issue about the quality of the fuel. Has that changed at all? Has that improved, or is what you said how it is now?

Mr McConnell—I took a delivery from the bowser this morning. Unfortunately, I was not able to get to the first delivery after it was topped up from empty, which is the best time to get an indicator. I still have sludge. I do not have any water. Above-ground tanks must condense internally. I talked to Richard Bowler, the CEO, three years ago in November, and said, 'Put a water and sediment trap in the delivery line that goes down to the bowser.' I know for a fact that they were here on, I think, Wednesday last week. They came and had to dismantle a pump, because it was blocked up with rubbish. Prior to that, they have had to remove the whole bowser

and clean out the sump, because it was totally blocked. It was so blocked that you could not get fuel delivered through the handpiece.

CHAIR—Who came last Wednesday?

Mr McConnell—IBIS sent a gentleman from North Queensland Resources or North Queensland Petroleum. He is a service technician. He had problems with two other facilities the same as ours on two other islands. When I called Peter Holcroft, who is the freight manager in Cairns who supplies the unleaded fuel to the island, I told him that I was really unhappy that we had run out. I had already spoken to him previously about the fact that the council would be buying from him a considerable amount of fuel above what would normally be purchased. He came to the island and dismantled the pump, because it was gushing fuel into the sump of the bowser. It was blocked.

Mrs VALE—Thank you very much for your testimony; it is very interesting. I am concerned about the fact that this poor-quality fuel could be given to the people of the island. It could lead to an unfortunate event when they go out fishing.

Mr McConnell—Absolutely.

Mrs VALE—Where does the sludge that you say was in the fuel tank come from? I do not understand anything about the transport of fuel, but I thought that you put fuel in a container. Is it not a clean container? It has sludge in it?

Mr McConnell—Originally, the containers were sourced from Horn Island and the fuel delivery was coming from Horn Island. After I sent that sample down to Bill Asher, who at the time was in IBIS in Cairns, he then arranged BP. I think the fuel comes from Reliance Petroleum. They now guarantee the quality of the fuel in the IBCs—the fuel delivery container. I am not sure that the sludge is not actually still in the pipe between the tanks and the bowser. Certainly it is there.

CHAIR—The tanks and the bowser here on the island?

Mr McConnell—That is right. It is a very difficult thing to clean that out, because it is a long length of pipe that goes from the bowser. The two tanks are above ground in the humidity, which in my opinion is why they condense so badly. They said, ‘We don’t ever put water separators on our facilities.’ I said: ‘What happens when you pour fuel into a stainless steel tank above ground? You’ll make water.’ It makes water.

Mrs VALE—It is similar with an aircraft, isn’t it? One of the things that pilots do in pre take-off checks is to check the fuel and make sure that there is no water in the fuel. It must be a similar principle.

Mr McConnell—It is a similar principle. There is supposed to be a sample point on the bottom of each tank. When those tanks were installed, one tank came with a sample point but there is no real way of it being a low point in the tank. It is just a take-off beside the delivery elbow, and the other tank does not have any sample point because it is on the elbow, which

means that the water has already gone down and is sitting in the pipe that goes underground before it gets to the bowser.

Mrs VALE—Is there any maintenance of these tanks? If this is the fuel source that is used by the islanders, isn't there any regular maintenance that happens on the tanks?

Mr McConnell—I am not aware of any maintenance that has happened. Because of the problem that we had with the pump unit gushing fuel and the fact that while it is doing that it cannot be used, IBIS asked me to go and have a look at it. I actually put a blockage into the outlet pipe that was gushing the fuel. Once that happened, the pump was incapable of bleeding and every time it ran out of fuel—which was quite regularly—I had to go and bleed the pump manually to get a fuel delivery out of the handpiece.

Mrs VALE—It sounds like you need a new facility for storing fuel here on the island.

Mr McConnell—It is certainly totally inadequate in that it is very complex. Until I spoke to the gentleman who came to repair the pump last week, I was actually pushing to get a similar facility as is now being installed on Hammond and, I think, Mabuiag. I thought that they were a better facility, but he tells me they are not; it is just a different bunding method, which is catching any possible leakage. They use the same bowser, which has a swipe card, which is exactly the same process—I am sorry, Daisy. I know that when they introduced the bowser systems Qbuild were involved and it was a total disaster. It cost them somewhere between \$600,000 and \$1.2 million to make them usable, and it was inadequate from the day it was put in.

Mrs VALE—How long since they have been installed?

Mr McConnell—I think it was about 5½ years ago. Ned, would that be right?

Mrs VALE—That is not very long, is it, in the life of a fuel capacity storage.

Mr McConnell—It is actually terrible. When I spoke to this gentleman he said, 'Do you know we can kit out a service station for \$100,000?' I shudder to think how many millions were spent on this facility, which is very complex because it has to have a capacity to remember what is on the card when you swipe it. I am using \$500 fuel cards now to supply the council's vehicles, and the card has to remember, when I come and go, how much is left on the card. So it is quite a complex facility. It does not seem to give a lot of problems, but the biggest problem we have is lack of cards, because they are not returned or they are lost, or they are not recharged fast enough. Another problem is lack of fuel. Sometimes there has been fuel here and IBIS have not been able to supply enough two-stroke oil. So you can buy fuel sometimes, but you cannot buy the oil that you need to run your outboard motor. It is just a delivery thing.

Mrs VALE—Who actually owns the storage facility? Who put it in in the first place?

Mr McConnell—I presume it was the Queensland government.

Mrs VALE—It was a government initiative, was it?

Mr McConnell—As I understand it, for QBuild to have been involved in the installation and design, it has to have been a state government system that was implemented.

CHAIR—Who is responsible for the tanks now?

Mr McConnell—IBIS have to pay the maintenance. They had to pay to fly these people up here to repair it. They do not want it. He said to me, ‘We don’t want it.’ Even David, who was here this morning, said, ‘We don’t want it.’

CHAIR—Who was the first person who said to you that they did not want it?

Mr McConnell—Richard Bowler.

CHAIR—When you rang him a few years ago to talk about putting in a separator, what was his response?

Mr McConnell—He said, ‘Good idea.’ I spoke to Peter Holcroft, the freight manager, only a few weeks back now, when I first told them that the council would be buying fuel from IBIS. He said he had been told it could not be done. Yet the repair man who was here last week said it could be done. It does seem to be a long way after the event.

CHAIR—You said he came up on Wednesday. Was that a result of an inquiry that you had made? Why was the person up here on Wednesday?

Mr McConnell—He came simply because I said that we had no fuel and that it required bleeding every time we ran out of fuel.

CHAIR—When did you make that complaint?

Mr McConnell—I made the complaint on the Monday and it just happened that this guy was coming to the islands. Otherwise, it may have been two or three weeks before he came to fix the bowser.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for making that contribution.

Mr McConnell—Okay. Could I just add something else, on a completely different matter? It would be an interesting question for you to ask the community that is gathered here how many people check their dockets for pricing. In my experience in the past four weeks, IBIS are advertising products in the newspaper, in the *Torres News*, and the cash register is not charging those prices. IBIS get sick of me calling them. I have rung Simon Cloonan, who is their purchasing manager in Cairns, to ask, ‘Why are you charging full price for items you are advertising as being on special?’

CHAIR—What was the answer to that question?

Mr McConnell—He said: ‘I don’t know. We’ll look into it.’ I asked him: ‘How does it happen? Does it happen at the store here or does it happen in Cairns?’ He said, ‘It happens in Cairns.’ They had not amended their pricing. They are selling rockmelons at full price when they

are advertising them, as you can see on the door over there and in the newspaper, at a reduced price. I have been watching. They had snow peas for \$14.99 a kilo. The next week they were on special for \$8.99 a kilo. The next week they were \$44 a kilo. That was the same week that Mark Johnston, who is the Chairman of the IBIS board, put an article into the *Torres News* saying that their prices for fruit, veg and meat were now cheaper than in Cairns. I asked Simon Cloonan, 'How can it be that you're charging \$44 for a kilo of snow peas when your chairman is saying that you are cheaper than Cairns?' I did a shop around in Cairns, and \$26 was the top price you would pay for a kilo of snow peas in Cairns. They were \$44 here, so I took them back, as you would. It was the same for watermelon. It was \$4.95 a kilo. You do not pay \$4.95 a kilo for watermelon in any city—or any main city, anyway—in Australia. Even today it costs \$2.39 for a basic watermelon and \$3.69 for a seedless one. That is still outrageous for a fresh fruit with a tick on it.

Mr KATTER—What is the solution on the fuel? What do you think would be the optimal solution?

Mr McConnell—To solve the fuel problem, you need a 6,000-litre minimum capacity. They have two tanks at 1,500 litres each, so they can only supply in 1,500-litre IBCs. Because of delay and because the weather has a big impact on how much fuel is sold, I would recommend 8,000 or 10,000 litres. That would be far less complex a system. There is no other solution, really.

Mr KATTER—What about the water solution in the fuel?

Mr McConnell—Trap the water before it gets to the bowser. They have a sediment strainer in the pump, and it is just not up to it. I have not bought fuel from them for three years, so I do not know how good the quality has been, but I still see the carburettors coming off outboard engines into the workshop to get the water blown out of them, so it is happening.

Mr KATTER—Is the water lighter or heavier than fuel?

Mr McConnell—The water is on the bottom, which means it goes straight to the pipe that is in the ground. Then it runs out. The poor person who comes to buy that first lot of fuel, who comes when IBIS delivers the 3,000 litres, buys what is just a mix of everything that is in the line. That does not happen in the mainstream very much. I think there is always at least four inches or a fair bit left in the bottom of each tank so it does not suck the sediment out of the bottom of the tank, and they come and pump them out to get rid of that rubbish. With this it all goes straight to the bowser, and it is expensive water.

Mr TURNOUR—Can I follow up the issues in relation to pricing. We heard evidence yesterday about similar problems on Thursday Island. Are you saying the rockmelons are advertised at a special price but when you buy them they are full price?

Mr McConnell—They are full price.

Mr TURNOUR—Is that a regular thing that you experience looking at your shopping docket over a long period of time?

Mr McConnell—Yes, there is a lot of inconsistency. What you see there in the store today is not an accurate representation of what it normally is. There is normally no indication on the shelves of what the pricing is, so you do not know until you get to the checkout what it is. And there is a pronounced lack of staff training. It is obvious that there is little happening. I heard it discussed before that things do not come out immediately on the barge. Sometimes it is three or four days later that fresh stock appears; sometimes you have to ask for it. There is also a problem with rotation and use by dates. I can remember someone bought something that was out of date by 18 months.

Mr TURNOUR—Are you saying that the effort that has gone into the store relates to the committee's visit today?

Mr McConnell—Absolutely, no question, and it goes a lot further than that. There is a lack of operator awareness. I bought a watermelon this morning and was charged a higher price. The manager from TI happened to be there and I said: 'It's charged at a higher price. How does that happen?' He said that that particular case was an operator error but that the sheet that they are using dates back to the days when Jessica was managing the store. I do not know how long it has been since Jessica was in the store. It might be 12 months. They were selling royal gala apples on special two weeks ago. There is no way they can charge out a royal gala apple on special when they do not even have it on their list. I rang Simon about that. I said, 'How come I got charged a red delicious when it was royal gala?' He said, 'We're calling that apple red.' I said, 'It is not a red apple; it's yellow.' I talked to Elizabeth about it and she said, 'We're still using the same sheet for our codes that we had when Jessica was running the store.' It has been 12 months, perhaps longer, since Jessica was there. There is a gross amount of overcharging going on in Torres Strait and it is wrong because the dollars simply do not go around. I was not surprised that Mark Johnston said that they made \$500,000 profit last year for the first time. I can see where it came from—all the stores in the outer islands and the IBIS store on TI. He is out of touch completely with what is happening out here.

Mr TURNOUR—While we are having this discussion about the stores, do you see similar problems with the Island and Cape store in terms of the pricing and the products?

Mr McConnell—I have not seen that problem down there, but I do not use it much either. Initially when we arrived we were tempted to buy our fresh fruit and vegetables direct from Cairns. My wife and I—just the two of us, no children—would get two polystyrene boxes, the small broccoli boxes, sent up. That cost \$33 in freight for around \$80 worth of fruit and vegetables. Now, the same two polystyrene boxes cost \$55 in freight on Sea Swift, minimum charge. There is no alternative. You must pay \$55. The two polystyrene boxes actually work out to be over the minimum charge anyway, so it is about \$63 for \$80 worth of fruit and vegetables from Cairns direct through Quality Fresh. The freight is a terrible problem now with Sea Swift's pricing. It is around \$400 a cubic metre, however you get it. Unfortunately, if you order a packet of biscuits, something that is dangerous goods like a battery, something that has to go into the chiller or something that has to go into the freezer, each one of those items attracts a minimum charge. It is an incredibly difficult problem.

CHAIR—Thank you for that contribution. Is there anyone else who would like to make a contribution to the committee? Father Douglas Billy.

Father Billy—I want to add to what Glenn was just saying in regard to the prices at IBIS. Just a week ago I bought three items from the IBIS store, which cost me about \$10. That was just for three items: two cups of noodles and some biscuits. Someone was just telling me that seven items she bought today cost her \$7. Before that, if she had bought seven items it would have been something like \$20. We know for sure that, like everybody has been saying, Richard was out here and it is amazing to see that all the fruit and vegetables are down to half price, whereas before it was as Glenn said.

With regard to fuel, it is unreal that the price of fuel is so high, especially for fishermen if they want to go out fishing. There is no capacity for the fishermen to go out. If we bought 200 litres down south, on the mainstream, it would cost about \$280. From the fuel bowser here it would cost us \$500 for a fuel can, which contains 200 litres, which are 10 20-litre fuel drums. The difference is something like \$220, and that is apart from freight. You are looking at another \$100 dollars or more on top of that \$280 for the fuel to come with the barge, which is Sea Swift. I am speaking on behalf of all the fishermen and everybody in the community. I think that is about all I want to say.

CHAIR—Thank you for that contribution. Is there anyone else who would like to make a contribution this evening?

Mr Messa—I want to say something about opportunity for choice. When we talk about remote areas, I want to make a bit of a comparison between Indigenous communities down south and us islanders up here in the Torres Strait. There is a big difference when you are speaking of a remote area. The opportunity for choice they get, we up here do not get. The opportunity for choice they have is that they can jump in their car. For example, at Hope Vale, if they want to do some shopping, they can jump in their car and drive to Cooktown, whereas up here we have to pay to catch a plane to Horn Island or, if we are planning to go down to Cairns or somewhere else down south, we have to pay to go from here to Horn then on to Cairns. Previous speakers have spoken about the prices that we face up here and the lack of choice we have. We do not have the same opportunity for choice that other Aboriginal people down on the mainland have. They have the opportunity to go and shop wherever they want, whereas we have to accept what we have been offered.

When you speak about remote, we are surrounded by open waters, and it takes four days for the barge to come with all the goods. I have witnessed some goods in the store that will last only a day before they get rotten. I am speaking about the opportunity of choices that we do not get up here compared with our Aboriginal families down on the mainland. We have to accept what we have been offered here. We have not got choices here. We have to take what comes day by day and just accept it. When you speak about remote, we Torres Strait Islanders live in a remote area. We are surrounded by sea. We do not just jump in the car and drive to the next town to do our shopping. It is remote. Compared to our Indigenous brothers and sisters down in the south, they can jump in the car and just drive. So when you speak of opportunity, we do not get that choice of opportunity. We live in a really remote area because we are surrounded by sea. It is easy for people to say that, because they have those opportunities of choice down south compared with us up here in the Torres Strait. We have to fly into TI or down south, and with the cost of air fares it is harder than hell—even the freight. We do not have the opportunity of choices here. The only choices we have for shopping are IBIS and our convenience store down the road.

We accept what we have been offered. Previous speakers have spoken about prices and fuel, the cost. We are living in a remote area and we do not have that choice or that opportunity of choice, but we have to accept what we have been offered.

CHAIR—Thank you. Would somebody else like to make a contribution?

Miss Gamia—I would like to comment on fruit and vegies at the local shop. I am a mother of three. My partner is on normal CDEP wages, and when I do the normal local grocery I end up spending nearly all of our income on groceries and then we have whatever is left for the next fortnight. Healthy eating is being promoted throughout the community, and it is pretty hard to give our kids healthy stuff when our fruit and vegies come up here rotten and spoilt most of the time on the barge, so we are left with no option but to stop our kids from eating fruit and vegies at home. It is first in, first served at the shop. I just wanted to comment on that.

Mrs Morris—I just want to support what Nazareth said. I am a mother of five, and I am trying to promote healthy eating. I support what Robyn was saying earlier about the high cholesterol rate in our community. Basically, with my budgeting I can only afford Home Brand, which is not a healthy option for my kids, and I would like a betterment for my kids' health, but I cannot because of the price range within the shops. I do my meat shopping at the mini-mart because it is cheaper than the IBIS, and I do my fruit shopping at the IBIS because it is cheaper. But I am on family payment tax benefit and it is not even enough with the prices we have here.

I lived down south five years back, and a trolley full of groceries from Biloela cost up to 70 bucks. But shopping here at the IBIS I pay \$250 and up to \$300 and it is not even for a full trolley. It is like we are used for wastage or for reduced or damaged products. It is sent to us up here. It is just not fair dinkum to us when we are trying to promote healthy eating. I cannot even budget to spend for a whole household. Trying to get cleaning stuff would cost me around \$50 to \$80. That is for 10 items. That is just ridiculous. Down south it would not be that much. We are just asking, from young parents' point of view, that you support the statements that we are putting in to you guys. Thanks. That is about all I want to say.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Thank you both for your contributions. Is there anyone else who would like to make a statement?

Mr Mosby—I just want to say something about the holistic approach to community wellbeing. First of all, I just want to say on the lifestyle in the community that we did gardening before but now with the development of the community it has stopped. With the Westernised lifestyle, people sit back. Have a look at whether the shops are putting anything back into the community. This community wellbeing reflects back into the healthy lifestyle system. You have listened to what we have said about diabetes. All of that comes into it. Even having a look at the shops, at the variety of things that we sell, it is all black and white products. It is not a very good product, even though it says that it is sugar free and all that. It has not come up to the standard where you have 10 different varieties of product up on the shelf. You can only get two out of 10 in the shops. If you say, 'Well, we wanted to put a healthy product on one shelf,' you will focus on substituting something so that you can have a healthy thing, but then the price goes up because you are targeting that product. The management I think looks at where more has been taken off the shelves and then the prices go up. The value is how much profit they have made out of that, but it does not reflect back out into the community, where the healthy lifestyle occurs.

Mr Turnour asked whether there was a customer loyalty program coming into the community. We are working on it. I hope there will be some financial assistance so that we can really get this going on as a program in the community. Now we are looking at really starting off something and really coming back into having fresh fruit and vegies and different varieties. We should have different varieties of food that really cater for this environment—not everywhere but only this environment. The last thing I want to say is this. You can always buy fruit and vegies at the shop because they are half price. It is about the wages that you get compared to the prices. You get paid once a fortnight. You do your shopping. Then you cannot do your shopping again the next week because your money limits you to shopping only for that period of time. It has to last you for a fortnight. That is it. Thank you.

CHAIR—Are there any other people who would like to make a contribution?

Mr G Nai—I would like to speak on the freshness of the goods that come through the IBIS store—both stores, anyway. Just yesterday we had a boat. We came to the store yesterday and bought a pumpkin. This morning the insides are runny. It is a spoiled pumpkin. I have the pumpkin in my car if you want to see it. It is not a good-looking pumpkin. I am a pumpkin eater. I love my pumpkin. But somehow that pumpkin did not look good to me this morning; there was water all on my kitchen bench.

Especially at issue is the price range of fruit and vegies. When the doctor came through and said to the chronic patients, ‘Stick to the fruit and vegie diet’ and all that, this is the thing that we are looking at. Our money is not that big compared to what the doctor requested of us. I ask the committee if there is any way that the government could subsidise anything in the stores, the freight or anything to make it a lot easier for people up here in the remote area of the Torres Strait. It is okay for us; sometimes we have a direct flight to Cairns. We have friends that fly and we can get vegies fresh; we got them yesterday and today we get them. But now the airline is a problem. We are not ever going into the bush again to do gardening, because a small twig will give us a scratch. It will get infected because of this chronic disease. That is why we all turn to the IBIS store. We look at that as the main source of fruit and vegies for us, especially when fresh. Fresh is best, naturally. That is why if something in the IBIS store is not good enough we have to go to the convenience store; it is more convenient over there.

We get our fruit and vegies mainly from the convenience store. We know that it is guaranteed. It does not matter that you get some higher prices and some not so high over at the mini-mart. It is good. As I and some previous speakers have said already, there is a lack of training, studying or whatever of shop assistants in the IBIS store that will let them know that what is out of date is out of date and to put it away, not try to sell it if it is out of date. We get a lot of that in the store here at low prices. They put the price down in specials and that is okay but, for some people, as previous speakers have spoken here, money is the big problem up here. We are low-income earners and we live with higher costs. For instance, the power line up there costs us about \$20 a card. You try to live with \$20 a card through the week. Mainstream get a power bill of about \$100 or \$200 a month, and here we pay that for one week of power. On top of that we have to pay for our food.

Mr KATTER—You are saying it is \$20 a week for electricity?

Mr G Nai—For some houses. But now we have air conditioners in the houses it is \$20 a day.

Mr KATTER—You are supposed to be on the same tariff as everyone else in Queensland.

Mr G Nai—We are not. We are in a different system up here.

Mr KATTER—Mr Chair, could I direct that to Jim Turnour, the federal member. Jim, you might have a look at that, because there is definitely an agreement that throughout Queensland it is all the same price. The total, all-up cost of electrifying the Torres Strait Islands with solar power was \$30 million. That was to last for 25 years and there would be no cost for diesel—or very little. It might switch on for four or five days per year. The system was designed that way. And there was to be some cost for batteries. Every seven years they would have to be replaced. But, really, the first cost was the complete, all-up cost. For reasons best known to some lunatic, they switched over to diesel. Not only does it have a horrific cost, but you have the cost of repairs all the time. A diesel engine requires an awful lot of maintenance, whereas with a solar system there are no moving parts.

On Coconut Island that system was put in to meet the demand at that point in time, when there was no electricity at all except for household generators. We said that over the next three years the consumption would double and that over the next five years it would grow to be the same as that of Townsville. It was programmed so that the system would increase. The system was not increased; therefore they said solar energy was not working and they would put in diesel. Ergon were absolutely determined that they would not put in solar power. I do not know why. They just had an absolute crazy madness about it. And they got their way. When the government fell, in 1989, they proceeded to put in diesel power and completely scrap the solar energy system, which would have had no ongoing cost. The Queensland cabinet had agreed to spend the \$30 million to electrify all the outer islands in the Torres Strait. That had already been agreed to and passed and is a matter of record in cabinet. I was the minister; obviously I know. I hear what you are saying and I recoil with anger.

CHAIR—Mr Nai, do you have anything else you would like to add?

Mr G Nai—Yes, especially on wages. Most of the island workers are on CDEP. You try to take a payment in there and do a decent shop but you cannot do a decent shop; you have to think about your power bill as well. Once you have put all your money into your shopping and fuel, you end up with what? You do not have much money for the power bill. That is our main concern on the island. We island men have a different way of looking after one another. Our ways are unique. If you do not have a power card, I will give you one. That is how it is on the island. We say, 'If you run out of sugar, come and ask me. I'll give you sugar. I'll give you milk. I'll give you peanut butter.' But if we go down to the mainstream it is a totally different ball game. That is why we like our little paradise up here. It is unique. If the government can subsidise us in any way—in freight or anything—just to get the IBIS prices or the mini-mart prices down, please do it. If we are going to live like this we are going to die young anyway because of heartache. Thank you.

CHAIR—That brings us to a close because the time is getting on. I would like to thank all members of the secretariat for the work they have done in making today happen, as well as Hansard. I thank all of you for setting up today. As I said at the opening, it is a wonderful setting that we have had today and we greatly appreciate it. I will hand over to your local member to close from our point of view and then Councillor John may want to close the meeting at the end.

Mr TURNOUR—I will follow up, as Bob suggested, in relation to electricity. Can I thank Councillor Mosby and the community for coming out today. I have campaigned about cost-of-living pressures in the Torres Strait and Cape York since becoming a member of parliament. I have been a member for only 12 months. It is great to have the committee here. I get to travel around and see the conditions that people live in and the type of life they live, but it is great to bring other members of the parliament to Masig and to other parts of the Torres Strait to see and hear firsthand from you about the situation here on Masig and other islands. Thank you so much for your welcome. I really appreciate that. Thank you for letting us stay here tonight. I pay my respects yet again to the traditional owners and elders for having us here on this island. Thank you.

Mr John Mosby—Thank you to Mr Chair and to our local member, Jim Turnour. Before I say other things, on behalf of the community, I just want to apologise for members of the community who did not have time to speak. Time is not on our side. I want to say thanks to all members of the community who participated and who spoke up about the high cost of living so that the committee could hear that. In closing, I think it is important that I ask you to provide feedback to us the community as to where to from here.

CHAIR—Sure. The committee is doing three tours within Australia as part of its inquiry. Coming to the Torres Strait is the first. We were on Thursday Island yesterday and we are going to Mer Island tomorrow and then we are going down to Bamaga and some of the Cape York communities to finish off the week. In about five weeks we are going to Central Australia, the top of South Australia and around Alice Springs. Then in July we will be going to the Top End, to the top of WA and to the Top End of the Northern Territory. Along the way we are also receiving evidence in Canberra from a number of government departments—for example, AQIS and also the Queensland Health department—to answer some of the technical questions which have been raised along the way.

We are scheduled to report in relation to this inquiry around September this year. We formally give a report to the House of Representatives. This inquiry is happening because the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, has asked us to undertake this inquiry. In giving that report, we also give the report to the minister. It is then a matter for whether or not government decides to take up the recommendations that we make. This is clearly an issue of concern to the minister. That is why she is keen we have a look at this issue. It really goes to the heart, as we have heard throughout the day, and the whole question of closing the gap in terms of health outcomes, life expectancy amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. I have no doubt that she will be waiting with interest to see what the report says and then, as I say, it will be a matter for government to implement any recommendations. That is the process from here.

Mr TURNOUR—With some indulgence of the chair, as your local federal member I have heard evidence over the last couple of days that I will refer to the Office of Fair Trading to have a look at in the interim. While they are directly related to issues of the inquiry, I think issues of pricing and the like in terms of the local store are things that I as your local federal member can take up with the Office of Fair Trading. I will do that for the community, Councillor Mosby.

Mr KATTER—I crave the indulgence of the chair for one moment. What Joey Mosby said before went back to the Bjelke Petersen government. Every single service here was under a

single department. Just to give you one example, Nigel Tillett was the executive officer for the whole of the Torres Strait. He was married to a lady from Badu. Nigel headed up the Island Industries Board as well as being paid as an executive officer. He has been replaced by a bloke called Bowler who lives in Cairns. I do not know what he is paid but I imagine it would not be much short of \$150,000 or \$200,000 a year. He is not up here; he is not doing anything. That is just an extra supernumerary position. There is a profit of half a million dollars. So there is \$1 million locked up in two items—(1) the fact that now there is a boss that lives in Cairns and (2) there is a profit. When a government department ran IIB there was no profit and we tried to keep the price as low as possible. The mainstreaming and the closing down of that department—Joey Mosby is right on that. That has been absolutely disastrous. I have not been up here since the collapse of the government in 1990. This is the first time I have seen how badly things have gone with the mainstreaming. Clearly, it has failed miserably in my opinion.

CHAIR—Thank you, Bob. So does that answer the question in terms of what the process is from here?

Mr John Mosby—Thank you. I just thought I needed to ask, that is all. I think many people will hear that. I hope you can see the turnout here because high cost is of concern to us. We are grateful to be one of the communities—I think I mentioned this in my opening statement—to have the opportunity to speak up. You are consulting all islands in the Torres Strait but basically you will find the same answers, I guess. Thank you again. I ask the committee that we close with a prayer. I apologise that we never committed these hearings to the hands of God. I ask that we close these hearings with a word of prayer.

CHAIR—We will leave it in your hands, John, to close it now.

Mr John Mosby—Father Mosby, can I ask you to close the hearing with a prayer.

Father Ned Mosby—Praise God. Let us pray. Father God, we thank you and praise you, Almighty God, and we thank you for this time. You are God yesterday, today and tomorrow. You savvy everything. We ask you this time, this day to share this meeting here.

Father, as I speak you savvy everything. The discussion that we present here comes from the heart, and you already savvy that. Father, we ask that you, God, make sure these people from the government are listening. We ask that your spirit be teacher, guide, confidant at this time. We know that the spirit of God moves within us, ministering to each one of us in a special way, giving people courage to stand up and talk.

We ask also for your knowledge, wisdom and understanding. We remind all these representatives here before us that you have given them the responsibility to look after our wellbeing. You have allowed this time to happen. We savvy that after the discussion that we have here more will come that will end our trouble. We ask that their decisions will be blessed by you. Once again, Lord, may no trouble again. May you continue to look after them. As you minister to them, may you also minister to our people and families back home as well. May we all be covered by the blood of your Son, Jesus. May the road that we follow and the ground that we stand up on be holy ground, and once again we give you all honour, glory and praise, and also to your Son, Jesus. Amen.

CHAIR—Thank you.

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

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 6.40 pm