



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND  
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Reeves report on the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern  
Territory) Act**

TUESDAY, 4 MAY 1999

KATHERINE

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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

**Tuesday, 4 May 1999**

**Members:** Mr Lieberman (*Chair*), Mrs Draper, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Mr Katter, Mr Lloyd, Mr Melham, Mr Quick, Mr Snowdon and Mr Wakelin

**Members in attendance:** Ms Hoare, Mr Lieberman, Mr Melham, Mr Quick, Mr Snowdon

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

The Committee shall inquire into and report on the views of people who have an interest in the possible implementation of recommendations made in the Reeves Report. In particular the Committee will seek views on:

- (1) the proposed system of Regional Land Councils, including
  - (a) the extent to which they would provide a greater level of self-management for Aboriginal people, and
  - (b) the role of traditional owners in decision making in relation to Aboriginal land under that system;
- (2) the proposed structure and functions of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Council;
- (3) the proposed changes to the operations of the Aboriginals Benefit Reserve including the distribution of monies from the Reserve;
- (4) the proposed modifications to the mining provisions of the Act including the continuing role of government in the administration of these provisions;
- (5) proposals concerning access to Aboriginal land including the removal of the permit system and access to such land by the Northern Territory government; and
- (6) the proposed application of Northern Territory laws to Aboriginal land.

The Committee shall make recommendations on any desirable changes to the proposals made in the Reeves report in the light of the views obtained.

[2.16 p.m.]

### **PARTICIPANTS**

**ANDREWS, Mr**

**BOLGI, PETER**

**CAMPHOO, NELLIE**

**CRAWSHAW, JOSIE**

**DOUGLAS, THELMA**

**FRIDAY, RODDY**

**FRY, NORMAN**

**KIRSTY**

**HARNEY, BILL**

**LANE, DAVID**

**LEE, ANTHONY**

**LINDSAY, RONNIE**

**ROBERTS, JESSIE**

**SMILER, ROBERT**

**SULLIVAN, JIM**

**SULLIVAN, ROSEMARY**

**WELLS, KATHRYN**

**WESTON, BARRY**

**YOUNG, RILEY**

**CHAIR**—Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I welcome you all here today to this public meeting of the committee. Before I proceed any further I will introduce myself and get my colleagues to introduce themselves so that you know where we come from. I am Lou Lieberman and I am chairman of this committee, which is a committee of the Australian parliament. I live in Victoria, on the Murray River. You might know the name of the great river.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I am the member for Northern Territory. The Murray River is not like the Katherine River or the Victoria River: it is only a trickle!

**Mr MELHAM**—I am the shadow minister for Aboriginal Affairs. I am opposite Senator John Herron in the federal parliament.

**Mr QUICK**—I am the deputy chair of the committee and I am from Tasmania.

**Ms HOARE**—I am a Labor member from New South Wales—just down the western side of Lake Macquarie, if we're talking about water.

**CHAIR**—We also have at the table Mr James Catchpole, who is the secretary to the committee, and we have other officers of the committee here and also members of Hansard. I will talk about the duties of Hansard in a moment so that you will know why they are recording and how that might help you in recording the meeting today.

This is a public meeting and we would like it to be informal and for you to feel free to talk to us. We obviously have to make sure that we do it in order that people can be heard. We have a roving microphone and I will tell you about that in a moment. We are here today because the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator John Herron, has asked us to come up here and to other parts of the Northern Territory to ask you what you think about the recommendations in the report that I am sure you know about, called the Reeves report. We are trying to talk to as many people as possible and we have already met with, and spoken to, in excess of 1,000 people so far at various meetings and also in individual face-to-face contact.

We plan to be able to give your views on the Reeves report and to report back to parliament by August this year. That is a fairly tight time frame, and we are doing our best to meet as many people as we can. We cannot stay, much as we would like to, for long periods of time because we could not possibly complete the schedule of visits that we wish to make. We do our best and we are trying to meet as many people as we can. We are sorry that we cannot stay longer but we hope that you understand our difficulties: if we did stay longer, we would not be able to see other people.

This meeting is part of the proceedings of Commonwealth parliament. Anyone who speaks to it will understand that they are required to give their opinion and that anyone giving false or misleading evidence to a parliamentary committee should be aware that that is a serious matter and that it would be regarded by parliament very seriously.

Our reporters from Hansard, as I mentioned to you, are taping—as you will see—what we are saying today. We hope you are comfortable with that. It will become part of the record of Australia. The committee need to have the transcript so that we can study what you have said and think about it, as we return to do our report in Canberra. Also, the report will be made public; it will be published and become part of the transcript of the Australian parliament so that many people across Australia who cannot be here with us today will be able to read what you say. I am sure you will realise the value of that. This is your chance to put your advice to us. We will send copies of the transcript, once it is typed, from Canberra back to you here. If you are worried about not getting a copy, please understand

that we will send it back here and that our staff will do their very best to ensure that everyone who wants a copy will be able get access to one.

I want you to know that the Reeves report is a report with very wide and sweeping recommendations and that the members of the committee have an open mind. We have not made a decision on what we will advise the parliament and the government. Although, from time to time, we will make some statements ourselves—we are only human—which will indicate some thought that may be passing through our mind at the time, you must understand that we are not here today to tell you what our final advice will be, because we have not finished hearing what the people of the Northern Territory want to tell us, and it would not be fair if we had made our mind up. We want to keep an open mind on the issue. I hope you will understand that.

I understand that there are some people, perhaps some women, who want to talk to the committee separately at the end of this meeting. If that is the way you feel more comfortable, the committee is very happy to cooperate in that regard. If you want to talk, I ask you to come up where we will bring our roving microphone to you. We would like you to tell us your name before you speak so that it can be on the record of the history of this meeting. We have interpreters here who are able to help us if we need them. Without any further ado, I thank you once again for coming. We have a list of speakers, so I will ask the first speaker to commence.

**Mr ANDREWS**—I would like to thank the people of the Northern Territory here and also the people of Canberra, the politicians, for coming to hear what we want to say about our own community. The two plans that we have put up there for you to see are for the people here to think about and decide what the best one is for them. You, the committee, have to relay the message back to Canberra. If you have any problems, I am here.

The politicians have to listen to you people very carefully on the Reeves report. A lot of people here did not have a chance to speak to Reeves about a lot of these things coming into our hands. It is going to destroy our communities. A lot of us will miss out on a lot of things that we have had before. There are a lot of changes coming in. It is just another European law that we are talking about. A lot of our culture, a lot of our sacred sites, a lot of the things that we have, we are going to lose.

You can think about work on the ABR, royalties, pointing at people who sit on the governing land councils, and governing your own communities. A lot of these things are coming into our ways. The first thing they said was self-determination: 'This is what you Aboriginal people want to do.' But what is the finding on the Reeves report? That is the issue. What did they find about Aboriginal people that went wrong in the past?

**PETER BOLGI**—I am from Manyallaluk and I am president. Like our brother has said, we are just trying to make it strong for our company. There still a lot of issues coming back. The elders are thinking about it very hard. There are a lot of sacred sites and ceremony grounds. Also, we worry about our land being bought up there from the beginning. It should be that they are not allowed to touch that ground.

**KIRSTY**—I am from Manyallaluk. I am not able to speak much. Thank you.

**BARRY WESTON**—I am from Beswick. I am just looking at the NLC. We have got a few land rights at Beswick and we would like to keep and run our country for ourselves. With our royalties now, we get them once a year. That is all I can say, thank you.

**RILEY YOUNG**—I am from Yarralin. What I have to say is about people's feelings on this proposal. I think we have gone back to the old days. That is my feeling, and I have every right to talk about this. We had a meeting at Yarralin, and we have got lots of important things to talk about. We are Aboriginal people and we know a little bit of white man's law, but you never go through the Aboriginal law. It is pretty bad. As soon as you bag that thing, we are going to have troubles. They can do anything. They control you. They control the board. They can put a bet on you or even me. It will not take you long: you will be down the road about 15 or 20 minutes and then you are gone, finished. That is the sort of thing you have to watch out for.

There are too many things for the community to cope with. There is a lot to check on that side of the chart. There is a lot of feeling for my side. I think we can take the land rights and mining rights out of this side. Do not worry about a new law. I think we have gone back to Welfare times. That is very bad. We should have rights. Those are all my ideas, thank you.

**NELLIE CAMPHOO**—Hello, everyone. It is nice to meet all the different politicians from Canberra and all around the place. It is nice to see your faces. I come from Bulman Station. This new policy on the board there has confused me. I was brought up on the land where I live in Arnhem Land now, and I will stick to our land council. It seems to me that the land rights act fits in with my law, and my law never changes. I know a bit about white politicians' law, but that does not fit in with me. My land is sitting pretty and I do not want my land destroyed. The land is there for hunting. Way back before we met white men, we would hunt and get all of our food—anything that we wanted. I want my land to be sitting pretty like it is now. Thank you very much.

**RONNIE LINDSAY**—I am from the Bulman community. Looking at this thing on the board, most of the elders where I come from do not agree with this new Reeves report and what is written. I have not read the book but, looking at this new idea of yours, it is going to set us right back to where we all started, as some elders were saying. Is it true that you are looking at wiping the land rights act? Are you really aiming at changing the land rights act or taking it away from us?

**CHAIR**—We do not propose to change it. We are here to hear your response to what you think Mr Reeves said. Mr Reeves wants to make some changes. He recommends some changes.

**Mr QUICK**—The report that gave us this business comes from Mr Reeves. He wrote that report for the minister in Canberra. The minister in Canberra has asked this committee to talk to people about what they think about that report. It is not our report, so you just tell us what you think about that report.

**RONNIE LINDSAY**—You will be asking us questions later so that we can answer your questions regarding the stuff here, okay?

**JESSIE ROBERTS**—I am from Jilkminggan. I am saying hello to everybody here on this committee. I am concerned about what you want and those new changes. People are worried and saying that they will stay in Jilkminggan. We are worried that we are going to lose our history and we do not want that to happen. We would like to stay with land rights. The Northern Land Council helped us from the start, from DAA, when we had the walkout from the station. DAA used to be what you now call ATSIC. We got support from DAA and then from the Northern Land Council. Are you going to keep changing this?

We are not from Canberra; we are from the bush. We have had our own laws from the beginning, from our grandfather and from our great-grandfather. We did not know how to read and write. You have got a new generation now who can read and write, but not me. I can draw my history. My father used to take me camping out bush, collecting bush tucker, with no nothing, just a goanna and all of that. I learned differently, but my children and my grandsons have all been to school. When I look at that and I see this report on you politicians, I say that we would like to stick to land rights. That is all I can say. Thank you.

**ROBERT SMILER**—Hello. I am from Jilkminggan community. What changed me was looking at the Reeves thing and our original councillor coming around and talking about taking our land rights from us. At the meeting, he was saying that they want to take from the traditional owners our royalties from the mining companies. The Reeves report says that it will take away the NLC and give us small land councils. In my opinion, I want to stay with one body and one voice. We do not want to change our land rights act. Thank you.

**DAVID LANE**—I am from Beswick. We have talked a lot of amongst ourselves, and I had heard a lot of talk from other communities and other members from other communities about the Reeves report. The proposals in the Reeves report do not do any justice to Aboriginal people in the way that the NT act does as it stands now. I have been around, I have worked around, and I know all about the New South Wales Aboriginal land rights act and the way that was set up and the way that it does not work. They wasted money there. They do not do anything, whereas our act here is strong. It strengthens us.

It also makes sure that we have the right to our land and makes sure that we have that land for our ceremony, for my ceremony and for my children to go through their ceremony, to make sure that that still goes on and that we do not lose it and that we do not become like white people—faceless people who have no ceremony, no nothing. All their ceremony is buildings, money, two cars, two garages and work, work, work: no looking after country, no nothing.

That is the way that the land rights act has worked for us. As far as I am concerned, the Reeves report is designed to eradicate our rights here in the Territory. They want to grab our land, in the same way that they tried to grab our land through the Wik Native Title Act.

**THELMA DOUGLAS**—I am from Borroloola. I would like to explain the two things on the board up there and what Aboriginal people like today. We have got to stay with land rights; it has been helping the people from the beginning when we first had the land rights act. We are not going to jump over to this new one because, if Aboriginal people go to that one, after we have settled down to that for a couple of years you would then change it again



to another new one. We go back to where we started from with the land rights. That is what our people worked for—to look after our sacred sites.

When people from here, or even the tourists, go down there are and they go halfway up to the whitefellas and ask the white people that work in Borroloola in our community, they just let them go there. We Aboriginal people really like to know about the people who are coming in and asking the whitefellas if they can go through. They get permission from the white people but not from the Aboriginal people. We are the Aboriginal people who have been living on that land and we have sacred sites and we have ceremony there every year.

That is the thing that is never brought to the parliament and explained in the parliament. We take our kids out in the bush and tell them about what is out there in the bush, about the ceremony and the sacred sites and who comes from that area. A lot of things are happening in Borroloola with all of the ancestors, and we are going to follow that up. This is the place where we can come face to face and talk to you about what we worry about with our land. We worry about our sacred sites, and we worry about our children.

If we go to this new idea, that will only be fooling people because you will change to another one later on. These people agreed to be in that old one and now we have to change it again. We never change our laws in parliament; they have been there from the beginning. We followed the government law in black-and-white, and we have to follow the rules that belong to the government. Because we are Territorians, we can speak out for our rights, because a lot of things have been damaging our land. We would like to tell you mob, little by little, about the Bing Bong that belongs to the Aboriginal people. The people from Ngukurr, Borroloola and Manangoora used to go and have a ceremony on that land.

White man came to that land and saw the government people so as to list the land as their own stations. That is why today the Aboriginal people get beaten from that area. In Bing Bong, you now have to ask permission from the people who have been living on that land all their lives. You have got to send a message that you are coming to do fishing down there. We are talking about Aboriginal land, but we have to ask whitefellas for permission to go there.

There is also the McArthur River mine and the people who belong to the McArthur mine. They are out in another area. The McArthur mine is a place where they had a lot of ceremony. They do not get much from their land. The people are saying that you are going to get money from your land. We are still sitting there, just because we are Aboriginal people. This is the plan that Aboriginal people have been talking about. The new one is going to change the old one, and they want people to forget about everything. You will then change it to another one. That will go on and on, and where will our children stand? They will not know the Aboriginal way.

They will forget where their parents came from, where their grandparents came from. They belonged to that land and the land belongs to the people. The land is the heart of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people never move around to other places—for example, Borroloola people never move to Ngukurr and say, 'I will be here and this is now my land.' We bring this up to let you politicians know, because we do not get a chance to talk to and to raise our voice up to talk to you. There are a lot of changes coming to us people, changes

which we do not like. We want our land rights to be there, with us as the ones that tell people—as with the one that has been working from the beginning of when we had land rights. It is there with us and we are not changing. That is what every Aboriginal person says about that. That is all I can say.

**KATHRYN WELLS**—I am working as a consultant to the Northern Land Council for two weeks on the Reeves report. When I went around to all of the community meetings, people had good strong meetings for about two hours. I took minutes of all of the people who were at those meetings and the words that they spoke. When we had a combined meeting before we came here to this room, people decided that they would like to give you the minutes of those meetings. I want to do that publicly, to make sure that everyone still agrees with that.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. We will accept that as an exhibit. While we are waiting, anyone can answer this question. Do you think your land council could be improved in any way? For example, some communities have said that they would like the land council to continue but that they would like them to open up more local or regional offices. Are there any comments on that?

**Mr ANDREWS**—As some people have said, a lot of the work has been done very strongly from the land council. Towards the year 2000 or 2005, the land council will do a better job if more funding is provided to them. In the Reeves report, he says that a lot of the funding has been wasted, but I think the land council has been doing a lot of work with people throughout the Territory. A lot of people are lucky enough to get their land back. I am a new member who just came this year and I feel that the land council has been doing a lot of work that no-one else has done for the Aboriginal people.

A lot of Aboriginal people in this Territory have got back some land which they can go and sit on or do whatever they like with. Depending on the funding, they might want to develop the land or outstation. A lot of the CDEPs throughout the Territory are going out and helping these people on outstations rather than the land council doing it; but the land councils are doing their best on the land that belongs to people who are still where they first began. A lot of the people here want to stay with the big land council idea rather than have smaller ones. The Reeves report says that he wants to break up the big land councils into 18 small ones. The people do not agree with the 18 small ones; they prefer the two big ones—the Central Land Council and the Northern Land Council.

**CHAIR**—Do you think the two big land councils would be improved if they also opened more offices and had more local representation from those councils? Do you think that is a good idea?

**Mr ANDREWS**—Yes. That is a good idea. We need more offices throughout the Territory between here and Alice, and further down from Alice Springs central and up the Top End.

**Mr MELHAM**—Would you like to see more money go to the land councils so that they could do more regional offices?

**Mr ANDREWS**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—Most of the moneys that the land councils receive now come from the mining royalties, don't they?

**Mr ANDREWS**—That is correct.

**CHAIR**—Where would the money come from, if you did not have more mining? Who do you think should pay the extra money that you feel they need?

**Mr ANDREWS**—I believe that everybody throughout the Territory is always putting in a budget to the federal government to get some funding and I would imagine that the land council would do this to get the extra funds.

**CHAIR**—Think carefully before you answer this question. It is not a trap, but it is important. Do you think the land councils should do other things on top of what they do now, but with more money from government? Is that what you are saying?

**Mr ANDREWS**—You are using the word 'things', but it has not got a name at this stage.

**CHAIR**—It was not the best choice of words.

**Mr ANDREWS**—If there is something that has got a name on it, then we might know whether it would get off the ground. We would know by then, but the word 'things' could mean anything.

**CHAIR**—You know that Mr Reeves has recommended that the land councils' job objectives be written better and more clearly and that they should have regard to social and economic issues, things like education and health—and those are my words, not his. What do you think of that? Do you think the land councils should not only look after the land very well but should also be involved more in things like education and health?

**Mr ANDREWS**—That is quite true. I have heard a lot of people mention education and a few other things like housing. The Northern Land Council has got the bigger voice in all of the Top End of Australia, the Northern Territory and also Central Australia. They have got a stronger voice, because a lot of us use the land council for land rights and a lot of other things, such as the permit system, that I cannot remember at this stage.

**CHAIR**—As I understand our discussion—and come in on it, anyone who would like to—you are saying that you think the land councils could broaden or develop more activities, provided they had the funds to do it. Is that what you feel?

**DAVID LANE**—For the past 20 years, the land rights act has been working on getting back land that had been taken away from Aboriginal people. Now, the focus has to change, but also the money has to be put back into the land council. The Northern Territory government has wasted a lot of taxpayers' money in fighting the Northern Land Council, and

it has cost not only the Northern Land Council but also the Commonwealth government, the people Australia, money.

If they had been able to give us our land back without the fight and without the cost, then we could provide simple things like running water, electricity, housing and infrastructure for communities. People are now asking, through the Northern Land Council, for these things at meetings. I hear this all the time. The Northern Land Council says that they are not a funding body and that people have to go and see ATSIC or the NT government or someone else. We are constantly put through this revolving door. We just want the same rights as everybody else in Australia has—that is, the right to education, the right to live, the right to power and the right for housing. But we are not getting it. What we do get is just crumbs.

**THELMA DOUGLAS**—I would like to address this issue. The land council needs more money from mining, because the mines are the ones that are damaging the area and the sacred sites. The land council should get more money because they want to train and educate our young people to work as land council men. They can train them to look after our area and our people. Everybody knows that a lot of white tourists go straight out there without asking Aboriginal people. They should train our young people and not just wait for the white land council to come and work in our community. This mob should train the young people who belong to that community to work in that area. They are the ones who should educate them.

A lot of our young people go to college and when they are finished in college they come back here and do nothing, because they do not have a job. We have a land council there to train these young people to look after our area, our ceremony sites, where the ancestors come from and where the ancestors stop. The same thing applies to people in Borroloola and right down to Ngukurr or Numbulwar. Aboriginal people can talk about the sacred sites. It is really good for our people to look after them. Our land rights must provide work for us.

We had a problem a couple of weeks ago about a man who is working for Aboriginal people in Borroloola. He was talking to one of the men who would like to get Five Mile to be his area to do the mustering. He asked him, instead of asking the elders. On the other side of that, there is a sacred site, where there is a story about a young man who went uninitiated, and we still tell our young kids about that today. This fellow got the letter from them and he came down and asked us.

You people told the fellow at Five Mile that he could run the place and do the mustering and bring the cattle up for selling. That man worked for Aboriginal people but he never explained or talked to the elders. We are sick of that. It is just not suitable for Aboriginal people. We would like to have our land council to have a lot of money to teach our young people who finish college, so that they can work with them on the land and learn about sacred sites and what is in the sea. That is the thing I would like to address to you. Thank you.

**JESSIE ROBERTS**—I wanted to talk again about our problems and also about what people have been saying today. On the matter of making small groups instead of the Northern Land Council, there are people from other communities like the one we sit in,

which were started from that. We would like to see that going on all of the time. You have one land council in Darwin and one in Alice Springs. We started with the one from Darwin, and we got support from DAA and the Northern Land Council from Darwin. We make that body, the Northern Land Council, come out here, and there is another body there and another one in Alice Springs.

A smaller, private land council will cut up this big organisation. Whatever organisation helps us, they are going to try and cut that down. We are worried about this. You are fighting. Why are you, the government, going to change that land rights act, if you two bodies work together? We Aboriginal people have other places like Jilkminggan. I am still waiting for my handover—and I will get it—and I am still waiting for Elsey Station. I have everything there: I have good jobs, they are working very hard there, and the management is running well; but we are still waiting. All of this I am going to take up.

But we see the point of that, if the Northern Land Council got more support from other governments, from Canberra. What Aboriginal people think is that you cannot work for \$120. How can you work for CDEP? You can earn \$120 or \$130 by working for CDEP. You cannot do it. You need more dollars. That is what this Aboriginal generation want. You cannot buy new stuff. How can you buy clothing and meals for your children and for yourself? You cannot. That is what we are saying about changing the CDEP. If we go to a small ATSIC and get a little bit of funding, that will not work. We need money for equipment.

How many times have I been talking about this? I do not read or write. I take it up and talk for my young people. You cannot work for that little money. They ask me how they are going to work for that. As for dole money, the single man gets \$300 a fortnight, and married people with four or five children get \$600 or \$700. The CDEP is through. We have got to talk about this and that is why I bring it up with you politicians today. I want you to know this. You can make a report and tell them about which is happening in our community. This is so not only for Aboriginals: for black and white, it is the same. The other blokes working there might be getting \$700 or \$120. Do you think that would make him happy? He will walk away and say, 'That is rubbish, and how am I going to work for that?' That seems really odd. You have to ask how the CDEP can do it.

That CDEP is like the dole money. We cannot have people sitting down on their backsides in our community. You want young people to work, to train and to do this and that. You are dabbling in my community. Robert Smiler is my eldest grandson. He tried training, but he has got CDEP. He will stick at that job but sometimes he says to me, 'Look, Nanna, that money is not enough. How can I buy you something?' I say to him, 'That is your money and you have to learn to work somewhere.'

I have got lots of family. I am a great-grandmother. I have been there for 20 years and I have worked to run that place. I am not going to walk away from Elsey Station. ATSIC said to me, 'Get your CDEP to give you help.' I get little bits of work from ATSIC, but we do not get royalties. We do not have mining. Where do the royalties go from Australia? The money does not stay in Australia; it goes overseas to all of the big places, and we get nothing. There are other people sitting here who get royalties, but we do not. We might make money from cattle if we could get the title for Elsey Station. I may get my money

back from the cattle, but I do not know yet. I am still waiting for the answer. That is why I have a problem with ATSIC, and I have tried. That is all I can say. Thank you all very much.

**KATHRYN WELLS**—I have just been asked by people in the room if we can submit the drawing that people did which relates to what we are talking about—money and ventures, and how it can all operate. That is the picture story that people asked me to draw up.

**CHAIR**—The committee will accept the documents on the noticeboard as exhibits and will receive them as evidence to the inquiry into the recommendations of Reeves report.

**JIM SULLIVAN**—I live at Mataranka. I have been in the Territory for 35 years. I am a farmer. I made a submission to the Reeves report on the permit system, to draw attention to the fact that the permit system was brought in to protect the Aboriginal people and give them time to adjust to the changed circumstances, and those circumstances have well and truly changed. The big objection to the permit system, as far as mainstream Territory goes, is the restriction on the roads. I will give you two examples.

I went to the Katherine Rural College about four years ago, to a graduation, and a couple were there from Nhulunbuy who had come down to see their son graduate. They had to leave four days early because the road was being closed for an Aboriginal ceremony. Where else in Australia would a main thoroughfare be closed for four days? The ceremony could have been shifted, or hessian blinds could have been put up for protection. To be able to close the roads for four days is a disgrace.

There was a schoolteacher at Palumpa, on the Daly River Aboriginal Reserve—I was the cattle manager there for 18 months or two years—and his parents were coming up from South Australia to visit him. They applied for a permit. They had a fortnight they could spend with their son. On the last day of the fortnight, they got a permit. That is an absolute disgrace. I recommend that the permit system be abolished but, if the committee sees that it has to be continued, it needs to be substantially altered so that the roads and public places are no longer subject to a permit. No-one wants to go onto people's land—whether it be my property or anyone else's property—but the roads have to be exempted. It is causing a lot of dissension among mainstream people in the Northern Territory. That certainly needs addressing.

I managed Aboriginal cattle stations for three years—Amanbidji, called Kildurk, near the Western Australian border, and Palumpa, near Port Keats. One very obvious thing is that the managers of Aboriginal enterprises should ultimately answer to a senior board of directors, perhaps on a statutory basis, because there are far too many times when Aboriginal enterprises are robbed or run aground through incompetence or opportunists robbing the system.

When I went to Kildurk, Amanbidji, it was \$300,000 in debt. Practically the whole cattle herd had to be sacrificed to pay for it. The store was \$20,000 in debt. We paid it off, and I and the manager who followed me got the store to a point where there was \$20,000 or \$30,000 in credit ready to build a new store with. The next manager who came along spent

the lot and left the whole thing in debt again. This is a very big problem in Aboriginal enterprises. Senior management must answer to a senior authority with, say, a quarterly report or some such thing. That is all I have got to say. Thank you for hearing me.

**CHAIR**—I want to clarify your recommendations on the permit system. You are saying that, just as with anyone else who owns land, people should get permission first to go on that land. You agree with that principle, but are you saying that roads that are used by the public regularly—agreed public roads—should not be subject to a permit?

**JIM SULLIVAN**—Yes. I have a friend at Port Keats and that is a major road going out there. Port Keats is the sixth largest town in the Northern Territory with two thousand people. I strenuously object to having to get a permit to travel on that public road. I do not want to go on Aboriginal land. I quite agree that I should get a permit if I want to go up and visit their land, that I have to go up and see the people or get permission or have a permit or whatever. The burr under the saddle with the permit system is this business that you have to get a permit to travel on roads that my taxes help to maintain. It would not wash anywhere else in Australia but it washes in the Territory and it needs to be addressed.

**CHAIR**—When difficulty has arisen about getting permission to go on a road, have you raised this with Aboriginal traditional owners or their managers? What has been the response when you have talked it over? Have they suggested that there is some problem and explained what that is to you?

**JIM SULLIVAN**—Certainly, with the two properties that I was on—Amanbidji and Palumpa—the traditional owners did not enforce permits at all on the roads. It is not so much the traditional owners that worry about you driving along the road, in my experience, it is the bureaucracy. It is certainly causing substantial resentment in the mainstream of the Territory population. Just as the people of Port Keats would be incensed if they had to get a permit to come to Katherine then equally are the people who have to get a permit to drive to Port Keats to see a friend or whatever. As far as the land goes, whether it is the trespass law or a permit or whatever it does not matter. I think that is the essence of what Reeves said. The trespass law is designed to protect land but it could go under the heading of permit, it would not matter.

**CHAIR**—You could have both.

**JIM SULLIVAN**—Yes, as long as the roads are accorded the same status as the roads in the rest of Australia.

**CHAIR**—This is a good thing that we have a discussion going on the permit system. Does anyone have anything to say about the permit system, either agreeing or disagreeing? It is an important issue and I would like to get some advice from you on it.

**RONNIE LINDSAY**—You said that someone came from Nhulunbuy and that they had to have four days before they could get back to there, what year was that? We do not have road blocks there when ceremonies are on. At Port Keats and Palumpa, yes. I have travelled through there because my wife comes from there. When did this happen? What year was it? Were they working on the road?

**JIM SULLIVAN**—I am just repeating what they told me. They were very upset about the fact that they had to leave four days early because the road had been closed. I am just repeating what I have been told.

**RONNIE LINDSAY**—I am a permit delegate in that area and I do not block anybody going through.

**CHAIR**—Can I clarify that. Are you saying that they do not need to get a permit?

**Mr SNOWDON**—No, he is a permit delegate. The road is a public road.

**RONNIE LINDSAY**—If they come to Bulman that is different. If they want to come in for a visit or fish or any sort of recreation—

**CHAIR**—Off the road or into a camp?

**RONNIE LINDSAY**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—But they can go on the road?

**RONNIE LINDSAY**—Yes, they can go on the road to Gove, today or any time.

**JIM SULLIVAN**—That is not correct. On the Beswick road, just near the turn-off, there is a big sign saying that a permit must be obtained when you enter Aboriginal land.

**ANTHONY LEE**—From the Stuart Highway up to the Arnhem Highway, there is a sign at 225 or 235, or something, and then you need a permit to travel.

**JIM SULLIVAN**—To travel on the road you need a permit.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Not to travel on the road.

**CHAIR**—Let me see if I have understood it. Our Aboriginal friends are saying that there is a misunderstanding. If it is a road, and you stay on the road, you do not need a permit. If you propose to go off the road onto the lands adjoining the road, and it is Aboriginal land, then you need a permit to go off the road. Is that what you are saying?

**DAVID LANE**—That is what we are saying.

**CHAIR**—Someone says that that is not right; I want to hear that person. Let that person explain to me where it is not right.

**BILL HARNEY**—I am the chairman of the Wardaman Association. I am a Wardaman man. I was raised in the Wardaman country. That connects and joins with the Jaowyn people and all of the other different tribes, western side and eastern side, all over the place. We have even got a family link-up around Port Keats, Palumpa, Bradshaw and everywhere. With me, I did fencing and I will be able to explain a little to you about this permit thing. I had to go over and do some fencing for people in Arnhem Land. With us, the Aborigine, we have



to get a permit to get down there. We respect that, that we have to get a permit to get down there.

Once you are travelling on a highway, it is a public road. Once you get up to the border, it is still a public road going into Arnhem Land, but off the road, because they have many sacred sites in the country, people have to get a permit. If anything is damaged on the side of the road, that person is the one to blame and not someone else. They can see that that person went up and when he went up. They know it was not any other bloke so he is the one who will get the blame. That is why we got our permit when we did a lot of fencing up there. We fenced off many sacred sites there where they were doing tours at Mount Boredale behind Oenpelli. Every one of us had to have a permit but we respect that because of the regional traditional Aboriginal land owners.

We came through from pastoral properties, well and truly. To us, in our country, we respect that because all of our heritage is inside of pastoral properties. They are all recognised sites also. We have got all of the stories and everything for all of the sites on the country, inside the pastoral properties. But with us and the pastoralists we are working together.

**CHAIR**—Does that satisfy you? We have a clear statement now from people who are very heavily involved in this area that you do not have to get a permit if you intend to drive on a public road and you do not intend to go off that road onto the adjoining land, if it is Aboriginal land.

**JIM SULLIVAN**—That certainly reflects the traditional owners or the Aboriginal people but it is certainly not what the Northern Land Council pushes.

**CHAIR**—We have a gentleman here who is the CEO of the Northern Land Council. If he wants to respond, I will let him do it.

**Ms HOARE**—Just for clarification, what does the sign on the Beswick road say?

**ROSEMARY SULLIVAN**—The same as all of them do; you cannot enter unless you have a permit.

**DAVID LANE**—I can tell you exactly what it says. I travel on that road everyday.

**NORMAN FRY**—Let David answer this part and I will answer the overflow.

**DAVID LANE**—I am from Beswick. The sign says, from 223 kilometres onwards, if you are travelling through Aboriginal land, you must obtain a permit from the Northern Land Council. Even that sign is wrong because from the Stuart Highway you are running through the Beswick lands trust and that land trust is Aboriginal land. Therefore, if you go off the road, you are going to need a permit.

**NORMAN FRY**—I am the CEO of the Northern Land Council. There are two issues here. As most of you would know, historically, when land rights claims were done, large tracts of land were granted straight up. We call them schedule 1. Woodward made a number

of recommendations. The Wadeye land trust and the Daly area that the gentleman is referring to—out to Peppimenarti—and the Arnhem land trust and various other land trusts are being added on after schedule 1 claims. The schedule 1 claims were automatic. In terms of the central Arnhem Highway it is theoretically not a public road because it goes through entire schedule 1 land. However, the anomaly over the past has been for Aboriginal traditional owners to allow the public to go through.

**CHAIR**—Is that without a permit?

**NORMAN FRY**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Is there sign?

**NORMAN FRY**—There is a sign, as David says, where they do require a permit. The operandi over the years has meant that these things have been on and off because people have been accessing that highway like a central highway. It has been a thoroughfare and very difficult to police for traditional owners and the Northern Land Council. With the land in question, if you go off the highway, you will need a permit because you are going onto private land. It is the same thing in the Wadeye area and Peppimenarti, you can go on the highway but, again, it is strictly not a public access road. There is only public access to the traditional Aboriginal communities. It is not open land.

**CHAIR**—Who maintains that road?

**NORMAN FRY**—Up until the last federal government the Land Council had a roads officer and we administered a lot of the Aboriginal roads for the Commonwealth. Since we had a change of government, that has been slashed to pieces here in the Northern Territory. There is a gentleman in this room who administered that program, Andrew Ross. He was a senior project officer of the land council and he could answer that in detail. The question about permits has always been one where people have tried to be as reasonable as possible. I think some of the arguments came up about a permit versus the trespass act with the way Mr Reeves spoke about that as one replacing the other.

What we tried to illustrate to the committee in Darwin was that clans or various groups of people, which Woodward recognised, are the traditional owners for specific pieces of country. The permit system allows those collective groups to give permission or to withhold it for their areas, and that is according to the ceremonies and who has responsibility for the land. The land council, fiercely, along with traditional owners, opposes the trespass act because it takes away the property rights of these clans, the cultural rights that they have. So the permit system has been derived around a particular concept.

**CHAIR**—I am going to persist with this and my deputy chair agrees that I should. Quite frankly I am disturbed to hear this. We have a gentleman here who has been kind enough to come along and stand-up, and it takes a bit of courage to do so amongst your own community, and talk frankly, as he has. He is a local. He is a man who has worked here for years and years and he is telling us that people travel on roads in this area and they believe that they have to get a permit to travel on those roads. You are telling us that a permit is required to go on Aboriginal land adjoining the road, and our friend over here acknowledges

that that is the case. You are also telling us that some of the roads—this is where we need to talk a bit further—are not public roads. They are thought to be public roads, because they are used by many members of the public but in fact they are private roads running through Aboriginal land. This is an important issue and I want it clarified.

**JIM SULLIVAN**—My understanding is that the permit system came in at the time the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve was established way back in the 1920s or 1930s. So it has got a long history. That road up to Nhulunbuy was a long time being put in. It is the main arterial road through Arnhem Land and a lot of Aboriginal communities all through the area use it. It is funded from the public purse.

I quite agree that there is no right to go out to the waterfall or over to the sacred site or anything else. But I should have the right to use a public road. Nowhere else in Australia do you have to have a permit to travel on a road, unless it has got a defence implication or something. Certainly, on the road to Port Keats, I know Northern Land Council people have pulled up travellers and demanded a permit. At the entrance to the Daly River Aboriginal Reserve, there is a big sign saying that permits are required to travel further. So there is no doubt about it. My submission is not to be travelling anywhere, but that main arterial roads and public places, such as airports and things like that, should be taken away from the permit system and the permit system be modified in some way. Thank you.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I think we need to clarify a few historical facts, rather than make believe. Firstly, the road from Palumpa to Port Keats is not a public road. The road from Palumpa to Port Keats is a private road and was funded as a private road by the previous federal government. The Northern Territory government has never funded that road, except for basic repairs and maintenance. The Commonwealth government and the Keating government put \$15.6 million to an Aboriginal roads program to fund these particular roads, including the Arnhem Highway. The road from Oenpelli, the Gumbalumya road, across the East Alligator is another road which was done like this. It has traditionally been used by everyone. Everyone has been using these road.

Historically, though, they have not been gazetted roads and historically they have not been public roads. In the context of the Arnhem Highway—so-called, the road up through the bush—there was a group of traditional owners of north-east Arnhem Land who refused for a long time to allow the road to be built. This group of people also refused any other development on their land. What we need to do is to get a picture of the roads, their usage and their legal status. I do not think there is any question that Aboriginal people, certainly in this audience, are saying that a road that is acknowledged as a public use road, such as the road from Nhulunbuy, should not require a permit to go onto it. I do not think that is an issue, but I think it is an issue in the context of who funds the roads. That is the real crux of it.

At the end of the day, what has been happening in a lot of these Aboriginal communities is that governments—federal or Northern Territory—have not funded the roads. I can take you to roads right throughout the Northern Territory which the public would say they should use but are not paid for by any government. They are not paid for by local government, they are not paid for by the federal government and they are not paid for by the Northern Territory government.

The Northern Territory government has refused to fund them because they say they are on Aboriginal land. I think we need to understand that the way to clarify this is to get the Northern Territory government to give us a list of those roads that are gazetted roads, which has been done historically, those that are public roads, and acknowledged as public roads for public purpose, and those that are private roads. You would be surprised to see the number of roads that are private roads but are used for a public purpose.

The answer to your question is not about the permits in the context of roads. Clearly, if it is a public road for a public purpose, as the people in the audience are saying, it should not require a permit, but where they are private roads, crossing private land, that might be a very different story. There are, as you would know, roads on pastoral leases. There are any number of pastoral properties around northern Australia that have access points through them where the roads are often closed for the same reason that Aboriginal people want their roads closed.

**JIM SULLIVAN**—Mr Snowdon is correct to some extent. Roads are called common law roads. I live on the Waterhouse River, which is a tributary of the Roper, and there is a road that runs from Mataranka to Beswick that is not a gazetted road. I have a police report of a peanut farmer who died there in the 1930s on that road and the policeman states that he drove up the road in a motor vehicle to see where this peanut farmer had died. There are many roads in the Territory like that. Oenpelli was established originally by the Anglican Church as a mission and the road came back and forth. Because it was not gazetted does not mean to say it is not a road. It has been used for a long time. I think the main arterial roads, and the important roads, have got to be taken off the permit thing, and airports and things like that.

**CHAIR**—You have helped us a lot and I appreciate the discussion from both sides.

**DAVID LANE**—In terms of maintaining the roads, the pastoral industry in the Territory has not paid for the maintenance of any road. We have to drive on dirt roads and they have the liberty of having gravel roads out to their stations. The pastoral industry does not pay rates. They have got away with this for years and years. You expect us to pay for everything and then you say that we get everything when in fact we get nothing. You have a go at us for having roads—and, fair enough, they get maintained and paid for by someone—but the pastoral industry has not paid a cent for any roads. They get the liberty of driving on bitumen and we do not.

**Mr QUICK**—We are here to listen to you people. We have got two models on the board. After 23 or 24 years of this regime, I would like to think that this is not the perfect system, and that some of you people could come up—I am not saying this in a nasty way—with some improvements. It is obvious to me, coming from Tasmania, that, if there is uncertainty about the permit system, we ought to put something in place, as Mr Snowdon says, so that everybody is clear, so we do not have people getting their knickers in a knot because they are not too sure what their rights are and what their rights are not.

If you think this is the best system that you people can have for the next 100 years, put your hands up. But if you think there are some improvements, like more regional offices for land councils, that is what we want to hear. Let us be honest, we only come up here once in

a blue moon, because we have got the whole of Australia to look after. We want to hear what you have to say but we don't want to hear all the negatives; we want to hear some positives. If you have some good ideas tell us. Let us sort out the permit system so that everyone can go away and say, 'This is a better system than we've had for the last 23 years. This is how we can improve things?' That is what we want to hear, not slanging at each other.

**DAVID LANE**—That is okay, I just want to answer what you said. You would not even be here if they had have said, 'Let the land council and the Aboriginal communities work it out.' It would have saved a hell of a lot of money. We would be able to work things out. We would call for expressions of interest and things like that. Let us do it. Don't do it for us. We did not need Mr Reeves to come around and do a report for the land rights act. We know what we want to see done with the land rights act. We have been working with it for the last 20 years. We didn't need Mr Reeves to get \$300,000 to do a consultancy. He has got a lot of money in his pocket. I have got bugger-all.

**CHAIR**—Tell us what you want to do?

**DAVID LANE**—I would rather see this Reeves report sit on a shelf, collect a lot of dust and let us, the Aboriginal people, do what we need to do with the land councils.

**CHAIR**—Tell us what you need to do?

**DAVID LANE**—The two full land councils need to sit down and work out what is best for us, whether we want 18 offices, whether we want the permit system or whether we want this. You would have been able to stay home with your families rather than be sitting here listening to us.

**Mr QUICK**—But we are here to listen to you.

**DAVID LANE**—Yes, but there would not be no need. Please, listen to what I am saying.

**Mr QUICK**—I am.

**DAVID LANE**—If Mr Reeves had not done this report, if they had come to us and said, 'Right, let's do a review,' we could have done the review.

**Mr MELHAM**—You want time to go away and talk to traditional owners and your communities in a time frame that suits your people, rather than a timetable which suits government.

**Mr QUICK**—Let us say we go back to John Herron and say, 'One of our recommendations is that we give the four land councils in the Northern Territory 18 months, two years to discuss it.' At the end of that time, you would have had your discussions and come up with a bunch of ideas. You could then give it to John Herron and say, 'John, what do you think?'

**DAVID LANE**—That is what we want.

**Mr MELHAM**—Hopefully he will not be there in two years!

**CHAIR**—The chair has a broad mind.

**NORMAN FRY**—Let me go to some of those issues that you raised there—what you want to see and all those kinds of things. The NLC's submission is basically what is on the board there, which these people, the full council and our regional councils, have worked through for sometime. We have come up with a number of those things in our submission.

If you have a look at it you will see there are a lot of things that Mr Reeves discusses that we do not dismiss. We think he has his nose in the right area on some things, we just do not agree with some of his solutions. We think he has got part of the understanding for some of the problems there but we think he should be listening to us. That is really what David is trying to get at. The Aboriginal people have been working and living with the land rights act for 20-odd years. We know it, unlike a lot of other acts that are meant for people. Let us say you asked territorians about mandatory sentencing, and whether they understood it. I do not think many would understand the checks and balances or the facts of it. If you asked Aboriginal people about the general principles of the land rights act, most of them would have an idea about it, and they have an idea how to make it work better.

**BILL HARNEY**—I have a bit more for you about roads. We own the property. We bought the property with few cattle and horses. We could not sell anything in the first year. We had 300 head of cattle. Now we are going ahead. We have 4,000 breeders. The cattle have gone off now. We have a public road going through our land. It is a public beef road. We made an agreement with the Department of Main Roads to take the gravel out of our land and to look after our road as well as the outside of our land, the highway. That is where we are working together. But when people go in they have to notify us, it is similar to permits. We want to know what he is going in there for, who he wants to see, whether he has any firearms to shoot animals and those sorts of things. We must have a permit so that we recognise the bloke who is going into the area.

**CHAIR**—On the beef road.

**BILL HARNEY**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Fair enough. We have farmers in Victoria who are very concerned about people coming on to their property shooting, causing damage and being irresponsible, so it is the same thing. We have a lot of sympathy for good management of land, protecting your stock, your hard work and your investment. It is a matter of getting a sensible arrangement on permits so that you are not over-regulating and you are cooperating with members of the public who go down what appear to be regarded as major public roads from point A to point B, when technically they are not. There is a clear problem there. We will have to work on that.

**JESSIE ROBERTS**—I want to take up an issue with the Northern Land Council to try to get more support and more dollars for the community. We are a small community and we

do not get much support. I have been talking today about the CDEP dole money. We have cleaning. We have a school in our community. It is very hard to get funding. It is very hard to get funding. We asked for support to get funding to get a vehicle. With families in our community, they get sick and they die there. Other places have health workers, a sister. If my family gets sick, I cannot get any support. There is no help. We have no motor car. We have a tractor or a motor car for working people. We have not got our own health people for our community. It is very hard not having a health vehicle in our community. If my children are dying or get sick, I will tell my boys to get on the tractor and drive it all the way along the highways. Why is that?

Other people have vehicles and we want some help. We have talked to them for many years but we have got nothing. It is hard living in my community without a health worker. We need something for an emergency. We need someone there all of the time in case somebody dies. We had one child and one lady die in our community. That was very hard. What can we do?

That is why we would like to see the Northern Land Council stay so there is only one body in Katherine and Darwin and we can get more support. If we have two bodies, we will not get support—you might have to get support from this government or that government. If I am president of my community, how am I going to get money from the ABR? If I have to go back to ATSIC, how am I going to get money from there? There is no royalty money there. ATSIC only have money for people and for the community. Where am I going to find my royalty money? Do I go back to ABR? I only got one big lump for Elsey Station. Now it is finished. If I have to ask for everything, how am I going to run my community? I get nothing. I have to wait. That is the last word I give you. Thank you.

**THELMA DOUGLAS**—I would like to say a last thing. I would like to talk about the land council. I think we Aboriginal people all agree that our land council works for us and we do not want to go into this new one. I would like to explain everything to you mob. From Borroloola and McArthur River the road goes down to Bing Bong. We Aboriginal people have to ask permission to go through our station for fishing. Now we have to ask permission to go through to McArthur mine for hunting. We people do not have a chance. All we have now is our land council to look after our sacred sites. Our sacred sites have signs and it says who looks after the sacred site area. We go there for our initiation ceremony and other things, it is our Dreaming area. We cannot get any help from the people that go through our islands, where there are lots of sacred sites.

We want to stick to our land council. They are the first mob that have been working for us. They are the ones who have been leading us and giving us ideas. We even ask them to work for us on that land. So we are going to stick to that one mob, the land council, that work for us today. That is the last word I can give you. Thank you.

**Mr SNOWDON**—One of the issues which this committee is going to be talking about is that there are people coming around claiming that they represent people from other communities. One of the issues that we will confront is the idea of people wanting a regional land council for south-east Arnhem Land, say. They will say they represent Jilkminggan and they will say they represent Ngukurr. What are we supposed to think when they come in

here and say that? Mrs Roberts is not here, unfortunately, because I would like to ask her about that.

**Mr MELHAM**—Can you repeat that; some people didn't get that.

**Mr SNOWDON**—One of the issues confronting this committee is that we will get groups coming to see us saying that they think they want a local land council. They will argue that they represent people. They will say they represent, for example, Jilkminggan, Ngukurr, Hodgson Downs and those places. What are we supposed to think? Are we supposed to think that they represent them or they do not represent them? Some of you people are from those communities.

**ROSEMARY SULLIVAN**—I am a part owner of a pastoral property, but I am also a teacher who has worked in Aboriginal communities for the last seven years. I would just suggest to you that Aboriginal communities are as diverse as non-Aboriginal communities and that different people represent different groups within them. In the same way as the group of people here today represent a particular interest, so do those people. Any suggestion that Aboriginal communities are all united on particular fronts is just not the case. The hard thing the committee has to work out is who is representing whom and whose interests are people speaking for.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I appreciate that, which is why I asked the question.

**RODDY FRIDAY**—You are from the committee down south. You are here to listen to us. It does not matter where we are from, as long as you get our feelings of Reeves' recommendations and what concerns us.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Ms Sullivan is right. We will be asked to make judgments about whether or not people who claim to represent people actually represent them. Otherwise we cannot have a view. There is a question that has to be confronted at some time. If traditional owners from one part of the country are saying something and someone else says that they speak on their behalf and say something else, what is this committee supposed to believe? I know what I think because I have lived in the Northern Territory for a long time, but these people have not.

**KATHRYN WELLS**—We have just tabled a list of the minutes of the community meetings—they were not full community meetings, and people would like to have fuller discussions—which lists all the people who attended. The communities then gave their authority for those people to come here today and speak on behalf of those communities. Formal motions were passed at those meetings. I do not know if the committee now wants to accept those minutes from those meetings.

**CHAIR**—I am sorry, I was distracted. Would you repeat that?

**KATHRYN WELLS**—I will repeat that for the benefit of the chairperson. I was just saying that, in answer to Warren's question, people held community meetings and they made very clear decisions about who should come here to represent those communities. Those meetings, however, should not be taken as any sense of decision about what is going on



because you will find from the minutes that are being tabled that all of those communities said they would like larger meetings, proper big meetings, for two days to discuss any sorts of new models or recommendations that might come up. But, in terms of representation, those community meetings gave a very clear indication about who should be here and who should be making the representation.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Kathryn. On that basis, I am going to ask Mr Melham that the minutes tabled by Kathryn Wells, a consultant with the Northern Land Council, be accepted as an exhibit and received as evidence to the inquiry into the recommendations of the Reeves report.

**Mr MELHAM**—I will identify them for the record. They are minutes of community meetings at Jilkminggan on Tuesday, 27 April at 10 a.m; Timber Creek and Amanbidjie Pastoral Aboriginal Corporation on Tuesday, 27 April at 12 noon; Yarralin on Wednesday, 28 April at 8 a.m., with representatives from Lingara and Pigeon Hole; Manyallalak on Thursday, 29 April, Beswick on Friday, 30 April at 11 a.m. and Bulman, Gulin Gulin and Weemol on Friday, 30 April at 2.30 p.m.

**BILL HARNEY**—Just to get back to this Northern Land Council. To us the Northern Land Council is fine. What are we doing ourselves? We are running our own property and stuff like that. We use the Northern Land Council as a consultant for anything to be done or to go ahead. They come and talk to us. We have a committee. One of the members of the Wardaman is on the land council. Our committee talks about other issues with the Northern Land Council but we set it up. It is a bit like the CLP or ALP. The Northern Land Council is an Aboriginal organisation. It is our main government body for all of the Aborigine people in the Territory. That is where we stand. To us, we are running everything ourselves. The Northern Land Council does not run anything for us. We are independent. All we do is use the Northern Land Council now and again as a consultant or the sacred sites society comes to consult with us. We are together, all the way.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I would like to get some advice. I do not want ask people to put up their hands or anything, but is it the view of people here that Mr Reeves did not come and talk to each of the groups that were consulted in this round? Did he come to Yarralin, for example?

**BILL HARNEY**—He did not come to the Wardaman at all.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Okay. So there was no consultation with a lot of you people from Mr Reeves or people representing him?

**BILL HARNEY**—Mr Reeves did not come around and talk to the Wardaman people. He must have spoken to someone else and that is about all.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Other people are also saying he did not come. Was there any discussion with anyone from the government about Mr Reeve's recommendations, before he wrote his report, with any of you?

**BILL HARNEY**—When was that?

**Mr SNOWDON**—Going back 12 or 18 months.

**BILL HARNEY**—There was one held at the civil centre, across the bridge.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Yes, there was a meeting there.

**BILL HARNEY**—A few people went up to that. We did not know whether Reeves was there. I would not know him if I saw him. I don't know who it was, someone was there.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I have another important question. Once the report was written, the NLC came around and talked to you about it but has anyone else come and talked to you about it?

**BILL HARNEY**—Not as far as I know.

**Mr SNOWDON**—So ATSIC has not come to talk to you about it?

**BILL HARNEY**—No, they kept it under cover somewhat.

**Mr SNOWDON**—But have they discussed it at ATSIC regional council meetings?

**BILL HARNEY**—They probably have, I do not know. We do not see the reports.

**Mr SNOWDON**—It is important that I understand this, because we are being asked to respond to a report which affects you. We were told that he consulted widely with Aboriginal people. We were then told that we have got a document, which is a report to the government, which most Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory have never read. I do not blame you for not reading it, because it is a very difficult book to read. It is very important that we understand whether there has been an effort to consult with you, apart from with the land council and ourselves. I think from what I am hearing, the answer is no, apart from ATSIC's regional council meetings. Is that right?

**JOSIE CRAWSHAW**—I am the ATSIC Commissioner for the NT northern zone. You were asking about other consultation that has happened. ATSIC has already submitted its submission and has given evidence to the committee. There have been a number of meetings of all of the ATSIC elected arm, jointly. We funded the Kalkarindji meeting. We also assisted with the first NT statehood convention. Where statements came out, ATSIC helped bring all of that together. We are now in the throes of—this is one of the reasons I am following the committee this time—working with the land councils to help with this. We are putting in money ourselves to go out and inform people of these issues. A couple of hundred thousand has been given because Reeves has not consulted since the report came down. This is the only way that we can do that. We thought it was important that we got to these meetings here, and then work out your next schedule so that we can try to hit those communities where you are going to, to at least get them informed. We are jointly working with the land councils to do that. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. I thank everyone for their attendance, for their advice and comments. I appreciate them and members of the committee do as well. We look forward to meeting you again at other times on different issues. We wish you well.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Quick**, seconded by **Mr Snowdon**):

That this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it at the public meeting this day.

**Committee adjourned at 4.07 p.m.**

