



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**

THURSDAY, 15 APRIL 1999

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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

Thursday, 15 April 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 Katter, Mr Lieberman, Mr Lloyd, Mr Melham, Mr Quick, Mr Snowdon and Mr Wakelin

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.

[10.42 a.m.]

PARTICIPANTS

ANDERSON, Alison

CRANNOX, Robin

EGAN, Jeanie

GRANITES, Dolly

HARGRAVES, Ned, Principal Interpreter

HENRY,

HERBERT, Lance

JAMBAJIMBA, Danny Nolan

JUNAHA, Keith

KENNEDY NAPAJARRYI, Lucy

MARTIN, Valerie, Principal Interpreter

MORRIS, Tiger

NAMBAJIMBA, Elsie

NAPANUNGA, Gladys

NAPANUNGA, Margaret

NAPPANARDI, Alice Provis

NELSON, Harry

ROBERTSON, Eddie

ROBERTSON, Merv

ROBINSON, Regie

SIMRAN, Smithy

SMITH, Otto

TURNER, Lindsay

WILLIAMS, Dennis

WRIGHT, George

NED HARGRAVES—Congratulations. Now you have seen the book, John Reeves's review and report, being burned in front of you. I would like to welcome you for coming here to listen to all the people. There are about five different tribes here. They want to put their points of view and arguments and they want to listen to you mob as well. This is the standing committee on Aboriginal affairs from Canberra. Do I need to go through the names? I will hand it over to this bloke here.

CHAIR—Good morning, everyone. Thank you for welcoming us so well and for letting us visit you in your country. Come close so we can see each other.

NED HARGRAVES—Right. Yuendumu women are now going to do a dance.

A dance was then performed—

VALERIE MARTIN—These ladies who are painted in ochre are the older ladies from this community. They have the culture. They are our teachers and they are the elders of this country all round this land here. They are here to show they mean business today. This is really important. We do not change our law—it is just the way we are holding it and teaching our young people for our young people's future. We do not want to change our culture. It is really important for us. This is what they are doing in every community. The law is really important for our lives, for our history, so we can teach young people to hold their laws properly.

NED HARGRAVES—We are going to get Mr Lieberman, the chairperson, to say something to us. Listen everybody.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ned, and thank you, ladies and gentlemen. We enjoyed very much your welcome. Thank you. It is a good welcome with a good message for us—a very dramatic message, but a powerful message. I would like to introduce my mob so you know who we are. We are from the Australian Commonwealth parliament from Canberra but we live in different parts of Australia. I come from Victoria. I am what they call a country boy from Victoria—from Indi on the Murray River. I will ask my mob to stand up and say where they come from so you know who they are.

Mr MELHAM—My name is Daryl Melham. I am the shadow minister for Aboriginal affairs. I come from Bankstown in Sydney where the cricketers, Mark and Steve Waugh, and Paul Keating come from. That is my country.

Mr SNOWDON—Good morning, everyone. My name is Warren Snowdon. I am your member of the federal parliament in Canberra.

Mr QUICK—Hi. My name is Harry Quick. I come from a long way away. My country is Tasmania.

Mr LLOYD—Good morning. I am Jim Lloyd and I come from just north of Sydney in New South Wales.

Ms HOARE—Good morning. My name is Kelly Hoare. I come from just south of Newcastle in New South Wales. As a daughter and a mother, I want to thank you women for your message. We will make sure that we take that back to Canberra. Thank you.

Mr KATTER—My name is Bob Katter. I am from Cloncurry, which is just across the border from the Northern Territory. The electorate that I represent runs right along the Northern Territory border up to the gulf country and back to the coast, covering most of the top half of Queensland.

Mr WAKELIN—My name is Barry Wakelin. I am like Bob Katter but I am from South Australia. My electorate joins the border with the Northern Territory. It is good to be with you today. That is pitchi pitchi country.

CHAIR—As you will see, we come from a lot of different places, just like you do. We are here today because the minister, Senator John Herron, does not want to read the Reeves report and talk to the Prime Minister until you have told us what you think about it. He will not read it until you tell us what you think.

We have two interpreters. I want to make sure that you all understand what we are saying, so sometimes we will use both interpreters and other times just one. We are going to ask the interpreters to work out whether they feel both or one should speak on any matter. Are you all happy with that?

HENRY—Mr Chairman, I want to call some people to come up here. This mob are going to show you the land trusts, the title that we received from the government. I want them to go in front and show you that. With the Yunkanjini land trust is Mr Nelson. Eddie has the Mala land trust and Paul has the Yuendumu land trust.

CHAIR—Come over here.

HENRY—That is the land trust title that we received from the government. They gave us this land, now they want to take it off us.

CHAIR—I have a very important thing I want to say straightaway. Are all the interpreters ready? I want you all to understand that we will not be taking your land away from you. Our work on behalf of the Australian people is to take your words back to Canberra, but there is no government that will take your land away from you. I want you to know that.

ALISON ANDERSON—Mr Chairman, they are showing you the deeds to their land because of the compulsory acquisition. That is why they are showing you their deeds. They

are saying that on one hand you give them the land and then in the next breath with Reeves you want to take it back.

CHAIR—Okay, a good question. I will try and answer it quickly. The Reeves report is not the policy or the proposal of the government. The government will not make its mind up until we go back to Canberra and tell the government what you want us to do. But I can tell you that the government wants you to keep your land.

We are here to listen to you. There is a microphone. When you want to speak, please come up and when you speak please tell us your name and where you come from. Please come up. Do not be frightened. We want to relax with you. We will bring the microphone to you if you do not want to come up.

MARGARET NAPANUNGA—I want the one big land council to remain as it is, no small regional land councils, just one big land council.

CHAIR—Thank you, Margaret. That is a good, clear simple message. How many of you feel like that? Put your hands up. How many want to keep their land councils? That is a strong message, isn't it? Thank you. You want to keep your land councils, that is clear. Do you want your land councils to have more regional offices opened up?

ELSIE NAMBAJIMBA—Why do you keep coming back to ask us questions? This is our land.

CHAIR—Because we want to listen to you.

LINDSAY TURNER—I am Lindsay Turner. I am chairperson of a community about 165 kilometres west of Yuendumu. Regarding entry permits: entry permits, which channel through the Central Land Council, have been a big problem for Aboriginal people. Entry permits are needed to go onto Aboriginal land—whether it is a mining company, non-Aboriginal government departments or government departments. The permit system is very important to us and the land. The permit to go on to the land that we are granted is very important to Aboriginal people.

There are entry permits for people that go in. If they are not holding any entry permits that is important for us to know because of the land and the law. We need entry permits for people to go onto Aboriginal land because of the culture and the sacred sites where the land is very respected. These are strong laws that mean a lot to us. Dozens of Aboriginal people have read it. So you got entry permits and sacred sites; they are all tied up with the land.

We have a strong culture that we want to maintain and start teaching to the young generation to continue carrying on that. That is why we are concerned about this John Reeves review—and your members when you go back to Canberra have got to be strong. Let us be honest between us. Be honest, you mob, and Aboriginal people will be honest with you. If you are going to start supporting us, that is how we want it. If you are going to take away this and continue agreeing with John Reeves's recommendation, that will weaken the land council and the Aboriginal people within this land. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you.

VALERIE MARTIN—Now is the time to talk about what the land means not only to us but also the next generation so he can take the message of what we mean back to Canberra. It is really important to talk.

CHAIR—Thank you, Valerie. That is a powerful message. Now is the time to talk. We want to hear you talk. Good to meet you again, George.

GEORGE WRIGHT—I am from Amoonguna. This is our land. This is our sacred land. Long before we got the title for the Yuendumu community—in one of the welfare times, I think it was—this was our land and you are not going to take it away from us

CHAIR—Thank you.

ALISON ANDERSON—I come from Papunya. We told Reeves when he visited our communities here at Yuendumu and Papunya that we wanted the land councils to remain as they are. Obviously he did not listen to us. He went back and reported only what a minority group told him and not the voice of the majority.

We want the land rights act to remain as a Commonwealth act. The only change we want made to that, if any, is to have the sunset clause lifted so we can claim more land. We want the two big land councils to remain as they are. We do not want any changes to the two land councils because we feel that by breaking up the two big land councils you are dividing and ruling people. There is no power in 18 small regional land councils. They have no resources; they cannot access the money—and who is NTAC, the Northern Territory Aboriginal Council? Is it elected by the people? No. It is hand-picked by the chief minister of the Northern Territory and Senator Herron.

Senator Herron holds the portfolio for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. It should be called ‘anti-Aboriginal affairs’, not Aboriginal affairs. We have had no satisfaction from the minister since he took the portfolio for Aboriginal affairs and we feel really, really hurt. As Aboriginal people of our country, the first people of the land, we have an Aboriginal affairs minister that sits in Canberra and opposes things to do with Aboriginal affairs. That is all I want to say.

CHAIR—Just let me remind you that the minister, Senator Herron, has sent us up to meet you and to take your advice before he decides what to do on the Reeves report. So I think John Herron has listened to you and I think he should be thanked for sending us up and not accepting the Reeves report until he hears from us on what you want us to tell him. Is that fair? Let us be fair.

DENNIS WILLIAMS—I am a councillor. I am a Yuendumu person. I think the minister for Aboriginal affairs who gave the money for John Reeves to do his job threw away ATSI funding. I think it is not fair. He has to go around and see all the communities and listen to people. He did not listen to people and what we want, what we told him at the meeting we had at Yuendumu. He did not listen to us. That report there got burnt. It was not ours. That was his. His report was nothing but lies. That is true. He did not realise what we put to him.

He did not write it down. That book that got burnt was his own writing. So take information back to the minister and tell him. Thanks.

CHAIR—We will. Ned, would you just tell everybody for me that all the words that they are saying are going to be recorded by our reporters here. All your words will be part of Australia's history. We will send you a copy of what is today's recording for your history up here as well. Are you happy with that?

KEITH JUNAHA—I am vice-president of Papunya. You are talking about those people back there recording and reporting. Last time Mr Reeves reported this same question that we are doing now we were talking over and over. What has come out of it? Nothing—N O nothing. Thank you. Are you going to answer that one?

CHAIR—I will just add a comment. These recordings today are for your parliament, the Commonwealth parliament of Australia, not for Mr Reeves. So it is for all Australians and their parliament.

ALISON ANDERSON—Reeves recorded us too and he should have all the information on the transcript. Now what happened to all that recording? We are frightened of people tampering with recordings. Look at all the money that is being wasted in all this. Whose money is it? Where is all this money coming from? That is why we are frightened. We recorded with John Reeves and he still went back and did the wrong thing. He did not report the words of the people.

CHAIR—We are going to send you a copy of today's hearing so you can check it. If you think it is not an accurate recording you will tell me straight away. Okay?

LINDSAY TURNER—Some of the delegates here are from other communities, also local. We want to get a clear picture. You say that we will be getting a feedback on all this once it is recorded. How are you going to serve these small communities and the out-stations? How are you going to do that? Are we going to march all the way to the Central Land Council, and the Central Land Council staff are going to tell us, 'This is what happened in Canberra; this is what is being done'? I think that is a stupid way. How are you going to get a report back? I think most of these people here are not sure about it. We are not clear on that. Are we going to get all these small communities and the large communities to march down to the Central Land Council, to march down the street in Alice Springs? Thank you.

CHAIR—I will come back if I can. Will you let me come back to talk to you and I will tell you what happened with what you told me today? My committee will come with me. Okay? That is the best way, that we talk to each other face to face.

SMITHY SIMRAN—I am a coordinator for CANCA, which stands for Combined Aboriginal Nations of Central Australia. I would like to table this book which has just been done recently. I would like to give it to the chairman. That has all the things that we say that are different from John Reeves' report. We talked about it in Kalkarindji. That has all the things we are talking about. Land councils are to remain as they are—no changes. That is important because we see the land council as a shield for all Aboriginal people in the

communities. If you have got time to go through that book, you will see what we have all been talking about—health, education, everything else that covers Central Australia. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you for that book. I will ask my mob to accept this book as evidence in this inquiry to be part of Australia's history and record and be read by all the members. Thank you for going to the trouble of doing that.

HARRY NELSON—That report or paper that Smithy handed over to you, will that be tabled in Canberra at your meetings?

CHAIR—Yes.

HARRY NELSON—Some of the things which were recorded in that book are very, very genuine and fair dinkum and very, very hard. I think the Australian government can give us a bit of a hand in slowing down the Northern Territory government, in not rubbishing us. We are battling really hard. You have seen our mob with our land trusts. They stood in front of you and showed you all the land trust papers, like a certificate. That is a proof that the government has given us the land back. Now they are talking about taking that land back from us and changing our lives completely, going back about 30 or 40 years.

CHAIR—Thank you. We will make sure that what you wrote in that book is read and understood.

KEITH JUNAHA—Whose funding have you spent on this—ATSIC or Aboriginal money or some other company's?

CHAIR—The money to bring us here today?

KEITH JUNAHA—Yes.

CHAIR—The Australian taxpayer—that is, all Australians that pay tax.

LINDSAY TURNER—Regarding John Reeves's recommendation, what sort of funding resources have been spent and where has the money come from? Has it come from the federal government in Canberra or the NT government? That is for the book that we burned this morning. John Reeves used all that money—where did that money come from? Is it from the federal government or the NT government in Darwin? Could you tell us?

CHAIR—I understand the cost of Mr Reeves' book was in excess of \$1 million. That money—and this is important in order to answer the question—was provided by the Australian taxpayers to ATSIC and ATSIC wrote the cheque out, but the money comes from the Australian taxpayer through ATSIC and ATSIC paid for the Reeves report.

LINDSAY TURNER—That money was spent through ATSIC. We are all taxpayers, everyone of us, whether we are black, white, yellow or whatever. We all pay tax to the Australian government. That money should be channelled through ATSIC, nationwide throughout Australia, to be spent on education, health and other things that Aboriginal people

need urgently. We are Third World Aboriginals. None of these things have been done through the federal government. We are still suffering.

HARRY NELSON—I am from Papunya; I am a chairperson. I just want to get back to the history of the Aboriginal people of this country. I was talking about the permit situation and I want to get back to that. The permit is really most important for all the Aboriginal people of this country. There are many in the Northern Territory. It was John Reeves's recommendation that the permit system should be wiped out. We do not want that to happen. We need that permit because we need the land council. The permits are going to be handed over through the land council. The land council is really most important for us. It is our power and our shield.

CHAIR—Thank you. The permit system is very important to Aboriginal people. My mob has asked a lot of people what they think about keeping the permit system. Everybody tells my mob to keep the permit system—make it work better, but keep it. My committee will tell John Herron that message. I am pretty sure we will.

JEANIE EGAN—I am a teacher. That building over there is a bilingual school. It is a two-way education building. That is what we are doing in this community. I was reading this book. This is really important for our kids and our future because we have to put in too and the land council have to support us. It is really important to teach our language to the young people. We have a bilingual school. We are battling really hard to have the bilingual school. It is really important. We are going into town to face the education minister about bilingual education. Bilingual education is really important for our kids and our future. It is important for our kids that our languages can hold up and the land council act too. I want to see bilingual education put into this book. It is really important for us. You have to think about our future too. We do not want to see our kids talking creole. In the communities, we see young people talking creole. We want to see young people talking strong languages. It is really important for us. We have been fighting for nearly 20 years now. I have been teaching a long time too.

I have been listening and I have been facing the education minister. This is really important. I do not see any people coming to talk face to face with us. We have 14 languages. I have always talked to Warren Snowdon, the Labor member. This is really important to us. My kids and I are working together. I want to see this working in the family and in the community with the Australian language. It is important to put our own language into the land council act.

CHAIR—Thank you.

GLADYS NAPANUNGA—I am from Papunya. I want to keep the one big land council strong because it is the Aboriginal people's shield.

CHAIR—Thank you, Gladys.

OTTO SMITH—I am a community member. Mr Chairman, one topic I want to bring out is the land council. We do not want 10 different land councils. We want the one land council. It is our voice; it is a strong voice. If we have separate land councils, we will be

powerless. It will be as if we are in a boat, tossed and kicked around. If we have one land council, we are strong. We have been struggling for over 20 or 30 years and we are still struggling. We need justice and we are still battling for justice. We will keep going until we get justice.

We are the first to give evidence in Australia and the Australian and the Northern Territory government should recognise us and support us. Instead, they bring out the Reeves report. They are breaking us down but we will still struggle on. As we struggle on, we get stronger. I do hope, Mr Chairman, that you will read the paper, which is our foundation. I do hope when you go back to Canberra that you will read it carefully. Please support us because we need support. We are battling for our rights. It does not matter that we have different government bodies trying to destroy our culture and our rights; we will still struggle on and we will still win.

We are fighting for our kids and our future. We are setting an example for our kids so they will take it on, as they did in the Wave Hill walk-out and Mabo and Wik. This is a turning point for the indigenous people of Australia, especially for those in the Northern Territory. We will keep on struggling. We will still fight hard for better justice for the indigenous people of central Australia. I do hope, Mr Chairman, when you go back to Canberra, that you will make sure that you read that white booklet because that is the foundation for the indigenous people of central Australia. We will fight strongly until we get better justice in central Australia.

CHAIR—Thank you. We will listen and think carefully about that.

TIGER MORRIS—My name is Tiger Morris. I can talk in Warlpiri—my language.

CHAIR—Thank you, Tiger. We will translate.

TIGER MORRIS—This is our land—for all of us. It is for all these people sitting around at this meeting today. The government cannot take it away from us, because we were born here, we grew up here and we are going to live here. Mr Chairman, this is really important: this is our land.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ned; thank you very much, Tiger. It is a good message.

ROBIN CRANNOX—Hello, Mr Chairman and Kimberley members. My name is Robin Crannox. Now that you have all come to talk to us, how do we know that you are going to support what you hear and what is recorded at this meeting? We still do not trust any government people in Canberra. What we are saying is that Reeves and his members reported the review. He did the recommendation without consulting with the communities and without reporting back to the communities. All we have seen is the report just this morning. It is completely different from what we said. How do we know that you are going to support us from this meeting?

CHAIR—Ned, would you interpret for me, please. That is a very good question: how do we know that what you have asked us to do will happen? I guess that is what you are saying.

Mr Herron, the minister, has said that my mob is required to come up here and to ask you what you think about the Reeves report. We have been told by the minister that he wants to know what people think about the Reeves report—for and against, or for change.

We promise that we will do that. My mob here are made up of people from different political parties—government and opposition. We will all work together to make sure that our report accurately tells Senator Herron what you people think about the Reeves report.

DOLLY GRANITES—I am from Yuendumu. This is our land. We dance and we sing to it like our great-great-grandfathers and our great-great-grandmothers did, and we want to keep it. They used to visit one another from every direction—west, north, east or wherever. They used to meet up, and we want to keep that going. That is what it means to us. We want to keep our land through the land council. We do not want anybody to come and dig it up or whatever they want to do with our land. We do not want that. This is our home and this is our land. That is what it means to us, our great-great-grandfathers and our great-great-grandmothers. Why does the government always come and humbug us? Leave us alone.

LUCY NAPAJARRYI KENNEDY—I am Lucy Napajarryi Kennedy. This is my grandfather's land and my possum dreaming is in the hills right here at Yuendumu. This is our land and it belongs to us. We want the land council, and we want your mob to go back to Darwin or wherever you came from.

HARRY NELSON—Mr Chairman, I have a comment made by one of the men over here. One person over here made a comment that you people should be telling us what is happening—what is brewing up. We know very little of what is happening in Canberra through our land councils. We would like to hear from you mob. You sit in the parliament. We would like to hear from you mob who sit in parliament about what you are out here for. Just give us a bit of a run-down.

You have come up here to study us, more or less. How long are we going to go on doing this? You people come up from Canberra and others even from the Northern Territory government come and talk to us. How long is this going to go on? We did not start this argument. All of the studying was finished 30 to 40 years ago.

CHAIR—We will finish our work on this report and have our report in your hands and in the parliament by late August this year. What is going on in Canberra is that the government and John Herron, the Minister, has said, 'I do not want the Reeves report until I hear back from you mob by August.' He will not make any decisions on Reeves until we tell him what you have told us.

EDDIE ROBERTSON—I am a councillor and a resident of community. What I was listening to when John Reeves made comments briefly on our life was very difficult and hurtful. You are saying that when you go back to Canberra today, that sometime this weekend they are going to sit down and look through that book. We believe that you are interfering with our lives. How can we live when there are some people who want to do that or this and they want to build themselves up from the past from 1877. Where is this going to end up? How are we going to stand and fight against the people who keep coming here?

Perhaps when you go back to Canberra and sit down we will be asking for John Reeves's resignation in Canberra.

There are people in Canberra who are trying to build up our lives, law and land rights. There are certain people in Canberra studying us. They are saying that we are getting too much money. We are sitting down. This is the rift that has to be built over. For us, right here, we ask this committee to go back to Canberra and ask that person for his resignation. We cannot have our people in Canberra lowered. How can we live and raise our children and have a good relationship with people in Australia? It is like a joke. They keep coming back and coming back until they get what they want. For me, it is not right. They know we are human beings. We have brains and everything. Therefore they should deliver the loan, support us and give us more funding.

We are the first Australians. We owned all of this land. Therefore we ask the committee to go and ask John Reeves to resign. Ask for his resignation in some way. After that we might be able to live in peace.

DANNY NOLAN JAMBAJIMBA—Mining companies and the government keep on coming back. Aboriginal people are rich in this country and they try to take our land and steal our land away, as they did a long time ago when they first came here. Thank you.

MERV ROBERTSON—I am from Papunya. Why do they keep coming back? What do they want? This is our land. We were born here and we will die here. In the first place Captain Cook came to Australia. He never saw anything. Later your mob shot all the people in the past. Then the people went back when they saw the empty land over there. I can take your mob back to that land in Australia. This is our land. We were born here. We are going to die here. We are not going to go overseas. My grandfather did not come from overseas; he belong to this land here.

I used to come over here when I was a little boy and I go back all the time. We are not going to go back to before. We are going forward all the time. People have to keep going. We are not going to look back. We are looking to the future and what will happen a bit further on. We are trying to keep our land. The land council is our protector. They protect our sacred sites and our law. They are the ones going to work for us.

CHAIR—I think I got the gist of that.

DENNIS WILLIAMS—My name is Dennis Williams. I am a resident here. I am a councillor. When you take the information back to Canberra and have a meeting in the parliament I suppose you will bring this up. But if that minister does not listen, or the committee from this meeting does not listen to what we put to you, the minister himself should come around to the communities and listen to us if possible. With a lot of these things we are just wasting our time talking to you and putting to you information to take back to Canberra. There will be a meeting in Parliament House to sort out the whole thing but we do not get feedback from you mob so we need the minister himself to come out here sometime.

CHAIR—I will tell the minister, but let me tell you this: we are listening very carefully to you and we have come here because the minister has asked us to get the views and opinions of all of you in the Northern Territory. We are doing that to the best of our ability and I promise you that the minister will get an accurate report back from us.

ALICE PROVIS NAPPANARDI—My name is Alice Provis Nappanardi from Papunya. I want to keep the one big land council strong.

CHAIR—Thank you, Alice.

LANCE HERBERT—My name is Lance Herbert from Kintore. I just want to go back to what my uncle said earlier about the permits. The land council does all the permits. They do all the permits through the land council.

I reckon he was right this morning. The land council is really powerful for us, for the whole community and for Central Australia. Also, the permits are the main weapon that we use for everyone when they come through. It is our weapon and the land council is the main weapon for every community in Central Australia.

NED HARGRAVES—Another thing we forgot to put in there is that the land council is a protection. It protects us. It is a shield.

CHAIR—Yes. You might tell the people this. It is like my land. People have to ask first before they walk on my land.

NED HARGRAVES—Exactly.

CHAIR—To protect my family, too. We want you to have the same, no difference.

NED HARGRAVES—That is what we want.

CHAIR—All happy with that?

REGGIE ROBINSON—I am from Yuendumu. As a lot of people are saying, we lived here for 40,000 years. That is going back to our grandfathers and all that. From those days until now our people have been passing land rights, white people's land rights, but they are our old people. We live with that and we passed it on to our grandchildren from those days. If the white people came around here, which they did, they just came in and ran the boundary to put their bullocks in. A few years later they went back and they did not want to run it. But our people and our grandfathers lived with that. They knew that this was their land. That is the same thing we feel and that our grandchildren will feel. Today we are feeling that way. Even when the land rights came in we knew that this was our land. Even if our land is taken away and our rights are taken away we know that this is still our land because of our culture, the sacred sites on our country. That is how we keep our land.

John Reeves spoke about nine regions which our land councillors have talked about and delegates. About the background of the other ones, the nine original little land councils, the

nine regions that we put in, that just means the language of all these people here. That is the background for us.

VALERIE MARTIN—I want to say on behalf of my people here that it means so much to us to have the land. It means so much to our kids. When it is all dug up it breaks our heart and our spirit. It is what it means to us, not only the people here at Yuendumu, but people in the other communities in the central region. It breaks our heart when people come in and dig it up. It breaks our spirit. That is what they did in the old days. They broke our spirit. The spirit is gone when it is all dug up. That is what the land means to us. We need support. We need the land council for our sacred sites and what it means so it can carry on to the next generation, so that our kids can know what we went through fighting for our land and for our culture.

LINDSAY TURNER—Excuse me, Chairperson; you say that you have your other members there sitting with you in the front at the platform. Is it possible that you call the rest of your group? Can you get one of your members to stand up and tell us what is happening? If this joint review has got to go ahead in parliament in Canberra, is it you who is going to stand up with the minister in Canberra? Is it possible for these other members to stand up? These people want to know. Can these other members speak up? Let one start and then have a few others. We are sick of hearing the chairperson.

CHAIR—When we finish our report in August this year, the report becomes a public document. All Australians will get it, as will all members of parliament—both opposition and government—the Prime Minister and Mr Beazley, the Leader of the Opposition. When that happens in August and the government gets the report, it will then tell you and the parliament what its decision will be on the report. Okay? I cannot tell you today, nor can any of these members tell you, what the government's final decision will be. It would be dishonest of me to say to you today that I know what the government's decision will be, because none of us know that. I will tell you what: our report will be a good report and it will make sure that your fears are very much understood by the government.

Mr SNOWDON—The chairman has been explaining to you the process for this committee. I have told the committee before that, when the Reeves report was first discussed before the election last year, it was made an election issue. Before the election, there were signs up in polling booths around here saying, 'If you want a smaller land council and want your own land council, vote for that other bloke.' Do you remember that? At that election most of you people voted for me, and I say thank you for that. You gave me a message, and the message was that you did not want the Reeves report or its recommendations. I heard that message.

Before the election, Daryl Melham, who was shadow minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, spoke to Mr Herron on the telephone. What they agreed was that, after the election, this Reeves report would not be acted on by the government before it went to a committee. That is what this committee is doing. These parliamentary committees have people from different political parties. The chairman is from the Liberal Party; this man is from the Liberal Party; this man is from the Labor Party; this man is from the Liberal Party; this lady is from the Labor Party; Daryl is from the Labor Party; Bob Katter, I do not know—he is an invisible man—he is National Party from Queensland.

Someone asked about One Nation: there is no One Nation. She is dead in the water. After that election, the government has the majority. It has got more numbers than the Labor Party in the parliament. The chairman from the committee and majority of the committee are from the government side.

LINDSAY TURNER—Where are the Democrats?

Mr SNOWDON—There are no Democrats. This committee is a House of Representatives committee; it is not a Senate committee. This committee was given a piece of paper by the minister and told to go and talk to your mob about those recommendations from Reeves, to see what you think of those recommendations. That is what the minister asked us to do. That is why we have come here. The chairman might have different views from me but he is trying to be fair to everyone. When we are listening, he says that he has got an open mind so he can be fair. So that, when we write that report, you can say it is fair report.

It is no secret—and I am sure the chairman will not mind my saying this—that I have been saying all along that it is a rubbish report. It is no good and we should burn it. We have not heard anyone—apart from one or two individuals and a small group—say that they support anything about the Reeves report. The message that we have got to give to that government has to tell the truth about what you say. The chairman's job is a difficult one. He has got to sit on the fence and he has got to make sure that the report is a fair one. He has got to make sure that it reflects what Aboriginal people are saying. If you are not happy with that report, you have to get on to me and tell me. If this mob have done the wrong thing and you do not like it, it is then my job to make them change, and we can do that in a number of ways. Do you understand?

Lou has been asked by the minister. He has to give them that letter with the recommendations and, if that minister says, 'I'm not going to accept those recommendations. We're going to make changes to the land rights act which Aboriginal people don't want,' I will stop it. My friends and I will stop it, do you understand? But I want to say thank you for allowing us to come here anyway to your country.

Mr MELHAM—As Warren said, I am the shadow minister. I represent the Labor Party. I am your voice in the parliament. You have heard me. I speak opposite John Herron. Before the election, I said to John Herron, 'We want to hear what Aboriginal people think about Reeves' review.' We did a deal before the election that a committee would be set up so you can put your views to the parliament about Reeves.

Now we have different views on this committee; we are from different political parties. But, with the chairman and the government members of the committee, we are trying to work together to get honest views from the people. I have seen changes in the chairman and government members of the committee listening to the community. They know that. I have seen a difference just by listening to the community.

I cannot say what government members are going to put in the report, but I can tell you what the Labor Party is going to say because we have said it from day one. It is in our

policy. There will be no change to the land rights act unless Aboriginal people consent. There will be no change to your act of parliament unless you say, 'We want a change.'

We would like to see some changes, if they are good changes, and if that is what you want and if it is going to improve the act and help the land councils give you better services. They are the sorts of changes the Labor Party supports. That is my view. This is your act. There should not be changes unless you want them. Twenty years ago a Liberal government gave you this act after Gough Whitlam tried to give it to you. A Liberal government is not going to change this act as far as the Labor Party is concerned unless you want change.

Mr QUICK—I am the deputy chairman of this committee, and I have great faith in my chairman. I can understand you people getting sick and tired of us people wandering into your land. If they were doing it to my land, I would be upset too. But we come here with open hearts. We are not bad people. These are a good mob. We want to hear your voice because, if we stayed in Canberra and did not come out here, you would say, 'They're a bunch of bad bastards. They never talk to us.' We are here to listen. We have big ears and big hearts. We hear what you say. We have been travelling around the Northern Territory for the last couple of months and we have two months to go.

When the report comes down, it will really reflect what you are telling us. We will not put lies in there. That is not our way. Thank you for having us on your country. It is a long way from Tasmania, where we did not look after our indigenous people. I am proud to be on your country just for a few hours and I will take away lots of good memories. Thank you.

Ms HOARE—My name is Kelly, and I would like to say to the women of the community here and you women who have come to give us your message that I, as a woman, as a daughter and as a mother, will make sure that your views and the promises that you have for your children will be reflected in the report that goes to John Herron. I, along with my colleagues on the committee, will try to force the government to ensure that our recommendations from this committee are stuck to. I thank you for letting us come onto your land. I thank you for the reception that you gave us.

CHAIR—Thank you very much everyone. That brings this to an end because we have to fly to another community. Do you want to say something quickly?

EDDIE ROBERTSON—Thank you. If you members of the committee go back, we will have to have some kind of account from the community here to say that every word that was said here today is going to be said in Canberra, that you're going to be sending back exactly what we said here. When you sit in Canberra, we want you to ask—it is a very hard question or request we are going to ask you—John, or who is associated, for the resignation. Otherwise, this can go on for another 10 years. That is all we can ask. Can you do that? Is it possible?

CHAIR—I will try. Thank you very much for letting us visit your country and having a good discussion both ways.

ALISON ANDERSON—I wanted to ask one more question, Chairman, to the committee. This is a public meeting, so why are people being given private meetings when this is a public hearing?

CHAIR—There are no private meetings taking place today, but sometimes—

ALISON ANDERSON—In town?

CHAIR—Just a moment. Sometimes committees like this one will be asked by people if they could speak in private. That always is agreed to by the committees because we have to find out what all people think. We always publish what those people say in private. It is revealed to everybody. There are no secrets there. Some people are too shy to get up in public and they feel it is very hard. So we want to say, ‘Okay, we’ll sit down quietly with you, so long as you understand that what you say will be in public eventually.’

HARRY NELSON—Mr Chairman, before I ask the people’s consent for closing this meeting, I would like to ask you one question. Why do people like yourselves, the standing committee on Aboriginal affairs, come up here? I want to find out, have we been doing the wrong things? I don’t think so. We haven’t been doing wrong things. The only thing that has done the wrong thing is the government. They are the ones who have been doing the wrong things. They have not been giving us enough funding to improve our housing situation, health, education, all that. You have heard those three subjects hundreds of thousands of times. We have not so far got a good result. New houses are going up, but how long are they going to last here, for the next three years? This is only one community. What about the other communities?

They come up every time, look at us and study us more or less. We are not little guinea pigs. We are Aboriginals. We are human beings. We are traditional owners of this country. Can you take that message back to our minister, or your minister, and extend that to him?

CHAIR—Thank you. I have just a couple of quick points before I close the meeting. Mr Reeves is not a member of this committee. Mr Reeves is not a member of the parliament. Mr Reeves is not a member of the government. So you do not have to worry about him telling us what we write. Do you understand that? Is that clear?

HARRY NELSON—Yes. That is not exactly what I am getting at.

CHAIR—I know that.

HARRY NELSON—I am getting at all the standing committees on Aboriginal affairs coming up here and studying us, or getting our views. The question that I ask is what wrong have we done?

CHAIR—You have not done any wrong. We are here today as your guests because we understood that, after the election, you wanted us to come up here and listen to what you thought of Mr Reeves’ opinion on the report. We are here today because you asked us to come and listen to your views. Now surely that is what you all want us to do. That is a good thing to do, isn’t it? And we have. I would like to thank you all very much for coming here

and being so forthright with us and giving us your valued opinion and advice. We appreciate that.

I want to particularly thank our reporters from Hansard who have recorded all of this today. They have done a wonderful job. It is very difficult. Thank you very much. What about a round of applause for them. I would also like to thank Valerie and Ned, our excellent interpreters. It is very hard to do. I want everyone to clap for Valerie and for Ned.

NED HARGRAVES—I am really sorry, because English is really hard. This is really important for us. I am really sorry. I didn't really mean it. I am really sorry.

CHAIR—Ned, thank you. Also, I ask my mob here: would you be agreed that we take all the words today and we take them back to become part of the evidence for our inquiry? As all are in favour, that will be done.

HARRY NELSON—Mr Chairman, I would like to thank you for coming up here and listening to all the speakers, both men and women, especially that person from Tasmania. I think it is a bit of a cultural shock to you. I was requested by some of the people up here, men especially, to ask that, after you close your meeting, can we get one of the Aboriginal people to come up here and close the meeting?

CHAIR—Please come up now and share with me the closure of our meetings. That would be a good thing to do.

HARRY NELSON—Seeing we are coming to the end now, I will close this meeting. Thank you for coming.

CHAIR—Our meeting is closed and yours is closed, thank you for letting us come.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 12.36 p.m.

