



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**

FRIDAY, 7 MAY 1999

GROOTE EYLANDT

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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

**Friday, 7 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 Lloyd, Mr Melham, Mr Quick and 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.



**WITNESSES**

**AMAGULA, Walter, Member, Anindilyakwa Land Council . . . . . 535**

**BILLETT, Don, Manager, Anindilyakwa Land Council . . . . . 535**

**JARAGBA, Lionel, Member, Anindilyakwa Land Council . . . . . 535**

**LALARA, Gula, Member, Anindilyakwa Land Council . . . . . 535**

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**YANTARRNGA, Jimmy, Member, Anindilyakwa Land Council . . . . . 535**

**Committee met at 9.27 a.m.**

**AMAGULA, Walter, Member, Anindilyakwa Land Council**

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**ACTING CHAIR—(Mr QUICK)**—As acting chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, I welcome representatives of the Anindilyakwa Land Council to this private meeting. Our Chairman apologises for not being present but he has had a death in his family and has had to go back to Victoria.

The reason we are using microphones is that Hansard are taking down everything we say. We understand that you are happy for whatever is said here today to be printed and distributed as part of the proceedings.

We are here to hear your views on the Reeves report and what you think about the recommendations. We have until August to travel the length and breadth of the Northern Territory to get the view of land councils on the Reeves report. We are here to listen to you. As I said yesterday, we have big ears, open minds and open hearts. Thank you for letting us into your country. I will now hand over to you.

**Mr Stewart**—I am a lawyer from Darwin. I act for the land council. I am certainly not their spokesman and do not purport to be. They have their own views. I think the discussion would be facilitated by having some structure and I might be able to help by introducing some topics and then they can have their say in relation to those.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Fine.

**Mr Stewart**—The issue in relation to smaller land councils is one that really does not concern this land council, of course, because they have already achieved that status. They did it after a long and protracted battle. They are very happy with their lot at the present time. They would not want that changed.

They are aware of the Reeves report recommendation for 18 smaller land councils, including this one and the Tiwi council that is already in existence. A point was raised in discussion between us as to why it has to be four at one end of the spectrum, or the other alternative of 18, and why there might not be scope for some middle ground for some of those regions to be represented by their own land councils and some not. That is an alternative that these people see as one that is worth investigation.

**ACTING CHAIR**—No numbers have been mooted?

**Mr Billett**—People look to the fact that there are a lot of small groups that would like to get up and some small groups that would probably never get up. Why don't you give those small groups that have the right a chance to get up and have a go at it? There are quite a few groups that have been asking you people and they are not given that opportunity to run their own land. They will never get up there.

**Ms HOARE**—Why would you see that other groups could not do it under the current land rights act where you were—

**Mr Billett**—Get up as a small land council?

**Ms HOARE**—Yes.

**Mr Billett**—We have been told that nothing is going to change. It is just a review and it is going to be the same at the end of the day. That is what the people are telling us. It does not seem right that these people are going around and doing an interview and at the end of the day we are told, 'Nothing is going to change.' How are these people going to be able to achieve anything for themselves?

**Mr SNOWDON**—Unlike a lot of regions in the Northern Territory, though, you have an economic base—moneys come into the land trust which gives some economic viability—whereas there are a lot of regions in the Northern Territory where there are no royalties. The economic base that exists for this land council is not replicated in many other places.

**Mr Billett**—We would not agree. We do not think you have got to have royalties to make a land council work. The Tiwi people do not have a royalties base but they make a land council work.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I do not want to get into an argument with you, Don, because I want to talk to Aboriginal people. Very different things are happening in different places.

**Mr Stewart**—Any members of the land council who are here can stop me if they do not agree with what I am saying. Somebody can come and say, 'Hey, you are not entitled to say that'. Their view is that, when they were represented by the NLC, they were often driven by

a political agenda. The NLC was not so much interested in local issues. The people here feel that they have dealt better with local issues under their own separate land council and that is a potential advantage that they see for other Aboriginal communities who may enjoy the same kind of benefit. Is there anything else that you mob want to say about the land council structure, the number of land councils, NLC and the way the land council itself is set up?

**ACTING CHAIR**—Assuming Reeves's recommendation goes ahead and we have 18 separate land councils, but we then have the structure of NTAC on top and 15 people are appointed by the Chief Minister and the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, how does this mob feel about that?

**Mr Stewart**—They are not very keen on that at all. They would be in favour of a body elected by the constituent regional land councils—members of their equivalent NTAC body—so they could contribute, but they are not in favour of government appointees occupying those positions.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Are they in favour of the proposal by Reeves to have the trust moneys which are currently available to them being administered by NTAC rather than by themselves?

**Mr Stewart**—No.

**Mr SNOWDON**—They are in favour of some sort of umbrella body but not with the powers that Reeves envisages?

**Mr Stewart**—Yes.

**Mr SNOWDON**—So, no powers over trust?

**Mr Stewart**—That is right.

**Mr SNOWDON**—So, no powers over how you spend your money?

**Mr Stewart**—Yes. No powers held by a body occupying that position. What the community would appreciate is more legislative guidance with regard to the application of the money—more structure.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Could you elaborate on that?

**Mr Stewart**—The Reeves report recommended that the MRE be regarded as the equivalent of public money and that therefore it should be spent on public purposes, however that may be defined. That is a restriction that is not present in the legislation as it stands. I do not think the people are in fact pushing for that particular restriction defined in those terms, but it is a problem for them. If they are to be criticised for the way in which the money is applied, and there are no guidelines as to the way in which it is to be applied, they are between a rock and a hard place. So they need some assistance.



**Mr SNOWDON**—Are you aware of significant legal advice which asserts that Reeves has basically done something which is possibly constitutionally invalid in terms of his recommendations and that, in any event, this money should not be considered as public money but private money? Therefore, any guidelines which might be imposed in terms of public money do not apply; they should be treated as private money once it reaches the trust.

**Mr Stewart**—I really do not want to be doing too much talking here. I am aware of that, and that is why I sought to distinguish between a restriction categorising the purposes as ‘public purposes’ to which the money could be applied—put that aside. Nevertheless, there would be scope for some guidelines that would, I think, assist the community in their own decision making processes, to be able to identify the priorities and, therefore, to feel as if they were conforming to some guidelines, rather than dealing with something nebulous and then be criticised for the way in which they are proceeding.

The next topic is mining. The land council wants to preserve the veto according to the present system. They do not see any scope for the soft exploration procedure that was recommended by Mr Reeves. It especially applies to this island here where they are only dealing with one miner—and I might say that they have a very good working relationship with that mining company—but that is a day-to-day thing.

From the land council’s point of view, the mining company is really only as good as its performance yesterday, and they want to be able to take into account the mining company’s performance when they give consent to exploration on new land. Whether it is soft exploration or more intrusive exploration, they want to be able to have a say as to whether exploration is going to proceed at all. Do you want to say anything about that, Jambana?

**Mr SNOWDON**—Mr Chairman, could I just ask a question? In relation to part IV of the act in the mining provisions, there has been some discussion in other meetings about the withholding consent provisions and the fact that, when people withhold consent, the mining companies are excluded for five years when people might believe that they could legitimately deal with someone else. They might be more amenable to deal with rather than the mining company they have rejected. Effectively, they are excluded from that process by the fact that the five-year period prevails. Is there any comment being considered by the Anindilyakwa Land Council about that issue.

**Mr Billett**—We see a problem in that, when we give mining companies the right to mine, we have an exploration of what we call the eastern areas. We also have companies applying for the rest of the island, but we would like to see their performance in environment issues, because we have a lot of problems with the environment. We would not like to give any other company the right unless we can see what the first company can do. If they have a good program, we accept it; if they do not, we should have the right to negotiate with somebody else.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What I am getting at is the other end of it, where you are unhappy with someone who has got an exploration licence.

**Mr Billett**—Yes, that is why we say we would like to watch the company that is asking for the eastern areas. We want to see what they do before we give them the right to any more.

**Mr SNOWDON**—It is not this company. What I am trying to get at is: if there is someone else—

**Mr Billett**—If somebody else would then like to apply? If the first company did not do the right thing, then—

**Mr SNOWDON**—Yes, that is right.

**Mr Billett**—another company should have the right to have a go at that area and to give a better performance.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Or negotiate with you on its terms.

**Mr Billett**—Yes, that is right. We have no problem with that.

**Mr Stewart**—One aspect that particularly concerns the community here is the social disruption that is engendered by mining activities. In many communities there is a degree of proximity between mining activities and the Aboriginal community but not to the same extent as exists on Groote Eylandt, where you have a contained, small land mass with several Aboriginal communities and a huge mine operating in the same area. That brings with it pollution: nuisance problems of dust and noise. The mine is operating just about around the clock, and this community feels that there should be some recognition of that in the apportionment of the areas affected payments—30 per cent of the ABR is on account of the areas affected component. The community feels that that should be increased, and the suggestion would be to 40 per cent in circumstances where there is this degree of social disruption occasioned by the mining activities.

I will just check whether there is anything else the community would like me to say about mining. We have had a good chat about this, so I have had the benefit of their views. It is not the way in which I would like them to be presented, I must say. But they have asked me to be here, so I will assist them.

**ACTING CHAIR**—That is fine.

**Mr Stewart**—I mentioned the ABR a few minutes ago. There are some issues concerning the moneys through the ABR.

There is one point I overlooked, however. I meant to draw attention to Mr Reeves's inclusion in his report, at page 359, of the principle of social disruption being taken into account as an element when determining the allocation of ABR moneys. It is a point in the report that this community wishes to adopt.

At page 96 of Mr Reeves's report he deals with the allocation of funding for administrative purposes. He refers to the percentages that apply to each of the land councils.

I cannot remember what each of those percentages is, but the percentage that applies to this land council is one per cent. They get one per cent of the overall funding for administrative purposes. It is not enough to run this land council. If it is calculated according to a population count, the one per cent falls short of the contribution that the population of this land council makes to the Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory. We are only talking about small amounts of percentage at any event, but the flow-on in terms of its financial effect is significant when you are looking at a low budget organisation. This land council has written to the minister for some considerable time, pointing out the discrepancy. Those submissions have not yet been favoured with a response.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Could I ask what you would be happy with.

**Mr Stewart**—One and half per cent has been the submission.

**Mr Billett**—We are looking at 1½ per cent. We have 1,500 or 1,600 people and by law we should be entitled to 1½ per cent. But we have been rounded down to one per cent since the incorporation of the land council. Over the seven or eight years we have probably lost over a million dollars for that reason, just by it being rounded down rather than being equal with everybody else. The Tiwi people were rounded up to two per cent—I think they have 1,800—but we have always been rounded down to one per cent. In the eight years we have probably written 100 letters to the minister, but we can never get a reply.

**Mr Stewart**—One aspect that is associated with that is that this land council is situated in a remote locality but a lot of its business is with the Northern Territory government. Because of the remote location it is more expensive to operate—it involves more travelling, it involves the necessity to engage outside professional assistance to a greater degree than for the larger land councils—and that is a factor that results in the inadequate allocation of funding for administrative purposes having a harder impact on this community here.

**Mr Billett**—We are talking about ABR funds. Under the law we can only give funding to a corporative body. There should be somewhere that a land council can give to a church group without it being a corporative body, or a school education group. We have problems with funding, that we just cannot give it outside of the community council or somebody else that is a corporative body. We think the law should be changed. The land council could actually allot money to different groups to help smaller people. We have got pension groups who cannot get money, invalid groups, dialysis machine groups, we cannot give money too, because they are not incorporate. The law should be changed to allow this to happen for a land council.

**Mr Stewart**—And commercial enterprises too, or not?

**Mr Billett**—Whatever people the land council represents. The land council is tied. They are not allowed to really represent their people far enough. They should be able to go further and help their people. They are there as an land council to help people. They should be given that right to help people further.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Don, which money are we talking about here?

**Mr Billett**—We are talking about ABR money. It only can go to the corporation or a—

**Mr SNOWDON**—You are talking surplus?

**Mr Billett**—No, ABR, section 64(3). It is limited: we can only give it to corporated bodies. We cannot give it to the sports and rec team because they are not an incorporated body.

**Mr Stewart**—Turning to another topic, the application of the Northern Territory laws: the community does not want the Northern Territory government to have the power to make laws that will have power over the land rights act. The community wants the land rights act to stay strong.

**Ms HOARE**—And stay Commonwealth?

**Mr Stewart**—Yes. On an allied topic, the acquisition of land, the community's view is that the process should always be by way of negotiation in the first instance; that the government should be required to negotiate with the Aboriginal owners before compulsory acquisition can be considered; and that, in any event, acquisitions should never take place over sacred sites, whether registered or unregistered, and sacred sites must be respected and preserved.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Can I seek clarification: you do not agree with the proposal for compulsory acquisition?

**Mr Stewart**—No, we do not agree.

**Mr MELHAM**—We are going to have to start the public meeting at 10 o'clock, in fairness to others, so if you have some points you will need to make them quickly.

**Mr Stewart**—The report recommended that, if the regional land council system was introduced, those land councils should be fully informed of acquisition proposals and be given access to documents. This community supports that view.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Only if it is compulsory acquisition?

**Mr Stewart**—Yes—obviously it would happen for negotiation purposes.

**Mr SNOWDON**—The basic premise is no compulsory acquisition, in which case negotiations are there anyway.

**Mr Stewart**—Yes. In relation to sacred sites, the community does not want to have the power taken away from land councils. It wants the sacred site provisions kept intact in the land rights act. The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority does not really operate in Groote Eylandt. This community has its own registrar of sacred sites. A lot of sacred sites are not registered. They know where they are. They want to keep control of them.

The final topic is the permit system. The community is happy with the permit system. They feel it operates well. It enables them to retain control over their land. It provides them with some funding for the appointment of two rangers who assist to ensure that the island is looked after. We are aware of Mr Reeves's recommendation that the system be dispensed with, but this community wants to retain it.

**ACTING CHAIR**—To sum up, there is not much in the Reeves report that you would take away as a positive. Would I be right in saying that, apart from perhaps the idea that other land councils could be formed, you are not in favour of NTAC, you want the permit system retained, and the ABR to be basically the same with a few minor changes? So, out of that huge Reeves report, am I right in suggesting that, apart from a few minoring tinkering with the current system, for this land council the report is irrelevant?

**Mr Stewart**—It is not up to me to make an overall value judgment. We have dealt with it item by item. I would be happy to leave it at that.

**ACTING CHAIR**—In all the other land councils we have met, we have heard from individual people. Before we close this private meeting, I would like to ask any of the people here if they would like to say something about the permit system, ABR, land councils or NTAC so we can get it on the record, so we do not have the situation where later someone says, 'Reeves came around and didn't listen to us, or if he listened he didn't write down what we said. This mob from Canberra came. They listened to us, but they didn't take any notice of what we said.' Before we have a public meeting, after a cup of tea, if anyone wants to say something, now is the time, because once we close—

**Mr Stewart**—We can say something else at the public meeting too, if we wish?

**CHAIR**—Yes, that is right. If no-one wants to say anything, we will close this private meeting. Thank you for your attendance. If you want to talk to any of us, please feel free.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.02 a.m. to 10.37 a.m.**

[10.37 a.m.]

## PARTICIPANTS

**BLITNER, Don**

**LALARA, Jabumi**

**WUNUNG MURRA, Banambi**

**ACTING CHAIR**—I welcome you all to this public meeting. I come from an island a little bigger than yours—Tasmania. All our words are being recorded as an official record for parliament. Whatever you say will be written down for ever, and anybody in Australia can read what you have to say. I invite you now to tell us what you think about the Reeves report.

**DON BLITNER**—A lot of people around here know me. I represent Umbakumba and some of the Bickerton people and Angurugu people. The only time we knew that the Reeves report was fair dinkum was when we saw his face on television last week. There were no reports and no feedback telling us when he would be here. They just came secretly to this building and straight out, without the other communities knowing. Maybe a few people were told about it but not the people who were really concerned. As I said in Yirrkala yesterday, the Umbakumba people would like to see everyone—their community, this community and the Bickerton community—go back to the mainland council. This is not rubbishing any of the other land councils that have been formed. We would like to see our group of people get better representation from the big land councils. We feel we would get better representation from the NLC rather than these little ones. That is about all for now.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Can I ask some questions of you? Are you happy with the permit system?

**DON BLITNER**—A lot of people are not happy with the permit system because most of us are being charged out by this land council. Half of the people want to run their own permits anyway. At the moment some of them are represented here. Another thing that Umbakumba did say is that they would like to turn this one into an NLC regional office like on the island. Our difficulty in the past was that we were too far from Darwin and could not communicate properly.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So you would rather have no permits and trespass system?

**DON BLITNER**—No. We would like to have permits. We have to have that permit system but with the TOs putting more input into it.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What about NTAC: fifteen people chosen by the Chief Minister and Senator John Herron to run the whole show?

**DON BLITNER**—No. We would like our own people voted from different groups in the big land council area.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You have not mentioned ABR.

**DON BLITNER**—What is that one?

**ACTING CHAIR**—I do not want to put words into the man's mouth but he only mentioned one thing. People have been growling at us fellows for coming and listening and then not putting down what you blokes are saying. What are the Umbakumba people saying about royalties?

**DON BLITNER**—Royalties are to be split up. There was an association formed here by so-called traditional owners and most of the traditional owners were given foraging rights anyway. That is how they started off. That is why we would like to go back to one big land council and try to be a group again—a whole people again like it used to be.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Is there anything else you would like to say before we pass it on to someone else?

**DON BLITNER**—Not at the moment.

**BANAMBI WUNUNGMURRA**—I am Chairman of the Maung regional council on the East Arnhem region including Numbulwar, Groote, Umbakumba, Nhulunbuy, Galiwinku and Ramingining.

I would just like to explain this to you because nobody knows what is going on. I will give you a brief as to what is going on, so you mob can know what is actually going on with this Reeves report and what they are trying to do. What the Reeves report is is shown in two pamphlets here which represent two things. He was talking about NTAC. NTAC means the Northern Territory Aboriginal Council. If you see these, that is NTAC there—that is the one that Reeves report is giving us. It means that they want to take all ATSIC money into this new organisation, everything. This means this mob is going to run our affairs.

Also, it says here that the Chief Minister and the Commonwealth minister will choose the chairperson for this one here. They will choose their chairperson, which means that nobody from us will be chosen for this chair.

All that money from royalties will go to this mob here. All mining companies that are affected, even here, Jabiru, Nhulunbuy, it is going to affect them if this goes ahead. We will not say anything. Our community, our Yolngu people will not say anything. We will be sitting outside, we will not say anything. And those people over here will say a lot of things on behalf of us, the landowners. That is very, very important. That is why Reeves did not come here and speak to a lot of people round here, even from here, from Umbakumba and also from Bickerton. Nobody knew that he was coming here to talk to the community and nobody knows what NTAC means. That is why you mob got really surprised that these parliamentary people from the House of Representatives in Canberra came here. They want to hear the voice of our people, our Yolgnu people.

The other one was: the top one is where the Northern Land Council has been operating, on the top there, where that money—what they call ABR—goes straight to your council.

That is how you are getting it. You are getting that one now because it is going straight through that council there and that is how it is all separated to regional councillors. That has been operating for nearly 20-odd years now. That is why you have got that little land council going. You have got that Anindilyakwa council coming here because you want to run this land council by yourself, which is good. You have got your own say for that royalty. You have got your own say for that. But when it comes to that other part, no, you are not going to say it unless that minister can choose those people to go into this council here. That is very, very important for us, for this council here. You have got to say it in strong words. If nothing, then you have got no say on it.

That is why Reeves came here without notifying you to come to this meeting. It talks about a permit system. It talks about land itself. If you are not going to say anything about land, these balandas will come and just mine the place, because the Northern Territory is going to say, 'They don't need that permit. You just go and mine that place.' That is why it is very important for us mob, the Yolgnu mob, here at Umbakumba and also at Bickerton and Numbulwar. That is why it is very, very important for us to actually sit and talk about these issues.

It talks about sea rights too, how we offer permits for sea rights for those fishermen there. The fishermen come here and land their boat next door and take all our fish from us, and that is very important for us. That is why this fella has been asking my brother here to talk about the permit system. We know about the permit system because we have been handling that permit system for a long time.

When we come to the bottom one, nobody can choose for this council until the chairman comes around and picks who is going to be the best person to go to this council here. From here you are not going to choose that person except only that person there, that person who is going to be chosen from that council, and that person is being chosen by the Northern Territory Chief Minister and that fella from Canberra, the minister. We do not like that. Nobody likes that. We would rather see our Yolngu choose our people here. That is very important. And it talks about all the issues.

One of the big things that I mentioned to you is that it is not only Northern Territory money that is going to go, it is ATSIC money, too—this one here, the bottom one. They are going to look after all that money for us. We are not going to say anything—except these people here. The Northern Territory is going to keep that money all together all the time. That is why we need you to speak up. These people have just come here to listen and to record our message. If you say nothing, then there is no chance for us because we have the land council here that operates only for the Yolgnu mob. They have every right to say that. But when it comes to you here—the elders mob—it is not going to be your say.

I would like to explain the last one to you—the bottom one here about the traditional land owners. It is going to be on the bottom. You are not going to say anything. Our land is very important for us. First, they have to go and talk to the landowners about any mining. Otherwise, if the answer is no, the mining people are going to come with their bulldozers and wipe all the land from us. In other words, the Northern Territory government is going to be there all the time. That was what I was trying to explain to you before.



The chairman is going to ask all of you questions. He should not be asking you all those questions. You should be talking and asking them questions: what is it all about, what is the Reeves report all about? I will tell you one thing just to give you a brief: this book here is a big report made by Reeves after he came to—what?—100 or 200 communities all around the Northern Territory. He reckoned that these were all your ideas but, no, they are not your ideas. They came from his own mind. The sum of \$1.3 million went into his pocket. That money was ATSIC money. That money would have gone to us for housing, infrastructure, health and those sorts of things. I am just pointing this out to you so that at least you know what we are talking about, what these people came here for.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Thanks for that briefing about the Reeves report. Is there anyone from the local community who would like to say anything about Reeves permits?

**JABUMI LALARA**—I was born at Emerald in 1942 but I have stayed on the island all my life. I would like to say something here concerning John Reeves's report. I say that it is rubbish. I say this for the Aboriginal people throughout the territory. I feel that I would not get anybody to make that decision for me.

When we come to the area when we get a federal election, or whatever the election is, you get all the Aboriginal people to vote for somebody to stand for Australia, or for the Northern Territory. Everybody is equal. The government is for everybody. Your government is my government, governing Australia. The difference is in this area. Aboriginal people have been sitting on this land for their lifetime until today: sacred, culture, ceremony, other things that are made from the dirt, from the dust, history. You have not made that history. History is made there for everybody who lives on this country here, our country. Culture, sacred things—all that has been put into our place.

The Aboriginal people have been going back throughout our territory. There is no secret about it, you know. It is going back to Malcolm Fraser, when people started looking into it, how we should find ways to protect the land. And we got it. Then we got the Northern Land Council. Then we said to the Northern Land Council to bring everything up for Aboriginal people. We are now sitting, we are now working, we are supporting each other today as Aboriginal people.

It is very important what I said earlier, and it is true. It is not good enough that somebody writes the report for himself, for the popularity. He lives in the Northern Territory like this, a Territorian. White people, black people. Somebody should be aiming for that. I do not want to be going back into the welfare time. That is the time I was born, when Welfare ran this place, and a lot of Aboriginal people were working under the missionaries and the government. I do not want to do that today. The year 2000 is coming around the corner for everybody, for Aboriginal people to lift themselves. There are a lot of Aboriginal people who are educated here today. But I do not know why. People here today are not sitting on this ground here. A lot of people have been working here just to put money in their pocket and build money for themselves, and not giving help to the Aboriginal people and helping educate people.

This sort of thing today is coming from down south. We are Aboriginal people. We are not politicians. We do not work for politics. We are just Aboriginal people. Everything has

to be going to the Aboriginal people. Why is that? We equal everything. So I say, very strongly, when I see here that he says 'protect your land', then we have got land rights to protect what we own, what we earn. Look back to our great-grandfathers and what we are now today. Instead of this business between the Reeves report and what had been established before Reeves, I am more likely to say that I would like it to stay on. Aboriginal people would like it to stay on as it is, because somebody is taking away our self-determination. We will have to hold that and keep that. I am not going to stay here sitting with these people here and repeating what a lot of people have gone through already. I think that satisfies me. If somebody is taking notes, whatever you do, put that down as what we are aiming for here today.

There are a lot of things that I can say, because I am not afraid of anybody. With my heart and mind, I am a very strong person so that I can talk. Somebody was talking about Reeves—I have not seen Reeves on Groote Eylandt. It is just the word that he has been flying around, and I think he has been flying around with the government's money. Where has he gone? A lot of the people here complain that they have not seen him here on Groote Eylandt.

We are happy that you came here to be in front of these people on Groote Eylandt. Of course, we have not got Umbakumba and Bickerton here. That is just because it was such short notice. I only knew you were coming up for this meeting last week, on Thursday. There was just not enough information. I would like to have gathered more people so you can hear from other people, but they are not here. That is the only thing I can say: we felt sorry about other people not being here for this meeting.

But I feel strong, and I will not say any more. I think everything that the Northern Land Council is working on now, from the part of what I said on self-determination, is all there. There is no change. And I am not asking for anything to change here. Thank you very much.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Thank you very much. There are 10 of us on the committee from Canberra, and it is our job to listen to what you people say and then write a report to Mr Howard and to Mr Herron, the Aboriginal affairs minister. Everything you have said and everything all the other people that we have spoken to over the last couple of weeks have said is put down on tape and will be printed. What you have said here today will be sent back to you so that you can see what you said.

We have to write a report by August. I can assure you that we have taken on board everything you have said. We will not change your words to suit us. Our report on the Reeves recommendations will be your thoughts, not ours.

Thank you for your hospitality. Unfortunately, we have to leave to catch planes to fly the rest of us back home. But I can assure you that, as a committee, once we have sorted out the Reeves report, we will come back, spend some time with you—a couple of days—look around your island and see the good things you do and how we can improve the things that you need improving. That is a promise. Thank you for your hospitality, and we will see you again.

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

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

**Committee adjourned at 11.23 a.m.**

