



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Proof 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**

WEDNESDAY, 16 JUNE 1999

DALY RIVER

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

Wednesday, 16 June 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: Mrs Draper, Mr Haase, Mr Lieberman, 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.

[11.02 a.m.]

PARTICIPANTS

BAUMANN, Miriam-Rose

BUNDUCK, Felix (Principal Interpreter)

GROWDEN, Joan

MELPI, Leon

NARJIC, Claude

NARNDU, Theodora

PETHERICK, Edith

SHIELDS, Eddie

SULLIVAN, John

CHAIR—Good morning. Thank you very much for allowing the committee to visit you in your homeland. We appreciate the very happy welcome that you have given us. I will introduce myself and then ask my friends to introduce themselves to you. My name is Lou Lieberman. I am a member of the Australian parliament. My home is in Victoria, on the great river, the Murray River. My electorate is called Indi, which is the Aboriginal name for the Murray River. I am the Chairman of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. I am a member of the government, but the committee that I chair is made up of members from all political parties. I am going to ask my colleagues to introduce themselves to you.

Mr HAASE—Good morning. My name is Barry Haase. I am the member for Kalgoorlie in Western Australia. I am very pleased to be here.

Mr QUICK—My name is Harry Quick. I come from Tasmania and I am happy to be here, too.

Mrs DRAPER—I am Trish Draper, the federal member of parliament for Makin in South Australia. I am delighted to be here and thank you for your hospitality.

Mr WAKELIN—My name is Barry Wakelin, from South Australia. As I have said to some of you, I used to work over at Tipperary. So I am doubly delighted to be back in some familiar country.

Mr SNOWDON—Good morning. My name is Warren Snowdon. I am the federal member for the Northern Territory.

Mr MELHAM—My name is Daryl Melham. I am the federal member for Banks, which is in Sydney, part of the Bankstown area where the Waugh brothers come from. I am the shadow minister for Aboriginal affairs.

CHAIR—We also have Felix Bunduck, who is going to act as an interpreter for some of your people. I will have to ask you for advice soon as to what other assistance you want—whether you are happy to have Felix interpret for you or someone else. We are happy to work with you on that. We do not mind. Also, we have people from Hansard who are recording the discussion we have today. Hansard are the official people from the parliament who record, for Australia's history, what we are discussing today. I am wondering whether I need to get Felix to interpret what I just said. Are you all able to understand what I just said? Are you all happy? Does anyone need anything to be interpreted?

FELIX BUNDUCK—If any of the Daly River mob would like to know about the report of John Reeves, and if there are any good decisions to make which need to be heard from them, this lot here are from the House of Representatives. They are people from Canberra who are here to listen to what we are thinking about our land, the control of our land and what we have in the spirit of our life, of our land. Try to talk from our heart and thoughts.

CHAIR—Thank you, Felix. I want you all to relax. We are here to listen. We do not want to make big speeches. We want to hear your advice on what you would like us to tell the minister, Senator John Herron, the Prime Minister and the parliament about the land councils and the recommendations from the Reeves report, because John Herron, the minister, asked us to come up here and ask you for your advice before he makes his mind up. So that is pretty fair.

I understand that John Herron, the minister, and Daryl Melham, the shadow minister, both discussed this idea of this committee coming up first to ask you what you think. It is a good idea: both sides of the parliament—the major parties—want to know what you think. I am going to now hand over to you. When you do speak, we have got a roving microphone. We will bring it over to you and we will hear everything that you say. Would you mind telling us your name and where you come from when you speak, so that it can be recorded in *Hansard*.

FELIX BUNDUCK—I have said earlier what we are going to talk to them about—to understand from our spirit and our mind, to talk about what we like in our land. Some of our people are on their way here, travelling from Port Keats to here. They will be down here in half an hour, and we will join together and talk to these people here.

CHAIR—Does anyone want to start? Just put your hand up and we will bring the microphone to you.

JOAN GROWDEN—Good morning, everybody. I welcome all the visitors to the Northern Territory. I hope you enjoy your stay here. I would like to introduce myself. My name is Joan Growden. I might take about 10 minutes to speak; is that okay?

CHAIR—Just make sure everybody else gets a chance. Don't be too long.

JOAN GROWDEN—I am from Woolaning community. It is a small Aboriginal community in Litchfield Park. I am representing the people who could not come today. I am speaking on behalf of them. I would like to introduce you to my sister Edith and Claude Narjic and I will hand it over to them.

EDITH PETHERICK—I am really happy that you are here today. We feel that the land rights act is not working. Marshall Perron wanted to change it so that it would work for the people who were living on the land. We have found that the land rights act is not working for us. They are bypassing the elders—the men—and the NLC have not been doing the job properly. There should be an inquiry into it and into the sacred sites. We also think it is causing divisions between whites and whatever colour—black, white whatever. A lot of us are not very well educated. A lot of our problems are coming from inside the offices; people are biased. They are putting it over the full blood Aboriginals who have had no education.

We have found that the NLC, anthropologists and lawyers are costing the Australian taxpayers billions of dollars when this problem could have been solved so simply if they had listened to the true people, the full-blooded Aboriginals—the full blood like their colour because they are very tribal. We come from the Wagait Reserve, the Djerait mob.

The NLC gave land to people there. It does not belong to the Marranunggo. It does not belong to the people they have given it to now. It is Djerait country. They gave the land to different people, different tribes. The mob over there now are the muk muk. This is a muk muk man. He is a muk muk—not the people that the land council gave it to now. He is a proper muk muk. My mother is a muk muk; a Wagait but muk muk as well.

Marshall Perron has done the right thing and the NT Liberal government is doing a good job. They want to sort this problem out. We are very thankful you are here. I can show you some maps after this meeting. The NLC gave the country to certain groups that are holding up developments with land claims. People are using our relatives—Robert Mudamee, my grandfather, the McGuinnesses in Darwin, murrinh Dayus from Batchelor. Certain other mob use our relatives, Robert Mudamee, my grandpa and my brother, who has passed away, as their relatives. They are our relatives.

There have been a lot of deceit and lies going on and there should be an inquiry into it. The land rights act should be changed to suit the people better so that it will work. This map here does not show the genuine Kungarakan people. They are not the Djerait. They claimed that there were huge tribes over huge areas—different tribes and different clan areas—overlapping different areas. It starts from Blackfella Creek right up towards Berry Springs. You can see the huge area they claim. That is stopping the government from developing the Territory further. I will show you these maps later.

CHAIR—Could you leave those maps with us?

EDITH PETHERICK—You can have a copy of those maps, yes.

CHAIR—Thank you. We would like to have copies. Sarah will arrange for those.

EDDIE SHIELDS—Some of these people here do not understand what we are talking

about. We just want to have half an hour outside to talk to them and tell them what it is about, if that is all right with you.

CHAIR—I will take some advice on that. We are happy about that. We do not want the meeting to stop because we have lots of travelling to do today. It would be a good idea if the people could talk to us first. Then if you wanted some time to talk outside, we could adjourn for 10 minutes. That would not hold up everybody else. Do you think that is a good idea? We are going to stay in the meeting here for as long as we can. But obviously, if anyone wants to go outside and have a private talk, that is fine. We will keep this meeting going so that we can get on with what we need to hear. Does anyone else want to talk now?

FELIX BUNDUCK—Like the Daly River mob, if you people do not understand, you may have to talk in English, but I will still help you out.

CHAIR—Thank you, Felix.

CLAUDE NARJIC—I originally come from Port Keats but now I live at Litchfield Park. Over 25 years, things have not changed in that area. But people keep on claiming the area.

I do not claim for that area. I own that area. My grand-grand-grandfather was there. In wartime, fighting time, all the time, they sent our family right back to Wadeyepilli. It belongs to somebody else—the King Brown people. We sent them right up to Fitzmaurice way. But now, this time, in 1999, we are going to move forward and we are going to step in again and live on that area. We call it Woolaning community. We will be at Woolaning community. We will be working with the Djerait mob.

These people's reports, every one of them who goes to Canberra is a liar. They are only claiming; we own the land. Djrambour, Tchimburrers and Ditpils—all those people—the Djerait mob. We come from that area and we were pushed out from that area and we were over there. Now we are going back in 1999 towards our country, our land. That is what we are going to do.

EDITH PETHERICK—There is some fish, long-necked turtles, barramundi, red kangaroo, catfish pelican, and the surrounding tribes and all the mob at Balgala missing out, too: the Kiyuk, the Wangamutch mob country back that way a little bit, the Marinungo country back on this side of the Daly—

CHAIR—Just take a little while to talk amongst yourselves.

THEODORA NANDU—I am from the Port Keats Wadey area. I am also a traditional land owner belonging to the Kardu Diminin tribe. Also, I am representing the Kardu Numida council. I am a vice president woman and also a culture woman. Today, I am here to speak on behalf of my people, the Kardu Diminin people who are the hosts of the people in the township of Port Keats which is situated on our land. Is everybody aware of what is going on with our land rights act? I have got to speak on behalf of my people.

I am sure all Australians have some kind of a dream. I will be talking about my

dreams—that is the land, the centre of my heart. I have a history for it. I say on behalf of the ownership is that it is really the life and the way of our people live in with that spirit, related to the land.

I am going to read my history, my identity, which has been passed down traditionally by my people, Kardu Diminin. I was born at Port Keats on 24 April 1942. My father gave me a name, Nungawumidee, which mean a country. The story of my country is very much my life. This acknowledges that my ancestors have left me a real life and I experience it every day of my life. I will continue to experience this life until I return to that land as dust.

For me this land is very important. It gives me a connection to all objects on the land, all creation. That land is my nature. I feel very strong and secure on that land. I know I must treasure it and protect it. When I go away from my land I carry with me the spirit of my land. I know nothing will happen on my land without my authority. When I get lost or get frustrated, I sit with my people in that land and talk about problems, whether it is council or business problems.

Every time people say to me, ‘Tell us about our land. Draw a picture of our land that tells us about our people.’ It is a big responsibility to look after the land. When I feel pushed out and other people take away my responsibility, I feel my spirit is dead. I have no power to make decisions about my land. My rights are being destroyed with my land. I remind myself that I am Kardu Diminin. That is who I am, and no-one can change that.

If a big town was built on other people’s land, I am sure they would feel the same. I am part of other special land that is my life—my mother’s country, my husband’s country and my grandmother’s country. I respect their land. If I want to do business on their land I would speak first to the elders. I would make an agreement with the land owners. Even though this country is connected to my spirit, I cannot make a decision on someone else’s land, I can only go out to have a picnic or do a bit of hunting activities. We must respect each other’s land. Without this authority there is no power. The people will walk on top of you. I feel powerless.

My land is the centre of my heart, the spirit I keep with the beauty of the environment and the creation of God. I have the confidence to sit down with my people to talk about how we can strengthen and build each other to say this is our boundary, this is our land, it belongs to Kardu Diminin people.

My elders understand what gives hope and strength that creates a vision for our future. This vision brings respect and authority in our community when we make decisions. We need to support each other with love and respect to allow the spirit to grow. I link with other clan groups. I listen to my old peoples’ stories. They sound like freedom to me. They speak with the wind so gentle and peaceful. That is the truth of what I experience.

Under the land rights act I want the same law that will hold that power to protect our rights as traditional Aboriginal owners, to have the capacity to control and use the management of our land. We want the present land rights system to keep strong. I want the land rights act to recognise my land, my ceremonies, my people, Kardu Diminin, my dance and songs, Thanpa, Malkarrin, my language, murrinh patha, my totems, kutck, ku kuluntutuk,

ku thithay, ku nguluykuy, and so on. My system of relationships is linked with my spirituality responsibility to my land. The land rights act must help me protect this land for future generations. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Who else would like to speak? I will give you a minute or so to talk amongst yourselves.

JOAN GROWDEN—I have worked on cattle stations for the last 20 years, gold-mining places. I have been all around the Top End of the Northern Territory and I have witnessed a lot of devastation amongst Aboriginal people through land rights. I want to clarify a few things, what has been happening over the last 20 years.

I was born in 1953 on the Wagait Reserve near Finnis River. My mother and her family clan group belong to this land. Our family group is the Djerait people. My mother speaks several languages. She is now 74 years of age. My father, Ray Petherick, who is white Australian, came from Bendigo, Victoria, in 1947 to live here at Woolanang.

I am proud to say that I appreciate both sides of my heritage and culture. My father is a great asset to all Aboriginal people as he has done a lot of research in finding and solving matters concerning land ownership in recent years. The greatest discovery was finding valuable information from the rock site in Litchfield Park. These important significant paintings tell the story of each tribal group who belongs to the land and where they come from.

Over the last few years archaeologist Daryle Goose has recorded and documented them. These paintings have revealed the truth about Aboriginal land belonging to this land around Litchfield Park, Woolanang and the Wagait Reserve. They hold great historical value of great importance.

The Petherick family have never made a land claim on the Wagait Reserve or in the Finnis River land claim because we believe the land was our family's inheritance through our Aboriginal mother, Nangalliku. We were advised not to make a claim on the Wagait Reserve because it was already Aboriginal land being a reserve for Aboriginal people. We were also told by Northern Land Council staff we had no rights to make a claim and were ignored for 20 years. The Northern Land Council has deliberately bypassed our family. We have never received any help from the Northern Land Council over the last 20 years.

However, in March 1999 we made a breakthrough with the Northern Land Council. The Northern Land Council finally agreed to let Ken Barbar work as an anthropologist to rightfully make a legal claim over land ownership over Wagait and surrounding areas for the tribal clan group who have not been represented as yet. These tribal Aboriginal people have never had their say as yet because they are from the bush.

In 1996, Woolanang community members elected Raymond Petherick to be the representative for the people in the south-west Darwin-Daly River region. For the first time in 20 years, we have had someone like Raymond to represent our community and other tribal groups to have a fair and honest say in the Northern Land Council and, most importantly, to reveal the truth of what is actually happening in land rights throughout the Top End. At

present, there are complaints made out to Raymond that he is not doing his job properly. We would like to know what area they are talking about. The genuine tribal elders of Wagait, Daly River, right through to Port Keats have great faith and trust in Raymond, as they know he will get the job done in the Northern Land Council as their member.

We want to see justice, and we stand for the truth. The land rights struggle for all Aboriginal people throughout the Top End and around Australia has been a traumatic struggle for many various tribal groups trying to get recognition for land ownership. We can ask so many questions put forward to the Northern Land Council, but no-one wants to give us the right answers. The Northern Land Council refuse to answer our letters at times, and they always put it under the carpet and forget about us.

These are the questions we would like to put forward at this meeting now. Is the land rights act working? In what way so far has the act helped Aboriginal people? How can a minority group of people in an Aboriginal association bypass ritual elders and their own family members and make decisions for themselves? How can the two Aboriginal associations on Wagait make a false claim, stealing other people's country, stealing their dreamings, their stories, and getting other people's relatives to claim land, and then be approved by the Northern Land Council staff? Something must be wrong somewhere.

These associations are claiming more than one tribal area, overlapping other clan groups. In a court of law, a man had a mandatory sentence of one-year gaol, sentenced for stealing a towel. What about people conspiring to steal land and falsifying sites? What treatment do they get? What happens to people who give false and misleading information to the Northern Land Council, to the lawyers, anthropologists and land commissioners, especially in the Finnis River land claim? Who and where do we make our complaint to about these people who steal people's land, running their own business on the land, locking gates, keeping the real traditional owners from entering upon their own land, intimidating, abusing and disrespecting elders? So after 20 years, why are there still disputes on the Wagait reserve and over the Top End?

Ask yourself these questions. Where does confusion come from? Why are people so discouraged? It comes from people who distort the truth. Where do arguments, envy and strife come from? From people who rob and steal land, people stealing other people's dreaming stories, falsely claiming relatives, history and family. Why are families not getting on with one another? It is because there are people causing divisions, stirring up trouble so that people could not settle on their own land. Why are Aboriginal people disappointed and discouraged with land rights? It is because Aboriginal people have lost hope.

Many of the bush Aboriginals have lost faith and trust in the Northern Land Council, lost faith and trust in lawyers and anthropologists and even perhaps the government. These people are lost souls. They have got nowhere to turn to, but a lot of them have resorted to alcohol and drugs. They become poverty stricken, they lose hope, because where can they turn to for help? Who will listen to them?

Land rights has not been working because it has divided the nation. Land rights has caused racial discrimination amongst us all, black and white. Land rights has caused division amongst tribal groups, people rebelling against each other, families against families, sisters

against brothers, and also people rebelling against political issues. Land rights has had a devastating effect on all Aboriginal people. There is no rest for the people until the truth is revealed.

The only way to life is by God's values and principles, and not by man's reasoning. We have been arguing for 20 years and we are going around the same mountain time after time, time after time. What is going to happen in the next 20 years? Are we going to be still fighting for our land? Are we going to be still fighting each other? As a Christian, I stand for the truth because God represents the truth.

For land rights issues to be resolved, we need to make a stand for what is right and recognise what is wrong. What is wrong? True reconciliation is to begin in our hearts, to be united with God in truth and speak the truth and to forgive one another for the past and to go on with our future. Thank you.

CHAIR—Is there someone else, from the Northern Land Council maybe, who wants to make some comment? The committee wants to hear everybody. We are here to listen to everybody so please take the opportunity to do that.

EDITH PETHERICK—I would like bring your attention to something. In January this year I went to the deaths, births and marriages department to get the death certificate of my relative who had passed away in the 1970s. I asked for a few more certificates. They did not want to give it to me. Apparently those records that come from the Aboriginal population record, from Aboriginal Affairs, have been tampered with because they put other names on them. Somebody in the Aboriginal affairs office has tampered with those records on deaths, births and marriages. There should be an inquiry into that too. I will show you the dates and the time I went to that place, because those records come from the Aboriginal population record and the deaths, births and marriages department only got them recently. There is trying to be a cover-up somewhere.

Also I went into the Commonwealth archives in Nightcliff, to get some history there. I got some history. I asked for B.J. Beckett from 1911 and the Djagdjerait people that were reported in a newspaper report. That woman in there told me that they destroyed the records. Certain departments destroyed the records because they said it was too personal. That was to cover up the Djagdjerait people coming from Wagait and Wanggumatj and Gurrindjurr. What right have they got to destroy that record? Hopefully, Canberra has got a copy of that record. A lot of that record has been destroyed up here. That is why I wanted to bring your attention to it. There should be inquiries into the legal aid and the Aboriginal population record also. Thank you.

CHAIR—Is anyone ready to talk yet from any other group? We have heard quite a lot from this group, and we appreciate that very much. What I am going to suggest if there is no-one else ready to talk, maybe we might take a 10-minute break. I propose to start the meeting again at 12 o'clock. Then I want the other people to talk if they feel they would like to. If they do not want to, there is no pressure on them. After that, if there is no-one wanting to talk, we will close the meeting. We want to give everyone a chance and it is important that we use the time, but if you do not wish to talk, if you are not happy, we can do it privately over a cup of tea, maybe. I will come back here at 12 o'clock, in 10 minutes time,

and we will start the meeting again and see what happens.

Proceedings suspended from 11.45 a.m. to 12.03 p.m.

CHAIR—I understand that Miriam has been selected to speak for a group of people.

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—There are a few groups here that are representing different areas of the Daly River region. For those who do not know who I am, I am Miriam-Rose Baumann. I am president of the council here. I have had a talk to several of the people that have come from far and wide. They want to get to the point of what this meeting is because they do have to travel back to wherever they have come from. I would like for the people who are members of the review to talk about the five points in this paper—to explain to us what the five points are about, briefly, so we can make comments on the points.

CHAIR—Miriam, could you help me? I do not know what paper you mean. Could you explain the paper that you have in your hand?

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—Do you want me to read the points to you?

CHAIR—We do not know what your paper says, so you should tell us what it is.

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—Okay. Reeves made many recommendations but the most important ones are: rights of traditional Aboriginal owners to be transferred to regional land councils; abolition of permit systems for entry to Aboriginal land; breaking up the Central Land Council and the Northern Land Council and replacing them with both regional land councils and a government appointed Northern Territory Aboriginal council; giving the Northern Territory government compulsory acquisition powers to administer the act and ensure that Northern Territory laws overrule Aboriginal law on Aboriginal land; and taking away the royalty payments and giving them to the government appointed Northern Territory Aboriginal council and changing the acts so that all money earned by Aboriginal people for use or development of their land goes to the central fund rather than the owners.

CHAIR—Miriam, could you tell me whose paper that is? Who made that paper?

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—It is called 'Review of the Land Rights Act' and is dated February 1999. Do you want to have a look at it?

CHAIR—Perhaps you could table the paper. James will come over and we will make that an exhibit. It is a paper that was produced by the Northern Land Council and is called a review update of February 1999. Is that right?

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—Yes.

CHAIR—I thought you said it was not. Miriam, this paper will become an exhibit and I will ask my colleagues Mr Melham and Mr Snowdon to move that this paper be included as an exhibit in these proceedings. Thank you, gentlemen.

Miriam, would you like to go ahead now. Miriam, I am told by my secretary that you thought that we would answer questions about this paper. Is that what you are expecting?

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—We would like your explanation of those five points.

CHAIR—Miriam, I have to tell you that the committee is here to listen to the people and what their advice is on what they think of the Reeves report. The committee is not here to explain the Reeves report or to argue that it should or should not be accepted. We are here to listen to your views on it. We are not here to interpret it or to tell you what it means or does not mean. That is for you and your advisers to consider and for you to tell us what you think about it.

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—I will do my best. I have not got the papers in front of me. The permit system, I think, was mentioned in one of those points.

The community that we belong to here at Daly, at Nauiyu community, from the time it began in the 1950s, has never had a permit system going. I think the group that is with me here, sitting in the back, agree that we do not want permit systems. Even if there are permit systems in the neighbouring communities at Peppi, Port Keats and Palumpa, people here have never made a fuss by bringing up the issue of whether you had a permit if you were travelling with non-Aboriginal people.

I am speaking of my experiences. If people were going into Aboriginal land across the river, there was never an issue that was brought up that we had to have a permit if we were being accompanied by non-Aboriginal people. All we are saying is that we support the suggestion that you have recommended. I think it is one of your points as well, isn't it?

CHAIR—Miriam, we are listening to what you are saying. While Miriam is considering her next point, let me explain this to everybody. The committee has not written these recommendations. They have been written by a man called John Reeves. He is a lawyer in Darwin and he wrote this report, called the Reeves report, and he made a number of recommendations.

My committee has not made any of these recommendations. My committee is simply wanting to ask the people of the Northern Territory what they think. Are they a good idea or a bad idea? Do you like some of them? Would you like to change some of them? That is the role that my committee has. We are not here to say, 'It's a great idea. You should accept it,' or, 'It's a bad idea. You should reject it.' We do not have that role. We genuinely want to know what you think. After all, it is your land and you fought for many years to get this land. We respect that and we want to know what you think about the future.

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—So that people can understand how the set-up is here, for a lot of the Aboriginal communities in the Territory, and I suppose Queensland and Western Australia too, just the Top End, I will give you an example. Here at Nauiyu there are about 10 different language groups and dialects living in this community alone. From the Daly River region there are about 14 different languages and dialects and that includes Peppi, Palumpa and Port Keats. Ten of those language groups from that region live here. We know that the Malak Malak/Madngele people are traditional owners of a lot of the areas in

the Daly region itself.

Eddie, who is sitting in front of me with sunglasses on his head, is representing his people and he will talk too. Eddie's family lives here, some of them, in the community and the rest live about 10 kilometres downstream on Wiliana Road. The land that we are living on, or sitting on right now, is owned by the Diocese of Darwin,

A few years ago this land was handed back to the people who are residing here. It was given back to the people of those language groups that I mentioned, the 10 different language and dialect groups that are living here. It includes the Malak Malak/Madngele people of Daly River.

I am speaking for this community. Eddie might want to speak about something else relating to his family. We recognise that there are the traditional owners. In the land that the bishop has given back to this lot of people that live here, Eddie's people have been included.

A lot of the people that are sitting in the back here now are from different traditional homelands and they are on the Aboriginal reserve across the river. In the reserve people have to have permits to travel to those countries belonging to the people sitting here with me. I just want to explain what the situation is. In a lot of the communities that you have visited already there are major language groups living in one community.

CHAIR—Thank you, Miriam. Eddie, would you like to speak now?

EDDIE SHIELDS—I am one of the Maluk Maluk tribe. I live in Darwin but I came down for this meeting. I want to talk about this regional land council Reeves suggested. What Reeves suggested is not really good. He said the regional councils should be taking over Aboriginal land. I think traditional people should look after their land and, if Aboriginal people cannot control their traditional land any more, the land right is dead. That is what I think about this regional council. It is not up to the regional council to organise everything; it is up to the traditional owners because they own the land. That is all I wanted to say.

CHAIR—Thank you, Eddie. Would anyone else like to speak?

JOHN SULLIVAN—I am a Maluk Maluk person also and I live on the other side of the Daly River within the land trust on an out-station. I come here representing about 10 out-stations between the Moyle and the Daly. Every one of those out-stations rejects the Reeves report. It is all right for Miriam to say that she does not want a permit because this place is open here and you do not need permit. You have got a policeman down the road who can protect you. Out where we are, we are isolated. If someone came in and shot us, blew our houses up or burnt everything down, nobody would know unless someone went there for a visit on a long weekend. So the permit system must stay; it has to stay. Without the permit system, we would all be in danger out there from a lot of white extremists. The permit system is what really had me bugged.

The other thing is that the breaking up of the land councils is not a very good idea because there are some land councils in the Northern Territory—the Tiwi Land Council across the strait over here and another one somewhere out on Arnhem Land—that just sit

there. They do not help us with any government issues that are raised. Just the Northern Land Council and Central Land Council get together from time to time and help each other with all the issues. But the smaller ones just sit there and do not worry about what goes on. Therefore, the land councils should not be broken up into a whole lot of little land councils. They should have little regional offices like we have now.

Royalties are to be run by an organisation called the Northern Territory Aboriginal something or other. How will Aboriginal people get that money when it goes through that organisation? We probably will not even see it. We will not even have a say on how to administer it or anything. It will be run by people who do not even understand Aboriginal people. So everything that goes towards committees like yours or the land council is what Nugget Coombs plainly told everyone: it still comes from the bottom; it is a bottom-up federalism. It is like a big triangle, with the Aboriginals down the bottom, a group in the middle, and one man up top. One day we might turn that triangle around the other way but maybe not in our lifetime.

CHAIR—Thank you, John. Mr Quick wants to ask you a question.

Mr QUICK—John, how would you go about turning the triangle upside down? Why can't we do it straightaway? We can recommend anything. Why can't we recommend turning the triangle upside down?

JOHN SULLIVAN—How can Aboriginal people do that when you have white bureaucrats down in Canberra saying, 'You stay down there and we'll tell you what to do.'

Mr QUICK—No, we are here to recommend some action to the minister and the government. We can recommend anything. If you guys say you want the triangle turned upside down, how is that all going to change? Is it going to take five years, 10 years, a year, six months? Are we going to upset everybody in the Northern Territory if we turn the triangle upside down? Anything is possible.

JOHN SULLIVAN—I cannot fully answer that.

Mr QUICK—You mentioned about regionalisation. One of the ways at least of turning part of the triangle upside down is that we recommend that the Northern Land Council and the Central Land Council set up a series of regional offices for every community over, say, 300 people and that each office has to be staffed by six people—get them all out of Alice Springs and Darwin and put them out where you people are. Would that be any good?

JOHN SULLIVAN—I suppose so. That would have to be discussed further.

Mr QUICK—Discussed by the Northern Land Council or your mob?

JOHN SULLIVAN—The grassroots people—the people on the bottom.

Mr QUICK—You mentioned a while ago about Nugget Coombs and things coming up from the bottom. Hopefully, your mob have thought about some of these things. We are here today for you to tell us. Do you want half a dozen people from the Northern Land Council

out here in Daly River on a regular basis instead of your mob having to fly to Darwin all the time and get on the phone and waste money?

JOHN SULLIVAN—There is a regional office that only shifted a few kilometres down from the main office in Darwin. It could have shifted a bit further.

Mr QUICK—Why should it not be out here?

JOHN SULLIVAN—We have talked about that. We have talked about putting it. This talk about a regional office has been going on for a long time—I believe nearly 10 years. They finally put one up at Palmerston.

Mr QUICK—That is not much good to you guys though.

JOHN SULLIVAN—No, we have to travel there.

Mr QUICK—How many people down in this part of the world? A thousand people?

JOHN SULLIVAN—I reckon well over a thousand.

Mr QUICK—Why cannot you have half a dozen people here in a regional office of the Northern Land Council?

EDDIE SHIELDS—The council did not want it here. We asked them to put the regional office here before but the council did not want it here. They said it was too much humbug so it is back in town.

Mr QUICK—It is no good to you guys up in Palmerston though. Why should it not be out here? If you want it, why cannot you have it here? We are talking about what you people want. You people away from the big towns would feel a lot happier surely if you could walk up the street and there is the Northern Land Council, instead of flying as we did 40 minutes from Darwin in a top class plane. God knows how long it takes in the back of a truck. Why should they not be out here?

CHAIR—I think John agrees with that, don't you?

JOHN SULLIVAN—You would probably have to—a lot of people probably got confused with John Howard's 10-point plan with his Wik thing.

Mr QUICK—But Reeves's suggestion to turn the triangle upside down was to divide the Northern Territory into 18 regional councils. That might be fine for you guys out here because you have got a thousand people but some of the mobs are only 125. They are not going to operate, in my mind, as a regional council of 120. A halfway house would be for the Northern Land Council to set up an office out here, surely. Everybody wins. You do not have 18 small councils but you have got regional representation out where your mob is.

JOHN SULLIVAN—I think that is what we want: the regional offices, not a breakaway land council because that weakens the whole system for Aboriginals to have a say if you

have these little land councils. Everything you say in the regional office goes back to the big council and it gets thrashed out there.

Mr QUICK—Would you be happy if some of us, when we sat down and drafted the report, said people in Daly River are happy if they had a regional office out in Daly River rather than being one of 18 regional councils with NTAC on the top?

JOHN SULLIVAN—I do not know what everybody would reckon about that, whether it should be at Port Keats or Daly River.

Mr QUICK—As long as it is out here somewhere. It is a lot better to travel from here to Port Keats or from Port Keats to here.

EDITH PETHERICK—The NLC do not work for the people living in the bush. They do not work for the full-blood Aboriginals. What I think would be a good idea, a lot of people you know—you have got different tribes and you have got the tribal elders who are men. If they run their own country you do not need an NLC of men from different tribes and clans for the full-blood. The man is a boss.

Mr QUICK—So you would rather not have any councils at all and just go back to the old days in the 1950s where the Northern Territory government said, 'We are the boss and you people—

EDITH PETHERICK—The NLC has done a lot of wrong things.

Mr QUICK—I am not here to argue whether they have done the right thing or the wrong thing.

EDITH PETHERICK—I am not arguing.

Mr QUICK—We are here because Reeves said 18 regional councils will solve all your problems.

EDITH PETHERICK—But if you put the full-blood tribal man in there to represent the area and their country, it will work.

CLAUDE NARJIC—What the Northern Land Council is about is for the whole Northern Land Council and Tiwi islands. It is not for individuals and favouring other people, a good friend of his. He should be treated the same as everybody. And now a silly question I am going to ask: can you run a pole from here to the pub with a live wire without stays? Can a people do that, or the Northern Land Council or the government do that? If you put a power line from here to the pub crossing of Daly River, what would happen with the wire in between that line? Go down the ground, eh? It kills people. What we need here is a stay in between. What we are talking about here is that the community have to have somebody, a representative, to be there working for the Northern Land Council and then report back to the Northern Land Council and then to the government, because we have a lot of representatives in the Northern Land Council who do not report back to the Northern Land Council and to the government. That is how the people are not being recognised.

Mr QUICK—That is why we are saying, Claude, that we should have regional representation.

CLAUDE NARJIC—We have representation go to the Northern Land Council meeting every year.

Mr QUICK—But the Northern Land Council office should be out here.

CLAUDE NARJIC—Yes, out in the community here, in every community.

Mr QUICK—Not necessarily every community. I would like to think that at least three or four hundred people—

CLAUDE NARJIC—Yes, but the response to smaller communities as well, say, like Daly River or Port Keats. We are out at Litchfield Park. We need one of the Northern Land Council representatives to be there.

Mr QUICK—But if we got an office of six, for example, in Daly River, it would be easy for them to go out there or for you to come in rather than having to go all the way to Darwin.

CLAUDE NARJIC—Of course. That is what it is.

Mr QUICK—As long as you have got an office and half a dozen out here amongst the mob, they can then go backwards and forwards with no excuse. If you have got a problem, they can come and see you or you can go and see them.

CLAUDE NARJIC—That is right. Nobody is going to leave from Darwin to visit a small community. They just leave it without doing anything else for them. They are ones who suffer.

Mr QUICK—Back where I come from, I represent 80,000 people. They complain to me that I am not out as often as I should be to the little mobs in my electorate, so I understand what you are talking about.

CLAUDE NARJIC—Yes.

Mr QUICK—I have got four people in my office and they help me. The Northern Land Council should be out here with their mob, looking after your concerns.

CLAUDE NARJIC—All right, it is not an argument, but if there were four or maybe two from the different groups living in the community, we can contact them very clearly and ask them about our problem, then to get support back to the big Northern Land Council and then to go to the government in Canberra. Nobody is missing out then.

Mr QUICK—I would like to think that the Northern Land Council have got enough commonsense and vision. I know they are actually doing it now. I do not know what they need in the way of additional resources and bums on seats to actually get people out here,

but I would like to think that if we recommended something like that they would take it up as a matter of urgency.

CLAUDE NARJIC—What we are saying here is that we need that representation in the community, the right person to contact the Northern Land Council and talk to them about it. It is no good just living there for maybe three, four or five years—you are forgetting that person; he is going to be broke or something if he does not own the land any more. But if we just work together, during that time the communications can be clear, open and wider.

EDITH PETHERICK—It is pretty good, that Reeves report. but we do not need Galarrwuy, whatever his name is, dictating to us what we should do.

THEODORA NARNDU—I apologise for having to speak again but I had to rush before when I started to give my history about the Kardu Diminin people. When we read the article about Reeves's idea, the people were shocked. We thought, 'This is no good.' When the people read about his idea the people started to get confused. Everybody was confused about what this was all about because in the triangle we saw that next minute our people were down here, the landowners were down at the bottom. That is an argument we had between our people about the kids. It was confusing when we read Reeves's article and we were not happy with it. That is my knowledge of how the Kardu Diminin landowners saw that.

When we heard that this big meeting was going to take place here, we thought that is good, we can talk about it and ask ourselves if Reeves's idea is a good one or upside down, like that triangle that was mentioned that Joan talked about. That was what I was trying to bring up very clearly. It made our people confused. That is why we have got to start talking about it. When this other mob says they have got to put a land council here, that is another big step we have got to watch ourselves and say, 'If kids do not want that idea, that is another big problem that is going to affect our people.' We have got to be careful of that. We have got to bring our people first and check it out, whether it is going to happen or not. That is another big step and our people have to be aware of that. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you. That was very helpful.

LEON MELPI—I am from Port Keats. I am the community president. I also came here as a traditional landowner. Part of my area is not within Port Keats—that is my mother's land. Kate has a paper there to show you. I am almost on the coastline, just between Kinmu and Nangu. It is somewhere near the coastline on the west side of Maninh. We have got a population of about 2,000 people. On the map you will find that we have got 16 clan groups. We have got Tchindi, the Muthirr people, Thankurrall, Yedirr, Nangu, Thinung, Ngaliwe—it is all in the list there. That is how many people we have got in Port Keats alone. We have got 16 clan groups and seven language groups.

When the mission first came, they took our rights away, and in late 1939 the mission was moved to Wadeye where the existing mission settlement is now. The missionaries never thought about the traditional landowners. They just came in, just as people who explored the land. The main thing I am trying to get at is we should not take the rights of the people's land. As traditional landowners you own the land.

When we read the Reeves report only a few months ago we sought some advice from the Northern Land Council on what it was all about because we did not know what was going on. We had to get the field officers down there to explain what was going on. They talked about traditional ownership and about the five things that were put up, about the regional land council and NTAC—the Northern Territory Aboriginal Council or whatever it is. They talked about the royalties. There was a permit system. There was also compulsory acquisition and NT laws. When Reeves made this report, he only flew to Port Keats for a day, then he went down almost to Central Australia, to part of NT and back to the Arnhem area. That is how the Reeves report came about. When these three things came in, we were all confused.

What I am trying to say is that no-one should take the right of ownership of what the Aboriginal owns. I, as a community president at Port Keats, have to balance with things that are going on there. It is a good thing because we have got a council of elders; we have got a system that has worked for thousands and thousands of years before the mission came. What I am saying is that the report that Reeves made is just out of the question. It really does not fit in with us.

CHAIR—Thank you. Leon, Mr Snowdon wants to ask a question.

Mr SNOWDON—Leon, for the sake of the committee, could you explain how many people live at Port Keats?

LEON MELPI—We have got about 2,000 people. In the age group of about 50 to 60, we have got about 150. In the middle aged group, my group, there are probably about 500 of us. When you come to 25 years and downwards, the population is about 1,300. It is a big population.

Mr SNOWDON—So it is one of the biggest towns in the Northern Territory.

LEON MELPI—It is. Peppimenarti would have about 300 and Palumpa normally about 200 or 300.

Mr SNOWDON—One of the issues which has been discussed a lot has been when a lot of people from other people's country live in one place. Can you explain how it works there?

LEON MELPI—I will get to that now. The Diminin people—I am talking about Dora and Felix Bunduck—are the traditional landowners of Port Keats. From what they have been seeing, they have been run down. Since the mission came in about the late 1930s to the 1970s, these people were run down. They really have not got any say on their land because we have got this other clan group. I fit into that category because that is from my mother's side. I have got my uncles, but I am still an outsider. We really have got 15 clan groups.

Let us not forget we have got these people like those old men over there. Some of his family members are over there. We have got some of these people, family members, from that side as well. We have got a big region from here and back. People have always traded from this site.

The question you are asking was what?

Mr SNOWDON—One of the issues which the committee has been—

LEON MELPI—Right, a lot of the traditional landowners, Kardu Diminin people, are getting fed up with the way they are being treated. I have applied for a subdivision myself. I am trying to move our people out of there. It is just across from there, about three or four kilometres out. It is just a region. That way these people will have peace and quiet and they can have their say over the land. At the moment we have to just keep hammering these people down.

Mr SNOWDON—So that is an issue, the question of the traditional owners for that country and all those other people living there. That affects the rights of those traditional owners. Is that correct?

LEON MELPI—Yes, that is an issue. Yes, it does.

Mr SNOWDON—You have set up a clan leaders thing, haven't you?

LEON MELPI—Yes.

Mr SNOWDON—Can you explain how that works?

LEON MELPI—We have about 59 elders who are representing the clan groups. If you look up what I showed you, each of these elders represents the land. Our people know what we are talking about. If we relate back to before the white people came, we were governed by the law. That is how our people survived.

Mr SNOWDON—So one of the issues for this committee to think about is how you make those two laws work together?

LEON MELPI—In a contemporary world, yes. You have got to lock it in together. But before you can do that we have to sort out the way it fits in. It is like nuts and bolts.

Mr SNOWDON—Is the most important thing, the first thing, the traditional ownership?

LEON MELPI—Yes.

Mr SNOWDON—So that is the most important thing?

LEON MELPI—The most important thing is you have got to relate to who owns that land, the ownership.

Mr SNOWDON—So the central principle, the heart of it, is traditional ownership?

LEON MELPI—That is the one.

CHAIR—Before you go on, you mentioned you tried to do a subdivision but you have

run into problems with it. Who—

LEON MELPI—No, we have not got a problem with it; we have got no problem.

CHAIR—I thought you said you had a problem?

LEON MELPI—No, it is just that we are trying to establish another area where people can move out of there. It will be about mid-July next year, the year 2000, when we will work on that land to develop it.

CHAIR—Is there any problem with doing it?

LEON MELPI—No.

CHAIR—You are happy?

LEON MELPI—We have access to the power lines, sewerage lines and the water lines. We have got no problem with that.

CHAIR—So there is no hold-up?

LEON MELPI—No, there is no hold-up.

CHAIR—Was that decision made by the traditional owners?

LEON MELPI—The decision was made by my people and the traditional owners of Port Keats and the 16 other clan groups.

CHAIR—Did you have to ask the Northern Land Council to agree?

LEON MELPI—No.

CHAIR—You did not have to?

LEON MELPI—I did not have to go through that because I own that land. There was no need to.

CHAIR—That's wonderful. Thank you. I think Felix, a traditional owner, wanted to speak as a traditional owner. Felix, it's your turn.

FELIX BUNDUCK—The traditional owners of Port Keats are okay. Since 1935 we have been growing very quickly on education and things like that. But like this man was saying now, we set up a subdivision over in this place and we are working on it. We have got to get stuck into it and try and build that.

That does not mean causing a problem because he realises he has to develop the traditional owner of the land. Do you understand that? It is just the traditional land, his own land, which means he realised the way to develop his land. That does not mean causing

trouble but, as he said already, 2,000 people now live together. That means he understands how to build his area, just like a bit of a town like this, because a lot of people, now 2,000 people, are over there.

It is the same as some of the other people who are interested in that. They tried to set up another station. We are looking at that way, but the traditional owners never change. It has always been there for generations and generations. It has always been there.

CHAIR—Thank you, Felix. That's good. Is there anyone else who would like to say something? No? I think you are all pretty satisfied with the opportunity you have had. I will just pause for a moment. I want to be sure that everybody has had a chance.

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—I want to get back to the permit system again.

CHAIR—Yes, go on.

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—Actually there are a couple of things. One was setting up the Northern Land Council's office in a region. We have been asked several times to allow that but we have said no, we did not want the Northern Land Council to set up camp in our community. I think Port Keats had a similar situation where they did not want the Northern Land Council to set up an office in their community as well.

Several years ago there were talks about the people in the Daly region wanting to set up their own breakaway council to represent the people in our region. It sort of died a slow death. I suppose they did not want the Northern Land Council set up here because in the land council itself the people who make up the committee represent different areas of the Territory, especially the Top End. They are people who are not familiar.

Even though we might have dark skins, we do not all speak the same language. We do not always do a lot of the things, when it comes to culture and ceremony, that are similar to each other. In some cases people are making decisions on behalf of people that might not be what their needs are for a particular area. There has been confusion on those terms.

In some cases, because they are not sure and have made a decision—this is the Northern Land Council—it has caused different groups of people to end up having disputes over areas. From the experience that different people have had in this region, the Northern Land Council has a habit of confusing people, ending up with people in dispute with each other because there is no understanding of who are the traditional owners of certain areas. They try and keep that as confusing as possible for as long as they can to keep employing their lawyers to sort things out.

CHAIR—Let the record show that there was loud applause—whatever it means. Sorry, Miriam, go ahead.

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—Coming back to the permit systems, I have got a chapter from the Maluk Maluk land claim book. It is chapter 7 and I would like to quote two paragraphs. Some of the things that I am going to quote are from Dr Stanner and they have been recorded in 1993. It says:

The non-Malak Malak/Madngele people resident at Daly River also forage over certain parts of the claim area acknowledged as open for their use. The claimants recognise these interests as legitimate under present conditions. Father Leary—

who founded the Madngella community in the 1950s—

speaks of this recognition as a ‘general permission’:

I’d say there is a general permission, if they go down to Shark Billabong or Kilfoyle or Red Lily here but a lot of them do remember the Malak Malak names. They’ll often give you the Malak Malak word. These are non-Malak Malak people—

that is referring to us—

but they’ll give you the Malak Malak word for the area.

As a last paragraph, again from this chapter from 1933, Stanner said:

The Madngella, for instance, are said to have had with other tribes complete right of access to the river through Mulluk Mulluk territory.

I have spoken to a lot of the old people who are sitting here with me—and I am sure it would be the same with the old people in front of us. If people wanted to forage on another tribal area, they did not need permission to hunt. It was always an open area and access was open to anyone, whether or not they were neighbouring language groups visiting another language group area to hunt and forage. I have even read the same thing from Justice Toohey: everyone had right of access to anybody’s land.

Just recently, there has been mention of people being influenced by missionaries—non-Aboriginal people from outside. The Northern Land Council has been influencing people in communities, telling them that they have to get a lease from the Northern Land Council ‘so that little bit of land belongs to you only’. It might be a husband and wife and children type of situation. My understanding of land is that, if my traditional homeland is on the Moyle River, I belong to that area. I do not own that land by myself. It is owned by other members of my language group. If anyone wanted to go and hunt on that land, I would not stop them from going there. This was always the issue, ever since Aboriginal people existed on this land. I will ask this question again to the people in front. Is there any chance of you lot talking to us about these five points here later on?

CHAIR—We are listening to you; we want you to tell us what you think.

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—Why can’t you talk to us about them?

CHAIR—We are listening to you. Over lunch we will be able to have a talk together.

MIRIAM-ROSE BAUMANN—We are not getting anywhere here.

CHAIR—This is for your people to talk to us and tell us what you think.

EDDIE SHIELDS—John Reeves should be in this meeting to listen to what we are

saying, instead of hiding behind the door. He is the one who has done everything wrong. He should be here listening today to what all these people are saying.

CHAIR—All this evidence is going to be on the record and it will be published. You can get a copy and every other Australian can get a copy, too.

EDDIE SHIELDS—Everybody is saying that he should be here himself.

CHAIR—This committee is not Mr Reeves's committee. We are a committee of the Australian parliament. We are here because the government, the minister, asked us to come and ask you for your ideas and your advice on those recommendations. That is what today is all about. You can take up with Mr Reeves, if you want, your own feeling about that.

Mr SNOWDON—Can I perhaps help Eddie and Miriam as well. Miriam, it is not our job, unfortunately, because we might have different views. The committee does not have a position on any of the issues. As individuals, we can give you our views about anything but, as a committee, we cannot because we have not made any decisions about any of those subjects. If you were to ask the chairman to tell you about those five points, he would give you his opinion. You could ask me and I could give you my opinion. But this committee does not have an opinion. That is why it is difficult for the chairman to answer your question. I understand the point about Mr Reeves. The responsibility for explaining the Reeves report is not this committee's. The responsibility for explaining the Reeves report is with Mr Reeves and the government. That is their job, not ours.

CLAUDE NARJIC—We were talking about putting our officers in various communities. There may be too many officers for another land council. But we will play a different way of doing it. I am going to ask questions of the committee. Would it be right for the community to call somebody from the Northern Land Council to come to that person, to that community?

CHAIR—You can always ask your Northern Land Council representatives to visit you. They do; I know that. That is something that you could do.

CLAUDE NARJIC—Thank you. We are getting to that now.

Mr QUICK—It is just like asking Warren, your federal member, to come out here and see you. If you ask him and he does not come, he is in your bad books.

CLAUDE NARJIC—I do not mean the federal. We are not talking about federal. We are talking about the Northern Land Council. It is their job to come to the community.

Mr QUICK—That is right. Just ask them. If they do not come—

CLAUDE NARJIC—Can we change the rules? I am asking the committee to revise the rule on visits. This is a call from the community to the Northern Land Council to visit them for a period of time.

CHAIR—You can make that as a suggestion. If I understand you correctly, you would

like the rules to be written so that, if a community like this one in the Northern Land Council area wanted to have a meeting with the Northern Land Council, it could request that meeting and the Northern Land Council would come and meet with that community. Is that what you are asking us to recommend?

CLAUDE NARJIC—That is what I am asking. I am asking the same thing as John Sullivan: an upside down triangle. The flattened part of the upside down triangle is the community. It does not go out to the Northern Land Council. That is what I meant.

CHAIR—Okay. That is a good suggestion. Thank you for that. The committee will certainly give that a lot of consideration.

CLAUDE NARJIC—The person's name and everything will then be on the record, and the local council will support that person to call the Northern Land Council and ask for three or four people to come in and visit that area instead of building an office.

CHAIR—Yes. That is a good suggestion. Congratulations; that is a good idea.

Mrs DRAPER—Can I pick up with you, Miriam, the upside down triangle that John brought up earlier and that a lot of you are starting to refer to. I am picking up that perhaps you do not necessarily want a Northern Land Council office here to represent the local people. Would some of you be happier with a local Daly River regional council to represent you at grassroots level, going from the bottom and turning the triangle around? Can I hear from Miriam, Claude and even John and Eddie what they think about a local community council in the Daly River region?

EDDIE SHIELDS—If they want the thing—and you have a group here from the Daly—each member should be representing their land. They should pick one council member to go to the full council meeting. They have Jimmy here, but Jimmy cannot represent the lot. The people who come from the out-stations should be representing their country—not one person doing it for them. That is why all this is happening. If you get people from each region, from each community and from each out-station, they should all be elected and go to the full council meeting—every one of them. They should be there and listening to what is being talked about—their land, their country, their culture. They should be there.

Mr SNOWDON—Eddie, there is a regional council now, is there not? Has the Northern Land Council got a regional council based in this region?

EDDIE SHIELDS—Yes.

Mr SNOWDON—That might help us if you can explain what that is.

EDDIE SHIELDS—We have a regional council, but the Daly River has an out-station out there. They should have more from the out-station representing the country. Jimmy No. 2 is an original council member, but they should get at least another two, three or four to represent their country to make it a regional thing.

CLAUDE NARJIC—No, Eddie. I was talking about the regionals, but the regional

council is up in Darwin. But, individually, a person in trouble may have a problem in his area and may want to make a complaint to the Northern Land Council—this is a routine check—so maybe the Northern Land Council could come up just for the day and talk to that person about his problem. That is what I meant. That person could give the problem to the person from the Northern Land Council when he visited the community. He could take it back to the office and then make a complaint to the regional council. It is individuals here, the individual person. Every one of us here now has a country, a land, but we do not combine; we are separate. The person may be looking back and thinking, ‘Who is going to help me?’ If the family do not want to help him, maybe he thinks he had better get the Northern Land Council to help him out. Do you or don’t you see what I mean?

CHAIR—If anyone else wants to comment, that is all right.

EDITH PETHERICK—I think what Eddie means is that you have the tribes and you have different clans in that tribe. What he must mean is every man elder out of that tribe, the boss of that clan. Our boss is this old man here, and I have another uncle at Port Keats. He means that the representative for that council and regional areas should be elected. They should not depend on the NLC in there. The NLC should be out with the people living in the bush.

Mr QUICK—Eddie, why can you not do it now? Who is telling you that you cannot?

EDITH PETHERICK—The NLC controls everybody.

Mr QUICK—No, no-one controls anybody in this country. If you want to have a meeting—

EDITH PETHERICK—They do not want to listen. For 24 years the NLC has never listened to us. There are buddies helping buddies in there. They are feathering their own nest. There needs to be an inquiry into it.

Mr QUICK—I would like to think that, in this country, if Eddie’s scheme has validity and all the rest of the people are interested in what he is on about, it is just a matter of contacting everybody and saying, ‘Let’s have a meeting.’ No-one in this country is going to say you cannot. That is ridiculous.

EDITH PETHERICK—It is dictated.

Mr QUICK—Rubbish! ‘It is dictated.’ That is a load of rubbish. It is not.

JOAN GROWDEN—My brother, Raymond Petherick, is a representative in the Darwin-Daly region. He actually represents this area. He would like to see an office set up somewhere in the Daly region—maybe in this community or somewhere else—have all the different tribal clan groups represented at that office and then for someone like my brother to take the information back to the main Northern Land Council and speak on behalf of all the people who are represented at that regional office. He should be here this afternoon to explain that situation to all of you.

CHAIR—Thank you. I think we have covered the topic pretty well. I believe we have the opinions of everybody here today. I am now going to thank you all on behalf of the committee for joining us today in the meeting. You have made a strong case that your local voice needs to be heard and listened to. That has come through to me very strongly. You want to see your local traditional owners and families and communities heard and listened to and you want us to think about that.

We will do our very best for you. We have some more hearings in Canberra. By the end of August, we hope to be able to finish our report to the minister and parliament, then you will receive a copy as well. The minister has to make his mind up on the basis of our efforts and what we have heard from you.

I emphasise again that we all come from different political parties but are all very deeply concerned to make sure that anything we say in our report respects your rights. You have fought very hard to achieve your land and to get your land back. We, in this committee, will do our very best to make sure that what you have fought hard for is protected.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 1.18 p.m.

