COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

MONDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2000

K A L G O O R L I E

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Wednesday, 1 November 2000

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, Ms Hoare, Mr Lieberman, Mr Lloyd, Mr Melham, Mr Quick, Mr Snowdon and Mr Wakelin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The present and ongoing needs of country and metropolitan urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Among other matters, the Committee will consider:

1. the nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians, including ways to more effectively deliver services considering the special needs of these people;
2. ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements;
3. the situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas, especially relating to health, education, employment, and homelessness (including access to services funded from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program);
4. the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including, where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged;
5. opportunities for economic independence in urban areas; and
6. urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties associated with urban areas.

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WITNESSES

Committee met at 11.01 a.m.

WYATT, Mr Brian, Director, Goldfields Land Council

CHAIR—I declare open this public meeting of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As many people would know, the committee has started this inquiry because the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, the Hon. Senator John Herron, has asked us to seek people's views about the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. This is the first of a series of meetings. We are very pleased to be able to start our inquiry in Kalgoorlie. We want to consult as widely as possible with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and we will be holding hearings in other states and territories with the view to reporting next year.

I would like to particularly welcome Mr Brian Wyatt who is representing the Goldfields Land Council. Brian, thank you very much for assisting us this morning by bringing forward your position in the program. On a formal matter, although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, it is, of course, clearly understood that all witnesses before the committee are involved in legal proceedings of the Commonwealth parliament and false or misleading evidence is a serious matter that may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. *Hansard* records will be taken today and they will, of course, be available to the public and to you, Brian. Before we ask questions, would you like to make an opening statement about your organisation's interest in this matter?

Mr Wyatt—Yes, Mr Chairman, I just want to make a couple of points. The first point is that obviously the Goldfields Land Council is the representative body under the Native Title Act in the Goldfields area. We cover an area from just south of Wiluna through to Esperance in the south, across to the border to Eucla in a sort of L shape, with a 'transline' out to Cosmo Newbery in the east. It is an L shape in our Goldfields area. We have just regained representative body status. We went through the process with the minister. That is the first thing I want to point out to you about the Goldfields Land Council.

I am involved in a number of community organisations, particularly here in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, which raises a whole range of other issues in terms of the land council's position. I would like to comment on that. I understand there is a cut-off point of 13 October for formal submissions to be received by the committee. It is my hope that we will submit one. I wanted to clarify that matter. I received a letter—the same letter received by everybody else—dated 12 September. I wanted to make sure that that was still part of the process. We will be lodging, on behalf of the land council, a formal submission by that due date. That is all that I wanted to say by way of opening comments.

CHAIR—You have a pretty extensive workload, Brian, having regard to all of those interests that you have.

Mr Wyatt—Particularly with youth, and that is a fairly topical issue at the moment in Kalgoorlie-Boulder. I am Chairman of the Maku Basketball Association here in Kalgoorlie, which fields 12 teams in the wider community competition in the Kalgoorlie-Boulder Basketball Association—under 17s. We are probably the largest participating club at junior level. We are making inroads for our kids to take the next step—not just to be insular in their

own community but to broaden them out so that there is a more competitive spirit in the community. That is another level that I am involved in. I am also a member of the committee which runs the stadium contained in this building that you are visiting at the moment. It overflows with those kids as well. I am not just involved in sport and those other activities; I am also involved in what goes on outside those hours, up to the wee hour of one o'clock in the morning, which is something I want to talk about a little later.

CHAIR—Were you called out on Saturday night?

Mr Wyatt—I was in the street. I make it a point to be out there observing the activity. I was one of the organisers of last week's events. As part of this organisation, we run Goldfields Aboriginal Week, and what happened on Saturday night reflected a normal function. In terms of behaviour and police response, I compare that function to Kalgoorlie Cup Day. I compare it to Kalgoorlie-Boulder speedway on a normal Wednesday night or Friday night. I compare it to the Kalgoorlie-Boulder grand final this year, between mines and railways.

I want to point out something very clearly about Saturday night. It seems to have created a bit of a headline today in the local *Kalgoorlie Miner*, which is very negative about the events that occurred throughout the week. They were probably the largest crowds that have ever participated in Goldfields Aboriginal Week. Last Monday, in excess of 500 or 600 people marched, and attended St Barbara's Square to acknowledge Aboriginal Week. There was a picture of the mayor and one of our key Aboriginal people raising a flag on the day. For the first time in history, the city of Kalgoorlie-Boulder has flown the Aboriginal flag in this city. With respect to the size of the newspaper article, it got a little page, a little clip, a little story—almost the same size as the article in today's newspaper about the event that happened on Saturday night.

Those are some of the difficulties I want to talk about in terms of urban dwelling Aboriginal people. Prior to my current employment, I was a senior public servant with the Aboriginal Affairs Department. We undertook a survey in that department on racism in Kalgoorlie-Boulder. I can assure you the figure was in excess of 70 per cent. That report has not been released publicly. The state Aboriginal Affairs Department has that report. That is the sort of thing that the community and others need to read in order to view how Aboriginal activities in this area are portrayed.

I must point out that the police were exemplary in their behaviour on Saturday night. It was the best I have ever seen police behave in a situation that I would not say was highly volatile but that could easily have gone that way. You know what happens when there are large crowds and the influences of alcohol and the like—it could easily have gone the other way, bearing in mind the ongoing relationship between police and Aboriginal people here in Kalgoorlie-Boulder. But the police were very good. I sat for nearly two hours out on the street just watching, observing how they were managing it, and they did a very good job. The crowd broke up, away they went. There is nothing wrong with 230 people going off down the street to a nightclub or a hotel which is open. I would compare that to Kalgoorlie Cup day: after the races were finished there were nearly a thousand people walking down the street heading to the hotels. So it is not a specific little incident that should be pinged or highlighted about how Aboriginal people behave in this region particularly. I think that report did us an injustice, quite frankly.

CHAIR—Some of my colleagues may not have had time to read the paper this morning. There is a report in today's paper of some incidents on Saturday night. I did not want to make a big thing of it, Brian, so please do not misunderstand the purpose of the question. I am interested to know whether the organisation of that night involved non-indigenous people as well as indigenous people. Was there some sort of joint planning committee?

Mr Wyatt—No. Aboriginal Week is run by the Eastern Goldfields Aboriginal Advancement Council, which tenders out activities during the week to different people. It was an Aboriginal event at the Railway Institute Hall. Normally it is held here but people said, 'We want something closer to the inner city area,' so we said we would try something different for a change. We have tried it and there was obviously a large gathering. I am making it a big issue because I want to link it to a couple of other points that I want to raise.

CHAIR—Sure, link them by all means.

Mr Wyatt—Something that we want to put across is that the relationship between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people in Kalgoorlie-Boulder is a huge problem here. If I can just go over some of the issues, obviously a land council has got to talk about native title, and that is what we do. There was a huge uproar, which ultimately led to Wik and the amendments, based on what was happening here in the Goldfields—a lot of it was generated from here. We had something like 88 claims over an area that, as I mentioned, is quite a large area, but it is still a lot of claims; and in one particular area there were 22 claims over that area where all the families were almost related and interlinked and so on. That did not engender good relationships between industry, ourselves, pastoralists and non-Aboriginal people because everyone saw it as a quick grab, money opportunity in terms of the right to negotiate.

But what has happened possibly since Wik is that 88 claims have been brought down to 10 that we manage today and, in that, a whole range of issues have been addressed. There are still some isolated claims that we do not handle which are still sitting off us. But the political environment has been fairly heavy and fairly hectic in terms of relationships, of how people view what Aboriginal people were attempting to do with their native title claims. And it just spills onto a whole range of things so that people sit there and compare.

People say, 'You're only interested in this for money. You're only making a claim for money.' When you make a claim, you get a right to negotiate—so what the hell are you going to negotiate with? It is on top of your claim process, so all these other opportunities come with it in terms of how good you are in your negotiations. I believe there is a little bit of misinformation and misunderstanding of what the right to negotiate meant and what it should have been. Yes, there were some opportunists who took the quick fix, and away they went. But overall I would say that, in terms of what we do today, a golden opportunity has gone begging, to say the least, over their right to negotiate, because people were not ready for it and companies did not appreciate or understand very clearly the plight of Aboriginal people in this area. They see them every day and we know that development occurs regularly, but there is really no understanding of the true position of how Aboriginal people are situated in society out here in the goldfields.

I will give you the example of education. We are in the 90 per cent bracket of students at risk for dropping out of school. I do not know how that compares with other areas around this state.

I say that as having been the Chairperson of the Eastern Goldfields Senior High School ASSPA Committee for two years, so I had access to those details in terms of figures. I was on the student risk committee here in Kalgoorlie. From that point the relationships just get worse and worse as we go along.

Mr QUICK—How do you resolve those? I was here a couple of years ago and there were some Aboriginal kids wandering the streets. One of our committee members said, 'Why are you kids out of school?' and they virtually said, 'Stick it up your jumper.' What do we do to address the whole education issue? To my mind, as an ex-teacher—and I have worked in some bloody terrible areas in Australia with disadvantaged and dysfunctional white kids—you have to put some structures in place and get the parents and the kids on side through a whole lot of innovative programs that are properly funded and resourced. You need your best teachers, not your worst teachers. Is that happening here? If it isn't, what do we do about it? They are your future, aren't they? They are you.

Mr Wyatt—Of course they are. Since 1972 I have been actively involved in Aboriginal affairs at different levels. Yes, there has been change—it has drifted through—but we go through cycles. At the moment primary school is probably the best it has ever been from year 1 to year 7. The relationship between teachers, kids and performance in the goldfields is very good. Where remedial action has been taken in individual cases, like at East Kalgoorlie Primary School, it has been a complete success because of how they have gone about taking a specific task by saying, 'Okay, there is a certain element of the Aboriginal community having difficulty fitting into school and we have to address that.' They have done that very well.

What is happening now is that in high school kids are coming from completely dysfunctional families. I have gone public just recently saying that the responsibility for how the kids are behaving now is parents'. So I am not shirking for one moment blame for parents; parents do have a responsibility. Another infamous incident is the Ditch here in Kalgoorlie—in Adeline, a suburb just next door to us—where kids gather until all hours of the night. At 2 o'clock in the morning you will see kids as young as 10 and 11 sitting in the Ditch just talking and gathering. In a couple of cases there would be one or two who would be under the influence of alcohol or one or two with drugs. Enough was enough when I saw the terror on the faces of the kids that night. I have been accused of being gutless and, recently, of not getting my hands dirty over kids by, of all people, the truant officer. I had attacked the education department truant officer in terms of a government service, rather than Mr X, truant officer in the education department.

In terms of government services, for that week there should have been 260 Aboriginal kids at high school. They battled to make 60. So where the hell were these other kids? That was all I was asking. So, of course, I got the stick about picking on somebody for not doing their job. But what happened then is that I analysed what those kids were doing. They come from dysfunctional families, so I got stuck into the families saying, 'Come on, we've got to stop this,' because of the sheer fear of the 24 kids being arrested by nearly 20 cops. It was just incredible. These kids were just terrified. Little 10-year-olds and 11-year-olds were just sitting there and they said, 'All we're doing here is just sitting here talking.' This was after another guy had been assaulted in the area and the police were called on to step up activities to cut down on crime in the area. They said they had to get rid of the criminal element in Adeline! The criminal element happens to be the kids that live in Adeline, so if you get rid of them out of Adeline, where the hell would you take them to? There was this overreaction and on came the action onto the kids.

Out of that we looked at it and thought, 'What the hell, we can't allow this to go on. It has got to stop.'

I took one of the kids home after I had bailed 24 of them out that night; we got them out and took them home. I had three attempts to get one kid home to a bed that night. First he went to his grandmother's; nobody was home. I said to him, 'Why don't you go home?' He said, 'No, mum's not home. Take me to aunty so-and-so.' I took him there; nobody was home. I took him up to the next street and the third time I was lucky. I found another aunty and the kid went in.

What happened from that was I thought to myself, 'This is madness. Where are these people? What are they doing?' It really set in then what was happening: people are gambling. How does a 14- to 16-year-old kid get alcohol? Some kids are being served alcohol at liquor stores. Kids are high as kites on speed or, you name it, whatever they are on. Where are they getting it from? There are any number of houses in their immediate area that supply them. I thought to myself, 'If you get rid of the criminal element, are we going to chase 10- and 11-year-old kids out of Adeline?' So where is the criminal element?

I have put it to the police. I have spoken to the shire people and said, 'We've got to fix this.' The only two people who can immediately fix it are police and shire. People say, 'What is the Aboriginal community doing?' This building here, for example, runs after-school activity, school holiday activities and programs through the whole process to deal with the issue of these kids and that is okay until it is time to go home. When they go home that is when all the problems start. That is the sort of thing I am looking at in terms of saying, 'How do we tackle that?'

Most of these people live in a suburb that is just boxes, just houses. One little park at the end of the suburb has got a basketball net. It is overtaxed. The difficulty with that was that an Aboriginal kid got assaulted and stabbed with a knife. It took two or three days for some action to be taken about that incident. Yet when the pensioner was assaulted, the police acted immediately.

Mr QUICK—Are there indigenous police in Boulder-Kalgoorlie?

Mr Wyatt—This is the other issue I am going to get to in terms of how services are provided. Every service provided at the moment is between nine and five or whatever the normal working day hours are. The Aboriginal police liaison officer is rostered on during the day. All the activities start from six onwards and go until 2 o'clock in the morning. The only people on at that time are police and one or two volunteers. That is the real issue. That is the problem. There is nothing around the clock to deal with these kids or these family groups in that area. When I raised this business about truancy and the comments made by the truant officer, the district superintendent raised a point and said, 'What do I do with a couple of kids?' and one of the kids he named was one of the kids I tried to take home three times.

I said, 'Your schools are not working for this type of kid because he's not ready to go to school. He doesn't have breakfast in the morning. He doesn't even sleep in his own bed. He doesn't even see his mother. So you've got no chance of teaching this kid at school. We've got to sit down to target specific things. One of the options would be buying Hampton Hill Station just down the road here, about 20 minutes drive, and we'll take him to school on a bus from

here in and out of Kalgoorlie.' He has got to get out of what is here. It is not working for him here.

CHAIR—So he would live on the station?

Mr Wyatt—Not necessarily.

CHAIR—I am just trying to work out the connection with buying it.

Mr Wyatt—The idea is that we have to take him away from where he is to work out what we do with him.

CHAIR—So he would live there for a time?

Mr Wyatt—Possibly, yes. Those sorts of things need to happen. The other thing is that immediately they need a drop-in shelter where kids can just come in and drop in. There was a vacant house at one of these streets in the ditch, and the house has just slowly been pulled apart, bit by bit, piece by piece. It is boredom. The kids have got nothing to do.

CHAIR—When did all this trouble start? Has it been going on for decades?

Mr Wyatt—Yes. We are talking generational shifts now.

Ms HOARE—Talking about the situation you are describing, do we say that it is too late for mum? Are you saying that we need to get the kid out of this situation? Are you saying that we have to concentrate on this young generation now because it is too late for their parents?

Mr Wyatt—In some cases, yes; I would not say in all. In the case of the young kid I was talking about a moment ago where you cannot find him a bed for the night on a given night, I think his entire family has got to be rehabilitated, not just him. I do not know how you do that. I am looking for answers and asking the questions. At the end of the day, we end up with the results of those breakdowns.

CHAIR—How big is this problem? Is it one or two per cent of the junior Aboriginal population? I am trying to get a snapshot.

Mr Wyatt—I have not got down to those sorts of figures yet in terms of that. When you start to link it into categories, we have an education problem, a juvenile crime problem, an alcohol problem and a drug problem. All of a sudden you find that it is practically the same kids across the board.

CHAIR—But in defence of Aboriginal people, it is not all young Aboriginal kids, or is it? Are you saying that it is in this community?

Mr Wyatt—No, I am not saying that at all. My role in terms of what I do as a director of the GLC, which is the representative body that incorporates a whole range of activities, is primarily a responsibility for the Aboriginal people. Therefore, I have to do everything in whatever way I

can to raise the issue so that the Aboriginal people and their concerns are addressed. Right now the greatest concern we have got out here are these kids. Whatever we are doing in terms of economic development or improving our standard of living or our housing, it is going to miss these kids—goodbye, they are gone. We are not going to grab them. They are not going to get it.

CHAIR—I agree that it has to be addressed, but what about talking up the very proud young Aboriginal people, of whom you would know many in this community, and their achievements? Pardon me for coming in on this angle, but in a limited time often you have to focus on something to get a response on a very important issue. Why is it that we do not hear about the many fine young Aboriginal people of Kalgoorlie who are doing great things? Why is it that we only hear about the tragic ones, which admittedly we do have to hear about?

Mr Wyatt—With Kalgoorlie, everything revolves around the economy of the region. It is very hard to grab headlines and promote things. It is industry dominated. Industry powers on; that is the nature of the beast and I accept that. It is very difficult, if you are not a participant or a player, to promote activities and all the good things that are going on. It is very difficult to do that.

CHAIR—I understand that. It is the same with my community. There is a big juvenile alcohol problem amongst non-indigenous kids in a city that I represent—Wangaratta. If you go to the outpatients of the major hospital on a Saturday night, it is full of kids who have been imbibing to an extraordinary degree.

Mr Wyatt—Again, in terms of activities that are going on, in terms of promotion, getting involved and providing services to Aboriginals, so much is left to so few. You will find in lots of cases it is the same people doing much of the work in the areas in which it has to be done. That is one of the problems as well. We just do not have the network systems to keep pushing kids through. The year before last, we had two kids finish year 12 here in Kalgoorlie.

CHAIR—Out of how many of that age group in Kalgoorlie?

Mr Wyatt—I would be guessing as to figures.

CHAIR—Have a stab.

Mr Wyatt—You are probably looking at about 20 or 25 per cent. The year before, there were only five and I think the year before there was the highest ever number—I think it was 12. We just never get to that. But in terms of sporting achievements, yes, that happens. Individuals go off and become champions in their chosen sport.

CHAIR—Will you have some strategies, Brian, in your submission? I appreciate this is a preliminary discussion; it has been very good of you to come and talk to us so early in the piece. We are not asking for definitive stuff from you today; that would be unfair. In your submission, when you give it to us, will you have some specific proposals? For example, should there be a case management model introduced to help, say, a family that has been identified because both mum and dad are not doing the right thing by themselves or their children? Are you going to come forward with specific target programs such as a case management situation?

Mr Wyatt—Yes, we will. Unfortunately, Mr Tucker is not here. He is out at Kurrawang.

CHAIR—Yes. He apologised, I think.

Mr Wyatt—He would give you an insight into how that community which is so near to Kalgoorlie survives and what it does. That is probably the kind of model we would be looking at—I am not saying it is the model. When we look at this region, at one point there were fairly traditional people, and mission people. Some of those missions were fairly basic in terms of their facilities, and in lots of cases people still lived traditionally even within missions. From that, we stuck them in a box in town, alongside Mr and Mrs Average. They are expected to send their kid to the school, they are expected to run to the shop. They are expected to do everything—get a job, work, work, work. We expected that to happen. It did not happen here. It happened in one or two situations, but generally, in terms of having a greater impact, you cannot say it has been a success.

What I am saying is: okay, it did not work that time; we have got to back off and look at what can work. I think we should look at the sorts of things that I raised with the district superintendent from the Education Department. I said to him, 'You've got to try something different at school; you've got to buy another type of school for these kids.' I am not talking about the old project orientated approach—in the past, people attacked it as being a second-rate education and so on. We have come a long way with education. I noticed in the literacy and numeracy tests that a couple of the schools in this region have come up tops. We are really coping with that sort of thing to a degree now. But people have fallen out of that, too. It is fairly broad. We are not just talking about Kalgoorlie; we can talk about Leonora, Laverton—to a lesser degree, because there is quite a bit going on in Laverton—and Esperance. People are not quite fitting into what everyone sees as a normal family lifestyle.

CHAIR—Brian, difficult though it is to achieve, isn't the core responsibility that of the traditional families—the families of our current indigenous brothers and sisters? Isn't there something in that? Governments can and must continue to do all they can—there is no question about that. But governments are a poor substitute for the family taking the supreme role in dealing with serious situations. Where are we at? What are we going to do? Are we going to keep pouring money into programs to get the outcomes that we have heard about. We come to Kalgoorlie and meet a guy like you who pours his heart out about the tragic things occurring here. When are we going to turn it around? Shouldn't we focus more on the family?

Mr Wyatt—I do not think it is a fairly easy thing to turn around.

CHAIR—It has got to be turned around, though.

Mr Wyatt—I accept that. But I think it is not as easy as turning the switch on and turning the switch off like we did in 1967—all of a sudden we are citizens. Bang! And then you are expected to cope with whatever citizenship brings you.

CHAIR—God, Queen and country, and all that.

Mr Wyatt—That is right. Yet, from that point on, things just seemed to step up a notch in terms of what was not happening or what could happen with different views. An Aboriginal

perspective of what should be happening is a lot different from a non-Aboriginal person, and that is the subtle difference in terms of it being imperative to send your kid to school if you want them to have a job and to own their own home. We drum that into our kids day in, day out—

CHAIR—And not live your life out until the day you are buried on welfare. That is the reality.

Mr Wyatt—That is right. That sort of ideology—I do not know what else you could call it—has not quite set in with Aboriginal people. It is not quite there. I look at all the programs and all the projects that we have been able to negotiate through our discussions over the years with industry for training programs and job opportunities. We always fall back. In some cases people set some fairly ambitious targets, and hopefully that gets them back to a reasonable level, but very rarely do they have a huge success. We can have a company come out here and say quite openly, 'We have an indigenous employment policy. We will employ 105 people on our project.' And everybody lauds that. It is a fabulous concept; it is a great idea. But we cannot make even 20 people full-time employed because of all the other things that just will not go along with it. People will work seven or eight weeks, get a bit of money in their pockets and say, 'Jingos, that's all right. I don't have to work for the next couple of weeks or months.' Of course, the work ethic principles then come in: you do not front up, out you go, mate. That sort of thing is still not in there. It has not set in yet. It is probably going to take a few more years for that to turn around and develop. We are not talking about a section or part of the Aboriginal community; we are talking across the Aboriginal community. My kids have difficulty getting jobs.

CHAIR—How many kids have you got, Brian?

Mr Wyatt—I have four. They have problems getting jobs. Every one of them went to year 12. One of them is a university student and still has difficulty finding jobs.

CHAIR—What degree did he do?

Mr Wyatt—It is a daughter. She is doing theatre, arts. She wants to be an actor.

CHAIR—She chose a tough one. That is why I gave up music: I knew I could not make a living.

Mr Wyatt—She is still doing it.

CHAIR—I am only joking.

Mr Wyatt—I know you are. The point is, though, that even at that level it is still difficult for people to get jobs and to be treated on their merit or whatever. We still have to lean on the old network system to get jobs: 'I know so-and-so; I will ring him up: "Hey mate, can you do me a favour?"' I do not know if that is life but I think it is part of it. I think also that, if you want to be open and competitive, it is fairly tough for an Aboriginal person out there on the ground to do that.

CHAIR—Because they lack experience?

Mr Wyatt—There is a whole range of other issues. The work force is competitive, so you have to be competitive; there is a whole range of things.

CHAIR—Hopefully, as we go around Australia over the next few months, this inquiry can identify whether there are barriers to the employment of an Aboriginal person who has been able to become educated. What they are and what needs to be done to overcome them could be one of our targets.

Mr QUICK—I know that some of the schools in Australia are now emphasising sporting skills, so these schools are basing their education on excellence in sporting achievement. If you are good at cricket, softball or whatever it is, you go to specific schools and part of your education is an addendum to your obvious sporting achievements. So has any thought been given to saying to kids, 'Okay, you're going really well in primary school,' and to start targeting and identifying kids? Football is an example. It is the thought of using some skilled kids and saying, 'We'll focus on having an indigenous football school.' You then say to the kids, 'Your health is one of the key determinants of you maximising your skill potential,' so you are into nutrition and so on. You can then get some indigenous ex-footballers who are role models to get the kids into the system. For example, with the AFL draft score, they have to go through a whole series of things. At the moment there are some kids that I know going through a training camp. We have not got to that stage yet.

You have this building here that my electorate would kill for. How do you maximise what you are doing through sporting achievements? You say to the kids, 'Sitting down in the Ditch is going to be a negative for the potential you've got here.' There is Cathy tonight, there is Nova, there is Kyle van der Kuyp and a whole lot of others. The kids have the potential. How do we maximise it? By doing something different with their education system, something way out of left field that we have not done at the moment. We say to these kids, 'Stay on,' but part of the staying on is this: 'We'll support you by putting buses on to bus you. Don't stay in the Ditch until 2 o'clock in the morning because that is going to be a detrimental impact on you being the best netballer, softballer or basketballer in the goldfields or the best footballer in the goldfields with the potential for an AFL career.' How do we get that over?

Mr Wyatt—As usual, it is resources. It is always resources.

Mr QUICK—But the bags of money are there through a whole lot of changes, aren't they?

Mr Wyatt—Perhaps.

Mr QUICK—That is if you can sell that vision.

Mr Wyatt—Sure. There are a couple of examples of that happening here. Let us take the independent school. It is run by the only organisation that runs independent schools in the region, CAPS. That is the model they operate on at Wongatha farm in Esperance. It is about taking an interest and then educating kids within that interest, and they have been reasonably successful at it. How you judge success is another question. People say, 'How many people have you churned out with what qualifications?' The fact of the matter is that they have a fairly

high participation rate. Kids go to school. They come from all over the state to go to it. So, yes, that is sort of there and, like I said, it is a pity Mr Tucker is not here, because he is the main person who runs those schools.

What has happened here in Kalgoorlie to some degree is that people have deliberately taken their kids out of the current system and gone to Coolgardie because they feel more comfortable and they see some hope in terms of the principles that they are trying to adopt there. I think we have to do a lot more of that. I agree with you in that sense. You are right in that sporting activities can open up all sorts of doors. The opportunities are there. As for the resources factor, we have youth workers coming out of our ears in Kalgoorlie. Every organisation has one and some agencies or government departments have a couple, so they are everywhere. But they are not working together, jelling together, properly; they are all over the place. If you sit down and talk to an agency, you will find that they say, 'Our criteria are this and we go down this track.' It is the same old story; you must hear it everywhere you go.

Mr QUICK—But we are only talking about 30,000 people in this neck of the woods. It is not a hell of a lot of people.

Mr Wyatt—A lot of people are involved with kids, I can assure you. We have got youth committees coming out of our ears. We have got the resources for those things just everywhere. What I would like to look at is that, at some point, we have got to have these special task force type operations to actually tackle the problems to work out then what to do with them. At the moment we throw resources at whoever makes the loudest noise. It is an issue of the day depending on what organisation or person is running the show and how much noise they can make about it. But we really do not sit down and say, 'Bang! Let us fix this problem.' The others can survive in the short term and do whatever they have to do, but we have got to grasp a particular problem at a given time to say, 'Look, how can this be managed?'

Mr QUICK—If you were the decision maker and had the power of making anything happen, who would you give the responsibility to? Would you give it to the local city council and say, 'You are the umbrella organisation. You set a program in place where all the people are slotted in so no-one falls through the net. There are to be no kids in the Ditch because it is all structured in such a way that it works'?

Mr Wyatt—Before I jump into that one and answer that, I would just broaden it a little. There is a Commonwealth-state agreement in terms of how you address Aboriginal affairs. I think it was put together in 1972 or 1973. In that there were various things that had to occur in that agreement. In some instances they happened and in some they did not. One of them was to incorporate local government into activities. That never happened for a lot of reasons, most of them political in terms of who was running what or what government was in charge and so forth. Politics interfered in that to some degree. We need a new arrangement between Commonwealth, state and local government now to look at Aboriginal affairs. One of the key things we are pushing now is that that original agreement has to be looked at. It has got to change so that we can then put the emphasis on different levels of government.

I am not convinced just yet that the city of Kalgoorlie-Boulder is ready for the responsibility. There were a couple of overtures made by the current mayor who has been quite good in his approach to Aboriginal affairs. He said he wants reconciliation. He wants to go down that path.

He wants to do things. We are saying, 'Fine, that is the way we go.' But in terms of making the tough decision, I wonder whether that is the appropriate body. I really do. There are some really tough decisions to be made. One of the problems—and I will probably get my head chopped off—is that we have a gambling problem here in our community, down to basic card playing. It is a problem. People are playing from Monday through to Saturday around the clock. Someone has got to tell me that is illegal. But we do not do anything about it. Okay, that is part of the problem and if it is social gambling, let us formalise it. Let us tax it so we can take the benefits to the kids about it. The gambling money that is going around the table is what is supposed to be going to those kids in the first place. That is the sort of tough decision. Whether local government can make that, I do not know. I certainly cannot make it because I will probably be looking for a job next week.

Mr HAASE—Brian, you are saying a lot of the things that many around the table have been thinking for a long time. It is interesting that in answering Mr Quick's question you led into what we refer to as bottom-up funding. I would like to know your view, and perhaps you could identify for this committee some of your negative points of view about bottom-up funding. What I am referring to would be a system of funding that would necessitate the dissolution of ATSIC in its present form, and representation for whole of community by local government with additional funding that is currently going towards ATSIC. I think immediately of the Wiluna local government experience and the Halls Creek local government experience where there is a large representation of indigenous people on those councils. I personally believe that local government, which is a truly democratic election process, would serve total communities well—and by total community I mean mainstream and Aboriginal as well. I believe it would give a greater opportunity for indigenous people to become part of mainstream society, to the point where we did not speak of mainstream and indigenous. I would like to hear what you could identify as some of the great negative hurdles.

Mr Wyatt—I do not want to pick on ATSIC—they fund us! But I appreciate the point. With regard to the bottom-up approach, we have serious difficulties in terms of administration, the skills of managing that process. How we handle the ATSIC system is a very difficult problem for Aboriginal community groups. I believe that is because the emphasis is placed on one particular agency—in this case it is ATSIC—to deliver such a huge barrel. How the hell do we expect one agency to try to address all the things that a particular part of the community needs to have to improve itself in this country?

I believe ATSIC is doing a fantastic job because, when I compare alongside ATSIC the other government agencies within the system that take care of the wider community's needs and responsibilities and whatever they do, there is a far broader range of government agencies pitching in to help. Everybody puts the barrel on ATSIC: ATSIC has to deliver everything to fix up the Aboriginal communities, to fix up what Aboriginal needs are, Aboriginal views, Aboriginal concerns. What I would like to see is a greater role of all those other agencies taking on much of the responsibility that ATSIC has got to perform. I am not suggesting you grab housing off them or you grab health off them or you grab whatever off them. I would have thought that, in terms of the citizenship rights that we all have, we are supposed to have access to every government agency to provide assistance and help. That is the key. If we tackle it from that point, then we start to get a better range.

Having said that, I think the elected arm of ATSIC has been sucked into the administrative arm of ATSIC, which I do not believe is their role. I do not say that in a critical way to say that the people in the elected arm are doing a good or a bad job. I say it because, in terms of what they should be doing for us in representing our views, I think they have been absorbed by the bureaucracy and are part of the bureaucracy, and they should never be that. They should be part of our role onward from there. But, yes, we need a new agreement to incorporate local government more into Aboriginal affairs, and we need a new arrangement between state and Commonwealth governments to fix up much of what we have got at the moment.

Mr LLOYD—Obviously, in an area such as this, a relationship between the land council and mining companies is very important, particularly for urban dwelling Aborigines. I noticed in some of the reading I was doing that the Goldfields Land Council has been having a problem with the Anaconda Nickel company. I have a copy of a press release that was put out on 19 May. I wonder if you could update us on where that is at the moment, on whether any of the difficulties have been resolved and what is happening there.

Mr Wyatt—One of the difficult tasks we have in the land council is that we have to service the members we represent. Sometimes that means putting yourself out on a limb. As much as I think the wider community view the Murrin Murrin project as vitally important for the region—and I do not doubt that for one moment in terms of the economy; I think it is—the processes that have been adopted to get to that point, for it to be a going concern, leave a lot to be desired. People say consultation did take place, but there is a bit of history here in terms of pre-Wik, where there was a whole range of applications, and the relationship really soured in that process. People then get a view of whether the land council is or is not a political body or a service body or whatever, or that we are just a damn nuisance that gets in the way. Those sorts of things from time to time have been expressed to us.

In terms of the Murrin Murrin, like I said earlier, I do not want to be critical but they did set a fairly generous target in terms of employment. I do not believe—in terms of our position—much thought went into how that could come about. It was, 'Get this project up and going. Get the approval processes through. We need it.' So, bang, away it went. Then on the run, after that, we said, 'We told people we were going to employee 100-odd Aboriginal people. Now we've got to do it. How are we going to do it?' Bang! We started turning the handle around, and off came all sorts of things. That is where the system went wrong. We were saying, 'Hold on—in negotiation with this group, you should have done this; you should have done that.' This is how it went and this is where the relationship soured, because people had expectations of a proper system being in place.

To even say a little bit more on that: I am sure you are all aware of CDEP and how difficult it is—there are just not enough positions and resources for this sort of thing to go around. Yet Aboriginal communities today survive on it and they keep asking for more to keep it going. It does not happen. Then, all of a sudden, this you-beaut project gets 65 new positions—bang. People say, 'Why didn't we get it? Why couldn't we get it, yet this company can grab 65 new CDEP positions on top of having promised us they were going to meet this employment target?' To say 'We're going to set that target—but, hang on, we need help to do it,' is fine. But to dip into the same barrel that communities are struggling on the ground to dip into to get their Work for the Dole schemes operating was just a bit too much. That is where it really went off the rails, because then we said, 'That's unfair. If we had, as a community, approached ATSIC for that

level of funding we would have been knocked back; we would have had to sit back.' Many of our community groups were very angry about it, and that is where we really got lost. Never, at any stage, were we critical of the development.

Mr LLOYD—It is not really the company's fault that they got 65 extra CDEP places. There is $524 million being put into CDEP, so it is a huge amount of money—although I do understand where you are coming from and that the community is saying that.

Mr Wyatt—I am just explaining why we ever got to that point—that is why. Our relationship with the industry is improving—put it that way. We are getting better at what we were doing three or four years ago.

CHAIR—On that note—and I hate to cut across or to use any more of your time than, I am sure, you thought you would, and which is very much appreciated—the other group has arrived, and then we have to go to another place for another group, before we catch a plane to Laverton. In view of that, is there any wrap-up that you would like to make before we part ways today—looking forward, of course, to your submission and constructive suggestions?

Mr Wyatt—I just want to thank you for the opportunity to get across a few points. I just hope that they were useful for your exercise.

CHAIR—They were very helpful.

Mr Wyatt—With a bit of luck, we might see something a bit more positive.

CHAIR—Just make sure you get a bit of sleep at night.

Mr Wyatt—It is funny you say that because I was up at five this morning moving the banners from down the street.

CHAIR—All the best, Brian. We will meet again, I hope, in the not too distant future. Thank you.

[12.01 p.m.]

OAKLEY, Mr Ross, Substance Misuse Coordinator, Ninga Mia Village Aboriginal Corporation

MEREDITH, Ms Maria, Manager, Ninga Mia Village Aboriginal Corporation

WICKER, Ms Linda, Committee member

CHAIR—Welcome. There are some formal matters that, as chairman, I have to put on the record. Witnesses here today, as with all parliamentary committees across Australia, are not required to speak on oath. Of course, committee hearings such as this are legal proceedings of the Commonwealth parliament. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Hansard reporters are taking a record today of what is said and that record will be available to you, as well as to us and to the public.

Thank you very much for coming along today, we appreciate very much your time. We have a visit to another group scheduled for 12.30 p.m. at 16 Macdonald Street, Kalgoorlie. This means we have about 20 minutes together and if it is okay by you we will try to work to that timeframe. If you would like to make an opening statement about matters which you would like to draw to our attention you would be most welcome to do so. Members of the committee may wish to ask you questions. Please relax, we are amongst friends.

Mr Oakley—Thank you for this opportunity. I think it is good to have a chance to highlight our concerns about what is happening at Ninga Mia. I don't know if you have been there, but it is a housing cooperation.

CHAIR—Where is it, Ross?

Mr Oakley—It is about three kilometres east of town. It is an urban based community. It is necessary to have these sorts of communities around Western Australia because we cater for the people from the desert regions where they come into town and do not have to sit around town, which is highlighted quite often. They can come to an area like Ninga Mia and sit down, but it also says that we at Ninga Mia have not got everything in place to cater—

CHAIR—How many people are there in the community?

Mr Oakley—At the moment, there are probably about 100 to 120 people. That is the stable population. The incoming people could number anything up to 200 or 300 at times when there is business going on with our people or, as with last week, when we had the NAIDOC week. We did not have much of an influx, but with the people coming down we had other problems. A person died on Saturday out in the community. We do not know what happened to this person. There were also other incidents of fighting, domestic violence, drinking and all that stuff. It says that Ninga Mia really, while it is in a position to help, has not got the facilities or the manpower to keep everything under control. The only way it has been happening is that Maria and I have not had a holiday together for going on seven years. One of us goes and one of us stays because we do not have the communications at the time. There is something good happening out there

now. As of last Christmas, we had communication lines put into all of the houses, and people are starting to get their own phones on. That has taken a lot of pressure off us so we do not have to be there as often.

CHAIR—How many houses?

Mr Oakley—We have got 24 housing stock. If you could see the quality of those houses, you would ask yourself, 'Why are people living like that in this day and age?' I always say that Australia is quick to put its hand in its pocket to have the Olympics here and underwrite $4 billion, yet our people still live in abject poverty and are being subjected to living out there, but that is a choice, too. That is a choice of our people to live like that.

CHAIR—Why?

Mr Oakley—Because they want to live with their families. They do not have to be pretentious. They do not have to put on a face just to live in a society. Living in town here, sometimes we have a lot of our people coming backwards. I say to myself, 'Our people should have the right to live like that.'

CHAIR—Have they got a choice to live somewhere else?

Mr Oakley—Yes, they have. They can come into mainstream and wait on the housing list, but you will find that through Homeswest, because of the extended families and all that stuff, there is a lot of hardship for a lot of our people in trying to adapt. I am not making excuses for them because we all have to live by the same thing.

Ms Meredith—A lot of the people just are not confident enough. They have not got the necessary skills in terms of the tenancy agreements and their requirements, roles and responsibility as a good tenant and good citizens of society. They feel more comfortable in a community environment such as ours. With our community, we are aiming to become a transitional area for people to learn those skills and feel confident enough to go into mainstream standards of living.

Mr Oakley—I have been referring to it as this—and I find it hard to say—but it really is a training centre. A lot of our people that are living in those houses have to adapt to our standards. If anyone asked us how we appraise those people that are applying to live in town, in a lot of cases we would have to say you would have to give them a bit more time or things like that.

CHAIR—We will interrupt with questions as you speak. I hope you do not mind. But if you want to make a longer statement—

Mr Oakley—No, that is fine. I do not want you to think that we have got all the answers, either.

CHAIR—No, we are learning a lot from you and we are very grateful for the way you are talking to us.

Mr WAKELIN—I was in Ninga Mia about six years ago, and I seem to remember you were there then.

Ms Meredith—Yes.

Mr Oakley—Yes.

Mr WAKELIN—I am interested in the housing stock. How is it held? Is it held in trust or held in a cooperative?

Mr Oakley—In the corporation.

Mr WAKELIN—Is it the Aboriginal Hostels?

Mr Oakley—No. Aboriginal Hostels were only funding us.

Mr WAKELIN—Yes, that is right.

Mr Oakley—They pulled out in 1995 and left a big hole in how we were funded. Maria worked for nearly a year without any pay. We have shown a lot of dedication on our side, but some of the funding agencies, I am sad to say, let us down badly.

Mr WAKELIN—And it is held in the local cooperative?

Mr Oakley—Yes, we are our own housing co-op—not co-op, community.

Mr WAKELIN—You would have long-term residents and some moving in and moving out on a constant basis, I guess?

Ms Meredith—Yes.

Mr Oakley—Yes.

Mr WAKELIN—Are you able to discuss the rental costs?

Ms Meredith—Because we utilise direct debit through Centrelink, we have been able to accumulate all our rental through them. So it is on a direct debit basis.

Mr WAKELIN—I see, so it is automatically coming out.

Ms Meredith—Automatically, yes, so nobody sees it. It just goes directly into our account.

Mr WAKELIN—How much is it? That is what I am interested in.

Ms Meredith—Well, we have different houses. We have got five brand-new houses that have been built in the last three years. There is one four-bedroom unit to cater for a large family, two two-bedroom units, and two three-bedroom units.

Mr Oakley—It is all on a sliding scale.

Ms Meredith—That is five of the units of the housing stock of 24. We have 10 transportables. Those transportables have two bedrooms on either side, with kitchen and lounge combined, and a toilet, shower and laundry all in the one area. You walk in the front door, you walk five paces diagonally, and you are out the back door—that is how small those transportables are. They have been there since day one.

Mr WAKELIN—And the rental price?

Mr Oakley—It is according to the house.

Ms Meredith—Yes, we get $100 to $125 per week for the new houses, and $95 per week for the transportables, because they have all been renovated—they have got all the mod cons in there. We have got four round houses that have been renovated. Those round houses are just one room. In there they have to do their cooking and it is also their lounge room area and their bedroom—it is just one big room.

Mr Oakley—And they have got no toilet facilities.

Ms Meredith—No toilet or shower—

Mr WAKELIN—Does that rental income provide maintenance? Do you have a contractor to come in and do your maintenance for you? Or CDEP?

Ms Meredith—At the moment we have got MSP—management support program—which is funded through Aboriginal housing.

Mr WAKELIN—Okay, and is that satisfactory?

Mr Oakley—Yes, everything is in place at the moment up until Christmas, when MSP will cease to exist in Ninga Mia. They are putting in an alternative scheme valued at $1,700 per house under their MIP program but, if we look at the amount of rent collected and the amount of funding through the MIP program, there may be a problem. You see, a lot of damage gets done to our assets, and that damage is not done by the people who live there: it is done by our visitors. The moment we say to our visitors, 'You can't come in here,' we have got a fight on our hands. We cannot win; we are in a no-win situation. So we put our hands up and let everyone come in and hope that they respect—

CHAIR—And wreck the houses.

Mr Oakley—I am not saying wreck the houses, but they cause damage.

Mr WAKELIN—They are an additional risk to the houses.

Mr Oakley—Yes.

CHAIR—Why would you let them continue to visit you if you know that they are the ones who are wrecking the house?

Mr Oakley—There are so many of them. Like I say, they are up here for festivities or for one reason or another. Maria and I cannot be expected to do everything.

Ms Meredith—We have been talking with the Ngaanyatjarra Council. We have councillors from that region who visit Ninga Mia; they actually stay there. So they know full well the amount of damage that occurs and the behaviour of their people when they visit our region. A lot of them are in a dry community, and in Ninga Mia we are trying to revert back to being a dry community.

Mr WAKELIN—That is where my next question was going—substance abuse and that sort of thing.

Ms Meredith—Can I get back to the housing matter. I told you that we have got those two types of house, then there is the round house which, because of the type of house it is, costs only $30 a week. The other square house is the same as the other one, although the design is much better—in terms of the architect who designed it—because it allows for some ventilation and it is slightly elevated. That type of housing is still unsuitable for my people. They do not have toilet and shower facilities there. So that costs only $30 a week. When we look at repairs and maintenance, for us to replace one door—by the way, there is only one entrance in and out of those two houses—costs a hundred and something dollars, and we are only asking for $30 to $40 a week in rent. It does not cover the cost of our repairs and maintenance, even when it comes to replacing something on the gas stoves which have been put into all the houses.

Mr WAKELIN—How would the door get damaged? Would it be someone on the grog going through a door and punching—

Ms Meredith—There is no security. Because of how the houses have been built and the way in which the doors open, they are not as secure as other houses, where you can make it like Fort Knox by installing dead bolts. Our houses are not secure. Our people go into town or to visit other members of their family throughout the region, and when they come back they find their houses open, because all that people need to do is get a knife or a screwdriver and they have got access to people's houses.

Mr WAKELIN—We are running out of time so I need to ask a quick question on substance abuse. You obviously took that dry community as an example and you mentioned that you were linking issues to substance abuse issues.

Mr Oakley—Yes. I have linked substance misuse to many things. The thing that is apparent in everything I do is economics. I believe if you find ways of spending money that ultimately lead people to better things like employment and housing, it is fine. One of the reasons why Ninga Mia has so much trouble with substance misuse and violence is because of the fact that we have got no law and order. We asked about a warden scheme. We asked about by-laws, et cetera. No-one has come back to us and said, 'You can get this.' With respect to the by-laws, we have to get 100 per cent support of the community to do that and I do not think we will ever get that.

Mr WAKELIN—No community would ever get that.

Mr Oakley—That is right. So that is against us. Trying to get law and order is hard. I would like to put it to people like you that communities are looked at from a law and order point of view.

Mr WAKELIN—I could not agree more.

Mr Oakley—They help protect the assets and they pay for their positions by saving on the R&M.

Mr WAKELIN—Is the type of substance changing? Is alcohol, marijuana or speed going up market?

Mr Oakley—Yes, it is going up market now.

Mr WAKELIN—Thank you.

Mr LLOYD—How is your cooperative funded?

Mr Oakley—We fund it ourselves.

Ms Meredith—Through the rental moneys that we collect. When we collected those rental moneys this year and last financial year, the community had to put a large proportion of those moneys into our ATSIC budget that we received mostly from our ATSIC region here.

Mr LLOYD—For your housing stock and other moneys that are needed, apart from your rent, the money comes in from ATSIC. Do you have a budget each year from ATSIC?

Ms Meredith—Yes, only a small proportion. Ninga Mia has to make up the other portion from our rental that we generate.

Mr LLOYD—We heard early this morning that there is something like five housing cooperatives in the Kalgoorlie area. To me, that seems a bit of an overkill. There is a lot of administration in small groups. What is your comment on that? Would there be an advantage if you all became one? Why are there so many?

Mr Oakley—I would like to see it run in a similar way to the CDEP. They have one governing body and they take up all the area. It should be the same with the housing stock. It would be a neutral body. The thing that comes to mind is that everybody thinks it is theirs. If we had a neutral body, I think everyone would be okay with that.

Mr LLOYD—So each one of these has basically been started by a family or a group which says that they will start their own housing cooperative in some way?

Mr Oakley—In some ways, yes.

Mr LLOYD—Yes. It is a simplified way of saying it; that is difficult.

Ms Meredith—Can I add something?

Mr LLOYD—Yes.

Ms Meredith—ATSIC did send two separate consultants to Ninga Mia and the committee did sit down and discuss their views of establishing a housing co-op. Had the government agencies approached the Goldfields people 20 years ago, it would have been a good idea but, because a lot of organisations have been in existence for years now and they have been autonomous all these years, it is going to be very difficult to bring everybody together under one banner for the one purpose.

When Ninga Mia were discussing it, we thought it was a great idea and then we saw that our community had the most housing stock anyway. Five other organisations are doing their own housing. We were thinking that a large proportion of moneys would be injected into that housing cooperative and the others only had a small number of houses. It was going to be a bit unfair because Ninga Mia has made the transition from being funded initially by Aboriginal hostels and then defunded and Aboriginal hostels dipped out of their responsibility. Ninga Mia tried to find other government agencies to fund us.

We have made that transition and we have taken our people from being reliant on the government system. We have become self-managed and we look after our own things currently. Now we are all going to be forced to go into a housing co-op. If Ninga Mia does not join the housing co-op, we will be penalised because we are not attached to a housing co-op and we would stay on the outer if that were the case. We are eligible to receive further housing developments in our community, and we thought long term it would be wrong for everybody to be forced.

Mr LLOYD—These are all the difficulties.

Ms Meredith—Yes, these are the difficulties. And because you have people with different levels of understanding and education, you are going to have to train our people up to the same level of thinking first off to get them there. This is going to be a big role and responsibility. If you are going to look at a housing co-op and you have a directorship over here as well, our people also need to understand that concept, the risk that is involved and their roles and responsibilities as a director. Our people do not realise that comes hand in hand with a lot of things.

Mr LLOYD—That highlights the difference. With your funding from ATSIC, do you have much communication with your council or your ATSIC commissioner, Commissioner Thomas?

Ms Meredith—Not as much as we should have, and we were disappointed, because in Ninga Mia we are proud of what we have achieved up to date. We have still got high expectations and we have a lot of things planned for our future. We want Ninga Mia to be self-sufficient in the long term. We have empowered our committee; we are teaching them everything that we know. I do not want to be there forever, I want to move on, so we are teaching our people who are there, our young people, and we want to get them trained up because they are our future.

We were disappointed that Ninga Mia did not even get a mention for the NAHS program after all the effort that we put in. We were a bit disappointed because we felt that, as a community, we needed more housing development. We have been inundated, even to this day, with people inquiring if there are any houses available because people who have to be here for medical reasons have to move to Kalgoorlie. These are people from outlying regions and people from the central desert who we look after as well.

Mr Oakley—If you look back over the last five to 10 years, there are three main centres that get all the people: Alice Springs, Ceduna to the south and us to the west. We are not going away because we are the big bright lights. All these people are coming here. I cannot understand why they are spending two point something million dollars in the NAHS program at Mount Margaret. As I said to the blokes who assessed it, 'If we had sat on our hands and done sweet FA, we would have got nothing.' We ought to have got everything. You do something positive and you get no support.

Mr WAKELIN—That is the dilemma.

Mr LLOYD—This is the sort of argument that I would encourage you to continue to talk to your commissioner about.

Mr Oakley—We have talked to our present commissioner. We have highlighted Ninga Mia's case. The submissions that we put in are not just airy-fairy stuff. They were part of a staged process where one stage would lead to another. Ultimately it would lead to economic programs that would become businesses and we would employ our people.

Mr LLOYD—Which is what you want.

Mr Oakley—Yes, which we want, and we would not be sitting around this table looking for further funding. We would be supporting ourselves.

Mr QUICK—How much would you need?

Mr Oakley—To do what Ninga Mia wants?

Mr QUICK—Yes.

Mr Oakley—We would want probably $300,000 to $400,000.

Mr QUICK—And you would go away and never bother us again?

Mr Oakley—You said it.

Mr LLOYD—Just in closing, because I know time is tight—

Mr Oakley—Could I just quickly say one more thing, Mr Chairman? You should not have brought me here—too late!

CHAIR—I am glad you could be with us.

Mr Oakley—I am chairman of the CDEP in town here. Are we allowed to talk about CDEP?

CHAIR—Yes. The only constraint I have is that I have to close the meeting in three minutes and Ms Hoare has a question she would like to ask.

Mr Oakley—I would like to see the income of CDEP participants, the amount of money that they earn, lifted to about $35,000 because Aboriginal corporations, even though they have CDEP participants, lose a lot of good servants because they have to go into the mainstream to improve their quality of life. We in the corporations out in the sticks using CDEP are always funding our people the Aboriginal way—with what we can get. It does not bring them into line with the awards or anything like that.

Ms Meredith—And it is wrong.

Mr Oakley—It is definitely wrong. So I would like to see that limit lifted up to $35,000 or $40,000. Currently, it is about $28,000. You cannot keep good personnel with that.

Ms Meredith—That is right.

Mr LLOYD—Today is a perfect opportunity to highlight those concerns as well. What I want to say to you is: continue to work through your commissioner. We are responsible to our constituents; we are elected as well. If we do not do the job in our area we will be out of a job as well. They are the people who are elected to really push for you. You mentioned that we are spending a lot of money on the Olympics. A huge amount of money has been spent by the federal government—$524 million—on housing and education throughout Australia. If you are not getting—

Mr Oakley—We are not getting any of that.

Mr LLOYD—That is what we want to hear: what the problems are. At the same time, we want you to take that back to your commissioner and to ATSIC. The money is there and we want to know why it is not coming out on the ground floor.

Mr Oakley—In closing, I would just like to say that next time you come to see us, give us a couple of hours.

Mr LLOYD—I would like to see your community; I would like to do that.

Mr Oakley—When are you leaving town?

CHAIR—We are due on an aircraft at 2 o’clock. We have another meeting now at McDonald Street.

Mr Oakley—You can fly over.

CHAIR—Ladies and gentlemen, I have to formally close this meeting and, in doing so, I thank you very much for your valuable evidence. I found it very challenging and helpful. Maria, have you a comment?

Ms Meredith—I just want to say something about the housing. When you give money to Aboriginal corporations to improve or build better quality houses, could the architect consult the indigenous people? That is what they did with Ninga Mia. They came in there with previously conceived designs and everything that were appropriate for the people up north and in the Kimberleys—that is fine.

CHAIR—We support you on that.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Haase**, seconded by **Mr Lloyd**):

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

Committee adjourned at 12.31 p.m.