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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

WEDNESDAY, 28 MARCH 2001

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Wednesday, 28 March 2001

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: Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Mr Lieberman, Mr Lloyd, 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.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 4.13 p.m.

JOHNSON, Mr Ben, Program Officer, CDEP, National Program Centre, ATSIC

OAKLEY, Ms Jackie, Manager, Rights and Culture, National Policy Office, ATSIC

RAMSAY, Mr Jim, Manager, National Corporate and Commission Support, ATSIC

RICHARDSON, Mr Geoff, Manager, National Policy Office, ATSIC

SCOTT, Mr Geoff, Manager, National Program and Network, ATSIC

SCULTHORPE, Ms Kerry, Manager, National Policy Office, ATSIC

TAYLOR, Mr Peter, Manager, Housing and Infrastructure Centre, ATSIC

CHAIR—I declare open this public meeting to the committee's inquiry into the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I welcome everybody and those observers as well who are going to listen in to this public hearing. As many of you know, the committee began this inquiry at the request of the then Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Senator John Herron. The new minister, the Honourable. Phillip Ruddock has indicated his enthusiasm for the committee to continue its work. The inquiry will assist the government's continued introduction and development of practical measures to help indigenous people.

We are consulting as widely as possible. Today's hearing is one of a number being conducted around the country. We are very interested to hear from all interested parties, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in a spirit of cooperation. The hearing, as you know, is open to the public. A transcript of what is said will be made available. If anyone in the public gallery would like any details about the inquiry or the transcripts, please do not hesitate to talk to one of the committee staff and they will be delighted to help you.

I welcome witnesses from ATSIC to give evidence. Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand, of course, that these hearings 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. Thank you for attending today. Do any of you have any comment on the capacity in which you appear before the committee?

Mr Richardson—Yes. I am one of three national policy office managers, with a particular interest in community economic development policy.

Mr Ramsay—The section I manage, Corporate and Commission Support, is the one to which a lot of the electoral issues are referred.

CHAIR—Thank you. I hope we do not get interrupted, and I hope that members do not have to leave. We know that you are aware of the fact that this could happen. It is not a discourtesy to

you; it is a part of the problem of the House. Before we ask you questions, do you have any opening statements that you would like to make, being conscious of the time?

Mr Scott—I would like to make a few points about the submission we have made to the inquiry and lead on to ATSIC's role and further matters. ATSIC has taken a pretty broad approach to the terms of reference. Your definition in terms of the non-remote community areas takes into account about 86 per cent of the community's ATSIC services. So, in that respect, most of our program areas do actually provide resources and services to the communities in question. That is why we have taken that broad view. However, we are here today to talk about Aboriginal disadvantage as a whole, not just in the non-remote areas. As a matter of record, Senator Herron said that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders are worse off wherever they live, and the Commonwealth Grants Commission has confirmed this in their indigenous funding inquiry as well.

CHAIR—Would you restate what you have just said?

Mr Scott—Senator Herron said as a matter of record in his submission to the inquiry that Aboriginal people are worse off wherever they live, whether it is in remote areas or urban areas; and I just wanted to make that point to the inquiry. The Commonwealth Grants Commission has also reaffirmed that in their initial reports from their inquiry into indigenous funding.

I wish to say what ATSIC's role is at the moment and reaffirm that ATSIC is Australia's national policy making agency for indigenous people. I would point out that the ATSIC Board and regional councils tend to identify and prioritise the issues and concerns of Aboriginal communities across the country—that being one of the primary sources of policy advice to us, as well. These plans are valuable tools and should be accessed by many more mainstream agencies, to assist them in targeting what the needs and priorities are for Aboriginal communities. On the whole, these plans are not used by other agencies.

If we go back to the national commitment in 1992, which outlined what ATSIC feels is a very good framework for the delivery of effective services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, that was one of the core principles under that commitment—identifying that planning was very important and that the ATSIC regional council plans were a primary tool in that process. We will find that, over time, most agencies will try to establish their own consultative mechanisms. ATSIC does not in itself provide services or facilities that deal directly with communities; rather we found organisations.

CHAIR—I am sorry to interrupt; but 'consultative mechanisms' with whom?

Mr Scott—A number of agencies establish their own consultative mechanisms for establishing priorities and getting feedback from Aboriginal communities.

CHAIR—So you mean directly with Aboriginal communities?

Mr Scott—No; they still set up their own consultative mechanisms. State, local and Commonwealth government agencies do this, on the whole. The point we are trying to make here is that the regional councils are a not inexpensive process that has been set up by the

Commonwealth government, and that much more attention should be paid to the planning processes that exist.

CHAIR—We will clarify that in a minute with a couple of questions.

Mr Scott—There are some other things to say about ATSIC's role. It is important to make the point that ATSIC is a supplementary funder. We are not supposed to be a primary funder of services to Aboriginal people and, in fact, if we have the program, it is more evidence that the mainstream agencies are not delivering the services. We should be the funder of last resort. If you look at ATSIC's program structures, the majority of funds we have are targeted in the housing and the employment areas, or CDEP, and we work with those today.

Most governments, be they Commonwealth, state or territory, tend to regard ATSIC as the agency with primary responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. We have to make the point that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are citizens and, as such, they should be a core responsibility of every agency in terms of delivering their programs. If those programs are not being provided, there is an issue in terms of access and equity. We also acknowledge that many of these departments have no real expertise in the area of Aboriginal and Islander affairs, but we are keen to work with them to make that process more effective.

I mentioned before the 1992 decisions. There is also the COAG decision of last year, 2000, which actually provided more emphasis and another push towards the National Commitment. That is really asking Commonwealth agencies to adopt a more intergovernmental approach, to take an issue of shared responsibility and to start looking at re-engineering their programs to be more flexible and have greater coordination at the community level. We are trying to assist in that process as much as possible. It also identified priority areas for action: investing in community leadership initiatives; reviewing and re-engineering their programs and services to ensure that they do deliver practical measures and outcomes; and forging greater links between the business sector and indigenous communities, to promote economic independence.

As a first principle, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be represented in all decision making forums in this regard. Again, I would emphasise the regional council processes. We cannot do this job alone; that is the point I would make about that as well. ATSIC has been successful in the last few years with establishing agreements with a number of governments. There was a fairly strong agreement established with the Western Australian government last year, and we will be seeking to renegotiate that agreement with the current government in the coming months. We will be approaching the South Australian, Queensland and Tasmanian governments before the end of this current calendar year with a view to forging other agreements as well. We have an agreement with the Victorian government and we have a number of bilateral agreements in place with a range of Commonwealth agencies.

This is evidence of ATSIC's ongoing role in identifying that the responsibility for providing services and programs to Aboriginal people resides predominantly with the mainstream agencies. We are trying to work with those to make sure that their programs are better—that they provide better services that are better targeted. But they should be targeted in terms of impact and outcome. As a case in point, it is very easy to build a house but much harder to maintain it and keep it there.

In conclusion, I would state that ATSIC believes that, through self-determination we are better positioned—and that is the principle we are trying to put up here—firstly, to have a greater role and to take control of the decision making processes that affect the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the communities; secondly, to take an increased role in determining and promoting policy priorities—that is, through the planning processes; thirdly, to preserve and protect their diverse cultures and languages; and, fourthly, to gather overall public support through achievement and awareness of what the programs are. Rather than going any further, I would like to take questions on our submissions.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for that. Your submission is a very extensive and comprehensive one. I have to confess to you that I am not totally across it as yet, but I am working hard on it and I am sure my colleagues are doing the same. For that reason, my questions today might be more of a general nature to identify the flight path that I hope we might all be on. The first thing I would like to clarify is that in your introductory remarks you said that ATSIC cannot take full responsibility for addressing all of the issues that indigenous people face; and I am sure that the committee accepts that as a given. Do you believe that in the last few years the attempt to have a whole of government approach to addressing the disadvantage of indigenous people has been the right direction to travel in—that is, to try to use all of the resources of government to achieve the agreed targets? Are you relaxed with that? Are you happy with that?

Mr Scott—Yes. I believe that is the correct approach to take, but there is a long road before we get to successful outcomes in that regard. Each department has their own idea of what the level of disadvantage and need is in its community. That is not necessarily borne out by consultation with the community or from their perspective. Programs are largely imposed, not delivered in any planned or contextual way. That is why I am trying to promote the idea that—

CHAIR—Can you give us some examples as you go, Geoff? It is a pretty broad statement you make.

Mr Scott—It is broad; and I am trying, I suppose, keep it broad and not attack too many.

CHAIR—I thought we had some good performers, some lights at the end of the tunnel—or am I too optimistic? Enlighten me: tell me which ones are not doing the job and which ones are on the right track.

Mr Scott—The needs of Aboriginal communities are much more diverse than any one program issue. Taking on the issues and trying to address community needs and priorities in a solo mentality from a program point of view in the long term is not sustainable.

Mr QUICK—Are we talking about Aboriginal communities in urban areas or in general? This is basically an urban inquiry.

Mr Scott—The committee's definition of 'urban' is 1,000 people plus and those people living around them. From ATSIC's point of view, that takes in in excess of 85 per cent of our communities.

Mr QUICK—I did not realise that we had gone down to—

CHAIR—In our discussion papers, we gave some parameters without excluding others—in the sense that we recognised that people might be in an isolated community but would need, at some time or other in their lives, to have access to urban communities for services and the like. We did not want to be too definitive but we did say less than 1,000 people or more than 1,000 thousand people, just to give a bit of a guideline. But we are not head in the sand on it, if you understand what I mean.

Mr Scott—I do not want to make the point that this is just an issue for indigenous people; this is an issue for all communities who access government services.

CHAIR—I will echo that. I have spent half my life trying to get services for my constituents.

Mr Scott—But the whole of government approach has to address the needs of communities and not the needs of a program: that is what I am focusing on. If you are going to address the needs of a community, if you are looking at the low employment in a community, that is often the contribution of a number of factors—whether that is the level of housing in the area, or the level of education that has not been provided, or the health facilities that have been provided in towns. I am also making the point that it needs a whole of government, united approach to addressing the problems themselves. It needs to be coordinated at the community level.

CHAIR—I would like to persist a little more, without wanting to put you on the spot. If you need further research, please do not feel that you cannot say that, and do not be embarrassed by saying that. We are here to work together. But I really would find it helpful if you could identify some of the agencies—or departments, if it is broader than that—who are doing the right thing and trying to take up what you are saying and deliver programs and develop them so that they fit into the whole objective of improving the future for indigenous people, and those that are not doing the right thing. We need some examples to try to understand how an application is or is not working.

Mr Scott—I can give you some examples of those, and my colleagues might raise others. One that I think was a good attempt—and we have not seen the outcomes fully yet—at a whole of government approach was the coordinated care trials that the Department of Health and Aged Care ran. That was in non-indigenous and indigenous communities. We have yet to see, from our point of view, the outcomes of those and where they are leading to. But that is what I mean by an attempt to look at the total needs of the community from the point of view of the number of agencies that are contributing services. They came back talking in varying degrees about pooling those funds and pooling those resources and then looking from the community's perspective at how to solve their issues. In essence, they cashed out their programs and looked at it from the community's perspective. That is one example.

CHAIR—So is that a plus?

Mr Scott—It is a plus, of course, yes. There are many who are actually doing good work on these, but the point ATSIC wants to make about the programs is that they have to be sustainable in the long term. They have to be sustainable or else we would walk away. That is the objective we should have.

CHAIR—Do you mean that you do not walk in with a big plan, start something off—

Mr Scott—Impose it and walk away, no.

CHAIR—And then leave people to sink or swim. Is that the sort of think you are saying?

Mr Scott—Yes, and it is about sustainable development in the community.

CHAIR—Most government programs—and please come in, colleagues; do not let me dominate this—for indigenous or non-indigenous people are usually established so that they are recurrent; they are intended to continue—not all but most. But occasionally they are reviewed and. obviously. they are all subject to the budgetary process of the government of the day or the parliament. I guess some programs would be correctly target to be implemented, put in place and then be self-sustaining, or else they are not needed anymore. The army assistance in relation to some infrastructure in isolated communities would be one where would you would see the army's role as being to help get the things in place and afterwards to leave, handing them over to the community so that the community could operate and maintain them. That model would be surely acceptable to you?

Mr Scott—When it is done properly. Peter is going to talk about that.

CHAIR—When it is done properly, of course; and they did a pretty good job, from what I hear. The army blokes reckon they did, from what they tell me, and they got a lot of satisfaction out of doing it.

Mr Scott—I think so; and there were good relations between the army and the communities. They provided a much broader approach, as well: when they saw something wrong, they fixed it; they were not constrained by normal program parameters.

CHAIR—Come in to help, Geoff. Have there been any programs in, say, the last five years where the government has implemented them—one of the agencies of government or whatever; or the community with some government funding—and then walked away, not sustaining them where they were needed? Can you give us some examples to illustrate what you mean?

Mr Scott—I am talking about community sustainability, not sustainability by government providing an ongoing crutch to their development. What I mean is that, in most communities, we deal with organisations. It is up to government. A lot of ATSIC's resources in the field are actually spent on supporting the organisations, the structures and the programs. That probably assumes that we are addressing all the needs, and we are not. Unless we can address the needs in some communities and move on and address them in others, we are going to have an ongoing issue about absolute need.

CHAIR—I for one, and I think most of my colleagues would agree, do not see ATSIC as being responsible and accountable for every program in Australia for indigenous people. I do not think we do. We see ATSIC as being a leader, an advocate, a negotiator, someone that can come in and talk to levels of government and agencies and communities and say, 'Look, we think, from a leadership point of view, that you should try and go this way.' So you can actually negotiate and facilitate others to do things for you. Am I right? Is this the way it is done?

Mr Scott—Yes, sure; on the whole, ATSIC carries out those roles, with varying degrees of success.

Ms Sculthorpe—I would add, on the question of communities and sustainability, that what you might have found when you were travelling around and talking to communities was that, whether people are living in discrete communities or in urban areas, people are often poor and do not have work, and they are seeking services from government agencies. The view that people often have is that there is a government agency staffed by people who are not Aboriginal, providing services to them on conditions determined by the government agency, and people very rarely encounter their own people—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—in those agencies. Because a larger proportion of our population comes in the low socioeconomic bracket, that means that people are constantly feeling victims of the programs; and the programs most often are designed for the majority of the population, as happens in a democracy. So the fit between the programs that are not ATSIC's and the Aboriginal people is often a very bad one. Whilst we have a structure through our regional councils, doing just what you were saying, advocating on behalf of Aboriginal people, it has been a battle to get agencies to understand the way that people feel about the services being offered to them and whether those services are actually doing the same for Aborigines as they are doing for other people in the community. So a lot of our issues are around white people delivering things to Aborigines, and a lot of the activity in the Aboriginal community involving regional councils tries to get Aboriginal people and communities into positions where they can do things for themselves.

Mr QUICK—You speak of people doing things for themselves. The fact is that in the community housing, IHO, sector in New South Wales you have 234 IHOs; and there is a huge discrepancy between New South Wales, where the average stock per IHO is 16, up to Queensland where it is 46 and, in the Northern Territory, 43. If you are only managing 16 and you need an infrastructure and a management level to do that, surely big is beautiful. Tasmania has probably got two too many: it has three. You cannot tell me that we should not rationalise that. I mean, 234 IHOs in New South Wales managing on an average of 16 is, to me, administrative overkill. If we are talking about a lack of houses and a lack of expertise and training to build some things, it mentions here the Commonwealth and state and the need to review the structure and distribution of IHOs to determine where the greater economic scale is. What has been happening over the last couple of years to say, 'Look, I am sorry; all you need is five in New South Wales; the other 229 need to disappear. Let's get fair dinkum.'

Mr Taylor—The board of commissioners recognised that problem in about 1997, when they adopted a policy of basically deciding not to fund any new indigenous housing organisation unless it was the creation of an amalgamation process of existing indigenous housing bodies. That policy is still in place. In addition to that—

Mr QUICK—So has there been a diminution at all?

Mr Taylor—The short answer is yes.

Mr QUICK—So it has gone from 234 down to how many?

Mr Taylor—With regard to the organisations that were previously funded, I need to explain a little about what rationalisation processes have gone on, to answer your question a little more precisely.

Mr QUICK—With all due respect, I do not want a Public Service answer. I need to know whether it has gone from 234 down to 230 or from 234 down to 185?

Mr Taylor—In one region of western New South Wales, the Murdi Paaki region, there are around 30 organisations in that part of the state. As of this financial year, the Aboriginal Housing Office in New South Wales is funding one.

Mr QUICK—What are is the standard number of people per IHO that administer it?

Mr Taylor—There are no general formulas for numbers of administrative staff. There is certainly a range of benchmarks that apply. But typically an indigenous housing organisation will do a number of other things as well. You will have number of generalist positions where people provide housing administration but also have a few other service roles in the community. If you would like me to continue on with the general overview of the rationalisation process, I can do that; or we can provide you with a separate briefing note if you would prefer.

Mr QUICK—I would like to know for March 2001 Australia wide and state wide? I am not too sure when this figure was collated, but it says basically that there are 701 IHOs in Australia looking after 20,000 houses. Whether you are indigenous, non-indigenous Croatian or Yugoslav, to my mind that seems a hell of a lot of administrative groups looking after 20,000 houses. We are talking about cost ratio benefits in this day and age, and you guys are strapped for cash, so every dollar you save could mean building another house which would be an extra eight or 10 people who have a roof over their heads.

Mr Taylor—Those are parts of the reasons why the board has strongly supported rationalisation of housing organisations. The underlying issue—which you may think is perhaps a technical question—is that the rationalisation process has been most strong in New South Wales and Queensland, where the largest number of small organisations have been historically. I think all but one of ATSIC's regions in Queensland have now established a regional housing organisation. In New South Wales, only the western New South Wales region has completed that process. The Aboriginal Housing Office in that state are introducing comparable processes in two or three regions, I think, this year, and they intend to go through a similar process across the state within three years. That is part of their strategic plan.

Mr QUICK—So ATSIC nationally have got to say, 'New South Wales could cope with 10; Victoria could have six; Queensland could have eight because of their size; South Australia surely do not need 47; Western Australia's 130 could go down to 10; Tasmania could go down to two, one in the north and one in the south; and the Northern Territory do not need 136 but could have five.' Have you got some goals to set?

Mr Taylor—We certainly strongly endorse the principle that there needs to be efficiencies and cost effectiveness in the structures of management of housing organisations. I think it would be inappropriate for someone like me to sit in Canberra or wherever and determine figures based on theoretical models. The processes that are involved in rationalising these kinds of

services touch on issues about the structure of communities themselves—the authority structures and the political structures—and, unless those issues are worked through to come up with a sustainable organisation that can balance a range of community and political interests, the rationalisation process will not work. So we are very keen for the rationalisation process, where it takes place, to be developed from the ground up. We are not interested in imposing financially derived models of efficiency and effectiveness from Canberra or Melbourne, which is where I happen to be based, but we very strongly support processes where particularly our regional councils—who have a pretty strong grasp of the structure of communities and their politics—are able to lead a process and undertake negotiations with communities so that efficiencies can be achieved. But the models will vary quite considerably within states and between states.

Mr QUICK—Following on from that, one of the things that we discovered when a different committee was doing a report on indigenous health, which took 2½ years, was the fact, for example, that Pitjantjatjara wander across two states and a territory, so you cannot still have the rail gauge and solo mentality about housing, where it is South Australia against Western Australia against the Northern Territory. There needs to be some rationalisation with indigenous communities, as well as within white bureaucracy and those two states and territories to say, 'We've got a problem. We can tell exactly how many people that we are dealing with. We have the census and ABS stuff. For Christ's sake, how many people do we need to house? We need one bag of money, not three.' Everyone is continuing to cry poor.

Mr SNOWDON—What proportion of money for Aboriginal housing comes through ATSIC?

Mr Taylor—Are you talking about indigenous specific programs?

Mr SNOWDON—No, I want to get to the point of talking about where the money is actually coming from to build housing. For example, I have just been to Maningrida. Maningrida is topical at the moment because it has a TB problem; there are 2,200 people so it fits the criteria of this committee, thank Christ. It has bad TB. We know that there is a chronic shortage of housing there, with 20 to 25 people to a house. Who should be responsible for providing the resources for that housing?

Mr Taylor—I think it is generally recognised that the Commonwealth and the states share responsibility for funding and resourcing indigenous housing. That is a principle that is broadly ensconced in the Commonwealth-state housing agreement and also reflected in the roles and responsibilities for indigenous specific housing. In terms of Maningrida, you might be aware that earlier this week there was an announcement that a NAHS project was going into Maningrida, with just over $3 million to provide a substantial expansion of housing stock there. That is ATSIC funds, but it will piggyback a range of earlier funding that went through the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory, and I think ATSIC and predecessors probably funded a number of projects.

Mr SNOWDON—So you are putting NAHS money in?

Mr Taylor—Yes.

Mr SNOWDON—What about IHANT money?

Mr Taylor—I think Maningrida has been on the IHANT program on a reasonably regular basis.

Mr SNOWDON—I only picked Maningrida because I happen to have been there; it could be anywhere. With the role of ATSIC versus the role of these other agencies, it is all very well to have an esoteric argument about the number of housing authorities, but the problem is need, assessing need and providing the resources to put people in houses. Frankly, I do not care who manages them as long as they are managed properly.

CHAIR—I think that was the tenor of Mr Quick's questions: to manage properly—whatever that means.

Mr SNOWDON—I will go to Mr Quick's point, but frankly I think it is impossible to assert that you should just have 10 or 20 or whatever the figure is for the Northern Territory—

Mr QUICK—One hundred and something IHOs, from what they tell us.

Mr SNOWDON—You said that they could come down to six. That is just not possible. I would not even contemplate it. It is a question of working with communities to work through the issues that are relevant to those communities and their regions. I think, before we make assertions about what should or should not be the picture, we should understand what is happening on the ground and who is responsible financially for providing housing. If we start from that basis, we might get a result. If we start from the basis of saying that we should restructure what Aboriginal people are doing in terms of the control of their own housing, we will not get a result.

CHAIR—That was an interesting interlude between members. Mr Haase has the call, after you add what you are about to, Geoff. Please keep it brief, because time is getting on.

Mr Scott—An historical perspective needs to be brought to the housing agenda. What has happened to date with the proliferation of indigenous housing organisations is as a result of a number of agencies providing the same resources to the communities. We have had the ADC, we have had DAA in its various guises and we have had the state government running numerous programs—all accessible by the same communities and addressing different issues in different communities. What that has brought is the number of housing organisations. There has been a sustained effort to try to rationalise those—and it is not just in the housing area; it is in a number of program areas—to try to make the best use of the resources that we have.

I think the committee has to look at and maybe consider that social housing is a millstone around the community's neck. It does not bring economic independence; it does the reverse. We are now trying to rationalise the number in the management of those. There are a number of measures in place, but they must work properly with the state governments. From our perspective, they are the proper ones to provide community housing. They are supposedly the best at it, and they should do it. We are working properly with them. We have a number of bilateral agreements with all the states doing that. IHANT is one of those. There is one in New South Wales. We have numerous others in South Australia and all the rest. That is about rationalising providers, getting the best we can for the money and in the end having the impact—that is, houses that are appropriate and sustainable for the community they serve.

Mr SNOWDON—What is the housing shortage around Australia? How many units are we talking about?

Mr Taylor—I think the latest census analysis suggests we need something like 10,000 or 11,000 bedrooms.

CHAIR—That is extra to your existing stock?

Mr Taylor—Extra to the existing stock, if we were going to achieve the same level of occupancy for indigenous people as the rest of the country.

CHAIR—Just in this context—and I do not want to stop the flow—did I read that ATSIC was saying that the shortfall, albeit still existing and unacceptable, has narrowed and been whittled down? Is that what I understand ATSIC to be saying?

Mr Taylor—The levels of overcrowding are trending downwards.

CHAIR—So some progress is being made.

Mr Scott—I do not think we are ever going to say that no progress is being made. With Aboriginal affairs, if you look behind, you see how far you have come; looking ahead, there is still too much to do. That is where it lies. There is one other point, which I think Mr Snowdon brought up, about the money that goes into the housing infrastructure area. It is about $91 million under the Commonwealth-state housing agreement, about $220 million or $230 million from ATSIC and then what each state contributes from their own resources and their mainstream funds. So that is the sector, and it varies between states.

Mr SNOWDON—Can you isolate what they have put in?

Mr Taylor—Over the last couple of years, states have contributed substantially more than they have in the past. From memory—and I will need to provide accurate advice on this after the hearing—close to about $100 million was actually provided out of mainstream housing assistance. From recollection, the main states that were redirecting mainstream housing assistance to target Aboriginal need were New South Wales and Queensland. I think there were some $3 million or $4 million over a couple of years by Victoria. I can provide you with more details of that.

CHAIR—To what does ATSIC attribute that very welcome development? Albeit the job is not yet done, but hearing that the states are now allocating more resources compared with their previous performance is good news to me, although I am not getting carried away with it. Can ATSIC in a few words just tell the committee what it attributes that particular manifestation to? What do you think has brought that about?

Mr Scott—It is across the board. It has been a sustained effort on the part of ATSIC and also on the part of the states to actually identify the integral need, and the only way to solve it is to work together. That is again brought about with the national commitment, about having a bilateral approach to our issues.

CHAIR—Working together?

Mr Scott—It is working together—and, as I think you mentioned at the start, having a whole of government approach to it. Having numerous levels of government going to the community with the same programs actually exacerbates the problem that Mr Quick brought up.

Mr HAASE—I apologise, Mr Chairman, but I do have to leave soon to go to another meeting. I am as concerned as you are, I believe, Mr Scott, about where ATSIC is going in providing and improving services. It strikes me that you have been relatively critical of some of the agencies providing assistance and funding. What is the solution? You made a point that indigenous people are, first of all, citizens and that they should be provided for by mainstream government funding just as all Australian citizens are provided for in that regard. Are you advocating the dissolution of ATSIC? Do you think ATSIC is, in fact, redundant because it has nothing to add to the solution?

Mr Scott—If I can go back to ATSIC's functions and role, only one of our core functions is to provide programs; the rest are about coordination. I will be blunt about it: I think ATSIC's programs are its strength and its weakness. Our programs have to be much more strategic; they have to lead to the best results—and that is getting the existing government agencies to provide the resources and coordinate the programs properly. That is just not on each program issue; that is between programs.

Mr HAASE—So you see your role as analysing and identifying needs and then organising government support to address those particular needs—and no other hands-on role?

Mr Scott—No, not at all. We have a number of roles. Our major role—and I am speaking here on behalf of the board as well—is they are supposed to represent and advocate for the needs and interests of Aboriginal communities for all agencies' efforts. That is another core role. It is about monitoring the effectiveness of other programs. It is about implementing the programs we run ourselves. There are core responsibilities in terms of an overall policy context. It is about protecting the cultural rights of indigenous people. It is a whole range of things.

Mr HAASE—But in reality today, you are a funding body, aren't you?

Mr Scott—We are a funding body, yes.

Mr HAASE—And you pick winners and losers. Your staff—in fact, elected members of land councils—pick winners and losers when it comes to funding particular organisations to promote various operations, be it accommodation, health or education. There are many, many aspects that are delivering services on the ground with funds that are allocated through the ATSIC process.

Mr Scott—There are, but we are not allowed to fund health or education. That is not our responsibility.

Mr HAASE—I am very aware that, in a practical sense, councils and representative bodies of particular communities put up very strong arguments and compete for all manner of funding, and ATSIC is looked to, at least in the first instance, to provide a solution to those requests.

Mr Scott—Yes, they do.

Mr HAASE—There is, you would be well aware, a great deal of criticism out there when those communities, or particular persons representing those communities, fail in their efforts to attract funding from ATSIC for their particular endeavour. This results in very broad based dissatisfaction with ATSIC, as happens with members of government. We are a target for our constituents on occasions when things go wrong. I sometimes believe that we have elections just to identify the right person to kick. I would suggest that, in the case of ATSIC, you are so often criticised by grassroots indigenous people because you cannot fund every request and, when you fail to fund, you are criticised. Do you have a comment about that?

Mr Scott—I think it is a very difficult job for our regional councils and our staff to actually prioritise which projects we do fund and which ones we do support. We are often criticised—

CHAIR—And retain community confidence as do you that.

Mr Scott—Yes. Our process of getting the grants raises expectations in terms of the potential to get funds, and there are far more people who do not get those than who do. We are criticised heavily, but I think any political party or politician will know what the outcome of that is.

Mr HAASE—We share your plight, yes.

Mr Scott—But, again, it is a very difficult job; and that is the point I made about trying to get some impact results on the ground. We cannot meet all the requests and needs. Another core responsibility of regional councils is the regional plan. That is the point I made at the start. It identifies what the priorities are and where they think funds should be directed in any given region. Part of their functions and role is to actually implement that plan, by talking to other agencies and getting a coordinated approach about who funds which projects.

Mr HAASE—Mr Scott, would you please comment on the quality of communication of your aspirations? When I say 'your', I mean the aspirations of the board in controlling ATSIC. How well do you think those aspirations are communicated to the grassroots level?

Mr Scott—In varying degrees. Sometimes it is not successful, and I admit it. One thing we do not do well, and it is across time, is sell what our achievements are. That is one thing we need to work on, I agree. Again, we used to have a process whereby we advertised for our applications for grants. But that raised expectations so high that it was counterproductive, and the communities got a feeling that there were much more resources around than we could actually provide to meet the need. We need to work on the communications side.

Ms Sculthorpe—Perhaps I could add to the answer about ATSIC's funding program and funding role. I would mention that the ATSIC Board thinks that our program funding role is very important, because it enables them to leverage, in many cases, greater financial assistance from other agencies. For example, in the housing area, if ATSIC did not have money for housing, it would be very difficult to go and negotiate with the states about getting agreements on housing. So, whilst we have other important functions, having program funding is regarded by the board as very important. In 1996, of course, you will recall that ATSIC had a budget cut. At that time, the board had to face a very difficult decision of how to prioritise its funding and it

came up with four principles that would guide funding across the country. Those four principles are identified in the current ATSIC corporate plan. They relate to funding things that promote the distinct identity of indigenous Australians, preserving indigenous cultural heritage, enhancing the rights of indigenous peoples, and providing services that other agencies are not providing—and that was mentioned by Mr Scott earlier, of course, as being a very important supplementary funding role of ATSIC.

Mr Scott—The grants programs now are not as wide as some people, and especially the public, think they are. In a lot of areas, they are more properly serviced by other agencies. Our budget is very constrained, both by finance and by ministerial budgetary restraints.

CHAIR—That gets back to that earlier point, if I may just clarify the record. I do not believe that the committee, the parliament, the government and, hopefully, most of the community expect ATSIC to provide the answers and the wherewithal for every need of indigenous people in Australia. We should start off with that sort of base and then say, 'Okay; having accepted that, what is the best way to contribute for each of us: government, parliament, community, business, commerce, ATSIC? Perhaps you should work away on that basis.

Mr HAASE—You are going down the same track that I am. My concern is with the perception. I am out there. I have a big patch. I do not know whether you are aware, but I am the member for Kalgoorlie, so I have a very large area to cover. I have a lot of people and a lot of communities. Apart from Kalgoorlie, you might say that I do not have the greatest aspect of the urban nature of our inquiry, but I certainly have communities. Those communities are scathing in their criticism of ATSIC—absolutely scathing. I think that you have a tough job, and I sympathise.

I wonder whether there should not be more communication, indicating specifically what you are responsible for doing, so that you reduce this unrealistic expectation. But I put the point to you that the expectation is sometimes heightened quite deliberately by members of councils, for sometimes other than perfect motives. I would suggest that, by officially communicating to communities and indigenous people generally the true role of ATSIC, its limitations and the parameters that you are limited to by funding, you might have a better PROVIDE result. Every time something happens in indigenous circles, in 91 per cent of Western Australia, which is my patch, there is criticism of ATSIC. Every time I find myself as part of a committee sitting down with the opportunity to discuss with ATSIC, there is this great tendency for me to go in boots and all on behalf of my indigenous constituents.

The classic example right now is Kiwirrkurra. I believe that Kiwirrkurra was located by sheer accident, because that is where the meeting was going on when the trucks arrived. But whoever was responsible for that housing funding should be keelhauled for the result of creating that housing where it is located. It is located in a flood plain and, every time it rains in the northern sector of the Western Desert, it gets flooded out. I have 194 persons who have to be shifted to Moropoi out of Menzies, at huge expense—194 persons, the majority of whom have not been 15 kilometres from a licensed premises in their life before, and they are going to be there for six months. That action in the first instance was sheer stupidity. The outcome—over which none of us has any control, because we cannot stop it raining—is another blight on the reputation of ATSIC. Whether you are officially implicated or not, that is the perception.

Mr Scott—Again, it is the perception that ATSIC is responsible for most things in Aboriginal affairs.

Mr HAASE—Yes; that is my point.

Mr Scott—I know the issues that you are talking about. Those people are being relocated to Alice Springs.

Mr HAASE—Sorry, are you aware of Kiwirrkurra?

Mr Scott—They are at Alice Springs at the moment, aren't they?

Mr HAASE—They are in Alice, yes; but they are about to go to Moropoi.

Mr Scott—They were relocated up to near Menzies; I am aware of it, yes. So in terms of who actually created the settlement, I could not tell you—

Mr HAASE—I think it was Aboriginal Affairs and the state housing department.

Mr SNOWDON—And the Western Australian government.

Mr HAASE—It was a Labor government, by the way.

Mr Scott—Aboriginal people are shifted off to places no-one else has wanted, and history tells you that. That is probably why it was there.

Mr SNOWDON—I will tell you why it was there. I will give you a bit of history to explain this.

CHAIR—Keep it fairly short.

Mr SNOWDON—It was on a cattle route and a stock route, but at the same time it happens to be the place where, in 1983-84, the last lot of Pintubi who were wandering around the bush came to. I know that because I was working for the land council in Alice Springs at the time and I went to Kiwirrkurra to prevent airlines and every mug in Australia coming out to try to take photographs. That community was a very small community and it reasserted itself because of these people coming in. That is why it developed in the way it did. So I do not think we should necessarily blame bureaucrats. What we have to understand is that there are other reasons for that location. We might have a concern about the way planning takes place and the way housing is built, but I do not think we should attribute it to being a systemic problem for an organisation; although I understand your point about perception.

CHAIR—Thank you for that, Warren.

Ms HOARE—I am going to go searching for some positives now. You are talking about there having been an agreement between ATSIC and the Western Australian government—and Western Australia may not necessarily be a good example. Would you or somebody be able to

tell us as a committee where we could go to see a good, working, intragovernmental approach to an urban indigenous community that has been organised by the community with the support of governments and other community members? You could take that on notice.

Mr Scott—That one I probably should take on notice. I can get some more details back to you about which ones are priorities. But there are examples around the country.

CHAIR—There are lots of examples.

Mr Scott—Yes; there are many examples where there are very positive things happening.

Ms HOARE—Rather than us criticising what may not be working or what may be perceived not to be working, it would be good to get some positives.

Mr Scott—On the communication side, I would just like to put on the record that ATSIC has got a very positive communication strategy. Actually getting newspapers to sell positive Aboriginal stories is not easy. Negative ones sell papers, not positive ones.

CHAIR—Only the bad ones get reported, most of the time.

Mr Scott—A bit like elections, yes.

Ms HOARE—I only have one other point that I would like to pursue. With the program delivery role of ATSIC, you have said that you no longer advertise for particular grants. Is it up to community groups or regional councils to apply for particular programs? I am just trying to understand how it works at the moment. For example, I would be approached by an indigenous community group for program funding. Under most circumstances, if I as their local member did not know of there being a program, I would write to ATSIC or the minister and ask what programs were available. With other grants, the programs are advertised; and we again as local members advertise those to our communities and our constituents. Then, when the applications for the program moneys come in, they can be assessed against each other, rather than not against each other—if you understand my question.

Mr Scott—ATSIC used to have a policy campaign of advertising broadly across all the program areas. What that did was raise expectations through the roof, and we could not meet even 10 per cent of what came in. We now advertise in an ad hoc way the different programs and different issues that come up. But generally through the community what programs we do have are well known. What applications we do get in now we still cannot service to any systemic extent at all, and we still pick up a lot of referrals from members, a lot of referrals from other communities. But who can help? They are taken on on an ad hoc basis, really. But to revert back to full scale advertising again raises expectations we cannot meet; and, for communities, there are enough unmet expectations around. ATSIC has been through a restructure at the moment to refocus what we are doing. It has a much greater focus on providing advice across the board, not just in a program-centric way, if you like. All of our resources were centred on the programs we had, and not on the breadth of functions that we have. That is about getting on top of what other agencies do: are they having an impact? Are they having any outputs or positive outcomes at all? That is getting back to what ATSIC's role is, and that is where I think the three policy managers here are really focusing on.

Ms HOARE—The reason I asked is that I am from the Northern Rivers Regional Council area, the southern end of it at Lake Macquarie. Some other government programs seem so rigid; and there are some fairly innovative ideas out there for indigenous communities in economic development, ideas which do not fit in the guidelines. That is where I would see a role for ATSIC funding: if something does not fit within the guidelines of other government departments, maybe you could be a bit more flexible. Is there flexibility amongst your—

Mr Scott—We are more flexible than other agencies. We are actually trying to meet the needs and the outcomes the community is seeking. So we do try and be flexible in our program nature. But the programs we do have are narrow; we do not have that many. What we are trying to do in terms of that COAG agenda I mentioned is actually work with other agencies about having their guidelines and their program focus being more flexible—about going to the community and looking at the needs from the community's perspective and trying to respond to them. I am not going to say that ATSIC is perfect in this. We have a long way to go as well. We have a bit of a program style of mentality as well, and so I am not going to say that we have all the answers; but we are moving towards it.

Mr Richardson—I would just make a comment about the whole of government approach that was raised before. ATSIC obviously wants to encourage all agencies to come to the table to talk to our regional councils about what the regional councils have identified as needs and, more importantly, about the aspirations of indigenous people. But one of the flaws of that whole of government approach that we have identified is that it is usually about synchronising inputs into communities. Agencies do not change. All that happens is that the agencies come together and work together about who is going to put in their respective programs. So it is more about synchronising inputs into communities rather than a fresh, whole new look at how the agencies can actually collapse their programs into more global buckets. We would like to see fewer silos, fewer programs, and more flexible programs. It is a challenge for ATSIC itself to collapse the silos we have within ATSIC so that communities can actually be funded for needs as they determine them, not as determined by the silos that we and other agencies have actually got.

Whole of government is good for reducing duplication, but it is not really good for much more than that. We are advocating collapsing programs down, having broader buckets and dealing with the question of developmental support to communities rather than service delivery. You can give houses ad infinitum to communities but unless they are actively engaged in the planning and the building of those houses and where they are located, all you are doing is handing out to the community. We are strongly advocating that in order to get sustainable outcomes you must actively engage, understand the needs as identified by indigenous people, and allow those people to address their own needs—albeit with support to do that. That is the challenge facing all of us, particularly ATSIC: to maximise the engagement of individuals, families and communities in addressing their needs and aspirations.

CHAIR—I thoroughly endorse what you have said.

Mr QUICK—Who is responsible around the table for the home ownership program?

Mr Scott—I am, I suppose.

Mr QUICK—You state in your submission that you are primarily concerned with home ownership as a tenure choice. Why is ATSIC concerned with home ownership in that way? Is that a standard approach that ATSIC has come to; or is it an indigenous thing or a bureaucratic thing?

Mr Scott—Home ownership is generally a tenure choice, and for many communities it is not an option. It is one option in the more populated areas where there is the opportunity to purchase their own homes. But it is not available in the more remote communities and in communities on reserves, where there is not the capacity to have title. There are lots of those issues coming up about it. It is a tenure choice, and we are working on various other measures with other governments. The New South Wales government is working on long-term tenure, where you do not actually buy the land itself but you actually purchase a stake in the house, which can be handed on to your family. There are different initiatives we are trying to work on. With home ownership, we have recently moved that program to be more closely aligned with the commercial branch. It is also seen as a wealth generation point for family units, and not just as a housing tenure choice.

Mr QUICK—When was the program first started up, and where did the seed funding come from?

Mr Scott—The home ownership program itself first came out of the old Aboriginal Loans Commission, which is going back to the late 1970s. That became part of the ADC, the Aboriginal Development Commission, and that handed on then to ATSIC when it was created.

Mr QUICK—So is there new money every year going into that?

Mr Scott—There is not. When ATSIC first came in, I think it put $10 million a year into the fund for the first couple of years to build up the equity in it. But at the moment it is the stream from the repayments that actually provides more money to lend out again. At this stage it is about $60 million a year.

Mr QUICK—I notice from table 7 on page 18 that in New South Wales, in 1974-75 to 1991-92 there were 2,160; and it has now gone down to 848. In Queensland it has gone from almost 1,700 down to 650.

Mr Taylor—Those are quite different time periods. You will notice that it is from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s. The other period is only a five-year period. The break-up of that particular time frame has to do with the historical issues that Geoff just outlined in terms of the structure of the program. Conventionally, it has been reported that way just because the parameters of the program changed a little, once ATSIC came into being and kicked some more money into the housing loan fund. It is not that the rate of home ownership loans has diminished over that period; it is just that there are shorter time periods that are reflected in the reporting framework.

Mr QUICK—Are there six state and two territory home ownership bodies, or are there, like IHOs, hundreds of them?

Mr Taylor—No. There is a single national home ownership program. It has national criteria. There is a network of home ownership officers in ATSIC offices who basically deal with prospective clients and assess eligibility, and work with clients to help them work up a package that will help them get a home loan.

Mr QUICK—So is there a standard form that people work through? If there is, can you provide the committee with the form?

Mr Taylor—Yes.

Mr QUICK—What is the average loan?

Mr Taylor—Off the top of my head I cannot tell you, sorry. I am not directly involved in running home ownership.

Mr Scott—There is an upper limit, depending on what the market is in each location. So in Sydney it is much higher than it is for western New South Wales or Victoria. It is based on market values.

Mr QUICK—What is the limit in New South Wales?

Mr Scott—In the city, I think it is in the low $200,000s. I could not be sure of that. In places like Dubbo, it is around $180,000.

Mr QUICK—You can provide us with the breakdown?

Mr Scott—In terms of what those guidelines are for each location around the country, yes.

Mr QUICK—So there is one group of people in ATSIC that decide all the home ownership loans in Australia?

Mr Scott—It is one specific group. We have 29 regional offices and nine cluster offices, which are administrative centres around the country. They are located in those centres.

Mr QUICK—So if I live in Mildura, where do I go?

Mr Scott—For Mildura, you go to Melbourne.

Mr QUICK—Mildura goes to Melbourne?

Mr Scott—Yes.

Mr QUICK—Then Melbourne decides, or Melbourne sends it to where?

Mr Scott—They make a decision there.

Mr QUICK—Melbourne decides.

Mr Scott—Officers have delegations there.

Mr QUICK—So how many decision making spots are there?

Mr Scott—There would be at least nine.

Mr QUICK—Nine right across Australia?

Mr Scott—Yes. We are actually trying to rationalise the administrative resources ATSIC has with its centres. We used to spread our resources around our 29 regional offices. At the moment we have got nine hubs which are trying to concentrate the skills and resources in terms of commercial programs—whether they be business loans or housing loans. So they will have a greater turnaround, will be more responsive and will have greater quality control.

Mr QUICK—On the last part, you mention the extent to which home ownership contributes to improved financial security for indigenous home owners being something that is not well understood, and that to examine these issues ATSIC will undertake a study of socioeconomic impacts of home ownership. You say that the study will focus primarily on current and former clients of the HOP program and will consider whether changes to the policy will assist in furthering benefits accruing. Can you tell me a bit more about this study? Are you sending it out to one of those wonderful hyphenated names that do all these in-depth studies? Or is ATSIC doing it?

Mr Taylor—We are actually in discussion with two separate academic based organisations that have expertise in analysing housing assistance and housing outcomes. We certainly would not be expecting to do that analysis ourselves, but there are a couple of organisations that we are still in discussions with as to which would be the best place to provide that kind of analysis. It will not be a quick study, because it will involve fairly careful liaison with clients about their economic circumstances both at the time of their loan and at some period afterwards. It is a fairly complex methodology that would need to be pursued if we were seriously going to scope out the economic impacts of home loan assistance.

Mr QUICK—According to the ABS figures, almost 17,000 indigenous households were buying their homes. Do you know where they are? Can you give a state by state and region by region breakdown, please, so that we can make some sort of value judgment?

Mr Scott—Yes.

Mr Taylor—Yes.

CHAIR—Can I just clarify: is that request only about those people who have been assisted with this program, or is it how many indigenous people in general?

Mr QUICK—Well, 76 per cent of indigenous households who are buying their homes obviously have not gone through ATSIC. They have had to go through what everybody else has had to go through, depending on the fluctuations. I would like to know whether they are all living in Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane, or whether 80 per cent of them are in Kalgoorlie?

CHAIR—However sourced their funding was.

Mr QUICK—ABS can tell you all that.

Mr Scott—Yes, they can.

Mr QUICK—One would assume that, if you are to spend tens of thousands of dollars doing a really valuable economic study of the benefit of home ownership, you would have a lot of that stuff at your fingertips.

Mr Taylor—Yes, there is some information about the geographic distribution of home ownership in a publication by Roger Jones which analyses 1996 census data across a range of tenures. I think it gives you some geographic information on home ownership distribution, by ATSIC region.

Mr QUICK—I will ask a heretical question, considering the government is generously offering $14,000 to first home owners who are prepared to build their own homes, is ATSIC considering perhaps using that $14,000 times however many people there are within specific indigenous communities that can build homes, so that they can actually get a head start? I mean, $14,000 is better than Sweet Fanny Adams in lots of those communities; and you might as well milk this government for all you can get. I said I was being heretical.

Mr Taylor—Our home loans officers are fully briefed on the first home owners scheme, and they provide that information as part of their general service to clients when people make contact.

Mr QUICK—I am advertising to the people who live in my socioeconomic area, which is about the lowest white socioeconomic area in Australia, saying, 'Go for it!'

Mr Scott—We have done the same. As Peter said, our home loan borrowers group have been asked to contact borrowers who can benefit from that and get it moving as quickly as possible, while it is still there.

CHAIR—I have a supplementary question on Harry's line of questioning. Is your study attempting to convince ATSIC that its future policies should go out and advocate more home ownership amongst indigenous people? Is that the purpose of it?

Mr Scott—At this stage it is actually to identify what the benefits of home ownership are, vis-a-vis the social housing program—

CHAIR—For indigenous people?

Mr Scott—For indigenous people. If you look at home ownership by indigenous people, I think it is about 34 or 34 per cent.

CHAIR—I want to move on now. The reason I asked that question is that this committee had a very great interest in the Northern Territory in the inquiry into Reeves. One of our strong

recommendations—I am pretty sure that it was unanimous—was that attempts should be made to encourage that, on Northern Territory land rights land. We floated the idea of long-term leases as being an answer to some of the traditional landownership concepts which, in legal terms, are not freehold titles to individuals; they are to communities held in trust. So we were very strong, passionate and enthusiastic about that. I guess what I am trying to say, with great respect is: don't spend too much money on consultants convincing ATSIC that indigenous people should have equal access to having their own home with a secure title. For God's sake, take that as a given, if you know what I mean. I am trying to encourage you to really go forward on this one, because there should not be even a doubt—there should be no doubt at all, with great respect—that indigenous people like anyone else will benefit, provided they are financially well advised and all of that, from the great thing of owning and having equity in their own home.

Mr Scott—I do not think there is any doubt about that. One of the points I made before was that indigenous home ownership is at about 35 per cent, whereas in the mainstream it is about 75 per cent.

CHAIR—But it is on the rise.

Mr Scott—It is rising.

CHAIR—But when we talk to traditional owners and their represents in areas where Aboriginals have won land, there is a traditional cultural wall—'What are you talking about, Lou, when you say, "Why don't you let your people apply for a loan through a building society or a bank?" To do that, you have to give them some form of tenure,' and their eyes glaze over. What I think is urgently needed is for ATSIC and people like that to go out and advocate to traditional owners and communities to be innovative: give people security; give them long-term leases so that, if they want to, they can apply for a loan. Do you see what I mean?

Mr Scott—In terms of those tenure options, that is what I spoke about happening in New South Wales where, on the reserves, they cannot actually get title to the house and provide the collateral as it is now, looking at long-term tenure options.

CHAIR—Warren would know better than I do about what happens in the Northern Territory. It is difficult.

Mr Scott—It is the same principle.

Mr LLOYD—Firstly, on that first home ownership grant—just to follow on from Harry—I really think that should be advocated as strongly as possible, because its relative importance to regional communities is more important than in an area such as Sydney, because of the value of land and housing. To pay $7,000 or $14,000 for new homes in Sydney is relatively small. But, if you take it into isolated urban communities in western New South Wales where land values and house values are a lot less, I think it is an area where certainly it could have an impact on indigenous housing ownership. So I would certainly support promoting that as much as possible.

This question is more for my own benefit, because I have an urban electorate; but I have been on this committee for five years and so I think I have a basic understanding of where we are going with this inquiry. With ATSIC, you have 18 commissioners. What role do they play in the decision of determining funding for the regional councils, and how does ATSIC allocate its funding to regional councils? I ask this because, in a couple of communities where we have been, I always ask, 'Do you know who your ATSIC commissioner is? Have you ever seen them in the area?' Often there is a negative response to that. Always, wherever we go, the answer to all the problems is, 'We need more money.' Every community you go into—and that is indigenous or any other community—the simple thing is, 'We need more money.' I want to get a handle on how you sit down and divide up the bucket and what the process is.

Mr Scott—We can provide details to you of ATSIC's budget down to regional council level and what is in those regional council buckets. But we have essentially what we call national programs and regional council programs. Regional councils now have delegation, and have a separate budget where they make the decisions entirely on who gets the money, within policy parameters. The regional councils have allocations for all the CDEPs, with standard participant numbers, and they make those decisions, including the on-costs. They make decisions in terms of legal service funding which is tied to their area and also some community housing infrastructure funding. They also then have a general allocation. The minimum is around $500,000 up to $2 million or $3 million. Those perspectives, in terms of what the break-up is between councils, are largely historical, going on what has been funded previously. There is not much scope for movement there, for councils to respond to initiatives in the community. They virtually have to defund something to fund something else. Again, that is one of the reasons for not going out to advertise. But we can give you details of what that budget is. We are currently developing next year's budget. But the board is the one who makes those decisions. It makes the decisions in terms of the policy premise on all of our programs, procedures and processes, and also the allocations.

Mr LLOYD—Is it on set criteria: a needs basis, a population basis or a region basis? The areas are so diverse. Or is it just historical? 'We have always funded this program, and so we will continue to fund that.' What happens if there is another group in that area who have developed an idea that they want funded but cannot break into the network?

Mr Scott—I am not going to deny that it is difficult for them; but it is a mix of historical funding and new initiatives coming in. CDEPs are on the basis of need. Especially in urban areas—it was 1987 that they came into urban areas—they are relatively new, compared with in the more remote areas.

Mr LLOYD—It is 85, is it?

Mr Scott—It is 95, sorry. In terms of those, that is based on where it is assessed that the needs are. We have a fair capacity to introduce new CDEPs—although, in response to the deputy chair's question, we are trying to rationalise the administrative process in CDEPs as well. We are very aware of the critical mass required in terms of the administrative support for those organisations and of the limited amount of funds we have. But that is just where we are with those. It is a mixture. In terms of the discretionary money, it is firstly targeting existing programs; and they have to defund something to fund something else. In terms of the community housing infrastructure money, it is done on the basis of the analysis of our own

surveys and of the ABS surveys about relative need between regions. It is a mixture of those issues.

We have undertaken a rather extensive process to identify the health impacts of the housing infrastructure programs—and they are targeted on some really stringent policy parameters that the board sets—to target those where we have going to have the greatest impact for housing infrastructure. One thing that does limit in our funding basis is that a lot of our funds are quarantined; they can only be spent on the programs for which they are provided, and so there is limited scope. That is just one limiting factor. But our budgets papers show where the quarantining is, and any variation requires a ministerial decision.

Mr LLOYD—In relation to the indigenous housing associations, I also have concerns about the number of housing associations on the ground. It is great that you are looking at some rationalisation. I understand how difficult that is because I have been to some of the communities and talked about the cultural sensitivities and the family association with certain groups, with none of them wanting to let go of what they perceive as being their assets in order to amalgamate; and that is very difficult. A comment was made—I am not sure who made it—to the effect that there is no point in doing that, and we just keep topping up the funding. I think it may have been Mr Snowdon. I just feel that, if there are leaks at the bottom of the bucket, there is no point in pouring more money in at the top. My view would be that we have to fix what is inefficient at the bottom of the bucket, if there is an inefficiency there, before you go pouring more money in the top. I am just making that comment and putting forward my own views on that.

Mr Scott—I agree. There has been, through the housing ministers' working parties and forums, a real effort in looking at how we actually rationalise that and provide support funding. There has been a recognition now that social housing costs you money. You do not make money out of it. It requires an ongoing recurrent subsidy. To do that, we are trying to rationalise the number of providers and the number of housing organisations. But there is a factor here that we grant-fund people for these houses. You cannot take them away from them; they own them. So it is very much the point that was made about persuasion, about the best way to go about it. At the moment, Mr Haase made the point that we are being criticised. In a number of communities around Australia we are criticised for encouraging—for want of a better word—organisations that will fund you if you join up to a reasonable housing body. They are the various measures we are using.

Mr LLOYD—One of the big issues in education facing indigenous communities is getting children to go to school and to avoid drugs and alcohol; and often they have dysfunctional families. It is difficult to get indigenous children to school in many areas. Are there any specific programs that ATSIC have in place to target the needs of indigenous youth, particularly in communicating with and, I guess, in many ways educating the indigenous parents about the value of education, whether it relates to indigenous and cultural education or the value of going to school and working through those sorts of programs. Are there any specific areas that ATSIC are looking—

Mr Scott—We do not fund specific programs ourselves. We used to, prior to 1996. There used to be a program which did all those things, but it is gone now. Also, the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Youth Affairs has a range of programs which do that: the

parents' support programs and the ASPA committees do those sorts of things. Given the scarce resources, ATSIC is not going to be in a position to go in and take over those functions. They are doing that, and they are talking to ATSIC on an ongoing basis, and we have policy officers with whom they are talking all the time. So there is a much better and more effective working relationship with DETYA at the moment.

Mr Richardson—We do have a sport and recreation program, which is complementary to the issue that you raise—trying to promote healthier lifestyles. It is not just about elite sport but about participation. Hopefully it will encourage kids to stay in school and give them something to look forward to. The question of education is a difficult one for all of us. The fact is that we do not have program responsibility, yet we have a major advocacy role. We see education as very critical to employment and to the future of all of our communities.

Mr LLOYD—It is the cornerstone of all Australians, education.

Mr Richardson—Absolutely. ATSIC's position is to advocate for the programs that support the retention of children in schools, support their parents, address the dysfunction in families through developmental programs rather than service delivery programs—which is the point I raised before. It is difficult to get kids to go to school if the families are in turmoil, if they are living in a house with 40 other people, or if there are any forms of abuse in that household. That is the point about silos. If you want to put a house in, you can put a new house and a family of 40 people move into a new house—or half of them move into a new house and take all their problems with them into a new dwelling. So, yes, you address one issue, but all those other issues are still there. Our aim is to look at the wider dysfunction in the communities, to try and reduce the silos of just addressing a house and addressing bits and pieces. You have to try and bring all those bits and pieces together.

Mr LLOYD—Does ATSIC have some sort of monitoring overview? In our travels around Australia, we have come across programs that have been very successful. Often they have been successful because of the personalities involved. If you have strong leadership within your community, they have been successful. I am just wondering whether there are certain models that maybe ATSIC are monitoring to say, 'Well, we might not fund them directly but certainly we can see that this particular model is working,' and maybe expand it somewhere else throughout the country.

Mr Richardson—The whole idea of the restructure of ATSIC is to place more attention to the advocacy and this monitoring and evaluation role that ATSIC has in its act. ATSIC and the powers that be in ATSIC have realised that in the past we have placed a whole lot of our energy on program delivery and did not give enough attention to monitoring and looking at best practice and developing good policy in collaboration with other agencies and, of course, with indigenous communities. We are trying to fix that through the restructure, whereby we have somewhere in the vicinity of 250 of our staff engaged purely in a policy and advocacy role, rather than a program delivery role. We have recognised that, and that is the emphasis that we are placing in the restructure.

Mr LLOYD—If there are any examples of a monitoring program that ATSIC have that they could provide to the committee—if that is all right, through you, Mr Chairman—I would appreciate that.

Mr Scott—Would that be simply in relation to education?

Mr LLOYD—Yes, for my purpose it is. Maybe the chairman may want to expand on that.

CHAIR—Or any other lights on the hill that would inspire people and give them confidence that it can be done. In the context of Mr Lloyd's questions, can I indicate that I felt a little bit worried or stunned when I read in the submission a reference to it being wrong to ask for mutual responsibility to be part of the relationship of indigenous people with programs and governments—they are not the exact words. Someone might be familiar with that. I was a bit disappointed and I thought, 'Hang on; we've all got a mutual responsibility,' and I was very pleased to hear your responses to Mr Lloyd, and Geoff's particularly, about the directions that you are advocating—and I congratulate you on that. To me, that is an illustration of mutual responsibility. ATSIC is seeing its role and the contribution it can make by advocating good parenting programs and the value of education, and by fostering the development of good programs—delivered by others, albeit; but that is fine. I was going to ask you towards the end: can you clarify what you said in your submission? Surely to God ATSIC in the year 2001 does not want to be portrayed around Australia in the light of a narrow reading of that phrase? I just wanted to make that comment before calling Mr Wakelin.

Mr Richardson—I would make a comment on that. In terms of reciprocity or mutual obligation, we have 33,000 people working for unemployment benefits. We feel that that is a significant contribution and a demonstration that indigenous people are indeed prepared to forgo sit-down money in exchange for meaningful work for the betterment of their communities. We have in the vicinity of 2,000 or more organisations, all of which are run by voluntary boards, people with varying degrees of expertise who have chosen to donate their time to the very important issues of addressing the needs across a range of subject matter. We are not opposed to reciprocity or mutual obligation. I guess our position—and it has not been through the board, in terms of this, and so I can only say it from an officer level—is what is mutual obligation and what is reciprocity, when we believe many of our people are contributing and responding to the benefits that they are receiving in kind. I guess it is a question for ATSIC to determine, in consultation with our own people: what does reciprocity or mutual obligation really mean?

CHAIR—Certainly, it is a dialogue we want all to have with each other. The thing that I would love to hear ATSIC talk about a lot is their belief that those perpetrators of family violence in any section of society, whether they be indigenous or non-indigenous, cannot be allowed to get away with it. They have to be helped or treated or whatever; but it is not acceptable, and there is a mutual obligation on families to intervene and to do their best, too, in relation to those matters—and I know that happens.

Mr Richardson—That is right.

CHAIR—So I have got that off my chest, and you know what I am talking about. I think we are on the right track; but you might like to have a look at what you wrote in the submission.

Mr Scott—I will check that out.

Ms Oakley—Just in relation to the family, I have come to this meeting from a meeting with three commissioners of ATSIC, and we are currently in the process of drafting a family policy

which deals with the element of dysfunction in our community. But when you talk about mutual obligation, you need to really consider the value that the mainstream put on mutual obligation and what Aboriginal people bring to the table when they are wanting to enter into negotiations, in terms of their capacity and what they have to contribute. You need to look at it from a historical perspective, in terms of what has happened to Aboriginal people and why they may not have as much as people expect them to bring to the table, and why there is the need for them to have support from the mainstream to be able to rebuild some of the elements within their community, to increase their capacity to make a real contribution—in terms of not only rebuilding their community and their families but also contributing positively in terms of the broader society and where they fit and where they want to fit.

But, at the end of the day, it all comes back to what Geoff said in the opening statements—and that is about the right of Aboriginal people to be self-determining, to exercise self-determination. Somewhere along the line, the mainstream has to come to terms with what that means when we come to the table; and ATSIC has gone through this restructure in terms of separating the policy from the programs. We can develop all the policies in the world, and the glossy booklets and whatever; but how that translates into Aboriginal people's reality—especially where I am coming from in terms of being the manager of the rights program—is that we would be promoting and advocating in those policies that Aboriginal people have rights and that they have the right to come and sit down at any table and negotiate a response from the mainstream processes of government, especially in terms of the service agencies. On a needs basis and in terms of the social indicators, they should be the most needy sector in society, and therefore a response must be conducive in terms of that need. We are not witnessing that. In terms of all the stuff that has been said—and that is what is coming out in the family policy—we can have all the policies and have them as empowering documents, and the families can want to deal with the dysfunction, but they need lots of support from the mainstream processes.

Mr WAKELIN—It is always a little risky coming in late to know what has been covered and what has not. In terms of the total housing stock and the life of the existing stock, in the past I understood that there was some work done on estimating the stock and the life of the stock, and what the need was and what the stock should be. Can anyone make some general comments about that in terms of previous reports or previous understanding? Give me a quick snapshot of how it is going? There were thumb statistics done two or three years ago about the expected life of a house; and that then leads into maintenance and all those sorts of issues. That is the particular issue that I would like to quickly touch on—and I apologise for not being here earlier. I do not want to spend too much time on it. I only want a general oversight of where you think things are at with the life of housing stock and the needs. Do you want to put just something on the record about where you think it is at, basically?

Mr Scott—Yes, we will try to be as succinct as possible for you. Peter is the manager of our housing infrastructure program.

Mr Taylor—I think it would probably be best if we provided you with a short briefing note which covers the information points. We have already covered a number of other dimensions of the characteristics of indigenous housing in some earlier discussion. I am very happy to include the particular questions as part of that broader briefing note.

Mr WAKELIN—I am endeavouring to understand the totality. I understood that some work had been done on this. It could include rental, private ownership, community ownership, cooperatives, regional and urban—all the various dimensions of it.

Mr Taylor—Sure. We can certainly provide you with a briefing note which gives you a breakdown.

Mr WAKELIN—And the longevity of the houses. I will leave that to sit there. I think we understand where we are endeavouring to end up.

Mr Taylor—Sure.

Mr WAKELIN—As far as the maintenance issue goes, in here you talk about discrete communities and 69 per cent having some of the $39 million, et cetera cetera. In terms of maintenance and training, you would have all heard it many, many times over the years: can someone give me a snapshot of where that is at? I know we have CDEP and the gangs and the companies and we have initiatives happening in that area. Where are we at with maintenance, and how well are we doing, basically? Maybe that is a question to take on notice too, but you might like to make a brief comment.

Mr Taylor—The briefest answer to that is that since at least two years ago the Commonwealth and the states have developed a very high degree of consensus about the need for additional funds to be channelled directly to repairs and maintenance and to better support community housing management. Housing ministers are considering in early May a report which basically sets out the parameters for much greater improvement in performance in those areas. The report to housing ministers will, I think, note that substantial progress has already been made in those areas. There are still underlying issues about the balance of capital and recurrent funding, as our submission suggests. But the Commonwealth, since 1998, has provided a lot more flexibility to states in terms of the balance of capital and recurrent funding. I think it is pretty encouraging that states are now taking up that opportunity. Previously the Commonwealth had limited its indigenous-specific funding through the CSHA to capital, which placed a lot of pressure on ATSIC to provide the recurrent funding support for that stock. That situation is rapidly changing.

Mr SNOWDON—Firstly, I would make a comment about what Jackie had to say. I would like to endorse a rights based approach to the provision of services. I am very much of the view that reciprocity requires the national government and state governments to accept that indigenous Australians have rights and have to be dealt with on an equal basis, and that that requires negotiation and settlement. For the record, that is my view. That leads me to the question that I want to ask about the devolution of power within ATSIC and the creation of government structures which more suit regional approaches. I have seen the discussion paper on the regional issue. Where is it going? There must be a matrix of different views emerging across the country about what is appropriate for the different regions. Can you give us some insight as to what is going on?

Ms Sculthorpe—It is evolving slowly, actually. You would know that that was a concept that grew out of a review of the ATSIC Act. We have funded a number of projects across the country, including the Northern Territory, the Kimberley and New South Wales. Very different

models are evolving and they are doing so slowly; and the overwhelming view amongst communities involved in this process seems to be that they do not want to be rushed. However, alongside that in different forums, a lot of regional council chairpersons—and, therefore, regional councils—have expressed the view that they think there is a need for changes to the ATSIC Act to enable regional councils to have more autonomy and authority and, in particular, to actually receive moneys in their own right, to enable a more effective pooling of resources and to help them with economic development.

Mr SNOWDON—I am conscious of Mr Richardson's comment about having a broader bucket. For the record, could you provide the committee with the budgets from 1996 onwards? You have mentioned budget cuts. I am interested to know exactly what program elements were cut as a result of those budget decisions and, in subsequent budgets, how the budgets changed and what additional programs might have been put in place.

CHAIR—That is all on the public record. There would be no problems with that; that will be fine.

Mr SNOWDON—Could you also, in doing so—just so that we can highlight in the record what we are doing—highlight the amount of money within the budget which is effectively a transfer of benefits; that is CDEP?

Mr Scott—Yes, we can.

Mr SNOWDON—In that way, the committee will get a very clear understanding of what mutual obligation means in terms of the provision of services via ATSIC. Thirdly, I am interested in looking at CDEP and, in particular, at the relationship between CDEP and employment outcomes. I am conscious that in 1995-96 ATSIC had transferred to it the TAP program. The money for the TAP program, from memory, expired in 1996. I want to know whether any additional resources were made available for that type of program within ATSIC. If not, what has ATSIC been able to access in terms of employment and training programs for CDEP? I would also be interested in knowing what the relationship is between CDEP and mainstream labour market programs, and also the take-up rate of those labour market programs in CDEP programs.

CHAIR—You may take that on notice.

Mr Scott—We will provide that to you on notice.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Reluctantly, I now have to close the meeting. I would like particularly to thank members of ATSIC and the support group for their attendance today, and my colleagues the members on a busy parliamentary day for your help today. I would particularly like to thank Hansard for your help—it has been appreciated—and also the secretariat for their good work. We look forward to a good outcome. I have a sense that maybe the dialogue we are having shows that we are working much better together. We are improving our performance, all of us. We have a long way to go, but we are headed in the right direction. I think that is the sense of what I feel today. I thank you all for your contribution.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 5.54 p.m.