



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

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

MONDAY, 23 APRIL 2001

PERTH

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

Monday, 23 April 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 and Mr Lloyd

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

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Committee met at 9.05 a.m.

BROUN, Ms Jody Mary, Executive Director, Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure, Ministry of Housing

HOUSTON, Mr Edward Shane, General Manager, Public Health and Purchasing Group, Health Department of Western Australia

JOYCE, Mr Gregory Louis, Managing Director, Ministry of Housing

JUDGE, Mrs Petrice Anne, Director, Federal Affairs Unit, Ministry of the Premier and Cabinet

REID, Mr Stuart Robert, Principal Policy Officer (Social Policy), Aboriginal Affairs Department, Western Australia

WYATT, Mr Kenneth George, AM, Director Aboriginal Education, Education Department of Western Australia

CHAIR—Welcome everybody. I will deal with some formal matters and then we will start proceedings with the submission from the Western Australian government. I declare open this public meeting for the committee's inquiry into the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As you know, the committee began this inquiry at the request of the then Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Senator John Herron, and the new minister, the Hon. Philip Ruddock, has also 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 and today's hearing is one of a number being conducted around the country. In fact, this is the second we have had in Perth. We wish to hear from all interested parties—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—in a spirit of cooperation and goodwill. The hearing is, of course, open to the public. A transcript of what is said will be made available. If anyone would like further details about the inquiry or the transcripts, do not hesitate to ask the committee staff here at the hearing.

I now welcome witnesses from the Western Australian government to give evidence. Ladies and gentlemen, for the *Hansard* record, I will now read a statement which goes into the record of all Commonwealth parliamentary committee inquiries in Australia. Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand 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. Hansard reporters will be taking a record of what is said today and, from time to time, I may ask you to repeat or spell place names so that we can record the details accurately.

You have given us an excellent submission. Thank you. Do you have any opening statements that you would like to make to supplement that submission?

Mrs Judge—Yes, please. I plan to make an opening statement and then some of my colleagues will add some further comments to that. Thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee to discuss in greater detail the Western Australian government's submission to the inquiry into the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As demonstrated in our written submission, Western Australian government agencies already deliver a wide range of mainstream and specific programs and services to urban dwelling indigenous people. The new Western Australian government has reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring that the needs of the state's growing indigenous population are adequately reflected at a whole of government level in the development of policies, programs and services.

The state government has expressed a commitment to genuine consultation and partnership with indigenous people, empowering communities to have more control over essential services. It is recognised that state government agencies need to work with indigenous people to ensure that service delivery is practical and appropriate and that resources are utilised in the best possible and most coherent way. Agreement to common priorities between agencies is an important step towards increasing the extent to which they can work collaboratively with Aboriginal people to achieve better outcomes in all areas of service delivery.

The state government has acknowledged that there needs to be improved outcomes in health, education, employment and housing. At the Council of Australian Governments meeting in November 2000 Western Australia, along with other states and territories, committed to a practical approach to Aboriginal reconciliation based on improved and responsive outcomes for indigenous communities and greater program flexibility and coordination between government agencies, including between the Commonwealth and the states. COAG agreed that family violence, drug and alcohol dependency and other symptoms of community dysfunction, leadership and economic independence were issues that governments would address as a priority.

Of particular importance is the commitment to develop performance indicators and benchmarks relating to improved outcomes for indigenous people. The Ministry of the Premier and Cabinet is currently working closely with the Aboriginal Affairs Department to overcome barriers and to develop an integrated approach to the COAG Aboriginal reconciliation process, with the aim of improving the health and wellbeing of both urban dwelling and non-urban dwelling indigenous people in Western Australia.

Given the particular interest expressed by the committee in health, housing and educational outcomes for urban dwelling indigenous people, my colleagues will now focus on these areas in their opening remarks. Our submission obviously covers more than those areas but we have chosen to bring these representatives to the meeting. I will now call on Shane Houston to begin.

Mr Houston—I will make some very brief opening remarks. The first issue I would like to point to is that in Western Australia 47 per cent of the Aboriginal population lives in the metropolitan or south-west portion of the state and a significant number of those people live in towns or major urban centres. The terms of reference for the committee, I understand, also take into account the needs of Aboriginal people living in other town based centres outside major metropolitan areas, but most of my remarks will be confined to the metropolitan and south-west because we are able to pull out good information at that level for that region. The

disaggregation of data to town based collections from those which the Health Department currently has is very difficult and really cannot be done without local surveys and other analysis.

One of the points that need to be made very strongly is that the health of Aboriginal people living in the metropolitan and south-west land division is not, as a lot of people would think, better than the health of Aboriginal people living in other parts of the state. There are a number of conditions for which Aboriginal people have death rates which are higher than state Aboriginal averages. I will give you a few very quick examples. In respect of hospitalisation, for example, for endocrinal disorders—and that is primarily diabetes—Aboriginal people living in the metropolitan and south-west land divisions have hospitalisation rates that are the second highest in the state and significantly higher than state Aboriginal averages.

The same would be said for respiratory disease. There are areas across the metropolitan and south-west where Aboriginal people are hospitalised for respiratory disease at significantly higher rates, where the number of admissions for injury and poisoning is higher than in many other areas in rural and remote Western Australia, and where the rate of pregnancy complications is higher than in many other parts of rural and remote Western Australia. There are a number of other conditions—for example, cardiovascular disease—where Aboriginal people have death rates in the metropolitan and south-west that are significantly higher than the state Aboriginal averages. That is something that is not often understood.

I believe the committee needs to appreciate the pressures that exist within metropolitan urban based communities for health services and not simply be drawn by the popular rhetoric that all the problems exist in rural and remote parts of the state. By way of example, Mr Chairman, we expect in a three-year period about 40 per cent of the Aboriginal population to be hospitalised in the metropolitan and south-west land division. The range of problems that we confront in the metropolitan and south-west land division for Aboriginal people is primarily in what I would call lifestyle type diseases.

I would suggest that that has a particular relevance to the operations of some Commonwealth programs—for example, Medicare. When the state and the Bunbury Aboriginal community joined together to establish a coordinated care trial, the enrolment process for that program showed that about 30 per cent of the Bunbury Aboriginal population was not enrolled in Medicare so they were unable to access services funded by that Commonwealth program in that location. The average consumption of Medicare for Aboriginal people across Western Australia is about \$84 per head. Hospital and community based Medicare funded services in this state for non-Aboriginal people run at about \$800 per head. In Double Bay in New South Wales they run at about \$922 per head. So you get a sense of the disparity that exists in Aboriginal people's access to that particular program.

CHAIR—I will come in on that one. You can answer it at the end, if you wish, or now. With reference to the Aboriginal people not covered by Medicare, do you have a policy that triggers off immediately when a person presents for assistance but has not been enrolled in Medicare so that you can immediately arrange for them to be stepped into Medicare by some process?

Mr Houston—The simple answer would be no.

CHAIR—Why not?

Mr Houston—For instance, we are contributors to a number of Aboriginal health services here in Perth, in Bunbury and in Albany in the metropolitan and south-west land division. It is their practice, if people are not enrolled in Medicare, to enrol them. That is one solution.

CHAIR—It is whose practice?

Mr Houston—It is the practice of those individual organisations—the three Aboriginal health services; Albany, Bunbury and Perth—to enrol Aboriginal people in Medicare if they are not currently enrolled.

CHAIR—On the spot?

Mr Houston—On the spot.

CHAIR—That is a sensible thing, isn't it?

Mr Houston—I believe it is.

CHAIR—A one-stop shop approach. A tick for that.

Mr Houston—One of the issues, though, is that the Medicare collections do not have Aboriginal identifiers. It is very difficult for us to determine Medicare consumption rates for Aboriginal people. We have been able to do it because Western Australia is the only jurisdiction that has a linked data set which combines hospital records and MBS data. Because we have an Aboriginal identifier in the hospital data set, we can then match that up with individuals across the MBS data set and that is how we have been able to arrive at our figures.

CHAIR—Who slips through? I am sorry, Shane. I want to satisfy in my mind that we have covered this. For those who present that are not enrolled, the agency is authorised and trained and able to commence the process for enrolment, and does so in many cases? Is that a summation of what you have said?

Mr Houston—They do.

CHAIR—Who does not get covered by that process and why?

Mr Houston—The metropolitan and south-west region has been an area which has been poorly serviced by Commonwealth Aboriginal health funding. Up until two years ago the Commonwealth only funded the Perth Aboriginal Medical Service and did not fund programs south of Perth. They still do not contribute, for instance, to the operations of the Albany Aboriginal Health Service at all and they have only contributed to the operations of the South West Aboriginal Medical Service by dint of their support for the coordinated care trial. But in both instances in the south-west land division it was the Aboriginal community in the state that engaged first to develop innovative programs in those areas.

CHAIR—The memorandum of understanding on health between the Commonwealth and the state covers those things, doesn't it? What action is being taken to fill the gap under the memorandum of understanding on health?

Mr Houston—The difficulty we have is that in a lot of locations across the metropolitan and south-west GPs do not bulk-bill. Aboriginal people do not have the funds to cover the 30-odd bucks to get in and see a doctor so they do not go. That is a significant challenge for all of us. The way in which the Medicare system is currently structured does not, in fact, provide for the sort of health care servicing I believe is required to address Aboriginal people's needs. Medicare currently is focused either on short- or long-term consultations. From our own experience, having recently examined the operations of one Aboriginal health service, we have found that Medicare covers about 55 per cent of the total consult costs associated with servicing an Aboriginal client in the metropolitan and south-west region. So it is a significantly underfunded initiative.

Part of the problem is that the mechanisms of Medicare need to be reformed and we need to find new and innovative ways of accessing the resources currently being provided by MBS and PBS across Western Australia for Aboriginal people. The fee-for-service medicine, as it currently exists for Aboriginal people, is not working and we need to find new ways of doing that. That could entail, for instance, a cashing up of MBS and PBS entitlements and the construction of a second generation coordinated care trial. The Commonwealth minister released the evaluation of the Aboriginal coordinated care trials not so long ago—last week, I think, or within the last 10 days—and that evaluation pointed to a number of successes associated with the coordinated care trial and the notion of cashing up of MBS and PBS.

The real dilemma we have in that respect, though, Mr Chairman, is that the Commonwealth's approach to this has been to minimise costs, rather than to provide costs which are equitably based and which in fact go to addressing the particular needs of Aboriginal communities.

The rate, for instance, that was used for the coordinated care trials used in fact the national averages, and was significantly lower, based on studies that we have conducted, than that which is required to properly service the health needs of Aboriginal people. While they were providing us with rates that were lower than non-Aboriginal consumption of Medicare funds in the metropolitan area, we have determined that needs are somewhere between three and five times that level, and that is the order of funding which is required. And it is not just the state which has arrived at those figures. John Deeble, in some of his recent work, has also pointed to those failings, and the need for the Commonwealth to increase the per capita allocation significantly if we are to hit the mark or come close to hitting the mark.

Mr Chairman, we also need to understand the particular aspects of health within the metropolitan and south-west region. We have found, for instance, that there are three age groups which particularly need attention in the metropolitan and south-west: the nought to 14 years, the 30 to 49 years and the 50 to 69 years. Interestingly, if I could hark back to a point I made earlier about the pressures of lifestyle disorders in Aboriginal communities in the metropolitan and south-west, there were over 300 deaths from heart disease alone in the metropolitan and south-west in the 10 years 1989 to 1998, and, as we work through the pressures, we can find a strong correlation between the causal factors associated with lifestyle diseases and some of the other programs and activity of other functional agencies.

The point I am making is that, in order to fix some of the lifestyle diseases that Aboriginal people currently must carry, we need to get education, employment, housing and other areas of activity outside the health sector well organised. While there have been significant efforts invested at the state level and those efforts have been given a significant boost with the election of this new government, we continue to find difficulties with getting the Commonwealth to coordinate their activities as well.

One example that I would draw to your attention is that in the last few years the Commonwealth department of employment, DEETYA, changed rules relating to Abstudy, which would have effectively wiped out Aboriginal health worker education in the metropolitan area, so one government department was taking a step which was going to have a detrimental impact on an effort of government activity that was considered a high priority. We need to get the Commonwealth agencies better coordinated if we are to see the sorts of changes that we would want to see occur in this state. The last point I would make very quickly, Mr Chairman, is that the notion of a one-size-fits-all program offered from Canberra is a particular problem.

CHAIR—In health?

Mr Houston—In health particularly.

CHAIR—Is that what the Commonwealth is offering?

Mr Houston—An example: they took the view from Canberra that eye health was a major priority and that they would fund eye health coordinators in every region across the state. In reality we do not need eye health coordinators in every region across Western Australia, we need them in very specific areas, and a coordinator is most probably not what we need. We need funding for services. Somebody to coordinate non-existent services, to me, does not make sense, but these are program designs that were constructed from Canberra and imposed on the state. In my view, Mr Chairman, we need to find a different mechanism which allows for the particular needs of each of the regions of Western Australia and the differences between Western Australia and other jurisdictions to be taken into account in the way in which the Commonwealth constructs its programs. I will shut up at that point.

Mrs Judge—Thank you.

Ms Broun—Rather than just go through the points we made in the submission, I am just going to talk about some of the main issues confronting the urban Aboriginal people.

CHAIR—Yes, please. And, by the way, can I just ask if you have read the Tenant Advisory Service submission to this committee?

Ms Broun—No.

CHAIR—You haven't.

Ms Broun—One of the issues is very high levels of overcrowding and/or homelessness.

CHAIR—In public housing?

Ms Broun—Yes, depending on how you define that. It is not just public housing. It applies to community housing a lot as well. We have full discrete Aboriginal communities which also suffer overcrowding. Depending how you define overcrowding, whether it is homelessness or overcrowding, the census in 1996 showed high levels, particularly in Perth and the sou'west, of overcrowding. We have done some analysis of that, and there are about 500 Aboriginal people on the wait lists in the metropolitan area. That could hide a whole range of other people behind that 500, depending on the size of the families, but then there are other groups obviously, or other families, that do not apply for various reasons, and I will come back to that issue. You might have some questions around that.

Lack of access to other tenures I think also results in a lot of pressure on the public housing sector, and that is access to home ownership or access to other community housing, and the private rental sector particularly. We get a lot of anecdotal evidence that Aboriginal people cannot apply to that sector.

There are issues confronting tenancies themselves, in maintaining a tenancy and building up debts and action being taken against them, which might result in them being out of the public housing sector and then having to try to get back in. We have done some work in that area. We have a number of programs to support people that stay in their tenancies. We have customer service officers within the Aboriginal housing infrastructure unit. We also have an Aboriginal Tenants Support Service which we have recently re-established after piloting some time ago. We have targeted that to some urban areas where we felt there was particular need: Carnarvon, Bunbury, Collie, Kalgoorlie, Boulder, Wyndham, Kununurra, Halls Creek, Albany and Port Hedland. Community based organisations are providing that sort of tenancy support and help to tenants and applicants.

CHAIR—How long have they been operating?

Ms Broun—In the main, about six months. We did pilot it a couple of years ago, as I said, and then we reviewed it and we have restructured it and set it up with much better base funding. We are hoping that they will operate a bit more effectively this time.

CHAIR—They are delegated to act for the state in the public housing area? Is that in effect what they do?

Ms Broun—Their role is to support tenancies and applicants. The reason they are quite separate from the Ministry of Housing is that they can advocate on behalf of those tenants/applicants. A lot of it was recognising that groups outside of the Ministry of Housing, a resource agency or an Aboriginal based community group, were trying to provide that service anyway, without the resourcing, so what we have done is to give them a level of resourcing to do that. It will be a little while until we can see how effective that has been but, as I said, most of them have been operating for about six months to date.

Ms HOARE—Jody, following the review, can you expand a bit more on the actual actions of the tenancy support services which have worked so far, and why they might have worked?

Ms Broun—Probably not at this point. Their role is a fairly spontaneous sort of response to tenancy issues, so if a tenant got a letter they did not understand, or it might be a letter asking them for a rental review form or something like that, if they did not have all the information and they needed some help with filling that in, or applicants were having trouble with their application, that service would help them with that.

Ms HOARE—It is a reactive rather than a proactive type service?

Ms Broun—Yes. There are other services. As I said, we have a Supported Housing Assistance Program which we have running throughout the state as well, and that identifies certain tenants who are having a lot of difficulty in their tenancies, and it does a very intensive program with them, looking at all the financial and other issues that they might have in the home. They are really targeted to those tenancies where there might be a threat of eviction for various reasons or there have been ongoing tenancy issues. That service has been working for quite a number of years.

CHAIR—In Perth?

Ms Broun—In Perth and a number of other regional centres.

CHAIR—Does the tenant advisory service know about that service?

Ms Broun—I would have thought so.

CHAIR—If you read their submission, you would have thought that they do not.

Ms Broun—SHAP has been operating for how many years?

Mr Joyce—In excess of eight years, Mr Chairman.

Ms Broun—We have also done a lot of work trying to look at issues addressing homelessness. We are contributing to and supporting a number of programs there. One is a Manguri Headleasing program, where they have 15 houses from the ministry and work with families who have had significant problems in past tenancies, and in order to get back into public housing they need a lot of support with their tenancies. Manguri gets some SAAP funding to operate that service. As I said, they have 15 houses but they have assisted 19 families, four of which have been moved to a point where they can come back into the mainstream rental. That one has been working quite well.

There is a similar program which we have been supporting financially, but also in making their clients priorities—the Indigenous Family Program, which has been contributed to by a number of agencies. It is for families who are identified mainly through the justice system, where they have significant social problems and dysfunction which need a lot of support, and one family that might be dealt with under that program might actually have 30 members in it. We are not talking about one nuclear family. We are talking about one extended family, so they might have to try and arrange housing for three or four families within the 30 people. That one also is in quite an early phase and it is a little bit hard to see how well that one is working.

We have done a lot of work on looking at appropriate design and the Aboriginal Housing Board Program particularly looks at providing larger houses for extended families, where we are building almost duplex type houses so that almost two families can operate in those houses, independently, but also recognising that some families want to live in that sort of environment, and we have done a bit of work on that.

We have trialled construction of granny flats at the back of some houses so that not necessarily a granny but another family member might be able to live close to that family. And we have done quite a lot of work on constructing houses that cater for specific need groups that might have a disability in the family, a mobility house, where they need a specific location, those sorts of things.

I work with an Aboriginal housing board and we control money from the Commonwealth, as well as the money from the state. We have a grant each year from the Commonwealth of \$15.862 million, which has been the same since 1989. Our figures on that, if you allow for growth and CPI, show that we have actually gone backwards at least \$7 million, but we are also being asked to do a lot more in terms of the level and the standard of construction with that.

Ms HOARE—Jody, is that under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement?

Ms Broun—Yes. There is a separate targeted program, a tied grant under the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program, which comes through to the state, and that is the \$15.862 million, but that has been stagnant for going on 12 years now.

CHAIR—But what about the Commonwealth-state agreement on public housing? What about that amount since 1989?

Mr Joyce—There has been no growth within the broad allocation under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR—Since 1989?

Mr Joyce—No, I think there was a little bit of growth in the initial nineties, but possibly over the last four to five years there has been no growth.

CHAIR—No growth?

Mr Joyce—No growth.

CHAIR—Can you give me the figure?

Mr Joyce—Just broadly, Western Australia's per capita allocation was in the order of \$107 million to \$108 million, probably six or seven years ago. Efficiency dividends have been applied to it by the Commonwealth, and there has been no capacity for CPI growth, so we are down I think now to approximately \$102 million, and we have estimated, I think, that over the last six or seven years—I have the figures back in my office—of the agreement we have lost

approximately \$40 million arithmetically, on the bases of those two restraints on it, no growth, no indexation, and also the efficiency dividend.

CHAIR—I wonder, Petrice, if the department might be kind enough to send the committee a schedule showing the figures since 1989, for both the indigenous and also the general Commonwealth-state.

Mrs Judge—We will certainly do that.

CHAIR—Thank you. I would appreciate that.

Ms Broun—And related to that is state funding. We have actually seen an increase in state funding, where the Ministry of Housing provides some additional funds to the Aboriginal housing area.

CHAIR—If we could have that as well, since 1989.

Ms Broun—Yes.

CHAIR—That would be useful.

Ms Broun—And the state treasury has applied quite a lot of new funds, not specifically to housing, but to environmental health type programs. They would not necessarily be applied to urban areas, but there is quite a significant amount of increased funding there, so the state has been trying to pick up some of that drop in real funds.

CHAIR—How much do you need, Jody?

Ms Broun—I think we had an estimate last year, looking to meet existing need as well as upgrade of existing housing, of about \$100 million to \$106 million.

CHAIR—Was that for indigenous and non-indigenous?

Ms Broun—That was just indigenous.

CHAIR—Is there a paper that shows that figure?

Ms Broun—Yes.

CHAIR—Could we have that, please.

Mrs Judge—Yes, we will undertake to provide it to you.

CHAIR—Also the shortfall for the general non-indigenous area.

Ms Broun—We have also been talking at the national level of developing a method of allocating funds based on need, rather than per capita, and looking at different factors that affect

need. They are things like homelessness, overcrowding, cost provision. Obviously, cost for us to provide in some regions and locations is quite extreme. If we are building in Kununurra, as opposed to Perth, it is something like double the cost.

CHAIR—When does your state bring its budget in?

Mrs Judge—It is going to bring it in in August this year. They have put it back, with the new government.

Ms Broun—We are looking at a method of needs based funding rather than per capita and developing it up. Obviously the weightings will affect different states and there will be a fair bit of argument about which weightings take the most account.

CHAIR—Who designs the houses for Aboriginal people? Do you have any Aboriginal people helping you design them? If not, why not?

Ms Broun—There are probably two different responses there. One is that in communities we do a lot of work with individual designs for communities.

CHAIR—Who is ‘we’?

Ms Broun—The Aboriginal housing infrastructure unit. We appoint an architect-consultant to work with individual communities on their design.

CHAIR—He would be a white bloke, wouldn't he?

Ms Broun—Generally, yes.

CHAIR—What about the Aboriginals helping design them? That is what I want to know. Do they or don't they?

Ms Broun—We do. As I said, we have done some work in design, looking at appropriate designs for large and extended families and we have come up with some specific designs there. That had a lot of Aboriginal input. Obviously, you still need an architect to come up with the designs and for that to go to council, but there is a lot of Aboriginal input.

CHAIR—It depends who the architect is, I would have thought. If they keep producing houses that are not suitable for indigenous people, then why do you need those architects to keep on doing what they doing, which has been inappropriate?

Ms Broun—We have done a lot of work there, I think. The designs are generally not that different. There are all sorts of constraints on what you can build in an urban area, but we have managed to do some different housing in some urban areas.

CHAIR—Who puts those constraints on?

Ms Broun—The shires do, to the largest degree.

CHAIR—What have you done about getting the shires to modify their—

Ms Broun—I suppose there are a lot of building regulations that you have to meet. There is an area of flexibility that you can move in but we do have to make those constraints.

CHAIR—You are a diplomatic person.

Mr LLOYD—Firstly, on housing, what is the relationship between the Ministry of Housing and Homeswest?

Mr Joyce—Mr Chairman, if I could answer that, ‘the Ministry of Housing’ is a broad, generic term which covers the four major business units of the ministry—that is, home ownership, rental, land development and the Aboriginal housing infrastructure unit. There is governance at the top of all of those major business units and the Aboriginal housing infrastructure unit has an Aboriginal housing board. The Aboriginal housing infrastructure unit is part of the department.

Mr LLOYD—Could someone please explain how the Aboriginal Home Ownership Scheme operates and how successful it has been? Also, has there been any promotion of the federal government’s first home ownership scheme? Has that been effective at all?

Mr Joyce—The Aboriginal housing home ownership scheme was introduced by the minister about eight years ago. We fund it to the extent of about \$5 million a year. It has been a very successful program. We have now financed the 300th home—and we are about to celebrate that event—for Aboriginal people who otherwise cannot get into home ownership through the commercial sector or the other four big programs that the ministry has.

If you look at the rates of home ownership for Western Australia across the board, it is something like 69 per cent of stock, whereas for Aboriginal people it is 22 per cent the last time I looked. The challenge for us all is to increase the 22 per cent home ownership up to the 69 and we—

CHAIR—Why not 80 per cent?

Mr Joyce—Yes, I agree. There has in fact been a survey across Western Australia that shows that 95 per cent of all Western Australians want to own their own home and obviously the challenge is for us to get there. The outcome has been 69 per cent, so that has been a very successful program and one we are pushing very hard because it does build up the self-esteem of Aboriginal people. But always the threshold issue is not to put people into housing poverty, so for some people it does not work and obviously they rely on rental assistance.

Mr LLOYD—Has there been mention or promotion of the federal government’s first home ownership grant?

Mr Joyce—Yes, that has been a significant advantage now for people with prospects of home ownership, the initial \$7,000 and now the \$14,000. We have been actively promoting that through the Aboriginal Home Ownership Scheme and we have taken out advertising space, for instance, in the local Aboriginal paper and we promote it as much as we can. We have just

embarked on a big program by Key Start to promote home ownership. Key Start is the business unit name we have for home ownership. Yes, we are taking advantage of that and doing very nicely. Last time I looked at it, there were something like 500 applicants who wanted to take advantage of the \$14,000 and build a new home. Hopefully, there are a significant number of Aboriginal people amongst that 500, but I have no analysis of that.

Mr LLOYD—How does somebody qualify to become part of the scheme? Do they have to prove their Aboriginality or do they have to have a certain level of income? What are the requirements?

Mr Joyce—Yes, on both counts: they have to establish their Aboriginality with processes we have, which are very fair—basically it is the Aboriginal community who decide whether a person is Aboriginal or not—and yes, in respect of capacity to pay. One of the figures quoted to me by the person who runs the Aboriginal Home Ownership Scheme, Robert Isaacs, is that he has turned down in excess of, last time I heard, 600 to 700 applicants for home ownership simply because they do not meet the requirements of capacity to repay. That is a worrying figure, a negative figure. We are looking at that and trying to work out ways in which we can get those people who actually want to own their own home, into home ownership.

Mr LLOYD—I have a couple of questions on some of the comments that were made in the Tenants Advice Service submission. I would recommend that, obviously, the Western Australia government people read that. There might be an opportunity for them to come back and make a response, because there are some fairly strong comments made in it.

CHAIR—Yes, please, urgently.

Mrs Judge—We will undertake to do that.

CHAIR—Thank you, Petrice, that is appreciated.

Mr LLOYD—Under the heading ‘Community Housing’ they say:

For example, Indigenous families’ access to such housing programs is limited by Homeswest policy, as it requires that the same eligibility criteria be applied to community housing applicants as it applies in assessing eligibility to applicants for Homeswest housing ... Homeswest demands that Community Housing Associations (CHAs) provide the names of all applicants in order to check their eligibility against Homeswest’s criteria.

Does anyone want to make a comment on that?

Mr Joyce—That is the issue really of Homeswest admittance criteria, where we have rules about getting assistance. We are always in the dilemma of weighing up Aboriginal rights against Aboriginal obligations. It is trying to decide where the balance lies in that respect. There is no doubt in our system that Aboriginal people are treated more favourably than non-Aboriginal people.

If you look across the key indicators, like arrears for instance, they are about 10 times higher for Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal people. For instance, the last time I looked at day-to-day maintenance, the figures were that we’re spending about twice as much on Aboriginal dwellings as non-Aboriginal dwellings. Aboriginals constitute about three per cent

of the population and I think they are at about 15 per cent of our applications and have about 18 per cent of our tenancies.

We have about 7,500 Aboriginal tenants. The basis for that imbalance obviously is the need of Aboriginal people, but always we have to weigh up the need and the rights of Aboriginal people against obligations. In respect of obligations we have these three rules: people have to pay their rent, live in harmony with their neighbour and look after the dwelling. What often happens if a family gets into trouble and owes the ministry money, is that we then apply the criteria—and we have lots of positive programs in that—to deal with previous debt. We ask the community groups to also apply that policy and to try to treat Aboriginal people the same as we treat non-Aboriginal people. That is always the goal.

Mr LLOYD—There is also in the submission a claim—a claim that we have heard in other areas and not just related to Homeswest but in other states as well—that many of the properties provided by Homeswest to CHAs are run-down ex-public housing stock and that the newly built housing is often cheaply constructed and vulnerable to change. They go on with some examples of that. I thought you might like to make a comment on that sort of claim.

Mr Joyce—Certainly in the south-west, Mr Chairman, there is substantial criticism of some of our older dwellings. I know that you come from a rural area and you would know the issue of dying little country towns, the fact that we have no demand and we have old stock. It is a fair criticism made by TAS and other groups that we do have old stock in little country towns which we expect Aboriginal people to occupy. We take notice of that criticism.

We have surveyed all of our towns and hopefully we have a future on every property we own. We have established a stock replacement program where we either go into the dwelling and do it up or, alternatively, knock it over and build a new one. We estimate there are approximately 1,000 dwellings caught by that criticism—and it is fair criticism—and we have replaced or upgraded approximately 250 of those units. It is obviously a matter of money and trying to balance up the competing interests for that money, but we will work our way through the program. There has been some substantial criticism of the ministry, particularly by Derbarl Yerrigan, of the quality of some of those dwellings in little country towns. Clearly, it is our responsibility—my responsibility—to do something about that.

Ms HOARE—I just want to clarify something you mentioned earlier about four housing programs within the housing department and one of those programs being specifically Aboriginal housing. Is that correct? Has the department or the ministry looked at using aspects of the Aboriginal housing program in the other programs, to make the other programs more accessible for Aboriginal people?

Ms Broun—My area is specifically Aboriginal but we also look very closely at the mainstream rental programs and the community housing programs to increase access there. I sit on the Ministry of Housing executive, so I have input to all those program areas, and policy areas as well, and we do a lot of work making sure that people have access to all the mainstream processes.

Ms HOARE—Therefore you would be making suggestions to the other programs about what makes the Aboriginal housing program accessible to be implemented in the other housing programs?

Ms Broun—Probably it is a little bit complex in that some of our program is urban based housing which we fund through the AHRP, but they are managed through the mainstream rental function, so we do not actually manage that housing. What we do is monitor the access to the whole 36,000 units and make sure that Aboriginal people are having equal access, based on need. We have done a lot of work there—similarly with the community housing program, which is a separate area—making sure that they advertise and making sure that Aboriginal groups can access that program.

Ms HOARE—Going back to the tenancy services that you provide, and going back to a similar point that the chairman was making, where do the suggestions come from for the services which you provide to help Aboriginal families with any tenancy problems they may have? Do they come from Aboriginal people themselves or is that a bureaucratic step-in, to say, ‘Well, this is the way things should be done and this is the way we’re going to tell you how to address these problems,’ or is there a process in place for those solutions to come from the community?

Ms Broun—All of those programs, except for my own sort of customer services officers, are run by community organisations, and besides assisting people to meet policy, how they might go about that would really be their own decisions.

CHAIR—Petrice, we will go back to your broad presentations. We will come back to questions then.

Mrs Judge—I would like Ken Wyatt to pass some comments on education.

CHAIR—Thanks, Ken.

Mr Wyatt—Thank you, Mr Chairman. In respect to the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the whole ethos nationally, of which Western Australia plays a key role, is based around the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs agreed national targets and performance indicators. These have also been enshrined in the Commonwealth legislation in the Indigenous Education Program Act, in which those targets have become objects of the act.

I will table with you a copy of our draft IESIP agreement with the Commonwealth which has been negotiated jointly. It is premised on a closure of the gap between educational outcomes for indigenous children and non-indigenous children. Over the four-year period, we have negotiated, with the Commonwealth, targets that will move towards closing the gap in eight key areas, and that is in terms of access and participation, the enrolments, improving Aboriginal literacy, improving numeracy, increasing employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in education and training, improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students, increasing enrolments and reducing the gap where students are not enrolling in either of the three sectors, increasing the involvement of Aboriginal parents and community members in educational deci-

sion-making, increasing professional development of staff involved in Aboriginal education and the expansion of inclusive curricula, which includes Aboriginal studies.

MCEETYA also has established an indigenous task force which has an ongoing role of looking at the areas of early childhood education—that is, from nought to eight years—and the actions that need to be taken by Commonwealth and state agencies in addressing some of the underlying issues which are impediments to children learning. For example, otitis media or middle ear infection is a significant factor, because we know that Aboriginal children in the first six months of their lives have one episode of OM and then have a subsequent number of them. That impedes the acquisition of language and sounds, and therefore it impacts in the long term on literacy, so there are collaborative arrangements that are being put in place.

The OECD's thematic report on early childhood education is also the basis of the MCEETYA task force work. It has looked at schooling, and there is a national report that has been produced and endorsed by all state and territory ministers and the Commonwealth minister as the key way forward for indigenous education over the next four years. That is also enshrined in the Commonwealth legislation, in terms of the objects of the act, the bilateral agreements that exist and the basis for the funding, and the amendments made by the Senate is the open reporting back to the Commonwealth parliament in terms of outcomes achieved.

CHAIR—Transparency.

Mr Wyatt—Yes.

CHAIR—The government accepted those readily, I understand.

Mr Wyatt—And state and territory governments have accepted those readily as well. The other important aspect is that in Western Australia, Catholic Education and the Association of Independent Schools and the Education Department have an arrangement that is based on a collaborative partnership where we share information and we join together in the development of resources. We are focusing on four key areas of the state where the literacy and numeracy outcomes have not been at the level that we would expect for the closure of the gap, fundamentally the Kimberley-Hedland town site and Strelley Community, the Goldfields in terms of Kalgoorlie-Coolgardie town sites and the three independent Aboriginal community schools. In the metropolitan area we are focusing on the Swan education district, where we are trialling a range of initiatives to do with these key areas, and in looking at what mechanisms work, where collaborative partnerships perform the basis of effecting change for the underlying issues in education. I will also give you a copy of our draft Aboriginal education operational plan as well.

CHAIR—Yes. You are doing that now?

Mr Wyatt—Yes.

CHAIR—Is it the wish of the committee that the document tabled by Kenneth Wyatt from the Education Department of Western Australia, *Performance indicators and targets*, be accepted as an exhibit and received as evidence to the inquiry into the needs of urban dwelling? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

Mr Wyatt—Mr Chairman, I will give you the other one too.

CHAIR—That covers you for privilege and all that. You know that. Thanks, Kenneth.

Mr Wyatt—And the other document that we have produced is: all state and territory systems create an Aboriginal education operational plan within their jurisdictions, which then looks at how that is implemented for schools, so it is then dispersed across all schools—urban, rural and remote—with a view that the targets that we are moving towards in achieving the closure of the gap apply equally across all parts of the state, and whilst there are specific intervention programs that may be required, based upon large centres, nonetheless the intent is to close the gap for all children so that they are competitive at the end of 10 to 12 years of schooling.

The other issue that arises out of the MCEETYA task force work is the strong recognition and correlation between the effort to address the nought to eight years of a child's life in focusing on the underlying issues that impact on education, and then looking at the collaborative mechanisms that need to be put in place. But the only downside was the closure of the gaps in terms of some targets and performance indicators. Certainly the Commonwealth had a very strong line in terms of wanting to reach certain levels, whereas the states and territories were being very pragmatic in what could be achieved, but there has been a reaching of agreement within the construct of those closures, and certainly it becomes the focus of our work over the next four years.

I am certainly optimistic that, with the partnerships that exist between the three education sectors in Western Australia and the cross-agency initiatives that are occurring with the Ministry of Justice in the future—health, and then with housing and other agencies—we will certainly move towards addressing those factors that get in the way of children achieving the educational outcomes that we seek for all children.

I also provide to you and table the copy of a draft Aboriginal education operational plan called *Creating the vision*, which goes to the pragmatic implementation of the targets and performance indicators within the IESIP agreement, because they are complementary in the work that the state is doing in its effort to close the gap in the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

CHAIR—Is it the wish of the committee that the document tabled by Mr Wyatt entitled *Creating the vision 2001-2004* be accepted as an exhibit and received as evidence to the inquiry into the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs Judge—I wonder if I could call upon Stuart Reid from Aboriginal Affairs to add some comments generally.

CHAIR—To add to that, might I say, most refreshing and dynamic introduction of something that is beautiful to hear. Good on you. Well done. Yes, go on.

Mr Reid—I have just a very few brief comments to make from the Aboriginal Affairs Department. I should preface them by saying that I do not have the depth of corporate history

and corporate knowledge of my colleagues here, having only been with the department a short while and having been called in at short notice to present today.

In addition to what we have said in the papers, I would like to stress that the Aboriginal Affairs Department is not the one that is actually providing services on the ground. It is very much a department that is involved in the coordinating role in relation to access to services.

CHAIR—Whole of government.

Mr Reid—Yes, very much so, and in providing support to government departments in the provision of services to Aboriginal people.

CHAIR—Stuart, who is your minister? What is the title of your minister's portfolio?

Mr Reid—The Minister for Indigenous Affairs is Alan Carpenter.

CHAIR—Does he have other portfolios?

Mr Reid—Yes, also education and sport and recreation.

CHAIR—He is a senior minister?

Mr Reid—Yes, very much so.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Reid—The actual areas where we do provide direct funding are in the areas of heritage and culture, which I think is covered in the papers, and the other one is funding to patrols, which is a fairly significant sum of money that is provided for street patrols of various kinds. Each one is different. There are no two that are the same.

CHAIR—Who designs them, Stuart? The community?

Mr Reid—The community. They are community initiatives primarily, and the funding is very much a hands-off type of funding as well, so it is like grant funding to those patrols. Most of them have ATSIC money from CDEP as well to pay for the patrols there, but the major one in the metropolitan area, the Noongar patrol, gets much more of its funding elsewhere, so it is funded from the City of Perth and other agencies as well.

But there are a number of issues associated with those patrols that I would just like to mention briefly to the committee. They vary enormously in their effectiveness. One of the things that the police tell us is that when a patrol is working well in conjunction with sobering-up shelters and other support services, there is a very significant decline in arrest rates and contact with police generally. That is something that we would like to see extended and developed. It is not something that the department can fund on its own, although we have a business plan at the moment to expand the funding for patrols and to get a couple more patrols up and running.

Access to Commonwealth money is something that we have started to turn our attention to just in very recent times, so I thought I would alert you to that. We are now looking at the Stronger Families Stronger Communities funding area there, and the Indigenous Family Violence Grants Program as well. One of the issues that was first raised by the Aboriginal Justice Council—in mentioning the justice council I would also like to put on record the deep regret of the department at the passing of Glynis Sibosado, the chair of that council, who died just a few days ago; it is a very significant loss—was that there be a state-wide conference or workshop of patrols. This is something that has been identified by various interagency meetings at state level, but it is not something that anyone has been able to fund, so getting those patrols together to meet and identify what works, what is commonly effective, would be something that would be, I think, a very significant contribution to making them work that much better.

CHAIR—Are you looking at getting people from patrols in other states as well?

Mr Reid—Initially the idea was to bring the people together from within the state. They do not have any peak body to represent them and yet there is a great deal of experience there. While it is not possible and would never be desirable to have one-size-fits-all, there are lessons learnt that would, I think, lead to some significant improvements to their operations, if people were given the opportunity to exchange those lessons.

CHAIR—I just mention it in a general sense. My colleagues, of course, have to deliberate with me on the report we make, but I think it is no secret that this committee believes very strongly in identifying people who can be successful mentors across Australia, and giving them support and recognition and encouragement but also, hopefully, being able to utilise their skill and their experience in passing on their knowledge to others who wish to attack problems at the community level.

Mr Reid—Yes. We have been giving some assistance to the Crime Research Centre at UWA, who are currently conducting a review of patrols across the country. They are profiling all of the patrols and, in that process, they may be able to identify some of those sorts of mentors that you have mentioned. We can certainly raise that with them and see if that is something that emerges from their research.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Reid—The other tendency, I suppose, in the department at the moment is in relation to our local area coordinator. We have regional offices and local area coordinators. If I could paint a broad brush across that, it would be to say that there is a movement afoot to shift the emphasis more towards capacity building so that those local area coordinators are working more closely with the agencies, local community organisations, to build their capacity to interact with government. Now, they are already doing that, and that is a substantial part of their role, but the department is narrowing its focus more to its core business of heritage and culture and land and the local area coordinating role will be very much focused in those areas.

CHAIR—Exclusively? What about health and education?

Mr Reid—What we find is that when you start to build the capacity in the community it increases its ability to deal with those other issues. For example, in my area, which is social

policy, one of the areas we have been working on is to do with youth suicide. In coming up with the profile of things that are risk factors and things that are protective factors in communities, we identify the same risk factors and the same protective factors as exist when you look at family violence or at the health issues or any of the other sorts of issues, so the strategies to deal with those issues tend to be common. An important element of that is working with those communities to build their capacity to manage their interaction with all these government agencies, and to access the funds as well, not directly from us but even just in spreading the word about the Indigenous Family Violence Program grants. That is something that we have been quite actively pushing.

CHAIR—It seems to me that we have a great potential, and without being discourteous to anyone—and I do not mean my words to indicate that, but I am hoping to get a response from you—you have people in different cars driving into the same communities day in and day out, month after month, trying to address these urgent issues, representing various levels of government agencies and the like. When will they travel in the one car? What is stopping them travelling in the one car together, even perhaps merging their responsibilities?

Mr Reid—I think I should just say ‘I don’t know’ to that one. I have not been with the departmental officers going out to communities myself, and I do not have the experience to be able to comment on it. Sorry.

CHAIR—Yes. You might like to take that on board.

Mr Reid—Yes, I will.

CHAIR—The committee, I am sure, will be. Thank you. Yes, sorry, Stuart, keep going.

Mr Reid—My final comment would be that in our role of coordinating, working with other agencies—particularly other agencies of the state government—we are in a stage of transition there with a new government having come in, and I think there is a feeling of optimism and some enthusiasm in the department for the emphasis on collaboration that is coming from the government. There are some promising signs there.

CHAIR—Certainly the Commonwealth would be very pleased—that is the Commonwealth’s strategy—to have people working together as a team in partnerships, and fostering the growth of the autonomy of the indigenous people from the ground up.

Mr Reid—Yes.

CHAIR—That is the way to go.

Mr Reid—Sure.

CHAIR—Thank you. Now, Petrice, how are we going? Have we covered the bases?

Mrs Judge—I think that has covered most of our points.

CHAIR—Mr Lloyd was anxious to ask some questions on health.

Mr LLOYD—Yes, particularly of Mr Houston. Some of the comments in your opening statement concern me a little bit. You commented that the average access to Medicare was \$83 per head for Aboriginal people. That is one-tenth of mainstream Australia.

Mr Houston—That is right.

Mr LLOYD—That really is a very concerning figure. Can you elaborate on how you come to that figure?

Mr Houston—There have been a couple of different approaches that have been used. We conducted a review of Medicare funded services across Western Australia about 18 months ago now. That was a fairly extensive exercise that brought together some survey work and sample work in Aboriginal communities across Western Australia, as well as using available data that we had at our disposal. Interestingly, John Deeble, who was one of the original architects of Medicare, about six months after that came up with a figure of \$84 per head. Some other work that we have recently concluded in respect of the analysis of the linked data set of MBS and the HMDS—hospital morbidity data system—has again demonstrated the failure of Medicare. The most telling example is that one I used in respect of Bunbury, which is a large regional centre two hours away from Perth. At the time that they were enrolling the Aboriginal population of Bunbury in the coordinated care trial, 30 per cent of them were not enrolled in Medicare. So it is not a figure that is dreamt up; it actually has a fair degree of science behind it.

Mr LLOYD—You also made the comment that a lot of doctors do not bulk-bill. Do you have some figures on how many doctors bulk-bill that could be provided to the committee?

Mr Houston—I am not sure whether that information is currently available. I do know that in Bunbury no doctors bulk-billed until the two doctors were employed in the Aboriginal Medical Service.

Ms HOARE—Would those urban divisions be able to provide those figures?

Mr LLOYD—Certainly I think the Commonwealth would be able to provide the figures as well.

Ms HOARE—Well, that is the urban division.

Mr LLOYD—I think that would be useful to get back to the committee on that.

Mr Houston—Sure.

Mr LLOYD—In the Commonwealth submission to this inquiry it stated that the Australian government's objective is to provide health services to all Australians through the mainstream health services. Certainly, talking about urban Aboriginal people, there would be an expectation that they should be able to access services that are provided to mainstream Australia. Some of your comments seemed to be very critical of the Commonwealth government's role, yet we

have the five-year Medicare agreement—a Commonwealth and states joint funding agreement—under which it is the state government's responsibility to deliver health services on the ground. I know that specific Aboriginal health initiatives are under the federal department of health, but I am concerned that there does not seem to be enough coordination or working together to actually get what we want, the results on the ground. What steps are the Western Australian government taking to increase communication and liaison so that the services can actually be effectively delivered?

Mr Houston—Mr Chairman, you mentioned the framework agreements, the bilateral agreements, between the Commonwealth and the states. Certainly that is one of the principal tools that we are using now to drive the sort of reform that is necessary. Western Australia constructed their regional plan somewhat differently than most other jurisdictions. We established and resourced partnership teams in each of the six regions across Western Australia that comprised ATSIC, Commonwealth, state and community sector representatives. Each of those teams then constructed a regional Aboriginal health plan. Those regional Aboriginal health plans were then rolled into a state-wide Western Australian Aboriginal Health Strategy which was endorsed by the cabinet prior to the last election. That strategy and those plans are now the driving force behind the efforts of the state to improve services.

Mr Chairman, what I was trying to point out was that it is fine to have macro-level framework agreements but, at the same time, my experience has been that there is, unfortunately, an historical legacy that Aboriginal communities and state governments of any persuasion do not get on. There has been a criticism historically that state health systems do not pull their weight, and—

CHAIR—Or cost shift.

Mr Houston—Or cost shift. One of the things that we have been quite keen to do in Western Australia is to dispel that myth. Over the last eight years we have lifted the specific contribution to Aboriginal health services from about \$275,000 to almost \$20 million, and 86 per cent of that is directed at community controlled Aboriginal health services. In addition to that, we have established a series of ground rules which are then written into the contracts—the health service agreements—between government and health service providers that draw their particular attention to the health needs of Aboriginal people. In addition to that, we have invested a considerable amount of work in understanding Aboriginal health needs, rather than being carried along by the rhetoric of it.

For example, we are in the process now of constructing a Western Australian Aboriginal health social atlas which allows you at a glance to understand the relative needs of Aboriginal communities in comparison with each other. That is a fairly important strategy because that then allows us to show, for instance, that people in the metro south-west have, for males, a standard mortality ratio basically equivalent to that in the Pilbara. That is an important issue which, until very recently, was hidden.

There are a number of these important strategies we have been putting in place but the point I wanted to make, if I could draw to a conclusion, is this: while there has been an historical suspicion of state governments and the Commonwealth has held the moral high ground in respect of the provision of services to Aboriginal people, the facts of the matter are that in

Western Australia we have invested an enormous amount of time and a considerable amount of money—almost \$75 million over the last eight years—in specific Aboriginal health services to turn that around.

It is fine, then, for us to construct a framework agreement, but the agreement has to be a true partnership where the Commonwealth does not dump on the state, the state does not dump on the community, and the community does not dump on both of us, but we recognise the shortfalls that each of us have and the constraints that each of us have by dint of budget or other statutory requirements, and that we work together. But it is important, I think, for the Commonwealth to understand how its operations and ‘Canberracentric’ attitude in many respects does in fact hide the notion of horses for courses. We need to target efforts, particularly if we are to hit the ground running and to make the difference that we need to achieve.

Another issue I will very quickly touch on, Mr Chairman, is that the national Aboriginal health performance indicators have now been in place for three years. The jurisdictions have just completed their third annual report of those performance indicators. There are something like 56 different indicators against which we report as a jurisdiction annually. We have noted over the last few years an increase in the life expectancy of Aboriginal people in Western Australia in the order of four years for both men and women. That is a considerable improvement, and I think we should be able to draw from that the conclusion that improving the level of activity in the state, making sure that the resources that we currently do spend and the building of a stronger partnership with the communities and the Commonwealth will deliver better results. We should not let the global rhetoric undermine the need for us to be at least honest about the shortcomings of particular programs.

Mr LLOYD—You mentioned the glaucoma program, which was not needed in some areas.

Mr Houston—Yes.

Mr LLOYD—Have you, as a department, made representations back to the Commonwealth government to tell them that? If so, what has their reaction been to that?

Mr Houston—Mr Chairman, when the Commonwealth brought their proposal to us, we raised that issue with them. I have been in this game for 30 years and we did exactly that in 1975 when the Fraser government established the Aboriginal Public Health Improvement Program and the National Trachoma and Eye Health Program.

That is what we did in 1975. When we pointed out to the Commonwealth that we were repeating processes that we established nearly 20 years ago and that we would expect a similar result—that is, not a huge improvement—their reaction was, ‘Oh, we’ll just send the money back to Treasury.’ My response to that was, ‘I think that’s a ridiculous idea.’ The state sat down and said, ‘Well, it’s your money. You make your call.’ But having raised a legitimate response, I do not think the reaction of the Commonwealth was at all suitable.

Mr Chairman, I would say, however, that there are very good examples of the Commonwealth and the state and communities working cooperatively. One of them is a program which the Ministry of Housing, the Health Department of Western Australia, ATSIC, the Commonwealth department of health, and Aboriginal Affairs Department are joint partners on and that is the

Environmental Health Needs Coordinating Group. That has been a specific example of where previous disparate efforts have been able to be drawn together in a well-coordinated, well-structured process which has, I think, meant a greater degree of efficiency and effectiveness of program outcomes across the board. There are examples, but I think we do have to be blunt about those where we still have problems.

Ms HOARE—Would you be able to provide the committee with some more information about that program you just spoke of?

Mr Houston—Certainly. There are a few publications, Jody, aren't there, that we can get hold of?

CHAIR—In conclusion, Jody, if you could provide the committee with details of the statistics on evictions of indigenous families in each part of the state of Western Australia in the past 10 years, on a year-by-year basis, we would be grateful. We do not necessarily want you to do it now but perhaps within the next month. I am a born optimist and I am hoping that those statistics will show a decline in the number of evictions, but I may well find that I am disappointed, in which case we will talk again.

Mr Joyce—No, Mr Chairman, there has been a significant decline in evictions of Aboriginals in the last two years.

CHAIR—In the month that we talk about, Petrice, I would particularly like a written response to the Tenants Advice Service submission which has been given to us. It is a public document. It contains some very serious matters and I would like to have the benefit of your response to that as well. I do not want the committee to deliberate in the absence of that response.

Mrs Judge—Certainly. When are you reporting?

CHAIR—We are hoping to do so by the end of August but there is a lot of work to be done. We would be grateful for that.

Mr Reid—Mr Wyatt has pointed out to me that there are a couple of projects where officers do go in one car.

CHAIR—I am sure there are.

Mr Reid—One is the Geraldton Aboriginal Reference Group.

CHAIR—It is the chairman's rhetoric, you know. I am sure there are. I just want to see more of it. We are on the right track. I would like to say that overall the submission you have given me and the responses today have been very encouraging. I particularly want to say that the more the Commonwealth and states can work together on identified, targeted, performance measured, dedicated consensus of policy and purpose, the more success we will have. I think the drive towards getting ownership of the programs from the community level, rather than people in Canberra or Perth—dare I say it—running them, is a great thing. If we keep working together, there is nothing that can stop us, is there? Thank you very much.

Mrs Judge—Thank you.

CHAIR—I appreciate your time today. We will now have a short adjournment.

Proceedings suspended from 10.25 a.m. to 10.34 a.m..

NINYETTE, Ms Robyn Michelle, Solicitor, Tenants Advice Service Inc.

PURDY, Dr Jeannine Marie, Coordinator, Tenants Advice Service Inc.

WALSH, Ms Joanne Patricia, Tenant Advocate and Access Worker, Tenants Advice Service Inc.

CHAIR—I now welcome witnesses from the Tenants Advice Service to give evidence. Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand 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. Hansard reporters will be taking a record of what is said today. From time to time I may ask you to repeat or spell place names so that we can record the details accurately. Before we ask you questions, we have received a submission from you, thank you. Do you have an opening statement that you would like to make in addition to the submission?

Dr Purdy—Mr Chair, I briefly would like to commence by acknowledging that this hearing is being conducted on Noongar land. I would like to thank the committee very much for the invitation to appear before you and to let you know that we do not have a prepared address, but we are happy to answer questions.

There are two minor issues I would like to clarify before that. The chairman has asked that I clarify a comment in our written submission which refers to rumours that were circulating towards the end of last year that this committee had gone to Margaret River for hearings. The chairman has confirmed with me that that was not the case. At the time I was unable to find information on the Internet, where I was referred by the office, as a site where I would be able to obtain information where the committee had attended hearings. I have since also been able to verify that the committee, in fact, had been to Laverton, Kalgoorlie and Murrin Murrin at that time.

The second point I would like to clarify arises out of comments that were made earlier this morning. I would like to draw the committee's attention to pages 23 and 24 of our submission. The comment related to the Supported Housing Assistance Program. You will note that our submission does address that program briefly, highlighting what we consider to be the existing problems with that program. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. Did you wish to ask your colleagues to add to any opening statements, or go straight into questions?

Dr Purdy—Straight into questions.

CHAIR—It was good that you were able to hear, for most of the time, the Western Australian state government representatives here today. You would have noted that I asked them if they had read your submission. I am not criticising them. They have not yet done so, but they have undertaken to look at it. I have asked them to give me a response to substantial matters you have

raised, hopefully within a month. We will share that with you, of course. That will become a public document.

Dr Purdy—Thank you.

CHAIR—I thought it was important to do that. You would have noted, also, that I asked the representatives of the Western Australian government to provide the committee with some statistics on evictions, et cetera. I thought it would be important for me as chair, and my colleagues, to have that knowledge; not that statistics are the things that finally decide things, but they are very helpful and give some guide. In that regard it might be my first question to you: what can you tell me about the trend in relation to evictions of indigenous people in Western Australia from public housing? Do you think it is on the rise or declining, or is it stable?

Ms Walsh—Anecdotal evidence would say it is continuing apace. We have been trying to get the eviction statistics for some time now. They used to be provided to us routinely. They have not been provided to us since soon after we did our analysis quoted in our submission. We are unable to verify what Mr Joyce has said twice now publicly—that there has been a decline in evictions. If indeed there has been a decline in evictions, that may well indicate or correlate with the high number of homeless people. Anybody struggling with their tenancy has already been evicted. Similarly, the number of people being housed by public housing has reduced over recent years and so naturally there would be a decline.

CHAIR—When we get that information we will share that with you. That will be very helpful to all of us, I am sure.

Ms Walsh—Thank you.

CHAIR—What sort of house design should there be? If you were designing a house for an indigenous family living in urban Perth, what would you do in that design?

Dr Purdy—What we had noted was an initiative from Family and Children's Services at the Commonwealth level in developing a booklet with very detailed outlines of the requirements for culturally sensitive indigenous housing. That appears to be only applied in remote areas and not urban, although our view is that a number of the considerations highlighted would apply just as much to urban dwelling indigenous people as they do to remote. We certainly are planning to use that as a reference for assessing the urban dwelling provided for indigenous tenants.

CHAIR—Yes. I am not asking you to do an architectural drawing, but in words can you paint a picture for me of what you regard as an appropriately provisioned design house in Perth for an urban family who will have visitors coming to it as part of its cultural activity? Can you give me an insight into that?

Ms Walsh—With respect, sir, I do not think it is our position to say what best suits Aboriginal people. I think Aboriginal people themselves need to be consulted over that.

CHAIR—I am not disagreeing with you. I thought you might—

Ms Walsh—I can tell you how unsuitable current housing is and why it is unsuitable, but I could not tell you what—

CHAIR—What about kicking off on that; tell me what is unsuitable.

Ms Walsh—What is unsuitable is the lack of outdoor living areas, the small rooms. For example, if you have a family with six children and you have a tiny little lounge room about as big as that kitchen out there, there is not a lot of space to sit and so people have to sit outside. The only landscaping provided by Homeswest is to the front of the house, so most people will congregate out the front of the house and cannot use the rear because it is mostly just sand and weeds. More than one toilet—

CHAIR—It is covered in weeds, did you say?

Ms Walsh—Yes.

CHAIR—My backyard gets covered in weeds sometimes, too, unfortunately.

Ms Walsh—Yes.

CHAIR—So that is not unusual.

Ms Walsh—No, it is not unusual, though it does aggravate those particular health issues that indigenous people have.

CHAIR—But I pull the weeds out when I get time.

Ms Walsh—Yes, I do, too.

CHAIR—Who should pull the weeds out in the Aboriginal home that is their home?

Ms Walsh—That would depend on the family structure, sir.

CHAIR—Explain that to me because I want to know what the difference is between a tenant who has weeds in their backyard and why the responsibility to clear the weeds off differs, if it does. I do not know whether it does and I want you to tell me about it.

Ms Walsh—Sir, I would say, given the level of disadvantage and health problems in indigenous families—for example, if you have nanna looking after six or seven littlies, her grandchildren, because for one reason or another mum is in hospital or indeed, in detention, there is nobody to help her do the gardening and she is struggling to cope with the children. Then weeds in the backyard are the last thing from her mind—for example.

CHAIR—Okay, but as a general principle, would you say that the tenants should be encouraged to try and do the garden and keep the weeds down?

Ms Walsh—Certainly, and that would be facilitated in some ways. Unfortunately Homeswest's reaction to weeds in the backyard is to issue breach notices and commence the termination process. We do not feel that minor things like weeds in the backyard justifies termination.

CHAIR—Have there been cases where people have had their tenancies terminated because the weeds in the backyard have not been attended to?

Ms Walsh—Sir, you would have noted Mr Joyce's repeating of his three main rules: pay the rent, maintain your standards and get on with your neighbours. Maintain the standards is associated with indoor and outdoor standards. Yes, people have been breached. Yes, termination notices have been served and, yes, court action has been instigated on the basis of the standard of the yard.

CHAIR—Do you think there is justification in some cases for that? I know we are generalising and there would be exceptions, but in general terms would there be justification for trying to maintain those three standards for any tenant, whether they be Aboriginal or not?

Ms Walsh—It would depend on the circumstances of the tenant. Those things should be taken into account.

CHAIR—Yes, but subject to that, generally speaking. I have a friend who is a quadriplegic. He and his family are tenants in a public housing estate and it is impossible physically for the heavy gardening to be done with two little children. Okay, so no-one would say that person should be taken to task for letting—

Ms Walsh—No, the circumstances would be taken into account, but as you heard Mr Joyce say this morning, 'We treat everybody the same,' and that is the philosophy—treat everybody the same no matter the circumstances.

CHAIR—Does a fair administration take into account special circumstances for any tenant, whether they be Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, not able to achieve for some reason the three standards because of something happening beyond their control? Doesn't the policy factor in that sort of compassionate approach?

Ms Walsh—No, unfortunately, sir, there is a discretionary decision-making policy. There are a number of policies; they are like four phone books that set out the policies and practices of Homeswest. They say quite clearly, 'If the standards are not maintained the tenant is in breach and this is the process.' There is one policy known as the discretionary decision-making policy which allows senior officers to take circumstances into account which could not be considered in a general policy because you cannot anticipate everybody's different experiences.

In May 2000, following community consultation, there were proposals to implement guides for officers making discretionary decisions; what things should be taken into account—for example, health factors, number of children, viable alternatives; those sorts of things. They still remain outstanding. Those guidelines have not been implemented in policy.

CHAIR—That is a Homeswest guideline, is it?

Ms Walsh—That is correct.

Ms HOARE—The advocacy service you provide for tenants is Homeswest community housing. Are there other community housing approaches in Western Australian communities which are working well and can you tell us why they are working well?

Ms Walsh—I can speak only from the urban metropolitan experience and there is certainly one program that stands out markedly and it is run by the East Metro Community Housing Association. They have more than 80 people on their waiting list who are, in effect, excluded from all other forms of housing. They have an average of three children for each of those 80 families waiting for housing just in the Midland area. There are policies they implement which are different to those of Homeswest and which are successful. For example, if one of their tenants is the victim of harassment in the neighbourhood or domestic violence, it is not considered a matter for that family to deal with themselves. They are assisted and a transfer is effected to more appropriate housing. If the woman is in danger, for example, there will be alternatives looked at in transferring into private accommodation as an interim measure until alternative housing can be found.

On the other hand, and in contrast, we have Homeswest. I have one case at the moment where the police were called 41 times to that house because she was the victim of severe domestic violence, and Homeswest refused to transfer her because she was in rent arrears. That is an opposite approach to what EMCHA would do. EMCHA would be counselling, financial counselling, helping people with their budgeting and dealing with the domestic violence issue appropriately, and not linking the two.

Ms HOARE—Who runs EMCHA and where do they get their housing stock from?

Ms Walsh—It is a community based organisation who gets their bricks and mortar from Homeswest and who struggle to provide enough, or to have enough support dollars to run the support side of their services, but they are very committed people.

Mr LLOYD—On that, shouldn't the support dollars come from the income that is earned through rents in the community housing organisations?

Ms Walsh—Certainly, yes, but then there are maintenance dollars. I do not know a lot about housing management and budgeting for things like planned maintenance and those sorts of things on a small community level. That is not my field. But maintenance costs are high, employment costs are high, running costs are high. The type of people being housed by such community groups are amongst the most disadvantaged in our society and therefore they have a higher need for those supports. Do you want me to say something about the support dollars for Homeswest—whether the rent they collect gets put back into supports?

Mr LLOYD—From Homeswest's point of view, are you aware of that?

Ms Walsh—I am aware of the Supported Housing Assistance Program and I am aware of the Aboriginal Tenant Support Service. I am aware that the workers in those organisations experience a high level of frustration, with Homeswest not taking into account their recommendations, or instructing them to withdraw support from families who, they know and

they have advocated, need it. I get calls at least once a week from those sorts of agencies who feel themselves to be in a conflict of interest situation. They cannot represent the tenant in court to defend against eviction. Although they recommend against eviction and support the tenant fully, they cannot take such a case. They are not funded to do that. There is a high level of frustration in the support agencies who are not getting the support of Homeswest when they are proposing plans to address the issues as they arise.

Mr LLOYD—Does Homeswest have any budget for maintenance and ongoing support of the bricks and mortar?

Ms Walsh—As far as I am aware, Homeswest does not do planned maintenance any more. Perhaps you can elaborate on that area.

Dr Purdy—Just to clarify, are you talking about community housing properties or their own?

Mr LLOYD—Particularly the community housing associations.

Dr Purdy—The day-to-day maintenance is the responsibility, as far as I understand, of the community housing agency. Structural issues are the responsibility of Homeswest.

Mr LLOYD—Is Homeswest encouraging the establishment of community housing associations?

Dr Purdy—Yes, it is. They have a very strong commitment to community housing.

Ms HOARE—Following on from that, you say the community housing associations have responsibility for the maintenance and the day-to-day administration and Homeswest provides the bricks and mortar funding.

Dr Purdy—Yes.

Ms HOARE—What if the funding came from the state government department to the community associations to build, maintain, administer and support the community housing, rather than the bits and pieces of funding for one home or one community coming from different areas?

Dr Purdy—It would be good if you had a community housing representative here to talk to you about these issues. From our perspective, one important issue we do have is that through Homeswest you have an avenue for having uniform standards across a sector of community housing people, because they are able to impose that through the contracts they enter into with community housing providers. At this stage we have problems with it because, as was identified earlier, I think, in questions to Mr Joyce, one of the requirements is that these community housing providers impose Homeswest policies. We see that, in certain circumstances, as being negative, but it is also an opportunity for quite a positive uniformity across a very varied sector, if it was used appropriately, we think.

Mr LLOYD—Do you get claims of discrimination from tenants where you have a number of community housing organisations in one town? Some of the submissions have said that in smaller communities there are very small community housing organisations and there seems to be a reluctance to look at merging into a coordinated body because each one has their own stock which they feel is their own. Do you get claims from tenants saying, ‘Well, I can’t access that particular community housing organisation because of particular reasons’?

Dr Purdy—No.

Mr HAASE—Jeannine, could you give us a broad-brush description of your organisation? I am interested in where your funding comes from. I am interested in whether you are racially specific and whether you provide for a general cross-section of the population. I would like to know what the organisation does. I would be most interested if you had some strong advice here as to what you thought Homeswest should do in regard to their policy of maintaining a standard for all tenants—how you would address that conflict of not condoning in one racial group behaviour that is expected to be condoned in another.

Dr Purdy—I will start, first of all, by briefly outlining our organisation. The Tenants Advice Service was probably the first community legal centre established in Western Australia. It has been in existence for over 21 years now. For most of its history it provided services directly to tenants through a telephone advice line and casework and policy work and representation on government bodies and input into law reform. Recently it changed its purpose considerably. A new program was put into place, developed through the Ministry of Fair Trading, which sees our major role now as being a resource unit for a tenancy network throughout the state. We assist and support tenancy workers who provide direct services in a number of remote and regional areas and in a number of metropolitan sites as well. That is our major function at the moment, with the continuation of our policy and law reform work.

Our funding is partly through the Commonwealth legal aid funding program for CLCs. A third of our funding comes from that. The majority of our funding comes from tenants’ money. It is based on the interest that accrues on tenants’ bond money which is managed through a trust fund called the Rental Accommodation Fund, which is administered through the Ministry of Fair Trading and also in conjunction with Treasury. Two-thirds of our funding comes from that source; therefore, tenants are paying for two-thirds of our services.

Mr HAASE—Your services are provided to clients on a non-racial specific basis.

Dr Purdy—That is right.

Mr HAASE—You are not an Aboriginal tenants advocacy service?

Dr Purdy—No, we are a tenants advocacy service.

Mr HAASE—Our discussions so far this morning may have led people to believe that was the case.

Dr Purdy—I would like to add that, under the programs for which we are funded, we are required to assist those most disadvantaged under rental market conditions. A majority of our ex-

isting clients that we do intensive casework with are indigenous, although we do provide other services, such as telephone advice, to any tenant.

Mr HAASE—You have not broached the issue of what advice you might have for Homeswest in handling a very large tenancy portfolio.

Dr Purdy—There are a number of issues that we have. If you are looking specifically at indigenous matters, we would always go back to the fact that we are not an indigenous organisation. The appropriate venue for dealing with indigenous issues is in consultation with indigenous people. We have issues about the level of funding. That is a major complaint that we do have. We also have concerns about Mr Joyce's three simple rules. We do not think they give enough weight to people who often have quite horrific circumstances attached to their lives and which make what appears to most of us to be very simple requirements extremely difficult.

The other thing is more a general, broader issue. There is a lot of talk about people being treated in the same way. If that is taken to its logical extension, I cannot see why a tenant can be made homeless because of the state of their garden, whereas someone who owns their house cannot be treated in the same way. In my view, there are issues concerning housing and shelter which go beyond what people like and do not like about their neighbours. If you are a property owner you cannot be evicted if your neighbours do not like who you are or how you keep your garden, whereas if you are a tenant you can be. To me, that is a very grave inequality.

Mr HAASE—Yes. Of course, the opposite point of view tends to herald some major problems in maintaining coexistence in society, doesn't it?

Dr Purdy—Yes.

Mr HAASE—It is fair to say we have broached the subject this morning about suitability of housing design. I was interested to hear you acknowledge the Noongar people here, whose lands we are on today. I do not like to pre-empt, but I imagine you believe that the future for indigenous people is one where we coexist but Aboriginal culture is something that is maintained very strongly. Would you agree with that?

Dr Purdy—Yes, I would agree with that.

Mr HAASE—Is it, therefore, problematic that we are, with an institution like Homeswest, building general usage housing and yet it has to address the requirements of two distinct cultures? You would, through your association, have enough knowledge to know that the Aboriginal culture and Western culture are directly opposed. They are not similar. They are directly opposed. I wonder if you appreciate the question of housing design and its suitability when you have a general community service to provide for both Western culture people and Aboriginal culture people. Into the future that becomes a continuing problem if we accept that Aboriginal culture is something to promote, underline, increase. We increase the differences.

Dr Purdy—To some extent I would agree with your comments, but not completely. I do not see that there is necessarily a diametrically opposed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture. Certainly a number of the issues that particularly are crucial for indigenous people in public housing apply more broadly. For example, the issue of poverty is much broader than the indige-

nous community; issues of larger and multigenerational families often apply to groups other than indigenous people.

Often we find that migrant groups have difficulties which are very similar to indigenous people's. So I do not necessarily agree with a distinct line and a diametrical opposition. But I do think there need to be allowances made for those cultural differences and, when you do have specific funding that is going to Homeswest for indigenous housing, it seems to me the argument that they need to provide a general housing stock that suits anybody needs to be mediated by recognition that there is specific funding for Aboriginal housing.

Mr HAASE—Would this explain, do you think, the popularity of creating separate organisations—that is, separate from Homeswest general—for the provision of Aboriginal housing? Do you think it is so out of kilter with the general community requirements that Homeswest recognises it as being something that needs to be addressed by a separate administration, because the homes are not culturally transferable, if you like? I accept your point that paralleling many Aboriginal situations are the situations of large families, immigration people—perfectly acceptable—but in the Aboriginal population we have three per cent. We have a general 97 per cent. If we have any belief in democracy, it ought to be, I would suggest, that the homes are designed to be generally applicable.

Dr Purdy—They may be the general statistics. Our point always goes to who needs Homeswest housing and you get a very different demographic if you look at people who are eligible for Homeswest housing.

Mr HAASE—I accept that.

Dr Purdy—It is not general. One trend you will see, based on that argument, is Homeswest providing smaller and smaller accommodation based on the general demographic. We would say, 'You shouldn't be using a general demographic. You should be looking at the demographic of the people you need to house.' They do have a different demographic. There is another point I would like to make that I was thinking about while you were speaking. To have a very diametrically opposed division of things also fails to acknowledge that some indigenous people might choose to live in a more mainstream style accommodation.

My position would be that there should not be any hard and fast lines here. We should be trying to accommodate people so that they do have choices, but not to impose structures on them where they must live in a certain way because they are indigenous. That also tends to often go into the idea of separate communities which again some indigenous people are not in favour of. I think there needs to be flexibility.

CHAIR—In a general sense I notice that 69 per cent of indigenous householders in Western Australia are in rented dwellings, compared with 25 per cent of the total state population. That comes from your submission. I would like to see what positive gloss we can see by asking whether in fact it is the case—and this is what I understand to be the case—that in Western Australia most of the indigenous tenants are good tenants and are not evicted and manage to get on reasonably well with their neighbours? Is that the case?

Ms Walsh—Yes, that is the case. However, you will find that most tenants in difficulty are indigenous tenants.

CHAIR—Yes. I am not trying to diminish the thrust of your submission, which I have listened to and I am worried about. I am stressed by it. I feel that it is terribly important for our indigenous brothers and sisters in Australia—the media are here today and I am glad they are—that the impression is not given, and I know you do not intend to convey it, but it is my duty as a chairman to make sure that indigenous people's interests are also looked after generally. The fact is that the bulk of indigenous families are good tenants and are regarded as such by everyone and get on very well.

Ms Walsh—Yes.

CHAIR—That is something I would like to see on the record and I am glad you are agreeing with me on that.

Ms Walsh—Unfortunately I do see all too often good tenants becoming a victim of bureaucratic processes.

CHAIR—I guess we have all been guilty of being affected by bureaucratic process at some time.

Ms Walsh—Only the outcome for our indigenous clients is much more severe.

CHAIR—Let us get down to the core of it then. There is clearly a need to do better for some of our indigenous tenants. That is quite clear. Do you think the path we should walk upon is that eventually the provision of housing and the management of housing for indigenous people should be the responsibility of indigenous organisations rather than state or federal bureaucracies? What would you see as an ultimate goal? Would it better to have them managed and run and planned and funds allocated and all of that by indigenous organisations, or do you see them as inevitably having to remain in a mainstream type of organisation?

Dr Purdy—I suppose our position always comes back to the fact that we are not an indigenous organisation and we would like to see those issues addressed in consultation with indigenous organisations. We do not feel able to make recommendations about what should be done. We have seen our role very much as identifying the issues that we deal with daily and highlighting the severity of the problem.

CHAIR—I know it is your duty to do that and you do it very well. I acknowledge that. I am looking to the future and where Australia should be heading. This committee of my colleagues has been involved in some major inquiries. We have worked together and, although we represent different political parties, I think we have a common bond, all of us, in that we would like to see indigenous people given the opportunity to run their own affairs more and to gain experience in management and look after things themselves.

Ms Walsh—Certainly.

CHAIR—That is a dream we have and I wanted to see whether you share that with us or if you think ultimately it might be a good thing. Inevitably some of the things have to be done with a mainstream mix. For example, you cannot have a health system totally excluded from the mainstream for indigenous people, can you? You have to use the benefits of the mainstream system.

Ms Walsh—But as much as we can we allow flexibility and choice, so that if an indigenous person wants to go to an indigenous health organisation rather than the local GP, they should have that option.

CHAIR—Yes, fair enough. I noticed in the Western Australian government's submission an excellent thing being done over here and that is to set up an indigenous elders advisory council. I am not sure whether that is the name of it. The elders are being consulted more and more to help the state government develop its programs for indigenous people. Have you had any contact yourselves with State Commission of Elders Council, SCOEC. Have you had any contact with them?

Dr Purdy—No, we have not.

Ms Walsh—Although I have had several clients who are members of the Noongar Circle of Elders who have been under threat of eviction.

CHAIR—There is a commission of elders underneath that peak body. I am interested myself in making contact with the Commission of Elders to see if they would spare some time for us, as a committee, to swap notes with us. I am wondering whether you might be interested yourselves in having a discussion with them, too. The issue of domestic violence, for example, is a horrific situation and worries us all. It seems to me that some of the elders of indigenous people can help us to try and address some of the cultural problems that are preventing women from going for help when they are constantly abused and violently assaulted, but for various reasons are not seeking help in areas where you would hope they would seek help, if you know what I mean.

Ms Walsh—Yes. We would be more than happy to see you consulting with indigenous people.

CHAIR—I noticed in your very graphic submission an account of a woman who was constantly screaming because of the violence she was being subjected to.

Ms Walsh—She caused a nuisance.

CHAIR—And was subject to an eviction.

Ms Walsh—Yes. She caused a nuisance. That is quite common.

CHAIR—My mind went to why would that poor woman be in that position. I did not want to make a judgment but I wondered whether there were some cultural problems that prevented her from seeking help as well.

Ms Walsh—The major cultural problem is that she is unlikely to call the police. Homeswest will then bill her for the damage by the rampaging perpetrator, which will put her at risk of eviction and, if she is evicted, she and her children will not be housed again. In addition, there is poor or a low level of security on such houses. I have another client currently who is a victim of domestic violence and we are having to go through inspections and negotiations and letter writing and provision of police reports and it is a long slow process to get security on the house. In the meantime the family has continued to be subjected to domestic violence.

CHAIR—That is the issue, as I said, in white man's society. I was a practising lawyer myself and in our society you would hope that the victim would call the police and the evidence would be quite clear that the damage done was not done at all by that person, the victim. No-one would even think of sending the bill to the victim for the damage, nor would they trigger off a provision in the lease that says, 'While you have been in that house it has been damaged.' Where the evidence was clear that the person who damaged it was this other person, the perpetrator not the tenant, no-one would even dream of bringing forward an eviction against that poor victim. But you are telling me, in this horrific submission, that a victim because of cultural problems was not able to demonstrate that the damage was not due to her.

Ms Walsh—That is correct. Even where we have got police reports, unless the woman says, 'Officer, before you give me a lift to the hospital, please come around and make notes of these holes in the doors and the walls that he has made tonight,' we only have a police report number, a report of an assault and there is nothing there about damage, the woman will be charged for the damage.

CHAIR—Are you telling me that the woman's word that she did not cause the damage, that she was in fact assaulted severely by someone and that that person did it—

Ms Walsh—Is not sufficient for Homeswest.

CHAIR—That Homeswest will not accept the word of the tenant.

Ms Walsh—No, they will not. I have one case at the moment where I have had to get FOI documents from the police in order to establish the case that the damage to the house was in relation to the high level of violence.

CHAIR—The person that inflicted the assault.

Ms Walsh—The perpetrator.

CHAIR—That is why I am trying to encourage you to talk to the elders, because it seems to me that the elders in our society in Australia today might be able to help us deal with some of these things.

Ms Walsh—Unfortunately some of the elders are victims of violence themselves.

CHAIR—I know. They have told me that. Most of the elders have great wisdom and ability to provide guidance, but many of them feel that they have been bypassed in the past and some of them do not want to, for reasons of violence themselves. It is a huge problem, isn't it?

Ms Walsh—Yes.

CHAIR—I have shared my thoughts with you. Thank you.

Ms HOARE—I want to go back to the support services. I do not know whether you were here when I was asking questions about the support services being provided by the government. It seemed to be a very reactive service that was being provided, where an incident would happen and officers would go out and help people clean up after the situation had occurred, whether it was getting in arrears or whatever the case may be. Your services seem to be provide a more holistic approach and a more proactive approach, rather than being reactive. Can I ask you the same question I asked of them. Where did the ideas for your services come from? Did they come from the community or are you there as a 20-year-old tenants advocacy service saying, ‘We think this is the right thing to be put into place’?

Ms Walsh—Underpinning our organisation is the principle of social justice and we also have a history and we take a very broad view. Where the workers on the ground providing supports to tenants through the Supported Housing Assistance Program or the Aboriginal Tenant Support Service may not necessarily have the training, the understanding of the person in their environment, their job is to ensure that the tenants comply with their tenancy obligations. They are in a very unfortunate position in that they are in a dilemma: is the client the tenant or is the client Homeswest? When Homeswest ask them to report on conditions at the tenancy they are restricted in their reporting—for example, in relation to, ‘Has the tenant been maintaining good standards?’ The SHAP worker will report, ‘The tenant is making great attempts. We are making inroads. It might be two steps forward, one step back, because we are dealing with domestic violence or other issues, and we recommend continuing support.’ But Homeswest, on the other hand, will be having a complaint from a neighbour or the rent arrears is not being addressed; perhaps the water bill is not going to be paid in time before the next water bill comes. Then the SHAP worker is instructed to counsel the tenant to pay their account. If the account is not paid in time the SHAP worker may well be instructed to withdraw their services.

We actually provide training to community workers and we have had recently one of the Aboriginal Tenant Support Service workers recently appointed and coming to our training and we have also trained several of the Supported Housing Assistance Program workers. What we find when they come along to our training is that they have little knowledge of tenancy legislation and they have little knowledge of Homeswest policy and are often very surprised to learn. We take the view that perhaps the tenant has not scrubbed out their bath, but what about Homeswest’s failure to put in sufficient ventilation? There is no exhaust fan in that bathroom and mould is rampant. The support services are only looking at ensuring the tenant complies with their obligations and nobody is looking at why Homeswest is not complying with their obligations in order to facilitate better outcomes for everybody—which is the view that we take.

Ms HOARE—Yes. It seems to be that the community groups and the advocacy groups, like yourself, need to say, ‘Okay, let’s put all differences aside. This has been going on for too long. We’re spending our lives fighting each other rather than working for the good of the community.’

Ms Walsh—Exactly.

Ms HOARE—‘Let’s sit down now and have a look at what has been working, where the difficulties lie and what we can do as governments and communities working in partnership together.’

Ms Walsh—Absolutely. We can get this to a certain extent. For example, there was widespread complaint about Homeswest’s bankruptcy policy. A working group was established, which included Homeswest and community groups, to look at and review the bankruptcy policy and see if it was still appropriate, who it was affecting and what the implications of the policy were. All members of the group tabled legal research and so on and so forth to develop a discussion paper.

Unfortunately, Homeswest refused to provide the legal advice on which they relied for that policy. So we are technically, perhaps, consulted and allowed membership onto groups. Another example is the Applicant and Tenant Support Service Working Group that I am on, where it has taken 12 months to get to the point where protocols for cooperation between Family and Children’s Services and Homeswest are at the draft stage. That draft suggests that the most appropriate form of coordination is that once an eviction order is made by the courts, then Homeswest will notify Family and Children’s Services that the children are at risk. That was the protocol they came up with after 12 months. So we try and cooperate and coordinate, but unfortunately it is a very long, slow, frustrating process with such a big bureaucracy.

Dr Purdy—On a more positive note, recently Mr Joyce, on behalf of Homeswest, publicly apologised to indigenous tenants for the treatment that they have been subjected to by Homeswest. We saw that as an opportunity maybe for things to change.

CHAIR—We heard him talk today about the inappropriate dwellings in some parts of country Western Australia.

Dr Purdy—Yes.

CHAIR—He did not pull any punches then, and said, ‘We were wrong,’ but we can all be wrong. I guess we have learned from it, and we move on and do better, don’t we?

Dr Purdy—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Jeannine, Robyn and Joanne. I have appreciated the effort you have taken and our discussion. I hope we can meet again. We will give a lot of thought to what you have said. We will have that information in a month’s time. James, will you make sure Jeannine gets a copy of those Western Australian government documents that we have asked for?

Dr Purdy—Thank you very much.

Ms Walsh—If there is anything we can provide for you, please feel free to call, because we have lots of documentation.

CHAIR—Yes. If you get to speak to the elders and there is anything that is appropriate that you can let me know about, I would appreciate a letter from you on that.

Ms Walsh—Okay.

CHAIR—The witnesses are excused, and we thank you very much. We will adjourn for five minutes until the next witnesses arrive.

Proceedings suspended from 11.22 a.m. to 11.30 am..

DAVIES, Reverend George Arnold, Member of Executive (Justice Portfolio), Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia

CHAIR—I now welcome witnesses from the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia to give evidence. Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand 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. Hansard reporters will be taking a record of what is said today. From time to time I may ask you to repeat or spell some place names so that we can record their details accurately. Before we ask questions, George, do you have an opening statement that you would like to make?

Rev. Davies—A very brief one, Mr Chair. I appreciate being able to participate on behalf of the Youth Affairs Council of WA. I am sorry I do not have my colleague with me that I had hoped to have. My personal involvement has been over 23 years in a range of areas of work and a lot of network contact with members of the Youth Affairs Council network, and I am happy to be able to collate some of that. It is clear, with particular reference to young people in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, that they have a need to get together and to be together. Their sense of community is clearly expressed by being physically with each other in a very major way. There is ample research about that, including a particular need in the inner city of Perth, as I assume in other inner city areas, because the CBD, the inner city, the metro here, is like ‘the big meeting place’.

It is a big drop-in centre. It is where, north and south of the river and east and west of the railway line, cousins and connections meet. Young people at Midland have said, ‘No matter what they have for us at Midland in the northern suburbs, we’re still going to go to town.’ Over time there is ample research of young people being in town but not getting a message of welcome. This is the critical problem, especially in the last decade. Whilst we can look at the needs of Aboriginal people, and young Aboriginal people in particular in the Youth Affairs Council’s case, we see a particular need to look at the environment around those Aboriginal people—the white environment, the policy environment, the application of power, the decision-making environment, which is largely of course a white environment—which has been blocking the clear researched needs of Aboriginal young people and their wider age range connections for a long time.

There are problems with local government, with state government, with federal government, with business community, with police policy, with the processes of all of those, and with attitudes, and I would be happy to expand on any of those in the process. But we think it is a key thing and people could say, ‘What are you doing as a whitey speaking on things to do with Aboriginal people?’ Well, we whiteys have an awful lot of work to do with other whiteys who are in the way, who are blocks, so it is certainly a partnership and often the white or the policy or the power community is not being an effective partner really.

I do have also, on behalf of various connections, some misgivings about the distance sometimes that Aboriginal elders can be from Aboriginal young people, so it is not just a race or ethnic thing. As we whites can become distant from our youth cultures and subcultures, the

same thing is clearly a potential in the Aboriginal community. Often young people who are at the most disadvantaged end, the most at-risk end, have difficulty being heard by their own eldership, who are under a range of stresses and pressures and are also having to react to pressures on them from non-Aboriginal power structures. Young at-risk Aboriginal people are a very lonely lot and I have had quite a bit to do with them.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. What is the role of the Youth Affairs Council with indigenous people? Does it have a formal responsibility in its funding or charter?

Rev. Davies—The Youth Affairs Council is a peak body in WA for agencies and individuals involved in youth affairs, so it is a very wide-ranging network, from individual members to agencies, from the Kimberley to the Great Southern, Esperance and such, involved in the practical nuts and bolts, practical reconciliation areas of health, housing, education and employment, but also in hearing issues to do with culture and connection and identity and inclusion. Across the network, public space has been a very major issue in youth affairs for both black and white young people. That has been the theme of a national youth research conference put on by Melbourne University and the University of Tasmania as the Clearing House for Youth Studies in Australia.

A couple of years ago the major theme was ‘public voices, public spaces’, and there is an apprehension amongst the community generally about young people being in groups in public spaces. It is almost as if there are three places to be that are legal if you are young. You can be at home, at school or out shopping, but if you are elsewhere, you are the focus of anxiety. Groups of young people are approached, but groups of older citizens sitting down around DOME Cafe or elsewhere are not approached. I went out to a meal with my mother who is 92. We took her out for a birthday meal at a nice restaurant at Subi—the occasional event that you attend as a sort of middle-class family—and there were the police frisking and searching young people getting off the train, wearing baggies sold by the retail industry. They are a source of anxiety for general commuters and they are the focus of private security and railway security and police.

They get a message from that, which is that they are not really included, they are not really welcome. Certainly they are not really understood. In the inner city a huge proportion of those young people are Aboriginal. The Noongar patrol system that I spent two years on the committee of—until last December—its first two years and a bit, would be contacting 200, 300, 400, 500 Aboriginal people each weekend with 40, 50, 60 per cent being young and 20 to 30 per cent of those being obviously affected by substances and constantly moved from point A to point B, with the suggestion—sometimes subtle, sometimes overt—that they should not be in town. The public space issue has been discussed across the whole state-wide network and national network in youth affairs for some time. It is a public policy issue, a major one.

CHAIR—George, from your long experience in working with youth, and particularly in the Perth area with indigenous youth, have you noticed an increasing trend of young people leaving the traditional or outback lands and coming to urban communities such as Perth? Have you observed any trends there and, if you have, can you tell me what you think is causing that?

Rev. Davies—No, I could not be specific about the trend. I have been doing youth depression and suicide training courses, so that has taken me to the Kimberley and to Esperance and

elsewhere. I have not been aware of issues raised by Aboriginal communities in those places that they are losing young people to the city. It is almost as if it is a given, it is taken for granted, that the city is a place you visit, if not stay in. It is a major zone of stress where those Aboriginal families that are urban have lost, extensively, connection with their roots, identity, culture, language and so on, and therefore the extended family that is so important in social networks is present for Aboriginal people and by and large not present for non-Aboriginal young people who do not have the aunts and uncles and cousins around.

But for urban Aboriginal people the aunts and uncles and cousins are themselves suffering the consequence of dispossession and disruption and so on, being overwhelmed by the complex world, which means that there is a lot of drunkenness, a lot of fighting and a lot of, you might say, inappropriate modelling. For white young people, the absence of an extended family is a serious problem; for black young people, the presence of an extended family likewise reflects urban culture, with changes that are too rapid and impacting. Those young people frequently become alienated from their own family. There are various cultural customs, such as being parented by more people than just your genetic mother and father. There are bigger roles for other persons, but making those connections work is more difficult in an urban environment, so that Aboriginal young people frequently become free-floating frisbees; they have lost their connection.

Friday and Saturday nights up in Midland there are groups of young Aboriginal people everywhere, and then in town they come on the trains. On the way in on the trains there will be fairly in-your-face policing—the words that Assistant Commissioner John Standing has used to his police officers—so there is in-your-face security. The Youth Legal Service has reported an escalation of public officer arrests, where a railway security officer or a police officer, for example, is saying, ‘Antisocial behaviour!’ and a stream of that is going on in the courts. My term for it is ‘double alienation’.

Young people are alienated from their family connections frequently and the family is alienated from roots and culture and environment and identity culturally. For young people to get anywhere near their own Aboriginality successfully requires a double jump. It is huge, and many are just not wanting to face it. They say, ‘I don’t want to know my uncles and cousins. They fight all the time. I don’t want to know about them.’ We started a network of shared housing in 1978, to be non-institutional, without paid welfare workers. There are those who would see as ‘the system’, ‘the welfare’, anybody who is paid to be in a hostel for them. We needed to have something lower key than that, so we developed a little network of houses where there were three people, with a spare bedroom. We connected the houses to each other and then to music and camping activities, and invited young people to use that spare bedroom, so that they would not feel cut off—but they were cut off in a lifestyle manner.

There was a young 15-year-old guy standing in the kitchen saying, ‘The Noongars don’t want me. Wadulas don’t want me. Who wants me?’ and there was an Italian fellow, aged the same, in the kitchen. He was from over the road. He was trying to be constructive about it, and he said, ‘Well, be an individual,’ and the Noongar guy says—he was slightly tanked—‘I don’t want to be a Noongar. I don’t want to be on my own,’ but he didn’t feel connection with either Noongar or Wadula communities. A couple of years ago, at age 35, he died over in Belmont. He was found under a bush after a heart attack in Weld Square at age 35. His close mate that used to live with us died, as well. They do not make it very far.

We have half a dozen Noongar young people that we are constantly in contact with through Sunday phone calls and visits. There is one young guy my partner Peg has been visiting for 11 years in the prison system. There is another guy who has spent most of the 15 years we have known him inside. He comes out for a few weeks, but recidivism is a classic problem. He is easily led, a lovely bloke, but he is back inside and cannot cope with this wider world outside, so there is a lot of institutionalisation. Whilst the ratio of Aboriginal people in prison is inordinately high, they are part of a process which guarantees that they will face huge difficulties coping in the outside world. When they come out of the prison system there is a huge demand on the networks of our little network, which now has a work co-op and the music place and so on.

We have a permaculture garden, we have a substantial little urban village, if you like, but every time someone is coming out of prison there are huge demands, because we know they are going to need a lot of listening, they are going to need a lot of people with them, around and about, not be on their own, not start to feel lost and depressed and start hitting grog or some other substance, and then to address the big issues in their life—‘What has been my past? What is my future? Who is important to me now?’ We are overwhelmed by that. It is just huge.

CHAIR—What is the solution to it?

Rev. Davies—The solutions are the creation of community in a range of forms, and I suppose my key example of a good way to go would be The Cave drop-in centre, and I think we tabled research and so on in our initial papers. We had had a little project, we had developed a network of houses, I was with the Uniting Church consultancy at the time, and we included people without a church background in our little team. We planted ourselves amongst people at the beachfront, rented a flat for a month as a base for coffee. That became a drop-in centre by young people voting with their feet.

The project went for three years and then we merged with a show we called The Cave, or the young people called it The Cave, in Murray Street in Perth, and for two years that was largely a white venue, and then Aboriginal young people came in groups, as is important to them to come, and that frightened the whiteys, so the whiteys cleared out and it was kind of taken over creatively and became an Aboriginal venue. Perth Inner City Youth Service that was running that is a collection of 21 agencies, so it is a cooperative exercise, it has a broad values base to it. The general view was that it was great, that there was at least one venue in the city that young Aboriginal people and of course the wider age group of older and younger Aboriginal people—around the teenage mark—felt was their place, a strong sense of ownership.

So because we had a co-op in the suburbs, we had cricket matches on Sundays between The Cave versus Squirrel Nutkin, which was the dried fruit and nuts co-op. There would be a mixture of black and white and we would put people in a heap, divide them roughly into two, and if you had little kids you would be having a picnic under the tree, and everybody bowls, everybody bats, so you did not have to be Steve Waugh and feel bad if you were not so good at batting or bowling. Fun days! We had lots of those and, out of the relational environment of being together, things creatively develop. You have your ear to the ground, you listen for the ideas. Any ideas that someone has you try out all over the place, saying, ‘What do you reckon about?’—and test the feedback, and then an idea will work if lots of people feel a sense of ownership.

We had a range of things develop. It was just your traditional drop-in with a pool table and table tennis. The young people said, 'Well, videos?' so they had a budget to choose their own videos. We had some music. An Aboriginal group came one night, did not expect it to be such an Aboriginal audience and they played mainly American rock and roll songs, and realised that they had a much more accepting audience to the stuff they had written themselves. They started doing Aboriginal music and it became Aboriginal culture nights. We had graffiti all over the walls, which of course was an ownership thing, but there was the WA Post-Secondary Education Grants Scheme, WAPSEG.

We had a three months project officer for literacy and numeracy who was very clever on saying to some young people, 'How about this or that idea?' and they said, 'Yes, let's do a mural,' and then looking through the books and learning about different designs. They were measuring up the wall. They were doing literacy and numeracy without realising it was happening, and other young people would put their heads round the corner of that room and sit on the floor and join in, and they produced this mural as long as the window over you. Absolutely magnificent. It was never tagged, messed or interfered with by anyone. It had great respect. It was just a beautiful piece of artwork.

Then some day excursions started to happen. We had creative black and white stuff going on with the cricket matches and some of them participating in work co-op. They had an identity by The Cave being really their place. It was identity plus sharing, which is creative integration rather than assimilation, plus the other things on the bubble. At the height of its success it was a busy scene. We had moved to bigger premises, we became dependent on federal money through the then Department of Aboriginal Affairs for a coordinator and admin. assistant and part of the rent, which had been entirely voluntary leadership and rent donated by churches in the city. We accepted that role of being partly funded.

But the problem is both sides of the house, dare I say here, not to be partisan. The government of the day sent us a letter in 1986, saying, 'We are dispensing with the program under which you are funded,' so the program area called Special Projects was dispensed with in Canberra.

CHAIR—Indigenous Special Projects Fund or was it just youth—

Rev. Davies—Yes, Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

CHAIR—Okay, right.

Rev. Davies—That was dispensed with, and the change was to focus on employment. The letter said, 'We invite you to submit for an employment project and we suggest you turn your venue into silk screening T-shirts,' and that could be seen as an employment training venue. Well, that would not have been the young people's idea. The things that were working with them, that were growing from the ground from relational contact over about the previous four years of wonderful development—it ran from 1981 until the end of 1986—was cut off like so. At the time the state government had some money for drop-in centres and venues, but in the late eighties in Perth there was growing anxiety and concern which was heavily influenced by the traders, and that has to be up-front and recognised, and many of them are unashamed to say that

anyway—that, ‘These young people should not be around. They’re interfering with our patrons, our patronage. They’re scaring people away from the doorway of our shop,’ and so on.

The Community Policing Crime Prevention Committee, now called City Safe, part of the state-wide thing called Safer WA, was put together in 1989 with a huge focus on surveillance cameras and extra police staff, and the whole climate of the day and the policies of the previous couple of years leading up to that were, ‘We don’t want. We must try and remove.’ Even in 1991 there was the famous street sweeping policy that was promoted by police as a policy to street sweep—remarkable terminology. The report that was done, funded by the state government in 1987, chaired by Ted Wilkes of Derbarl Yerrigan Aboriginal Medical Service, endorsed the significance and the value of a venue in the inner city in the cruising zone, if you like, to Aboriginal young people, to their family networks, to their agencies. The report was endorsed across the board, but it was not then actualised, and that problem of policy then did not happen on the ground. What were the blocks? The blocks were anxiety and are anxiety, particularly by traders who would then, to use the vernacular, lean on the police to continue a sweep type operation.

Then ATSIC had a research thing in 1993 and we submitted material to that and did not get any awareness of what happened after that, but we thought there was a sea change in 1997, four years ago, when the City of Perth conducted research into young people in the city. The City of Perth had always been conservative about young people in the city, giving \$3,000 here or \$3,000 there, but had no serious involvement in addressing the cultural realities at all. The City of Perth did its research and identified in its own business plan, which was then adopted by the City Safe Community Policing Committee as its business plan for young people, that there should be welcome and inclusion of young people, with culturally appropriate venues; not just two- or three-day activities and a bit of a cultural thing and a skateboarding competition or a couple of gigs and an art display or a three-day festival in the park, but also culturally appropriate venues.

As a member representing the Youth Affairs Council and the City Safe committee, then being drafted from the City Safe committee to the Noongar Patrol System Committee and being connected with Perth Inner City Youth Service that was lobbying for a venue, I thought here was a sign of hope; to have formal policy of a local government with major power in the city, endorsed by the City Safe committee, of all committees, which had been a surveillance type committee—that thoughtful people were saying, ‘Yes, this makes sense. They’re in town anyway. They haven’t been removed, they’re not going to be removed. We only move them from point A to point B and round the mulberry bush. So, yes, this is good.’

But no resources have been put into that. In fact, a major plan was put up by Perth Inner City Youth Service which got sidelined by state government processes, even though an architect’s drawing of a detailed nature was done for a venue at the railway station by Westrail. We had a very cooperative process, but that was sidelined in its last stages. Then of course we have Assistant Commissioner John Standing, who is unashamed of his public view, who came to the City Safe committee and said he believed in in-your-face policing, he believed that the main problem in the city was young Aboriginal people and he was going to have his officers on the front foot, and not only if someone was breaking the law but if they looked like they might break the law they would be approached and asked what they were doing there.

The feedback from young people from street work networks and so on is that if you are approached four or five times in a night and asked, 'What are you doing here? Why are you here? Why aren't you somewhere else? I think you should go somewhere else,' and if you give an answer like, 'I'm just hanging around,' that really seems to escalate the tension in the discussion with either railway security or the police officer or private security that you are discussing it with. So young people get angry about that, and then come back in with an adversarial attitude—

CHAIR—And then commit crime, some of them.

Rev. Davies—Yes, and for many it is a survival crime, because the city is a place where you can scab for dough or steal a handbag or shoplift and, if you are in a close-to-the-wind personal budget, you can survive by doing petty crime. But there is also an expression of anger, an expression of resentment. When police have said assaults have gone down, break and enters have gone down and car thefts go up and down, and they are constantly claiming that there is some decline as if really we are getting onto the roots of this and the decline of two per cent in crime will mean that 40 years down the track we will have a big decline, but other things go up, then they reluctantly say, 'But graffiti has actually gone up. But why?' There is a huge effort to have graffiti-proof paints and rapid removal so young people do not get the kudos from it, and so on, but in the youth field we have said, 'Look, why not actually meet the people and listen to why they're doing it?'

CHAIR—And you are saying the police do not do that?

Rev. Davies—Well, they cannot. There are some very great and wonderful police who relate well, but the uniform will get in the way of young people feeling too close and saying too much and feeling at ease. Therefore, when a police officer is around, there is tension. There is a very unequal power relationship, so that makes the relationship—

CHAIR—If you chaired the meeting, there would not be that tension.

Rev. Davies—Which meeting?

CHAIR—An imaginary meeting between youth and police in Perth.

Rev. Davies—That is right.

CHAIR—Couldn't you broker a peace between them?

Rev. Davies—But it is not the real issue anyway. The real issue is to take a risk, to say something kind, put this on hold a bit, but they are seen as the private army of the establishment.

CHAIR—By whom?

Rev. Davies—By young people.

CHAIR—By young people only?

Rev. Davies—By others.

CHAIR—What others, George?

Rev. Davies—I think other age groups of Aboriginal people. There were my two 35-year-old friends who died.

CHAIR—Young Aboriginal kids are not the only ones committing petty crime in the CBD of Perth.

Rev. Davies—That is right.

CHAIR—There would be young white kids, too, wouldn't there?

Rev. Davies—Sure.

CHAIR—I just want to make the point that we are talking about Aboriginal kids but there are also young white kids that are involved in crime, too.

Rev. Davies—Absolutely. It is the survival stuff and it is the anger stuff. It is not really professional stuff and they are often really very unskilled. Some are very skilled, but we—

CHAIR—Yes.

Rev. Davies—In our little network we would have a new bunch of young people coming in, and I will say something here—it is on *Hansard* but I will take a risk. My partner would say, 'Look, they need to have a bit of education about crime. If you are going to do over the cars in the street'—which they were going to do anyway because their style was to be doing cars because that is how they survived day to day—we had accepted them into our accommodation and we said, 'At least do it a few blocks away so that the whole street doesn't say, "That house," and we get shut down and wound up and then there isn't even that resource.'

We try and say, 'Be half sensible,' so that we can get beneath all this behaviour stuff to the reasons. The big issue is to see what is behind the behaviours, which means for a time you have to appear to be tolerating the behaviours, and being accused of condoning that, but it is not condoning any of that. If we in the non-government and non-police zone of youth affairs reporting become an extension of the police force, then it is a temporary measure and we are then lost to young people as a resource. We turn a blind eye to masses of petty crime, but in a sense we are not turning any blind eye to it because we are working hard for the community to address their alienation and their anger.

We know then the crime will go down and their self-damage will go down; their need to shoot up and to drink too much and to take too much speed and so on will also decline. So we work hard. My mother is now 92 and living in the granny flat and there are masses of senior citizens clamouring for tough penalties, but we work harder because I know my mother will

only be safer if there is less anger around, because she is not only in the little granny flat, she has to be, at times, out and about, to go to the hairdresser and all the rest of it. We work hard on the roots.

Ms HOARE—George, would you see a place like The Cave as being partly government funded? The Cave, from what you were saying, developed over years—

Rev. Davies—Yes.

Ms HOARE—to become the place that it was. Would you see a place like The Cave being able to be established with government money? Or do you see a place like The Cave as only working as well if it developed along the lines that it did develop? Rather than having a once-off, ‘Here’s the set-up money, go and build a drop-in centre,’ do you see a need for it to develop in the community for the community that it is in?

Rev. Davies—The need is within the community. The consultation has been huge and the feedback is huge with young people, so it is very realistic to say to those in the networks, ‘Look, there is this state or federal government prepared to put some dollars to this kind of resource. What do you reckon?’ In a sense, the Aboriginal agencies would want ownership of that if it were an Aboriginal venue. But my personal intuition is that any venue will be taken over by Noongar young people anyway, so it would not matter who sets it up. The Perth Inner City Youth Service has 21 agencies working together and is a good sort of model; would not want to compete with Aboriginal agencies who had talked about a venue at Weld Square. In fact, the former leader of the National Party here, Hendy Cowan, and the then Mayor of Vincent, John Hyde, were in the local Northbridge newspaper talking about \$70 million to be applied to an Aboriginal cultural centre near Weld Square, just north of town, which would also include facilities for young people to use.

I thought, given there was a venue costing \$160,000 to build at the railway and there was lots of um-ing and ah-ing about finding \$160,000—suddenly \$70 million is supposed to be available from somewhere—but also not in the cruising zone. The City of Perth said, ‘There need to be venues in the cruising zone.’ There is a multimillion dollar exercise based around the skateboard association—and three cheers for them—being built down at Leederville train station which is out of town a bit, a great venue for skateboarders. They see it as having medical and legal and all sorts of other things there. You have the problem of getting too big and too frightening if you try and be a one-stop shop like that. Young people in town are not going to go on a Friday night all the way down to the Leederville railway station to have a conversation with each other. They are doing that in what the City of Perth call the cruising zone of Murray Street Mall, the cultural centre, Russell Square, James Street and in particular the railway itself—the venues that are in that zone—but that is also a heavy trader zone, but young people are in there anyway so police have said consistently in reporting to the City Safe committee, ‘We move them from Russell Square and they go to the cultural centre. We move them from the cultural centre and they go back to James Street. We move them from James Street and they go into Murray Street Mall. We move them from there and they go down to the railway station.’ The railway security are moving them away from the railway station and the police are tending to move them to the railway station to get on trains and go home.

There is this cross-current, like down at Augusta, where the Great Southern Ocean meets the Indian Ocean and there is deep turbulence going on. Yes, the crunch is not whether there is government resourcing, because that is public money being administered through government and it is the appropriate thing to do for the community as a whole, to be brought to bear. That is excellent. The main issue is whether there are such guidelines as are viewed as 'godlines' in the strategies and what the outcomes will be and how the outcomes will be achieved and so on.

Mr HAASE—George, you have talked a lot about this cruise zone in Perth. You have explained very well, I think, about why it is the focal point. You also mentioned the point that many people find it—I do not think you used the word 'offensive'—I think you said 'threatening'. I think much of society finds the presence of collective Aboriginal youth or Asian youth or white youth as threatening. Yet I am a little suspicious that large numbers of similar age group, without adult involvement, is not something that you would see as culturally appropriate for Aboriginal youth. I wonder therefore about a future of encouraging large gatherings of Aboriginal youth, but more specifically I want to hear from you what involvement there is, what influence there is, from Aboriginal elders today, with regard to the future of the creation of such a centre. If you have any good news about Aboriginal elders involving themselves in the question of Aboriginal youth behaviour, I would be very pleased to hear that.

Rev. Davies—Could you say again about encouraging large groups and cultural appropriateness of young people in the group?

Mr HAASE—My point is that we are hearing in most locations—and we travel extensively—that the future for Aboriginal people, of course, involves the strengthening and the recreation, where it has already faded, the cultural aspect of Aboriginal life and all its facets. I think the large gathering of rather than a homogenous group, but a specific age group of Aboriginal youth, is not something that falls directly within an arrangement that would in the past be culturally appropriate. I wonder, in the long-term sense and effectiveness of creating large venues to accommodate large numbers, when perhaps, with the influence of elders, we might get a decision that I think would accommodate your idea more, which would be to break down into smaller groups. Your comments, please.

Rev. Davies—Thank you. They are very valuable items to raise. Firstly, I think the culturally regular—compared with years and years ago—grouping of young people is a starting point. You connect with those persons in a non-threatening way, which is what detached work or street work does, and get to know them relationally and listen to what is going on. It certainly is the same for white young people. In the days of the fifties and before, with the extended family being more in place and certainly in country towns, they had contact with other teenagers but they also had significant contact with older age groups. They had more life experience as a resource to them and there is certainly a deprivation of adult life experience for young people if they have excessive peer contact.

Their peers are not adequate and they should not be expected to be adequate on bigger issues, like the Italian guy saying to the Noongar guy, 'We'll solve the disconnection from Noongar and Wadula by being individual.' He was doing his best, but he was not any Margaret Mead. She said, 'We need to find new forms of extended family,' et cetera. He was not able to bring that sort of stuff to bear. They need more than their peers, because they then become accepting

of more than their peers if they meet some adults who are not in an authority relationship, who do not have any power to control their lives.

In our little network of housing and street, beach contact to start with, we were not in any authority relationship, and we are not now. They can come and go without us being able to stop them going. We do not act as an extension of the police force. We are resource, not boss. We find we are given an authority. They come and say, 'What do you think?' They tell us personal stuff and are listening to what we say about it. We have authority really because we have not sought it. We get respect by having given a message that they are important persons in their own right and so on.

In terms of adding bigger numbers, the cricket matches thing was like a picnic day at the races. It was multi-everything, from little kids, black and white—I am 62 now, but I was 38 then—so plenty of sprinklings of adults around the place. Medical people talk about brief intervention. It can change attitudes to have some persons who are not in their normal connection group make a connection and it affects the way they view the rest of the world. That certainly applies where some police officers are very human and very wise and have a lot of life experience and give some young people and some groups a different experience of a police officer. Those groups will say, 'Hey, maybe it is not all hopeless,' and they get off the generalisations of the 'all them and us' to 'Maybe it is more varied.'

Certainly as a Christian minister, that is the case. After some time they say, 'Are you a reverend?' and I hope there is enough relationship before they find that out, but then often they say, 'Bloody' and then, 'Oh, sorry, Reverend.' Then I say, 'Look, your language is effing shithouse, you know. You have to do something about it.' They look shocked and then everybody talks about everything. You have to get past these various stereotypes and barriers and so on without trying too hard.

CHAIR—What is your advice to a member of parliament in this cynical society?

Rev. Davies—I can tell you, Mr Lieberman, that when we had a Senate inquiry back in about 1985 or something into long-term homelessness and unemployment and so on, the officer for the committee said, 'Look, we have difficulty getting young people to come up to the umpteenth floor. There is not a lot of contact with the sort of young people we are looking into. Have you got any suggestions?' We said, 'We've got this co-op thing out at Bagot Road. How about afternoon tea at the end of the hearing.' So the committee came out at the end of the day to our co-op. We said to some former members, 'Look, a Senate committee is coming. You have had connections with the place. Turn up and swap yarns.' We had about 25 young adult people, black and white.

Some of them, current criminals and drug users, were in and out of trouble, and they were part of the mix. The committee persons came, took the odd coat off and were given a little tour around the permaculture garden, et cetera. Then we sat down in second-hand, scrounged chairs, and had a coffee. Somebody made a comment that someone picked up on from across the group, and it became an all-in group discussion with the 30 or so people.

Then there was the formal bit, some Senate hearing, with the microphones in an adjoining space, which people could participate in. There were 25 of them and six committee members.

We explained it before, and said, 'Look, here's the committee. We thought maybe they could come out here and have afternoon tea and we could have a yarn and show them around,' and they said, 'Yes, that would be great.' That was because they had ownership of that; they felt in control; it was where they felt comfortable. The committee doing the travelling to their patch was a good message, and it was them being in control and being familiar with the environment, rather than coming to an environment like this. They felt good, so they talked very freely, and it was excellent.

There was a very well-dressed, successful businesswoman who said, 'I'd like to go to that co-op and see what goes on, but they wouldn't want me down there.' I said, 'Yes, go in something where you can lean on a shelf and it won't matter. Don't wear your best gear, wear your casuals, but be who you are. Go with your unawareness, with your technical ignorance of the place.' She did. She went in and she said, 'Look, I've heard about this place. What do you like about it?'

There was a central room with a table a third the size of this. You could get free coffee as long as you helped to stick labels on dried fruit and nuts. People would sit around labelling the packets and knock off the coffee and swap notes, and she joined that group and she said, 'What goes on?' A 16-year-old at the time was one of the 35-year-olds who died, but he was the one who stood up tall and told her all about it, so here you had a 16-year-old Noongar being the teacher to the middle-aged businesswoman, who was happy to be the learner, and there was wonderful stuff going on. It did more for his self-esteem than a self-esteem course. We, all of us, should be who we are. With the involvements we have, the whole thing is a partnership, and you can be accepted if there is not inappropriate use of power. Power is the worry; relationship is the need.

CHAIR—I think I could say, because my colleagues would be embarrassed saying it themselves, that we have unique characters like Barry Haase from Kalgoorlie, who sleeps under the stars and spends most of his life out and about with the communities; Mr Lloyd who represents the river people out of Sydney and the Hawkesbury and visits them in a little outboard, et cetera; and Kelly, I know, works hard. We try and pick up the theme that you are talking about. Parliament is reviewing the committee system and we are hoping more and more that committees will be less formal. Sometimes we have to take evidence in a certain way, but we are hoping it will more and more involve travelling to the communities and sitting down with the people in their own communities.

Mr HAASE—I raise the question of the involvement, if any, of tribal elders, and I would very much like to hear if there were any positive outcomes from their involvement.

Rev. Davies—With respect to large venues, The Cave was a busy venue but not terribly huge.

Mr HAASE—A comment on the \$70 million versus the \$160,000.

Rev. Davies—Yes, too big is very risky. We adults do not have a one-stop shop. We have cities and suburbs and goddam huge networks of things, and you find out where to go. It is about networks. There need to be probably half a dozen venues in an inner city for the different subgroups, so that the Vietnamese grouping of young people could take over some little thing that's a shopfront sized exercise and that is their patch. People say, 'Oh, but that's some sort of

apartheid. You've got Vietnamese over there and Aboriginal over here and Greeks over there.' That is okay. Have that identity consolidate. Then you have the leaders, key influentials in those groups, have yarns with each other and talk about their stuff and then they get creative ideas together and you have identity plus sharing. No-one feels taken over and everybody feels important and they work creatively together. Great things will happen, so let's not be afraid of that, and have a network of small to medium venues. Huge things frighten the tripe out of me, I must say.

I have a lot of respect for Dean Collard of Manguri and various other Aboriginal elders around the place, especially Ted Wilkes and so on, but I have worries about shows like the Noongar Patrol system. When it comes to actualising policy, elders get locked into becoming kind of an authority. It has been very sensitive in the Noongar Patrol system for me to say, 'There's evidence in our reports of a lot of moving young people on, but to where?' The coordinator got quite anxious about that and they stopped using the term 'moving on' in the reports. But, in effect, that's what it is.

Then last year I raised a question. There had been a big media coverage saying, 'Young people, come to the city to meet each other. It is an important get-together place,' and all this creative stuff was being said by the Noongar Patrol staff, but then in a later report they were saying, 'We were at Cannington working with railway security to divert young people from coming into town for no good reason.' And that was identified in two separate spots—'no good reason'. I asked how that contradiction could be resolved. I got no answer around the table, and two months later I was off the committee. But I also asked them were they hearing, from young people, an endorsement or a difference from the City of Perth research that said there should be venues and welcome and so on. Were they hearing young people say 'Yeah' to that or 'No' to that, or were they not hearing that whole topic, were they not really listening.

Mr HAASE—George, is there any elders' involvement in where youth is going in this city, specifically Aboriginal youth?

Rev. Davies—But at that table of Aboriginal elders plus police, I got no answer to that question, so I am worried—

Mr HAASE—You are suggesting there is minimal effective involvement in the direction of Aboriginal youth in the Perth urban area?

Rev. Davies—Yes, I am worried about it.

Mr HAASE—Thank you, George. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Rev. Davies—The key thing is to have the sorts of attitudes that are here, and the connections, to send a message to the key white players who are blocking stuff. A huge number are from the anxious business community. The Perth Inner City Youth Service, in 1993, had a delegation to the City of Perth and we ended up with a planning committee and extra people in the room. It was full of traders. We took the Stephen Covey approach of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, a textbook in the business scene. Corporations, Stephen Covey says, should do conflict resolution on a win-win basis, because win-lose becomes lose-lose. You must

look at win-win. But when your business community addresses social issues you get into win-lose. You get into, 'We want you out of the way. We want you moved on.'

'They are in town anyway. It doesn't matter if you don't give a fig about young people,' we said to the business group. 'At least support the addressing of their needs, and anger and alienation will go down and they will win and you will win, because there will be less anger and alienation. If you did succeed in getting them out of town, there is more risk to your residence instead of your business, so it is simply relocating the problem. Address the actual needs and it is win-win for them and for you.'

There was a lot of good response to that, but one staff person on the inside of City of Perth started a campaign against it and stopped the momentum of that at the time. But I think there is a lot of capacity to talk win-win, for practical, realistic and cultural issues, with the business community. And in school education, we should not be going in there teaching just Aboriginal Dreamtime. The problem is that we whiteys do not understand the significance of identity enough. Sister Veronica Brady says that all Australians are dispossessed—Aboriginal people in their history since white settlement, invasion, whatever you like to call it, but also the rest, Asian and European. Our roots are on the other side of an ocean, so everybody in Australia has an identity problem, and I have often felt that the coalition government in WA, with its policy of practical reconciliation of education, employment, health and housing, was being ideologically superficial, because unless we go beneath that to the roots, then we are just dealing with symptoms of the deeper stuff.

Richard Court is a nice bloke, Richard, but I do not think he understood this: the reason why Aboriginal identity is not given enough significance is because we whiteys do not understand enough our own loss, our own deprivation of roots, our own search for culture. There was a big national youth scene in the Uniting Church. The Tongans came on and did Tongan music, the Samoans came on and did Samoan dancing, the Pacific Islanders came on and did their stuff, the Maori group came on and did their stuff, and the white Australians came on and sang American songs. That is the sort of problem we have. It is a total issue.

CHAIR—George, thank you for sharing those moments with us, and your wisdom. We wish you well with your work and we hope we will meet again. At this stage I will adjourn the hearing. Thank you, everyone.

Proceedings suspended from 12.28 p.m. to 1.23 p.m..

ANNEN, Mrs Anne Joy, Advocate-Mediator for Aboriginal Issues, Anglican Social Responsibilities Commission**WOODS, Mrs Rona Maureen (Private capacity)**

CHAIR—I now welcome witnesses from the Social Responsibilities Commission of the Anglican Province of Western Australia. Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand 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. Hansard reporters will be taking a record of what is said today. From time to time I may ask you to repeat or spell place names so that we can record the details accurately. Before we ask you questions, I understand you have a brief opening statement that you would like to make.

Mrs Annear—Yes, thank you very much. Honourable Chairman and committee members, thank you for inviting me here as representative of the diocese's Social Responsibilities Commission. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional Noongar custodians of the Swan River upon whose land we meet today. In a brief update, the Social Responsibilities Commission would stress what you have probably heard today: that the number of homeless indigenous people in our urban area now stands at a conservative estimate of 4,000. The impact of such a vast number of families existing without a stable base cannot be overestimated, particularly as it correlates directly with increased medical, mental, social and spiritual health issues, and lack of education for the children.

People are dying on the streets, either from violence or their health is totally undermined by stress and despair. Most probably the majority of people sitting here own their homes. We, therefore, do not experience the compounding effects which homelessness or threats of eviction would have upon our families and ourselves. The main ones would be experiencing the horrific trauma of eviction and the despair at no rehousing in the foreseeable future; a sense of shame at being forced to use up relatives, family by family; the gross overcrowding caused by this situation; sharing inadequate amenities, straining the family's emotional resources, the undesirability of 10 or more children sleeping in one room, and the ever empty fridge; facing the fact that overcrowding results in domestic violence, with children put at great risk; splitting up the family around relatives, thus losing control, and maybe putting them at further risk; living in an old car in someone's yard as a last resort.

One desperately ill woman was forced to run her respirator off a car battery—she lived in the car—throughout one winter. Another will shortly be discharged from hospital after surviving massive complex heart surgery, with nowhere to go, accommodation having been refused. Other effects are watching your children lose all hope of educational opportunities, a loss unlikely to be restored; having no address to which mail from Centrelink, hospitals, et cetera, can be sent; realising that being indigenous severely lessens your chances of living in mainstream society and enjoying the most basic of resources; above all, the appalling results of all of these factors in terms of health—increased depression, mental problems, hypertension, panic attacks, poor diet, rocketing sugar levels, stress increased, arthritis and asthma. The list goes on while the

indigenous mortality rate climbs, as do rates of incarceration, deaths in custody and youth suicide.

Beyond the plight of the homeless are the psychological pressures caused by the housing ministry's policy of maintaining community standards in our rapidly gentrifying suburbs, a slow process of forced assimilation. These include growing front lawns and then maintaining them, which leads to higher water bills; insisting that tenants remove any car not in use, which denies men in a family the interest and opportunity of working on the car or using its parts to keep another car roadworthy; expecting a single mother who may be suffering from chronic ill health or grief trauma, with three or more young children, to present her tenancy as scrupulously clean and tidy; the fear of an eviction leading to the removal of children by Family and Children's Services, a repetition of shameful historical events from whose effects hundreds of families continue to suffer. I would add that Mrs Woods' husband is particularly one of those people who suffers from that.

With regard to the steady reduction of available housing stock which the ministry declares is due to shortage of available land, the following questions can be raised. Why are so few houses currently being built to meet the needs of large indigenous families—for example, more than three bedrooms and verandahs or shaded patio spaces provided? When an old asbestos type house on a large block has reached its use-by date—that is, has become uninhabitable—why is the block auctioned off to be bought by a developer who covers it in town houses and sells privately? Why is the ministry's current redevelopment policy responsible for removing numbers of Noongar families from suburbs within reasonable proximity to the city, as in Carlisle, East Victoria Park, Parmelia and Kwinana, for instance? Why is our state government not matching Commonwealth funding, but instead planning a \$40 million profit from the rental sector at the expense of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people?

In conclusion, the SRC would recommend that the urgent housing needs of urban indigenous people must be addressed by a new holistic vision which takes on board the aspirations of the people themselves. Rather than viewing this as an Aboriginal problem, which is all too easily done, we need to address the solutions as an intrinsic ingredient of active reconciliation—after all, who is interested in reconciliation without a roof over their heads—which would lead to a shared enrichment and relationship across our diverse communities. In 1987 the acclaimed Aboriginal artist and writer Sally Morgan published her family's biography *My Place*. This story exploded myths and was a catalyst for change. Today 4,000 women, children and men across Perth's urban areas have no place. Let this be our catalyst for change in 2001. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you. Rona, did you wish to add anything?

Mrs Woods—Yes. I would like to talk about my case with Homeswest.

CHAIR—Yes, please do so now.

Mrs Woods—I was on priority transfer for 12 months. Then they took me off priority transfer because they said I did not fill in some survey form. That is a year ago now, so for two years I have been waiting for a transfer, and the house is falling down around me—rats have eaten through all the cupboards—and every time I point this out to Homeswest, they do not want to know about that. They say, 'Do your garden, do your yard now.' So many times we

have had the yard done and then, when they come out to have a look, they do not take any notice of the yard.

My husband had an old Valiant that he was fixing up, for him and our son to work on, and they just kept saying, 'Get rid of the car. It's not licensed.' Why were these cars in our yard? They told me to wash all the walls, so I washed all the walls with bleach, and they never came and took any notice of that. They put another toilet in the house and left all the dust through the house, and my three youngest ones are asthmatics. When my husband and I cleaned the dust up, they all had to go to the doctor the next day with asthma. They were sick with asthma. There is still nothing going on about a transfer and the house is still falling down around me and they still will not do anything. They just keep going on about the yard. The Derbal Yerrigan have come and done the yard twice for me. They have come out and said, 'Not again,' because I want the yard done all the time. It has these creeper things that grow very quickly and they have to be cut back all the time. They keep going on about the yard and that, and they promised me a transfer two years ago.

CHAIR—A transfer to another suburb?

Mrs Woods—To another house, yes.

CHAIR—In the same suburb?

Mrs Woods—I told them any suburb. I suggested another house because this house is falling apart and the rats have eaten through everything. The cupboards and doors are hanging off. There are big holes. When I pointed that out to Homeswest they did not want to know about it. They turned the other way and said, 'Oh, well, do the yard'—do this, do that—and I said, 'What about this?' My youngest one is under Princess Margaret. She is anaemic and asthmatic. My little grandson is anaemic and asthmatic too, and my next one is asthmatic and anaemic.

A lady from Aboriginal housing came out to inspect the house. I thought I would get these people to come and have a look. She came out and said, 'Everything looks fine to me,' but then she ended up sick with Ross River virus and she said she caught it at our house, and yet we are still there and Aboriginal housing were frightened to come to our house.

CHAIR—Why?

Mrs Woods—Because they thought they were going to catch this Ross River virus.

CHAIR—I see.

Mrs Woods—Rene came out there. Everyone felt a bit dubious about coming out there. I said, 'If everyone's scared to come out here, what are we still doing in this house, if that's the case?' with my little kids and that, you know. This lady was supposed to be suing Homeswest for that. She was very sick. Her name was Vanessa Walley. She came from Homeswest Aboriginal housing.

CHAIR—Have you been through Anne? Has your organisation taken this case up?

Mrs Annear—No. I have not known Mrs Woods for very long—in fact, only a few days—but I wanted to have somebody here who could speak for the—

CHAIR—Will you be taking it up?

Mrs Annear—Certainly, if Mrs Woods would like me to, yes.

CHAIR—Do you want Anne to take it up for you?

Mrs Annear—I think Derbal Yerrigan are doing quite a lot, aren't they? They are doing it for you.

Mrs Woods—Yes, and I think it is going to Equal Opportunity. They are doing something about it. I am not too sure what is happening there.

CHAIR—I am sure the committee would not want me as chairman to finish our discussion with you without feeling confident that someone was taking it up for Rona. Will someone be taking it up? Will you do that, please, Anne?

Mrs Annear—Yes, I certainly will.

CHAIR—Will you undertake to do that, please?

Mrs Annear—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. There are a lot of personal matters that I am sure need to be discussed in the privacy of your home.

Mrs Annear—That is right.

CHAIR—You understand what I mean?

Mrs Annear—Yes.

CHAIR—I feel confident that something will be taken up there. Thank you very much, Rona, for informing us about that.

Mrs Woods—Can I say something else, too?

CHAIR—Yes, of course.

Mrs Woods—Could Homeswest possibly drop this labelling of people as antisocial all the time? Every time something goes wrong they send a letter out: 'antisocial behaviour'. An Aboriginal family who lived across the road from me were labelled 'antisocial'. Her daughter was hit by a motor car, had a gun pulled out on her, yet they were antisocial. As soon as they moved out of that house—that was Aboriginal housing—Homeswest sold it so that no other Aboriginal family could come in that house. That is straight across the road from me. I am

saying, 'Why did they sell it?' That was a house for another Aboriginal family, but they did not want another Aboriginal family in there, so they sold it.

I got a letter the other day saying I was antisocial. I do not drink, I do not smoke, and yet these people are walking up and down the street chucking beer cans and having parties and smashing bottles, but that is all good behaviour. Any little thing that happens with any Aboriginal family, they are labelled antisocial, and I do not think that is fair. The headmaster at my son's school called him antisocial—at school. I said to the headmaster, 'Don't you ever call my son antisocial again. He doesn't know what that is. When other little kids do it, they're being little kids, normal kids, so why, when an Aboriginal kid does it, is it antisocial? Why is it not classed the same as other kids?' He was antisocial in primary school. Isn't it wrong to label kids antisocial?

Ms HOARE—What was the response from the headmaster, Rona?

Mrs Woods—He just went quiet, but he never did it again. I said, 'For a start, don't call my son antisocial again.' You don't do that to children. If they are labelled antisocial in school, when kids grow up, they think, 'Oh, I'm antisocial,' if their headmaster is telling them they are antisocial—and he was doing nothing different to what other kids were doing on the oval. One thing Homeswest has to stop is calling people antisocial, because every time anything goes wrong they send a letter out: 'antisocial behaviour'. It makes you think, 'Well, what am I doing wrong?' There are these people who make normal black people seem uncontrollable, who say you are doing so many things wrong, and you are not. It is sociable to whose standards? I see people running around doing things that you would not want to say, and then, if anything goes wrong in your house, you are antisocial.

CHAIR—Anne is going to take the issue up. Anne, on the question of consultation with Aboriginal people about their needs—services that need to be delivered and provided—we are aware from the Western Australian government's submission that there has been a commission for elders established in Western Australia for the purposes of consulting.

They are apparently interested in giving advice on general issues for Aboriginal people. Is your organisation in touch with the Commission of Elders at any time? Do you have any experience in discussions?

Mrs Annear—Is that the Commission of Elders set up by Richard Court?

CHAIR—Yes, I presume so.

Mrs Annear—Yes, I have talked to them. I have talked to one or two of them when they had been on the point of resigning because they have felt used or not used in the right way. They were told that they would be very valuable people and they have never been called to one single meeting. In disgust they have left. Perth is a very widespread area and I think it is difficult for people to get around over all the issues there are, all the families that are having difficulties. I just hear of some through Derbarl Yerrigan and do what I can family by family. Sometimes I have about three families that I am working with at a time and that depends on them wanting to have me working for them. That is the basic thing, whether they feel they can trust me. Over

time the commission builds up a portfolio, I guess. I have never found that I have been able to work with any of the Commission of Elders. I do not now know who they are even.

CHAIR—Okay, thank you.

Ms HOARE—You have given an example of the hard and fast rules that seem to be coming out of the Housing Commission people. You have given some more examples here—housing for youth, housing for young women, housing for grandparents. Does there need to be flexibility within the rules for different situations, not for Aboriginal people as a whole but for young single women who, as you give the example there, like to be close to their parents—that is not isolated to young Aboriginal women, let me tell you—housing for young people, housing for grandparents to be able to be cared for within their own community rather than having to maybe go into a nursing home situation? What kind of flexibility do you think there can be in the rules of providing public housing to allow for different situations?

Mrs Annear—I think there can be that flexibility because, after all, the types of houses and units that can be built are endless in variety, aren't they? It is well understood, I think, by the Housing Commission and the government here—I hope it is—that different groups of Noongar people will prefer different areas of Perth. For instance, those people who live in the southern suburbs would probably never ask to be transferred to the northern suburbs. That would not be their country and vice versa.

The same from over Armadale way, Kenwick, Maddington. They would prefer to stay in that area because that, again, is their country and it probably is historically going back for several generations, too. Therefore, it is important that within each of these areas where different groups of Noongar people prefer to live there is a variety of accommodation—that certainly is not ghettoised by any degree. But when you see a mother living in, say, Westminster—I do not know whether you have any vision of Westminster but it is in the Mirrabooka area—who has four tiny children and she has a baby that died so she is a fairly stressed out young mum and she has a good partner but she needs support, to get to her mum and her grandmother she has to bus into Perth, which would take her half an hour, and then she has to change buses and go out to Innaloo. That is when the buses are working.

That is with one newly born baby, born two months too early, plus another one that is only 10 months old—she had two very close together, incredible—and then these other two little ones. She is just one example. When she goes to her mother she tends to stay because she wants to be there for as long as she can because grandma is there as well. Then Homeswest get worried that she is not in her place and that her mother's place is getting overcrowded and it is stress all round. That sort of thing does need to be looked at. She is on a priority listing at the moment for moving closer to her mother.

Ms HOARE—How can the community encourage or recommend to Homeswest to be a bit more flexible about some of these situations? Do you have any answers about how the community can become more involved, or should the community become more involved?

Mrs Woods—I will tell you about the house across the road from where I live in Kenwick. The community got together to get that lady kicked out. Then they sold the house on her and the community all got together and had a big meeting to get her. They drank and they fought

amongst themselves. They harmed nobody else in that street, yet her daughter, like I said, the lady down the road hit her with a motor car and never got charged. The man up the road pulled a gun out and put it on her daughter's chest, and this really traumatised the girl, yet they called them antisocial and got them evicted and then turned around and sold the house on them. They could have put another family in that house anyway, an Aboriginal family, but they sold it to the bloke next door, who bought it from them because he wanted the backyard or something and he is renting the front of the house.

But I get on pretty okay with the neighbours. Some have come around with baseball bats for my 16-year-old son and said that he broke their truck. When my husband took him around there, 'No, wrong boy.' But if my husband and I had not been home at the time and they had caught my son—they were drunk—they would have beaten up my son with baseball bats. All these things happen and they do not care if it is true or it is not true. They will come back and say, 'You are all this and you are all that.' Then they find it is not even your kids involved. Then there is no 'Sorry' or anything. They do not know which way to look. We have had to put up a lot with that in Kenwick. My husband called them a lot of—what is that word—'rednecks'. That is what he calls them.

Ms HOARE—We have heard the term before, yes.

Mrs Annear—I think the Aboriginal community themselves, for instance, had a big meeting which I think you have heard about—Derbarl Yerrigan—a couple or three weeks ago, on housing. The minister came and so did Mr Greg Joyce and Bob Thomas from Homeswest. It was a very useful meeting because those men heard the Aboriginal voice really probably for the first time on these issues of housing and all the correlation with the other problems of health, education; while children drop out of school, all that kind of thing. Mr Joyce at the end stood up and said, 'We have obviously not been listening to the Aboriginal voice and I'm sorry.' He did say he would put a moratorium on evictions, but somebody has since been evicted. I am not quite sure what he means by that, but I think it did open the eyes of people quite a bit. The Aboriginal leaders and elders at that meeting were talking about much better housing, appropriate housing, new housing not old housing that is falling down—as Rona says—and to look at everything holistically.

When, say, the Ministry of Housing will take no notice of the Ministry of Health, when a hospital specialist writes that a woman is in a very bad situation with her lungs or whatever and will die if she remains living in a car, and they say, 'No, sorry, that's not sufficient evidence to put her in a house,' there is something wrong with the communication lines, isn't there? Somebody is not hearing somebody else and there needs to be much better communication between the departments.

CHAIR—Do you have correspondence between your agency and the Western Australian authorities on that case?

Mrs Annear—Yes.

CHAIR—Would you share it with the committee? Would you be able to give us a copy of the correspondence, the letters you have written and the responses?

Mrs Annear—I am sorry, I would not, because that case is going before the equal opportunities and it is rather confidential.

CHAIR—Okay, I do not want to pressure you otherwise.

Mrs Annear—It is sub judice.

CHAIR—After the case is over, would you share it with us?

Mrs Annear—Yes, certainly.

CHAIR—Thank you. We would appreciate that.

Mr HAASE—Rona, you made the point that a case you have been involved in is going to the equal opportunities. I would be very interested to hear about what your point of view is with regards equal responsibilities. I was alerted to this because you made the point that when Homeswest become concerned about the state of your backyard you have, on a couple of occasions, gone to what I imagine is an indigenous CDP group.

Mrs Woods—Derbarl Yerrigan, yes.

Mr HAASE—And had them contribute the labour to clean up your backyard.

Mrs Woods—Yes.

Mr HAASE—What do you believe your personal responsibility, or the responsibility of your husband, is in maintaining your own backyard, at your own cost, as other tenants of Homeswest houses are expected to do?

Mrs Woods—At the time we had no car and both had no licence to go around and get lawn-mowers and things to do these—what, are we going to walk up the road and get a lawn-mower and push it all the way back? Because I suffer from high blood pressure, too, I said, ‘When my blood pressure lowers, I will do these things’ and I did. I did all the walls; I did everything they asked me. I went over all the yard, everything was done. It is not really untidy; it is just these tree things that are just growing, you know, that makes it look untidy. It has got this vine thing that just keeps growing back all the time. You cut it back and it just keeps growing. It grows that quick. Then every time we did it they never even came and looked at the yard. They just said, ‘You’ve still got the cars here. You’ve still got the old cars in your yard.’ I thought, you know, they did not even take notice it was different.

Every time they keep giving you a different accommodation manager. You have to keep explaining yourself to a different person every time. You just get sick of talking. When they sent me a letter out saying, ‘If you don’t answer back to this’—they reckoned antisocial behaviour—‘we’ll evict you,’ I just totally ignored it.

Mr HAASE—That is not a very wise move in hindsight, of course.

Mrs Woods—I know it is not, but you get sick of explaining yourself and talking, and talking until you are blue in the face. When they first gave me the priority transfer I went to the tribunal thing at Homeswest and explained to them about the cupboards. If I rang the health inspector they would probably condemn the house because of the rats.

Mr HAASE—Indeed.

Mrs Woods—It would be condemned as unfit to live in.

Mr HAASE—The point of view of responsibility with equal opportunities, I see an image of also equal responsibilities.

Mrs Woods—Yes.

Mr HAASE—If I have rats in my home, then the next thing on the shopping list is Ratsak. Do you not see that?

Mrs Woods—No, I know that, but I have little ones and I will not use it while they are little.

Mr HAASE—But that is your choice.

Mrs Woods—They said they were going to come and fumigate the house. With the rats, fair enough, we get rid of them. But they have eaten all the cupboards away and when you point that out to Homeswest they could say, ‘Yes, we will come and replace the cupboards. We will replace them for you,’ because they are all eaten away; they are all so old they are all falling apart. They will not even do that. They just turn a blind eye and say, ‘Do your yard.’

Mr HAASE—I guess they address those things that they see as most easily addressed and would perhaps turn attention from their own responsibilities.

Mrs Woods—If I owned a house and I saw it falling apart and I was renting it to someone else, I would say, ‘I’ll come and fix the cupboards for you’—if I knew how to do it and I had the money—but my husband is on unemployment and by the time we get paid and pay the rent, pay light bill, pay gas bill, buy a bit of food, we have no money left.

Mr HAASE—How many children do you have? You have three children, do you?

Mrs Woods—I have six children. My eldest son is in Casuarina Prison. My daughter is trying to get her own place from Homeswest. Then I have four children living home with me.

Mr HAASE—It cannot be easy, but I am very concerned that I have heard from Anne and I have heard from you a great deal of suggestions as to what other agencies should do to change their performance to make your situation more equitable.

Mrs Woods—Yes.

Mr HAASE—But I wonder—in that list of suggestions you would make for change—where change of the general performance and attitude of indigenous people generally fits in, where we do not have this labelling of antisocial behaviour and the name calling and the special circumstances.

Mrs Woods—Yes, I do not know how to do that. They even did that to me when I lived in Girrawheen—said antisocial behaviour.

The bloke said, ‘Oh, people were pulling in and out,’ and my neighbour next-door came out and said, ‘This lady doesn’t even get visitors.’ It was the white people across the road, and the white boy next-door broke the back fence, because I was in a duplex. He broke the back fence, and Homeswest came and said, ‘You broke the back fence, a hundred and something dollars.’ They wanted me to pay. I tried to explain—

Mr HAASE—But you defended that at the time, I am sure, did you?

Mrs Woods—Beg your pardon?

Mr HAASE—You defended that false charge at the time.

Mrs Woods—I did. I said, ‘I never did it.’ Something happened, but they still put it on my bill anyway. I still had to pay that hundred and something dollars because they said I did it, and I tried to explain. I said to Homeswest, ‘We never did it.’ I said, ‘Me and my children did not do it. The young boy next-door was off his face on drugs and he went and busted the fence,’ because it was a duplex, and they still would not believe me.

Mrs Annear—Could I just say on the comments you made then, I think within what they can do economically, you will find that most indigenous people around Perth do take a lot of responsibility. I know that Rona paid \$80 for getting her grounds cleaned up, didn’t you?

Mrs Woods—Yes, I paid that at one other place, 80 bucks.

Mrs Annear—It was not that Derbarl Yerrigan did it for free, but she paid each time for it to be done, just as you or I might. I have to pay somebody now, because I cannot manage all my garden, and so did they. So I think it is being responsible. As far as putting Ratsak down when you have little children, I do not think that would be responsible.

Mrs Woods—That is why I will not do it.

Mrs Annear—I would never, because little children get in everywhere. When you are not watching, they are into something, and it is highly dangerous.

Mr HAASE—It makes it very easy on the rats, though.

Mrs Woods—Yes, I know.

Mrs Annear—You do the best you can.

Mrs Woods—They were even going to come and paint the house, the owners were. They were going to come out and paint it, because I had my grandmother living with me. It was the next day after she passed away, that bloke came out and said, ‘I’ll paint the house,’ and I said, ‘No, my grandmother just died and I don’t want no-one messing round in her room,’ and he said, ‘I don’t mind.’ I said, ‘But I do.’ I said, ‘Haven’t you got any respect?’ I got very upset, and then the accommodation manager came out and told him. He said, ‘Look, don’t. No, not now.’ I said, ‘I don’t want to get angry with you but there’s a time for everything,’ you know.

Mr HAASE—Have they since returned?

Mrs Woods—No, never heard from them again.

Mr HAASE—You have contacted them?

Mrs Woods—I have never heard from them.

Mr HAASE—You have not contacted them?

Mrs Woods—I will not even talk to them because I get sick of talking to them and explaining myself, because every time it is a different accommodation manager that you have to explain yourself all over again to, and the next one who comes along does not seem to know what is going on and what the other one had set up to do. And, of course, they said they were going to come and fumigate the house, and that never happened.

Ms HOARE—They should be driving the same car within the single departments as well.

Mrs Annear—That is an oft-repeated statement—that there is always a different accommodation manager.

Mrs Woods—That is it, yes.

Mrs Annear—You are forever trying to catch up with the next one.

CHAIR—You need a case manager that stays with the case.

Mrs Woods—Yes, and they do not know what plans the last one made with you, so they have to look it up, and then they say, ‘We can’t find your file,’ or something, and something is missing and they do not know anything about it. The same happened with my transfer. They said they took me off because of this survey, and then this Rene came out from Aboriginal housing and he said, ‘I’ll fill this transfer thing out for you,’ and I signed it, and the next accommodation letter said, ‘What was your reason for transfer?’ I said, ‘I’ve been on priority transfer for 12 months. What are you talking about?’ Nobody seemed to know what was going on.

Mr HAASE—That is not a situation that is unique to dealings with Aboriginal tenants, of course. It is something that whites have to deal with as well.

Mrs Woods—Yes, true, but they have to stop labelling you antisocial every time you do something, or anything goes wrong. I do not drink, I do not get out fighting, all these antisocial things, and then any little thing, ‘You’re antisocial.’ That sticks to you when people say you are antisocial. That is a little group where everybody knows everybody’s business.

Mrs Annear—That is in place of section 64, which was a section whereby people could be evicted without any reason given and, because there was so much objection to section 64 and it was seen as very unjust, this antisocial statement now is used constantly.

Mrs Woods—It is, for any little thing.

Mrs Annear—I think it devalues the possibility of people generally realising the enormous gift that Aboriginal people are to us. They have so much to offer and they do offer it, but it is constantly rejected.

CHAIR—Anne and Rona, thank you. Thank you for your presence today. Anne, I know that you will take up the advocacy for Rona, and I wish you well there.

Mrs Annear—Thank you.

CHAIR—I suppose you are pleased that the next Governor-General might happen to be a certain person.

Mrs Annear—Yes, I think it is a very nice thing; a good choice, that one.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, and I wish you all the best, Rona. I hope that your problems will soon resolve.

[2.00 p.m.]

CARLETON, Mr Trevor Edward, Deputy Chair, Catholic Social Justice Council

QUINN, Mr Terence Anthony, Project Officer, Catholic Social Justice Council

CHAIR—I now welcome the witnesses from the Western Australian Catholic Social Justice Council to give evidence. Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand 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. Our Hansard reporters will be taking a record of what is said today. From time to time I may ask you to repeat or spell place names so that we can record the details accurately. Before we ask you questions—we do have a submission from you—you are welcome to make any opening statement that you would like to make.

Mr Quinn—Thank you very much. To put the committee in context of where we are coming from, the Catholic Social Justice Council is the justice body of the Archdiocese of Perth and, in cooperation with many other bodies, both with other churches and other religions and indeed the wider community, we work for justice in social structures at all levels, whether it be the national, the regional, the local or the global one. From the church's point of view, we take a particular commitment to the marginalised or the poor and we are very active in the community on behalf of these people insofar as our capacity is to be active for them and with them.

Our role is both positive and negative. We will support actions and policies that enhance human life, that enhance the community at large, and social integration of the Australian community, and we see it as part of our job to criticise actions and structures that damage people. Given that brief introduction, perhaps Trevor could speak to some of the terms of reference.

Mr Carleton—Thanks, Terry. First of all, the Catholic Social Justice Council of WA supports the role that you people are playing in your terms of reference, one which we think is greatly needed, particularly in Western Australia. Regarding the first terms of reference, special needs of these people including ways to deliver services more effectively, we certainly believe at the council that these existing and new programs need to be clearly articulated to indigenous communities in plain, simple English. We think there is a continuing role by ATSIC and through their regional council structure to have the ability to make and implement decisions locally, in consultation with other regional organisations.

The big questions are, what programs and services are available over the three levels of government, where is this source of information, and how can it be accessed and understood? If you talk to the people on the ground in the remote urban communities, the Kimberley and the Goldfields and the like, not all have a good understanding of what programs and services are available and how they can access them, and who to talk to. They have many people from many agencies visiting their communities with different messages. In terms of land it might be the Aboriginal Lands Trust, it could be the Aboriginal Affairs Department, it could be ATSIC, it

could be the Indigenous Land Corporation, and then they get all those confused, and this is right across government.

I pose those questions: where is the source of all that information about programs and services, and how can it be accessed and understood by the people on the ground? Perhaps there is a need for regular local forums to explain programs and services and regional priorities on a yearly or biyearly basis. Perhaps that could be organised through ATSIC and its regional councils. Perhaps it already does that, I am not particularly sure.

Ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision-making affecting their local communities: again the council sees with the current structure we have through the ATSIC regional councils that there probably should be a mechanism in place there that provides genuine local input, not just input from bureaucrats. In my travels through remote areas of Western Australia people are frustrated that they do not have input. Certainly people are elected to councils and they have their say, but how much of that filters down to the people on the ground is the big question for all of us. How do the people on the ground have some input? There is certainly a sense of frustration there that they do not.

Indigenous young people in urban areas: obviously youth is our future. There are parenting and family issues and there is certainly family disunity that you see. When you travel around through most areas of the state, you cannot help but see the disunity between families, family groups, conflicts in communities and, when you look at the sad history of Aboriginal people in Australia, you can well understand why there is that disunity today. You have to look further than what is facing you there and then.

The reconciliation issue obviously is yet to be fixed, yet to be addressed, and I think that would go a long way to resolving some of the conflicts and some of the frustrations felt by the people out there. Despite years and years of funding, there does not seem to be much improvement on the ground. In places that you might travel to in remote Western Australia, over a 10-year period you do not see much improvement. The housing standards have not improved that much. It is the hoary old chestnut: how much of the money that is in Aboriginal Affairs gets to the people on the ground, or is it all tied up in the bureaucracy administering programs?

Again I am fortunate enough to be able to travel in these remote areas, and I have not seen much improvement over the years, particularly in terms of housing. We hear all the time these days of levels of funding being cut back for various programs, not just Aboriginal programs, and I see their situation becoming more desperate. Perhaps there needs to be a greater use of mentoring programs. Certainly some communities are lacking better leadership out there. We also believe as a council that there is an opportunity for local government to better assist Aboriginal people, but most local government groups struggle with indigenous issues. It was pleasing for us to see a newspaper article last week. The City of Fremantle has developed a comprehensive policy on how they will be dealing in the future with Aboriginal issues, including native title and health and education issues, and I am sure that is a great step forward for local government.

The maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage in urban areas: heritage, culture and the land are the most important issues, we believe, for the indigenous

people. Perhaps there needs to be some adult community education to focus on heritage and culture. We believe there is a role for the ATSIC regional councils in better promoting culture and heritage locally, and perhaps there should be some funding for some memorials in interpretive centres as well. There are a lot of issues and events that have happened in Australia's history, particularly in Western Australia, where the non-indigenous people are unaware of events that might have happened, and perhaps if there is some money given for interpretive centres, the general education of the community through the tourism aspect might improve everyone's understanding of heritage and culture of Aboriginal people in this state.

In terms of economic independence in urban areas, certainly the council believes in capacity building within communities and good training programs to teach the local communities how to better maintain their houses, how to fix the plumbing, how to fix the electricity, rather than constantly relying on outside services.

Perhaps local government programs need to include indigenous people, as I have mentioned before. Some local governments, particularly in this state, seem to struggle with some indigenous issues. Perhaps a better, beefed up CDEP is needed.

Land is a key issue for economic independence. Certainly this state is in the process of handing back land direct to Aboriginal people, land that has been held on their behalf for many years, and this will give them the basis for, hopefully, some future economic independence. The state and others need to provide advice on better management and use of that land, and there are many examples now of great initiatives amongst Aboriginal communities, particularly up at the Dampier Peninsula—aquaculture and the like—north of Broome where people are getting some pilot programs going to improve their lot up there. They have many great ideas but they need some seeding capital to get the ventures done, and perhaps even enter into joint ventures.

In terms of the sixth term of reference, urban housing needs and particular problems, we believe, as the Social Justice Council, that funding is still inadequate for Aboriginal housing. Housing and infrastructure development, as we have mentioned in our previous written submission to the committee, is very expensive in remote Western Australia, and I am not sure if the bureaucrats or government take due regard of the expense of remote Western Australia compared to, say, an area the size of Victoria or Tasmania.

There needs to be constant input from people on the ground as to their needs and wants, not just the judgments of bureaucrats, and there needs to be better housing management in terms of local responsibility for housing maintenance and collection mainly for payment of rent and other outgoings. I note your comments before about equal responsibility and there needs to be that responsibility engendered into communities—that with the CDEP, they need to put some money aside to pay for the rent and to pay for the outgoings and the like. I think the Ministry of Housing in Western Australia is coping with that. They have a program for better housing management, but to begin with all other government programs need a little bit better resourcing and funding to get the message across that there is equal responsibility. That is our general statement.

CHAIR—There were a lot of practical comments there, Trevor, and I congratulate you and Terry for focusing on those important issues. Have you had any dealings with the Commission of Elders established in Western Australia to advise government on indigenous matters?

Mr Carleton—Yes. The Commission of Elders is a group of indigenous people and it is an organisation set up under government policy through the state Aboriginal Affairs Department. It is broken into regions around the state.

Mr HAASE—Could I interrupt here?

CHAIR—Yes, of course.

Mr HAASE—When you say ‘set up by the government’ are you referring specifically to the new ALP government in Western Australia?

Mr Carleton—No, the previous government.

Mr HAASE—I just wanted to clarify that.

Mr Carleton—Yes. I would need to check if it is actually established under legislation, the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act. I am not sure if it is, but I could refer that information back to you. But there is a Commission of Elders with representatives from right around the state, and they are there to advise government on indigenous issues.

Mr Quinn—And, to answer your question, Mr Chairman, did we have a relationship with them, we have one of our elders on our own Catholic Social Justice Council. He has just retired. Ben Taylor is his name. He has been feeding us information, and we to him—you know, come and go—on the business of the Commission of Elders, et cetera. There was some disaffection expressed by our representative on our council, by Ben Taylor, and others, that it did not have enough independence, that it did not have enough distance, I suppose, from government, with the Court government having established it. Some on the commission felt that it needed a little more distance for its deliberations.

CHAIR—What sort of issues, are you aware of, that have been tackled by that elders group? Can you give us some comment on what the outcome was?

Mr Carleton—I do not have any direct involvement with the Commission of Elders but I could provide advice on the function of the Commission of Elders, if that is your wish.

CHAIR—We will be able to get that from the Western Australian government, but I just thought you might be able to tell us what you have heard, being very much on the ground as an organisation, which we appreciate. Because the committee is looking across Australia at ways of trying to involve indigenous people more, it just occurred to me, subject to my colleagues’ approval, that the committee might talk up a model like this in the future, provided it is effective and provided it is able to give its independent view. For example, on the horrendous issue of domestic violence, I wish I had the solution. I have not, but it seems to me that it might help if the elders could take a higher role in the communities in Australia to try and help address that, because there are some cultural issues. So it is attractive to me that we might be able to kick around a policy that fosters the development of a council of elders.

Mr Carleton—Certainly the Commission of Elders is on two levels in the state. We have a state Commission of Elders, which is the representatives from each region, plus you have re-

gional commissions of elders as well, so there would be one for the Kimberley, one for the south-west and the like, or even different sections. So it really does go down to the grassroots, and they all feed up to a peak committee. My understanding is that they comment and pass decisions on a range of issues they inherit, such as culture, education—the works.

Mr Quinn—I was at a meeting of Aboriginal people at the Aboriginal Medical Service about 18 months ago, subsequent to the high-speed car chases and the unfortunate deaths that occurred there. There was great passion at this meeting to do something about it themselves, to mend some of the damage that some of the few families that are repeat offenders are doing to their own community and to the broader community. One of the remedies they did suggest was to beef up the authority, if you like, of the Commission of Elders on the local level so that these people can exercise more influence, not only with government and other agencies, but also within their own communities and within family groupings, so that that traditional means of authority will be strengthened rather than weakened. This appeal to have a bit more independence and distance from government, once established, is a feeling to strengthen their own structures of management themselves.

CHAIR—Yes. One of the observations we have been able to make is the role of the regional ATSI representatives. It seems to me, without making a judgment because my mind is open on this, that they are elected and they have to fight for their election, which is democracy at work, but then they are thrown into the deep end on a whole range of issues, and expected to come up with the goods on those issues, dealing with different cultural issues as well, and problems. I just wonder whether the regional elected person needs some help in management or is there a better way of coordinating? For example, the state told us today they have appointed area representatives to travel around Western Australia, dealing with delivery of state services and available services and the like, and here we have the regional ATSI guy driving in his car, probably down the same road some days as the state guy. Wouldn't it be nice if they all travelled in the same car? Have you any thoughts on what sort of model could achieve that?

Mr Carleton—Not so much on the model, but certainly it is a big problem in Western Australia, and one I have picked up earlier in my notes there is 'better coordination across the three levels of government'. A while back, just before Christmas, I was in Fred Chaney's office down at the National Native Title Tribunal and we were talking about certain issues and then we got on to Fitzroy Crossing—'Oh, you're in Fitzroy Crossing next week? I'll be there a week later'—and we were talking about the same issues, because we were both talking about native title and land and the like, and there was just that lack of coordination: I am in town one day and the next day the ILC comes in or ATSI comes in. But how we can get the three levels of government all to work together I think is a hard one, and I would like to know a model.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Carleton—Because that is what we are striving for, and I believe that is what the new government of Western Australia is striving for, too—better efficiency and better coordination.

CHAIR—Certainly Mr Howard's federal government is absolutely determined that that should be. That is why he has set out these programs for all of his ministers, and we were delighted today to hear the report of the Western Australian representative on education of the dynamic new agreement entered into around Australia by all the states, willingly, to work towards

targets and goals and performance measures, and to address that very important thing, education. So we are trying, too, from our end, but my intuition tells me that probably the ultimate answer—ultimately, in a perfect world—is not to have the Commonwealth or the state involved much at all but, rather, let the community do it.

Mr Quinn—Absolutely.

CHAIR—But we have to walk first.

Mr Quinn—We have said we see ourselves in a positive role, and one is to recognise some good initiatives, and I think we would thoroughly support, as a basic mechanism, the national commitment to improved outcomes in Aboriginal programs which I think goes back to 1992. It is almost 10 years old now.

CHAIR—Yes, 1992, that is right.

Mr Quinn—I read in the ATSIC submission to you that there were improved bilateral arrangements, there was some kind of revival of interest in the outcomes stated in the national commitment. The problem of coordination is always going to be there, especially with three levels of government and especially with the different services. You have ATSIC saying, 'We'll only come into programs and projects that are not the existing responsibility of state and local government,' and I think that is right.

I do not think the Commonwealth should override the states, given our system, but there are many programs which even the state needs some sort of additional assistance with so that we can have a more effective on-the-ground outcome, especially in places like Western Australia where we have issues of housing, issues of remoteness—you would be aware of that—and the question of costs, et cetera. I think we should argue for assistance in that regard. An overall recommitment to the national commitment to improved outcomes is something very positive, and it would help the coordination job that we still have before us.

CHAIR—That is very good.

Mr LLOYD—Does the Catholic Social Justice Council own any housing stock yourselves or do you help coordinate housing for indigenous people?

Mr Quinn—We own nothing. We do not have any role in that ownership area. We simply are really a research body. Part of my job is to be a research officer, a project officer. We would certainly work to coordinate with other agencies. We do lobbying. We stand with people on the marginalised areas of Australian life but, no, we do not—

Mr Carleton—It is more an advisory body.

Mr LLOYD—Trevor, you mentioned, and the chairman followed up on it, frustration on the ground from Aboriginal communities. It is a frustration that I share as well—and I have mentioned it in these committees before—over the lack of contact with the ATSIC regional commissioners and other people who are elected.

They seem very difficult to contact. I suspect that is a similar sort of problem that you found on the ground. Do you have any ideas on how we can fix that or make it a little bit easier?

Mr Carleton—As the chairman alluded to before, they are elected to these positions. The burden is quite great and the pressures on them are quite great as well. They cannot be everywhere all the time. In large regional areas—take the Goldfields—they are right out to the border, as Mr Haase would know.

Mr LLOYD—You would not get an argument from any of us on this side of the table. We have to deal with similar problems. We understand where they are coming from as well, but I have said to some of the commissioners that we, as elected representatives, face exactly the same as they do. Maybe there are not the resources or the support that we get to assist us. Maybe that needs to be there for Aboriginal elected leaders.

Mr Carleton—I believe they need to be better resourced. Also maybe there should be the opportunity for open forums with the commissioner and the chairperson present in those particular areas, where people can have their say in an organised and structured way.

Mr Quinn—Yes. I think the forum idea and the question of community adult education is a real issue for indigenous communities. I have seen many a regional councillor struggle to keep up the communication with his electorate. Perhaps some field officers or research officers could be appointed in special circumstances where there is a particularly difficult constituency, for whatever reason. That would be a very good idea. That is part of the resourcing. Also, that education and passing on of information—not only passing on information passing but some formation, too, going on and the things Trevor was referring to existing—needs to be clearly articulated. There is a lot of non-understanding of very good programs out there for indigenous people and people do not know of their existence.

Mr LLOYD—On another matter associated with health, you might be able to give me some advice. It was raised by the Western Australian government that there is a very high percentage of Aboriginal people who do not have access to Medicare. When they first present to a health service they find that they do not have a Medicare number. Do you have any information on that?

Mr Carleton—No, I am afraid I am not.

Mr LLOYD—You are not aware of that?

Mr Carleton—No, I am not aware of that. I could follow that up and come back to you. We have some contacts within the Aboriginal Medical Service here, the doctors.

Mr LLOYD—Yes. I would be happy if you could do that because the information they gave us, or said, was that the average annual cost of an Aboriginal person accessing Medicare is \$83 per person, compared to 10 times that amount for a white Australian person or a non-indigenous person. That worries me greatly and I would really like to get some feedback from other areas on that and see if it is substantiated by other bodies.

Mr Carleton—Certainly.

Ms HOARE—You spoke about being like an advisory or research type of area—that the council is—and you have one elder on the council at this stage.

Mr Quinn—Yes.

Ms HOARE—You spoke about providing that advisory or research service for marginalised groups in our community.

Mr Quinn—Yes.

Ms HOARE—In the recommendations which you have made in your submission, do you see a more active role for the Catholic Social Justice Council, or do you see yourselves as continuing in that advisory-research role? The reason I ask is, where I am from—and Jim will know about this also—is the Newcastle region and we have had recently formed what they call the Two Bishops Trust. You have the Catholic and Anglican diocese working together, raising money, holding forums and hosting the activity in the community to address some of these issues.

Mr Quinn—Yes. I know about that alliance between the Anglican and Catholic bishops and I think it is—

CHAIR—A dangerous alliance!

Mr Quinn—We now have a governor-general coming up.

CHAIR—Yes, indeed. That is right, yes.

Mr Quinn—I think it is a wonderful initiative and I would love to see the church and other non-government agencies involved in community education. That is very close to my heart. We are much more proactive and just, as we described. Forgive me, I did not give you the full picture. We very much connect with many other agencies in the community, including getting out in the street sometimes in front of various places with banners and things. We do have the proactivity, if you like, the social action part, but the educational area is an area that I would really like to see done.

Ms HOARE—Can you see an expanded role for the council in these areas?

Mr Quinn—Sure. Absolutely, yes.

Mr HAASE—I am interested to know whether or not you are specifically involved in Aboriginal situations or whether you are a non-specific social justice council, first up.

Mr Carleton—We have members on the council who are specifically involved, but as a social justice council we cover a range of issues.

Mr HAASE—How is the group funded that is responsible specifically to Aboriginal clients? How is that wing of your organisation funded?

Mr Carleton—We do not particularly have Aboriginal clients. We would advise the archbishop on any indigenous issues. Like governments, it is very underresourced in terms of human resources and financial resources. Terry is our sole part-time person, half-time per week. We have no great funding from the church to carry out our function. We are trying to build on that. We are developing a strategic plan and trying to better represent ourselves to the archbishop to increase our funding. We do not have any direct involvement with Aboriginal organisations as such.

Mr HAASE—You would be aware, I imagine, that for services to indigenous populations there are a number of funding sources available from governments generally for those that provide services. I think specifically of the great fight over land on behalf of Aboriginal groups under native title and the extreme amounts of wealth that are being created for the legal fraternity, for one. I would be interested to hear whether or not you were aspiring at a future time to access any of the funding programs to better provide a service to indigenous peoples.

Mr Carleton—I would not have thought so.

Mr Quinn—No.

Mr Carleton—Ours is purely an advisory body. We are not there to service clients or to access funding like that.

Mr HAASE—You mentioned, however, the data collection role and visiting Fitzroy Crossing. You also mentioned the Goldfields. That is an expensive operation.

Mr Carleton—I was talking in terms of my own personal circumstances, not as a member of the Catholic Social Justice Council.

Mr HAASE—I misunderstood that.

Mr Carleton—It is through my professional job that I visit these areas.

Mr HAASE—I see.

CHAIR—What is that, Trevor?

Mr Carleton—I work for the state government through an organisation called the Aboriginal Lands Trust.

Mr HAASE—An interesting topic in itself.

Mr Carleton—A very interesting topic in itself.

Mr HAASE—One immediately thinks of groups like Rubibi.

Mr Carleton—Yes.

Mr HAASE—You were going to add something to that answer, Terry.

Mr Quinn—I was going to say, Mr Haase, that the church does have agencies like CentreCare and homes for Aboriginal families, et cetera. It also has its chaplaincy services where, as you know, indigenous people are grossly overrepresented in prisons. We are in contact with outreaches, if you like, of the church that are involved in certain limited areas—nothing like the expanse of the activities of ATSIC or the Aboriginal Affairs Department—but we do have those agencies, which feed back to us and we to them, information of an indigenous nature.

Mr HAASE—To pick up on some comments that you made, Trevor, you mentioned the possibility of, I imagine, raising the issue of reconciliation or streamlining reconciliation through the use of funding for interpretive centres.

Mr Carleton—Yes.

Mr HAASE—That, of course, is a double-edged sword. There are many good stories to tell about Western culture interfacing with Aboriginal culture. There are many horrendous ones to tell.

Mr Carleton—Yes.

Mr HAASE—It is worth noting, however, that the flying foam incident on the Burrup Peninsula is well recognised with local cairns and plaques, et cetera, but it needs to be put on the record that for all of the often rumoured atrocities—and I have in mind a debate that took place at the National Press Club quite recently when there were some rather polarised points of view as to the validity of some statistics in that regard—but I would like to have a quick reaction from you, if we were going to create funding for interpretive centres to publicise the horrendous occurrences, as to whether we ought to fund the interpretive centres for the publicity or publicising of some of the rather atrocious interfaces of Aboriginal and Western society in the very early days of exploration here in this state.

I am immediately brought to mind of the writings in *A Drop In The Bucket* at Mount Margaret Mission and the fact that that mission was created solely for the care of the offspring of interaction between Aboriginal and white, as a result of the wood lines being pushed out into the Goldfields areas. The price of a young Aboriginal female was a bottle of whisky and a pouch of tobacco. It was much worked upon by Aboriginal elders at the time, in their innocence or ignorance, if you like, but the creation of many of those Western Desert missions was motivated by the huge number of offspring of mixed racial interaction and, without the involvement of the churches of many denominations, there would have been a far more disappointing outcome for Aboriginal peoples.

I think the weight of public opinion today is heavily on the side of criticism of the actions of governments of the day and is often blinded to the realities of life in a very harsh environment in Australia. I would like your comment as to whether or not you, representing an organisation, are aware of some of the dichotomy of the argument and whether you were aware, for instance, of our recognition of some of the incidents that were changed, and whether you would have a

point of view which agrees that for total transparency all aspects of racial interaction should be highlighted.

Mr Carleton—I am not familiar with all of the specific issues you have just talked about, but I think the whole issue of memorials and interpretive centres should be done very sensitively and should be balanced from both sides. That has been the case. I was looking for a newspaper article before I came here—as a last minute thought—because I read I think in the Indigenous Law Bulletin some time last year about a memorial in western New South Wales. It was the Myall Creek memorial where the blacks and the whites stood together and said, ‘Listen, we recognise that this happened in this particular area.’ It was a very positive outcome. That is the sort of outcome that our justice council would be looking at; something which is positive for both sides, not just highlighting the strengths or weaknesses of particular sides. There has to be a sensitive balance. I think that Myall Creek memorial is a great example of what can be done.

Mr HAASE—Yes. We have many, of course—the Pinjarra situation, the Derby situation, Burrup Peninsula.

Mr Carleton—Yes. Bungarun in Derby is one that comes to mind, which is Aboriginal Lands Trust land, in fact. But a lot of Aboriginal people lived and died there and it would be very useful for people visiting Derby—because there is not that much more to see in Derby—to go out there and actually see an interpretive arrangement there that tells the history of that place. That would bring something to the town as well and a great deal of understanding as well.

Mr HAASE—It would not be quite as good as a Derby tidal power project, but nevertheless.

Mr Quinn—I just think that the debate between Windshuttle and—who is that other historian?

Mr HAASE—I heard the argument, not the names.

Mr Quinn—The debate that is now going on—that was a marvellous debate, great television, I saw it last week—I just think it is a story that has to work itself out. Sure, the criticism may be on the side of the white colonists, I suppose, it may be against them at the moment but there is certainly a debate now ensuing. I really support the idea of an open debate about this because it will lead us to greater maturity. I have been with Aboriginal Affairs, like Trevor, in my particular job. I used to work with Aboriginal Affairs and then with ATSIC before I started working with the church. I see through landmark agreements, like the 92 national commitment, a real maturing occurring. There was a reaction, I think, to that.

But I think the debate is good. It will lead hopefully to a greater maturity, not only of getting our history right, which I think is important, because that is to do with our own image and identity as Australians, but also getting our programs right for the indigenous people so that the outcomes are really there on the ground, as you said, Mr Chairman. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Trevor and Terry, you have both been a great help to us and we wish you well in your work. I hope we will meet again in the not too distant future.

Mr Quinn—Thank you very much, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR—Thank you. The witnesses are discharged. The committee will adjourn until the new witnesses arrive.

Proceedings suspended from 2.41 p.m. to 2.48 p.m..

GARLETT, Mrs Annette, Employment Project Administration Officer, Peedac Pty Ltd, and Member, Yahnging Aboriginal Corporation

GARLETT, Mr Gregory Lawrence, Manager, Yahnging Aboriginal Corporation

MAY, Mrs Lynette May, Project Officer and Committee Member, Peedac Pty Ltd

CHAIR—I now welcome witnesses from Peedac Pty Ltd and Yahnging Aboriginal Corporation to give evidence. Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Commonwealth parliament and giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Our Hansard reporter will be taking a record of what is said today and, from time to time, I may ask you to repeat or spell place names so that we can record the details accurately. Before we ask you questions, we believe that you would like to make an opening statement. Annette, are you going to tell us how you do it and how to solve all the problems? I have been advised you know the answers.

Mrs Garlett—I wish I did! I would like to thank the representatives of the standing committee for the opportunity to talk about what is possibly one of the most significant problems facing indigenous people within Australia—that is, to be homeless—and, at times, be excluded from many of the advantages of ordinary living and the ability to access a stable address. A home is a fundamental requirement to be able to function in this modern society. We need to have a stable address which allows children to attend regular school and to build relationships in a learning environment and not to be forced to adjust at a new school each time we change addresses. It is also to get away from overcrowding as well, which happens from time to time. People need to have a permanent address to give employers and not to have to rely on relatives and friends passing on messages of possible employment. The employer is not likely to be reassured when the person taking the messages cannot be sure of being able to pass on that message in a timely manner.

Government agencies, banks and other organisations all require proof of identity and without a stable address people's lives become increasingly difficult. Many indigenous people have had their driving licence suspended because fines have not been paid—they have been going to the wrong addresses because people are moving around. Not having a driver's licence is a major barrier to gaining employment and being able to pay the rent.

The mechanics of managing housing projects have been documented in our submission. Government support would be necessary because, to the best of our knowledge, there are no training courses available for people to learn processes and procedures without first being employed by a property managing company or organisation. Our proposal is a result of community members attempting to solve community problems, involving community members in educating, encouraging, and mentoring community people—in other words, passing on, in an emphatic way, lessons learned by families and individuals about the benefits of reliable housing. As we have said in our submission, both Yahnging Corporation and Peedac have experience in providing services to a variety of housing providers. It should be remembered that they have done this although they were underresourced.

A commitment to provide support in the form we have suggested and to work closely with government and community will enhance the lives and ambitions of Aboriginal people and help ensure that children will grow up in a stable environment.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. Do you wish to add anything before we ask questions?

Mrs May—Peedac employs over 500 people on the Community Development Employment Project.

CHAIR—In Perth?

Mrs May—In Perth, yes. Mandurah, Pinjarra and right through to Perth. What is the furthest we go?

Mrs Garlett—Lancelin.

Mrs May—Lancelin.

CHAIR—It is a very big organisation.

Mrs May—Yes, it is. The two main problems for getting our people into employment and training are housing and licences. Many have licences, or had them, but have lost them because of fines and moving house all the time. I personally was a community development officer at Winjan Aboriginal Corporation at Mandurah, five years or more ago. I was very much involved in trying to get housing for people. Our Peedac site at Mandurah has a Homeswest contract and we do the painting and cleaning and maintenance of that contract. We have held that contract for over four years. I managed it the whole time. In that time it has been part of the community. Also, managing the contract, I have seen both sides of what Homeswest has to deal with and how we deal with Homeswest.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mrs May—It is a very difficult thing for Homeswest, because of the way it is set up, to deal with how our people are culturally. When a relative needs a house or somewhere to stay, you always let them move in. Often enough, because of ignorance of the Homeswest system or maybe just ignoring it, sometimes it gets too much for the family that was originally there because they have become overcrowded from other families who have been kicked out of Homeswest houses and they say, 'Well, that's it. I'm packing up and leaving.' When they do that they do not hand back in keys and, in the end, they have a huge Homeswest bill as well; another bill around their neck.

Being the chairperson for the ASSPAA committee at Mandurah for nine or so years, I have had a lot to do with and have seen from within the education system how the constant moving affects our kids, too. The Best Start program is helping a lot. There are, I have noticed over the last 15 years, a lot of new programs helping us, but we have a long way to go. ASSPAA is the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Association. We get a small amount of funding from DEETYA and we make sure the kids go off to camps that they could not afford, et cetera. There again, we have had to deal with a lack of housing.

We have had several families living in cars. It has all been pretty terrible, because you look at what the kids are suffering.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr LLOYD—What is the relationship between Peedac and Yahnging Corporation?

Mrs May—Peedac handles the community development employment moneys from ATSIC. We then have affiliations with all the various organisations and Winjan is one of them, along with Yahnging. Our ideas are to help the community organisations stand on their own two feet. There is no other way to get funding a lot of the time. There is no way to get moneys for wages so the Community Development Employment Program at least is able to give the organisation places so that they do not have a wage that they have to pay out.

CHAIR—So Peedac does the maintenance work?

Mrs May—No. Peedac has a maintenance contract out at Mandurah with Homeswest. I was just saying that the way I see a lot of things happening is because we have had such a very close relationship with Homeswest and part of our community.

Mr LLOYD—Your submission is a joint submission.

Mrs May—Yes.

Mr LLOYD—Did Peedac assist the Yahnging Corporation to put the submission in?

Mrs May—Yes. We fully support them in every way.

Mr LLOYD—Thank you.

Mr Garlett—We have had some houses for the last six years. We put a submission to ATSIC to acquire some rental homes or purchase some homes which we rent out to our people.

Mr LLOYD—How many, Greg?

Mr Garlett—We have six at the moment. They have only given us money for two at a time.

Mr LLOYD—But you have six homes. Are they all in the Perth area?

Mr Garlett—Yes. Most of them are in the northern suburbs. We are doing housing maintenance for Homeswest tenants: cleaning up houses, rubbish collecting and lawnmowing. We have come up against a brick wall with ATSIC because they have closed off the funding for the housing. What has happened is, I think a couple of our submissions got copied on the way through and someone else has applied for the housing. A lot of planning has not gone into how to maintain those houses and keep up with the rates and everything that goes with owning a house, so the funding has closed off. It is just held back with ATSIC now and they have actually told us we will not get any more funding for houses.

CHAIR—For new houses, additional houses?

Mr Garlett—Additional houses, yes.

Mr LLOYD—Did they give you a reason?

Mr Garlett—Yes, they gave us a reason. They have set up a new organisation to control the whole lot, so that has come to a standstill. With the housing maintenance we have had trouble getting paid for the work we have done. A lot of it got done voluntarily, for people in crisis situations. We would just go and do it. We have actually worked out a way to do that work and get paid for it. It is a pretty simple solution.

CHAIR—Do you want to share it with us?

Mr Garlett—We have worked out that for an additional cost onto the rent—probably about \$4 a fortnight—you can get your house and yard and lawnmowing done and your rubbish collected and taken away twice a year. The shire pick up rubbish when you put it out on the verge twice a year, so if you did it alternately, you get four times a year when you can get your place cleaned up. If you are a person who looks after your yard and your lawn and so on, that can go to inside work, painting and other odds and ends. It all depends what your needs are for that time. What we have found is that for a lot of Aboriginal people, being without a driver's licence or motor vehicle, it is very hard to hire a lawnmower and go and pick it up, getting to and fro. That is the maintenance part of it.

Mr LLOYD—Do you think that the people who are renting these homes, particularly Aboriginal people, understand that there is a mutual obligation and they actually have a responsibility to keep the homes tidy and to do the yards, or do they see that as being Homeswest's responsibility?

Mr Garlett—I think about 70 per cent of them do.

Mr HAASE—Do what, Greg?

Mr Garlett—Understand that it shall be maintained and done in a proper way. What you also have to remember is that there are a lot of people brought in from outside communities where they have their own rubbish collection service where they come around and clean all the yards. They have people on CDEP and the rubbish tip is in walking distance. If you have no vehicle, you can just grab a bag of rubbish and walk down to the tip.

Mr LLOYD—So they come from a community where the CDEP runs a service that basically does come and take the rubbish away, so they have got used to that and there is an expectation that that will happen here, too.

Mrs May—They also have different priorities. Often enough, relatives come in on them and all that sort of thing. A lot of these people have been cut off from the dole or Abstudy or something like that, so their priorities are food and not rubbish in the garden and having to hire lawnmowers, et cetera.

Mr LLOYD—When you say that people are cut off from the dole or Abstudy, do you know why or how that happens?

Mrs May—Yes. Often it is a mix-up with Centrelink. They are on Abstudy and then they want to leave Abstudy. They are just overpayments that Centrelink does not seem to keep up with, and the person ends up—

Mr LLOYD—So Centrelink will come back with a claim saying, ‘You’ve been overpaid’?

Mrs May—Yes. Of course they lose their money and they have to pay it back. But, as with all of us, the priority is you have to feed your kids, so that is the way it happens. These things are secondary.

CHAIR—And they do not feel that they should notify Centrelink that they have stopped their study. They do not think they should have to?

Mrs Garlett—Some of them do, but it still ends up coming out of your payment.

CHAIR—That is how you finish up in debt. If you keep getting money for an allowance that you have ceased to be entitled to and you do not tell Centrelink, they can still send you a cheque for a while. It happens a lot to people in my area, you know.

Mr LLOYD—I am sorry, we seem to have digressed. I am very interested in what you have to say about—

Mrs May—But that is one of the reasons why a lot of people do not prioritise yards and rubbish and all that because—

Mrs Garlett—Because you do not have the money to do it. It costs about \$40 to go to a tip, doesn’t it, to get a tip pass, to take a trailer load of rubbish away?

Mr Garlett—\$30.

Mr HAASE—That is if you pay somebody to cart it and collect it and tip it.

Mr Garlett—No, \$30 to actually go through that gate and put your rubbish off.

Mr HAASE—Depending on shires, yes. It varies from shire to shire.

Mrs Garlett—Yes, that is in the metro.

Mr HAASE—As owners of the house, do you not get vouchers from your local government that you can issue to your tenants for each house? They certainly do south of the river.

Mr Garlett—Yes, we can do it in the Wanneroo shire.

Mr HAASE—I thought you could and you would pass those vouchers on to the tenant in the house.

Mr Garlett—We are actually talking about doing the work for somebody else. If we are doing it for people already in the Ministry of Housing homes and they already have so many passes for the tip and we go and put their rubbish on, we will get no passes for the tips.

Mr HAASE—They have already used the passes they were issued by that local government. That is hardly a valid argument for having somebody else's responsibility.

Mr Garlett—You can use them with overcrowding, no worries. You find some rubbish, that is what the problem is in the first place, the overcrowding part of it.

CHAIR—Greg, can I get some knowledge from you. Your organisation has got six houses.

Mr Garlett—Yes.

CHAIR—And you rent them.

Mr Garlett—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you do a better job as a landlord than Homeswest? Tell me how you do a better job.

Mr Garlett—For a start, with the amount of money we are getting and operating on, we are probably doing a better job because we are actually volunteer work to run it. There is no-one on wages there.

CHAIR—So it is cheaper.

Mr Garlett—That part there is volunteered.

CHAIR—Do you get the same rent from your tenant as Homeswest?

Mr Garlett—We get exactly the same problems as administrative housing gets, exactly the same.

CHAIR—Twenty-five per cent.

Mr Garlett—Might even be a little bit more, might be worse.

Mr LLOYD—Sorry, he said more problems.

CHAIR—Yes, I mean rent, sorry. Do you get the same rate of rent? Is it 25 per cent of income?

Mr Garlett—Yes, about the same.

CHAIR—So you charge roughly the same rent.

Mr Garlett—Yes.

CHAIR—But your administration is done a lot by volunteers, so there is less cost. Therefore, you have a profit, do you?

Mr Garlett—Yes.

CHAIR—And you put that profit into what?

Mr Garlett—That all goes back into those homes.

Mr HAASE—Into?

Mr Garlett—Into those homes.

Mr HAASE—Maintenance?

Mr Garlett—Maintenance, yes.

CHAIR—Greg, I am going to ask you this next question and it is not intended to offend anyone; it is just that I am interested. Do you find that you have the same amount of trouble or difficulty with tenants as Homeswest—like default, damage?

Mr Garlett—We have the same problems but we are able to deal with them a little bit better, on a more understanding basis.

CHAIR—How do you deal with it?

Mr Garlett—Before we started we made up a set of rules and we go by those rules. When we deal with a tenant we say, 'Look, we made these rules up for everybody. That's the way we're dealing; that's the way we're operating. If you don't like it, that's it.'

CHAIR—Have you had to evict any of your tenants, Greg?

Mr Garlett—Yes.

CHAIR—On what grounds?

Mr Garlett—We have had one with rental arrears and we had one with damages.

CHAIR—What happened to those people when they were evicted, Greg? Where did they live? Where did they move to?

Mr Garlett—One lot moved in with relations and the other lot moved out of town to the country.

CHAIR—What you are saying is that an indigenous organisation like yours accepts that sometimes unfortunately, sadly, it is necessary to evict the tenant.

Mr Garlett—That is right.

CHAIR—We heard evidence this morning from people who I think were saying it is wrong to evict an indigenous person, even though the rental is behind or damage has been done or both, because they are so disadvantaged anyway and what you are doing is putting them further behind the eight ball, into further difficulty. Perhaps they did not quite say that, but that to me was close to what they were saying. That is why I am interested, because you are an indigenous organisation and you have a love for your people of course, but you have to also run your place as a business properly, otherwise it does not work.

Mr LLOYD—I think that is the whole basis as I see it, Mr Chairman. I support that because if there is no control, if one person there is not paying rent everybody else—like all society, we have rules and regulations that make an orderly society work. I think in your own housing co-op you have to have your rules. You said you drew up a set of rules. Would it be possible to get a copy of those rules for the committee? Would you have any objection to that?

Mr Garlett—This committee here, you mean?

Mr LLOYD—Yes.

Mr Garlett—Yes.

Mr LLOYD—I would be interested to see what your rules are.

Ms HOARE—Greg, how are your rules different to the Homeswest set of rules? You have only had two evictions in how many years?

Mr Garlett—In six years.

Ms HOARE—Two in six years. I got the impression they tended to have more on a percentage basis than that. What is different with your set of rules that makes it easier for Aboriginal people to live by than their rules?

Mr Garlett—The rules are similar. I think it is the understanding part now. We are more into the same paths as our own people and we understand the problems and we can work ways around it, you know; whereas when our people come against the Ministry of Housing there is automatically a brick wall there and it shuts off a lot of vision now to see either side's problems.

Ms HOARE—So you can go along to one of your families in one of your homes and they can say, 'We've got some health problems in the family. We can't keep up the maintenance of the yard, or the outside of it.' You can come along and say, 'Well, okay, how about we up the rent by \$4 a fortnight and we will come in and cover that for you?' There is that bit more flexibility, is there?

Mr Garlett—Yes.

Ms HOARE—That is good.

Mr HAASE—It is excellent, yes.

CHAIR—Greg, you might not want to answer this and I will not be offended if you do not want to, but don't you come under some cultural pressure when you have to run this? What happens?

Mr Garlett—Anything out there, you name it, we have had it.

CHAIR—Yes, I suspected you might have, but I did not want to put you in a position of having to talk about something that you would rather not talk about.

Mrs May—Yes, Winjan is going through exactly the same thing, the same with the houses.

CHAIR—I will tell you why I asked. I will share something with you. I had someone from ATSIC tell me in Canberra that they found it difficult in some places in Australia to make some changes to the management of some programs because of the cultural problems and ATSIC did not know how to solve them. They knew that if they tried to there would be a lot of problems. They shared that confidence with us and I appreciated them telling me. Everybody has problems and I just wanted to know how on earth you cope with those, because I knew you would have them. Do you want to talk about it, Greg?

Mr Garlett—I will give you one example. We came against one problem; I will not say what the problem was, but I have had some stuff thrown at me from very close relations. The person was reared up by me from a small age, like a brother. He said I was not doing the right thing, I did something wrong against one of his kids, and he threw me out of his house.

The way I put it to him was that I said, 'Look, we have got this thing off the ground from scratch, from nothing. We set all the rules up and this committee put me in this place here to enforce this thing and make sure it runs along smoothly for everybody. If I am going to wilt on one little thing that everybody else thinks is wrong and I believe is right, if I am going to draw back on that, I might as well just pack up now and walk out and go bury myself in the sand somewhere else.' By that this bloke changed his attitude and he saw it from my side. So there is always two sides to an argument. If each party can understand each other, they know where you are coming from.

Mrs May—It just feels so much better talking to your own people, too, if there is a problem; a lot of the things you are probably too ashamed to share with the Homeswest accommodation manager that comes around. We do not have enough people working in Homeswest. SHAP workers are all white, or most, and we do not have enough people trained and working in Homeswest to deal with our people directly. It is better that way, isn't it?

Mrs Garlett—Yes, we do have that understanding. Some of us, when we came through, when we sort of lived in camps, did not have to pay rent and, having to start to pay rent and having to move into the urban dwellings, into the urban homes, having to live a whole different

way of life to what we are used to, we have that understanding of where people are coming from.

CHAIR—Do you get people coming to ask you for advice on how you set yourself up and whether they should try and do it themselves somewhere and seeking your advice and guidance on what you have done?

Mr Garlett—Yes, we have quite a few.

CHAIR—You do?

Mr Garlett—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you think there are quite a few Aboriginal communities who would like to do what you are doing, if given the opportunity?

Mr Garlett—Yes, given the opportunity they would probably do it.

CHAIR—Yes. That is good.

Mr HAASE—Greg, can you tell me your source of funding? I know that you received the money for the six houses, two at a time I believe, from ATSIC. Is that right?

Mr Garlett—Yes.

Mr HAASE—Do you get ongoing funding? Each year do you get another amount of money from ATSIC to run the show?

Mr Garlett—Not a cent.

Mr HAASE—You do not get anything from ATSIC?

Mr Garlett—Not even one cent.

Mr HAASE—Do you get anything from any other government organisation?

Mr Garlett—No.

Mr HAASE—I need to know what Peedac stands for.

Mrs May—Just Peedac.

Mr HAASE—It is just a name? It does not stand for Perth Environmental Education Division or anything?

Mrs May—Are we talking about the community or Pty Ltd?

Mr HAASE—I am talking about Peedac Pty Ltd, first of all. I want to know because Peedac, I believe, owns the houses.

Mrs May—No.

Mr HAASE—The community owns the houses? Greg, you are part of Yahnging. You said you were a committee member of Yahnging.

Mr Garlett—Yes, Yahnging owns the houses that I am talking about.

Mr HAASE—All right. Does Yahnging get funding from elsewhere?

Mr Garlett—No.

Mr HAASE—All right. We go to Peedac. We do not know what Peedac stands for.

Mrs May—Yes. When you were reading Perth Employment Enterprise Development Aboriginal Corporation, that is the—

Mr HAASE—It is that, is it? It was only a guess.

Mrs May—Very good. We are committee members on that committee. Perth Employment Enterprise Development owns Peedac Pty Ltd, which is a share company. They own the one \$2 share. Peedac Pty Ltd is the one that administers the ATSIC funding for the Community Development Employment Program. Peedac then wants to help and support Peedac Pty Ltd, groups like Yahnging et cetera, hopefully giving them some places. We do not give them any funding at all, but we do—

Mr HAASE—When you say ‘we,’ which ‘we’?

Mrs May—Peedac Pty Ltd.

Mr HAASE—Do not give funding to Yahnging.

Mrs May—Does not give any funding to Yahnging.

Mr HAASE—But they give contracts to Yahnging. Is that what you are saying?

Ms HOARE—No, CDP places I think you are talking about.

Mrs May—Yes. It is something like the Work for the Dole scheme, so they get the money from that.

Mr HAASE—All right, that is good enough. I want to know who makes up Yahnging Aboriginal Corporation. You are a member of that group, Greg?

Mr Garlett—There are 28 members, yes.

Mr HAASE—Can it be 29? How is that Yahnging Aboriginal Corporation delineated?

Mr Garlett—The minimum is 25, but there are 28 in there.

Mr HAASE—Which people is it representative of? Who are the beneficiaries? Is it a list of specific names?

Mr Garlett—All Aboriginal people from the northern suburbs.

Mr HAASE—So there must be a list of names of people that live in the northern suburbs.

Mr Garlett—Yes.

Mr HAASE—That list cannot be added to.

Mr Garlett—It can be added to.

Mr HAASE—At whose discretion?

Mr Garlett—The executive committee's discretion.

Mr HAASE—Are you a member of the executive committee?

Mr Garlett—Yes.

Mr HAASE—Do you live in one of the six houses?

Mr Garlett—No.

Mr HAASE—You collect the rent and the rent pays for the maintenance of the six houses that you have?

Mr Garlett—Yes.

Mr HAASE—When maintenance is carried out by CDP employees, who pays the group that is running those CDP employees? Who pays them? You have no maintenance carried out on those six houses by CDP employees.'

Mrs Garlett—By the participants, but then the corporation—

Mr HAASE—They have to get paid, don't they?

Mrs Garlett—All the money—

Mrs May—They are partly paid by Peedac. Peedac funds the position. The people from Yahnging employ the people and all that Peedac does is pay \$350 a fortnight to that person for

working 17 hours per week. The actual going out and doing of the work, the machines, the tools, the petrol, the cars are all paid for by Yahnging. Peedac pays nothing but that wage.

Mr HAASE—So where does the money paid by Yahnging go? Doesn't Peedac contract those employees out? Peedac pays those employees.

Mrs May—No.

Mr HAASE—When they utilise the services of those employees, who reimburses the CDP company?

Mrs May—No-one. It is not done like that.

Mrs Garlett—No.

Mr HAASE—There is no contractual use made to other persons? You said you have a contract with Homeswest, for instance.

Mrs May—No, sorry. I probably put you off there.

Mr HAASE—I simply understand what happens elsewhere, I suppose.

Mrs May—Yes. Peedac as an entire organisation has various sites around Mandurah, Rockingham—

Mr HAASE—Five hundred employees.

Mrs May—Yes. They are all over the place. One of the things we do is to try to pick up government contracts. We presently do the Education Department mowing. One of the contracts we picked up was Homeswest in Mandurah.

Mr HAASE—That is fine. We have a basis there now. Regarding Homeswest in Mandurah, when those CDP employees do the work for Homeswest and Homeswest pays somebody, who do they pay?

Mrs May—They pay Peedac Pty Ltd, but that does not happen with Yahnging.

Mr HAASE—Why doesn't it happen?

Mrs May—Because Yahnging is a separate organisation completely. They are not under Peedac. At Mandurah, say, with the Homeswest contract, that is Peedac Mandurah. Boolawongin Nursery is owned by Peedac. Crompton Road site is owned by Peedac. Appeal Clothing is owned by Peedac. They use the CDP money and the extra \$2,000 to build up the business and get people into full-time employment. But also we have outside placements, so there is no money out there. There used to be the CYSS money to help organisations. There is nothing out there any more. What we do is say, 'Okay, Yahnging, we are giving you 10 places and a memorandum of understanding.'

Mr HAASE—That is a memorandum of understanding between Peedac and Yahnging.

Mrs May—Yes. ‘You may employ your 10 people, who you choose.’ We have nothing more to do with it except make the payments. We pay into their bank account. They are insured and all that sort of thing. Yahnging then uses them on their housing.

Mr HAASE—This is important when we, as government, contemplate what you are doing, because Homeswest pay Peedac to have the maintenance work done.

Mrs May—At the other end of town.

Mr HAASE—But Yahnging gets that work done for nothing because Peedac provides the CDP positions free of charge to Yahnging.

Mrs May—Yes.

Mr HAASE—That is the difference. I certainly want that on the record. Thank you, that is all, Mr Chairman.

Mr LLOYD—The money from CDEP employees comes from ATSIC?

Mrs May—Yes, it comes from ATSIC. It is something like the work for the dole program. CDP is also voluntary. You can be on the dole or you can work. People only get the same money as the dole but they are employed.

Mr LLOYD—I think we are very familiar here with that program. Do Peedac tender?

Mrs May—Yes, we tender.

Mr LLOYD—I am more familiar with the work for the dole and I know the agencies in my electorate actually tender. They have places with work for the dole and I presume Peedac—

Mrs May—No, we do not do that. No, there are a set amount of CDP places in the whole of Australia and we have to bid for places. If one CDP closes down in Darwin or something, then everyone in Australia will get to bid for those 20 places, but there is a finite number.

Mr LLOYD—When you say ‘bid’ what do you mean by that? Do you put your hat in the ring?

Mrs May—Yes. We say, ‘Peedac would like another 40 places, because we’ve got 40 people out there wanting work and training.’ That is the way it goes. We started off with something like 200-odd and now it is up over 500.

CHAIR—Can you tell me briefly about any success stories with some of your CDEP people in relation to their life? What difference have you made to their life? Do you know whether they have gone on to getting jobs and training and skills?

Mrs Garlett—Out of the 500, we have had about 30 who have gone on to full-time employment within the last year, from the CDEP.

CHAIR—That is good.

Mr HAASE—What sorts of jobs?

Mrs Garlett—Various jobs—admin, mines, orderlies.

Mr HAASE—You have given them confidence in themselves.

Mrs Garlett—Given them confidence, given them work experience. A lot of them have never worked before so it is making them job-ready, making them get up and go to work, be there on time and learn how to take orders from somebody else. Quite a lot of people have done this and have gone on.

Mrs May—We help them to get extraordinary licences so they can work and get to work.

Mrs Garlett—A lot of them have found their own jobs as well.

Mr LLOYD—The advantage you have in an urban situation is the fact that there are jobs out there. One of the problems you have with most CDEP schemes in isolated areas is the fact that that is basically the only employment in the community. This is good to hear because it is one of the first examples I have heard, Mr Chairman, of quite a large number of people going from CDEP to full-time employment. It is encouraging.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mrs Garlett—Yes. Peedac has 200 people on the Peedac Pty Ltd projects and there are 300 participants placed out with Aboriginal organisations.

Mrs May—And many others, too.

CHAIR—These businesses—like the nursery you mentioned and another place that are owned by your organisation—do they employ people?

Mrs Garlett—Yes.

CHAIR—Do they employ indigenous people?

Mrs May—Yes, only—just about.

CHAIR—How many now today?

Mrs Garlett—That is the 200.

Mrs May—Some of them are part-time and some are full-time. When we go for contracts we have to go for them in a commercial sense so we use all the different businesses to top up wages. Any profit out of any business by the Education Department might top up wages of the nursery. Everything keeps on flowing around and around. Yahnging is looking at doing panel beating and that sort of thing, so Peedac will send our vehicles there and it keeps the money flowing.

CHAIR—I come from small business; you are small business. Are you in the black or in the red with your bank? Do you know what I mean?

Mr Garlett—Us? Yahnging, you mean?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Garlett—Yes, we are in the black.

CHAIR—Good on you, that is great. What does it feel like? Tell me?

Mr Garlett—It is a big struggle all the time.

CHAIR—It is hard running a business, isn't it?

Mr Garlett—No-one is going to come in there and give you a hand-out and do things for you. You have to get out there.

CHAIR—Yes. Greg, why did you want to get more money from ATSIC for more houses? Did you have a goal? Did you need to get X number of houses because you saw that they were needed? Is that the reason you wanted them?

Mr Garlett—Yes.

CHAIR—Because of the shortage of housing for your indigenous people.

Mr Garlett—Yes, for homeless people in our area.

Mrs Garlett—Yahnging also has a Family and Children's Services project, where two people are employed. One of the main issues they are facing is homeless people. Clients are always ringing up and saying, 'Can you find us somewhere to live?' It is not only with families, it is with adults and it is also with youth. There is some accommodation out in the northern suburbs but not enough.

CHAIR—Yes. Did you design these six houses yourself, or did you use the Homeswest plan?

Mr Garlett—What do you mean by design?

CHAIR—The plan. The number of bedrooms and the layout.

Mr LLOYD—Did you build them or did you buy them?

Mr Garlett—We were given some money and they said, ‘Treat this money like it is the only money you are going to get on earth and you’re not going to get any more. Make the most out of it,’ so we had to buy reasonable houses, but a number of houses, so that we had money as well for two older-type houses.

CHAIR—I see, existing houses.

Mr Garlett—If we had bought a brand-new one, we could only have bought one.

CHAIR—Did you buy them from the open market?

Mr Garlett—Yes.

CHAIR—They were not planned by a Homeswest designer?

Mr Garlett—No.

Mrs May—Can I bring up one point that we are all missing? It is really very important.

CHAIR—Of course.

Mrs May—It is about what happens to Aboriginal people—and my grandmother was Aboriginal and I was born in Sydney. If Greg walks into a real estate agent for a house, they are knocked back because they are black—for no other reason. Time after time we have had people who are very well dressed, with references and all that, go to real estate agents. They ring up and say, ‘We would like to rent.’ They say, ‘Come and see the house.’ You walk in with your little black faces—‘No, that house isn’t available any more.’ If we do not provide our own housing no-one is going to give it to us. These homeless people are not going to get houses because they are black. The majority of people do not want to rent to Aboriginal people. I am not saying all, but a majority. Homeswest is all Aboriginal people have.

Mr Garlett—We came up against that problem when we first moved out to Malaga. We had a warehouse office to operate from. After a week, when we had already signed the contract to go in, the owner found out we had the wrong colour skin for him and he wanted us out of there straightaway.

Mr HAASE—How did you get on?

Mr Garlett—It was an already signed contract.

Mr HAASE—So it was okay.

Mr Garlett—We were sitting in a legal situation and we explained that. We stayed in there for the 12 months until the end of that contract and then we got another place. We have been there for six years now.

CHAIR—That is very sad, though.

Mr LLOYD—What sort of condition are your six houses in maintenance-wise? How are you going? Are you keeping up the maintenance? Are they in good condition?

Mr Garlett—Yes, pretty good condition.

Mr LLOYD—The final question, which I think is extremely important: Yahnging seems to be functioning very well. You say you are in the black. Your houses are in reasonable condition. You are keeping the maintenance up. Yet ATSIIC have come to you and said there is no more money. They have not really given you a reason. They have just said, 'We are going to have a new form of funding.' Have they given you any indication whether you can apply for that funding under their new scheme? Are they putting in other companies to provide the housing? What is happening?

Mrs Garlett—What they have done is set up an Aboriginal housing corporation and all the funding will go to that housing corporation. I did not know anything—did you know anything about that corporation they set up, or what the name is?

Mr LLOYD—Will you have an opportunity to apply through that corporation?

Mrs Garlett—No, all the funding will go to that corporation.

Mr LLOYD—Basically is what they are doing shutting out all housing groups such as yourself? Are they are basically shutting off the funding to them?

Mrs Garlett—Yes. They did say that the smaller corporation with the houses could have three options: either hand all the houses over to one corporation, or get that corporation to manage the houses for them, or the small corporations look after the houses themselves.

Mr LLOYD—With three options, it does not sound like it is a very good deal to me, certainly for smaller—

CHAIR—It sounds like there are only two really.

Mrs Garlett—Yes, two really.

Mrs May—Not for Yahnging that are doing very well with their houses. They are not left with nowhere to go. With some other corporations, who are not handling their housing well, it is a good idea.

Mrs Garlett—Maybe one of the things that they could have done was said to the organisations which lend houses, 'We're going to set up one big corporation. Does your corporation want to apply to manage those houses for us?' It did not happen.

Mr LLOYD—It seems to me there should be other ways for those that are working well to allow them to continue and to expand.

CHAIR—Where did you learn how to run these businesses? Was it just experience and hard knocks or whatever? Did you do any training?

Mrs Garlett—I have an associate diploma in human services so that has helped a lot. But a lot has been from experience.

CHAIR—Yes. Greg, what about you, mate?

Mr Garlett—Out in the real world and looking at what is going on.

CHAIR—Did you have a father or an elder brother that helped, encouraged you to do what you are doing now? What started you on this path, Greg?

Mr Garlett—We were involved from a long way back. My father and grandfather had been involved in contract work on farms. I was a shearing contractor for a while and had about 14 people working under me.

CHAIR—In Perth.

Mr Garlett—No, in country areas.

CHAIR—What school did you go to, Greg?

Mr Garlett—High school, do you mean?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Garlett—I have been to a couple of high schools down here—Hamilton Hill and Mount Lawley.

CHAIR—I am asking these questions because you would be a great model for young Aboriginal people to learn from, to say, ‘Well, I can do what Greg’s done.’

Mr Garlett—I believe you must have so much education and use so much of your experience when you pass and the rest will come from commonsense.

CHAIR—You have to believe in yourself, Greg.

Mr Garlett—That is right.

CHAIR—A lot of young kids—white kids, too—do not believe in themselves any more. It is sad.

Mr Garlett—One thing we have not mentioned on the employment side, which comes through from Peedac’s side and from our side, is the crime rate.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Garlett—We believe the crime rate has come down by giving all these young fellows jobs and stuff and they have places to go.

CHAIR—Yes, fantastic.

Mr Garlett—But it has not been recorded and no-one has recognised it.

CHAIR—Do you have anything in your reports about this, because we would love to give publicity to that, if you would like us to. This committee will be reporting to Australia and, if there is something we can include, we are happy to do it. I think my colleagues would be happy for me to do that. Annette and Lyn and Greg, would you mind sending something to us on any success stories like that?

Mrs May—Yes. The new prison that is being built, the private prison, we have already made contact with them and set up arrangements. We also have an upholstery business. The Aboriginal people doing their time there will start making the frames for our lounges. Instead of us getting an outside person, they will learn to do it. They will also probably be seeding and doing some of our trees. They do them in hothouses and then we take them out to the nursery and sell them. We intend to interact in that way and then when they come out they will be coming in to maybe the nursery or the upholstery or something like that.

CHAIR—Wonderful. Thank you very much. I reluctantly close the discussion. We could learn so much from you. I would like to congratulate the three of you and your members. Please pass on to your members our appreciation of the great work you are doing. We hope we can meet again. Thank you.

Mrs May—Thank you.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Lloyd):

The committee authorise publication of the evidence given to it at the public hearing today.

CHAIR—The other witness who was scheduled has not arrived. I now declare this meeting closed. I thank you for your attendance today. I also thank Hansard and the secretariat for their arrangements.

Committee adjourned at 3.38 p.m.