



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

TUESDAY, 24 APRIL 2001

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS
Tuesday, 24 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: Ms Hoare, Mr Lieberman, M Lloyd and Mr Wakelin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

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Committee met at 9.05 a.m.

CHAIR—Welcome, everybody. I declare open this public hearing of the committee's inquiry into the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Before I proceed with an opening statement about the inquiry, sadly we have just been informed that a former chairman of this committee and one of our parliamentary colleagues, Mr Peter Nugent, the member for Aston, has passed away in Melbourne. As chairman of the committee I would like to record at this public hearing the sympathy of all members and our condolences to Peter's wife, Carol, and his family.

Peter was a great champion for indigenous people in Australia. His work for indigenous people and in relation to human rights generally was quite significant. He was the chairman of the Human Rights Subcommittee of the Joint Committee of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade and pursued his passionate interest in the rights of people throughout his life. Peter was born in England and served with the British Air Force. He came to Australia as a very young man, I think as a serviceman, but made his way through the community and life and served his electorate in the House of Representatives for I think more than 12 years. It is a very sad occasion but one that members of this committee will draw strength from in the sense that Peter's very courageous and unqualified support for indigenous people provides an inspiration to all of us to continue our work.

As everyone knows, the committee began this inquiry at the request of the former Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Senator John Herron. 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. We wish to hear from all interested parties, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in a spirit of cooperation. This hearing is open to the public. A transcript of what is said will be made available. If you would like further details about the inquiry or the transcripts, please ask any of the committee staff at the hearing.

[9.07 a.m.]

DIVAKARAN, Ms Ceilia, Principal Policy Officer, Department of State Aboriginal Affairs

RATHMAN, Mr David John, Chief Executive, Department of State Aboriginal Affairs

CHAIR—Welcome, David and Ceilia. Although this 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. Before we ask you questions, I would like to thank you for the excellent submission from the South Australian government. It has been very helpful. I believe that you might like to make an additional opening statement about the South Australian government's interest in this inquiry.

Mr Rathman—Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. If it is permissible, Mr Chairman, I would also like to express my condolences to the Nugent family because over the number of years I have been involved in Aboriginal affairs I have met Mr Nugent on a number of occasions as chair of similar committees to these.

CHAIR—Thank you, David, that is appreciated. We will convey your thoughts to Mrs Nugent.

Mr Rathman—The South Australian government is, at the moment, re-examining some of its program commitments in this area to try to determine how best we can ensure that there are results arising out of activity in Aboriginal Affairs. The government, in its program for the next financial year, will require all of its departments to express some clear view about what they are going to do in respect of reconciliation, particularly the Council of Australian Governments' endorsement of that process. Each department will be required to set down its commitment to reconciliation in terms of service provision and support of Aboriginal groups in South Australia. We believe that is a significant step forward because the document on South Australian government commitment is the basis upon which all services are provided in South Australia. This is a significant level of support from the Premier and the cabinet.

In addition to that—and this has arisen since we wrote the report, although we did allude to this in the report—we are looking at integrated service levels in South Australia. Rather than follow traditional views about Aboriginal affairs service delivery, we are wanting to look at an integrated service model. It is designed to pick up five levels of cooperation, which distinguishes it from the programs that have probably been put in place in the past. The model will attempt to integrate cooperation on the ground. As opposed to the policy cooperation that you often hear talked about, this is trying to develop it locally.

The elements we are looking at involve the central agency, the local agencies and the Aboriginal community. We are looking beyond community leaders to opinion leaders. We have seen this work in a number of circumstances in which Aboriginal groups have been led by community leaders who are not necessarily the opinion leaders. To give you an example, the grandmothers group here in metropolitan Adelaide have had a fairly significant and influential

effect on issues such as drugs, but they are not an organised group of leaders; they are opinion leaders. They were not elected by anybody. They were not put together by government agencies. They are a group of people who are concerned about their grandchildren and their children. They became a group of very powerful opinion leaders who have led to a drug house being set up for people to be referred to by the drug court. This facility, which was opened just recently, was driven primarily by the efforts of that grandmothers group.

So we are looking at the Aboriginal community in a couple of ways. One is the organised, elected groups of people; but we also want to find the opinion leaders. The other area that we are very concerned about is the effect of local government on the ability of services to be provided effectively for Aboriginal people within regional and metropolitan South Australia. Local government have a very significant impact because they also are working with a group of localised opinion leaders or elected members.

The other group are the client group. We are wanting to see the client group, Aboriginal families and individuals, represented in some way. It has been illustrated—and you will note that in our report—that the families project at Port Augusta, for instance, is designed primarily around the opinions of the client group and how that client group are able to impact upon the services provided for them. A simple question put by a social worker to one of the families was, ‘How do I get out of your face?’ That person then told them how they might get out of their face. Some of it was not exactly welcomed, but it did illustrate what the person felt about that service provider, whereas in the past the service providers imposed their opinion on how that family should conduct themselves.

We have five elements there. Really the whole thing is predicated on the understanding that the groups there will agree locally as to how they will deliver the services. One of the things that we are proposing, which will be the subject of some discussion in our state because it is not something that is necessarily accepted wholeheartedly by government agencies, is that the resources for that region be put on the table and be designed around that local community’s needs rather than policies being developed—which was one of the great tragedies of Australian social welfare development—across a whole range of people and making the people fit the policy, not the policy fit the people.

This model is designed around trying to get a localised focus that is designed to give those people the power to distribute the resources in the best way, as they see it, to deliver an outcome. This is something that, as an Aboriginal affairs agency, we will have to push uphill to get because it changes a whole lot of focus for a whole lot of people. But if you take some of the smaller successful programs, they have been designed and developed and have been successful because those people locally have had control of the resources, they have had control of the plan and ultimately they have achieved good results. In essence, we are interested in trying to improve outcomes that are real and sustainable.

In the past we have put quite large amounts of resources into areas such as the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and we are still not satisfied that the result at the end of the day is a major improvement on what it was previously. We are anxious to ensure that, if we are to develop better services, we have to integrate the current service. To give you an example, in one region we looked at homelessness and people who found themselves on the streets. We found that around \$14 million of government services were going into that one

region for that very issue, but these were not impacting on the 50 or 60 people who were causing most of the difficulties. One questions whether or not there is effective use of the resource. What we are doing is pouring lots of resources into institutional structures and not pouring too much into the coalface. What we are trying to do is change the focus of that. Mr Chairman, that is all I want to add to what we have previously said.

CHAIR—Thank you. Ceilia, did you wish to add any further comments?

Ms Divakaran—There is probably one to add to what David Rathman has just said. We recently co-hosted a national forum on indigenous family violence. The message from the community that participated from around Australia is that governments should start listening to indigenous people and that local solutions are the way and the direction forward.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr WAKELIN—David, thank you, for a very comprehensive submission and some insight into trying to address some of the great challenges that are there. I was quite taken with that \$14 million and addressing the 50 or 60 people where perhaps some of the core issues are. It rang a bell with me, given the frustration that can sometimes emerge for all of us who have responsibilities in this area. Are there any other key issues facing urban dwelling indigenous people? Are there any other issues, for example, in the four pillars of health, employment, housing and education? Is there anything else there in a holistic way in your local solution approach that you find is giving you better results?

Mr Rathman—The Aboriginal Housing Authority, which has 1,800 houses under its wing, is a good example of where the model that we are talking about is starting to have some impact. That particular program is managed by Aboriginal people.

Mr WAKELIN—Just to intervene there, my memory of it is that it goes back five years, roughly. It brought together the players on a state basis. It might be worthwhile spelling that out for the committee because it is a very good model in terms of allocating resources and getting all the players to the table.

Mr Rathman—That is true. The program previously had Aboriginal housing, which was part of the South Australian Housing Trust program; then you also had ATSIC housing and some communities accessing other programs for housing. What this did was to integrate all of those. The review found that we were duplicating effort. It is an example of Commonwealth-state cooperation—also ATSIC-Commonwealth-state cooperation—because it meant that ATSIC, the Commonwealth and the state arrived at a bilateral agreement about housing in this state. That meant there was greater integration between the players in the housing programs, and that has meant some 50 or so Aboriginal families in our state at the moment working to purchase their own homes, which they have been living in for some time. There are other schemes being developed to improve rental recoveries, because one of the largest componentries of housing is deficits. This program has meant there has been agreement and development of that rent recovery process. There is also a program to enable people in communities to better improve the circumstances of their housing. All that has meant that some areas in our state which have been missing out on housing all of a sudden have a more equitable share of the housing.

I think we presume in Aboriginal affairs that there is equity. As an Aboriginal person I can tell you that there is a lot of inequity in our own set-up, so from time to time these agreements can be very helpful in just getting us to stand back and have a look at the big picture. This has also enabled the community, which might have been missing out on housing, to actually access housing. I think you would know, Mr Wakelin, that in your electorate there were some community groups that missed out over the years because of the inequity of that previous structure, but this new one has enabled some of those communities to get housing where they were not previously able to.

Mr WAKELIN—I can only agree with that. It is probably not an easy one to answer. I was not privy to the bringing together of those people. I am aware of some of the reaction at times, going back a few years, but it would have taken quite a degree of skill and discussion to get people to sit down and work through it. I know you would have been somewhere near the scene at that time. Are you able to comment on a couple of the other ingredients that brought people together?

Mr Rathman—I was chairman of the review of Aboriginal housing. One of the things we did was to actually go back to the communities. This is where I have come to the conclusion that opinion leaders are very critical people in what you design at the end of the day, because members of the old board made it very difficult to be able to get a conclusion that was satisfactory. They played politics better than some of you guys. We cut through that, back to the people who were using the housing facilities, people who were affected by a lack of housing. That enabled us to come up with a very strong result at the end of the day. ATSIC was very supportive of that process. With all of that we were able to get a constructive result. We were able to break the barriers of the previous strongholds that had been developed in housing.

Mr WAKELIN—Thank you for that. You have pre-empted the whole of my next question, so that is all covered. I will move quickly to the success stories in health and housing in a more specific way. You have mentioned the Ceduna Aboriginal community and the town camp. You also touched on local government and how important it is. Could you give us a description of where Ceduna is at and how it is going? What are some of the challenges ahead?

Mr Rathman—I might get Ceilia Divakaran to make comment about that.

Ms Divakaran—Ceduna is on the west coast of South Australia and it is populated by a number of Aboriginal groups—some of them traditionally orientated, coming from Yalata—that were, to some extent, displaced by the decision for Yalata to go dry under the liquor licensing provisions. Ceduna has been a source of alcohol and liquor supplies and so there has been a significant transient population. As well, there are relatives and visitors from the Pitjantjatjara lands that pass through Ceduna.

I guess the local council have been particularly concerned about what they have described as dissocial behaviours as a result of public drinking. There has been one particular Housing Trust resident who has been the focus of a number of groups that have gathered and settled for a period of time, and that has been a source of consternation. Over a number of years the local council had a town camp planning authority which was trying to deal with this issue—not very successfully—but in the last four years there has been an inter-agency committee that Aboriginal Affairs has been involved with, together with the Department of Human Services,

the local ATSIC players, the local council and a number of other Aboriginal stakeholders in Ceduna. It has been a very cooperative approach to looking at ways forward.

The council has, in conjunction with the community, identified a particular site for the establishment of a rehabilitation facility—or, rather, a facility for those who choose to continue to drink. That is one of the issues—that people should be allowed to have choices. There are those of us in the community who perhaps do not actively pursue sobriety, and that is an issue that Human Services and service agencies need to deal with. This was a facility that would provide a safe place for those affected by alcohol. Ceduna also has a sobering up centre attached to the hospital. That initially was not accessible to Aboriginal people but this process, which has been managed by the Ceduna Koonibba Health Service, has encouraged greater access to support services through there. There is also the associated issue of people who are passing through who come into Ceduna Hospital for medical assistance and who need a period of convalescence. They are not in their home location and they tend to go—

Mr WAKELIN—Ceilia, to come to what I was looking for: where do you think it is at? My understanding is that it has got a way to go in terms of a conclusion. Are there any particular hurdles you know of that are preventing progress and from which maybe we can learn? I understand the collaborative approach and people working hard, but it is a very difficult issue and I just wondered where it is at today and what we might expect in the next few months.

Ms Divakaran—The Department of Human Services is leading this process now. We started off instigating the collaborative process. My understanding is that a site was identified and there were some commitments to developing the facility for the people at Koonibba Street.

Mr WAKELIN—Do we have a time line?

Ms Divakaran—That information I do not have.

Mr WAKELIN—That is fine. David, in terms of that \$14 million and the 50 target group—I am not thinking that this community may be that particular community, because it may be spread—in a community like Port Augusta, where they are focusing and trying to break down what some call the silent mentality and are coming up with local solutions, it must provide you with huge challenges. The luxury of ‘one solution fits all’ is that you can be in Adelaide and offer some consistency, but that does not work all the time. I can only agree with you, but it does provide you with huge challenges in providing different solutions to different problems. How do you, as a senior administrator with experience gained over a long period of time, get that local solution? Local ownership is part of it, but from your point of view what are you looking for to have a successful outcome? I know in Port Augusta we have some challenges and we know we sometimes probably miss the target group, but from your point of view and perspective, what is the key ingredient? We go to these better solution types of models but for you as administrator it must be a nightmare sometimes.

Mr Rathman—No more than some other areas are. The thing is relative in the sense of trying to work out what we are actually dealing with. If we look at the example I was giving before of the \$14 million, those services are being provided to a whole lot of people. The people who cause the most difficulty are the 50 or 60 who are visible, and you wonder why the \$14 million is not touching those people effectively.

If you take Port Augusta as an example—I was born and bred there and I grew up there so I know the place reasonably well—the biggest problem there is attitude. That is a thing that you cannot design. You cannot buy it. You cannot sell it. If there is not a healthy attitude on both sides of the fence, then it does not help to find solutions, as you would know. I do not know if members know this, but the city council there actually engaged a consultant to develop a social vision for Port Augusta, which is a bit of an innovation in some ways for local government. Now the ministers—the Minister for Human Services, the Attorney-General, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Minister for Justice and the Minister for Police—are all working with the mayor and a high profile group of senior executives to develop that plan into action. What we are seeing is a change on some sides of the fence to attitudes. People are starting to feel as though something is happening.

The other factor that we have talked about in our area is that fact that we are not being very truthful about the non-government organisations. We tend to take a stick to government service providers, but there is no clear understanding of what the NGOs are doing and that some of the NGOs are limited in what they can do. Some of the NGOs are, I suppose, controlled by particular Aboriginal groups and other Aboriginal groups will not use them. We then condemn that service provider for not being effective without realising that they are only effective to a certain group of people.

Mr WAKELIN—And the others will not use them.

Mr Rathman—You know that is the case in Port Augusta. There are services which are controlled by certain groups in Port Augusta that other people will not use. Then we have a whole lot of people falling between the chairs and then everyone says we have a difficulty. There was a recent tragedy in Port Augusta, where we saw people representing themselves as spokespeople who in fact were not spokespeople for that group. That group of people have said, ‘We will quietly go about trying to deal with this issue ourselves and trying to make sure it doesn’t happen again.’ But often with a situation like that in Port Augusta we are actually dealing with the wrong people. The people who are of concern to us may be juveniles and others who are causing some problems, but we do not even go anywhere near their particular elders or the groups of people that might influence their behaviour. That is starting to change and I think that is where we have to move.

The other issue is that no-one in this country has seriously tackled the questions of Aboriginal economic malaise or Aboriginal unemployment. The incarceration rates, in my opinion, are directly related to the inability of people to have self-determination and self-management. What we keep looking at in relation to self-determination, self-management and economic independence are global issues rather than individuals and groups of families. For instance, if you were able to provide one income per family, it would make a significant difference; but we are not tackling that issue head on.

CHAIR—When you say ‘one income’ do you mean one income from government programs or one income earned from personal exertion in employment?

Mr Rathman—I am talking about one income per family from employment. Whether it is government or non-government employment, if there were an income coming in to some of

these families it would make a significant difference to their self-management, their self-determination and their economic independence.

Mr WAKELIN—David, you are right on the money for me. My last question is to do with business development—it was an excellent comment. Could you attempt to isolate some of those major barriers? Why does it not happen as strongly as we would all like to see it happen? Can you comment on an organisation called the South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee and how that is going?

Mr Rathman—With respect to economic development, we are trying to develop with ATSI/A some models which are, again, trying to help small business develop effectively, but at the same time we have been talking to major companies as well. In recent times I had the pleasure of working with an employment agency that had helped Coles Myer. They were very impressed with the Aboriginal people who came through. As you know, Mr Wakelin, the CDEP at Port Augusta has been doing some excellent work in the transition of people to employment. Some of that is working quite effectively, mainly because they have developed their CDEP on business lines.

Some of the CDEPs are just holding points. They are doing no more than sitting all day at the unemployment office. That is basically what people are doing. But the ones that have developed their whole ethos on a business approach tend to be able to spin people out of those programs into long-term employment, so we are interested in looking at those models. There is, I think, a lack of coordination in economic development around this country. We have the health partnership South Australia, which is an agreement between OATSI/A, ATSI/A and South Australian health providers. We have the Aboriginal Housing Authority, which is another collaborative model and we have the Essential Services Agreement. But, economically, what is the agreement between business, the Commonwealth government, and the state and territory governments to advance Aboriginal economic development? Zero. That begs the question of how serious we are about that issue.

On the other issue of the South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee, the minister has asked them to start looking seriously at the attendance rates of children and to start ensuring that the committee gets out and starts questioning the effectiveness of education delivery in South Australia. The committee is made up of education providers. The interesting thing about the committee in South Australia is that it has been able to get the participation of non-government schools as well. We have seen in South Australia an increasing number of Aboriginal children attending non-government schools. We have seen the Catholic education system explode in terms of participation. Lutheran education has always been constant. If you take Ceduna—the one you were talking about before—there are more Aboriginal children going to the Lutheran school than there are to the public school. That is as a result of the efforts of that committee and a number of other groups over the years to increase the level of participation.

Mr WAKELIN—And that traditional link there for a hundred years.

Mr Rathman—Yes, it has been there for quite a while.

Mr WAKELIN—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—In respect of education, yesterday in Western Australia we were very pleased to hear of the initiatives being taken by the Western Australian government following the meeting of governments in November last year and their focus on a number of programs—just like South Australia—but in particular on education. We were given as an exhibit a document setting out a strategic plan for implementing the national and state strategies on education. How far advanced is South Australia in respect of a strategic plan for education and training for Aboriginal people?

Mr Rathman—South Australia has a plan for Aboriginal education in early childhood in schooling. That plan is designed to operate from 1999 to 2003. It is a very forward looking plan. I do apologise; we should have provided a copy of that plan to the committee.

CHAIR—That is fine. I wonder if you would be able to provide one to the committee, which we would make an exhibit to the public inquiry as well so that it would be available to other Australians.

Mr Rathman—Yes. That plan is something they have worked very hard to develop and to implement and it is starting to show results. The fact is that there were more completions in secondary school last year than there have been for a number of years—and that is only a couple of years into the plan.

CHAIR—That is very good news.

Mr Rathman—To me that is a highly positive piece of news. The fact is that there are also high levels of performance by children in the literacy and numeracy testing areas. In fact Aboriginal children in our remote communities are sometimes performing better than children from other areas. There are improvements starting to occur. South Australia has traditionally had a very strong curriculum base for Aboriginal studies and so we are seeing an increasing number of schools taking up Aboriginal studies. That advances the whole cause of greater understanding between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples.

The plan is also designed to embed in the whole system of the education department an understanding of Aboriginal issues and also a basis upon which teachers should conduct themselves within the system. For instance, in schools set up in regions in South Australia, home language is being encouraged rather than discouraged and children are being encouraged to learn from their community. There are a number of regions that do not want language taught as part of the school curriculum; they want that to be taught as a community initiative. Educators are being flexible enough to fit in with that process as well.

The other part of the program is the Commonwealth government's Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program. It is also a very strong and important part of the system because it allows for some of the national priorities to be reflected locally and allows for resources to be applied to those. I will provide to the committee the plan so that you can actually have a look at what that says.

CHAIR—I am sure my colleagues would be as interested in it as I am. I was very pleased to hear of the development of the model to unbundle various government funding programs and to allow a local community to develop its own model of service delivery using that unbundled

money. I am very pleased to hear that. I wonder if you could provide the committee in writing, over the next 30 days, with some descriptions of the early projects that are on the drawing board using that model.

The committee is very interested in encouraging people throughout Australia to use innovative ideas such as unbundling. We might be able to use yours as a sort of impetus to others. If you could give us a description of a couple that are being planned and are about to be implemented, we would be very grateful. I think that is a great way to go. It also will give local people the opportunity to learn skills in the management of programs as well, rather than having people in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide running them. It is far better, I would have thought—and I would like your opinion on this—for local people to run their own programs, and to manage them and be accountable for them as far as possible.

Mr Rathman—We have developed only a draft form, but certainly I will seek the approval of the minister.

CHAIR—Even if we are given a version that is okay for public dissemination and does not contain information that the government is still developing policy on, that would be helpful. What we are looking for is the direction you are going in, why you are doing it, a couple of the ways in which you believe you will do it and the benefits that you see would come from a successful implementation of that program. That would be very good.

Mr Rathman—One of the things we have found is that in some cases it is not a question of resources, it is actually a question of how the resources are applied. Sometimes services are developed by layering services on top of other services and it does not necessarily provide you with a better structure. That is why we have tried to address it in this way. We are not actually looking at anything that is not already being done. Quite a lot of this is already being done but it is being done on a very small scale and is probably not being recognised. I know of another jurisdiction in which they are also having success with similar approaches, but it is an area in which, from my point of view, the Aboriginal community needs to be involved where there is a need rather than at a higher stratosphere where people get lost.

CHAIR—My colleague and good friend Dr Michael Wooldridge, the minister for health, has developed a program in community primary health care for regional Australia. Some of the expressions he used in that policy document are quite interesting. He says that he does not think people should be made to fit a policy but that a policy should fit the needs of the local people. That is the basis of his community health program.

I have been privileged to be able to be involved in a couple of small rural communities attracting funding from that program, and to see the change in the way the local people feel about their future is quite exciting. There is a spring in their step now because they feel they own the health services that are being developed, the primary ones particularly. They feel that they have a say in what is available to them. Also, they are showing great leadership in the sense that they are tackling issues for which they know that, on an economy of scale, although they cannot have a program in a small community, they can share and attach themselves to larger areas where there is a need for more specialised services and they can then devise their own local delivery services. For example, one community I know has said, 'We need a lot of drug and alcohol help in our particular area and we need some visiting community health

nurses, counsellors and the like.' They have put the emphasis in the first two years of their plan into that area, whereas an adjoining community has put its emphasis on other things. It is quite interesting to see the different models developing. I congratulate you on that.

Mr LLOYD—I just want to ask a few more questions about housing, particularly in relation to the Aboriginal Housing Authority. I understand it administers the private rental assistance. I just want to understand the role of the board a little bit more, linking into the home ownership program and whether the federal government's new home ownership assistance grants have been utilised. Can you expand a bit more on that, please?

Mr Rathman—You understand that the housing representatives are not here so I am a bit limited in what I can address.

Mr LLOYD—Whatever you can provide will be of great assistance.

Mr Rathman—One of the things I did emphasise earlier was the fact that we found in the review of housing that there was quite a sizeable degree of inequity and some people were missing out. There may be a view in the community that that is still happening to some degree, but one of the things that occurred in rural and remote communities was the fact that user pays was introduced under the housing program. The other issue to come out of the Aboriginal Housing Authority was that they were able to address the question of 'adequate housing' and what really were the needs of urban, rural and remote communities. They have worked fairly tirelessly on addressing that. That has also been assisted by the fact that ATSIC has been involved, so you have had a wider spread of people.

The Aboriginal Rental Housing Program suffers from the fact that there is a huge deficit which is constantly affecting the ability of people to get new housing. When we looked at it just recently—and from advice I had from Housing—they were estimating that they were dealing with about 300 people. The same 300 people were recycling themselves through the housing. That was in fact quite debilitating to their ability to provide for more housing accommodation.

In effect what you had was a situation where those 300 people kept going around in the system. There were people who had, for years and years, been inside the rental program who probably deserved the opportunity to be able to provide for their own housing. So there has been a program to try to encourage the purchasing of housing. South Australia HomeStart—I do not know what you call it in other states—joined with Aboriginal Housing to provide those opportunities for people to get housing. That scheme has seen 50 or so people being able to take the opportunity to access housing. In the rental housing program one of the things they suffer from is not having timely access to resources. This is one of the things where there has been a slight breakdown in our state, between getting the resources provided from the Commonwealth housing program in a timely fashion and then being able to access housing on the market.

The issue of the 300 people that cycle through that program constantly is preventing lots of deserving families and individuals from having access to housing. There needs to be some strategy—and I think there are moves now to develop a strategy to actually deal with those people—because they are causing enormous problems with damage to housing and therefore the maintenance bill just goes through the roof. It is into some millions now. I do not know if I have adequately answered the question.

Mr LLOYD—That is fine. Do you know if the South Australian government has targeted the first home ownership grants—they were \$7,000 and are now \$14,000—from the federal government? I am from Sydney and a \$14,000 grant on a block of land in Sydney is a very small percentage, but I would imagine a \$14,000 grant on a home or a block of land in, maybe, Ceduna would be a huge percentage. If people can access it, I would imagine it certainly would be a boost.

Mr Rathman—I am not aware of what position Housing takes on that. I could inquire into that and give you some feedback.

Mr LLOYD—Thank you. Does the South Australian government have much communication with the Western Australian government, particularly on housing issues? As you are aware, we took evidence from the Western Australian government yesterday. Certainly, from my point of view, a lot of what you are saying today makes a great deal of sense and addresses some of the problems I believe the Western Australian government are trying to address. It would be very useful if there was some communication between the two state governments. I am not sure if there is, or whether that is likely.

Mr Rathman—We only communicate at MCATSIA—ministerial councils—and I think the housing ministers forums. Other than that, no, we do not have strong links.

Mr LLOYD—I know the community housing associations are not your area, so I will understand if you do not have the answers, but do you know much about them in South Australia—whether they are working or how many there are?

Mr Rathman—No, I do not have any information on that.

Mr LLOYD—It would be interesting to know. If somebody could provide some information on those housing associations to the committee, I would appreciate that.

Mr Rathman—Yes, we can do that.

Mr LLOYD—Thanks.

Ms HOARE—I am interested in the draft model that you are pursuing within the department. I know it is in the initial stages of development, but where are the major obstacles at the moment to developing that further or implementing it?

Mr Rathman—At the moment we are in the very early stages and there are no major obstacles at this point in time. There are only the usual sorts of barriers between agency silos that they are concerned about keeping control of. The Port Augusta social vision will enable us to test it out to some extent. I am about to address the justice department's group to outline what the proposal is trying to achieve. The justice department in our state includes the Attorney-General's Department, the police, the fire brigade, the courts authority and also correctional services. It deals with a lot of community justice issues on the ground. We will be talking to them. They have carriage of the Port Augusta social vision. We are hoping to be able to encourage them to use that as the model at Port Augusta. Recently I presented a paper to the senior management council, which is made up of the super chief executives in government, and

they were fairly encouraged by what was there. We are hopeful it will get a reasonable level of support.

Ms HOARE—Is that the paper you might be able to provide us with?

Mr Rathman—Hopefully I will get the okay to do that. It is not a long paper but the significance of it is that it is not rocket science either. It is about taking the basics and pulling them together.

Ms HOARE—It is commonsense.

Mr Rathman—I am sure I will be able to get the okay to provide that.

Ms HOARE—My colleague Mr Wakelin talked about the four pillars of health, housing, education and employment. You have just spoken about justice. Would the proposal be able to pull in domestic violence issues? What about welfare?

Mr Rathman—Yes, it includes all of those. We want to break the cycle of perpetuating the current what I call merry-go-round of services by getting people to profile by agency locally, so they would actually come to the table, put down on the table who their clients are and the sorts of initiatives that they are taking with those clients so that the whole group of agencies can work together. The idea is to go back to Aboriginal people on the ground rather than, as has been the case, Aboriginal people believing the services are no longer close to them. They are starting to feel as if the services are getting further away.

One of the constant things we hear about is reducing a simple but very tragic statistic—the number of premature deaths in the community. You hear a lot about deaths of infant children, but there are a lot of young people dying prematurely—too many of them. What the community wants are sustainable programs on the ground that can actually do something about that. What this integrated service model talks about is actually taking that service closer to the people on the ground. We are talking about, say, in the area of justice, having Aboriginal community justice. We have a paper here, which I am happy to table, which talks about Aboriginal community justice and about local Aboriginal people assisting the justice system rather than having Aboriginal people alienated from it.

The integrated service model is actually also being honest and up front about the non-government sector as well, saying, ‘Why keep criticising that service when the service is set up to provide a service to a particular group of people and it does it quite comfortably? Let’s find a way to provide a service to the other people within that community.’ The integrated service model is really about pulling everyone together and trying to put the resources that are local on the ground for people to decide how best to use them.

Ms HOARE—Thank you.

CHAIR—Is it the wish of the committee that the document tabled by David Rathman on behalf of the South Australian government, *Vision 21: Aboriginal policy perspectives, Aboriginal community justice*, 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. That will become an exhibit which others will read as well, with interest.

David and Ceilia, that brings to a close the South Australian government submission. I would like once again to thank you both and your colleagues in the various departments for an excellent submission, one with a lot of good ideas and one with a lot of enthusiasm. Thank you very much for that. In the next month, if we could receive the additional information that we have discussed, that would also be very helpful to us. We wish you every success in your continuing work and we hope that our paths will cross soon.

Mr Rathman—Thank you very much, Mr Chairman.

[10.04 a.m.]

KEOGH, Mr Peter Damon, , Policy Officer, Indigenous Land Corporation

PAXTON, Mr Martyn, Senior Policy Adviser, Strategic Development Branch, Indigenous Land Corporation

CHAIR—I welcome witnesses from the Indigenous Land 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. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. Before we ask you questions, you have given us a submission and we appreciate that very much. Do you have an opening statement that you would like to make?

Mr Paxton—Only that we would like to apologise on behalf of the ILC's acting CEO, Mr Haebich. He was unfortunately called away to an urgent meeting in WA. I would like to tender his apologies. We have given you a submission and we hope that has been of some benefit to the committee. The ILC is currently reviewing its national and regional indigenous land strategies at this very point in time and there may be some specific changes in relation to urban dwelling indigenous people that that policy direction might take. While the submission was an accurate statement of the ILC's position at that point in time, in a months time our position could have changed quite radically.

CHAIR—Thank you. Do I read into that, without obviously pre-empting it, that the corporation believes at this time of its life that there may need to be some different policies in respect of the management and use of indigenous land?

Mr Paxton—It would probably be premature of me to say what the policy direction might be, but I could say that they have been giving considerable attention to how we might more successfully gear our policies to meeting the needs of urban dwelling indigenous people. I think there has been some recognition of the fact that, while we believe that our national strategy does encompass addressing the needs of urban dwelling indigenous people, the perception of a lot of urban dwelling indigenous people is that it does not, particularly because of our emphasis on traditional ownership and cultural significance. It would be safe to say that the new policies will be trying to take that into account and perhaps repackaging our policy positions more appropriately.

CHAIR—That is a very positive indication for the future. I would like you to tell me whether your charter permits the corporation, in appropriate cases—and, if so, what they are—to grant an individual title to an individual indigenous person; for example, to borrow from a bank or a building society to build a residential property on a quarter-acre block. Can you tell me whether there is any provision for that?

Mr Paxton—Under the current legislation for assistance to acquire land, we cannot do that for individual people, we can only do that for corporations. However, for land management there is no such restriction.

CHAIR—Can you explain the difference?

Mr Paxton—If we had a proposal to acquire a block of land for an individual person, we would have to knock that back on the legislation which requires us to provide land only to corporations. For land management it is a little bit wider. We can provide land management assistance to pretty much anyone for any activity, but it has to be on indigenous held land.

CHAIR—Do you have any inquiries from Aboriginal families as to whether they could take a title so they could get a bank loan or a building society loan to build their own home?

Mr Paxton—Periodically we have had requests from people for things that might be described as house and land packages. I know that housing was a fairly significant but not a major issue that was raised in our recent consultations, which took place prior to the development of our new policies.

CHAIR—You do receive inquiries which indicate that there could be an unmet demand?

Mr Paxton—Yes.

CHAIR—But to enable the corporation to achieve and deliver a product along those lines, there would need to be legislative change. You are actually prohibited—you have not got power at the moment—from facilitating that sort of arrangement.

Mr Paxton—No, but under its present policy, if there were a tract of land that was culturally significant and we could vest the title in a corporation representing traditional owners, there would be no earthly reason why that land could not be used for housing.

CHAIR—Yes, but Mr and Mrs Smith, an Aboriginal family, wanting to get a loan from a bank or a building society to build a house would not be able to.

Mr Paxton—Probably not.

CHAIR—They would not be able to. How would they?

Mr Paxton—No, you are right.

CHAIR—They could not do it, could they?

Mr Paxton—There would have to be housing and they would need to rent it from the traditional owner corporation.

CHAIR—Yes. Are you aware of any valid reason which would argue that Aboriginal families should not be able to get a title to traditional land to enable them to go ahead and buy or build their own house?

Mr Paxton—No. In fact, in some cases they do. Traditional owner titleholding bodies are sometimes pretty much coterminous with a family, often an extended family, and they do quite often get title to land. I do not know of any instances when they have got loans.

CHAIR—But not your corporation lands?

Mr Paxton—Yes, there would be corporations that are fairly close to an extended family group.

CHAIR—No, I am sorry, we are at cross-purposes. I am talking about an individual family looking for a house and wanting to be a home owner like any other Australian might aspire to be.

Mr Paxton—Yes. I am not aware of any. Do you mean like a nuclear family that might have acquired land from the ILC for housing purposes?

CHAIR—Yes. Similarly, if an Aboriginal family in Adelaide had aspirations to develop their own business—for example a panel beating business, a small business—and they needed access to land in order that they could build their workshop and their bank felt they had a good business and wanted to help them to do that, they would not be able to get a title, would they, from the Indigenous Land Corporation if the Indigenous Land Corporation had land available in Adelaide suitable for that purpose?

Mr Paxton—Probably not, but I would suggest that there might be circumstances in which that could happen. If that family group had a particular traditional tie to a tract of land, it could become an incorporated body and acquire that land through the ILC.

CHAIR—But they would not own the land like other small business people and therefore work for 20 or 30 years, as small business people do, own their workshop and use that as part of their retirement fund. They would not be able to do that, would they?

Mr Paxton—There is no reason why they could not own the land. If they were incorporated as a traditional land group—

CHAIR—No, I am talking about individuals.

Mr Paxton—If it were a family group that was incorporated as a traditional owner group, they could. As individual people, no, they could not.

CHAIR—They could not do it. The point I am trying to expand on is why can't Aboriginal people be treated equally—the same as non-Aboriginal people—in respect of accessing land in this case and pursuing their aspirations as Australians, like other Australians? Why do Aboriginal people have to go through the red tape of having a corporation and an incorporated body created before they are recognised? That is the point I am making.

Mr Paxton—I think the answer to that lies in the intent of the legislation and its relationship to the Mabo decision. The Indigenous Land Corporation is often described as the other side of

the coin to native title in that it was the second part of the Commonwealth government's response to the Mabo decision. The intent of the legislation seems to be—in fact, it is stated to be—to redress dispossession. We take that dispossession to mean that which Aboriginals were dispossessed of at the time of the settlement of Australia.

CHAIR—Two hundred years ago.

Mr Paxton—Yes. That is, in effect, what they were dispossessed of. It is a communal title, not an individual title.

CHAIR—But bringing that principle forward to now, every other Australian has the opportunity to access land and ownership for residential and for small business and other purposes, if they work hard. Under this legislation that you administer—I know it is not your fault; parliament set out the rules—Aboriginal people are deprived of that opportunity in respect of indigenous land.

Mr Paxton—Only in respect of the fact that the Indigenous Land Corporation was set up for a specific purpose. There are housing and small business programs available through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

CHAIR—Yes, but they cannot get a title. The family, the individual, cannot get a title to the land under your legislation, as I understand what you are saying. They are treated differently from other Australians.

Mr Paxton—Specifically because the legislation under which we operate is not set up for every ordinary Australian.

CHAIR—Exactly. I think we have established that point. Thanks very much.

Mr LLOYD—Where does the funding for purchases come from for the Indigenous Land Corporation? Just elaborate a little bit more on that for my benefit.

Mr Paxton—If we acquire land for indigenous groups?

Mr LLOYD—Yes.

Mr Paxton—At the moment we have a process called the land needs planning process, which operates nationally. Under it we deal with local groups who develop, in a local area, strategies for the acquisition of land, but they are aggregated up into subregional areas, which are basically the regional council areas, or the native title representative body areas. Those are then aggregated up into regional indigenous land strategies. The idea of that is that local groups themselves can identify what their needs are in the local area. When they are grouped together they are given a certain priority, and in that way we hope to be able to address the stated needs of indigenous people as they see them. Once that is done a group will put in a registration of a land need. The groups that do that can vary from individual family groups that are not very big to quite large groups that might represent an entire language group, perhaps.

Those registrations of land needs are processed by the corporation. If they are consistent with the policy, the board will approve them for acquisition and the administration will then proceed to acquire them. They can be approved for acquisition whether or not they are actually on the market at the time. It could be that a land need will stay registered on our system for years, if that particular property is not on the market.

Mr LLOYD—Where do the funds for acquisition initially come from?

Mr Paxton—We have a draw down. The corporation was set up to be a self-sustaining capital fund at the end of the draw down period. The exact figure escapes me, but it would be in our annual report—drawn down is something like \$121 million. We take \$45 million or thereabouts for the administration of the ILC and the remainder is put into the fund for future use.

Mr LLOYD—Is there any reason that would stop an Aboriginal incorporated group seeking to get ownership of an area of land and then to work with, say, the Commercial Development Corporation or ATSIC to establish a community housing association to provide housing on a particular block of land? Is there a network of coordination that would allow that to happen, or is that not possible?

Mr Paxton—No, absolutely. One of the major policy principles of the ILC is that we work with other agencies to try to provide as much of a holistic package to meet people's needs as we possibly can. When a proposal comes to us we would look at what people want to do with that land—whether they want to live on it or develop a business or that kind of thing. We try to organise other agencies—not just indigenous agencies but organisations like Environment Australia, for example—to be involved so that we can meet as many of the needs as possible. The corporation does not believe that giving Aboriginal people land of itself is necessarily of particular benefit to them, so we try to make sure that there is sustainable land use associated with that land.

Mr LLOYD—Do you have any examples of land being purchased by the ILC and developed for Aboriginal housing?

Mr Paxton—No, not offhand. I could look into the files and let you know. I do know that most of the properties that we acquire have some kind of residence on them. I do not think that is what you are getting at, though.

Mr LLOYD—No. If you could have a look and if there are any examples it would be appreciated if you could provide them to the committee.

Mr Paxton—Yes.

Ms HOARE—Just following on from that line of questioning, you do not put obstacles in the way of Aboriginal people acquiring the land, do you? If, for some reason, the organisation that is putting in the application for the land, or is acquiring the land, does not come up to speed or does not meet the expectations of the Indigenous Land Corporation, do you as a corporation say, 'No, you can't have that land'?

Mr Paxton—I do not think that we would put in place barriers to people getting land. Our major policy principle is that we will try to help everybody who comes to us. If we cannot help them through our own activities we will try to refer them to an organisation that is perhaps more appropriate. In circumstances in which a group might apply to us for land, and, for example they did not have a traditional relationship to that land, we would actually be buying land from the traditional owners to give them. That might be a circumstance in which someone would apply for land but not get it from us.

Ms HOARE—Once the land is acquired and the title is owned by the Aboriginal corporation, what role does the Indigenous Land Corporation have, if any? I would not see any role for the corporation to be following up what has happened with that land because that title is no longer government owned; that title is privately owned by a private individual. My local shire council may follow up with what I am doing with my land, but I do not have the bank coming to me to see what I have done with the land, or if somebody has given me the money, or if I have inherited it. I do not have a government organisation looking over my shoulder every step of the way to see what I have done with the land that I now legally hold title to.

Mr Paxton—Generally speaking, once we grant title the Aboriginal corporation that owns that land then owns it in the same way as any other Australian corporation would. Under the legislation we do have a caveat at the moment which says that the land that we grant to indigenous people cannot be sold or placed under charge without the corporation's authority. Other than that, the land is freehold or leasehold, the same as it would be for any other corporation.

Ms HOARE—Why is that caveat in place? If the land were going to be developed to provide economic sustainability for a community, why can't that community then go and sell off a piece to establish a panel beating shop or whatever it might be?

Mr Paxton—They could do that if they obtained our authority to do it. I think the reason the caveat is there is that one of the stated intentions in the second reading speech was creating a sustainable land base for future generations; to assemble a land base that would serve people's needs now and in the future. I guess it was to prevent wholesale selling off of assets that were acquired with Commonwealth funds.

If, for example, a group wanted to use their land to raise a loan to run a business on it and they came to us and said, 'Could we take a mortgage out over the land?' we might well be favourably disposed to that, providing that the business proposal demonstrated that the ownership of the land, as indigenous land, was not under threat. The business proposal would need to demonstrate that the group in question could service the loan.

Ms HOARE—As an administrator or manager, Martyn, do you see a role for the legislation to be revisited or reviewed with that caveat in mind, because of the changing nature of corporations, the same as the changing nature of businesses? The connection I am trying to make here is with a family farm which has been passed down through generations and, for some reason or another, the family now want to sell off part of the farm. Do you think that there is a need now, nine years or 10 years down the track, to revisit that caveat?

Mr Paxton—I believe it is being revisited under some proposed amendments to the legislation. I do not think it is the general view of the corporation that we would like to see the caveat removed, simply because it is a safeguard for assets acquired with Commonwealth money. In the worst case scenario, if the caveat were removed we believe that the ILC would probably be besieged with a large number of failed mortgages that we might feel some moral obligation to bail people out of, I guess, in order to keep the land indigenous. I think the caveat is a way of safeguarding people's interests.

Ms HOARE—One of the messages we get—and I think political parties on both sides are getting this loud and clear across all different issues in listening to the people who are affected by this—is that this is a view of the Indigenous Land Corporation. But what is the view of the Aboriginal corporations that acquire the land?

Mr Paxton—I actually could not answer that. I do know of a number of examples where people have protested against the caveat, but that information is purely anecdotal. I could not give you any quantitative data about what the degree of dissatisfaction is with it.

Ms HOARE—I will be interested in following up that review myself. Thank you for that.

Mr WAKELIN—Mr Paxton, in relation to the ILC's land management role and the findings of the National Land Management Research Project, could you just remind me again of what was achieved with that program? It related to sustainability, and to the neighbours, fencing and general good management practices, I would imagine. Were there other things that came out of it that the committee would be interested in?

Mr Paxton—Probably not. There was enormous consistency across Australia about what indigenous people were wanting. While the sorts of things they said they wanted to do on their land were very varied, it all seemed to boil down to people wanting to be free of welfare. They wanted their own income, principally as a result of employment. I think that is probably the main thing that would interest the committee in relation to that project.

Mr WAKELIN—That is very encouraging, really, is it not?

Mr Paxton—Yes. I think it creates a situation whereby people are almost thirsting or champing at the bit to get on with the operation of sustainable land uses on land that the ILC acquires. The complication comes about with our limited resources to satisfy those needs and the rather complex web of government services that we have to weave in order to meet or go some way towards meeting those aspirations.

Mr WAKELIN—So sustainability of the land is one thing, but sustainability of the wellbeing of the people on that land is very much part of it. If I am hearing you correctly, it is the amount of capital available to provide a living or a sustainable habitation on that land. Is that what we are talking about here?

Mr Paxton—Exactly. The corporation does not see much benefit in giving land to people without providing some other benefit to them. Our charter requires us to provide economic, environmental, cultural and social benefits, with a priority on cultural and social benefits, through the acquisition and management of land. A circumstance in which we would grant land

to people without giving any consideration to what they were going to do with it or how they were going to enjoy that land would not occur. We try to see that as a package. It is land and people together. If you do not get the mix right then you are doomed to failure.

Mr WAKELIN—In terms of the research project, was there very much evidence coming forward of poor sustainable practices, where clearly the management practices had been something less than desirable? Was there much there?

Mr Paxton—Not really. I think the main thing that the project demonstrated in terms of poor practices was that a lot of the land in the indigenous estate was not of very good quality and had been subject to inappropriate uses in the past. When we acquired it, or it had been acquired under a previous mechanism, it was not in a terribly healthy state. We did some consideration of what the initial repair bill for the indigenous estate was. Do not ask me for a figure, but it was phenomenal. We need to consider how we address that kind of problem. In many cases it argues that indigenous landowners need to look at alternative land uses to those that were perhaps in place when we or a previous mechanism acquired the property.

Mr WAKELIN—That means alternative management practices prior to purchase?

Mr Paxton—Yes.

Mr WAKELIN—I will just go to the area of urban and regional rural. No doubt the tension between expenditure of money in urban or in regional communities would always be there. I am wondering how the ILC deals with that. It picks up a little bit of the chairman's comments, but would you care to comment about the tension between the competing interests of what is very clearly a CBD type of purchase—an urban purchase versus open rangeland, if you like?

Mr Paxton—Yes. There is no actual provision in either the legislation or our policy to prevent us buying land in urban areas. I will just give you a hypothetical example. The Kurna people could come to the ILC and nominate a particular tract of land on Currie Street, outside here, and may well be successful in acquiring that land under our program. We have acquired a rather large building in Sydney. It is called Cyprus Hellene. I cannot remember where it is exactly, but it is certainly in Sydney itself.

Mr WAKELIN—It makes the point.

Mr Paxton—It was acquired specifically for the local traditional owners, or the local traditional ownership group. We do recognise that in urban areas you do not get necessarily the same constellation of traditional ownership that you might get in Arnhem Land, for example, where people have always lived and their land ownership practices and regulations are pretty much the same as they might have been 200 years ago. Rather than looking for a discrete group of traditional owners in urban areas, we might vest land in a language group titleholding body, or something like that. There is nothing in fact to stop indigenous people acquiring land in urban areas; it is just that I think many people are deterred from doing so. In terms of the proposals that we often get—perhaps 'often' is not quite the right word—there are examples of people from urban areas who sought to acquire land, but outside that urban area. I am thinking particularly of the area around Ceduna in South Australia, where people are seeking to buy rural land

outside of the city so that they can take their families away. There are examples from other cities as well. Brisbane is one city in point where this has occurred.

Mr WAKELIN—Clearly, the social and cultural linkages are quite different. You have made the point about Arnhem Land and you made the point earlier about the other side of the coin of native title. It does present very significant challenges in terms of equity. You may have heard our previous guest talking about equity and inequity. It leads to the question of how you achieve equity. I do not expect you to answer that but, just by way of a statistic, would you have any idea of how many properties are regarded as rural and regional, versus properties of clearly an urban nature—we could agree roughly on the definition—and the ratio of urban to non-urban purchases?

Mr Paxton—May I take that on notice and get back to you?

Mr WAKELIN—Yes, please, I would like you to.

CHAIR—Gentlemen, thank you very much for your help today. We look forward to that further information. Could we possibly have it within 30 days, if that is convenient to both of you?

[10.36 a.m.]

AGIUS, Ms Heather, Member, Grannies Group

BUCKSKIN, Ms Patricia, Member, Grannies Group

GROSE, Ms Diana, Grannies Group

WILLIAMS, Ms Lorraine Rose, Member, Grannies Group

WILSON, Ms Coral May, Member, Grannies Group

WOODS, Mrs Margaret Ann, Member, Grannies Group

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, all committees of the Commonwealth parliament ask that witnesses understand that these hearings are in fact legal proceedings of the Commonwealth parliament. They help the public because all of what you say is circulated around Australia, so it is a great process for people to be able to communicate their views not only to the committee but also to members of parliament and to the committee. Any false or misleading evidence is of course a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. We will make sure that a copy of the transcript is sent to you. I would like to say how very pleased we are to welcome you here today. We have heard something of your excellent work, particularly for young people. The committee members will benefit greatly from your good advice today. I invite you to make your presentation.

Overhead transparencies were then shown—

Mrs Woods—As a summary of this presentation, Grannies Group made 28 specific recommendations to this inquiry in the submission forwarded to you on 12 October last year. In this presentation we shall try to extend and explain the arguments on which our recommendations were based. We shall address each of the terms of reference in the inquiry in turn.

Why are our existing organisations not coping well with the problems of our community? Substantial amounts of funds are allocated to existing organisations and to large numbers of programs that do not provide benefits to our people. Current organisations are not in touch with our needs at a community level. Ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making include eliminating nepotism within organisations, amending the constitutions of funded organisations so there is only one family member on each board and providing training for indigenous people to empower them to work effectively on boards.

In relation to the situation and needs of young people, in particular drug abuse, the death rate of our children from drug abuse is appalling and unacceptable. If the death rate continues we shall lose a whole generation. Recently, three young people from the same family died of drug overdoses. Detox centres for indigenous drug users are urgently needed. Domestic violence creates many of our problems, such as homelessness, drug abuse, child neglect and child abuse.

Sadly, Muriel's story in our submission is all too common. Unemployment is often the cause of domestic violence. In terms of alcohol abuse, actions that will help our people include promotion of pride in aboriginality among our young and reassociation with our culture and land. Unfortunately, Veronica is not able to give her experience. She is at a funeral.

In relation to housing and homelessness, there are insurmountable barriers for our young wishing to progress and set up a home. There are inappropriate criteria for allocating houses to the young. Inadequate housing is the underlying cause of many other problems such as stress and family breakdown. There are no job opportunities to match traineeship and pilot programs. There is a lack of targeted positions for our young. The situation is very demoralising for our young people who put in the effort to complete traineeships or apprenticeships.

The situation and needs of young people—education and training: vocational education and training programs should be more relevant and accessible to young Aboriginals. The Department of Education, Training and Employment should be made accountable for vocational education and training pathways for Aboriginal students. Greater resources should be directed towards traineeships, apprenticeships and cadetships. In relation to single parents, government agencies use the wrong methods when they intervene in family matters. The problems of single parents include loneliness, isolation and, sometimes, depression. Single parents need much more support than they are receiving at present.

In terms of the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, Grannies Group is active in culture awareness and teaching about racism. Elders of the community are involved in mentoring in schools and colleges. The enthusiasm of non-Aboriginal school children in these awareness programs has been very gratifying. In relation to opportunities for economic independence, Grannies Group is ready to provide and support community based initiatives. Cooperation between government and non-government bodies is essential if real progress is to be made towards economic independence. Urban housing is a key area of concern. In terms of our difficulties with existing agencies policies and programs, our experiences are based on direct involvement—once again, Veronica is not here.

On behalf of Grannies Group we thank you for the opportunity of making a presentation to the inquiry. We would also like to invite members of the committee of inquiry to attend a Grannies Group meeting, should they be interested in doing so. Once again, thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. Our chairman has just been called away for a moment. As deputy chair, I will just take over. We appreciate your presentation.

Ms HOARE—Margaret, thanks very much for that and thank you all for coming along to talk to us today. The submission that you provided for us last year was very valuable and this has been an excellent expansion on that. As a mum in a community, I and I think a lot of us have concerns about what is in store for our young people—where are they going to go, what are they going to do and what the future holds for them. I am really interested in how you got together. Were you all from the same area? How did you form the Grannies Group?

Ms Agius—One of our grannies, Lorraine Williams, called up some of her friends—were some of us were at the time—to get together to do a workshop on women exiting prisons, with two of her co-workers. After finishing that we just extended it to work together because we

found that we were isolated from each other with our problems. It has really brought us close together, dealing with a lot of the issues. It was about seeing the problems and trying to do something about it because we were all trying to deal with different problems at different times and not getting anywhere.

Through that we sort of worked on what those problems were, and the issues, and how we would access departments and organisations to actually do that. I personally found very negative responses from some organisations. I had three heroin addicts at the time—I still have—and was trying to cope with everyday issues. Most of us have similar stories around that, and if it has not affected us personally it has affected us through extended families. So it is about us coming together and being there for each other mainly, to get us through those things, to get us through the problems and to try to access services.

One thing sort of led to another, so it has been a learning process for us to get to where we are now. It has been very educational for us and very painful sometimes to get to where we are. We did not expect much, but we have moved down the road and we have a few grandmas who are coming in and are experienced in dealing with organisations at different levels, so it is about putting all our resources together and actually tackling all that stuff together. Our concerns are our grandchildren, because we are taking on responsibilities our children leave us with—that is, looking after a lot of our children—and so we need to have time out. I look forward to it every fortnight because it is time out for me; it is time to listen to somebody else who has problems worse than mine at times. It has brought me closer together to a group of women who deal with everyday issues that are very harmful to all of us—mainly stress.

Ms HOARE—That is good. I find being women we get a lot of benefit out of sharing our experiences. Do you only meet in Adelaide?

Mrs Woods—Yes.

Ms HOARE—Are there any other grannies groups starting up?

Mrs Woods—Not that we know of.

Ms HOARE—And how can other women get in touch with you? Are you a well-known network in the community now?

Mrs Woods—Yes, we are.

Ms Williams—We are actually an open forum. Anyone can come and join us. We have no funding. We have sent out fliers and everyone knows that we are there. We are just trying to get other women involved, but because our families are so depressed a lot of them just sit back. The organisations are not reaching those people because they are not able to talk for themselves and do what they have to, so it has been very difficult for all the grannies.

Ms HOARE—Thanks, Lorraine.

Mr LLOYD—The one comment I would like to make is that it is quite inspiring to see that in your submission you highlighted the problems but you also tried to put forward some positive

solutions. That is quite refreshing because all of us can highlight the problems, which are very difficult, but to actually be able to sit down as a group and hopefully come forward with some practical, on-the-ground solutions I think is wonderful. Does your group receive any government funding or support?

Mrs Woods—No.

Mr LLOYD—Have you applied for support?

Ms Buckskin—I suppose that is one of the problems. I have only been to a couple of Grannies Group meetings and, as Heather stated earlier, we have all got the same problems: either dysfunctional families or drug related. It is a very supportive network, but getting into organisations and getting other funds is very frustrating because those moneys are already allocated to programs and, as Lorraine spelled out, the programs do not hit the people in the community. The funding is mainly about providing a salary. There are no service provision moneys targeted to it, or the money is directed to other areas. But given the whole problem, I think it is going to be a long way down the track in relation to resolving this.

The other thing that we find is that Aboriginal people must get in off the ground, like the Grannies Group is doing at the moment, and accept that there are problems out there, and identify and try and deal with them and come up with the positives. I think for a long time we have hidden behind them, saying, 'No, we haven't got an alcohol problem and we haven't got a drug problem in the community.' That is one of the main issues that I find that people are now talking about openly. They have developed themselves a network. You can do lots of things without money, but you can do greater things with some money, and I think that is the next big step. It is about putting the ideas of the submission into reality, and that is where the push is. I suppose there is going to be a fight because you have to fight some other program or some other organisation for some money, so there are some politics around; but we might be the quiet achievers and come up from the grassroots and be able to deliver something. We never know; we can only hope.

Mr LLOYD—Do you think you have the support of other organisations, or are they suspicious of you or what you are on about?

Ms Buckskin—I think the latter is right.

Ms Williams—The latter is right because of the fact that we are trying to make these organisations accountable for this delivery. We find that they get into jobs and they forget the reasons why they get into those jobs and they do not revisit the grassroots to find out what is happening there. They forget the reasons why they go there in the first place. I think in every government job a person should have a day out of their job when they revisit and find out what is going on on the ground, because they just lose touch and lose the reality of what is happening in that community.

Ms Agius—We are going through a whole learning process and we have been up since 1999. We are putting one step in front of the other, and when we are talking about funding and stuff I think that is something that we will need to learn about. We have a couple of ladies here who are quite in tune with that stuff. It is about us feeling good about that next step in front of us and

where we are going. But, like I said, we have a couple of women here who have come on now, and we can say, 'Okay, where do we go to from here? What are some of the little things that we can put in place immediately to sort of help with some of the issues that we have in the community?'

Mrs Woods—Some of the things that are already there are inappropriate, such as the housing, and we have homeless children. My friend Coral can tell you better about that.

Ms Wilson—Yes, there has always been an issue with Aboriginal housing, I feel. Housing is a big issue amongst Aboriginal people. Because we now live in the mainstream, we are not in Aboriginal communities. We cannot accommodate our children and their children any longer like we used to do by living in groups and sharing with one another. Because we live in mainstream, we are all battling, whether we work or not. I work, but I have something like 40 grandchildren and 20 great-grandchildren—extended families. Where do they come when they need help? To my house. When Aboriginal people apply for Aboriginal housing, they must prove their aboriginality, which I find is intimidating. It has shocked Aboriginal people. They do not need to provide proof of aboriginality when they go to town to college or when they go to Nunkuwarrin Yunti health; it is only for housing, and that holds up their application for housing.

Mr LLOYD—Coral, could I just ask you how are they asked to prove they are Aboriginal?

Ms Wilson—The applications say, 'We need to have proof of aboriginality.' I do not know whether they are then given forms from Housing or whether they can go to the college or any Aboriginal community that knows them and get that stamp if they are known. There are interstate people who come over here and want to live here, and then when they want to apply for housing they find it very hard to send a letter back to their own communities. Maybe they have lived in Melbourne all their lives, or in Sydney, and do not come from a community.

I find that it sort of holds up the process. Speaking for myself, I have still got my 40-year-old sons at home waiting for housing. They have been there for nine years waiting, with letters from politicians, with medical letters. I believe that there is a priority 1 and a priority 2. Priority 1 would be housed tomorrow, but five months on priority 1 is a bit too much. Because of the overcrowding of homes with our children and grandchildren, it causes a lot of friction in the household. Sometimes some want to throw in, sometimes they do not. You have that problem, so what happens is that there is family violence in the home.

Ms Buckskin—Just as an extension of what Coral is saying in relation to that, with the three priorities, if you are a person like Coral who works out there and has children who are employed and waiting on housing, you are in category 3. Category 1 is about dysfunctional, drugs and all those sorts of things, so it is very hard. There are people still on the waiting lists. I have not been on housing for three years, but I have still been waiting 15 years. So really what Aboriginal Housing is saying to the community is you can have housing if you are dysfunctional and you've got a drug and alcohol problem or a domestic violence problem. This same housing thing is being recycled all the time, so people like Coral's son could never get in the door, because you never get up onto that list.

One of the things I said to Aboriginal Housing was, 'Well, for me to get on the list and get a house, I'll go down to the pub and get drunk and get a reputation and give you a couple of letters from counsellors saying that I've got a drug problem or an alcohol problem, and then you'll give me a house.' They would say that that virtually is the truth. They are quite open and honest about it, but it does not deal with lifting people's self-esteem, especially young people coming out now with traineeships and things like that. They want their own accommodation. They want to go out into the work force. They have set goals for themselves, and you get into the housing situation and virtually it is, 'See you later, Jack, go to mainstream,' but because of traineeship wages and things like that, they have to live at home for 40 years.

Ms Wilson—Yes.

Mrs Woods—Coral has her own home and works. She and I are friends and we do not live too far apart. Because of the big influx of family into her home, a lot of times Coral is homeless because they come and sleep at her house or live in her house. Then she rings me up to get a bed at my house. So we in fact become the homeless because we give our homes to our children. And if you need to have proof of your aboriginality for housing, it is something like giving proof of three or four generations back, of where you come from.

CHAIR—If you would not mind, could you write to us setting out how you would redesign the housing allocation policy, based on your insight and knowledge? I would just like your ideas. Imagine that you are the Premier or the minister for housing or the director of Aboriginal housing; put yourself in their position and write your suggestions as to how the policy should be written to meet the needs of today and the future. I would be very grateful for that.

Ms Wilson—We do talk about it quite often and say, 'If I were in this position, this is what I would do.' They have their AGMs and select from the community. I think they should be ministerial appointments because of the nepotism. Nepotism is rife.

CHAIR—We will look forward to getting something from you on that. It will be very helpful. Can I just explain that my aeroplane to Melbourne has been cancelled and I have just been told that I have been put on a flight to Sydney, which means that I have to leave in the next couple of minutes. Mr Wakelin will take over as chair. I do apologise that I have to leave before our formal completion. I would like to thank you very much for the work you are doing. I hope that we can get the benefit of your advice on this housing matter and that, when we get it, we will do something for you on that by looking at it as a full committee. We may get back in touch with you as well to have further discussions on that. In the meantime, it is very refreshing to have you taking such a good role in a very important area. Thank you very much.

Mr LLOYD—I would like to say thank you very much for the time you have given today and the submission. I am sorry, but I have to go with the chairman. All the best and, again, thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Chairman. I guess some of the questions have been pretty well covered, but I would like to go on from where the chairman was talking about the Aboriginal Housing Authority. I know you will probably write it down and prepare a supplementary submission on that, but you have been very candid so I will try to be candid as well. The nepotism issue is very commonly spoken of, and it is not as a criticism; it is a development

issue or, in some ways, an evolution of practices that have been there for a long time. The idea of the Aboriginal Housing Authority was to try to overcome some of that nepotism. Where is it going astray at the moment? Could you give us a bit of a clue on where the Housing Authority is missing the mark at the moment? I know it will come in the written submission, but I would like just a couple of points on the authority as you see it. You made a very good point when you said all of us, whether we are politicians or public servants, should sit on the other side and become consumers from time to time to remind us about what it is like to be on the receiving end.

Ms Agius—I do not think I had enough information about the changeover from Aboriginal Housing to the housing authority. Personally I felt it was a very quick, rushed process. There were comments that there were different times they had set up workshops for that to happen—and I do not know how many times, it may have been a couple of times—but I do not think the information got to the community. It did not go through so that people could understand it in a different way—the change happened.

ACTING CHAIR—What was the result, though? What was the impact? What actually happened?

Ms Agius—Because I do not understand it, I do not have any idea about it.

Ms Buckskin—One of the comments I heard in relation to what you are talking about is that, when it actually came up to filling the positions on the Aboriginal Housing Authority, you had to be a Rhodes scholar with a master's degree to fill out the application.

ACTING CHAIR—I see. It was an application technique to be part of the board.

Ms Buckskin—Yes, and that went up to an interim board or something—whatever was in place. The feeling I had was that it was sent to every household, but, as I said, unless you had a master's to fill it in, it excluded the community from having membership on there. So the membership is all people who have well paid positions in government departments. There is no community spread on there, only the ATSIC reps. I think that is one of the issues.

In relation to the nepotism issue, I think we are talking about that right across the board, not just with Aboriginal housing. There are a lot of Aboriginal organisations within the metropolitan area in particular which get a lot of Commonwealth and state funding. Surely there could be some agreement that your membership has to have broader community participation in decision making. What happens is that you work in the organisation and you are also a member of the board, or you cross over. Your brother could run one organisation and your sister could run the other, or your first cousin, or whatever. It is very tight knit in relation to constitution. Surely the funding agencies must be able to come up with some criteria to fit in the community as a whole.

ACTING CHAIR—You are making a very clear recommendation, as I understand it, that it is one member of family and that is it. It is not only that justice has to be done but has to be seen to be done. It is that approach as well.

Ms Agius—Yes, and we need help to work through that. Some of the recommendations from that in here are about changing that so that we are seen to be working together rather than against those families. Do you know what I mean?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Agius—It is about bringing up something that is in place to prevent it happening. It may need to be written into their constitutions. But it is getting to the meetings, because we do not hear about meetings. It is about a whole lot of communication breakdown as well. It does not happen—so that we can participate in these decision making things—at grassroots level.

Ms Williams—Not only that, you have all this funding happening. You have three or four different organisations all getting funding, but no-one is delivering that service by doing anything about it. Why are they getting funded if there is no service delivery for people? We have been talking about detox for I do not know how long. We will have no kids left soon because they will be all dead in the gutter.

ACTING CHAIR—You have made a very strong point about substance abuse. There have obviously been some pretty significant tragedies. You have mentioned one in particular, I think, in your submission.

Ms Williams—They should be made to work together, these organisations. If you have four lots of funding, why can't those people all sit around the table instead of all going into their little buckets of money and all working separately and doing nothing because they are all watching each other?

Ms Buckskin—Our work is significant. We do not know what impact that has on people like you, but the funeral today is drug related. We could spend five days a week going to funerals related to drug overdoses. We know all the families. There is an average of five or six a week. We could have three in the metro. We had a span of, I think, 10 just before Christmas. It is shocking. If we go out to places like Warinilla and take our kids out there, they say, 'Sorry, there is a month's waiting list.' We go in here, where the funds are, to the Aboriginal organisation and they say, 'We don't deliver that.' But we know, as a community, that the money goes into those programs. We have all these Aboriginal organisations and we know there are lots of funds going in there but we cannot get a delivery on the ground. Just a couple of counsellors to support the families through this stuff would help. We cannot even break down that door at the moment.

ACTING CHAIR—We talked about the Aboriginal Housing Authority and the board, the structure there and the difficulty of linkage. These organisations would have their own structure as well, their own direction. Do they have community linkage or community committees?

Ms Buckskin—Yes, they do have committees but, as we said, because the constitution blocks out the community they are all in house.

ACTING CHAIR—It is back to the same issue again.

Ms Buckskin—Yes, back to the same issue. They might only have one vacancy this year and two next year. It rotates so that only one member comes off. It is the way the constitutions are written. It blocks the rest of the community out.

ACTING CHAIR—It is basically an in-house decision and not open.

Ms Buckskin—If the Grannies Group wanted to put a rep on there it would be very difficult because of the way the constitution is written. It actually excludes the community rather than includes them.

ACTING CHAIR—For example, how many detox substance abuse facilities do you estimate are in the Adelaide urban area?

Ms Buckskin—I only know of Warinilla because I have taken my kids there. I have had the door shut on me. You know, ‘Come back in three weeks and we might be able to help you.’

ACTING CHAIR—So there is a real need, but you know of only one facility.

Ms Buckskin—There might be others, but that is the only one I know of.

Ms Agius—There are two others—one is the Woolshed—but they are just isolated. Non-Aboriginal people tend to think that they need that time out, whereas we need to be part of that child’s healing. While he is having the detox there needs to be continual inter-agency support and family support. There is nothing like that here and we have all been desperate for something to take our children to and to set up those services like counselling and family relationships and relationships in themselves.

There are a whole lot of issues. I sat down one night and counted 20 issues that my son would have gone through in his life and thought that this was a whole lot of baggage that he was dealing with that I could not take on because I had a whole lot of my own. It is about providing that service to that person so that we can all work together to clear it up. There was nowhere I could take him.

ACTING CHAIR—In terms of the issues around domestic violence, can someone give us an oversight as to just how you see it? You might include facilities and what your own Grannies Group experience has been and where you are at, at the moment, with the issue.

Ms Williams—We have only got one Aboriginal women’s shelter. That is in the city area, which is not appropriate because people live north, south, east and west. Yet you have to come all the way to that one Aboriginal shelter. It is not adequate. You need them in all suburbs, not just the one right in the middle of the city. People do not like coming into the city.

ACTING CHAIR—And that is it?

Ms Williams—That is it—one Aboriginal women’s shelter.

Ms Wilson—Everyone knows that place because the Aboriginal Child Care Agency used that building. So everyone knows where it is.

Ms Williams—And that is not appropriate.

Ms Wilson—It is not appropriate because everyone knows where it is.

Ms Buckskin—It goes back to all the other issues that we are talking about, like drugs and housing and right across the board. Domestic violence is really alive and well out there. My concern is that domestic violence is happening at such a young age. We have 15- and 16-year-old kids who are really beaten through domestic violence. There is nowhere to take them. The Aboriginal Health Service at Elizabeth at the moment is dealing with four or five cases a day, but there is no other service provider they can take them to for counselling. The health workers are dealing with a lot of baggage out there. As Heather said, you cannot shut the family out. You have to let the family in. With the non-Aboriginal services we are working with at the moment, if I take my kids to Warinilla, I have to put them in the door and then not come back for four weeks. Those programs are not appropriate.

It is really difficult. Domestic violence is a major concern. I do not walk Hindley Street, but I do go there for a look every now and again. I do not earn a living on the corner, but I go to see what is happening. It is amazing how many kids are on the corner and how many of them have just had a big fight and have a black eye or a broken arm or have been kicked in the ribs. It is really hard-core domestic violence. It is not just a slap or verbal abuse; it is really violent stuff.

Mrs Woods—I work with the metropolitan Aboriginal youth team for high profile offenders. I would like to say that Warinilla and all those places are for 18 and over. We do not have anything for under 18. We have nothing. I have had children who are taken in and put on life support. The hospital at the very best can keep them 30 days only, then they are released—to what? Nothing. There is no monitoring. There is nothing at all except what I can provide or their worker can provide.

ACTING CHAIR—Would it be fair to say that they are amongst the most vulnerable?

Mrs Woods—Yes. They follow the older ones. It is peer pressure; they do as the bigger ones do. I keep saying to our Grannies Group, ‘I come from the stolen generation, but look at the kids I work with. We are going to have the lost generation out there; they are going to disappear. They are not going to be around.’

ACTING CHAIR—Margaret, do you understand why it cuts off at 18? Is there some legal issue? What is the issue with being 18 and over?

Mrs Woods—I do not know. We do not have anything for juveniles. We do not have that rehabilitation, unless you are talking about Frahn’s Farm, out from Murray Bridge, where they go for two or three months or whatever. But that is not really an ongoing program for drug and substance abuse. It does not really deal with those issues.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, I think I know the centre. I need to admit that I am chairman of another parliamentary committee looking at substance abuse. This issue of 18 years and over has come up. I was in Darwin last week looking at the same kinds of issues, so I am interested.

Mrs Woods—For up to 18 there seems to be help. If we do not get them now, by the time they get to 18 they have not got much hope.

Ms Buckskin—Would that fit around the funding criteria? That is what most organisations say. District nurses at this stage say that they cannot provide a service unless you are 65 because of the funding criteria. I think these organisations might be the same. Unless you are 18—that is when we get funding to support you.

ACTING CHAIR—It is something we would need to ask the departments. It is an issue there sitting in front of us, so we will need to ask. I am sure James will have noted that and we will get to the bottom of that one.

Ms Williams—Before we go off drug abuse, out of this I have found that mental health through drug psychosis has just blown out. Our mental health is shocking. There are no services there for these people.

ACTING CHAIR—This is perhaps getting slightly off the terms of reference but I am selfishly thinking of my other inquiry as well. What type of substance? Is it marijuana? Someone has mentioned heroin. What about marijuana? Do you feel there is a rise there?

Ms Williams—I think marijuana—the one they call the safe drug—is the one that is doing all the damage, because these kids have been smoking from 10 and 11. Now we are seeing all the damage that is done from there to here. They are just not functioning. They are dysfunctional now. Heather can tell you about what is happening in her family, the dysfunction. I work in corrections. I see it in the prisons, where 49 per cent of our guys go through James Nash House and come out like zombies. That is unreal.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. Have we talked about education at all?

Mrs Woods—A lot of our kids do not function well in school because of the marijuana problem. As I said, I also deliver cultural programs within schools. I do not want to give any names. I was one of the people who went to the schools and who took out two or three children for the day because they were run-amoks and they caused upheaval. They did not do any work. The principal would tell you, ‘When they have finished at 3 o’clock, drop them off at the house. Don’t bring them back to the school.’ There seems to be no concern that Aboriginal children do not attend school, that Aboriginal kids do not achieve in schools. A lot of it is because the marijuana smoking has perhaps put them behind the eight ball for learning.

ACTING CHAIR—In terms of the value of education, does the Grannies Group have a view? How important is it to you?

Mrs Woods—It is very important.

Ms Agius—We believe it is very important. It is like an awareness for me, too. When you are back there you think, ‘Well, I’ve done that with my kids and now I’m going through the same thing with my grannies.’ What is accessible to the kids? Racism seems to still be a big part of the problems with little things. There is a whole mixture of stuff that we need to sort out. As a parent I do not know. As a grandparent I am just tackling it as I see it. It has not become so big, but maybe Pat could enlighten you a bit more on that. I think it is just about the understanding of what services—

ACTING CHAIR—Whatever you are comfortable with.

Ms Buckskin—Yes. In relation to what Heather and Margaret were talking about, I think the Commonwealth has put a lot of money in to achieve parent involvement in decision making and educational decision making. We have to get that to happen at the state level in relation to policies. Aboriginal people need to be a part of the things that Heather was talking about, like behaviour management policies, attendance, racism policies and stuff like that. If you are not part of developing anything then you are excluded. That is one of the issues. We are starting to move a little bit on it, but I think the policies have been developed and we have to fit into them. Aboriginal people do not fit into any policies unless they are part of making them. You have to have ownership of it. The figures for our kids achieving in schools is appalling. It is a long, hard haul. If we have people like those in the Grannies Group making systems accountable, we might see a change. The power is within the community, not within a public servant.

ACTING CHAIR—There was a comment made that you are an open forum and you have been going since 1999.

Ms Grose—It is since 23 November 1999.

ACTING CHAIR—You really see it as very important to be open and encourage people in to talk about these issues and you see the seriousness of them. I am not going to put words into your mouths, but I just want to try to understand. It really struck a chord with me when you said you were an open forum and that anyone could come.

Ms Grose—We encourage anyone to attend if anyone out there has drug related issues like we have.

ACTING CHAIR—How often do you meet?

Ms Grose—Every fortnight. For 12 months it was weekly, then we went on to fortnightly.

ACTING CHAIR—Is it in a regular place?

Ms Grose—A regular place, yes, since we started.

ACTING CHAIR—Can I ask where?

Ms Grose—At my place.

ACTING CHAIR—Approximately how many of you would meet?

Ms Grose—There are 18 to 20 on the list. People who can make it come. Normally we get about eight or 10 people every fortnight.

Ms Agius—I suppose, for me, it is about understanding lots of processes and understanding what the system is about so that I can have a say in that and help. I have been crying for 10 years about what there is for me to actually access so that I can make my dysfunctional family better. For me it was about personal growth and understanding other people's issues. Even though they were the same, they sounded different. I think it has really bonded this group. It has had that impact on me, I know. It is about understanding a whole range of things within the system and how to get from A to B.

ACTING CHAIR—And understanding the system and developing solutions which will work, which will help to fix it?

Ms Agius—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Is there anything anyone particularly wanted to say?

Ms Buckskin—Can we ask you a question?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, certainly.

Ms Buckskin—What happens with these inquiries? What is the outcome? Aboriginal Education presented a paper two years ago. Even though we present information, we never know where it goes and what happens to it.

ACTING CHAIR—You presented the information to a federal parliamentary committee?

Ms Buckskin—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—There are a number of parliamentary committees. I am not familiar with exactly that one. James will guide me through in terms of the time lines, but certainly the committee will go through all of the discussions we have had all over Australia and prepare a report for the parliament in about August. The government of the day respond. They are expected to respond in three months. Sometimes they need a bit of a nudge to get them to do that. They respond in a positive-negative or agree-disagree way in terms of the number of recommendations that this committee would agree on. Maybe there will be a minority report or whatever. Normally you would be looking for a unanimous report. Then those recommendations, depending on the government of the day, are picked up or not picked up. We are making recommendations essentially to the executive of the day. It is a long process. The first thing to say is the Grannies Group will receive a copy of the report. You will see the recommendations and then it will be a matter of 'watch this space.' Then it is up to the political process, the executive of the government of the day, as to what gets implemented. That is about as much as I can say. Is that all right?

Mrs Woods—I would like to say that there are a lot of organisations out there but they are culturally inappropriate for us. We would like to be part of the changes that are necessary for us to help our people to function better.

ACTING CHAIR—I think that is a very appropriate place to conclude this morning. I apologise once again that aeroplanes have changed the schedule of the chairman a little. I can only congratulate you once again and reinforce what members have said previously. You are inspiring. You have decided to get out there and have a go yourselves and really you are the best hope—hopefully with us as well—that your people have in these sorts of things.

Mrs Woods—The only hope.

ACTING CHAIR—Good luck, and thank you.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Hoare**):

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

Committee adjourned at 11.32 p.m.