



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

## Official Committee Hansard

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

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

MONDAY, 30 APRIL 2001

DARWIN

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

**Monday, 30 April 2001**

**Members:** Mr Lieberman (*Chair*), Mrs Draper, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Mr Katter, Mr Lloyd, Mr Melham, Mr Quick, Mr Snowdon and Mr Wakelin

**Members in attendance:** Mr Haase, Mr Lieberman, Mr Lloyd and Mr Snowdon

**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 9.02 a.m.**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The committee began this inquiry at the request of the then Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Senator John Herron. The new minister, the 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 and learning. The hearing is open to the public, and I extend a special warm welcome to members of the public who have joined us today and to members of the media. I have given permission to the ABC to film before we start taking evidence today. I hope no-one is concerned about that. If they are, they should let me know. I also welcome the Hansard officers. Without their help we could not function. Thank you very much for being here today. Anyone who would like further details about the inquiry or the transcripts, please feel free to ask any of the committee members or staff here at the meeting. They will be happy to help you.

I would like to take the opportunity to introduce my colleagues who are with me today. On my right I have Warren Snowdon, the well-known member for the Northern Territory. Thank you, Warren, for being here with us today. Mr Barry Haase from Kalgoorlie, the world's largest electorate, I thank for being here with us today. Mr Jim Lloyd, from perhaps the most beautiful electorate in New South Wales, the Gosford area, I think. We have apologies from some of my colleagues who could not be with us today but who joined us in other parts of Australia for the inquiry.

Ladies and gentlemen, before I start to welcome the first witnesses today I would like to pay tribute to one of our parliamentary colleagues, Peter Edward Nugent, who unfortunately died suddenly last week. Peter's funeral service is being conducted in Melbourne this morning. It was a difficult process for me to work out whether I should be here today, because Peter was a close friend of mine. I thought it through and thought that he would want me to be here and, as I outline some of Peter's service, you will understand why my judgment is that Peter would want this committee to get on with its work rather than disrupt the hearing today.

Peter was the member for Aston. He had been elected by the people of Aston in 1990, 1993, 1996 and 1998. He was much loved in his electorate. The tributes that came from ordinary people in Melbourne were quite remarkable and moving. Peter had a great love for indigenous people. In fact, he was an active member of this committee from 1990 to 1992 and again, following the election, from 1992 to 1996. He was also the shadow minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs when John Hewson led the Liberal Party. He was a member representing the government on the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation from 1991 to 1997. He made a very valuable contribution to reconciliation. Peter was a passionate defender of human rights and in fact took great interest in many forums to try to advance the rights of individuals and to protect those who could not perhaps defend themselves as well. Indeed, he was chairman of the Amnesty International Parliamentary Friendship Group for five years.

Peter was born in the United Kingdom and served in the Royal Australian Air Force for many years, in the UK, Singapore and Cyprus. He retired after distinguished service with the rank of Squadron Leader. He was awarded the General Service Medal Malaya in 1957. I would like, on behalf of members of the committee, to pay tribute to Peter and his work. He took a great interest in the work this committee has been doing, particularly the Reeves inquiry which we all remember so well, and spoke to me a lot about it after the committee's report. Peter is survived by his wife, Carol, and we send our sympathy to Carol and to his children, Deirdre, Greg, Barry, Nicholas, Victoria and Sarah. I wonder if Mr Snowdon might like to add some comments from the other side of politics about Peter.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Thank you. On behalf of the Labor members of this committee who are not present, I would like to endorse your remarks and perhaps add a little more to them. Peter, as well as being very active on matters to do with reconciliation and indigenous Australia, was extremely active as a member of the parliamentary Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, and was chairman of the Human Rights Subcommittee of that joint parliamentary committee. He was someone who had the respect of both sides of parliament because of his commitment and as a result of his commitment to matters to do with indigenous Australia and human rights. He was somewhat of an expert on matters to do with South-East Asia. He was a frequent visitor to that part of the world, particularly China, and most recently arrived back from China, I think, a day or so before he passed away.

You do not always have to agree with people to respect them. It is important to acknowledge that, despite the differences I may have had with Peter—and there were many—I did respect him and I did endorse a lot of what he did. I know he personally had difficulty in coming to terms with some of his own party's positions on certain matters. I know he acted forthrightly and courageously in advocating his view and the views of others within the party room. I am not a member of the Liberal Party, but I know it to be a fact.

Peter was a near neighbour of mine in Parliament House. I saw him on most mornings with his wife, Carol, walking into the parliament. He was someone who endeavoured to take care of himself. I think there is a salutary lesson in his passing to all of us that our lives are finite and the unexpected could happen to any one of us. On that note I would like to endorse your remarks and pass on to his wife, Carol, and their children the condolences of the Labor Party and myself.

**CHAIR**—As I said, Peter would want us to get on with the job and we intend to do that. We dedicate our work to Peter's memory.

[9.11 a.m.]

**BEADMAN, Mr Robert John, Chief Executive Officer, Office of Aboriginal Development; Secretary, Department of Local Government**

**CLEARY, Ms Jennifer Elizabeth, Assistant Secretary, Community Health, Aboriginal Health and Hospital Services, Territory Health Services**

**JONES, Ms Trish, Senior Policy Officer, Aboriginal Health Policy, Territory Health Services**

**PLUMMER, Mr Peter James, Chief Executive Officer, Northern Territory Department of Education**

**SYMONS, Mr Graham Douglas, Chief Executive Officer, Territory Housing**

**CHAIR**—I welcome witnesses from the Northern Territory government. Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Commonwealth parliament. The giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the parliament. Before we ask you questions, do you have an opening statement that you would like to make?

**Mr Beadman**—Given what has transpired, I should say that I knew Peter Nugent too from a previous life in the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs and ATSIC and during the period he was shadow spokesman. I too would like to add to the sympathy to be conveyed to his family.

In terms of an opening statement we should say up front that we are a bit unnerved by an inquiry into urban Aboriginal needs, given the demography of the Northern Territory. We would like to leave you today with a view as to the uniqueness of the Territory and the way people have dispersed through the landscape. The last ABS count shows that 28.5 per cent of the Territory's population are indigenous people. I suspect that by the time we get the numbers for the count that is to occur this year that will have grown to over 30 per cent. That compares remarkably to the next jurisdiction, where 3.1 per cent of its population are indigenous people.

The next feature that distinguishes the Territory is the dispersal of people through the landscape. Here 60 to 70 per cent of Aboriginal people are remote rural residents. That contrasts sharply with the states where, on the figures I have seen, 80 per cent of people are urban dwellers. I think no inquiry could complete its work without interesting itself in the history of human settlement of land in the Territory. Here, vast areas have been set aside as Aboriginal reserves requiring permits for entry. That land subsequently got transferred into Aboriginal ownership as inalienable freehold title land, again requiring permits for outside people to enter.

I mention the permit system twice to convey to you the idea that, in many respects, these remote Aboriginal communities are artificial constructs. Whilst the permit system provided a layer of protection against encroaching pastoralism, mining or, indeed, the defence services in

World War II, it also prevented the normal migration of the usual range of commercial business activities. You do not have a bakery, a garage or a windscreen replacement facility run by private enterprise in these communities. It is all council run. The council does not have a rates base. The council derives its income from government, and consequently the inhabitants of those communities have a much greater reliance on those services than people in urban environments.

To take that further, if you look at language, 70 per cent of people in rural remote areas invariably have English as a third or a fifth language. That makes interface with the wider society all that more difficult, and you can begin to see the focus that the Territory government needs to maintain in those places to provide a level of service. Against that, the urban situation is not easy either, especially in the Territory, given the wide range of Aboriginal people who might be in townships for any particular reason—that is, the long-term residents who have been here for many generations and who have melded into the suburbs contrasted at the other end of the spectrum with remote people who are here on a temporary basis for medical services or whatever other services they need to access. Our focus is very much rural remote, and the enhancement of parallel services for indigenous people in townships—which tends to have been the way policy development has occurred over the last 20 or 30 years—seems to us, given finite dollars, to have ultimately been at a cost to the provision of services to rural remote people. Frankly, we would hate to see that balance further eroded. Our focus is very much rural remote, and we want to emphasise that through the course of the morning.

**CHAIR**—Do your colleagues wish to add any other comments?

**Mr Plummer**—No, not at this stage.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I have quite a large number of questions. I do not want to take up the whole time of the committee but, Bob, perhaps you could explain to us the basis on which the Northern Territory government is funded via the Commonwealth Grants Commission and what the formula it uses entails.

**Mr Beadman**—I am certainly not an expert in Grants Commission processes, but obviously the Grants Commission goes about trying to establish relative need and weights the dispersal to the state jurisdictions of Commonwealth general purpose revenue according to indices of need—horizontal fiscal equalisation. I think the end result is that the Territory gets substantially more per capita than does Victoria.

**Mr Beadman**—The indigenous factors weigh heavily, given the proportion of Aboriginal people in the population profile and given the dispersal of those same Aboriginal people through the landscape—the points I was making in my opening statement. That contributes largely to the calculations that are mounted by the Grants Commission. The other factors mounted by the Grants Commission have to do with the size of the Northern Territory, the distances and the isolation. The other factors have to do with the relevant lack of infrastructure, given the history of development of the Territory vis-a-vis the history of the states. You cannot confine yourself to looking at those things in isolation without looking to the way the Commonwealth disperses special purpose grants for example.



The typical approach to special purposes grants in on a straight per capita basis. It seems to me that there is a fundamental contradiction between horizontal fiscal equalisation in general purpose revenue sharing and a per capita split on special purpose revenue sharing. If we want to get down the line of the increased revenues that have been collected since 1983 and the increased share of the funds that the Commonwealth has retained out of those general purpose revenue collections since that time, you can really well make the point that the Commonwealth's retention of the special purpose revenue grants and the splitting on a per capita basis has disadvantaged the Territory enormously.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Have you or the Northern Territory government made submissions to the indigenous funding inquiry on this issue of funding by the Grants Commission, which is currently under way?

**Mr Beadman**—Yes, we have.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What was the basis of those submissions in terms of funding?

**Mr Beadman**—I cannot recall off hand, but essentially it was the very high number of Aboriginal people in the population make-up and their widespread distribution through the landscape have contrasted with the states, where most are concentrated in urban areas. Those two factors really distinguish the Territory in any of these sorts of discussions that we have.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I have quite a number of questions on the various sectoral submissions you have made. By way of introduction perhaps at some point you might like to comment on the NLC submission in relation to access to land by urban dwelling Aboriginal people, particularly, for example, the Larrakia. You might like to do that later if you like. Specifically, I note on page 6 of your submission in relation to health you make the statement:

Demands on THS urban services continue to increase because funding of remote services are neglected by the Commonwealth and there continue to be inadequate commonwealth funded medical and community care services in urban centres

Could you expand that statement, please?

**Ms Cleary**—A lot of the pressure on urban services arises from the movement of remote dwelling people into our urban areas. There are various reasons for that drift into the urban areas. One of them is lack of adequate services in the bush for the complexity and prevalence of the chronic diseases that have arisen in the Aboriginal population. I am talking about things like renal disease, where people have had to come into town for renal dialysis and prolonged control of unstable diabetes and those sorts of conditions. Why we talk about a lack of Commonwealth inputs out there is associated with the lack of Medicare access and also pharmaceutical benefits access in the bush. That has arisen basically because the gatekeepers to those services are GPs and we do not have many GPs out there. There are 22 across the whole Territory outside of our five key urban centres.

The Northern Territory government basically funds the primary care services in the bush, which the Commonwealth government funds in the rest of the country. It is called the primary health care sector or part of the continuum of care, which is the first point of call service. In towns we have an Aboriginal medical service—mainly Commonwealth funded, but part

Northern Territory government funded—a primary health care service in each of our five key urban centres. In Darwin, for example, we have Danila Dilba. While those services are better resourced in terms of perhaps administrative support vehicles and all sorts of things like that, and certainly building infrastructure, they still cannot cope with the load of morbidity and the sickness that our Aboriginal community experiences. For example, we really describe an epidemic at the moment of chronic diseases. You probably heard about our renal disease rates, diabetes and so on.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I have been caused to make comment on them.

**Ms Cleary**—Yes.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Could you perhaps tell us if you have done any comparative cost benefit analysis of the community based health service as opposed to the provision of public health facilities generally?

**Ms Cleary**—We have certainly done a lot of work in the last couple of years on what we are calling health gains or getting the best bang for the buck, as they say. We are able to do our marginal budgeting around those sorts of calculations. There is always more outcome from the population based services as opposed to services that target individuals. At the same time the level of sickness of individuals is so high that you cannot actually remove individual services and let heads bleed or broken limbs not be fixed for the sake of investing in population health. We have to always balance those.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What I am trying to establish is the cost of health care provision through community based health services such as Danila Dilba, for example. How does it compare with the cost of delivering similar services through other public health needs?

**Ms Cleary**—I think that Aboriginal medical services, along with other primary health care services, delivered by Territory health services or by our government councils under grant arrangements are more efficient at their work than the fee-for-service primary care that the rest of Australia uses for its primary health care. There is no doubt about that. In a normal consultation you would have, say, a child being immunised at the same time as the growth being assessed and the mothers' health being checked and so on and so forth, whereas with the fee-for-service type of arrangement, you would tend to have just one problem fixed at one time and that is \$30, thank you very much.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I support the general views expressed by Mr Beadman in terms of the focus of this inquiry. I wanted to ask a question, which I think is self-evident by your submissions, about the lack of infrastructure in remote communities as a cause of the high movement of people into and out of cities like Darwin for services such as medical services, educational services, et cetera. Would that be correct?

**Mr Beadman**—Most certainly. Clearly, you cannot have a dialysis machine in each small population centre. That illustrates the point perfectly well. You can go through the range of other speciality type services too, even high schools or universities, and get to the same conclusion. There is a migration to centres where those services can be economically provided.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Would you explain to us—your submissions are quite comprehensive on this point—how Aboriginal housing is funded in the Northern Territory?

**Mr Beadman**—Yes. We have the CEO of housing here. I was involved in the very early days of the Indigenous Housing Authority. There are three streams of money, which are all Commonwealth sourced. They are all Commonwealth sourced because the Commonwealth took a decision at the time of self-government that it would not transfer indigenous housing to the Territory government—a point that is not remembered by many and purposely forgotten by others. The first stream of money is the Commonwealth-state housing agreement money, and I think there is \$19.5 million earmarked for indigenous housing. That money is made over immediately by the Territory into the Indigenous Housing Authority, and I will explain that in a moment. The second stream of money came from ATSIC. ATSIC had \$15.3 million in a Community Housing and Infrastructure Program, which it signed over into the Indigenous Housing Authority on its commencement on 30 June 1995. The third stream of money is ATSIC's National Aboriginal Health Strategy money. From a casual reading of the bilateral agreement that was entered into in 1995, one would have assumed that that new pot of money that ATSIC got through federal budgetary processes would have also been paid into the Indigenous Housing Authority account.

The logic of the Indigenous Housing Authority is that you reduce two program deliveries on the ground into one program delivery stream, and they have avoided the spectacle of two sets of contractors tripping over one another in the same remote community on the same day. ATSIC kept the National Aboriginal Health Strategy money and recreated a second program stream. So the two remaining streams are the Indigenous Housing Authority and the ATSIC National Aboriginal Housing Strategy money. Occasionally the Army comes in and creates a third housing delivery program.

The Indigenous Housing Authority has a majority of elected Aboriginal people on the board making decisions, the seven ATSIC regional council chairs, the two commissioners. It has a range of public servants on it too, including me and Graham Symons and others. In the main it now handles the \$19.5 million and \$15.3 million from ATSIC and a \$4 million contribution from the Northern Territory government. All up it is about \$40 million.

**Mr SNOWDON**—How is that money allocated?

**Mr Beadman**—The IHANT board makes decisions on how it will disburse those funds to regional councils, which is based on a weighted needs basis on the best data we can marshal, and the ATSIC regional councils in turn make decisions on which communities, organisations and localities within the council area will share from that grant. It is a hierarchical thing. The board makes the decisions as between regional councils and regional councils make the decisions as between communities within the council area but within the confines of guidelines laid down by the IHANT board.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What other housing moneys does the Northern Territory government spend on public housing?

**Mr Beadman**—There is another stream of public housing money—really I should defer to the CEO of Housing—of Commonwealth state housing agreement money but our per capita

share of that means that we actually repay more to the Commonwealth in loans for the value of housing taken on at the time of self-government than we get annually by way of our per capita share of the Commonwealth-state housing agreement money.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Can I just raise this: an issue that I know you are aware of and is quite contentious is the provision of employee housing in Aboriginal communities. For example, I was at a number of communities last week, and at two of those communities the issue of Aboriginal teachers housing was raised with me as well as Aboriginal health worker housing and police housing. Does the Northern Territory government, as a matter of course, provide indigenous employees in remote communities with a housing entitlement?

**Mr Beadman**—Not as a matter of course. The Territory has taken a position in relation to local recruits whether it be in remote Aboriginal townships or in mainstream townships that, if you are recruited from that locality, you do not qualify for housing assistance.

**Mr SNOWDON**—So if you are an Aboriginal person and you came from Galiwinku and you are teaching at Raming, would you have access to employee housing?

**Mr Beadman**—That is as I understand it, yes.

**Mr SNOWDON**—So we should not be able to find cases of Aboriginal people who come from one community to live in another community doing a Northern Territory Public Service job who are not in Public Service housing?

**Mr Symons**—That is correct. They would be entitled to government employee housing.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I am sure you are aware of this. Can you see why the way the policy is framed and administered is seen as a disincentive by some Aboriginal people towards their employment in the public sector?

**Mr Beadman**—I certainly can. Again, it is a case of balancing the need. In terms of recruitment and retention of nursing sisters or expatriate teachers into remote communities, the turnover is horrendous. The turnover has at least in part something to do with the amenity of life and in turn that has to do with the sort of housing that is available. The opportunity cost of that turnover again is an enormous drain. So at the end of the day you are faced with the dilemma of upgrading the quality of expatriate teacher housing in order to save over time on replacement costs or bringing the eligibility policy back to include local recruits.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Wouldn't there be an external cost factor involved in terms of training as well? How many teachers recruited to indigenous communities in the Northern Territory have any cross-cultural training or language training for the communities in which they are about to teach?

**Mr Beadman**—That is one of the difficulties. We try to improve the induction as we go along, but of course nobody is going to be up to the same sort of speed as local recruits. I understand the point you are making perfectly well, but in the end decision makers have to do a balancing act in terms of the end value for the dollar spent. At first glance I can understand your problem in relation to local recruits.

**Mr LLOYD**—I want to expand on the comments made earlier in relation to the number of Aboriginal people who come into town for services. I have to say that that is not a purely uniquely indigenous problem nor is it a problem unique to the Northern Territory. Throughout Australia in rural and regional areas people are always crying out for additional services, whether they be medical, schools or whatever. Obviously in the major centres, such as Darwin and every other capital city in Australia, you can provide world-class services, which obviously means that people can come to the city for treatment rather than relying on the lesser quality or piecemeal services that are provided on a scattered basis all through rural communities. Can somebody make some comments on that idea and then develop how we can better service those people who do come into town?

**Mr Beadman**—I can assure you that you travel much further from the bush to a township where you could get those services than you can in your electorate, Mr Lloyd, from the description your chairman gave.

**Mr LLOYD**—I certainly understand that, and I am conscious of not being fully aware of that.

**Mr Beadman**—The difficulties are magnified by that reality. Given the small population of 200,000 spread across a landmass the scale of the Territory, and given the climatic differences from the bottom end to the Top End, it is a constant difficulty to get those services at a location that can be accessed by the greatest number of people. Even so—and the health people and Peter Plummer can correct me—we find that Territory residents are flying interstate for speciality medical services. We find that Territory people are studying interstate for want of a particular discipline in tertiary education that is not available here and that cannot be provided because of the numbers here. I think we would need to pick a topic to test these contentions rather than just generalise.

**Mr Beadman**—If one reads through your terms of reference, one sees that the word ‘partnership’ occurs a number of times. I think that was more in the context of partnership with the end recipients of services than with the agencies that delivered them, but we have taken it literally and I think the Indigenous Housing Authority is a perfect illustration of agreements between governments to streamline the delivery of services into communities. Much has happened on the health front and perhaps we should allow the people to generally describe our trilateral health ones.

**Ms Cleary**—We have actually entered into a framework agreement with three partners, so there are four partners to the agreement: Commonwealth Health; the Territory government; ATSIC; and AMSANT, which stands for the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT, which is the umbrella organisation for the primarily Commonwealth funded community controlled primary health care organisations. Under the framework agreement we sit down together, about four or five times a year, and actually do planning for the health care system; we plan the health care system together. I think we have achieved a lot through that. One of the things that we have achieved is that services are quite well coordinated. I know there is a lot of talk nationally about duplication in the health care system,—that where services are provided by different organisations they duplicate each other’s services and so on—but I think duplication is a nonsense word in the NT; it is really the gaps more than the duplication that we are concerned about.

Another achievement that has arisen out of that framework agreement and the forums that we have on a regular basis is that we are able to actually work together to make the best of whatever funding streams are available to us. One of those that is very critical to the NT and to both remote and urban health in the very near future is the primary health care access program, which some of you may know of, whereby the Commonwealth will put new money into the system to compensate for our lack of access to Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and have that money sit side by side with Territory government funding in a pooled arrangement. We have trialed that in coordinated care trials in the Tiwi Islands and in Katherine West, which all parties have found successful, so that we are actually rolling that out on a larger scale under the primary health care access program.

**Mr LLOYD**—When was that agreement set up?

**Ms Jones**—The first agreement was signed three years ago. The most recent agreement has just been signed by the Northern Territory health minister and it is doing the rounds for signatures from the other partners.

**Mr LLOYD**—Was that set up under Michael Wooldridge, the federal minister?

**Ms Jones**—Yes.

**Mr Beadman**—I made a point earlier about the growth in revenues collected over recent years. The question about duplication brings me back to that point I made earlier. About a year ago I saw some numbers that suggested there had been a 67 per cent growth in total revenues collected since 1983 and, of that 67 per cent, 51 per cent has been taken up by increased Commonwealth own purpose outlays.

The lion's share of that increase in Commonwealth owned purpose outlays has been in special purpose payments rather than general revenue increases. The special purposes payments come to be administered only through a growth in the Commonwealth bureaucracy. If you were a real cynic you could develop a case very easily that this growth in Commonwealth outlays has represented a growth in Commonwealth bureaucracy which has duplicated the infrastructure on the ground by the states and created the problems of duplication that we constantly battle to eliminate in our work.

**Mr LLOYD**—Is it not better for the Commonwealth to specifically target a problem?

**Mr Beadman**—I think the state governments would contest that point very vigorously.

**Mr HAASE**—Let me congratulate you, firstly, Bob. You have had the most to say at this stage and I am most impressed with your knowledge of your patch. You refer to it as a big one. Let me bring to your attention the fact that the Northern Territory is about half the size of my electorate. Whereas you made the valid point that Mr Lloyd is perhaps enjoying facilities in his electorate that you are deprived of here—and if we make comparisons we always fall into this trap—by comparison with the Kalgoorlie electorate the Northern Territory is overpopulated, so to speak.

The submission that you have put in is fulsome and extremely informative. I think it expands all of the statements to the point where there is very little justification for specific questioning on what you say. But I am struck by one point, and that is that I see the issues you raise as being endemic for remote areas, full stop. I do not see anything contained in here that is necessarily, in the long term, specific to indigenous Australians. We have communities that are not Aboriginal communities with exactly the same problems that you have outlined in this area. I agree with your point wholeheartedly that an inquiry into urban situations might ring alarm bells as to what is happening to remote communities, but I think it is that, full stop. It is the issue of facilities for remote communities. I do not see it as something that can be perhaps specifically identified as just Aboriginal.

What should we, as a government developing policy, do when we have so many submissions—and it is to be found in your own as well—that highlight the need for culturally appropriate housing in reference to style and size? There is much criticism of the restrictions placed on tenants placed in public housing that is administered and designed inappropriately from a cultural point of view. There is much criticism of the education policy and the design of curriculum, et cetera, and how it is not culturally appropriate. There is a huge call for our health services, if they are integrated, to be culturally appropriate, culturally sympathetic and culturally aware. Today Mr Snowdon has mentioned the necessity for our teachers to get education in cultural awareness and so on.

In summary, finally, we are asked to make sure that indigenous people can move seamlessly into developments in industry so as not to be disadvantaged. I see an absolute contradiction there—a dichotomy, if you like. The jobs that we are talking of are necessarily mainstream with some areas that can be, of course, specifically indigenous. If we are talking about cultural tourism, we are talking about employment specifically for Aboriginal people. But, if we are talking about maximising the job opportunities for indigenous people, we cannot tailor the jobs to be culturally appropriate in the main. I see that as a dichotomy that really needs addressing right across Australia. With your depth of knowledge, I thought you might have something to say about that.

**Mr Beadman**—The inadvertent effect of that has been to close the doors to the normal migration of the range of commercial opportunists who would go out there and create a garage, a windscreen replacement shop, a hairdressing salon or whatever. The end result is the demand that we make on remote councils through the dearth of those other sorts of services that migrate to remote areas is extraordinary. It follows that a council for the most remote township in the Northern Territory has got a range of responsibilities that is far and away greater than the Darwin City Council or any other of the great capital city councils that you can think of.

In terms of a dichotomy in this protection, this culturally sensitive stuff and special services—and I read somewhere the other day about a parallel universe of indigenous services—I think the 21st century has turned us around a corner. It tends to suggest that the policy outcomes from that 30-year effort have not been good. We have diverted indigenous policy down a path that has not equipped people to interact with the wider world. My own view is that that is true. My own view is that we have to have the guts to broach a fundamental policy shift and recognise that those outcomes have not been what was sought.

In terms of what you do in remote communities, I think you stop beating around the bush about curriculum and teach reading, writing and arithmetic. Let us stop beating about the bush in terms of parallel services of a health kind, say, and face up to the fact that it is grog, tobacco, hygiene and diet, not services per se, that are the causal factors. In terms of schools, let us face up to the fact that the problem about outcomes is kids' attendance and the view amongst parents as to whether it is worth while sending those kids to school. That is where the work has to happen. In terms of what you do about recruitment and retention of remote area staff, I think the problem is that, whereas we now have a range of mutual obligation tests for welfare payments in the cities, we have not been game to broach the political correctness conundrums in order to devise a parallel set of mutual obligation tests for the bush. But it can be done. CDEP for example—

**CHAIR**—Do you mean the indigenous bush or the indigenous and non-indigenous bush?

**Mr Beadman**—Both. I think CDEP is an excellent scheme and we should never, ever revert to payment of individual benefits. Whilst it is an excellent scheme, I think it has tended to travel over the reality of the levels of unemployment in remote areas and to discourage the seeking of more realistic outcomes. I think if you looked over a 30-year time frame you would see that the little cattle enterprises, the community bakeries, the market gardens, the chooks, the oyster gathering and the fishing ventures have all gone because of the free availability of welfare benefits and because of the preparedness of people to adjust lifestyles downwards. I think if you did a stocktake of local employment in councils across remote parts—not only the Territory—you would see that it has dropped off and expatriate employment has grown over those years. I think all of those things need to be dealt with.

I saw some figures that suggested, looking at Aboriginal contracting for road maintenance, school ground maintenance or whatever, that four per cent of available contracting work is taken up by remote communities. I think it is time governments got in people's faces a little bit and said, 'We want to test whether an expatriate needs to fill this job before you go and recruit a non-Aboriginal person. We want to test whether or not we should increase the CDEP numbers in a particular community through the unavailability of other sorts of work.' We should put our thinking caps on and come up with a whole new approach to the free flow of welfare benefits into these places, because generosity in terms of welfare availability has been especially cruel in the long run in terms of social outcomes.

**Mr SNOWDON**—We might have a difference of opinion on some of those—

**Mr Beadman**—I am sure we would have.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Could I make an observation? I was at Maningrida last week. The Maningrida community has tried to get oyster licences and trepang licences so it could develop its own commercial infrastructure, and it has been refused access to those licences. I think whilst your general assertions—some of which I would agree with—are very broad brush, it is very important that we comprehend that government has a role, and the Northern Territory specifically has had a role, in militating against the development of many Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. You are inviting me to comment on the fiscal responsibility of the Northern Territory government. There is not one mainstream high school



service provided in any Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory outside of Wadeye or Bathurst Island, as far as I am aware.

The Maningrida school goes up to year 10 and has 650-odd students, in a community of 2,200 people. Any other community of that size in Australia would have a high school. There is no high school, there is no appropriate infrastructure investment. Whilst your general submission makes a large number of points and your individual submission, as you have just outlined it, makes some compelling arguments, I think we ought to accept that they are compelling arguments and there are differences of view. I have a substantial difference of view on many of the things you have raised. Could you perhaps tell us what the attitude of the Northern Territory government is to the provision of land for traditional owners in Darwin—the Larakia people?

**Mr Beadman**—I can talk in general terms. I am not from the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, and I did not detect that that question might come out of your terms of reference or our submission. But I think the complication in relation to Larakia is caught up in the 23-year history of the Kenbi land claim—

**CHAIR**—Mr Beadman, I do not want to be rude but I am concerned about time, so can you keep it short and to the point.

**Mr Beadman**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Mr Beadman**—The Kenbi land claim has since been reported on by the land commissioner, and you are not going to get solutions in relation to Darwin proper until you have a resolution in relation to the Kenbi land claim, which is the Cox Peninsula, which you can view across the harbour.

**CHAIR**—I would like to quickly comment on the earlier observations you made about being somewhat taken aback by the inquiry into urban needs of Aboriginal people. This is an Australia-wide inquiry and, as you would well know, there are huge numbers of our indigenous Australians living in urban centres around Australia. This committee has a deep and abiding interest in the welfare and the future of all Aboriginal people, wherever they live. From time to time over the last two decades—in fact my good friend Peter Nugent was deputy chair of an inquiry into urban needs about 10 years ago—this committee has tried to visit different aspects of life in Australia for indigenous people.

That is why the inquiry is now nationally supported by the ministers—because of the very important need for governments and the parliament to be brought up to date by the communities and by the state and territory governments on how Aboriginal people are getting on and whether the delivery of taxpayer funded services are working or not working and how they can be improved or whatever. I would like to ask Jenny Cleary whether she thinks Michael Wooldridge's approach to partnerships in health and targeting is generally supported as being a sound way of addressing the huge disadvantage in many areas for health for indigenous people.

**Ms Cleary**—The short answer is yes. We do think that for the NT—and I am not talking about the whole of Australia—he relies a little too heavily on the general practitioner as the

leader and the key deliverer of primary health care for the NT. We do not see that as the best way, and he certainly has a lot of support for that. But in general, yes, we support wholeheartedly the primary health care access program that I referred to before, the pooling of Commonwealth funding and increasing Commonwealth funding into Aboriginal health.

**CHAIR**—That is nice to hear, and we will certainly encourage him to keep up his work in that regard. Turning to Mr Peter Reith's work in respect of business development and Mr Kemp's work in respect of training and education, I understand that those federal ministers are working with the states to develop partnerships. Are those general directions regarded as being on the right track? I am not saying that they will solve the problem, but are they on the right track? Should we encourage those ministers to keep up the sort of work that they are trying to do?

**Mr Beadman**—Encourage them by all means, but I am a bit confused, for example, in terms of the enterprise development program that is run out of the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, the enterprise development program that is run out of ATSIIC and the enterprise development program that is now run from Indigenous Business Australia. Again, it seems to me that the Commonwealth, rather than concentrating effort and eliminating duplication, increases it. Mr Reith announced a further enterprise development program about 18 months ago. I had to scratch my head and ask why, given that these things already exist in other Commonwealth agencies.

**CHAIR**—We will take that up with the minister, thank you, Bob. This next question is not designed to embarrass you, I can assure you. Reading your submission about the town camps—the endeavour to accommodate Aboriginal people coming to urban centres for whatever reason—what do the people who live there think about the town camps? Do they want them to continue or not? Under normal society, Australia approaches the idea of separating people into a segregated area as not something that we are actually comfortable with. I just want to know what the people who actually live there think. What is the feedback on that? Unfortunately, we have not got any submissions from any of those people.

**Mr Beadman**—The historical reason for town camps is that that is where people happen to have congregated, living on the fringes generally—of Alice Springs in particular and Tennant Creek, but it is also repeated in the Territory. They derive comfort from being near kith and kin, and not being salt and peppered through the suburbs, if one can use that term. The town camps are initially seen as transitory posts for people who would otherwise find themselves over the long haul in normal public housing. They have tended to become the permanent housing option for people who gain a tenancy there, so one can only assume that they are the preferred locale for urban dwelling.

Those who cannot fit into town camps, who come to the top of public housing waiting lists and who have not previously had the experience of urban dwelling are confronted with a special difficulty and one that concentrates the minds of Territory Housing and the support services. If you have got non-Aboriginal people either side of you, you have got a high visitation rate of relatives who come to town with a high population pressure on that particular house and you are unfamiliar with the suburban expectations of behaviour, hours, noise and so on, it seems to me that you are leading people into a formula that really sets them up to fail. That has tended to be the public housing experience of people who come straight from the bush and go straight into a

suburban setting. It is most unfortunate. I feel tremendously for the Aboriginal families that are in that situation. The town camps, by contrast, I think provide a comfort zone and some familiarity where those sorts of stresses do not arise. So it is the preferred mode for many people.

**CHAIR**—Has there been any research done by the NT government on whether or not the customers, being the people living in the camp, are happy with that or not?

**Mr Beadman**—There is some under way at the present time.

**CHAIR**—When will that be completed?

**Mr Symons**—I think the survey Mr Beadman is referring to is aimed more at itinerants than at people living in the town camps, but it does overlap to some extent. I think, Mr Chairman, you probably need to look to some extent at how people vote with their feet.

**CHAIR**—They have got no choice.

**Mr Symons**—Public housing is a choice for some but in fact there has ended up being quite a stable population in most of the town camps. Most of them are no longer transitory places of residence. One of the things we are trying to do at Territory Housing is to engage in discussions with the organisations that manage the town camps to see whether between us we can actually end up with a broader range of housing options for people—

**CHAIR**—That is covered by the report that is being done now.

**Mr Symons**—That is one of the things that is being discussed.

**CHAIR**—When will that report be available, Graham?

**Mr Symons**—I think it is due to finish about midyear and there will then be a series of consultations with agencies and government before recommendations are finalised probably around July or August.

**CHAIR**—Tell me, at the motel I stayed at today—I will not mention its name; no free ads—which I understand is owned by Aboriginal people, I could not see any Aboriginal employees at all. Admittedly I was only there late last night and early this morning. That seems strange to me. What is going on with the investments of Aboriginal people? Why aren't they apparently employing a maximum number of Aboriginal people? What is the core problem with that? What is the big picture solution to that?

**Mr Beadman**—It seems strange to me too, Chairman.

**CHAIR**—Let us talk about it. Why is this the case?

**Mr Beadman**—I do not know. Presumably it is not the preferred employer for people. Maybe people do not want to get involved in the tourism industry or the hospitality industry. I do not know. That was the problem that ATSIC's Commercial Development Corporation saw

when it assisted with funds to forestall a loss of the Crocodile Hotel at Jabiru: no local indigenous people employed. They ran a course and managed to hold to graduation 17 out of the 19 people who began the course. The problem is that I do not think any of them were locals from that region. They came from hospitality areas across the rest of Australia.

**CHAIR**—The Aboriginal people run these organisations themselves; governments do not run them. Have you any observations to make about why it is that it appears, *prima facie* anyway, that Aboriginal owned enterprises or Aboriginal controlled enterprises are not maximising the number of Aboriginal people employed in those enterprises?

**Mr Beadman**—At the end of the day, you will probably find that the answer lies—and I know Warren will want to challenge me on this again—in the free availability of the myriad of welfare benefits.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I will challenge you briefly. If 28 per cent of the population in the Northern Territory are Aboriginal, what proportion of the cohort at year 12 are Aboriginal?

**Mr Beadman**—Very low.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Would it be four per cent or two per cent?

**Mr Beadman**—I do not think it would be four per cent.

**Mr SNOWDON**—We are talking about towns here. As you are aware, I used to be a teacher—a couple of my ex-students are down the back. The school at which I taught had 1,200 students—and that was a cohort which was quite large—and there were 80-odd students in year 12. Perhaps three Aboriginal people passed year 12. Whilst I understand your comments about welfare, Bob, there is a far more intricate explanation for this. It is about the lack of appropriate education services being provided to meet the needs of indigenous students, both urban and in the bush. There is the lack of appropriate vocational training—and I know it is improving substantially in the urban community. I noticed the gathering of young people at Alice Springs last week made these exact points. It seems to me it is quite easy for us to blame welfare. I do not think welfare is the problem. Welfare might be a contributing factor, but the real issue is the lack of appropriate government intervention.

We do not have time to debate this this morning, but I think writ large all over the submissions we have received from indigenous Australians is their real concern with the way Northern Territory government policy has headed in the past. This is not your responsibility, but I make one observation. One of the significant issues which arises for us is the request by Aboriginal Australians of the Northern Territory to bypass the Northern Territory government in terms of funding and to directly fund Aboriginal organisations. You would be aware of the proportion of the special purpose grants coming through the Northern Territory government which was taken in administrative costs—48 to 50 per cent. What is the answer? Why shouldn't Aboriginal people be directly funded to negotiate with the Northern Territory government for provision of their own services and the money not go through the Northern Territory government Treasury, where it can be hived off?

**Mr Plummer**—In terms of education at least, that is not happening anymore—not at all. Personally, I think we should be testing that proposition, but I do not think it is the only proposition we should be testing. There are a whole lot of activities that not just this government but governments around Australia, including the Commonwealth, have undertaken that have led to no improvement—if anything, the opposite for Aboriginal people in the last 30 years. It certainly seems to me that there is a policy framework that is not right. I do not have the answers, but we are using the Commonwealth funding that is now being made available and the Collins report that we have as an opportunity and as a breakpoint to start to make rigorous evaluations of what does work and what does not work, bearing in mind that, no matter how good our programs are, there will be external factors that will take kids out of those programs from time to time.

I am not in a position right now to tell you what I think. I know two things, though. I know that having one extra kid every year get through years 3, 5, 7 and 9 literacy and numeracy tests would make a huge difference just in the Territory and I suspect also around Australia. I do not think that is a big effort—one kid in every school—although a lot of people will become very egalitarian and say, ‘Forget it. Right now we need outcomes and we need some models.’ That is the first thing.

The second thing I want to test, and I am going to test, is the impact of IT in a learning situation in schools. I suspect that this might be the breakthrough technology. We are going to rigorously assess that, but I do not see that being assessed in a context of Aboriginal learning nationally, nor do I see any major effort being put into that. From watching kids in the Hospital School and the way kids handle ATMs and anything that is card or icon driven—they do it much better than reading a 10-page text—I see that they do it well. I think there might be an answer in some of that stuff. I am not in any position right now to make anything other than conjecture.

**CHAIR**—I am reluctantly forced as chairman to conclude this session because other witnesses have commitments as well. I just want to say, Peter, that you are quite right. There is a lot of money now available to expand IT into schools. I represent isolated schools myself and I can tell you now that it works. The tyranny of distance is still there but we are gradually addressing it. Thank you very much. I hope the next time we meet we will be able to talk about how we have achieved a lot more. I wish you well in your work.

[10.16 a.m.]

**CUMMINGS, Ms Barbara, Chairperson, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Yilli Rreung Council**

**DWYER, Mr John, Executive Policy Adviser, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission**

**HILL, Mr Kim, Northern Territory North Zone Commissioner, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Darwin**

**WALKER, Mr Kenneth James, State Policy and Advocacy Manager, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Northern Territory**

**CHAIR**—Welcome, Mr Hill. I understand employees of ATSIC Regional Northern Territory accompany you—is that correct?

**Mr Hill**—That is correct.

**CHAIR**—Welcome to you all. 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 which may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Mindful of the time, before we ask you questions do you have an opening statement that you would like to make?

**Mr Hill**—Yes, Mr Chairman. Thank you and your committee for inviting me to be at the hearing today. Before I start my opening statement I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of Darwin, the Larrakia people. I do not intend to take longer than the allocated 15 minutes. I am the chairperson of the Yilli Rreung regional council. Ms Barbara Cummings, who is with me, is from the elected arm.

I have already advised you that the submission I lodged in October 2000 concerned my views and did not include the views of other ATSIC officers or regional councils or preclude their making a submission on their behalf. I was concerned about the original time frame for the submission because it was culturally sensitive to the needs for ATSIC regional councils to consult with other constituents. However, I note that the time was not extended until late November 2000.

I am particularly worried about the competition for scarce funds between remote communities and urban dwelling people, which may serve to polarise the two groups in this zone. Despite the record amount of federal government spending in Australia, services and resources are still needed for urban dwelling Aboriginal people. I want to take you and your committee through important points from my submission and from the introduction to the individual terms of reference for this inquiry.

Firstly, the zone's indigenous population is approximately 29,893. The northern zone, which I represent, totals some 550,000 square kilometres, extending from below Lajamanu—Hooker Creek—and Borroloola in the south, to Bathurst and Melville islands in the north, and from the Northern Territory and Western Australia border in the west, to Nhulunbuy and Groote Eylandt in the east. The zone comprises many different languages and clan groups, with a mixture of people living in rural and urban locations. We have problems with the data that we are able to access, either because it is becoming unreliable or because some states do not collect similar data to that which we are seeking. This current elected arm is looking at ways in which we can collect data to raise the issues of people living in urban centres.

I would like to deal with the terms of reference now. The first point is in regard to indigenous housing. In this zone, housing shortages, overcrowding, high cost and poor quality housing exist. There is a partnership—as you may have heard through the Territory government—between the Territory government, the Commonwealth and ATSIC. This established the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory, which I and Chairperson Cummings sit on. This involves the ATSIC elected members of the authority in strategic planning, funding, prioritising and linking ATSIC programs in the consideration of Aboriginal housing assistance and related infrastructure.

The Yilli Rreung regional council, which covers Darwin, has identified housing as a high priority. Darwin is a major urban centre in the Northern Territory and as such attracts both transient and permanent populations from outside this region. This population movement to Darwin produces a situation of overcrowding in the urban living areas and a shortage of welfare housing stock within the suburbs. This has led to the regional council establishing the Indigenous Housing Association. IHA assists indigenous housing tenants with their tenancies.

There are 14 Aboriginal hostels operated in the Northern Territory under the Commonwealth hostels grants program in northern Australia, with approximately 142 beds. The occupation rate there is 68 per cent. Though only a few hostels are specifically designed for homeless people, many homeless people, including young people, use transient hostels. The number of hostels still does not meet the demand for accommodation.

In the area of health, the health disadvantage of indigenous people begins early in life—even before birth—and continues throughout their life cycle. Our people die, as you are no doubt well aware, 15 to 20 years younger than the rest of the Australian population, with 23 times the average death rate from infections or kidney disease. We have 12 to 17 times the average rate for diabetes—one of the highest rates in Australia and the world. We have three to four times the average death rate from respiratory diseases. We are 10 times more likely to suffer blindness, largely because of diabetes and other diseases. We are twice as likely to be admitted to hospital, and are usually so ill that we need to stay longer—mainly because of complications connected with dialysis or pregnancy and childbirth. We suffer higher than average rates for mental disorders, alcohol and other drug conditions.

Although not mentioned in my submission, the *Health is life* report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs of May 2000, agrees that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations are the best, most effective and efficient vehicles for service delivery to indigenous communities.

With regard to education, indigenous people generally have a low rate of participation in the education system. The 1999 Collins report, *Learning lessons*, which reviewed indigenous education in the Northern Territory, found an overall decline in school attendance, poor retention rates and children having lower literacy and numeracy skills.

**CHAIR**—If you would just pause there I will ask one question—not to interrupt the flow, but it seems logical to ask it now. What is ATSIC doing, what are you doing, about trying to encourage indigenous children to go to school and also to get the parents' support for that? I am not levelling blame at you; I want to know what you are doing about it.

**Mr Hill**—We do not have program dollars for education. However, the current elected members representing the seven regions in the Northern Territory which have chairpersons, and the two commissioners—Commissioner Anderson and I—have identified five priority groups to address in our term. One of those five priorities is health and education. Through the state policy centre we are looking at coming up with strategies to deal with having our children attend schools. ATSIC in the Northern Territory have had very little involvement with the Territory government's Department of Education, but Commissioner Anderson and I are having talks with the department to address some of the recommendations in the Collins report.

**CHAIR**—I know governments have a responsibility to be involved and I am not arguing about that. What about from the perspective of you, the elected representative, ATSIC and your fellow Aboriginal people—what are you doing about getting kids to go to school and stay at school and getting their parents' support? I recognise that governments also must do a lot—I am not trying to transfer it—but I want to know what you are doing about it and what your ideas are.

**Mr Hill**—There are things I want to do to address some of these issues. Firstly, there is a mistrust between my people and the Territory government, not just with regard to education but right across the board, so I have to convince my people about the things we are doing jointly with the Territory government's Department of Education. However, to get over the obstacles there has got to be recognition of Aboriginal rights. All these nations that reside out there need to be respected by the authorities with regard to the language they speak and to addressing some of the social issues. I believe that the first thing is communication and language. The Territory government has got an interpreter service; however, there are questions with regard to its funding and usage. I believe that is where the problem is—language. My people need to understand what the situation is with regard to their children not attending school.

**CHAIR**—But you do not need an interpreter to tell that to your people. Governments might, but you do not.

**Mr Hill**—There are many language groups out there and I do not speak them all, so I do need interpreters.

**CHAIR**—But you have got mates you can ask to help you as you do your job, just as we do as members of parliament. We have friends who can help us if we visit an ethnic community in our electorate, who help us to talk with them if we are not able to speak the language. Some of us struggle to do that, but we fail miserably. So you can do that.



**Mr Hill**—Yes, I do that on a daily basis. However, not just I but many other departments who access these communities use those individuals. Those people are normally on CDEP; if not, they are working with an organisation, which is something Senator Herron has mentioned: seagulls that fly in and fly out. I think it is inappropriate for me to use and continue to use these individuals when they have other commitments to their families and communities. There is a high burnout ratio in the communities when you are using these individuals on a daily basis as interpreters.

**CHAIR**—It is a very urgent, desperate issue, isn't it?

**Mr Hill**—Definitely.

**CHAIR**—So, why would you be worried about asking people to help you more frequently than once or twice? Have you got some worry about asking them?

**Mr Hill**—Yes. It is all to do with culture as to how I behave myself. Sure, I might have a non-Aboriginal title as the Northern Territory North Zone Commissioner; however, I have got responsibilities and obligations to the traditional owners when I go into the community in terms of who I speak to. It is not so easy that I can go to the high school or the primary school in the community and say, 'I need to talk to you about this.' I need to go through a protocol in regard to talking and making my presence known to the traditional owners of the area, knowing the administrators in the community, and then going to the school and addressing those individual parents. However, again, ATSIC does not have the dollars through its elected arm to go out there and be at the forefront in getting the message across to the communities—especially the parents—to send their kids to the school.

**CHAIR**—What is your priority? Should they put more money into that and less into something else?

**Mr Hill**—There is talk these days that there are adequate dollars available to address some of these issues. However, as I said earlier, there is mistrust within the Aboriginal community with regard to dealings with the Territory government. That is something pretty deep. It is difficult to convince people that the Territory government wants to sit down with them now and talk to them about addressing some of these issues, because it is up to the parents out there to actually get their kids to school. However, if you are fighting for your rights and your country and trying to deal with it day-to-day, it is really difficult to prioritise. A lot of these people in these communities are living in Third World conditions—and that has been reported. We have done a number of projects involving surveys regarding the housing standards in remote communities and in urban centres—even here in Darwin. Again, it comes back to the uses of those dollars and who controls those dollars.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Can I just ask a question? It is in line with this. Mr Hill, in your submission—

**CHAIR**—I do not want him to go back to his submission; he is reading his statement.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Can you let me ask the question? Mr Hill, in your submission on page 7—which is quite appropriate to what the chair said by way of intervention, although that intervention was I think in itself inappropriate, quite frankly—you say:

In June 2000 the NT Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (Indigenous Advisory Council) on Education was disbanded and there does not appear to be any attempt to re-establish any formal body or mechanism to advise the Minister and the NT Department of Education on educational matters affecting Indigenous Territorians.

Could you comment on that? That might give an appropriate answer to the lack of will by the Northern Territory government to take proper regard to the views of indigenous Territorians.

**Mr Hill**—I am not familiar with the history of the disbanding of that group. My involvement in Aboriginal affairs has mainly been through indigenous rights, when I spent some eight years working with the Northern Land Council. I have no background in education. However, I do think that it is a bit strange that the Northern Territory government does not have a group of Aboriginal people or educators in that field advising them of how to deal with indigenous education in the communities or in Darwin. I think that it is only commonsense to have a group of Aboriginal people advising you on such an issue of importance, so I am a bit mystified with regard to the disbanding of that group.

The elected arm will be looking at taking up discussions with the education minister about having a group. We feel that ATSIC can be part of the selection process of people on such an advisory committee. There has been very little interaction between ATSIC and the Territory government on many issues. The fact that we have never had a relationship in the past is something that I, Commissioner Anderson and my fellow chairperson acknowledge—and, I believe, it is also something that the Territory government has to acknowledge. That is something that we are trying to build now.

**CHAIR**—Okay, go ahead with your opening statement.

**Mr Hill**—Before I get to the itinerants, I will talk about employment. You mentioned employment regarding a hotel here. The Northern Territory unemployment rate for January 2001 was 6.5, compared with the national average of 6.6 per cent; 17.8 per cent of the indigenous labour market of the Northern Territory is unemployed. This increased to between 80 per cent to 90 per cent in regional centres and remote communities outside Darwin. If CDEP participants were added, the indigenous unemployment rate for the whole Territory would be closer to 53 per cent. Employment opportunities for indigenous people in the Territory are severely limited, as a high percentage of the indigenous population live in areas with little or no employment and few economic opportunities.

**CHAIR**—Is that because of their isolation?

**Mr Hill**—It is because of their isolation. The zone has 39 CDEP schemes, with some 5,496 participants and a budget of \$69.54 million. Input associated with the scheme has benefited both the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments. In regard to the itinerants issue, in the Darwin and Palmerston area there are many indigenous people from remote communities living an itinerant lifestyle. There are concerns about homelessness, alcohol use, the need for a free interpreter service, health and wellbeing, and the social behaviour of itinerants. The Northern Territory government and ATSIC, in conjunction with the community based organisations, have

engaged a consultant to study the issues facing indigenous itinerants and service providers in the Darwin region.

**CHAIR**—Another set of consultants.

**Mr Hill**—This is a Paul Memmot project—I do not know; I was not here earlier.

**CHAIR**—They do not know what the problem is, is that what you are telling me? They do not know what the problem is, or they want to confirm that the problem is what they think it is?

**Mr Hill**—There have been comments in regard to why people are here and what the itinerants are doing in regard to antisocial behaviour and so forth. It has been used in both the Darwin City Council elections and the Northern Territory elections as an issue, but it does not appear that anyone wants to take up the issue and address the problem associated with itinerants. The elected members of ATSIC, especially, the Yilli Rreung regional councillors, took it upon themselves to address some of the issues. We feel that, as people who live here, we tend to become very easy targets for the wider community in criticising the way in which we live. However, we believe that a lot of the people who reside here as itinerants are not from this region or have not had long associations with this region. It has been used as a political football by the majority of people in this town. We thought that we need to address it and we need to empower the local traditional owners in addressing some of the issues. I personally believe that the traditional owners, the Larrakia people, will play a major part in addressing some of the itinerant problems.

**CHAIR**—I am happy that you are telling me that you are doing it; it just surprises me that your traditional owners and yourselves do not already have some ideas that you would like to implement to address it. I would have thought that, rather than wait for a consultant to tell you, you would have a damn good idea of some of the things you need to do.

**Mr Hill**—There have been a number of reports and studies of the lifestyle of the itinerants by the city council, by the Territory government and by various indigenous organisations. However, it has always appeared in the past that if one group said this in regard to itinerants and trying to resolve some of the problems with itinerants, the other side would say, 'We were not part of that process.' As you know, it was very hard. Nobody in this community wanted to talk about the issue together. There is talk about ownership in addressing the issue, but no-one has really taken hold of it and run with it. The only people who have come onto the scene who have incorporated the land councils and the various indigenous organisations, with the support of the Larrakia nation, the department of health and the department of education, was the Yilli Rreung regional council.

**CHAIR**—Obviously you feel strongly about this and, while you are regional director, you are going to do something about it. Good on you.

**Mr Hill**—Our chair will be addressing that issue. For the first time, we had a meeting last year involving 40-odd organisations including non-indigenous organisations and community groups such as Red Cross and St Vincent de Paul. That did not occur in addressing the itinerant problem in Darwin.

**CHAIR**—Well done. That is good. Keep going.

**Mr Hill**—On ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting the local communities including partnerships and government arrangements, ATSIC, the Northern Territory government and Commonwealth agencies are working together and exploring new approaches through bilateral agreements, MOUs and other arrangements to target outcomes and to minimise duplication and overlapping service delivery. Models of local government reform and regional autonomy are being developed. Commonwealth funding for indigenous Territorians should be channelled through ATSIC so it can be properly monitored to ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved.

Greater voter turnout in ATSIC elections and regional authorities, IHANT, indigenous associations and local government reforms are ways to provide greater opportunities for improved governance of urban dwellings. The Northern Territory Foundation for Our Future for national areas that specifically applies to indigenous Territorians should be monitored by this House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs to ensure that the Northern Territory government continues to focus on achievements and steps with Aboriginal people.

The third point relates to the situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas, especially relating to health, education, employment and homelessness and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. On homelessness, indigenous people are disadvantaged which places them at risk of poverty, violence, ill health and reduced well-being. That covers many of the routes to homelessness. In relation to the national evaluation of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, from 111 claims available evidence suggests that homelessness is increasing in Australia with between 35 per cent and 50 per cent of homeless people failing to access the accommodation assistance program services. In Australia, more than 68 per cent of indigenous people are under the age of 30 and, when considering the increase in homelessness, it is reasonable to conclude that a fair number of these must be youths, and because the Territory has a high proportion of young people, they must be overrepresented here.

On indigenous child welfare, or juvenile justice, ATSIC NT supports Commonwealth funding and a joint inquiry into the juvenile justice system in the Northern Territory, subject to the NT repealing its discriminatory mandatory sentencing legislation. Your committee may wish to seek guidance from an ATSIC project to identify good practical models concerning indigenous child welfare and juvenile justice. This relates to national standards and the principles of self-determination identified in the *Bringing them home* report.

The fourth point relates to the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including, where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged. English is a second or third language for the majority of the Aboriginal population of my zone. In some communities and homelands, English is not spoken at all. Traditional ceremonies and responsibilities are significant factors in maintaining culture, requiring time, research and recognition. Indigenous lifestyles in the Northern Territory range between semi-traditional and contemporary. The significance of culture in the Northern Territory is considered so important that ATSIC's promotion of culture advisory authority output plays a vital role in the maintenance of indigenous culture for urban dwellers in the Northern Territory.

My fifth point relates to opportunities for economic independence in urban areas. Large infrastructure agriculture programs suited to the whole of government response to attract private sector involvement and investment are deemed in the national interest and are a practical step in the reconciliation process which will produce immediate and observable economic outcomes for indigenous people. This is important when considering the relative marginal nature of the significant Aboriginal land estate in the Territory and the ability for economic development. A more flexible approach by Centrelink to the definition of work might result in increased employment in tourism and the mining industries. For example, casual work is attractive for many indigenous people in remote areas who want to maintain a more traditional lifestyle. The regional transaction centres in Aboriginal communities may provide banking facilities, limited opportunities for income generated activities and small businesses in remote communities.

ATSIC's strategic alliance with the Northern Territory area consultative committee will help encourage initiatives, create sustainable solutions to both urban and non-urban indigenous employment through the Regional Australian Assistance Program. ATSIC is a party to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Economic Development model, which has a strategic approach to project development.

My sixth point concerns urban housing needs and particular problems and difficulties associated with urban areas. A high percentage of families and single people in group households live in urban centres of 100-plus people where there is better access to housing and a greater choice. The number of families living in impoverished dwellings has raised overcrowding. Poverty has increased amongst indigenous people particularly in Nhulunbuy. Low rates of home ownership are becoming lower because of lower income leading to more people using the housing of last resort option or public and community housing. Housing programs need to focus on making houses more affordable through income support or other housing reduction programs.

Finally, you will see that in my zone we are still in great need. It is not so much a matter of increasing funding, although that is essential, but changing the way government does business with our people. There should be an emphasis on partnership arrangements. I have to remind government of their obligations to provide basic services and of people's rights to receive these services. It is about recognition of the unique place of my people in Australian history and society today. It is about the rights of my people and it is about the future reforms necessary to secure and underpin those rights and to ensure that they can be exercised and enjoyed by my people.

**CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Mr HAASE**—Mr Hill, you have raised a very large number of issues and I am sad to say that, from my reception, they were all negative. You have pointed out everything that is wrong with the system and everything that is wrong with the relationship between government and your people. To my ear you have not underlined any process that has taken place so far that is positive, productive and good. That disappoints me because we are carrying out these hearings in an endeavour to formulate policy that points us in the right direction for the future. Unless some of the actions that are beneficial are reinforced and underlined as being beneficial they are liable to be changed as well, of course, which is the reality. You have specifically spoken about

high death rates, high medical care costs and high housing maintenance costs, and you have criticised the system of education.

If we are to get it right, we have to devise some sort of attractant for Aboriginal children and youth to get some degree of education that will allow them to compete in mainstream employment so as to be financially independent. I note that the reasons so often quoted as to why children do not attend school is that the remote area schooling is inappropriate, that language is not taught and that education, generally, is in English. I ask you to explain to us how we can equip Aboriginal children from communities to compete in mainstream jobs if their concentration is not on the mainstream language.

I would ask you to comment also on whether or not the process of putting education, as we know it today—primary and secondary—into remote areas is perhaps ahead of its time. Are we pushing education into areas that have no productivity in the sense of a Western style existence, and, therefore, we should not be pushing an education system into those areas where there is no genuine productivity in a Western sense? I realise that there is some radical questioning there, but I would like you to endeavour to address it.

**Mr Hill**—Firstly, there are some positives occurring with both ATSIC and the Territory government. One is through IHANT in regard to addressing the overcrowding and housing situation for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. These issues will not necessarily be addressed, I believe, in the next five years. This is a long-term investment in regard to dealing with some of these problems. A lot of the issues that you have raised we have inherited through a lack of understanding by governments, especially the Northern Territory government, and Aboriginal people here in the Northern Territory. I am not one who likes to criticise firstly. You can see, if you speak with Minister Ruddock, that there is a changing mood within ATSIC to addressing some of these issues—you just have to look at the board of commissioners—and that reflects the election and the people you have in ATSIC now compared with the past.

In some areas, education is very important; in some areas, housing is very important for people. You have to take a whole-of-government approach in dealing with these issues. It is about capacity building in these communities. Parents ask how sending their kids to school will benefit the family at that time. I know for a fact that the individuals who reside on these communities are living in Third World conditions. They do not have the dollars to feed their children and send them to school. If they take a bit of responsibility upon themselves, they get loaded with a lot of other social problems within their immediate family.

**Mr HAASE**—Could you explain that, please? Are you saying that, if you are seen to be expressing an interest in education, you are criticised socially?

**Mr Hill**—Yes. There is still a certain mentality out there about how, if your child goes through education—and this comes back to peer group pressure regarding your Aboriginality—you are becoming more of a white person in your thinking and therefore you are going away from your culture.

**Mr HAASE**—You are getting off the dole?

**Mr Hill**—You are getting off the dole, yes.

**Mr HAASE**—Is that something that we as a committee are not aware of—that you are ostracised if you endeavour to improve your opportunity to be independent financially? Is that what you are saying?

**Mr Hill**—Not necessarily. I use myself as an example. I grew up on the Tiwi Islands. I went to school with a lot of boys from the Tiwi Islands. I went to the local school here, St John's College. Out of the 20 of us boys who went to St John's College, probably only two of us are in the work force. Some of the others are on CDEP and some of them are not working at all. It just happened that some teachers took me out of a classroom with the rest of those boys and put me in another classroom with all the white kids. Why did the school do that to me? That was because some individuals took me out of that classroom to further my education. The brothers I grew up with are still struggling—they have very poor literacy and numeracy skills.

**Mr HAASE**—Has the fact that you have been successful ostracised you or brought shame to your family?

**Mr Hill**—It has not brought shame; it is just that I am missing out from the cultural aspect. I do not have time to go back home and participate in ceremonies and so forth.

**Mr HAASE**—I consider myself a Christian but I do not attend church every day and I hold down a job. That is not a criticism; it is simply a statement. I wonder why—we have now had a couple of hundred years of association—that has not been seen as a popular road to take.

**Mr Hill**—When you look at indigenous affairs—and this is my own opinion—

**Mr HAASE**—That is what we want.

**Mr Hill**—We got the right to vote only in 1967, a couple of days before I was born. When Aboriginal people got the right to vote and to participate in the Australian society, I was born two days after that date. I think Aboriginal people have come a long way. When members of parliament say to us, 'What is your problem?' I find that an insult because we have come a long way in dealing with some of the issues. I was at the cricket match at Manuka Oval and, as Geoff Clarke said, if you give us the opportunity, we will succeed. The Prime Minister did give us an opportunity to play cricket at a level—

**Mr HAASE**—And you succeeded.

**Mr Hill**—And we succeeded. That is all we ask for. And to be saying that it is not the government's responsibility: whose responsibility is it? To place it on the individual who has been kicked around from pillar to post and continues to be challenged in regard to his or her rights, and being compared to other religions around the world—as you all know, Aboriginal people in Australia have been studied over and over again and I do not want to inherit my grandfather's, my grandmother's or my forefathers' problems, but I have to and I live with that every day as an Aboriginal person. Rather than pointing the finger at Aboriginal people and saying, 'How come your kids don't come to school?' I invite members of parliament, both Territory and Commonwealth, to go to Aboriginal communities and reside there for a week. I have put that to a number of politicians and got the same excuse—'I'm a bit too busy.' Go and live on a community, even in Darwin here, and you will see racism and marginalisation. Here in

regard to the itinerant tenant problem, it is pointed at Aboriginal people. Businesses are looking at putting electric fences up.

**Mr HAASE**—But surely not for no reason.

**Mr Hill**—It is not for no reason, but I do not think that is how you should deal with it. I believe there are other countries that put up electric fences to keep out black people. Is that the Australian way of life? I do not think so. My chairperson has been around a lot longer than I have in Aboriginal affairs. I find it very frustrating that people can say, 'It's your problem how you are going to get your people.' Talking to people such as Bob Collins and looking at the indigenous education scenario at the moment, there are schools which are getting their indigenous kids up to the territory standards and largely meeting the national standards in education. Why aren't they news? Why do you have to point at communities which are so dysfunctional? Not because of the welfare. Some people will argue that it is because of the welfare, the handouts. Some people say it is not necessarily the handouts. You are looking at the individuals living on these communities where there have been, for example, the stolen generation. I will ask my chairperson to comment on that because she has been a leader in addressing the issue of the stolen generation. I think that this committee really needs to look at working with ATSIC, as the peak body for Aboriginal people. However, they need to show a bit of faith. You give us a level playing field and we will succeed.

**Mr HAASE**—Therefore, perhaps we should abolish ATSIC altogether to get a level playing field, and just consider you to be another human population in Australia, and we have one government.

**Mr Hill**—No, I disagree with that.

**Mr HAASE**—Most people in ATSIC do—you are no Robinson Crusoe. Maybe I should end that line of questioning and give some time to other members of the committee. Thank you, Mr Hill.

**Mr LLOYD**—I have one comment on what you said. Of course, governments have a responsibility to all Australians, but I firmly believe that each and every one of us has an individual responsibility for our own actions. No matter where we come from, what our background is or how depressed we are, there is an individual responsibility for our own actions. The one question that Barry asked that I would like you to follow through on—it really did not get answered—relates to the issue of teaching English to Aboriginal children, particularly in isolated communities. I would like you to elaborate a little more on that because I find some of the arguments that some children should not be focusing on English very difficult to accept, English being the primary language of this country. If you want people to have opportunities and to succeed in this country they obviously need to be able to deal with the English language. That is my view; I would like to hear yours.

**Mr Hill**—I believe all Aboriginal people want to understand and speak English. However, you have to have programs that address the child. For example, a child may go to school and be taught English for six to seven hours, then they go home and mum and dad speak English as a second or third language. I have no background in education, but I can see it is commonsense to start by addressing what is at home. They can learn to understand and speak English for six



hours but if dad and mum do not speak much English the kid will get frustrated, there is no doubt. I know that there are some Commonwealth programs like the ASSPA where money goes into homework centres and so forth, but I believe that when we talk about English we have to look at it not just through education.

**Mr LLOYD**—That is a problem that is not specific to Aboriginal communities—there are many migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. When I was growing up a lot of the children I went to school with were from Greek and Italian families who had virtually no English in their homes and yet they learnt English and in fact went back to their homes and encouraged their parents to speak at least basic English. Now those people are functioning fully in mainstream society because they went ahead and learnt English. If they had not learnt English and had spoken only Greek or Italian they would not have been able to progress. It is not unique to the Aboriginal communities.

**Mr Hill**—I cannot really give you an answer to that, apart from saying that for those ethnic groups English has to be their first or second language, whereas I believe that, from an indigenous perspective, it does not have to be for us. My language is my language and I belong to a nation which speaks that one language. Our laws have to be recognised and our language has to be recognised.

**Mr LLOYD**—I was not questioning the fact of recognising your people or your language, my own view is just that people in this country are disadvantaged if they do not have English.

**Mr Hill**—Definitely.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I have a number of questions, but I will start by making an observation. In so far as the contributions from my colleagues reflect any of their views, they are not the views I hold. I make that very clear. We have someone unique among us, someone who has actually lived in a remote Aboriginal community for a number years. I want to identify strongly with what you have said, Mr Hill, and make the point that, in my involvement in Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territory over a period of 25 or 26 years, there is no question that Aboriginal Territorians have suffered severely from institutionalised racism. Whilst the attitudes of this committee reflect some attitudes that are symptomatic of the attitudes of others, we have a responsibility to come to terms with the fact that we are dealing with indigenous Australians who have special rights—they are not other migrants. We need to come to terms with the fact that indigenous Australians have their own languages and cultures and that they differ from place to place. We have a special responsibility, as the dominant culture within the community, to make sure that we do not pursue the totally assimilationist policies which are, I think, reflected in the questions which have been asked this morning.

I also want to make this clear: if this inquiry is to examine indigenous education, I am happy to participate, and participate very actively, but it would be absolutely erroneous of us to believe that, on the basis of the terms of reference we have, we could satisfactorily or adequately address the issue of indigenous education either specifically or generally—specifically in relation to urban education or generally in relation to Aboriginal education in rural and remote communities.

I have to also agree with the comment by Mr Hill that Aboriginal issues have been a political football in the Northern Territory—particularly the issue of itinerants, fringe camp dwellers, town dwellers or however they might be described—long grass people. I give one example and invite a comment. It is in relation to alcohol. In Katherine the Northern Territory government in conjunction with the Katherine Town Council decided, against the advice of indigenous people in Katherine, to build a drinkers' camp worth, I think, between \$75,000 and \$80,000, which has yet to be used. It failed—absolutely—because neither the Northern Territory government nor those people involved with the Katherine Town Council would come to terms with the fact that the advice they were receiving from the indigenous community was different.

They took a view, for their own political purposes, that they would impose a view on the community. Let there be no doubt about it. It behoves us on this committee to start to open our eyes to what has been going on in this country and in the Northern Territory, particularly since self-government. Whilst I understand that my friends on this committee are allies of the CLP in the Northern Territory, it is a sad and sorry record that needs to be revealed, and if I had time to do it I would do it.

Ms Cummings, you are the chair of the Yilli Rreung Council, and you are also a member of the stolen generation. Would you like to address us on your experience, particularly as a chair and a member of the stolen generation?

**Ms Cummings**—Thank you, Warren. Gentlemen, I am happy to have a brief word with you. I grew up in this town and I have seen many changes. As a child I was institutionalised with many children in this town, and we have watched this town change dramatically to the point where it is not our town any more. I have been extremely critical over the years—and it comes from living in this town—of the fact that the Northern Territory government has forgotten about people like me who have made great contributions to this town over the years, in particular regarding services for Aboriginal people. As far as Aboriginal housing is concerned, in the 1930s special land was allocated for Aboriginal people, and the money to acquire that land was taken out of Aboriginal people's wages and put into a trust account. All that land was resumed after the war, and people were forced to live in temporary army huts until the housing commission program came out in 1959. I have watched the housing commission program change dramatically—which does not suit us who are local people.

We have watched migration from all over Australia into this town and we are treated the same as the mainstream migrants. We find that very difficult to accept, particularly now. In the last 10 years the NT government has had this building boom and it promotes the Northern Territory. We have said on many occasions that we have special rights here—particularly the stolen generation people who were removed from their country, who have no rights under the land rights act and who were dumped here and left here. We have nowhere else to go. We should not be treated the same as migrants in the mainstream community, who are going to be here for only a couple of years and then move south.

The dilemma for us is this: when we get kicked out of our houses we have nowhere else to go. We cannot go back to the country, we cannot go down south. We have to stay here; we have nowhere else to go. So we are saying that we need special conditions. We have watched the migration of remote communities into this town, creating sometimes a little bit of havoc; however, we have an advert that is promoted 24 hours a day on cable, 'If you never, never go, you'll

never, never know.’ While we are busy building for the migration from interstate, nobody is concerned about the migration from elsewhere that also needs to be accommodated. That is not being dealt with by the state government. We have a housing body and a bilateral agreement between the NT government and ATSIC which is looking at carving up the dollars for Aboriginal housing. That is basically all we are doing. But those of us who are never going to be able to live anywhere else have a complaint: our needs are not being met.

I am very critical too of the education system. We believe that ignorance breeds racism and that is what has happened here. Nobody is interested in putting the Aboriginal history as part of the curriculum in the schools so that there is a general understanding of what Aboriginal culture and history is about. Therefore, everybody barks in ignorance and we are the victims in all this. I find it quite horrific that the NT government continually pretend that they are doing things for us when they are not. We have a special unit that is looking at Aboriginal education and I believe that not one thing has been implemented. They have an office full of people, but governments seem to want to hang on to all the welfare programs. They do not want to distribute unless it is a real problem and becomes a problem to them.

We have a terrible problem with the migration of people into this town, yet we have only two night patrol vehicles. Those night patrol vehicles are now operated by the NT government and they work only for so many hours per day. They cannot possibly do what they have to do. Night patrol was introduced 20 years ago as a safety thing for our people. It has now become an extended arm of Chubb Security, in my view, because all they do is police the drunks—pick them up, put them in the van, take them to the spin dry, which is a detox centre, and leave them there. That is not very good for our people; there is no education in that. It is just cleaning up itinerants. I am also concerned about the health of those people. They are people with alcohol related problems and they are sick people, but nobody is concerned about that. They just want to get the drunks off the street and out of sight. It is not good enough. We have to recapture night patrol and make it work for our people, to give our people some safety. That is what it is about. It can pick up white fellas as well, but it only ever picks up our people.

It is something that was created by the Aboriginal community. It was funded through the royal commission on deaths in custody. It has had its problems. It is now controlled and owned by the NT government, so what else do we do? They are the major funding bodies. ATSIC does not have the dollars for those services any more. It has all gone over to state. We only have a very small bucket of money. That is for small grants for organisations that may want to deal with specific projects, and that is it. Education has been a responsibility of both the state and the Commonwealth governments. We are only here to advocate. We assist our community organisations with the support they may need through their various councils but there is very little we can do, because we do not have a major say. It is the state government that controls the process.

**Mr SNOWDON**—In 3.2 on page 13 of your submission, under the heading ‘Indigenous child welfare or Juvenile Justice’, you make the point that the Territory does not really have a juvenile justice system and there are no separate juvenile courts. Do you want to expand on your concerns in relation to that issue?

**Ms Cummings**— I will say a couple of things. I worked in child welfare some 15 or 16 years ago when welfare officers were expected to take on juvenile justice as well as other portfolios.

Certainly there has never really been much focus on juvenile justice, other than setting up a particular system to separate it from welfare programs. We have a concern about the diversionary programs and the way the diversionary money is being spent; there are complaints all around town about it. We do not consider that there is an appropriate juvenile justice type focus on what has happened with juveniles, and an extension of that should be programs that look at substance abuse. None of that is happening. The placement of Aboriginal children is not taken very seriously by this government. It provides about 1½ positions to an organisation to ensure that Aboriginal children are not misplaced again. That is a clause in the child welfare act from 1983 but it is totally underfunded and not taken very seriously, in my view. I set up that organisation and it still does not function effectively, as far as I am concerned, regarding the welfare and the protection of children in this town and in remote areas.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Mr Hill, on page 11 of your submission—and you mentioned this in your introduction—you say that ATSI NT has a strong view that the Commonwealth funding for indigenous Territorians should come through ATSI so it can be properly monitored to see that desired outcomes are achieved. You also say that recent criticism by the Northern Territory Auditor-General concerning transparency and the absence of freedom of information legislation reinforces this point. Do you want to expand on that?

**Mr Hill**—Again, with transparency and the absence of freedom of information it has been documented that money channelled through the Commonwealth to Aboriginal people is not actually hitting the ground. ATSI over the years, through its audit and evaluation unit, has got pretty stringent guidelines in regard to funding our organisations and our reporting mechanism. We feel that through this whole process, and with the election of our people and the involvement of our people on the ground, it is probably the most appropriate process at this stage. There is a lack of trust, that is all I can say: there is a lack of trust within the Aboriginal community with regard to Commonwealth dollars coming into the Territory and not being spent where we believe they should be spent.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Do you have any specific concerns? We heard this morning that the only housing money being spent on indigenous housing in the Northern Territory is Commonwealth sourced. Have you had any discussions with the Northern Territory government about perhaps providing some of their own source funds for Aboriginal housing?

**Mr Hill**—Chairperson Cummings and I are on the IHANT board. When you look at the funding distribution—and I ask Jim or John to correct me if I am wrong—the Commonwealth contributes some \$18 million; ATSI contributes \$16 million; and the Territory government contributes \$8 million. We are supposed to be a supplementary funding agency. The Territory government, as program manager, charge us an administration cost, which really questions—

**CHAIR**—They charge ATSI?

**Mr Hill**—No. With the IHANT budget allocation, the sum of \$42 million, the Commonwealth throws in roughly \$18 million and ATSI throws in \$16 million.

**CHAIR**—That is Commonwealth money, too.

**Mr Hill**—Yes. The Territory government throws in \$8 million. However, the Territory government, as the program manager, also bills us roughly \$2 million to run the program.

**CHAIR**—But they bill ATSIC?

**Mr Hill**—No, they bill IHANT. The three bodies throw in the money; the Territory government, as program manager, charge us \$2 million for the administration operations of the project. Therefore, their contribution, in our view, is \$6 million, however there are questions in regard to the actual contribution of that \$6 million from the Territory government—who is it coming from?

**Mr SNOWDON**—Where is that money spent and how is it allocated?

**Mr Hill**—The IHANT dollars are split between the seven regions in the Northern Territory. IHANT, through its program manager, consults the ATSIC regional councils in regard to the housing needs in their regions, and then the regional councils will support a request by the IHANT project manager for respective communities to be funded X number of houses. The regional council ticks it off and it goes back to the IHANT board. Distribution is based upon the chairman's report and a few other reports, rather than just on a needs basis, so a large proportion of the IHANT dollars addresses the overcrowding and so forth in remote communities.

**Mr SNOWDON**—But what is it based on? How do you judge whether you will put five houses into Maningrida, three houses into Lajamanu or whatever? Who makes that judgment at the end of the day?

**Mr Hill**—The program manager, the department of local government and their officers through a number of documents. They will put a recommendation to regional council, and then regional council, if they like, will no doubt challenge the decision or the recommendation, and then it comes back to the board for endorsement.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What about NAHS funding? Where does that fit into it?

**Mr Hill**—NAHS is the National Aboriginal Health Strategy program. It is a national program. In the Territory, we receive some \$31.2 million from it. Again, the criteria are a bit different from IHANT's criteria; we focus more on housing needs, and NAHS focuses on infrastructure—roads, sewerage ponds and so forth. NAHS is a larger program and it is run through ATSIC. However, ATSIC engaged Ove Arup as the program manager, and here in the Northern Territory we have encouraged the program managers of IHANT to work in conjunction with Ove Arup in looking at more cost-efficient and effective service delivery to our people.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What do you regard—it is in your documents, I know—as the shortfall in indigenous housing in the Northern Territory, and what is the budget call to remedy that situation?

**Mr Hill**—On page 3 of my report it says that the total housing needs are assessed at about \$182 million with an allocation to the Northern Territory government—

**CHAIR**—Is that a one-off figure or a recurrent annual figure?

**Mr Hill**—I say here in my report:

Housing shortages and poor quality of housing remain significant issues within the NT North Zone. The total assessed housing need is \$182.6 million with an allocation to the NT of \$84.5 million. The housing needs of the Indigenous citizens in the NT represent some 34% of the total national need.

**Mr SNOWDON**—How many housing units are we short? How many bedrooms are we short?

**Mr Hill**—I have not got that information.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Could someone get that for us, please?

**Mr Dwyer**—We can take that on notice.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I want to explore this for a little bit, because it seems to me that this is a crucial issue. We have heard a lot of comment this morning about education and health. If you have 10, 15 or 20 people living in a house, it is not advantageous for health or education. Has there been any attempt by the Northern Territory government or the Commonwealth government—including NAHS—to prioritise Aboriginal housing in terms of funding to address the broad environmental health deficiencies and housing deficiencies?

**Mr Hill**—Not to my knowledge, but I can take that on notice and get back to you.

**Ms Cummings**—I do not have any of those stats either, but a lot of us have complained that the 'develop this town at all costs' policy is causing us problems, particularly those of us who are permanent residents and who have generations of children who will also become permanent. We have been complaining for years. We were the first tenants of the housing commission in this town, and we have been paying rent from day one. Now the big move is to put a lot of us out of the three-bedroom houses, because our children have grown up and moved away, and to plonk us into flats. The pressure has been on, and we thank the NT government which has agreed that they will stop that pressure on people who have been tenants for nearly 40 years.

We are also trying to encourage our people to buy their accommodation, their houses, but we are not prepared to take old stock. If I have paid rent since 1959, give me that house for free; I have paid it off. And it is old stock—it came to us without any furniture or any wardrobes—just the basic cupboards, a copper and a stove. That is all we got in a housing commission house, whereas the opposite type house, which was for the public servant, had wardrobes and fans in every room—all that sort of thing. There is a real discrepancy between the blue-collar worker and the white-collar worker in housing in this town. They have tried to amalgamate but there is a group, and that is the stolen generation group, who are barking continuously that there is something wrong here. We have been paying rent since day one, and we are being forced to stand in line—or our children are—with the migrants from interstate. I think there is something wrong—don't you?—if somebody can come up here and get accommodation before my children. My children have nowhere else to go and those people who are migrating to town, when

times are tough, are able to leave town tomorrow. There is some discrepancy in the delivery of housing in this town, and we are looking at that and trying to do our best.

We are trying to deal with the remote area problem regarding housing. It is a massive problem but those people, like anyone else down south, are attracted to the publicity that the NT government puts out to get people to come here and be residents here. It takes away some of the basic rights of the stable population, and it is a real concern to all of us because we have nowhere else to go. We have been making an attempt, we have been trying to talk to the remote area people, but maybe they should be building their own accommodation in this town rather than just allowing people to migrate and live in the city centres or out in the public places. We are making an attempt to do that; we are trying to do something about it.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What sorts of rents are people paying in housing commission properties?

**Ms Cummings**—Rent has gone up excessively over the years. When I first started paying rent it was \$10 a week. We could buy our houses in those years for \$13,000, but none of us knew how to do it so we never did it. They do get a rent subsidy, so a fair tenants' rent is around, and people just have to comply. If people have difficulties, there is assistance to help them get over that. We have the problem—and we are concerned about the problem, like everyone else—of the migration of people coming to the town, living in housing, destroying what they have, leaving town again and leaving that debt. Those bad tenants impact on all of us as well.

**Mr Hill**—In regards to that question you asked, it was just brought to my attention that on page 5 of my submission, in paragraph 4, it says:

The reality is that around 320 new houses are needed in the Territory every year to meet population growth and an outstanding need of 2,958 dwellings.

However, I am conscious of time. I am a little bit disappointed in regard to some of the questions from your members. Correct me if I am wrong, but the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs is inquiring into the needs of urban dwellers—and yet for the last 40 minutes we have all spoken on remote areas. This is something which, Chairperson Cummings and I, as well as other people who reside in urban areas, have difficulty in trying to let governments know. We also have issues in urban areas.

**CHAIR**—I will extend your time if you think that you have not had an opportunity to raise very important issues about urban needs. I would like you to fill in any deficiencies in information. Please feel free to do that.

**Mr Hill**—Chairperson Cummings was talking about the migration of people here and, from a younger generation, I feel that there is a need in regard to urban dwellers here. It is something that we are working with the Territory government on through the bilateral agreement—that is, the swap purchasing of homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in the urban area, being Darwin-Palmerston. We are still workshopping that in regard to how we can go about swap purchasing housing for Aboriginal people—long-term residents who have occupied housing commission houses for some 30 or 40 years. I am quite willing to provide

further information in regard to how we are going and what processes we are using in dealing with this issue.

**CHAIR**—We are interested in that, Kim. Would you mind sending to the committee details of what you are doing in regard to that? We would be very happy to receive a written outline of that.

**Mr Hill**—Okay.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Could I ask—

**CHAIR**—I have not finished yet. Please, Kim, proceed to fill in the areas that you feel you wish to add in respect to urban needs.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Could I just ask—

**CHAIR**—Just a moment. Order, Mr Snowdon.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Do you want me to leave?

**CHAIR**—The witness has been asked to—

**Mr SNOWDON**—We will be without a quorum if I walk out of here. Now just listen. Let me ask this question.

**CHAIR**—Order! Mr Hill, would you please continue.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I just want to ask a question.

**CHAIR**—You will get the chance to ask a question in a moment.

**Mr SNOWDON**—It is pertinent to what he is about to say, if you do not mind.

**CHAIR**—No, you do not know what he is about to say. Please give the witness the opportunity to—

**Mr SNOWDON**—What do you regard as urban?

**CHAIR**—Order!

**Mr SNOWDON**—Sit down.

**CHAIR**—Order!

**Mr SNOWDON**—Sit down. We will be without a quorum—is that what you want?

**CHAIR**—Order! Mr Hill would you please proceed—



**Mr SNOWDON**—I just want to ask a question about what he regards as urban. Do you mind?

**CHAIR**—Just let him finish, then you can ask the question. That is all I am asking you to do.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I will welcome how he responds to the question.

**CHAIR**—Please, Mr Hill—I am sorry for this outburst by my colleague.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Your outburst. The way you run this committee!

**CHAIR**—Please proceed, Mr Hill.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Fix your questions and your general attitude.

**Mr Hill**—I think there is the definition in regard to urban people. There is a need, for example, with the Yilli Rreung regional council in regard to its funding and ATSIC's programs. A lot of the money is not received by or does not go towards long-term residents. It is more or less for people who are migrating here or are in-transit itinerants, and there is no flexibility. We elected members feel that is something which we will do internally and address from an ATSIC perspective.

There is a lack of services, not so much in those available to urban Aboriginal people but it is more or less in accessing those services. There is very little material in regard to how many Aboriginal people access government services. I believe that the Territory government will have difficulties in actually saying how many Aboriginal people access their services. That is something that I think this community needs to note. Maybe if you have an opportunity you can go back to the Territory government and say, 'How do you measure Aboriginal people using your government services?' I think it would be very little.

**CHAIR**—That is a good suggestion. I will indicate now, Kim, that the secretary will be asked to write to the Northern Territory government asking for that information. I will share that with you.

**Mr Hill**—That would be the first one, Mr Chairman: how many Aboriginal people, either urban or rural, living in Darwin are accessing government services? I do not think they have any indicators to actually specifically state how many are accessing them.

**CHAIR**—Okay, we will share the results.

**Mr Hill**—So that is the first one. The second point I would like to make is that, as Madam Chair Cummings has indicated, there is a need in regard to addressing some of the stolen generation issues. For example, my father was taken away from the VRD—the Victoria River Downs area—and put on the Tiwi Islands. However, again, we have moved on. That is so, through my mother's side, when you look at the housing needs and where people reside in Darwin. This is something I have argued and debated with members of the Territory government. In the old days people were more or less located in the Parap camp area and

gradually moved out to the northern suburbs or the new suburbs, being Nightcliff and so forth. Today you see a lot of Aboriginal people at Palmerston, which is some 20 kilometres down the road.

Why is this happening for our people? As the chair said, we—the urban Aboriginal people and those from remote areas—have contributed to the growth of this town. We have been part of this town—and I still call it a town rather than a city—yet we have not been necessarily involved in the decision making, which is a sad reflection. However, there is the goodwill of the Territory government and I believe there is goodwill by the Territory government, especially by its senior bureaucrats, to work with Aboriginal people and organisations such as ATSIC. However, urban Aboriginal people are the forgotten people in the sense of dealing with their problems right throughout this. I do not think I have the time or the specific information you may require to present to you. I can forward to you something about some of the holes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Kim. Have you finished the areas that you wanted to cover?

**Mr Hill**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for that. Mr Snowdon, do you wish to ask a question?

**Mr SNOWDON**—I have a number of questions. In future, I hope you will not interrupt. Mr Hill, can you perhaps tell us how many urban centres there are in the Top End zone of the commission?

**Mr Hill**—With regard to the number of urban centres, there is Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine and the larger communities such as Port Keats, where there is more than 1,500 in the community. Jabiru and Nhulunbuy are the ones which spring to mind for my zone.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Would you agree with the view that the needs of people who live in Darwin, Palmerston and the Darwin rural area might be seen as different to those of the people who live at Maningrida, Nhulunbuy and Wadeye? When I say ‘different’ I mean that the difficulties they confront are different. We could go into a discussion here about the whole question of expenditure, but it is an issue which we need to understand.

**Ms Cummings**—It is different for them. It is like, ‘This is my town,’ and people are coming in new—

**Mr SNOWDON**—It is your country?

**Ms Cummings**—Yes. And we would feel the same when we go into their country, that we are visitors.

**Mr Hill**—One of the centres I forgot is Borroloola; and even on Groote there is a large population.

**Mr SNOWDON**—The nub of what I am trying to get to is that the needs of people in Darwin and all the difficulties that are confronted by town camps may or may not exist in these other

places. Educational issues are generally across the board, I would assume, as are health issues. Questions to do with land title may be different for the Larrakia people in Darwin or the Arrernte in Alice Springs from the land title issues that confront people at Maningrida or Galiwinku. But I am conscious of the fact that the traditional owners at Maningrida, for example, may have a similar view about people who visit their country as the Larrakia may have of residents who come from other places. Do you have a comment on that?

**Mr Hill**—The views are different. Firstly, it is through the languages, but then, as Chairperson Cummings said in regard to ownership, when you get down into a region there are different needs from traditional owners who have different aspirations to those of residential. Most of these major centres do have camps, if you want to call them that, or areas where the designated language groups are from. You always have a north camp or a top camp or a bottom camp.

**Mr SNOWDON**—South camp, east camp.

**Mr Hill**—You have that here in Darwin and in Palmerston, where there can be various town camps.

**Mr SNOWDON**—How many dedicated town camps are there in Darwin and how many informal town camps would you see in Darwin? What are the differences between the two?

**Ms Cummings**—I do not know whether we really know the extent of how many illegal camps are set up. There are a number of established town camps, such as at Knuckeys, but I do not think those camps have ever really been structured the way they were structured in Alice Springs, whereby they have proper housing and also a town camp community council. We have not gone down that road. I do not know why ADFA has not gone down that road. It has not been successful and it has always only accommodated certain groups; whereas Arnhem Land does not fit into the town camps but they have taken over the hostel situation. It is a really complex, difficult thing. We have satellite camps all around the town of people who do not have the dollars to go into residential accommodation or who choose to live out in the open, away and out of sight. The city council is constantly on the prowl looking for them and fossicking them out. We have had numerous court cases involving people being charged for sleeping and camping in public. It has not worked.

I have tried really hard, and I am still trying, to encourage and involve other chairpersons from those regions to be part of this situation because it is not my problem. It is my town. I am not a landowner, but we have to deal with it because the migration is getting bigger and bigger and the state government keeps promoting this town something chronic, saying ‘Come here,’ but they are not accommodating or looking after those people who have massive social problems. I have a real concern about that because they are the constituents who are coming up for the bright sunshine and the tourism places with the person who has the money, but we are not able to cater for the druggies or anybody who comes up with a social problem. This government just seems to ignore it.

As a committee, you have to be very mindful that we have this massive development mentality in this state where we build and build at all costs, but we are not doing anything for the social part of what is happening with the human beings who are coming up here as well.

That is a real problem. Education and all sorts of things are being considered. Bearing in mind I grew up under the protection policies where, in education, there were no choices. It is only in the last 20 years that we have started to change the education system to make it suit. It is a very young state. I do not see that both parties are doing as much as they should be doing. We just seem to be getting the blame and they ask what we are going to do about it. We are trying our best, but we have a commission that does not have a lot of money and which acts now only as an advocate. It is up to the other governments as to whether or not they take us seriously. We are in a real dilemma in relation to Aboriginal affairs.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. That brings to an end your presentation today. We look forward to receiving that further information that you indicated you would send to us.

[11.48 a.m.]

**HAZELBANE, Mr Fabian, Chairperson, Indigenous Housing Association**

**McGUINNESS, Mr Lyndsay, General Manager, Indigenous Housing Association**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Commonwealth parliament. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Before we ask you questions, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr McGuinness**—Not necessarily. I am just here to speak on some issues that directly concern the operations of our organisation.

**CHAIR**—Would you like to do that now?

**Mr McGuinness**—Yes. Firstly, the Indigenous Housing Association is a newly formed organisation, which is run by membership from incorporated organisations within the Darwin urban area, or the Yilli Rreung Council region of ATSIC. It addresses issues on housing and accommodation in the urban area in conjunction with Territory housing services.

The main problem that our organisation has found over the last 12 months of operation is basically the itinerant problem relating to extended families from remote communities and the damage that associates itself with them, and the antisocial behaviour that goes with overcrowding of the accommodation facilities that are provided for these remote area Aboriginal people moving into the urban areas to live for health reasons and educational purposes. It is concerning because of the damage that is done to the houses. The people get evicted and we put up the next tenants to reside in those premises. These cases get associated with the politics locally and it becomes very difficult for the organisation to operate in re-establishing Aboriginal people in those dwellings after evictions have occurred.

The other issue we want to touch on is extended training opportunities for younger people and people coming from these remote locations. We would like to put some of the responsibilities back onto the local government communities to deal with some of these programs prior to people moving into the Darwin urban area. We are talking about living skills programs and, when people arrive here, training programs for youth and CDEP participants. We would like to extend those programs to a certain extent, so qualifications come out of them over a 12-month, an 18-month or even a two-year period.

IHA have spent the last four or five months concentrating on our indigenous building team, which does repair and maintenance of some of our housing stock. That is gradually getting developed and it is going to be of assistance to the organisation. But we are looking for more participants to participate in some of these exercises and this will assist right across the board by giving youth opportunities to be actively involved in some of these programs.

Because of the Larrakia people's traditional affiliation to this area, I cannot really speak about how they deal with this itinerancy issue, but I believe they could be more outspoken in relation to it, because it is getting to be of great concern for the traditional people of this area, given that this type of humbug, I guess, does not affect the situation in these remote communities to the extent that it is occurring here.

**Mr Hazelbane**—There are different things that are creating that problem. It is not really the evicted tenants; it is their relations that come in from the bush. One of our tenants is a renal patient that had a transplant. His countrymen come in, and that is where the problems starts—they anchor with him, and they are not the actual tenants of the house or entering into the tenancy agreement. That is where the problem lies—with the family coming in. Culturally, that bloke or that lady cannot tell their relations they are not allowed to stay there.

Nine times out of 10 they have come from communities that are dry. So when they get to Darwin they get on the grog, and when it is time for inspections these people are the ones that have damaged their houses. The tenant gets evicted because of all the damage that has been done to the house. Some of them have got cultural problems. They might have trouble within their own community and they are running away from that cultural payback, so they are not living in their communities. They are living in Darwin sometimes with families in housing trust houses or sometimes just in the long grass. So there are a lot of different things causing the problems that Indigenous Housing have.

Some of the people that come to Darwin—I know them personally—have got out-stations. I have got an out-station in the Finnis River Land Trust. A lot of my family are from the Daly River area and I know that they have got out-stations there, but those out-stations are not adequately funded. They are expected to stay in these houses that have not got a bore and they have got to cart water or they have not got proper access into their out-stations in the wet season because it is just inaccessible by four-wheel drive. Some of them have not got airstrips. They cannot get in there, so they just do not stay there. They do not want to stay in places like Port Keats, Peppi or Daly River Mission, so they come to town. There are a lot of different reasons why Indigenous Housing are having problems.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for that. The programs you are developing to try and prepare people before they come to the urban areas are seen as one of the positive contributions you can make to help deal with this problem. What are other initiatives or ideas you have got that might help deal with this problem?

**Mr McGuinness**—Creating activities and opportunities to get that interest—just giving them something to do to take the boredom of their life, I guess. Some of the problems are associated with the remoteness and the costs associated with getting back to those remote locations. Coming in is one thing, but their returning and receiving royalty payments to allow them to be able to get back to those remote locations is another. There are general costs associated with getting back there. Coming in after a three- or four-month stint on CDP activities in a remote location, a bit of a bank account is built up. After two or three weeks or a month in Darwin, the money has run out and the cost of getting back has to be dealt with. Generally it is not a return ticket with charter flights and stuff like that from some of these remote locations. It is generally a one-way ticket that brings the people in, and after all the money is spent they cannot get home.

**CHAIR**—What is your gut feeling on how many that come in would like to go back? I know it is a hard question. Can you give us some guidance?

**Mr Hazelbane**—They more or less come in and stay for—

**CHAIR**—What percentage?

**Mr Hazelbane**—I know what the Port Keats mob do, because I had them around my house, staying at my house, on my driveway—I get up in the morning and they are there asleep on my driveway. Some of them are my grandfather and my uncle. Like Lyndsay said, they could sit out on their community, but they have got keycards now. It is a new trend in how they are able to come to Darwin and get on the grog. They have got normal Commonwealth Bank keycards. Whereas before their cheques used to be sent by mail to the communities, now the money goes into keycards. They know that if they are out in the community for six or eight weeks and come into town they are going to have three or four cheques there and they go straight to the main airport or Marrara bottle shop and draw straight on their key card out of EFTPOS. They might have enough money to see them drink and carry on for a week or two weeks, supporting 10 or 12 different family members, and then that guy's cheque will come and it is a vicious circle. Every week someone else is getting money and they have got no reason to go back to their communities because they have got a constant supply of money to support their habits coming in weekly, even daily.

I think Port Keats has got about two planes a day that come in, and for every 40 or 50 that come out of those two planes there are probably half that are going back. So right now if you went to Rapid Creek you would probably find 40 or 50 of the Port Keats mob there, all drinking. I know some of them have been in town for two months. Perhaps it is because of the wet season and they do not want to go back to their outstation because there is nothing there for them, not even CDEP, and they reckon they are better off in town here drinking and carrying on.

**CHAIR**—So what would you like to see governments do to deal with the situation, other than what they are doing already? Have you got any ideas for us on that?

**Mr McGuinness**—I think the community local government councils can concentrate on allocating funds to set up programs at the grassroots level in the first instance. Possibly some of the wet communities that do sell alcohol need to look at their pricing structures too, because at the likes of Warankawu, Milikapiti and Garden Point the price of a carton of beer is, say, \$90. These people are not silly. At the end of the day, when a carton can be bought in downtown Darwin for \$30 they are going to come to Darwin because they can buy three cartons for the price of the one carton they can buy in the community. That encourages them to stay in the urban region as well.

**Mr Hazelbane**—And maybe on the health side of it, with the renal patients and so on, these renal machines can be provided out in those communities instead of those people having to come to Darwin or Katherine, where it is fairly bad as well. I think they just got some out in Borroloola, but out in the Daley they have not got any renal machines. The guy living next door to me is from Ngukurr and I do not think they have got any out there, or at Numbulwar. They have got the nurses out there, health clinics and so on, but if they had the machines out there

then those people would not have to come to town and some of their families would not have somewhere to come to town to anchor.

**CHAIR**—Is there a health organisation that you are rubbing shoulders with, working with, in the Northern Territory that you can raise these ideas with?

**Mr McGuinness**—For sure. Territory health. Those issues have been raised in past meetings and whatever. But that priority housing arrangement is a concern for the operations of our organisation and Territory Housing, because once the health side of it find the accommodation they are out of the picture. Then it is basically up to Territory Housing and our organisation to deal with the concerns, because health issues generally relate to a sorry time for Aboriginal people, especially in dialysis and renal issues. The families have to be close because it is a serious issue with that treatment.

**Mr LLOYD**—Does the association own housing stock or does it lease it on behalf of other people? Where do the homes come from?

**Mr McGuinness**—Through Territory Housing.

**Mr LLOYD**—So they are provided to you by Territory Housing and then basically you manage them?

**Mr McGuinness**—We manage the tenants and try to provide ongoing support through yard maintenance and living—

**Mr Hazelbane**—But the actual tenancy agreements are not done through the Indigenous Housing Association; they are done through Territory Housing. One of the problems we have is with Territory Housing staff not understanding the cultural aspect when dealing with Aboriginals and they come the heavy hand on our clients, whereas if the Indigenous Housing Association had the tenancy agreement signed up with that client we could better manage the people coming to the house as well as the backup service for the legal tenant.

**Mr LLOYD**—Who do they pay the rent to? How does your association fund itself? Are you responsible for maintenance? I want to get a better handle on exactly what you do.

**Mr McGuinness**—We are funded through ATSIC and THS to provide for our operations. We handle the repairs and maintenance accounts of the tenants and monitor that side of it, which is tenants' moneys. They deposit it into the account and we manage it for the contractors to complete those repairs and maintenance.

**Mr LLOYD**—When you say 'tenants' moneys', is that money which they have had to pay to compensate for damage or is that their rent money?

**Mr McGuinness**—It is a saving they have set aside which is placed into a repairs and maintenance account.



**Mr Hazelbane**—It is not a compulsory payment but it is something that we encourage them to do because we acknowledge that there are a lot of repairs and maintenance needed in Indigenous Housing Association houses, but it is not compulsory for them to pay into that account.

**Mr LLOYD**—That is over and above their rent?

**Mr Hazelbane**—Yes. I live in a housing commission house. If something breaks down in my house, I ring up Territory Housing and they contract a company called Systems Homes to come out and fix up my fan if it is bugged or something like that. Indigenous Housing has to pay for their service. If their fan buggers up, they have to ring up Indigenous Housing.

**CHAIR**—Do you mean the tenant has to pay?

**Mr Hazelbane**—Yes. They ring up Indigenous Housing. Indigenous Housing will get a couple of quotes for that repair to be done and it comes out of their maintenance account that they are paying in off their own bat.

**Mr SNOWDON**—This does not exist for non-indigenous renters?

**Mr Hazelbane**—Non-indigenous tenants are not obliged or encouraged to pay any moneys into repairs and maintenance accounts specifically for their house, whereas Indigenous Housing Association tenants are not compulsorily required to do it but we encourage them to do it.

**Mr SNOWDON**—If you send someone out to fix the fan, who pays for it?

**Mr Hazelbane**—The tenant.

**Mr SNOWDON**—If housing send someone out to fix your fan, who pays for it?

**Mr Hazelbane**—Territory Housing, I suppose, because Systems Homes just come there and fix it and that is the end I hear of it.

**Mr SNOWDON**—And they do not bill you?

**Mr Hazelbane**—No.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What sort of rent do your tenants pay?

**Mr McGuinness**—It varies on the size of the house: four bedroom, three bedroom, two bedroom, one bedroom.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What is a three-bedroom house?

**Mr Hazelbane**—And depending on their income because they are means tested.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What are the rates?

**Mr Hazelbane**—Probably about \$160-odd for a three-bedroom house for somebody who is on parenting and CDEP, a couple.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Could you provide us at a later point with a profile of the rents that your people pay?

**Mr McGuinness**—I can do.

**Mr SNOWDON**—So that we can have a look at how much money people are required to pay. Do you have a profile of whether the people who live in these homes are employed?

**Mr SNOWDON**—Can you provide us with a profile, at some later point, of the rents that your people pay?

**Mr McGuinness**—I can do that.

**Mr SNOWDON**—The reason is that we can then have a look at how much money people are required to pay. Do you have a profile of employment, whether the people who live in these homes are employed or unemployed?

**Mr McGuinness**—We do not have a record in that sense. It would take a bit of work, but we could identify that.

**Mr Hazelbane**—When it comes time for rental rebate and those types of things—where the tenant has to fill out forms and supply evidence of what wages are coming in for the tenant of that house—that is done through Territory Housing.

**Mr SNOWDON**—So they have a picture of it?

**Mr Hazelbane**—Yes.

**Mr LLOYD**—Somewhere here I saw that you said that the housing was not appropriate. In your submission you mentioned that there were numerous existing programs and services available to assist indigenous people with their housing needs, but none of those were effective or appropriate for the Darwin area. Why do you say that? Can you give us some examples or elaborate on that a little bit?

**Mr McGuinness**—I was talking about the lack of home living skills in that paragraph. I think that is what it relates to. We have run a couple of home living skills programs that have been successful. The first one was. We had one group associated with one region, and they worked well together. The second one we had was a combined type of arrangement, which did not work all that well as it was set up. We are workshopping another program to run. It is just assisting people with how to deal with repairs and maintenance and general living style.

**Mr Hazelbane**—Again, it is not something that is required of non-indigenous tenants, like the home living skills program. Although the people that are looking to go into houses that are under IHA jurisdiction do their tenancy agreements with Territory Housing, they are required to

do a home living skills program at Nungalinga College. Some of my board do not think it should be a prerequisite to do a 40-hour home living skills course before being eligible to get a house.

**Mr HAASE**—Mr Hazelbane, we have heard from Mr McGuinness that, in view of the damage that is created by people coming in from the lands, there ought to be some prerequisite training before occupying houses, yet you are saying that it is considered to be inappropriate to be required to do a 40-hour course. You are making a distinction between perhaps people that are already urban living and people that are coming in from remote areas: is that what you are saying?

**Mr Hazelbane**—Potential tenants apply and, if a house comes up, they can get their house after they have done a home living skills course on hygiene at the Nungalinga College.

**Mr HAASE**—And you are objecting to that, Mr Hazelbane. I am just asking: where are these people from? Where are the people that think it is inappropriate? Are they already urban living or are they 'long grass' people or are they coming from remote areas?

**Mr Hazelbane**—Some of them have just been on the waiting list with Territory Housing. Some of them could have been waiting for three years.

**Mr HAASE**—But are they from remote areas or are they living in other situations?

**Mr Hazelbane**—The people who have been waiting are not really the problem. It is the people that are coming in from remote areas once that person gets his house that are the problem.

**Mr HAASE**—So it is the people that are not signed up—the relatives, et cetera?

**CHAIR**—They are not the tenants.

**Mr Hazelbane**—They are not the legal tenants of the house.

**Mr HAASE**—There are a couple of things that I will be specific about before making a generalisation or asking a general question. Mr Guinness, you have raised the point that it is apparently inequitable that you are trying to create nine new apprenticeships and you are getting funded under the CDEP program, but there seems to be no reasonable source of top-up funding. It is a point that is made in a letter from Sue Shearer, General Manager of IHA, but I would ask you to consider that situation. Where are the funds going to? If you are taking on maintenance contracts, for which you are now employing nine new apprentices, that maintenance you are carrying out must be remunerated in some way from the owner of the housing stock. Is that correct?

**Mr McGuinness**—Our trainees are not qualified yet to carry out protected trades repairs like plumbing, electrics and stuff like that.

**Mr HAASE**—Of course not, but if they are being engaged as apprentices they must have some practical ability on the job to assist as TAs and so forth.

**Mr McGuinness**—They have not completed the training program that we have established for them as yet. They have only been going for 3½ months and that is the first module. They have another module to go before they actually commit themselves to an apprenticeship.

**Mr HAASE**—So they are not apprenticed as yet?

**Mr McGuinness**—They are not apprenticed as yet.

**Mr HAASE**—And they are not having any practical time on the job assisting tradesmen carrying out maintenance?

**Mr McGuinness**—Not right at the moment, no. They are being trained. There are projects they have been involved in but they are not directly related to the repairs and maintenance of the particular houses that we manage.

**Mr HAASE**—In these three or four months are they doing pure theory? They are not entering premises assisting tradesmen carrying out maintenance?

**Mr McGuinness**—Not in that sense, no. They are being introduced to an apprenticeship.

**Mr HAASE**—It is a classroom situation—is that what you are saying?

**Mr McGuinness**—No, they do field work: mechanical work, scaffolding work and all that. It is field work as well as being a classroom situation.

**Mr HAASE**—But specifically for maintenance of residential housing in an urban area?

**Mr McGuinness**—Eventually they will be, yes, when they are qualified to carry out those works. Once we establish the tradespeople who are going to train them, the ultimate aim is that that will be a continuous working opportunity for them to stay in full-time employment.

**Mr HAASE**—Do you employ any tradespeople at this stage?

**Mr McGuinness**—We have contract arrangements: repairs and maintenance subcontractors who come out and—

**Mr HAASE**—So it is those subcontractors you engage that you hope to act as masters to these apprentices? Is that the case?

**Mr McGuinness**—Eventually, yes, when the guys decide on what trade they are going to enter into.

**Mr HAASE**—They are doing a prevoc course at this stage? Is that right?

**Mr McGuinness**—Yes, like an introduction to deciding on what trade they want to enter into: electrical, carpentry, plumbing—

**Mr HAASE**—All right. I am just trying to better understand. The criticism here is the fact that DWSRBE has not made any allowance for top-up. I am sorry: specifically in the top-up funding provided by DWSRBE, there is no provision for the payment of superannuation from that top-up funding. My concern is that some arrangement for funding has to be made. I understand the nature of specific indigenous employment programs: that, in the main, you have to find specific funding programs to afford those endeavours. I am concerned that there needs to be sufficient funding to cover all aspects of their employment and remuneration. You have got on the one hand CDEP; on the other hand you have got assistance in funding from DWRSBE as top-up funding. But you are still left wanting this mandatory superannuation.

**Mr McGuinness**—We have dealt with that.

**Mr HAASE**—You have dealt with it?

**Mr McGuinness**—Yes, part of that provision—

**Mr HAASE**—What is the solution? It is not contained—

**Mr McGuinness**—CDEP are responsible for their component of superannuation and the top-up funding from DWRSBE eventually will be adjusted to deal with the superannuation component for their section of the employment.

**Mr HAASE**—My apologies, Mr Chair, and to you, Mr McGuinness. I note now that this is dated 11 October and a lot of water has gone under the bridge since then.

**Mr McGuinness**—Certainly.

**Mr HAASE**—The point has been made that you have an influx of remote area people coming into the urban environment and staying, often uninvited, with tenants of housing in the urban area. You say they come from out-stations and they come because there are no facilities such as running water and sewerage, there is no airstrip for resupply and there is no grog. I put to you that they are all non-cultural and non-traditional facilities or pursuits.

On the other hand, you say that the problem is created in urban areas because of the cultural considerations of the tenant not being able to communicate with the visitors that there is a responsibility to behave in a manner that agrees with the Tenancy Act. Once again, I see that as a great dichotomy. If the primary motivation for the action is that there is an absence of all of these things that are non-traditional and non-cultural, and that is such a strong motivator to be in a situation, doesn't it follow that it would be rational for these people to also consider something else that was non-cultural and non-traditional like the responsibility to behave in a certain manner with a relative who is now utilising a home provided by taxpayers and requiring a certain level of behaviour?

**Mr McGuinness**—That is a good point. A lot of this activity occurs after standard working hours. I guess there is alcohol involved in what you are saying. We also get the situation—and

this occurs quite often in allocating houses where the IHA has not been involved in the past—where two big, flash, established whitefella houses, as they would say, have a Territory housing commission house in the middle. That is a recipe for disaster in relation to priority housing where health is associated with a person getting the house. Our organisation cannot interfere and Territory Housing will not deal with the issue because of discrimination. That full-blood family can go straight into that house. It is a recipe for disaster by putting that family straight into that situation. They get a three-month probation and if they do not live up to that three-month probation, the eviction notice is served on them and they are basically out. That house will never see through its life for that allocation.

**Mr HAASE**—Could you explain that? Do you say that physical damage to the house will render it unable to be let?

**Mr McGuinness**—The politics associated with those two big, flash whitefella houses next door to that one house gives them only three months. If the extended family create any nuisance, they will get evicted. The nuisance associated with the extended family is what generally gets these people evicted. That does not get dealt with because the nuisance side of things generally happens after hours.

**Mr HAASE**—Outside the office hours?

**Mr McGuinness**—Yes, outside the operating hours. Our organisation employees and THS employees only work a certain amount of hours.

**Mr HAASE**—I make the point again: why isn't it rational for the tenant to—I accept, if necessary—contravene the cultural and traditional requisites and say to those visitors, 'You are going to put us all out with your behaviour. You need to behave yourself in such and such a manner because otherwise we are all going to be out in the long grass'?

**Mr Hazelbane**—It is just black fellow culture that if there is one sardine or one kangaroo leg or one goose to eat they all share it. If there is one house, they share it. That is just black fellow culture. That is how they are. There is no way around it.

**Mr HAASE**—Do you appreciate the dichotomy that I am trying to have you address—that all of the other motivating factors are factors that are clearly not traditional and yet we cannot break any sort of traditional barrier, as you are saying, in communicating the standard of behaviour necessary?

**Mr Hazelbane**—You say that an airstrip, sewerage and running water through a bore reticulated to a house is not traditional. But what do you expect—that these people move back to their country from Catholic run missions or welfare-days-set-up missions that are still operating, like Ngukurr?

**Mr HAASE**—Don't get me wrong: I am not referring to that; I am simply asking why they cannot be required to behave in circumstances—

**Mr Hazelbane**—Although they are non-traditional things, they cannot go back to these places and live under humpies. Times have changed since then. Outstation movement is being

encouraged so people move away from places like Port Keats that are overcrowded and move back onto their traditional homeland, instead of being in a community where you might have 12 to 15 different language groups or clans living in that one place. That is where trouble starts.

**Mr HAASE**—It's not the case with outstations though—

**Mr Hazelbane**—With places like Port Keats, trouble starts there because—

**Mr HAASE**—But it's not the case with outstations though.

**Mr Hazelbane**—No, because they are moving back onto their own traditional country.

**Mr HAASE**—But they are not wanting to be there either. They are wanting to break with tradition and move from there but not to accept a break with a tradition and accept their host's requirements as a tenant.

**Mr Hazelbane**—They have not got adequate essential services on these outstations to make it feasible for them to stay there full time.

**Mr HAASE**—I am trying to be productive for the sake of the evidence going into *Hansard* here. I am looking for suggestions from you as to how we can best tailor a communication service to these parties coming from more remote areas that make it easier for your tenants to communicate the standard of behaviour necessary for the tenancy to be maintained so you do not have the problem with physical damage, so you do not have the problems of eviction and so you have a more harmonious relationship in the community as a whole.

Does it involve some greater controls over the supply of grog and the consumption of grog? I do not know. I am no real stranger to this, I can tell you: I am the member for Kalgoorlie in Western Australia. Do you have anything to contribute?

**Mr McGuinness**—Our organisation is talking about a form of security so that we can control this activity after hours—after those working hours. Do you see where I am coming from?

**Mr HAASE**—That seems to me more like stick than carrot.

**Mr McGuinness**—A lot of these issues relate to priority housing and a lot of the tenants that receive this priority housing do not necessarily drink. We have tenants that do not drink. It comes back to this that priority housing, through health issues and whatever, relates to sorry business—family and people wanting to be near and close by in case of whatever happens.

**Mr HAASE**—Strength in numbers.

**Mr McGuinness**—Yes. They see it as being like family support. Whether they come out with one chicken leg or a full goose or a kangaroo leg, it is a contribution to their situation, that sorry business situation of that client being there.

A lot of our issues generally relate to priority housing allocations which relate to sickness and there needs to be something dealt with. Generally everyone else waits for 18 months or whatever before they get their allocation. Priority housing can happen overnight in relation to a seriously sick patient that is going to be looked after by a close family member—and they get their house and they get three months. If they behave themselves during that three-month period, they get an extension but otherwise it is limited to that three-month probation period.

**CHAIR**—And they know that?

**Mr McGuinness**—In a sense they know that. Generally the supporting parent, which I suggest it is, is not involved in alcohol or its consumption and generally tries to control that situation, but because of the sorry business associated with that, they are not the only relative of that patient.

So a lot of their problems stem from this priority housing allocation. We have talked this through with THS, and they understand it. There have been discussions and there will be more discussions with the health department in dealing with these priority housing allocations to better control these recipes for disaster where a commission house is right in the middle of a political bomb situation.

**Mr HAASE**—That is what you referred to as the ‘pepper and salt’ situation.

**Mr McGuinness**—Yes.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What about the issue of new housing? How much new government housing is being provided currently? I am talking about new structures; I am not talking about new additions to existing structures.

**Mr McGuinness**—I know that we have not as yet got any allocations in a recently established suburb.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What discussions, if any, have taken place, or has there been any indication that discussions will take place, with you or IHANT or indigenous people generally about the design of those houses?

**Mr McGuinness**—At this stage, we have not been involved in any design processes.

**Mr SNOWDON**—If I visit Lajamanu, for example, I will see relatively new housing and some renovated housing, all of which has been designed to meet the particular needs of the families and the community in which those houses are being built. There are a whole range of scenarios—for instance, wet areas outside—which help people to live in that environment. Has there been any discussion between the Northern Territory government and you about those sorts of issues?

**Mr McGuinness**—Not with us. We have been operating for only 12 months.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I just want to get the answers on the record.



**Mr McGuinness**—It does not suggest that IHANT itself has not dealt with this directly.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Can you see where I am coming from?

**Mr McGuinness**—Yes.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Your submission talks about ‘culturally appropriate housing’. I assume that we are talking about not only the design but the size of the block, its location and a whole range of issues which go towards accommodating people’s particular needs. Has there been any discussion with you about the size of blocks and where those blocks might be located for indigenous housing?

**Mr Hazelbane**—The houses that are currently under indigenous housing management are ex-Territory housing houses. We allocate them according to the waiting list or priority housing, in conjunction with Territory housing. The houses are not allocated on the basis of whether they are appropriate. A lady on McMillans Road service road has a totally disabled boy who is tube fed. It is just a normal three-bedroom housing commission house.

**Mr SNOWDON**—When they allocated that house to that person, there was no assessment of that person’s need, and they have not fixed the house up so that it accommodates that need?

**Mr McGuinness**—No, it has not been modified to suit the tube-fed patient who resides there.

**Mr SNOWDON**—In terms of the repair and maintenance budget, if you have a house which is, say, trashed for whatever reason and substantial work needs to be done to bring it back to some sort of appropriate accommodation standard, is there any discussion on how you might alter that house so it more adequately suits the particular living styles of the people who move into them?

**Mr McGuinness**—We have started negotiations with THS to look at how we deal with those situations. That is happening now and will be ongoing. Over the next month or so, we will have some positive outcome established.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What I am trying to get at is that we have heard a lot today about how people should be made to fit the house. Perhaps the house should be made to fit the person. If I were to build a house, I would design the house to meet my particular needs. The point made in your submission and by others this morning is that we have a prerequisite now for people to do a course to get into these houses, but that it appears that the houses are not designed to take into account the living styles of these people.

I am afraid the impression being given this morning is that most of the visitors who enter town are drunks. It is a statistical fact that the proportion of drinkers in the Aboriginal population is substantially less than the proportion of drinkers in the general population. I think it needs to be put on the public record that not all itinerants who come to town sit out the front of the Marrara pub—or any other pub for that matter. They could be here for legitimate reasons—women taking young kids to hospital and a whole range of other reasons—but they, too, are adversely affected by the behaviour of a small minority. I think it is worth making that point.

How important is gambling in eroding the lifestyles of these people? I am thinking of the number of gambling schools around the place. We all know where they are. Does that have an impact on the lifestyles of people in these homes? I know the dollar circles around these groups, but do you have any idea what impact this proliferation of gambling schools would have if I had a couple of young kids? Do you see where I am coming from?

**Mr Hazelbane**—I know that some people who are gambling are losing all their money. I know that happens at a couple of different places. Some people will go there with their whole pension and pay. If they are losing and their countrymen are coming in on a plane that day, they know that they can rely on them to have some money and to support them. It is just a vicious circle: people coming in with money are supporting other families who do not have money and then when their pay day comes around the situation is reversed—that is, the people who have to fly back do not have any money because they have been gambling.

**Mr SNOWDON**—How many accommodation units do you have?

**Mr McGuinness**—About 420 at the moment.

**Mr SNOWDON**—How do you classify that house; how do you get to have 400 and not 450 or 500?

**Mr McGuinness**—The more productive we are, the more will be allocated.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I want to get to the point here. This allocation of housing in the public housing stock is for indigenous people. There would be a lot of indigenous people in the housing stock—Fabian, for example—who are not classified as coming under the Indigenous Housing Association. What is the criterion that delineates the two?

**Mr McGuinness**—Eventually—say, in another 12 months—Fabian could very well be under our banner.

**Mr Hazelbane**—The Indigenous Housing Association was meant to branch out from urban into the Wadeye-Yilli Rreung region, and that will take in half a dozen to 20-odd out-stations and communities.

**Mr McGuinness**—There is nothing to say that in 12 months time we will not have 2,500 under our banner.

**Mr SNOWDON**—But they will come from IHANT funded sources as opposed to the Northern Territory public housing stock sources.

**Mr McGuinness**—No.

**Mr SNOWDON**—So these are Northern Territory public housing stock only?

**Mr McGuinness**—Urban-wise, yes.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I am talking about the expansion here. If you go beyond and into the council areas—

**Mr McGuinness**—Eventually, it will come under IHANT and THS or ATSIC.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I want to go back to the employment question. Have you had any discussions with the Top End group training company about helping with these apprentices?

**Mr McGuinness**—Yes, they are heavily involved. They provide the funding for the RTOs to provide the training. They have been part of the deal from the start, with DEWRSB and ATSIC. They all work in together.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I would like to ask you one last question, if I may. Do you have a copy of your submission?

**Mr McGuinness**—Yes.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I want to read to you item 2 of your submission. It states:

2. Ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements.

The most effective way, in the Northern Territory, would be to eliminate the tiers of funding—i.e. direct funding to the appropriate service provider ...

That is what is being argued here in your submission. In other words, instead of going through the Northern Territory government, they will go direct to IHANT, IHA or whatever. Do you think that would be a profitable thing to do? Your submission, which I understand was written in October, refers to the Victorian Aboriginal Housing Authority and the South Australian Aboriginal Housing Authority and the agreements they must have with their respective state governments. Do you know about those?

**Mr McGuinness**—No, I was not involved in that excursion. I have not seen a report that relates to that excursion. I do not know how their programs work, but generally I see it as THS provide a component of our operational funds and ATSIC provide another component.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for appearing before the committee today, and good luck with your work.

[12.42 p.m.]

**COSTELLO, Mr Kelvin, Coordinator, Larrakia Nation**

**ROMAN, Mr Curtis, Governing Committee Member, Larrakia Nation**

**RISK, Mr Bill, Native Title Officer, Larrakia Nation**

**HAIRE, Ms Katy, Research Officer, Northern Land Council**

**SULLIVAN, Mr John, Executive Member, Darwin/Daly/Wagait Region, Northern Land Council**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Commonwealth parliament. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. We have received a good submission from you, and we thank you very much for that. We understand that you wish to make some short statements about that submission.

**Mr Risk**—There are a few issues that I want to raise with regard to land rights and native title. I work within that area for the Larrakia people. As you are probably all aware, the Kenby land claim has been running for many years. It is possibly the longest one in the Australian native title and the land rights act history. We have been to the High Court and the Federal Court on numerous occasions, come back and fought through. We finally have a decision from the land commissioner which has been handed up. From our point of view we would like to see that carried through and a decision brought forward as soon as possible. From the point of view of the Larrakia people, our housing issues will be resolved and our capacity to look after our people will be much greater.

Amendments to the native title rights to negotiate have been pulled out and that has made the Larrakia's position in Darwin in regard to a city and native title issues regarding cities on Aboriginal land much harder for us to push through. However, we are going to follow through with that as well and pursue native title issues. Again, that impacts upon the Larrakia people and their means to deal with indigenous issues and with indigenous people coming into our country—itinerants, et cetera. Curtis will speak shortly on the itinerant issue.

The other matter I wanted to raise was the proposed amendments to the Land Rights Act. We would like to see some final indication on the amendments to the Land Rights Act: are they still up there; is there a possibility that there are going to be amendments, et cetera, or is it going to be knocked on the head? More importantly, if the proposed amendments were to go ahead—and I am talking about the Reeves report—I and many other Aboriginal people would want to have much more say and consultation because it is quite obvious to me and to many other Aboriginal people that we do not want the types of amendments that came out of that report. Those are the areas I would like to address in relation to Larrakia's position on land rights, native title and the itinerant issues that are wrapped up in all that and our ability to manage the responsibilities from our point of view.

**Mr Roman**—I am the representative of the Larrakia nation Darwin and Palmerston management committee for itinerants. I am currently chair of that committee. I will be talking about that. For a long time now there has been great concern in the community about indigenous itinerants. Linked with indigenous itinerants is also antisocial behaviour. Wherever there is one there is going to be the other because everything they do is in the public eye, often in the most public of places—car parks, shopping centres and other sorts of parks and recreation places. There is also great concern about the impact itinerants have on the entire community, not just on their friends, family and other relatives but also on shop owners, business owners, visitors and tourists. There is also concern about the health and wellbeing of the itinerants themselves. For example, many of these people have long-term health problems which they are carrying around with them that are not being addressed.

The NT government and ATSIC are jointly funding the study. The study will explore why people choose to live like this. It will also explore things such as their dietary patterns, what they eat, sleeping arrangements and whether they are prepared to accept alternatives. The steering committee consists of the NT government through health and housing, ATSIC, the Northern Land Council, the North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service, the Aboriginal Medical Service and its alliance with the NT and Larrakia nation. The study is going to be conducted in three stages. Stage 1 began in December last year and includes collating and analysing existing documentation and consulting with relevant organisations, individuals and groups.

The consultant has provided a preliminary report on progress thus far. Stage 2 will require the consultant to undertake qualitative work with itinerants, in conjunction with the Larrakia nation. This will include field research and visiting selected remote communities that have been identified in the study to talk to community elders and community representatives. Stage 3: the consultant will then consolidate the findings of stages 1 and 2 and prepare and conduct a workshop for the reference committee and the management committee. This will be to consider findings, drafts and recommendations. The workshop will assist in the process of agreeing to and finalising matters for the report, with specific references to pilot projects that can be developed, coordinated and initiated. It is really not just another consultancy; the project is working to bring many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations together on Larrakia land to identify solutions which are based on Aboriginal law. At the moment there is a consensus among the steering committee that a major factor in addressing the behaviour of itinerants is to have the Larrakia nation involved in the night patrol, and that is something I feel very strongly about. This concept would provide an Aboriginal solution to a community problem.

**CHAIR**—Which worked elsewhere.

**Mr Roman**—I believe this will be the only initiative that attempts to actually eliminate the problem, because it is my belief again that other programs that accommodate the problem act to the total detriment of everyone involved in the entire community, and especially the itinerant people themselves. They will become entrenched in this sort of system, and if these sorts of programs are available, other people, younger people, will also become entrenched. It is there for the taking, that sort of lifestyle.

**CHAIR**—Are you on the working party?

**Mr Roman**—I am the chair of that.

**CHAIR**—Sorry, I missed that. Thank you.

**Mr Roman**—The involvement of the Larrakia will ensure that the program has cultural significance, otherwise it will continue to be a bandaid program which only accommodates the problem. Through the study we will be able to identify if itinerants are accessing and using various services and service providers, and looking at ways to increase these services and improve these services to itinerant people. Having the Larrakia involved will be a positive for the itinerant people. Knowing that they are on someone else's country in an indigenous way will, I am sure, influence their behaviour, and that will influence their health and lifestyle while they are in Darwin. Let us not forget the Larrakia people in all of this as well. Having the Larrakia people involved in this sort of process will also do a lot to improve their psychological wellbeing, because they will be caring for their country. The make-up of the management committee is pretty unique, actually. It is encouraging, as well. As I said, it consists of the NT government with health and housing, ATSIC, the North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid, the Northern Land Council and the Larrakia nation as traditional owners, all of whom share a common goal to make the community a better, healthier, safer place for everybody, not just for the itinerants but the entire population. The study has the full support of the ATSIC Yilli Rreung Council and the full support of the Northern Land Council. So it is definitely progressing in the right direction, and the make-up of the steering committee, as I said, is encouraging.

**CHAIR**—Is there a time line?

**Mr Roman**—Time line? I think it is six months. As I said, it began in December last year. As I said, there are three stages. The first stage is collating—

**CHAIR**—July?

**Mr Roman**—Yes, July. At the moment we are in stage 2 which will involve the consultant working in conjunction with the Larrakia nation to visit selected remote communities, and also itinerants who are in Darwin at the moment.

**Mr Risk**—It is a confidential report at this stage.

**CHAIR**—That is fine; we will respect that.

**Mr Sullivan**—I just want say almost the same things that have been echoing all the morning, which have been education, health and housing. Aboriginal people have the worst outcomes in Australia. Mostly, Northern Territory Aboriginal people are very low on the list when different fundings are considered. Funding should be direct to Aboriginal organisations. The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act review is still up in the air. A lot of us feel that it should be thrown away—discarded. Not even little bits of it should be taken out—it should just be discarded completely. The Native Title Act amendments took away—

**CHAIR**—Just in fairness to you I will clarify that. You do not mean that you want the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act repealed—you want to keep that, don't you?

**Mr Sullivan**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—That is fine, I just did not want any misunderstanding on that.

**Mr Sullivan**—I am talking about the Reeves report.

**CHAIR**—You want that discarded.

**Mr Sullivan**—Yes—not even little bits taken out of it.

**CHAIR**—I understand what you mean.

**Mr Sullivan**—Some amendments that were made to the Native Title Act took away the rights to claim in towns: people like the Larrakia people could not claim a town area. Now they want a stolen generation claim for their loss of land and family. They have been seeking compensation but their claims have not been recognised through the courts. I feel that the government should look into compensation and repatriation, not the Northern Land Council or the other Aboriginal bodies. It should be a government thing.

**CHAIR**—John, are you a member of Curtis's working party?

**Mr Sullivan**—No, I live on the outstations on the other side of the Daly River.

**CHAIR**—All right; fair enough.

**Ms Haire**—I was not going to say anything. I am just here in case you had any tricky questions about our submission.

**CHAIR**—Thank you: we would never ask tricky questions.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Bearing in mind that we have only got a short space of time, I will just ask two questions which are important that the committee ask. Is it right that Paul Memmott is doing the study?

**Mr Sullivan**—Yes.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What is the general view about the question of town camps? How many legal town camps are there on Larrakia land and how many illegal town camps do you think there might be?

**Mr Roman**—As new people come into town, their daily routines assist them in exploring the city or the town. They are always coming up with new places that accommodate their numbers and keeps them away from other groups whom they may not have friendly relations with. That changes also with the seasons—the dry and the wet. It is changing all the time.

**Mr SNOWDON**—But there are permanent town camps, aren't there?

**Mr Roman**—Yes. There are three permanent town camps.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Where are they?

**Mr Risk**—There is one down here at One Mile Creek.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What has happened to that?

**Mr Risk**—There is still talk from the Northern Territory government of developing that area and moving the Aboriginal people out. They are standing up quite strongly and objecting to being removed from that area. The Larrakia have associations with that area.

The other one is out at Knuckey Lagoon. Down here at One Mile are predominantly long-term residents from Daly River region. Knuckey is long term residents from Knuckey, and there is also a mix of people from regions scattered across the Daly. The other one is out at 15 Mile near the Howard Springs turn off. That particular camp has changed its role probably over the last 25 years. The Maningrida people moved around in the bush in that area. Through the ADF, the Aboriginal Development Foundation, 15 Mile was set up predominantly for the Maningrida people. They were moved out. There was political pushing around and moving people out and other people moving in. There was quite a large group of WA people there at one stage. Those are the three main ones.

**Mr SNOWDON**—They have all got infrastructures?

**Mr Risk**—They have all got infrastructures. I am not happy about the infrastructures that are on those communities. They are built with a view for the houses to be there for a long time. They are built with heavy-duty steel and arc mesh and stuff. There are no toilets inside them. There are communal toilets where people have to go out. If you want to have a look at housing while you are in Darwin and have a talk to Bernie Valedian, I am sure Warren will assist you to get the right authority to go in there so you can have a look at the housing. In this day and age I think it is quite atrocious. They are open. They have a little bedroom area at one end and arc mesh all the way around. When it rains they have to put up tarps to stop the rain coming right through. The kitchens are really not kitchens at all. They mostly operate with little stoves that they buy themselves. They buy a stove and there is a bench like this. They are very basic. Yet I was told it costs in the vicinity of \$140,000 or \$150,000 to build these little two-bedroom shed things.

**CHAIR**—How old are they?

**Mr Risk**—The particular houses that I was talking about costing \$140,000 or \$150,000 were built eight or nine years ago.

**Mr SNOWDON**—What about the conditions in the itinerant camps? What exists there?

**Mr Risk**—They really do not have any superstructure. If you would like to look at it from the NT government's point of view, they are illegal camps. They basically live underneath the blue poly tarp structures. If they are able to stay for any length of time where they feel comfortable they will scrounge bits of tin and build little shelters there. They have to walk for water. Quite



often they pick an area where there is water within walking distance, either at a pipeline or at public toilets along the beaches. They will find somewhere where they can at least go and use the public facilities that are there. They quite often get blamed for illegal activities that go on like breaking into cars along beaches, et cetera. Whether they are or not—they say they are not a part of that—that is another culture of people to the itinerants who work at the beaches.

**Mr LLOYD**—In relation to your recommendation No. 5 that a land acquisition program be established specifically for people of the stolen generation, firstly, who do you suggest would fund that land acquisition and, secondly, how would you identify where people come from and which particular land you would be looking at trying to compensate them with?

**Ms Haire**—The recommendation needs to be seen in the context of our overall recommendations about the stolen generation. The issue of the funding being kept separate from the native title and the land rights act funding is in recognition of the origin and the context of the stolen generations situation. That is, it is a result of Commonwealth government policies which were in place in the Northern Territory until the early 1970s. As a direct result of those policies, large numbers of people—as Barbara talked about earlier—have been separated from their families. Many of them have lost their opportunity to learn their language and their culture, which is an essential part of being able to claim land rights or native title rights. The view of the Northern Land Council is that the great loss and suffering of these people needs to be recognised and compensated by the government. However, the funding for this needs to be seen as separate to other indigenous funding—it is a response to a specific issue.

We are also not talking simply about compensation. That is one of the simplifications that is always made on this in relation to the stolen generation. The need for an apology and recognition of the issue is, of course, just as important. We have also argued along the same lines as Lowitja O'Donoghue: there needs to be some kind of tribunal or alternative dispute resolution process put in place so that people such as Peter Gunner and Lorna Cubillo do not continue to go through these tragic and terrible court cases where they are forced to relive memories of abuse, psychological damage and so on. Australia as a nation needs to come up with an appropriate and compassionate way of dealing with the problems of the stolen generation rather than through the adversarial court system. So compensation would be one facet that would result from such a system. Sorry, I have forgotten your second question, Mr Lloyd.

**Mr LLOYD**—How would that land be decided? How do you identify where people believe they came from or where the land would be situated?

**Ms Haire**—In terms of identifying where people come from, in the Northern Territory the land councils, and in other parts of Australia many of the rep bodies, are now in a position to provide people with a lot of information based on the information we have gathered as part of land claims and native title claims, and we can assist people to trace their genealogies. In many cases where records have been lost, however—and where people were landed up at Croker Island or down at the Bungalow, not even knowing the name of the place they came from—that kind of thing is no longer possible. Barbara was referring to people in that situation as those people who really have nowhere else to go. In terms of reparation of land, the decisions over that would need to be made in consultation with the stolen generation members themselves and the traditional owners of the land where those people now live. For example, stolen generations

in Darwin now live on Larrakia land, so a process as part of the dispute tribunal would need to be developed.

**Mr HAASE**—What role do you see the ILC playing in that? I was under the impression that the ILC would have directly addressed that specific recommendation.

**Ms Haire**—I do not believe that it is a specific aspect of the ILC's charter at the moment, although I imagine that with some additional funding and perhaps an amendment to their goals that could be one way of addressing it. At the moment, I do not think addressing the stolen generations issue is part of their function.

**Mr HAASE**—They address the procurement of land for those groups of Aboriginal people who would have no chance under native title legislation. I would have thought that the generation that you referred to would have been addressed or funded by that particular legislation.

**Ms Haire**—Along with many others. But the point that we are making here is that the stolen generations are a specific group with particular needs.

**Mr HAASE**—So it should be extra to the \$43 million a year?

**Ms Haire**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, Northern Land Council. It was good to meet you all again—we have met some of you before. I wish you well with your work—and Curtis particularly, because that project you are unfolding will be a very important one. Thank you.

[1.10 p.m.]

**ANDERSON, Ms Patricia, Executive Secretary, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory**

**GALLACHER, Mr James, Executive Officer, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Commonwealth parliament. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Before we ask questions, would you like to make an opening statement? We have, of course, received your submission.

**Ms Anderson**—Yes, we would like to make a statement. We would like to table—

**CHAIR**—Could I ask you to pause for a moment? I need to seek advice on a technical matter. We have received what we think is a summary submission.

**Mr Gallacher**—I think we called it an interim submission.

**CHAIR**—Do you propose to give us a written one now?

**Mr Gallacher**—No more than what you have there.

**CHAIR**—If you could just pause for a moment, we will have to authorise this. It is ordered that the submission tabled by the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory be accepted as evidence to the inquiry into the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and be authorised for publication. I understand that you are going to talk to that submission.

**Mr Gallacher**—As you will appreciate, when you appear before a lot of committees, you start off with the submission that you hope you are going to add to and then unfortunately the deadline descends on you. That is what has happened in this case.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. We appreciate the submission you have sent to us.

**Ms Anderson**—To add to that, we would like to table an information package which tells you all about AMSANT so we do not need to spend valuable time now taking you through that. I will give you a brief outline.

**CHAIR**—Do you have some more?

**Ms Anderson**—Yes, I have some more. I will give you all a copy. Every year, we have what is called a 'We AMSANT.' We have a health of summit and 200 or 300 people come to a bush

camp. We have held three so far where Aboriginal people set priorities. These meetings do not comprise just our membership; they are open to all people across the Northern Territory. We have had three health summits to date and I would like to table these documents as well because many of the health priority issues are detailed in them and they show how we, as an organisation, have dealt with them. I would like to table these four documents.

**CHAIR**—It is ordered that the following documents, *Together for our health* AMSANT information package September 2000; *AMSANT Aboriginal health summit 4-8 September 2000*; *Banatjarl Aboriginal health summit* AMSANT 2-6 August 1999 and Central Australian Aboriginal health summit 25-28 October entitled *Our health in our hands* be accepted as exhibits and received as evidence to the inquiry into the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**Ms Anderson**—Thank you, Mr Chairman. Briefly, just to get some information about us, we are a peak advocacy body for the Aboriginal community controlled medical services in the Northern Territory. We have 15 member organisations throughout the Northern Territory and they range in different sizes from large services in Alice Springs, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, which is 25 years old, to very small services at Kintore and all the way down the highway, including Danila Dilba, of which I am the CEO here in Darwin, and the large organisation at Miwatj. So we make up AMSANT.

AMSANT has been quite influential, we think, in changing the national agenda, for a whole range of reasons. We were instrumental in lobbying for the transfer of indigenous health back from ATSIC to the Commonwealth, which was controversial then, and I think it probably still is in some quarters. Nevertheless, we were very clear on why we did that. It was not a criticism of ATSIC but rather that indigenous health, which should be a concern of the nation state, was marginalised and subsisting on a very small budget and away from where the main health dollars were. Also we did not have access to cabinet or to our own minister. AMSANT was very instrumental in lobbying for that return of indigenous health to the Commonwealth.

**CHAIR**—Congratulations, it was a fantastic effort on your part. Good.

**Ms Anderson**—Thank you. We have helped to pioneer a joint needs based primary health care planning process between governments and the community sector. Our backbone, our whole reason for being, is Aboriginal community control, which is a health issue. We believe, like all of the AMSs in Australia, that the way to improve Aboriginal health is to return the decision making to the community and how it defines itself as a community.

We have negotiated with the Commonwealth and the NT government, as well as ATSIC, and AMSANT are the main stakeholders in this new planning process. The major breakthrough has been the Primary Access Health Care Program, which is a method of combining Territory and Commonwealth indigenous funds. That money will stay in, but supplementing these funds is a grant from Medicare, and where we have a formula 1½ times to four times \$350 per head, per Aboriginal person in Australia. That will come to those states where there has been regional and state based planning. We have completed that process here in the Northern Territory, and we have on the table the Central Australian indigenous health planning study and also a similar one for the Top End. So, in terms of funding us under that formula, we in the Northern Territory are ready to go, and it will deliver up about \$1,400 per Aboriginal person of new money for the

Northern Territory. This will be spent on delivering quality comprehensive primary health care on site where people live, and that is a fairly important point, which I will come to in terms of the purposes of your study.

We have collaborated with government to develop these planning processes, like I say, involving the major stakeholders, ATSIC, the Commonwealth and Territory governments. We all sit at a planning body called the Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Forum, which was set up under the Northern Territory Aboriginal health framework agreement. These agreements exist with those same stakeholders across Australia. The health forum is not a funding agency but rather it is a body where we can think, act and plan strategically in a coordinated way, which also has not happened before. The whole purpose of having these planning processes is so as we can target priority areas and distribute these across the Territory. AMSANT has services both in the remote areas and also in the urban centres, so we are dealing with both groups of people.

We believe that AMSs have contributed across the country to providing health leadership. There are many indigenous people across the nation working in this health area who have considerable experience and expertise, to the effect that we were able to change the national agenda and, for the first time ever, negotiate with the Commonwealth to have a proper funding base under the terms of the primary health care access program. That had not existed before.

**CHAIR**—Is this with Michael Wooldridge?

**Ms Anderson**—Yes. He has been instrumental in this, although a lot of our thinking is now seven years old. We started thinking along this way at the time of the transfer. We had to come up with all the arguments why that should happen. We were already thinking in terms of having a sound recurrent base that would stand alone and be independent and apart from the vagaries of whoever was in Parliament House. If it comes out of Medicare and if a particular government wants to change that, they have to fight with everybody, not just a bunch of mad blackfellas. It is to make it sound and secure, and we have always wanted to do that. It has been a seven-year process to get to the primary health care access model and formula. We started this thinking seven years ago—in fact when Carmen Lawrence was minister for health. Michael Wooldridge, when he came in, to his great credit, picked up what was already sitting in Carmel's office.

**CHAIR**—He took it out of the basket and persuaded the states to come on board?

**Ms Anderson**—Yes, through the framework agreements. These are not contracts, they are rather like gentlemen's agreements: they work only if all the parties want to cooperate. That might seem longwinded, but it is important that you understand what happens here in terms of this resourcing, because it does impact on people's movement, their health and what have you. When I came in, I heard someone talking about the impact of people's mobility on urban services. All of our urban centres, not just the AMSs but all of us, are under considerable pressure from the impact of people coming into centres and staying longer and longer. Often, it is as a result of people needing to come into centres for longer stays to have access to very sophisticated medical technology like renal dialysis, for instance. People come in and stay and then their family come in, and that puts extra pressure and strain on all of our urban services. But let me say up front: these are free towns and people can come and go as they please but, for the purposes of your inquiry, it does impact on urban services.

However, even with all of this, governments are still not doing enough. There are lots of myths about the money that goes to indigenous organisations, and they are myths, because a lot of it is taken at various levels before it gets to the ground where it is needed. There needs to be a major injection of funding into Aboriginal affairs across the board. Governments, unfortunately, concentrate on ideas about assimilation and reconciliation and definitions of Aboriginal identity, and they continue to be manipulated to suit a political analysis that undermines self-determination. Although we have done all this work, we are constantly having to justify our existence and constantly having to say that we need to make our own decisions. Despite a lot of international evidence, the social determinants of health have now been taken up by all and sundry. There is more going on in indigenous health, not just poverty and marginalisation. A lot of issues are happening there. I will stop now so that we can have some dialogue.

**CHAIR**—I know that you both are conscious that, including questions, the committee will adjourn at 1.40 p.m.—we will have no choice; it has to adjourn because of other things. Thank you for being so cooperative, too, by the way.

**Mr Gallacher**—I am not sure to what extent the NLC and Larrakia people got to talk to you about it, but we find one thing difficult and we want to point out to the committee the frustration of it. Curtis Roman referred to the itinerant project they are now working on. AMSANT is a part of the consortium of people who are working on it. We have put in a lot of long hours, trying to do the hard yards to examine why it is that people come to town, what happens to them when they come to town, why things break down when they come to town, and so on.

The difficulty for us was that, in the midst of that work, the Northern Territory government produced an idea and then followed it up with some paperwork, which, I understand, largely went to the media. It was called a public order and antisocial conduct act, and it proceeded to go through and look at all these issues but in a much more political way. It is called an act, but it should actually be called a bill, as you would know. It purports to give authority to police to move people on where they are creating no disturbance. It is just a very political response to this work that we thought we were sitting down to do with the federal and NT governments, ATSIC and all the other agencies, including us at AMSANT with the Larrakia nation and so on.

This is a problem that I have been involved in dealing with in Darwin since 1976—trying to work out what to do about people who come to town, and what the consequences of their actions are in town. To me, having worked on and off on that since 1976, this was the first real effort that was being put into this. And then to get this response from the Northern Territory government—this draft act or whatever it is—has really affected the work that the people want to do on the committee, because it takes your authority out of it and your ability to work on it and so on.

And that is just an area of frustration for us that we wanted to point out to this committee, because everybody, I think, recognises across the board that there are difficulties in dealing with people who come to town and misbehave. Everybody has acknowledged that and wants to do something about it. This political response is not the way to do it. That is our view.

**Mr HAASE**—I am intrigued by one thing. You made a statement about how now ATSIC and the Commonwealth government are funding health. If it is a better model now that the funding

is seen to be more direct and more appropriate, and it is run by AMSANT, I am wondering why you need to have ATSIC funding or ATSIC involvement.

**Ms Anderson**—With respect, ATSIC does not fund anything. All moneys for Aboriginal health were returned to the Commonwealth. ATSIC sits there at the table and is involved in all these processes because it is the largest indigenous organisation in the nation, but they also have the role, in terms of the work that we do, of looking after environmental health. They also have an advocacy role, to make sure that the rest of us, AMSANT included, are doing what we said we were going to do. So they perform a very important role within that four-way partnership, if you like. But all the money that we are talking about does not come from ATSIC at all. It actually comes from the Commonwealth, through Medicare.

**Mr HAASE**—I thought that was the case and I am sorry. I noted that you had involved ATSIC as a key player.

**Ms Anderson**—Yes. They need to be at the table because we need them to come along with us.

**Mr HAASE**—I think the rest of your submission is self-explanatory. Keep up the good work.

**Ms Anderson**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—I guess I could ask you for a bit of a progress score since the agreements were finally implemented, based on your excellent work over many years. How do you think we are going? Are we making any progress?

**Ms Anderson**—To be frank, we are concerned at the amount of money that is being spent on the petrol and what have you, because we see our fee cap money disappearing. That is a concern and we are writing to Dr Wooldridge about that.

**CHAIR**—Apart from that, Australia-wide, is there more realisation by governments collectively that they must work in partnership and empower people at community level? Do you sense that that is starting?

**Ms Anderson**—That is really hard to answer; take the Northern Territory as an example. We have done seven years of this work, but it took the NT government two years to sign the framework agreement, and it was not a contract, it was a gentlemen's agreement. I am not sure why they hesitated or procrastinated. The NT Aboriginal Health Forum works to a point. There is still a bunch of stuff which Jamie can give you specific details on. While we are sitting at the table we read in the paper about something going on out there or someone doing something else, so it is very difficult to round up everybody—mainly the governments. In the Northern Territory we have quite a good relationship with ATSIC, which we have had to work at really hard, but that is working okay. It is usually the governments that go off the table, if you like, and start doing things outside and we have to do quite a lot of work to catch them back. We often feel like a blue heeler trying to get everybody back to the table.

**CHAIR**—Generally speaking, when the committee go back to Canberra should we signal to the parliament and to Dr Wooldridge, the current minister, that he should be encouraged in the process that he is trying to achieve?

**Ms Anderson**—Absolutely. It is a good formula; it is going to work through. The example Jamie has given you is a good one of how it often works only to a point, but involving indigenous people in decision making—and we have said this in the substance misuse inquiry—is what needs to happen. People need to sit down and work through issues in a constructive way so we can get to an outcome that will work.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. I do not think you will find a quarrel from any member of this committee on that point.

**Mr SNOWDON**—How are your services impacted upon by such things as tuberculosis? I have in mind the high incidence of tuberculosis at Maningrida. Presumably you see clients from Maningrida who come into town. What interaction do you have with the Maningrida Territory Health Service that is provided there, and have you had any discussion with them about how you might monitor patients of theirs as they come into town?

**Ms Anderson**—We have not specifically done that, and that issue probably needs to come to the health forum table. We monitor it fairly well here in town. There is an increase in tuberculosis across the country. It is largely due to overcrowding and poor housing, which is the situation at Maningrida. It is a public health issue that has to be dealt with in a constructive way—once again, with all people sitting down and working through the issue. But the issue at Maningrida is to do with housing and overcrowding. There are some other issues at Maningrida, in terms of getting their own health board up and running, but that is community business. In the meantime, we have this outbreak, really, and THS and the other agencies have a responsibility to sit down with the people and sort it out. Of course, building houses on remote communities is, as you know, very expensive, but it is that infrastructure that is needed—roads, airstrips, water. Some communities still do not have proper running water, in this day and age. It is all of those issues and then complementing them with access to quality primary health care on site where people live. All the agencies have to be interlocked and interknitted so it can happen.

**Mr Gallacher**—There is a couple of other things about the situation at Maningrida worth mentioning. Tuberculosis is a notifiable disease—if any of the Aboriginal Medical Services staff believe someone has tuberculosis then there is a set of protocols about notification.

**CHAIR**—The committee was counselled because we were exposed.

**Mr Gallacher**—That is happening. To the extent that that might be an extra burden on services, that is the case, but those are the extra burdens that the larger urban or town based services pick up on behalf of remote living people. That happens across the board, not only in tuberculosis, but in a number of areas.

**Mr SNOWDON**—Do you have any data on the cost effectiveness of providing services through Danila Dilba as opposed to other public health services, such as a hospital?



**Mr Gallacher**—Not specifically. We have been asked this before. As you would appreciate, that is a tremendous exercise to go into. We would need to see our services funded to do that. What we have said before in answer to that question is that people vote with their feet, and if you want to talk about the effectiveness of Danila Dilba, they hold, for instance—and congress in Alice Springs is the same—17,000 files.

**Mr SNOWDON**—I am conscious that congress actually did this exercise and, from memory, I think they demonstrated clearly that the cost per patient was a lot less than in the public hospitals. I wanted to make that point. I also wanted to raise the question of how you service itinerant people who come into town—who live in mobile camps, effectively.

**Ms Anderson**—Most of the AMSs down the highway—the hub centres, if you like—do provide mobile services. We go to all the camps, the itinerant camps as well as the more stable camps—all the camps that were talked about by the Larrakia nation. We service those every day with two health workers, plus a doctor once a week. We are fairly familiar with the moving camps as well, which are seasonal, as Billy Risk so well described. Housing is not really very good, at all, in the permanent town camps and we have been dealing with the Aboriginal Development Foundation. All the things that Billy said are true, and there is no hot water. We have done a study working with the people at 15-mile camp about getting laundry facilities. There is scabies and other skin infections, so it is really complex.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, both, for your attendance today.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Lloyd**):

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

**Committee adjourned at 1.37 p.m.**