



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**

WEDNESDAY, 20 JUNE 2001

CANBERRA

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**  
**Wednesday, 20 June 2001**

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

**Members in attendance:** Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Mr Lieberman, Mr Quick, Mr Wakelin

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

**WITNESSES**

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**Committee met at 4.13 p.m.**

**CHAIR**—I open this inquiry into the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As you know, the committee began this inquiry at the request of the then minister, the Hon. Senator John Herron. The new minister, the Hon. Philip Ruddock, has also indicated his enthusiasm for the committee to continue its inquiry. The inquiry will assist the government to continue its introduction and development of practical measures to help indigenous people. We have been consulting as widely as possible. Today's hearing is one of a number that we have conducted in Canberra, and around the country as well. We are very keen to hear from interested parties, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in a spirit of cooperation. The hearing is open to the public. A transcript will be made available. If anyone would like further details about the inquiry or transcripts, please ask any of the committee staff at the hearing and I am sure they will be able to assist you.

[4.15 p.m.]

**BENNETT, Ms Barbara, Assistant Secretary, New Apprenticeships Branch, Training and Youth Division, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs**

**BUCKSKIN, Mr Peter, Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Education, Schools Division, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs**

**FORREST, Ms Julia, Director, Policy and Coordination Section, Indigenous Education Branch, Schools Division, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs**

**GREER, Mr Anthony John, First Assistant Secretary, Schools Division, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs**

**KARMEL, Dr Tom, Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Division, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs**

**CHAIR**—I welcome officers from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, some of whom we have had the pleasure of meeting before. Although the committee does not require you to speak under oath, you should understand 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 the parliament.

I thank you all for the excellent submission that you made available, which is part of the public record and has already been published. I appreciate that very much. There are a number of questions that colleagues will want to ask you. However, you may like to make an opening statement or provide us with some additional information that you might have available.

**Mr Greer**—I will make a short opening statement. We are happy to be here today to appear before the committee as representatives of the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs covering the divisions of schools, higher education, and training and youth. As you have mentioned, Dr Kemp forwarded to the committee the department's submission on 6 November last for the inquiry's consideration. That document details programs and responds in detail to issues raised in the committee's terms of reference.

Whilst the constitutional responsibility for education rests with the states and territories, the Commonwealth contributes to the education and training of all Australians, including indigenous Australians, through a range of programs and particularly equity programs. As outlined in the submission, eligibility for the Commonwealth's mainstream and special indigenous education programs is not determined by geographic location. Indigenous students enrolled in accredited education programs delivered by registered education providers are all eligible for assistance, irrespective of where they live. Similarly, funding for preschools, vocational education and training and Abstudy is provided across the country. With the exception of funding under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program—our IESIP program—and the Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness programs—our ASSPA programs—it is not possible to accurately or readily determine the quantum of program funding that is allocated for education on urban dwelling indigenous Australians as a discrete cohort, nor to provide participation data accurately in that way. We are happy to elaborate on issues that

may be raised in the report and to address any questions that the committee may have in relation to indigenous education and training.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. We have another witness coming today and the House is sitting, so time will be limited. I anticipate that colleagues may not get to ask all the questions today that we would like to ask. I wonder if I can foreshadow that, in that case, we will write to you with any remaining questions and ask if you would be kind enough to respond to them.

**Mr Greer**—Certainly. And if there are any questions we do not have the answers to here we would be happy to take those on notice.

**CHAIR**—Generally speaking, my questions will be in the context of what I am about to say, which is that I appreciate and welcome the strategic direction that you have been pursuing; your attempts to measure outcomes and to monitor progress are very welcome things. I think my colleagues will tell you in their own words about the importance we attach to making these programs work and getting them going. As a committee, we had the pleasure of visiting the mine site at Anaconda in Western Australia as an early part of this inquiry. We met the people involved in the training of some young Aboriginal men there, and we were very impressed with the spring in their step. It was a wonderful experience for us to meet these young Aboriginal people who were involved in a training program and were very respected in the mining activities around there and were part of the team. We have, however, been told by people involved in developing that training program—which is, in a way, a pacesetter—that they are a bit frustrated, because they find that the current programs are not flexible enough to meet their needs. Are you familiar with the Anaconda program of training, and would you like to make some comments to me? By all means, take some of them on notice to come back on, if you wish to?

**Ms Bennett**—I have received some information from our Western Australian state office, and that brings me up to date with some of the issues that I understand may have been raised or are occurring with the John Forrest Vocational Education and Training Centre. Is that the one you are referring to?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Ms Bennett**—As Mr Greer pointed out, the balance between the Commonwealth's responsibilities and its capacity to contribute and those of the states does mean that at times it takes longer to try to integrate that level of support. Speaking from the New Apprenticeships area, we run a program that seeks a set of outcomes to be eligible for financial assistance. Those outcomes are that the new apprentices are participating in a New Apprenticeship pathway, that they are doing a training package which is recognised by their state and which delivers a quality of training that is part of that national system and which has the right on-the-job and off-the-job components. It must be, as I said, a New Apprenticeship.

The John Forrest Vocational Education and Training Centre is not particularly interested in that more formal pathway. It is looking at skills that are specific to their enterprise, which is to be commended. It is understandable that they want to put their efforts toward meeting the needs of their particular employment opportunities and what their business is doing. So it has been really difficult for us to try to find a way through with them and to say, 'It is really important to

us that the participants get a nationally recognised structured training that relates to New Apprenticeships in my area.' I understand that there have been discussions with the Western Australian government about how they can provide assistance for the VET sector more broadly.

You will notice in the submission we have provided to you that under the vocational education and training pages it lists the level of money that we provide specifically for the indigenous and for the disadvantaged and also some of the other options in the broader VET sector. That includes things like skill centre funding. In addition to that, the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business works with indigenous communities for employment outcomes. The tension that exists with the John Forrest Vocational Education and Training Centre at the moment is that they are trying to offer 18-week short courses that give people skills specific for their enterprise, and they want assistance to establish a training centre—or further funding that allows them to deliver those courses. Is that what you understand as well?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Ms Bennett**—Our objective is that these training contracts are longer term, have a higher skill level and fit within the nationally agreed standards. So we are caught between where I am actually allowed to spend money under the appropriation that we have.

**Mr QUICK**—But, with due respect, somebody should take the initiative. Out of the \$920 million in recurrent and infrastructure funding, if there are a dozen players or half-a-dozen players, surely there is something there for innovation. With the Anaconda example, actually no-one is falling through the gap. Whether it is DETYA, DEWRSB, ATSIIC, the state government or VET, surely someone has to say, 'We will run with it,' rather than looking for excuses and saying it does not fit within the guidelines?

**Ms Bennett**—I do not in any way disagree with that but, as you would understand, there is accountability about how money is spent. This has been an issue that has been going on with this organisation for some time. My briefing suggests that they have been trying to negotiate some way through this since 1999. I want to make it clear that there is no unwillingness to provide support, it is just that we need some sets of outcomes. On the surface, I think you are right that this organisation is doing very good things, but they are not—

**Mr QUICK**—It is one of the few organisations in Australia that is actually employing indigenous people in huge numbers. It is not only employing them; it is paying them wages that they only dream of in the rest of Australia and giving them skills that they can translate not only to other places in Western Australia but to every other state in Australia. They can even take them overseas. Yet we are pussyfooting around saying, 'Is it a state government or a Commonwealth government responsibility?' It is ridiculous.

**Mr Greer**—I think what Ms Bennett was saying is absolutely right in respect of the formal parameters of the New Apprenticeship system. Notwithstanding that, in the recent budget a package of \$10 million over four years was announced. That starts from 2001 and runs through to 2004, picking up, in the broad, the very successful Polly Farmer type model in Karratha, which is essentially a community compact between a major mining company in that area and



the schools and the community there. We will be looking at having a series of those piloted around the country over the next four years. I can certainly undertake to the committee—

**Mr QUICK**—With due respect, why do we keep having to pilot everything? If someone went through every Commonwealth government department—and the same thing happened when we were in power, so I am not just saying it is the other side's fault—

**CHAIR**—I think Mr Quick is referring to the Labor Party.

**Mr QUICK**—Yes, I am. There are pilots everywhere. When you set up a pilot, you build up an expectation that there is going to be recurrent funding, and that is usually not the case. Anaconda has world's best practice training for indigenous people, giving them higher skills in a very competitive environment. Those guys do not hand out money for nothing. They set the bar very high and, from my experience, having visited it a couple of times, they have fantastic outcomes. Why do we need another pilot?

**Mr Greer**—I am just saying that the government has made a decision that it will conduct a series of pilots over the next four years in every state and territory. We are in the process of rolling those out, looking for potential opportunities, starting from the next financial year—next month. My undertaking to the committee is to look at the Anaconda model and see if it has synergies with the Polly Farmer model that the government has recently announced. If those are there, it could well form one of the sites. The purpose of pilots, of course, is to demonstrate their workability and sustainability and ensure that we can, perhaps, roll them into the mainstream.

**Mr QUICK**—But, rather than trying to fit it into the Polly Farmer model, why can't it be a model? Throughout Australia, we have huge mining concerns in close proximity to large indigenous communities. Off the top of my head, I could probably name a dozen that I have seen. It has a set of guidelines, the training program is nationally accredited and it has fantastic outcomes. All it wants, basically, is someone to put forward a model that satisfies the state government and the Commonwealth. Basically, they are doing it on their own, and they are funding it themselves.

**Mr Greer**—What I am suggesting may be a bit outside the square or at the edges of the square, but it is within the context of the policy that the government has set in relation to the Polly Farmer initiative, or to that broad model initiative, which, in the broad, talks about linking up significant industry sectors—a mining company or some such—with the local schools and the local communities, entering into a compact and seeing that through. If we can find sufficient flexibility in that, we may be able to do something with the Anaconda project. My undertaking to the committee is to fully explore that.

**Mr QUICK**—From my understanding of Ms Bennett's part response, you guys get in touch with the Western Australian office: have any of the first assistant secretaries ever gone out to Anaconda and spent some time there, as the committee did, actually seeing how remote the place is and trying to figure out a simple solution? In my mind, that would be one way of resolving the issue rather quickly, rather than relying on second- and third-hand information. Do the first assistant secretaries ever get out to those places and see what is going on first hand? If they do, why hasn't anything happened?

**Mr Buckskin**—Mr Chairman, when Senator Vanstone was our minister, she did travel.

**Mr QUICK**—No, I am talking about the first assistant secretaries. You are the guys who are providing the information to the minister.

**Mr Buckskin**—The people that went with her to work with these particular companies were assistant secretaries. Anaconda is one of the many mining companies which are part of a working group chaired by the Secretary to DEWRSB, Dr Peter Shergold. That group is working with a whole range of companies, including Rio Tinto—which includes Hamersley Iron and other companies in the coal mining business on the east coast—addressing these issues associated with training. We are part of that inter-departmental committee. That group is certainly raising, as you have had raised with you, the issue of the inflexibility of the current apprenticeship and traineeship system, as they see it. But that is ongoing work. This year, we have had two meetings of that particular committee. The first assistant secretary, Miss Di Hawgood, from that particular department, has been intimately involved in working with these types of companies and visiting these places, to get a better appreciation of needs in the training area.

**Mr QUICK**—I have just looked through the submission, and I do not know how the system works. I like to think that I am a reasonably intelligent person. I do not know how indigenous people cope. There are so many acronyms: AEP, IESIP, AJEWs, NIELNS, IEDA, ASSPA, VEGAS, ATAS, ESL-ILSS, IYPI, ATSIPTAC. That is not even taking into account some of the Commonwealth things like VET and ANTA and MCEETYA and all the rest of it. How do they all work to come up with a model that, for example, Anaconda can try to cope with? Each of those 14 or so acronyms I mentioned probably has its own set of guidelines and its own little sub-bureaucracy. This is like a Bruce Petty cartoon. Looking at the linkages through all those with what Anaconda trying to do, can't you understand their frustration. They have a model, it works and they are employing over 100 indigenous people, but they do not fit within the box.

**Mr Greer**—Regarding the first part of the question, a lot of those programs work, and they work very well.

**Mr QUICK**—But how do they all link together?

**Mr Greer**—They link together quite well. A lot of them are subsets of broader strategies. For instance, the ASSPA program is essentially a program element that is directed predominantly at engaging or involving indigenous parents with their local schools. That program assists over 3,800 ASSPA committees around this country in engaging indigenous parents with their schools.

**Mr QUICK**—How does that work for the kids at Port Augusta high school, for example, where there is a large indigenous population? How does the link from Port Augusta high school into whatever TAFE or further education there is available work? As an ex-schoolteacher, I am about concrete examples. You can have all the acronyms under the sun but, for an indigenous person living out at Davenport, what does it mean for that family and for the Port Augusta high school? They are trying to cope with poor retention rates, the closure of the Commonwealth railways and the downsizing of manufacturing and the like. What do all those acronyms mean for indigenous people looking for work in, say, Port Augusta?

**Mr Buckskin**—Port Augusta high school would have a very significant allocation of money under the ASSPA program, because it has a very large student population. In terms of the IESIP program, we have multimillion dollar bilateral agreements with state and territory education systems. Our money flows through the relevant state education department to schools like Port Augusta high school, Wilson primary school and Carlton primary school—I think the children from Davenport mainly go to Carlton primary school which also has a very large ASSPA committee. We also have a bilateral agreement with the VET area, so Port Augusta TAFE would also benefit from the IESIP multimillion dollar agreement which we would have bilaterally with that group.

**Mr QUICK**—Could you provide this committee with details of the various funding streams to indigenous people in, for example, the Port Augusta area? Obviously, you will not have those at your fingertips but, having read all those acronyms out, I would be interested to see how many funding streams there are into the indigenous populations in Port Augusta, at the primary and high school level as well as at the further education stage. I know that when we go and visit them, I will be very surprised if I hear them say, ‘We don’t want any more money, we have got so much, and we are happy with our retention rates, and we are happy with the school-to-work transition for our indigenous young people.’ I would be amazed by that but, if you can provide us with that information, we can see, when we do go and visit the place, what is going in through the various funding streams on the one hand, and we can then say to them, ‘Why are we doing it this way, and what deficiencies are there?’

**Mr Greer**—Whilst we would not be able to provide you with the detail you want of funding streams going in to a particular school, what we can provide you with is details of the funding streams going into particular state or territory education authorities. We have moved from an inputs control to an outcomes focus, and we are into our second quadrennium on that. That means that we have taken our hands off tracking every dollar that goes to every local provider and so forth—

**Mr QUICK**—Well, who does know? Does the state office know?

**Mr Greer**—Not our state office. We have moved, quite deliberately, as we have in the mainstream, from an inputs focus to an outcomes focus. We have very rigorous outcomes monitoring, in which we get every provider—in this case, a state territory education department or a state territory VET provider—to contract with us over a four-year period. The funds flow from that education provider, provided they then report—and we can publicly report now, through the parliament as a result of changes to the legislation late last year—on what the outcomes have been. Those outcomes are measured against literacy levels, attendance levels, participation levels, year 12 retention levels, school-to-work transition levels and so forth. That shift to an outcomes focus—

**Mr QUICK**—So you could tell me the retention rate of indigenous people at Port Augusta high school, but you could not tell me how much money has gone into the program to make that a success, nor why it is working there and not, for example, at Kalgoorlie high school—or whatever the high school is called in Kalgoorlie?

**Mr Greer**—No.

**Mr QUICK**—You cannot make comparisons?

**Mr Greer**—No. We can tell you what the retention rates will be within South Australia. We contract with the state, not the school, and we contract with the state to improve the outcomes across those different cohorts that we are talking about.

**Mr QUICK**—So we would have to ask the South Australian education department to tell us?

**Mr Greer**—They then report to us on what the aggregate movements are, so we can look and see what the trends are in improvement in a particular state against particular key indicators. These are indicators under the IESIP program that all education ministers around the country have agreed to and signed off on. In some of these we are comparing apples with apples in every jurisdiction and being able to monitor improvements or declines or what have you. Where we see a decline, we can go in, engage with that jurisdiction and, if we are not satisfied with answers, look for remediation plans.

**Mr QUICK**—Are there any sanctions?

**Mr Greer**—I think the contracts say that, if there is a pattern of repeated underachievement, we need to review the contracts. But, by and large, we want to work with jurisdictions.

**CHAIR**—As you may know, Mr Haase is the member for Kalgoorlie. He has a very detailed knowledge of a lot of these issues, including the Anaconda development. I know he is very anxious to ask some questions.

**Mr HAASE**—Thank you, Chair. Mr Greer, I am very interested in the line of questioning that Mr Quick has started, because it seems that the last thing that you want to say is that you are dissatisfied in any way with the program being run with Anaconda. You have talked at length about the possibility of the pilots you will fund in the future, possibly revealing that Anaconda is similar to them and, therefore, may be funded, but it does seem to me to be a little lopsided. The question has been well and truly put. Given that there is something which we believe is running so effectively now, why on earth would you waste money—which is how it appears to us—on a pilot program, in order to prove what, in our minds, is already proven at Anaconda. Can you address that directly, please?

**Mr Greer**—I contest the assertion that we are wasting money. I am talking from my perspective, from the schools area, about Anaconda. I am not expert on the specific details of the Anaconda project. What I have undertaken—

**Mr HAASE**—With due respect, sir, you ought to be.

**Mr Greer**—Without knowing the specific details, I am not sure that I should be expert on that particular project. I am not sure that, from a schools perspective or from an indigenous education perspective, the Commonwealth has in fact funded that. It may well be that it is being funded from a vocational education perspective, either through the Commonwealth or through ANTA or through the state government. What I have undertaken to do is to look closely at that project to see if it can in fact be brought within the realms of Commonwealth guidelines and

whether we might be able to do something to work with Anaconda to continue with this exercise.

**Ms Bennett**—We understand that they have also applied for skill centre money from the Australian National Training Authority, and they are going through that process at the moment. We could keep you informed about how that is happening. That may well be the answer to what they are seeking.

**Mr HAASE**—Let me get this clear, please. I may have misjudged you, Mr Greer. It may be that, in fact, you have no knowledge of applications for funding being made from this institution and, therefore, you would have no justification to understand it fully and judge whether or not it deserves funding. If that is the case, you should clearly indicate that that is so, so that we can let you off the hook, if nothing else.

**Mr Greer**—Okay. Well, I personally have no direct knowledge of an application for funding from Anaconda. I will undertake to the committee to go back to my division to look across the division to see if in fact we have had an application. If we have, I am happy to report that.

**Mr HAASE**—You will report exactly why it has not received funding.

**Mr Greer**—Yes, certainly.

**Mr HAASE**—That suits me. Mr Chair, do you want to take further specific questions from Mr Wakelin on that issue or would you allow me a question on a different matter?

**CHAIR**—I think Mr Haase can continue his questioning on other matters, and I will come back and wrap up the Anaconda one.

**Mr HAASE**—I note from your submission your ambition with indigenous education is to improve a number of things: indigenous literacy, numeracy, the employment of indigenous people, educational outcomes, environments, the involvement of indigenous parents and community members in educational decision making, professional development and expanding culturally inclusive curricula. You do not say anything there specifically about making more kids attend school longer, with the greater participation of parents. I would like to hear your comments about what I consider to be the greatest hurdle to education today for indigenous peoples—that is, getting them to attend school on a more regular basis for a longer period of years, which I recognise needs the full support of parents, the involvement of parents, and the parental recognition of the importance of education in their future outcomes.

**Mr Greer**—The government released last year the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. This is a strategy that has attendance at its absolute core. That strategy is driving much of the activity in indigenous education around this country, certainly today and into the next several years. As a result of this strategy, we have required every jurisdiction to develop a NIELNS funding strategy as a precondition to access to IESIP funding which is their main—

**Mr HAASE**—What is IESIP funding?

**Mr Greer**—IESIP funding is the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program funding. It is the core funding that we are using to accelerate indigenous outcomes. The government's strategy has been to lead with the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy to drive home the absolute imperative of English literacy, numeracy, attendance and so forth. Another part of the strategy is to ensure that indigenous education is the mainstream element: that it is a fundamental delivery of mainstream funding from all states and territories and us. We are not just trying to pursue indigenous outcomes with special indigenous funding—you use your mainstream funding for that. To the extent that we have gaps between the educational outcomes of indigenous students and the outcomes of non-indigenous students through the mainstream, we then draw on our IESIP funding—which is some \$600 million, I think, over the next four years—to accelerate the momentum of closing those gaps.

**Mr HAASE**—How long has that program been in place?

**Mr Greer**—That program has been in place since—

**Mr Buckskin**—Since 1990.

**Mr HAASE**—Did you say that the indicators are showing a greater attendance?

**Mr Greer**—We have mapped those indicators. We are on the cusp of finalising it. All bar, I think, two jurisdictions, have contracted with the Commonwealth for IESIP funding and NIELNS funding for the next quadrennium. Characteristic of those is against key indicators: against literacy, particularly year 3 literacy—and this will be followed through as year 5 and 7 benchmarks come in place; against attendance; against professional development and a range of others. We are looking to close the gaps between the outcomes of indigenous kids and non-indigenous kids. As a rule of thumb, we have used a 50 per cent closure over the four-year period.

By and large, all of the state jurisdictions—the state education departments—have signed off on that and have set particular targets each year out to 2004-05 where they will endeavour to reduce by half those outcomes. In the non-government area, some of those targets are more ambitious than that and in some cases are seeking full closure on some measures of the outcomes of indigenous students and non-indigenous students.

**Mr HAASE**—What do you mean by 'full closure'?

**Mr Greer**—The aim in the jurisdictions is to get equality of outcomes. If, for instance, in a particular jurisdiction, say, Tasmania—

**CHAIR**—You remove the gap?

**Mr Buckskin**—They are the same as the non-indigenous cohort.

**Mr Greer**—They are the same. If there were 87 per cent or 90 per cent of non-indigenous kids reaching a year 3 benchmark by 2004, there would be 90 per cent of indigenous kids reaching that benchmark.

**Mr Buckskin**—Since the national Aboriginal education policy has been in place since 1990, we have seen retention rates move from single to double digits. Over the last 12 years or so we have seen a massive improvement in retention rates, from around less than 10 per cent up to around about 30-plus. We know that is not good enough.

**Mr HAASE**—Be more specific, please, Mr Buckskin. Is it retention from primary to high school?

**Mr Buckskin**—To year 12.

**Mr HAASE**—Are you suggesting that you have up to 30 per cent of indigenous people attending year 12?

**Mr Buckskin**—About 34 per cent.

**Mr HAASE**—In a specific area or Australia-wide?

**Mr Greer**—Australia-wide. That compares to about 72 or 74 per cent of all kids. There is still a sizeable gap, but it has come a long way. Through our NIELNS and IESIP strategies we are looking at a range of methods. There is no single silver bullet on this. We are looking at a range of measures to try and improve that. One that we have—and we work this one with DEWRSB—is that we have contracted the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to provide work experience opportunities for indigenous students back in years 9 and 10. This is to try and encourage them to stay on at school for those next two years. You can put in place, through our VET in schools arrangements, a range of things to encourage them to do that.

**Mr HAASE**—Where is this in place?

**Mr Greer**—This is in place nationally. We have contracted the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to do that. We are focussing on the structured workplace learning whilst the kids are in school. At the same time, DEWRSB have also funded ACCI to look after these kids as they come out of school. We are looking at a cross-portfolio intervention that gets business engaged whilst these kids are still at school, at years 8, 9 and 10, to expose them to other pathways and opportunities, to try and keep them in school through year 12 and hopefully, as they exit school, either at year 12 or earlier, give them employment opportunities that the other portfolio is—

**Mr HAASE**—You mentioned that some states had been reticent in signing off on this agreement. Which states have been slow to sign or have not signed?

**Mr Greer**—At this stage, New South Wales has not completed its contract. We understand that it is very close. The Northern Territory has not completed an IESIP agreement with us for the next quadrennium.

**CHAIR**—Completed means signed?

**Mr Greer**—That is right. Agreed to.

**CHAIR**—In other words, it has not started, because it has not been signed?

**Mr Greer**—All of these jurisdictions have had IESIP funding and IESIP agreements in previous trienniums, in previous years.

**Mr Buckskin**—Since 1990.

**Mr Greer**—Consistent with the government's policy here we have taken a more stringent approach on an outcomes focus this year and at this stage all of the non-government sectors, by and large—there might be one or two stragglers—have signed off. The vast majority of state governments have signed off.

**CHAIR**—But New South Wales and the Northern Territory have not?

**Mr Greer**—New South Wales and the Northern Territory have not. My understanding is that New South Wales is very close to signing off. I am not as confident that I can say that about the Northern Territory at this point.

**Mr HAASE**—Does this reflect perhaps a difference in outcomes? Could you compare perhaps the outcomes in Queensland with those in New South Wales?

**Mr Greer**—In a number of the key measures you can, because ministers—MCEETYA ministers, not just Commonwealth ministers, but ministers for education—have agreed that, in relation to this subset of the indicators, these will be comparable across jurisdictions. In some of the other indicators, whilst they will not be comparable across jurisdictions, they will be comparable and you will be able to show trends of improvement over time within a jurisdiction. It has been those accommodations which have enabled us to get a pretty robust accountability framework in place. As I say, we think New South Wales, on the advice that I got as late as yesterday, is probably within days or so of signing off. Within the Northern Territory there is a significant issue of what we think, particularly in the remote areas of the Northern Territory, of acceptable stretch.

**Mr HAASE**—I do not want you to answer this now because I would much prefer that we saved time and you gave us a written answer, but do you believe that by breaking down to the smallest portions possible you could give us some outcomes as we have been discussing?

**Mr Greer**—Certainly.

**Mr HAASE**—That would assist us greatly. You might be able to give some indication now as to the question of truancy and the legal ramifications of truancy. I understand that it is a state responsibility—

**Mr Greer**—That is correct.

**Mr HAASE**—but can you tell me whether there is any difference, to your knowledge, in the legal ramifications of truancy for the mainstream population compared with those families considered indigenous?



**Mr Buckskin**—I will take that on notice.

**Mr HAASE**—Good man.

**Mr Greer**—We will take it on notice and come back, but I think that, in the broad, most jurisdictions have cultural sensitivity approaches to indigenous absences and non-indigenous absences. But there are absences on the indigenous side that might be outside of the cultural sensitivities that are causing some problems.

**Mr HAASE**—There is a difference of application according to race?

**Mr Greer**—I think there are cultural sensitivities. For instance—

**Mr HAASE**—That is enough code for me, thank you, Mr Chairman.

**Mr Buckskin**—When people are absent, there are either explained absences or there is no explanation whatsoever, and that is when you consider people being truant. The education systems will not indicate to us where the truants are truant through non-attendance, if it is explained. If it is an explained absence, then it is not seen as being truant.

**Mr WAKELIN**—I think you have already said that you are reliant on states for your data to determine retention rates. There is no ability to check what the states are doing at a regional level? There is no capacity for that?

**Mr Greer**—What we are saying is we have contractual arrangements with states for our particular IESIP funding, but over and above that all jurisdictions report annually through the MCEETYA processes, through the annual national report, on a whole range of schools, not just—

**Mr WAKELIN**—Can I take it that the contract with the IESIP funding does imply specific regional outcomes?

**Mr Greer**—No. There are two parts to that. The contracts for IESIP with jurisdictions imply a whole of state response. We require them to report at a state level.

**CHAIR**—Expressly, not impliedly.

**Mr Greer**—Expressly. With NIELNS, our National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, which sits over the top of our IESIP agreement, we can come down to looking at the regional differences of that. For instance, looking at the Western Australian agreement, we agreed what the outcome expectations and targets would be for our bucket of IESIP funding across the state. Having agreed that, we said, ‘Okay, if we enter into an agreement with you for a NIELNS overlay, what is the additional outcome that we will get for that?’ In that context, you will be able to go into certain regional areas and see the attendance, the literacy outcomes and what have you, in those regions.

**CHAIR**—Is a region a part of a state, in your language?

**Mr Greer**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Does that go down to town by town?

**Mr Buckskin**—It could. It all depends on the state jurisdiction. South Australia would give us a plan. Through their own data—their literacy and numeracy results—they would pick regions of that state which are most in need of this additional money over and above what we already allocate to them through the IESIP program. We would agree with them bilaterally—we would come to some agreement—that we believe this additional money would accelerate and contribute to closing that gap. But it is up to the state jurisdiction to agree to the initiative and on which regions they would wish this additional money to be spent.

**Mr WAKELIN**—The answers earlier implied a state based outcome.

**Mr Greer**—That is correct.

**Mr WAKELIN**—How do we know that the money is actually achieving those outcomes? What degree of reassurance do you get that they are achieving it? And if they do not achieve it, what penalty applies to that state?

**Mr Greer**—It is a matter of looking at trends over time.

**Mr WAKELIN**—Is there a penalty on the state if they do not achieve it?

**Mr Greer**—What we are trying to mirror in our approach in the IESIP arrangements for the next quadrennium is, in fact, the approach in our mainstream arrangements for the next quadrennium. In our mainstream arrangements for the next quadrennium, we will be essentially looking at \$22 billion of contribution to state and non-government schools. What we require there is a commitment to the national goals for schooling and a commitment to report against the targets and measures that apply. A failure to report would lead to financial—

**Mr WAKELIN**—But that is different from a failure to achieve the outcomes.

**Mr Greer**—Yes. A failure to report would lead to financial implications. A reporting, but an underachievement, will not lead directly to financial implications. But if there is a pattern and it is repeated underachievement, what that provides for is the intervention of the Commonwealth to work with that jurisdiction to look at remedial arrangements. They could be gradated. You can see where, if that kept going, you could end up at—

**Mr WAKELIN**—It seems to me that the Commonwealth has a very limited capacity to influence outcomes. We very much rely on the states.

**Mr Greer**—As I said earlier, the constitutional responsibility for—

**Mr WAKELIN**—Yes, absolutely. Therefore, I think we need to be very direct in assessing the likelihood of a state just lining up for a top-up, with all the best words in the world, without really achieving. There is no penalty there whatsoever. I am concerned that the Commonwealth

may put money in, and the states can tell us a pretty good story, but there is not much that the Commonwealth can really do about it.

I will go on to another area. For example—and I think it is a pretty common view around the place—with the lack of attendance at school, which is one of the key factors why any child will not achieve whether they are indigenous or non-indigenous, what strategies to your satisfaction are there? It is as simple as that: it is turn up and do the job and get on with it, and improve your literacy and numeracy, because you have got a far better chance if you do turn up. What assurances do you have in that simple attendance rate: what sort of measures would a state need to reassure you about that?

**Mr Greer**—They report to us and we know what their baseline rates are. We know what the baseline attendance rates are for most states for indigenous students, and we know what they are for non-indigenous students. That is part of the reporting framework. What we are saying is—

**Mr WAKELIN**—Can you tell me that? Do you know?

**Mr Greer**—I can certainly let you know that. I have not got it here, but I can take that on notice.

**Mr WAKELIN**—Can you show an increase—the trend levels?

**Mr Greer**—Certainly. The contracts we are entering into have states not only putting something out there at 2004—what the targeted incremental rates of closing that gap will be year by year—but through the passage of the legislation last year for the first time these performances against our supplementary funding will be reported to parliament on an annual basis for the scrutiny of parliament.

**Mr Buckskin**—We have been collecting data on school attendance rates for the last quadrennium, and that is what we are using for the baseline data for the negotiations for the current quadrennium, because we want to see improvement on that.

**Mr Greer**—But certainly we can take on notice and provide the committee with that data and comparing indigenous with non-indigenous.

**Mr WAKELIN**—Continuing on this theme of my great wariness about the capacity of the Commonwealth to influence outcomes—that the states basically set their own agenda and they can have a begging bowl and tell the Commonwealth how terrible it is, and if you do this there is a chance we might improve it—I am very wary of the states' capacity to be fair dinkum in a lot of these areas. Given that view from some hard experiences, and where the greatest disadvantage is for indigenous people, and for all Australians, is in regional Australia, the evidence to us, just in a very anecdotal but I think really factual way, was that the reliance on the capacity of the state system to deliver in smaller regional communities was just way out of kilter with anything achieved in the more closely settled urban areas. What focus would you have in your programs to deal with these areas of greatest disadvantage, of absolute non-performance from a state and what capacity do we as a Commonwealth have to do anything about it, because there is a pretty big body of evidence which actually says that we will not make one scrap of difference?

**Mr Greer**—Again, we are not saying that you are going to change the world with the Commonwealth capacity.

**Mr WAKELIN**—I am not saying we want to change the world; I just actually would like to see someone actually have an outcome.

**Mr Greer**—What we are saying is that we are using very strategically the funds available to the Commonwealth to leverage not only what we purchase out of our funds, but also leveraging purchase from mainstream funding from states and territories anyway, because the outcomes for indigenous kids is the composite outcome of the total resource package.

**Mr WAKELIN**—But do you see my point about these very tough areas where we, as a national parliament, really should try and make some difference?

**Mr Greer**—There are and, in fact, this is part of the stumbling block that we have with the particular jurisdiction at the moment. We have a level of comfort with the outcomes and the stretch that this particular jurisdiction wants to have in the urban areas, but a far less a level of comfort with stretch in the remote area, and this seems to be the road block at the moment and, until there is an agreement or some satisfactory agreement on that—

**Mr WAKELIN**—So you are pressing hard—that is how I take it—to achieve that to the basics.

**Mr Greer**—Exactly.

**Ms HOARE**—I am from the Newcastle region. The University of Newcastle has places for Aboriginal students who do not necessarily achieve the high marks required to get into, for example, medicine. That program, as far as I am aware, works very well and produces some excellent Aboriginal doctors. Are there any other examples of other regional universities through which that occurs?

**Dr Karmel**—Various universities have a range of programs to assist indigenous students, and there is really quite a variety of them. A large number of students are in what we call enabling courses. The idea of these courses is to actually bring students up to a level at which they can successfully attend higher education to get higher education awards. There are other examples, in particular in universities, of preparatory courses. My recollection is that the minister has recently agreed on some assistance to a New South Wales university—I think it is the University of New South Wales but I would need to check that—on a preparatory program for the built environment, and there has been a program in legal studies at another university. So there is a range of programs available. If you wanted more specific detail then I would have to take that on notice.

**Ms HOARE**—Are they working? Is there evidence out there that they are working?

**Dr Karmel**—Some of them work very well, but some of them do not work as well as one would hope. Certainly the professionally based ones seem to have been pretty successful. Some of the more general programs and enabling courses have not worked as well as we would have hoped.

**Ms HOARE**—Would you be monitoring those so that, if you were not getting the outcomes in these particular enabling courses, you could say, ‘Your particular university will not get the funding until you implement a program that we know is working’?

**Dr Karmel**—That is certainly right. We monitor the statistics very carefully university by university. We have been looking at enabling courses very carefully and we have data on the number of students who successfully go on. We distribute indigenous support funding, which is additional to the usual operating grant moneys that go to the universities, on the basis of actual achievements by the university. So, as well as having an element of participation in the formula, we want to make sure that the university is actually concentrating on ensuring that the students are academically successful. We follow that pretty carefully. If the universities are not so successful in getting their students to pass units and complete awards then the funds will not flow to them to the same extent.

**Ms HOARE**—In my electorate of Charlton in New South Wales, there is one of these new superschools, Callaghan Campus. You might have heard of it. It is in the south Newcastle area. Because of the establishment of Callaghan Campus there is more room to manoeuvre—if you can call it that—to incorporate the vocational education training within the school system. It seems to be like an economy of scale. My local high school would not be able to do that so much because of the size of it and there would not be as many students to access the vocational education training. Could you expand a bit more about where you were talking about getting the Chamber of Commerce and Industry on board in relation to the vocational education training? Is that what I heard earlier?

**Mr Greer**—There has been somewhat of a revolution in senior secondary schooling over the last several years. In 1996 we had something like 26,000 students participating in what we call Vocational Education and Training in Schools. It is not just work experience. It is accredited training and exposures and what have you.

Those numbers have increased dramatically. I think the numbers for this year, which will be reported to ministers next month, will probably be around 160,000, so we have seen this quiet revolution going on. There are about 50,000 employers participating through these mechanisms to provide structured work placement opportunities for young people. Whilst the chambers of commerce, particularly the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, have been involved in providing and facilitating structured work placement opportunities for young people generally for some little time, as part of our NIELN strategy we have specifically engaged them to find 1,600, 1,700, structured work placement opportunities for indigenous young kids in schools from those years 8, 9, 10, primarily, as one strategy, to try and encourage them to continue through to years 11 and 12. We want them to get some exposure to the workplace et cetera and, in doing so, to get recognition for the accredited modules that they are doing. As I have mentioned before, with another hat on, hopefully with the same people working with them, if they drop out of school early or if they go right through, there will be a transition perhaps into employment opportunities. It is a very good example, I think, of a bit of joined up government and focusing on the needs. We can certainly provide you with details of that project, the project managers and so forth.

**Ms HOARE**—Before my election I was heavily involved for about four years in the delivery of TAP programs through the CES. I found that to be a very successful program. I did not have

any failures of young people and young adults whom I assisted and the government assisted through traineeships and apprenticeships, mainly through wage subsidies. The wage subsidies were mainly to get over prejudice. In your evidence and in your submission I did not see any specific indigenous wage subsidy programs under the apprenticeship scheme. Do any exist?

**Ms Bennett**—The Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business provides wage supplements for employment outcomes, which are quite generous, and we work with them to try and do as Tony described. The training relates to that wage supplement, so there is a connection. With the change in arrangements two years ago, our portfolio mainly looks at the education and training outcomes. We work closely with DEWRSB. Peter gave other examples on the mining industry, where we work with them. There is a mapping and a blending on the choices, but it is a different responsibility. There is some overarching stuff that occurs for new apprenticeships, indigenous new apprenticeships, with the Australian National Training Authority, where we target specific outcomes. It has been quite successful. I was looking at the numbers just before I came here. Since 1996 we have increased by about 2,800. Young people identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander—it is a self-identification process—and last year we had 5,200 people in ATSI identified in new apprenticeships. I think it is a flow-on for increased participation and retention. It is having a flow-on to participation in post compulsory education.

**Mr Greer**—I think the critical thing there was when the changed administrative arrangements happened two or three years ago, the employment function went from the education portfolio to DEWRSB and the TAP program was part of the employment initiative.

On that earlier question you asked, in addition to the arrangement with the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, there is also a very exciting capacity with the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation, formerly the ASTF. That has had an indigenous school to work strategy called WADU. The recent budget supplemented that, so it gave that strategy longevity through the forward estimate period and no doubt beyond. That looks specifically at another way of engaging, in particular, indigenous young people whilst at school to get them that structured work experience and hopefully keep them on. I am happy to provide the committee with some detail about it, if required.

**Ms HOARE**—That would be good.

**CHAIR**—I want to go back to the Anaconda issue. I wonder whether, when you respond about some further matters in writing, you could look at the submissions 101 to 107, from pages 1,500 to 1,503 inclusive, and respond to the committee urgently, if you would not mind, in relation to the Anaconda model and their difficulties. I really do need something more than the possibility of them coming into some pilot scheme operation. To me, after travelling around Australia with my colleagues, to find an example of 40 or 50 young Aboriginal people being trained successfully and enthusiastically going out and becoming mentors is too good an opportunity not to foster and nourish.

**Mr Greer**—We will certainly take that challenge.

**CHAIR**—I have a great sense of urgency about this. If you would not mind responding quickly, I would be grateful. It is in that context that we can learn from each other. The second

point I would like you to take on notice is that hearing you describe the efforts you are making to get all the states on board—and I know how frustrating and difficult it is and how long it takes—they are looking at the real world of young Aboriginal boys and girls not getting educated and finding it almost impossible, if not impossible, to make their way in Australia. Sadly, they finish up in very difficult circumstances. To me, we do not have time any more to wait for the states to sign off on this, yet I know the protocols are there and you have to work within them.

What other alternative means of funding could be looked at to stimulate some action? For example, this may not be the answer, but I will let you know what I am thinking about. Why couldn't the Commonwealth, instead of going through all the protocol, say through the state education ministers to all the schools in Australia, 'We have a pool of money to provide for indigenous education. You can access it. We will pay it to you in instalments directly to the region within the state of the cluster of schools—take your pick. We will pay it to you in instalments. We will pay you an initial seed amount and then, as you succeed with your attendance records, we will accept your audits for them. We do not want to get involved in all that, because you guys have enough to do at Commonwealth level. As you report each three or six months on decline in truancy and then the happy occasion of an increased rate of retentions, further payments will be made.' That would be preferable instead of, as happens at the moment, going into the state pool and waiting for the state people to then put in place all of their programs. Many of them do great work and come up with some good outcomes, but it is too bloody slow, quite frankly. We do not have time. Why not do that? Why can't we look at that sort of model?

I know I have oversimplified it. I have set a challenge to you. I wonder whether you could perhaps respond. You do not have to embrace the idea, but write to me in a week and say, 'Lou, that's just hopeless for this reason,' or, 'There is a possibility of that happening.' Then this committee can do some running for people in Australia. We can come out with some innovative suggestions.

**Mr Greer**—We certainly will come back to you on that issue, but off the top of my head there are a couple of issues that come straight up. That is, at the end of the day, schools and principals are employees—particularly in the state sector—of states and territories. By and large, schools cannot directly enter into contractual arrangements with the Commonwealth and so forth. We have had that experience—

**CHAIR**—But don't worry about that. I will fix that. You tell me in your letter what you need us to do, and this committee will ask the parliament to take it on for you. Okay?

**Mr Greer**—Okay. The other danger which may be there is one we talked about earlier about trying to drive indigenous education improvements wholly by the supplementary funding, rather than it being the first dollar of the \$22 billion or more of mainstream funding that is there. That is, you limit what can do by the size of the supplementary bucket that you are prepared to put in there, whereas the Commonwealth's position is that, certainly from our point of view, all our schools funding is for all children, and the most disadvantaged children in this country are indigenous children, and so the first dollar of our mainstream funding should be going to these ends, before we come back to our supplementary funding to look to accelerate that. One danger

may well be that you build a scenario where \$600 million over four years is the extent of the indigenous education commitment.

**CHAIR**—I understand.

**Mr Greer**—As I say, they are just two off the top.

**CHAIR**—I understand that. The thing I find is that out there, there are some wonderfully talented, dedicated teachers and community people, who might just say, 'I can help on this one, and if I am directly involved in a program I can drive this.' At the moment this is not happening. For instance, we went to Western Australia the other day, and in an outback area we were told, 'The trouble is we cannot keep the teachers. It is too isolated and remote and, by the time they get what they want, they are despairing and moving off and goodness knows what.' So the actual connection between the teacher and the pupils, which I believe is so important, is not happening. In my life, my relationship with my teachers was such that they often inspired me and my colleagues, and I think the teachers need some direct involvement and some incentive to link up and say, 'Hey, there is a bit of money here. If we access it, this committee will make sure that the parliament gets them the right to enter into approved sorts of contracts', and then they can drive it from the community up, instead of through this great ship of state that we have in this great country of ours.

**Mr Greer**—We have been coming top down and bottom up. There have been a couple of very exciting developments over the last 12 months or so under this broad umbrella. Two particular projects—

**CHAIR**—And that is acknowledged. Please do not take what I am saying as a condemnation of the good work that is being done. That is certainly not the context in which I am saying it.

**Mr Greer**—No. But, through the Australian principals' professional development group, we have engaged over 1200 principals face-to-face, in taking the indigenous education message to them. We have changed mind-sets through this. We have principals out there now, with this agenda, as the change agents on the ground. That has been very exciting.

**CHAIR**—And it works, doesn't it?

**Mr Greer**—It works. Talking about 'it works': probably three years ago we put about \$13 million into some very practical action research to see what works in indigenous education in the classroom. These were a range of action projects across all jurisdictions, and they have been developed into a report called *What works*. Then *What works* will work again. We have disseminated that. We have had people out there taking that to teachers, and I think I heard today that over 2000 teachers have been taken through this *What works* approach. So, in addition to the ship of state and the top down process, we are very active out there in a bottom up approach, through those key educational leaders—the principals and the teachers bringing this bottom up. We have also activated, I think—

**CHAIR**—Again, generally and over-simplifying, which I am terribly guilty of doing too often, if you had a choice of spending 60 per cent of your budget on those sorts of programs, compared with 60 percent having to trickle through from the top, which would you opt for?



**Mr Greer**—You would like to balance it.

**CHAIR**—I was hoping that you would say that you would go for 60 per cent from the bottom up.

**Mr Greer**—At the end of the day, I think to really improve educational outcomes for indigenous kids, we need systemic change. We have to change the systems. I think the outcomes focus we have been pursuing is taking us down that path.

**CHAIR**—Yes. You remember my opening statement. I support the direction you are going in. That is great, but I am an impatient guy, and I do not like to see young kids dying and despairing and living their life on welfare. It gets to me. Okay? So I want to a bit more. I want to do a bit of punching and shaking. Do you understand what I mean? Are you guys going to do that?

**Mr Greer**—I think we have a lot of synergy of thought.

**CHAIR**—Okay. I have left you with my thoughts. Can you come back on that. I will be very grateful. Thank you very much and keep up the good work.

**PRITCHARD, Mr John Alexander, National Policy Director, Australian Local Government 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 it may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. Before we go to questions, do you have an opening statement? I apologise for the delay in calling you to give evidence. You were very patient; I appreciate it.

**Mr Pritchard**—Thanks very much, Mr Chairman. I will make an opening statement and I will try to keep it brief. The purpose of my appearing here was, as I understand it from the secretariat, to provide an overview of some of the local government issues, and I will try to provide some examples. I thought I would start with a very quick overview of the Australian Local Government Association and the work that we are doing, so that you might understand the approach that we are taking to the issues of concern for your inquiry.

First of all, the Australian Local Government Association is a federation of state and the Northern Territory associations. We have been very actively involved in advocacy work—in particular, in indigenous affairs work—over the last decade. More recently, over the last couple of years, we have tried to put the indigenous affairs issues within the broader context of a multicultural or culturally diverse society.

We have done a lot of work promoting access and equity in a culturally diverse society, and we have published a number of publications in relation to that work. Having said that, we still believe that indigenous affairs is a core area of work that needs to be addressed quite specifically.

In working in indigenous affairs, the Australian Local Government Association has a formal advisory committee. The national indigenous local government advisory committee is chaired by Councillor David Lane. David is a member of the ALGA executive and is a councillor from the Wugularr Community Government Council in the Northern Territory. He is also the vice-president of the Northern Territory association. The committee provides advice on all indigenous matters related to local government, and this is totally consistent with our belief that Aboriginal people need to be involved in the policy setting of ALGA and local government at a national level.

With the support of the Commonwealth over a number of years we have had a very strong relationship with a number of government departments and have pursued a number of initiatives. Our relationship with ATSIC has been extremely productive. Currently, we are negotiating a memorandum of understanding which seeks to establish a framework for cooperation so that the Australian Local Government Association and ATSIC work collaboratively to try to improve the opportunities for Aboriginal people throughout Australia. That MOU is very important and recognises the relationship between the ATSIC organisation and our own body as a representative body for local government across Australia.

I note that your terms of reference address issues relating to urban matters. I will give you a further overview of some of the approaches that we have taken. First of all, I should qualify my statement by saying that the data at a national level is not good. We have not got a systematic way of collecting information, and that creates a difficulty for inquiries like your own and, indeed, for making representations and submissions. Most of the information has been collected by survey on a from-time-to-time basis and has not been particularly systematic with particular follow-ups.

We have, again on a from-time-to-time basis, developed a number of resources looking at best practice examples. I will table for your information this publication, which you may have seen, titled *Justice and equity for all—local government indigenous partnerships*. This is a document that provides an example of about 24 good case studies of best practice as to how councils are involved with trying to improve the service provision and their relationship with their local indigenous communities.

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

That the report, *Justice and equity for all—local government indigenous partnerships*, be admitted as an exhibit to the inquiry.

**Mr Pritchard**—We conducted a survey three years ago and some of the statistics may be of interest to the committee. The survey indicated that approximately 110 councils had formal indigenous consultative councils supporting the decision making processes in councils. We have a total of 678 councils across Australia, so 110 councils, as shown in the survey three years ago, is a reasonable proportion. Obviously, we would like to see more councils developing the consultative council process.

Eighty-eight councils had public statements of reconciliation and 69 councils were at various stages in the development of formal agreements with their local indigenous communities. These agreements would take the form of statements of recognition through to agreements about service delivery and processes which will ensure that those services might be delivered in a culturally appropriate way. So there are some very significant and interesting processes. A number of case studies are documented in the submission that I have just tabled as evidence.

I will give a particular example which illustrates some of the particular issues that I note, having regard to your terms of reference, you are interested in. One of the greatest challenges facing local government in urban areas is how to plan for diversity, including the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as how to genuinely involve them in planning and management processes so that they have greater control over the matters affecting their lives.

The best way of illustrating this is by way of example, and the example I am going to use draws heavily upon a paper that was presented in Brisbane by Dr Wendy Sarkissian, a social planning consultant. This case study demonstrated the real difficulties local councils face in trying to genuinely involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in planning and land management processes. Although the example is in an inner Sydney area, the processes and the issues are pretty much the same in Halls Creek in the north of Western Australia, the Kimberley and throughout other areas of Australia.

The case study was concerned with the future of a factory site immediately adjacent to a residential area known as the Block in Redfern in inner Sydney. The Block was granted to Aboriginal people under the land rights legislation in 1970. The area has received a lot of media and political attention in recent years as housing owned by the Aboriginal Housing Corporation deteriorated and the area became a centre for drug dealing and drug taking.

Local opinion was dramatically divided regarding the Aboriginal presence, with some non-indigenous people living in the area believing or hoping that the government would come and clean up the place before the Olympics, whilst other non-indigenous residents were firmly behind a multicultural neighbourhood. In 1980, the local council rezoned the site for community use, which meant that the factory closed down a decade later and the council acquired the site. It then rushed to move an approval for the demolition of the building and the establishment of a park with a police station in the centre. Community groups expressed strong disapproval of any use of the site for Aboriginal purposes. The indigenous community, however, wanted the building and the site used for Aboriginal economic development purposes, including a training facility. The third group of residents supported that indigenous community.

The council backtracked and hired a social planning consultant to conduct a consultation process which would result in a master plan for the whole site and which might accommodate the conflicting and diverse needs of the three groups that could not reach agreement. The consultant agreed to establish a consultative process, which commenced with a public speak-out. At this speak-out, all three groups were asked to speak. It was a high-risk strategy but it was important to clear the air for the various parties. The intention was that real issues could be aired. The real issues ranged from resentment on the part of conservative non-indigenous people who resented the presence of Aboriginal people—they were concerned about personal safety, et cetera—to the Aboriginal people who, on the other hand, were sad and had grave concerns about alienation and the fact that they had not been involved in determining what was going to happen on that site.

It was only after the speak-out that it was possible to move on to hold joint discussion groups and negotiations and, as a result, there was an opportunity to establish a set of principles for the further development of the site. It was a compromise agreement but at least there was an agreement as opposed to a major form of discontent. The important issue is that the agreement came some eight months after the process occurred—it was not an overnight fix. It did take time and the council did recognise that they were not able to simply move forward and progress a development without proper consultation. The result of the process was that a master plan was developed. It was a compromise and, indeed, it was a breakthrough. It enabled council to move forward with the development of the site.

Planning for areas, in urban areas in particular, involves confrontation and dialogue across a huge cultural divide; it requires practitioners to be fluent in a range of ways of knowing how to communicate with the communities. This is a particular example where it was impossible to start with a face-to-face meeting of the protagonists, but the speak-out process enabled people to develop an understanding of the issues and a method of moving forward. This illustration demonstrates that there are many occasions where a simple tool kit of negotiation skills is not enough; you need a range of quite expert skills and a willingness to engage people in decision making.

This highlights and illustrates the sorts of situations that are faced by councils right throughout Australia, where community development opportunities can often cut across the cultural divide, and that there is a great source of potential frustration that needs to be resolved. Councils often lack the resources and the skills available at hand to be able to negotiate these processes through. Councils also need the support of organisations such as our own and Commonwealth assistance to sometimes facilitate and break through these sorts of difficulties in communication. I hope that has been useful. I am more than happy to answer questions.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, John. That was an interesting insight into a case that involved a lot of patience and skill, and local government. The suggestion is often made to me and to colleagues around Australia, not just in this inquiry but others we have been involved in, that the best way of delivering success for indigenous people and helping to overcome disadvantage is to, as far as possible, provide bottom-up delivery of programs, managed as close as possible to the community. I have detected some earlier fear and mistrust by indigenous people of some local government organisations; but recently I have detected a greater willingness, both from local government and indigenous communities, to work in partnership. I welcome that; it is a very healthy thing. What do you think are the prospects of being able to foster in local government a wish that local government become more involved in bottom-up administration of delivery of programs? What incentives might be needed to break through if there is any reluctance in local governments?

**Mr Pritchard**—I note your observations. We would agree totally that there has been a substantial change and progress made by local government and in the attitude of councils. Some five years ago we called for applications to engage in some reconciliation programs and we were overwhelmed, with more than 260 councils actually wanting to get involved in reconciliation programs. We thought that was an outstanding response to the issues. So there has always been a willingness, but I suppose there was a concern that the skills were not available and they did not really know how to start the process and how to tackle the process. The Australian Local Government Association has taken the view that you need to assist councils by providing resources, support material, stimulation with ideas about best practice, et cetera.

I mentioned our discussions with ATSIC on the memorandum of understanding. With respect to the best practice documentation, we have been very well supported by ATSIC and until recently by the National Office of Local Government. In earlier days, DETYA also supported our work through funding in order to provide resource material which advocated change but which, more importantly, demonstrated practical examples of what councils were doing so that they could learn from each other. Three years ago, we compiled a database. We now have a reasonably solid database which provides us with the opportunity to answer direct questions from councils wanting to make contact with other councils who are tackling similar indigenous issues.

**CHAIR**—Would it be possible to get a copy of a summary of its contents?

**Mr Pritchard**—Yes, indeed.

**CHAIR**—Subject to my colleagues' agreement, we would like to take the opportunity in our report to foster and encourage others to try, by connecting them with success stories. In that context, would you be able to make available to us a summary, including some examples of the

type of advice you give. Could it be along the lines of, 'When we did this, the outcome was this.'

**Mr Pritchard**—We would be pleased to do that.

**CHAIR**—We would be very grateful to receive that.

**Mr Pritchard**—This is part of a longwinded answer to your original question, which was: what sort of support can the Commonwealth provide, or what sort of incentives do councils require? We believe, from a national and state perspective, that maintaining this work is important. I indicated that our work is really based on a grants opportunity that arises from time to time, so that maintenance of the database becomes a problematic issue. Our last survey was three years ago. The likelihood of another survey will depend on the ability to attract funding and the priority that we would give to that.

In terms of resourcing and supporting councils with best practice examples and access to information, at the national and state level there are real advantages. We have also had, with Commonwealth support, funding for an indigenous policy manager at the Australian Local Government Association, and one policy manager in each of our state associations. Regrettably, due to a lack of funding or the inability to attract Commonwealth funding, that network has been depleted. As a result, the resource person on the ground who can provide direct information is no longer available. State associations have tried to accommodate and build into their own work programs and into their own information policy frameworks the material and ideas that had been generated by the indigenous policy worker, but having a dedicated position is obviously very important.

Finally, there are a large number of councils that want to do more work in relation to employment of Aboriginal people and the facilitation and support of economic development opportunities. But, again, it is a matter of access to some resources. Grants programs have been extremely successful in local government in picking up and employing Aboriginal people as part of local employment strategies, or in supporting indigenous economic development opportunities. The message really is: to the extent that local government is able to facilitate and support bottom-up development, local government is willing to do so, but it is financially quite limited in its ability to generate revenue from within its own resources and needs to develop very strong partnerships with the Commonwealth.

**CHAIR**—And the states?

**Mr Pritchard**—And the states; yes, indeed.

**Ms HOARE**—Of the 22 models that were published in that booklet in 1999, how many councils amalgamated with ALGA and how many of those would have applied any of these models to their own area in the past two years?

**Mr Pritchard**—As I have indicated, we are a federation, so the picture that I will paint will go from the bottom up. There are 678 councils across Australia, and ALGA include approximately 64 Aboriginal community councils in their own right in the Northern Territory and Queensland. Out of the 700 or 680 councils, they in their own state belong to their state

association and to ALGA as a federation of the state association. So councils are not members of our organisation directly, but they are members by virtue of their membership of the state organisation. Unfortunately, we do not track the materials that we have developed as advocacy documents all that well. We put them in the public domain, we circulate and promote the notions and the concepts to our councils, and we know, through periodic surveys, that councils pick them up from time to time. If there is a database that was done three years ago, we know that, for instance, we had 110 councils with consultative councils. If we were to survey councils tomorrow, we would know whether there has been an improvement or a decrease in the success of the strategy. I cannot answer the question because we do not have that data.

**Ms HOARE**—That is okay. I have seen the document before. My local council—which is Lake Macquarie City Council—does have a very active consultative council and a very active reconciliation process. It seems to be working quite well, although there is some conflict in that process as well. Another question I have relates to the amalgamation of councils, where you are getting bigger councils and therefore may be having consultative groups made up of—in my area, I think we have about half a dozen different land councils on the one consultative group. The bigger the council, the more organisations, the more land councils, the more indigenous area-specific groups you are going to be dealing with. Is that seen as a barrier at all?

**Mr Pritchard**—It has not been an issue that has been raised with us, but I believe it is an issue that is not specifically an indigenous affairs or an indigenous issue. It is a—

**Ms HOARE**—Community of interest.

**Mr Pritchard**—governance and community of interest issue. It certainly is. In the debates around amalgamation of councils, particularly in Victoria, there was a lot of discussion about how you might engage your citizens more actively in the democratic process. Those from New Zealand, for instance, spoke very strongly about neighbourhood council models, so you had neighbourhood advisory committees springing up. If you apply that same sort of logic to indigenous communities of interest, the larger geographic area, then you need to devise more diverse strategies to ensure that the interests of particular groups are accommodated. Victoria's amalgamation process ran through and was completed about four or five years ago. South Australia is probably the latest one to have gone through the amalgamation process, which was a relatively smooth transition. In New South Wales, there is lots of talk about amalgamation but there are difficulties in doing so. I think you have identified a really important issue in relation to governance issues and community engagement issues that councils do need to be aware of. We have not identified any specific cases where it has become a major issue that needs to be workshopped or worked through.

**Ms HOARE**—I am not sure whether or not the grants system has any strings attached for councils—and I do not know whether the chairman or the secretary might know. The chairman was talking before and, I notice you were listening, about Commonwealth funding for indigenous education going straight to the schools. To give you an example off the top of my head: do you see a role for the Commonwealth under the grants program saying, 'Sydney City Council, you have an indigenous population of five per cent, show us that, in all of your council programs, employment and service delivery, you have a five per cent indigenous component. If you have shown your commitment to indigenous issues in your council area, you will be at the

top of the list for CDEP places or something like that to help with council programs where you employ more Aboriginal people'? Do you see a role at all for something like that?

**Mr Pritchard**—Governments have to be innovative in the way in which they apply their funding to leverage up better outcomes. Because I am here representing the Australian Local Government Association I will give you a likely response from our organisation. Part of the difficulty with grants and strings is that there is a tendency to get minimum compliance and, unless programs are very cleverly designed, if there are quotas you only get the quota. We have taken the view that, albeit slow, promoting best practice will achieve a better result than trying to leverage up support through designing programs which require certain trigger points to be made before you go onto the next stage.

The progress that we acknowledged at the beginning of the questions has been achieved pretty well without very much funding at all. The reconciliation process in local government has been a particularly good one in the sense that we have come from what was a pretty hostile environment where very large numbers of councils are very committed to reconciliation. It has not required funding; it has required support, encouragement and leadership—which are all relatively cheap commodities but are really hard to do. It needs dedicated resources and dedicated people to be able to promote it.

**CHAIR**—It empowers people, too.

**Mr Pritchard**—Yes, indeed. Cleverly designed incentive programs can work, but promotion, leadership and advocacy are really good commodities in this sort of work.

**CHAIR**—In wrapping up, I declare my interest as a former minister for local government, my strong support for local government and my appreciation on behalf of the committee for the efforts being made. I see an untapped resource, and hopefully we can have dialogue. There are a number of questions we were not able to ask today because of the way the hearings have gone. If you do not mind, we will write to you and we would appreciate it if you would give us a response fairly quickly.

**Mr Pritchard**—Sure.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, that would be very helpful to us. We will try not to make it too onerous for you. I would like to send the committee's good wishes to you and your executive and members, thank them for their work and leadership and encourage them to keep up the good work. We will try to reflect that in some way in our report. Thank you for your attendance. I thank *Hansard* and the secretariat.

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

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

**Committee adjourned at 6.05 p.m.**