HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Factors influencing the employment of young people

ALICE SPRINGS

Friday, 4 April 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Members

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Peter Baldwin	Mrs Gash
Mr Barresi	Mr Marek
Mr Bradford	Mr Mossfield
Mr Brough	Mr Neville
Mr Dargavel	Mr Pyne
Mrs Elson	Mr Sawford
Mr Martin Ferguson	

Matter referred for inquiry into and report on:

Factors influencing the employment of young people.

WITNESSES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Factors influencing the employment of young people

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Present

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Brough	Mr Mossfield
Mrs Gash	Mr Sawford
Mr Marek	

The committee met at 9.00 a.m.

Mr Charles took the chair.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing on the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people. The purpose of the inquiry is to consult widely and produce recommendations for government action that will help promote the employment prospects of our youth.

The committee has received over 100 submissions and conducted public hearings in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Hobart. The committee has also conducted school forums in Sydney, Brisbane and Hobart in which young people discussed their views and opinions with the committee.

The committee is now conducting public hearings in rural and regional centres in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. This meeting is one of a series in Roma, Charleville, Longreach, Mount Isa and Alice Springs which will give Australians outside the capital cities an opportunity to put their views and concerns to the committee.

This is a very broad ranging inquiry. Matters raised in the submissions so far include the attitudes of young people; the work ethic of young people and their familiarity with the requirements of the workplace; the adequacy and relevance of the education and training systems; the importance of developing better linkages between schools and the business sector; the need for a more flexible industrial relations system, and the effectiveness and efficiency of government programs to assist young people to find employment.

That is not meant to be an exhaustive list of issues the committee will consider or which might be raised. We are entirely open to the views of everyone who wishes to make an input to the inquiry. We are here to listen, to learn and to help improve the prospects of young Australians.

[9.00 a.m.]

MILDRED, Ms Elizabeth Ann, Regional Manager, Central Australia, Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce and Industry Inc, PO Box 864, Alice Springs, Northern Territory

CHAIR—Do you have an opening statement you would like to make about the issues that we are here to consider?

Ms Mildred—No. I have a few notes with me which I may refer to occasionally when I am asked a question.

CHAIR—Okay. Elizabeth, do you want to tell us about the activities of the chamber and the kinds of employment prospects there are in Alice Springs?

Ms Mildred—From the point of view of youth, employment in Alice Springs is quite active. There seems to be no trouble for people to get jobs in this town. Particularly young people have a range of part-time jobs as they may have in other cities. There is a low unemployment rate—I am not sure of the percentage—for young people, particularly in Alice Springs. So it is quite an energetic town. There seems to be work for anybody who really wants to look for it.

CHAIR—Do you have a business yourself, or are you an executive of the chamber?

Ms Mildred—No, my background is that I am a human resource practitioner and an industrial relations specialist, so that helps me in the position that I have at the moment.

CHAIR—Sure. Outside of tourism, is there any other major industrial activity here?

Ms Mildred—Alice Springs has every industry that a town would need. I think its isolation means that it needs the infrastructure to help it run. So we have some light industry, metal type industries. There is the building industry of course. There are not large manufacturers here, but they are of the type of industry that just helps the town run.

Mr SAWFORD—What is your knowledge of apprentices and trainees in this town?

Ms Mildred—We have an employment and training field officer employed by the chamber who works out of our office, and his job is to liaise with employers and industry to get young people, apprentices, trainees, into positions, to actually help the employer set the positions up so that they put a suitable person into that job under the right sorts of conditions.

Mr SAWFORD—How many people do you have in your organisations, paid positions?

Ms Mildred—Over the territory or just here?

Mr SAWFORD—Just here.

Ms Mildred—We have got four people in our office, including me.

Mr SAWFORD—Right. And they are funded by local businesses?

Ms Mildred—The chamber is funded entirely, yes, by local businesses, by its membership.

Mr SAWFORD—What are your links with schools like and what are your links with the training providers, people like the CES or group training schemes and so on?

Ms Mildred—Very good. The main link is through the employment and training field officer and through our training officer who is a separate person who runs training programs, and we run small business traineeships as well through that training provider. We are a training provider, I suppose.

Mr SAWFORD—What is the quality of the vocational curriculum that is offered in the secondary schools and TAFE in this town?

Ms Mildred—Personally, I do not really know what the actual standard is. In terms of commenting on whether young people are prepared or not for employment, their comment to me was that they do not get the right sort of advice to tell them what work is really like. They are not commenting on the actual training that they are getting in their vocational training, but they are talking about whether they are work ready.

Mr SAWFORD—The careers advice is limited.

Ms Mildred—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—That is the standard answer we are getting all over Australia.

Ms Mildred—That is right. In fact it is not realistic; they are not perhaps giving the young people a realistic picture of what work really is—the fact that they perhaps need to start at the bottom and work their way up.

Mr SAWFORD—Are there any special initiatives that your organisation has developed with schools or with training providers other than your own?

Ms Mildred—No special initiatives, except that we maintain a constant liaison with them in that the field officer visits the schools, talks to the careers advisers, tries to put across the message that we need to give the young people the right information about what they will find when they go out into the workplace, and just what to expect.

Mr SAWFORD—What opportunities are there for Aboriginal youth in Alice Springs?

Ms Mildred—The same opportunities as for everybody else in terms of schooling and education. Whether or not those opportunities are taken up or promoted enough I do not know, but the opportunities are there for them to have the same training and education as everybody else. I would like to see it encouraged

more. I really do not know how much encouragement is given to get them into training, and that is my honest answer.

Mr MOSSFIELD—When young people leave school, what are their literacy and numeracy skills? I would imagine here, particularly in the tourist industry, they would have to have pretty good literacy and numeracy skills.

Ms Mildred—Yes, they should have. I can only speak for our members. I have had a comment from members that they feel that the literacy levels leave a bit to be desired and they would like to see that improved.

Mr MOSSFIELD—That is a general comment we are getting around the place.

Ms Mildred—Yes. But it is something that they see, something that is really happening.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What about the CES? If a young person is looking for a job locally, would they go through the Commonwealth Employment Service, or are there other means?

Ms Mildred—That I do not know. My role is to speak for members who are the employers. I am not quite sure, except from comments from our employment and training people who liaise with the CES in filling vacancies and liaise with employers at the same time.

Mrs GASH—How many businesses are in the Chamber of Commerce roughly, in Alice Springs basically?

Ms Mildred—Over the territory there are 270. We have actually got 236.

Mrs GASH—What sorts of training programs do you provide?

Ms Mildred—The usual half-day and one-day workshops for business which are things like selection and recruitment, industrial relations, payroll type courses. We also have a big involvement with Aussie Host, which is the training program for the hospitality industry. That is well used here.

Mrs GASH—How many people would you train—and I use that word 'train' as being apart from information seminars. How many would you train per year?

Ms Mildred—I cannot tell you that, I am sorry.

Mrs GASH—So you could not give me a breakdown of how many are young people as opposed to—

Ms Mildred—No, I have not come along with those sorts of figures, so I apologise for that.

Mrs GASH—That is really what I wanted to know. I wanted to know the ages of the people you train.

Mr BROUGH—There are 236 businesses here in your town; do they do much ongoing business management and that sort of thing? Is that what is also provided by the chamber to give them more skills with which to run their businesses?

Ms Mildred—Yes. We will provide whatever they want, basically.

Mr BROUGH—Are they well attended?

Ms Mildred—Yes, although it is quiet at the moment because we are still at the beginning of the year. I think we need to get that fired up and running, and businesses need to be able to think about it—they have not quite got their heads around that yet.

Mr BROUGH—And you do not know what relationship business has with the CES; whether they find, when they ask for recruits, whether it is good, bad or indifferent; whether they are getting the sort of person or the sort of applicant that they are looking for?

Ms Mildred—I have not heard comments from members about that. If they are using our service with the employment and training field officer, then I think all the bases are covered.

Mr BROUGH—Would you explain that a bit more? They use your field officer, and you are assisting them fairly substantially with their recruitment?

Ms Mildred—Yes.

Mr BROUGH—Would you go into a little depth on that, please?

Ms Mildred—Let us use the example of an employer making an inquiry and saying to us, 'I want to employ somebody. I do not know how to go about it; I do not know what to do.' Our role is to go in and help them write the selection criteria for the position, set the position up, create a vacancy through the CES, and actually take the whole process through to its end.

Mr BROUGH—Are they paying a separate amount to access that service or is it just part of their annual fees?

Ms Mildred—Actually, I may have misled you. The employment and field training officer is funded by DEET, but employed by us. That service is available to all employers, not just our members.

Mr BROUGH—Do you have any specific areas in which employers complain that they cannot get people locally—they do not have the expertise or the training?

Ms Mildred—I cannot give you specific examples.

Mr BROUGH—There is nothing that has been highlighted, obviously.

Ms Mildred—No. It is just generally a comment about the fact that young people are perhaps not ready to work and that they do not understand what it really means.

Mr BROUGH—Thank you.

Mr MAREK—As far as jobs and employment and those sorts of things are concerned, you have touched on the fact that there did not seem to be great unemployment here and that, more to the point, those who want jobs can get jobs. So are you saying that with people who would come here looking for work, if they cannot get work they would then leave? Or do they just stay and mull in?

Ms Mildred—I do not really know about that. I do not know what they do. The hospitality industry provides a lot of part-time work, of course, and does anywhere—it is not just in Alice Springs. It is the sort of work where people work shifts and are in and out at different times. I have no idea what people do if they cannot find work. The general perception is that there is work if you want it.

Mr SAWFORD—How many people are involved in transient work—young people who come from other countries, say, Kiwis and people from Canada and the United States?

Ms Mildred—Once again, I do not know the figures.

Mr SAWFORD—Is it prevalent in Alice Springs?

Ms Mildred—Yes. If you visit various places, such as hotels and restaurants, you will hear the accents and you will know. People come in and out, work for a while and go again.

Mr SAWFORD—Does it cause any problems?

Ms Mildred—I do not know about that.

Mr SAWFORD—Does it diminish opportunities for local youth?

Ms Mildred—That I cannot answer either. I really do not know.

Mr SAWFORD—On a different tack, what is your chamber's attitude to junior wage arrangements? How critical are these in the employment of young people here?

Ms Mildred—I do not quite understand your question.

Mr SAWFORD—During this inquiry, some people have mentioned to the committee that wage rates for juniors are far too high for people to be able to employ them. Is that a problem here in Alice Springs? I gather that it is not.

Ms Mildred—I do not hear that from members.

Mr SAWFORD—Right.

Ms Mildred—As I said before, I can tell you only what I hear from members, and I have not heard that specifically.

Mr MAREK—Have your members ever discussed much in relation to their children's education here? Do they send their children away to be educated or do most of them educate their children here?

Ms Mildred—All of that, I suppose. It depends on what you want in education. The Centralian College here is a TAFE college, and it runs some courses from the Northern Territory university in Darwin. I believe they are starting up a couple of a degree type things, and I like that. But there is not a full range of higher tertiary education here in Alice Springs, so if you are looking for that you would have to send your children away.

Mr MAREK—Would many of the kids come back after they have got their education away or would they stay away?

Ms Mildred—Yes, they do come back.

Mr MAREK—And then possibly find work?

Ms Mildred—Yes.

Mr MAREK—Most of the work, I guess, is tourism orientated, so it would be interesting. Is it right that most of the work here is tourism?

Ms Mildred—It is a big part of what happens in the town but, as I said before, it is a complete town with an infrastructure which covers a complete town. So there are all sorts of different types of jobs here in different types of industries.

Mr MAREK—What is the population here? Twenty-odd thousand?

Ms Mildred—No, just under 30,000, I believe. It fluctuates between 28,000 and 30,000.

Mr SAWFORD—We have got 40,000 to—

Ms Mildred—I have not heard 40,000.

Mr MAREK—I am looking at it and I am thinking that the main industry here is tourism, and that there would have to be so many kids leaving school every year. It sounds like they are getting soaked up into the system—they are getting jobs if they want jobs. Then you have got a lot of kids who go away to get an education. They would not all be going away and learning about tourism and those sorts of things. They are probably learning how to be doctors, lawyers, dentists and all those sorts of things. You still find a lot of those people coming back?

Ms Mildred—I can only say that I know of young people who do come back—there are members whose children do go away but come back anyway. But, of course, it is going to be a spread. Some of them will not come back. They will find something more attractive where they are or it may be related to a profession or something in which they could not find a position here.

CHAIR—I assume if tourism died so would Alice?

Ms Mildred—I hope not. I think that there would be a lot of—

CHAIR—I said 'if'.

Ms Mildred—I cannot imagine that a town with the sort of energy that this place has got would allow that to happen. I think that you would just have to find other ways of doing things.

CHAIR—You talk about the energy: what mechanisms in Alice spring together or are there mechanisms that bring together the education system, government agencies and the business community?

Ms Mildred—I do not know. I think it is just a matter of wanting to survive. I think if you want your town to live, you simply have to look around you to make it work.

CHAIR—So there are no formal relationships between the three?

Ms Mildred—Not that I see in action. I believe that it all works because people know where they have to go to get things and they just do that.

CHAIR—So there is no strategic plan for Alice that puts it all together, other than planning malls?

Ms Mildred—That is a difficult question for me. First, I have only been in this job since the beginning of December and, secondly, I have only lived in the town since last April. I can only tell you what I see at the moment and what I have seen in that short space of time.

Mr SAWFORD—Maybe this is not a fair question either. I notice that your chamber has a bit of responsibility for Yulara and Tennant Creek—

Ms Mildred—Yes, that is my responsibility.

Mr SAWFORD—Have you had an opportunity to have a view about what is happening in those places re youth employment?

Ms Mildred—I have not been to Yulara in person. I have constant contact with them, though, because we have an industrial relations advisory service—it is mainly a telephone service, because that is the convenient way to do it—and we get calls all the time from all our members all over the place. I have had three visits to Tennant Creek in the short amount of time that I have been here. I have actually seen Tennant Creek. I have been there and had—

Mr SAWFORD—Have people raised issues about youth employment opportunities in those areas with you?

Ms Mildred—Yes. Tennant Creek is obviously a smaller place. We have 30 members there, if that puts it in perspective. It has a smaller range of employment centres. A lot of Tennant Creek centres around mining.

Mr MAREK—I want to go down a different track. I want to talk about employment and native title. I want to talk about Ayers Rock. In years past native title claims have, I guess, taken Ayers Rock; it has been given to the Aboriginal people. With the way that went—step in at any stage and tell me if you do not know where I am coming from—it was given to the Aboriginal people and then, I guess, they would have had a greater direction over the tourism in the town. Because of that process, did it affect in any way the employment in the town?

Ms Mildred—I really cannot answer that. It is a difficult question for me because of my lack of history in the area.

Mr SAWFORD—It is a long time ago.

Mr MAREK—Just to go a tad further, the reason I am asking that question and asking you to quantify it is that you would have had tourism bubbling in all different areas and everybody would be focusing on the Rock because I imagine that is why a large percentage of tourists come here—and of course to see the good old Henley on Todd. When it was passed across to the Aboriginal people and they basically had all rights to it reserved then probably all the tourism operators would have been pushed aside. Would it have, in any way, downsized tourism in the community—in other words, by giving the Rock across as a Native Title Act to the Aboriginal people, did that affect employment in the town at all?

Ms Mildred—I cannot really comment on that. Tourism is still going. It is still vibrant. The operators in that industry work very hard to keep it going.

Mrs GASH—Where are you from, Ms Mildred?

Ms Mildred—Adelaide.

Mrs GASH—What made you come to Alice Springs?

Ms Mildred—My husband had been working here for three years and home was still Adelaide. We decided that we were not going to do that any more after three years so I moved up here.

Mrs GASH—Not sorry yet?

Ms Mildred—No. This is a good place to live.

Mr MOSSFIELD—This may be a bit difficult for you to comment on. It would appear as though the

ownership of Ayers Rock would improve employment opportunities for Aboriginal people by the fact that they have got control and are running it where if they did not have that I would think—

Ms Mildred—I would hope so.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You would think that that would be the case. What part does government employment such as employment in government services, CES and TAFE play in the town? What proportion of the working population would work for a council or the government?

Ms Mildred—I still cannot give you any figures. You will find those figures quite easily, but once again it relates to the town itself and how it runs.

Mr BROUGH—How many businesses are there in town? Are a fairly high proportion involved with the chamber directly and contributing?

Ms Mildred—Those numbers relate to actual businesses and not individuals.

Mr BROUGH—So there are a total of 236 businesses in town; is that right?

Ms Mildred—Including the Barkly. That includes Tennant Creek so knock 30 off that.

Mr BROUGH—What percentage of those are actually paying to be members of the Chamber of Commerce?

Ms Mildred—All of them.

Mr BROUGH—So you have every business in town in the Chamber of Commerce?

Ms Mildred—No. Sorry; they are our membership numbers. We do not have every business in town. That is my aim.

Mr BROUGH—Do you know how many more there are?

Ms Mildred—No, I do not.

Mr BROUGH—Roughly?

Ms Mildred—I really do not.

Mr BROUGH—So you have no idea whether you have 50 per cent membership or what? You have a vibrant town and you have four employees. You have done very well. I was trying to get a grip on the figure.

Ms Mildred—I really do not know the actual number of businesses. They come and go I suppose. Being fairly new to my job, my next big role is to get out there and do more marketing.

Mrs GASH—Has the new industrial relations act made any difference to people employing people or will it?

Ms Mildred—I hope it will make people a bit more comfortable about unfair dismissals and things like that. It is still very new. I know the legislation has gone through, but even practitioners like me are not really using it yet, if I can say it that way. It is just so new that it has not had time to settle into place.

Mrs GASH—I will put it another way. Do you feel it was a drawback previously to people employing people?

Ms Mildred—I do not think it has anything to do with the age of the people who are employed. The effect has been that it makes employers very nervous about employing—full stop. They really are nervous about their own rights in terms of anything they can do with employees, I suppose. It is not just related to young people. I feel it has not discouraged them from employing young people.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for coming to talk to us today. It is our intention to finish the inquiry at the end of June. We hope to bring down a report in August or September. We will certainly send you a copy.

[9.28 a.m.]

TOYNE, Mr Peter Howard, MLA, Parliament House, Darwin, Northern Territory 0800

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you for coming this morning to talk to us. Is there anything you wish to say about the capacity in which you appear before the committee?

Mr Toyne—I am the MLA for Stuart, which is an electorate immediately to the north of Alice Springs. It is 250,000 square kilometres in area, so take your pick as to where I am coming from. It includes 60 remote communities and two streets in Alice Springs, just to make it even more interesting.

CHAIR—Our inquiry is into employment, not unemployment—unemployment has been done to death. We are really looking at two things. The first is how to help young people to become more employable and the second is how we can create more opportunities in the community from business, industry, commerce and the public sector to encourage them to employ young people. Would you like to make a statement to us about the issues that we are here to address?

Mr Toyne—Yes. First I would like to focus on the situation as regards employment of young people out in the remote, mainly Aboriginal, communities in my electorate. I want to do that because I believe we are facing an absolute disaster out there with the trends that are currently happening. It has never been a good picture, but in the last few years I think it has probably deteriorated. I would like to spend about 10 minutes elaborating on what the problems are and then look at some initiatives that have had some positive effects, and could have far more effect if they were acted on.

First of all, to give you the scale of the problem at the moment, it is translating into an actual death rate of about 10 to 15 people per year in, say, the case of Yuendumu community, which is about 780 people. On that level of loss of the generations we are talking about, which is the 15-year-olds to about the 30-year-olds, we are going to lose about one-third of the population in those generations from communities like Yuendumu. The losses of life are due to the effects of alcohol and violent deaths to do with disputes in that age group, which mainly occur in Alice Springs with people who come here either itinerantly or on prolonged stays in the river bed, and also in health problems related to the kind of life style that this group are taking up. It affects mainly the male population. With the young girls and women it is slightly better, but it is by no means a good picture.

I would put Yuendumu on the severe end of the scale of communities—there are more stable communities in my electorate than Yuendumu. But it is a good touch point, I guess, to talk about the sort of picture we are seeing. I will trace for you a case study of a young bloke who is in the Jungarrayi subsection. I will not mention his name; I do not want to drag his private life into it. Essentially, his is not an unusual story. His schooling was very intermittent. He ended up at the end of primary school with very low literacy and numeracy skills, and really no employable skills at all.

He lost his father and three sisters in a tragic accident; they all died of thirst. That unbalanced his life to the point that he took up petrol sniffing. He was a constant petrol sniffer for something like 2½ years. That left a lead loading in his body that will ensure that he will probably not live beyond 40, if he is lucky. His

schooling was basically a pattern of coming in every now and then. But, against a background of petrol sniffing, there was no way he was going to learn much because of the effects of the substance itself and of the late nights when the petrol sniffing went on. It happens at night in communities, by and large, although in some communities it is in the day time as well.

This Jungarrayi then proceeded beyond school and went into the next phase of the age group, which is football trips, binge drinking in town and, essentially, a very closed part of the community. For people like adult educators or educators, as I was, it is very hard to penetrate that group and bring them out of their own life style. They tend to go together in old cars and hang around together in communities. Part of that is cultural tradition for the age group.

I had a particular friendship with this bloke's foster father who was trying to bring him up. We involved the son in some work to do with communications in the Tanami network. He did not have many skills, but the fact that someone said, 'Come over each day and spend time with us,' brought him away from the petrol sniffing. It was such a small thing to do, but it was an intervention that actually got him out of petrol sniffing at least and brought him into some contact with the employment context. That small act two years ago has continued now with some continued relationship with Jungarrayi and he, at least, would be capable of being brought back into training for some employed future.

It is a pretty grim story and it is by no means unusual. He is still alive and a lot of his contemporaries are not. The things that I would like to say about the initiatives out-push that might do something to help this—and why we are so worried about the current trends—is that really the only resources we have had available to support kids like this young bloke were the existing jobs within the community, the ability to attach young people to the jobs, the labour market programs which we were using pretty extensively over the last couple of years and, I guess, the CDEP and other work for the dole arrangements.

CDEP has been bought in at Yuendumu and it is universally unpopular with the young blokes to the point where they would probably prefer to get in their cars and live somewhere else if they had been put into anything but a fairly personal relationship, such as the one I have described in Jungarrayi. They do not want to go around painting rocks white, or picking up rubbish that everyone else is leaving behind. They want to feel that they are being treated to a creative possibility. The thing that bought Jungarrayi into Tanami network and held him there was that the work is genuinely important and interesting; it is not just a throwaway activity. Unless CDEP programs are set up with that kind of variation and a really serious intent on the employment activity, they are just seen as a fairly humiliating experience by a lot of them, particularly in the larger communities.

In a smaller community some of the programs have worked pretty well, like Wulukurlangu Artists Coop, or something like that, where there is just a family group and you are working with your family. You get that sort of respect and what you are doing is more significant than it is in a bigger community.

The other feature of CDEP programs is that we have had so many programs collapse that people really do not trust them, particularly in big communities. There have been shonky white fellas running them as coordinators who rip off money, or there is bad or incompetent organisation where people do not get the sort of consistency or reward from the programs that they should. At least with the dole cheque you know that you

are going to get it every fortnight and you are the only one that is entitled to it, whereas with the CDEP program that relationship is sometimes blurred because of the incompetence of the program. So that side has not been good.

In the second category I mentioned, community based work, we are seeing a real cutback in the number of jobs that are available. We have seen clinics go from 11 health workers down to two and three in some cases. The funding for women's centres is under duress at the moment to the point where we are losing those coordination positions and the things that flow on from them. The practice in the territory of taking out assistant teacher jobs when Aboriginal trained teachers come into the school is wiping out a lot of assistant teacher positions. They are core areas that we have used in the past to put young people into training and to give them the prospect of a career at the end of it and we are losing a lot of those positions.

So the community based jobs have always been inadequate but they are becoming less numerous as we are going through them the last few years. It is not just with the change of government. This trend has been around for several years where, I think, less effort is being made to bring Aboriginal people into local employment and the local servicing of their own community against all the rhetoric that is around at the moment.

The last area is the labour market programs and the related issues of case management and employment services. We set up a model nearly two years ago under the ESRA programs where we put up a structure that was actually staffed and controlled by Aboriginal people out bush to run employment services under contract. It was a different model of case management in that, generally, that is addressing an existing job market and trying to match clients, particularly young people to the jobs that are available. Out bush there are not the jobs and, as I have already said, the jobs that do exist are actually diminishing, if anything. So we had to propose a different model of case management which involved job creation initiatives, training and case management in a triangular relationship. That worked very well in Tanami in the first year that the case management services ran, but then we were basing a lot of the job creation initiatives on labour market programs which have now been lost. We actually managed to create something like 60 positions around the area that the contract was servicing, which was four large communities, which were then filled with clients that we were managing.

I do not think that there is any point in applying case management without those other two elements because, if you are not training people and creating the means by which they are going to be employed, there is absolutely no point in sitting there as a case manager and looking around for somewhere to put someone to work. CDEP is a pretty untrustworthy ally in that process because it is so dependent on the competency of the coordinators and their ability to generate new activity given that there really are not the jobs there to put people into.

I think that under the new case management arrangements we can see some ray of hope. If that triangular model were allowed under the new case management arrangements coming in, the additional resources that have been put into that case management structure could allow quite a significant amount of enterprise development and job creation on a smaller scale to be applied. The way we would apply it and have applied it in the past would be through regional developments where you take a language group, or an area where a language group exists, such as the Warlpiri communities, and work out a series of small to medium scale developments, such as roadwork programs, abattoirs, communications developments—the sorts of things

that you can apply to a small group of communities to create the basis of employment. Matching those to training and then matching them to the personal support that a case manager can give has actually produced some quite hopeful outcomes in the early stages.

But we are in this interim phase now where we do not know whether the full measure of what was in those labour market programs will reappear in the new case management structures. So that is a quick summary. I hope that has made sense. I would be quite happy to answer any questions.

CHAIR—Thank you for that, Peter. Could you tell us, in your view, how we can best go about encouraging young Aboriginal children to stay at school? What is the solution to that?

Mr Toyne—I was trying to do that for six years and I think, at best, I got 70 per cent along to school and achieved the best results we got at Yuendumu. We did that by busing kids into school from their own community even though only small distances were involved, and working with the parents to build up a reason for going to school.

The basic problem is: how can you force someone to go to school if there are absolutely no outcomes at the other end? What is the purpose of an education if there is no job there? We have lost the connection. We have even lost that in town here. The youth here do not see the connection between a year 12 graduation and doing better than their peers in work.

CHAIR—No role models at all?

Mr Toyne—There are role models, and they have taken 15 years in some cases to put in place. There are Aboriginal teachers working at Yuendumu school. There is an example I have brought here. There are seven of them now in the school out of a total staff of 12. It is now filtering back down that yes, if you persist with your teacher training and get into a position where you have graduated, you have a good chance of getting a job. But that is seven people out of a community of 700 people, so we have a long way to go. I think we have to look at making that connection first, where there are some examples around you that people have actually used their education to better themselves in employment or whatever.

CHAIR—Is there any other mechanism better than encouraging education for the young people to help solve the problem?

Mr Toyne—We have to have an economy. There is almost no economy up there. I think it is not because there cannot be. I think it is a matter of thinking pretty hard about what are the strengths in these remote areas, and there are some strengths there. Culture is a real strength. It has been translated into the production of art. The Yuendumu art co-op produces about half a million dollars worth of sales a year. That is creating at least casual income for a large number of people there.

We bring meat up from Adelaide to a cattle station to feed people. It is crazy. Yet the regulations make it almost impossible to run even a very basic killing floor. We need to somehow make the conditions a bit easier. We had six young people working in the abattoirs at Yuendumu, but it is now illegal to run that facility because of the new regulations. They are protecting people's health, but nothing is more unhealthy than the

sort of lifestyle that people are leading. They do not have an economic involvement out at Yuendumu, so I think there has to be some priority put on allowing those sorts of facilities to operate out bush.

Often the threshold to get an enterprise or at least a single job going can be quite low. We have put in for grants of $3,000 to buy an arc welder for someone who knows how to weld. There are lots of things they can weld up and sell around the community such as bed frames and fire grids and those sorts of things. For $3,000 you have someone who can get an income for themselves.

So often you go with a small application like that and it is too small to get any attention. So that is why I think that, if you go on a regional level rather than try to solve the whole problem across the country, you are getting down to specific people who have skills or at least ambitions to do things. You can give them a timely response to that, and we could do quite a lot of things.

Mr SAWFORD—Are we looking at three or four generations before we are going to get on top of this problem? Are Aboriginal elders, for example, suggesting strategies? Is there a specialised or a very special vocational curriculum that is required? You mentioned the art world and the practical skills around the place.

Mr Toyne—I think we will not have two or three generations to solve this problem, because it is not like you have the same goodwill to solve the—

Mr SAWFORD—I am not saying it is a good thing. I am saying—

Mr Toyne—No, I know. We are actually losing goodwill as we go along. Each time people go into a development, it is contravened at some level. I will give you a quick example. The Ananguku Yiuarra Aboriginal Corporation and the nine communities in the western desert got together. They got a strategic road plan together over a period of two years of consultation in the communities and road surveys and so on. They got strategic road funding 1½ years ago. They bought a million dollars worth of plant against the contracts they thought they had. Then three months after they started their roadworks program, which was committed to go for three years, the funding was cut. So they have now done 2½ years work, bought a million dollars worth of equipment, which is now sitting out on the Kintore Road. That is the result they got out of it. So the next time someone goes and talks to them and says, 'Let's get a roadworks program,' what is going to be the reaction?

Mr SAWFORD—Are there any other examples of that?

Mr Toyne—Yes, there are. You go through any community out bush and you will see the ghosts of all of those things. There is infrastructure lying around in the dump or in the community itself which were all bright and bushy ideas at the time. We are running out of chances. Let us put it this way: you go back and revisit these areas and people say, 'Last time we tried that this is what happened.' So we have got to get it right and we have got to get it right quickly.

Mr SAWFORD—You are looking at almost a total demoralisation?

Mr Toyne—Well, if that is reflected in my voice it is not true in that I am still trying to make things

go. You cannot help but say that that was a bugger-up. There is no other word for it. You cannot afford too many of those in the future. We have got to get the detail of local interaction right.

Mr MAREK—You were talking about schools there before. You found, and you could clarify this, that if you took the children away to a school you achieved a better result.

Mr Toyne—I think the opposite has been my experience. Are you talking about boarding schools—

Mr MAREK—I will give you a bit of a scenario. I have got Woorabinda in my electorate. We have a primary school cum somewhat high school secondary education. You cannot keep the kids at school. If you try to force them, the next minute the kids bash the teachers, the next minute the parents come and knock the teachers around and it goes on and on. In some instances we have found that if the children go away to Baralaba by school bus, which is about a 30-odd minute trip, the students go to school, they enjoy school and they come out with a better education. They are the kids who end up leaving the community because they see there is no future in sitting in the community. Is that what you would say is fair?

Mr Toyne—Our experience in Central Australia is that there are some examples of either busing arrangements or boarding arrangements where it has produced a small number of graduates who have gone on into reasonably good personal lifestyles and employment. The overwhelming outcome has been people dropping out because of homesickness or teasing or because their families do not want them in wrong relations with other language groups or in the wrong skin relationship. And at $20,000 a head the boarding option is a very expensive way to educate kids. If you are only getting the sort of success rates that we are getting around the Kormilda College or Yiuarra here—they are the main ones but some of the Queensland schools as well—the outcome has not justified the amount of money thrown at it.

Probably the more hopeful model that we are working on at the moment is what we are calling mixed mode delivery into the communities where specialist teachers are brought in electronically into the delivery of upper primary and high school courses. They are using video conferencing on computer links. That is attached to a tutor who personally supports the students out bush. In junior high school level we have been getting quite good outcomes from that model because for the students who stay at home with their families in a traditional community at that age group it is the time when the serious initiation of teaching is supposed to be happening. In some of the stronger communities it is still a major feature of each summer with ceremonial things going on through the rest of the year. So it suits the families a lot better. It brings young girls who have been married off at the age of 12 or 13 back into the education process because they have often got kids or young babies that they cannot take off to boarding school. Particularly with the young girls, that has been quite a successful model and deserves a much stronger representation around the communities than exists at the moment. There are about five communities trialling those sorts of models of delivery here at the moment.

Mr MAREK—I see your comment also about possibly over-regulation from government. It seems to be very prevalent as well, particularly like you said at that meatworks.

Mr Toyne—The general rule I would say is that the further removed from the detail of a particular context you are looking at, the less likely the decisions being made, for all the best reasons in the world, are relevant to the needs of that particularly locality. Somehow we have got to connect the resourcing and decision

making much more closely to the detail of the context. It gets down to a particular person sometimes that wants to do something in the next couple of weeks. If you do not resource it they give up on it. To get to that sort of level detail—we cannot even do that from Alice Springs here. By the time the DEET officers here get around their area of responsibility they are lucky to have visited a community once every six weeks. That is even with the old resourcing levels, let alone the one we have got now. So you are just not getting out there often enough to pick up the detail.

Mr BROUGH—What level of substance abuse do you have throughout the community out there? What is the total number of adults to start with?

Mr Toyne—It is in two categories. You could call them almost the wowsers and the bingers. Most communities are like that: it is either all in or all out. Surveys have shown about 60 per cent do not drink at all. They are mainly the senior people and the women. But the people that do drink drink horrifically.

Mr BROUGH—The substance abuse then affects the entire community dramatically?

Mr Toyne—Absolutely.

Mr BROUGH—The programs that you were talking about, the roads et cetera—who was managing that?

Mr Toyne—That was a committee. They incorporated as the AYAC, which is the committee. That had representatives from each of the nine communities. Then they employed staff to actually undertake the roadworks and the training. They brought some specialist trainers up from South Australia to actually run the roadworks and train at the same time.

Mr BROUGH—Do you believe they had the skills in which to be able to manage a project of that size, as in the financial side of it?

Mr Toyne—Well, they were doing it. They had completed the first two contracts when the axe dropped on the funding. One was a patrol grade which was something like 500 kilometres of road. The other was a road building of some 40 kilometres which they had to rebuild the entire surface and re-compact it. They had done it. It is not to say it could not have been done better and better as they learnt, but they were getting there.

Mr BROUGH—That money was available through ATSIC?

Mr Toyne—It was through the Department of Regional Development. It was Brian Howe's old area. I think it is Sharp now. It got axed out of the $8 billion deal.

Mr BROUGH—How much of this problem is actually cultural? In many western towns throughout Queensland and throughout Australia you have someone from the indigenous population who has become a stockman or whatever else who finds himself dragged back down by those who have not yet clawed themselves up. Some have alcoholic dependencies. They demand money. Part of the cultural upbringing is, if

asked by a relative to provide, you will. That is part of the culture. How much is that making the job that you are trying to achieve so much harder?

Mr Toyne—It gets down to the scale of the initiatives that you have got to achieve if you are going to make any inroads. With that case management model I was talking about, we had enough activity out of the labour market programs to actually draw enough of the people out of the old lifestyle into this new lifestyle. If you had 50 young blokes that were cruising around in a binge drinking, footy trip sort of lifestyle and you had over two-thirds of them getting involved in one or another of the training cum employment creation schemes, then the whole lifestyle of that group changes. If you are trying to get four or five of them out, given the cultural aspects you are talking about, blood is very much thicker than water in Aboriginal culture. You have got very strong kinship ties and obligations. So you have really got to redefine the whole lifestyle in a quantum leap rather than try to chisel away at bits and pieces of it. I think that makes the job harder if you have not got the resources to do it.

Mrs GASH—You seem to be doing a whole lot of it yourself, just listening to you here. What sort of a support base have you got within the community to do what you do?

Mr Toyne—It is not all personal initiatives. I have been involved in supporting a lot of these things but there are a lot of people out there that are working on these sorts of initiatives. In the case management staff at the Tanami network, the Wulukurlangu Artists Cooperative, anyone is potentially able to intervene and get involved in creating or consolidating.

Mrs GASH—How large is the Aboriginal community here in numbers?

Mr Toyne—Across the territory as a whole, it is nearly 30 per cent of the territory population. I think we have a total population of 178,000 in the territory; that gives you some idea.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What opportunities are there for the local Aboriginal youth to get involved in the tourist industry? We heard from Elizabeth earlier that most young people can find jobs in that area. Are there opportunities for young Aboriginal people to get involved?

Mr Toyne—There are two aspects of that: the mainstream tourist jobs like working in a hotel or going out on buses or whatever and the more niche market of culture based tourism or environment based tourism. I think both of those should be far more thoroughly explored. The actual participation rate of Aboriginal people in the tourist industry here is fairly low. It is totally out of line with the actual interest tourists show in wanting to see both the environment here and the Aboriginal culture in particular. The scope is enormous but it is a very tricky thing to bring together. The Aboriginal lifestyle is so centred on family life and internal community life it is hard to disrupt that beyond a certain point. They are the kinds of balances you have got to strike.

There is a fair bit of exploitation of Aboriginal people and culture in tourism as it stands at the moment. Generally artefacts and artworks make more money for other people than they do for the maker. Often people paraphrase Aboriginal culture, having talked to a few Aboriginal people, and they then present it to the tourists. This is more secure, I guess, because they know they can do it day in, day out, but it is not

providing any value to the Aboriginals.

Mr MOSSFIELD—That is an area that you are going to be working on anyhow.

Mr Toyne—Yes.

Mr MOSSFIELD—On the education system generally, are there any Aboriginal people getting through to the higher school certificate standard and if so, how many?

Mr Toyne—Very few. The main senior high school in Alice Springs is Centralian College. I think they had one graduate two years ago and one last year and that is the total output. Currently they have started a program called Detour where they have got something like 60 Aboriginal girls and young blokes and they are teaching them in outreach programs, outside the actual main campus. They are going to do that for something like six months and gradually introduce them into the mainstream academic work. I think that is a great way to go because it is a fresh start. You are getting a whole new group involved in the thing, or re-involved.

Mr SAWFORD—In terms of basic need, in terms of water, food preservation, health care, aged care, child care, sanitation, are there successful programs that have been operating, and if there have been what are some of the characteristics of those?

Mr Toyne—For aged care and child care and women's health issues, the women's centres have been a great success in Central Australia but, as I said earlier, their survival is under threat at the moment because of the ATSIC cuts. There are 18 women's centres in Central Australia. They carry out all those core functions as well as night patrols aimed at both petrol sniffing and grog problems. If there was one structure that you would want to preserve against all other priorities, it would be the women's centres. They are the most stable group in any community and are focusing on those fundamental issues of bringing the kids up and feeding the old people, disability problems for their relatives and those sorts of things. It is a meaning of life thing. Anything else is getting less directly attached. So anything your committee can do to support that cause would be welcome, amongst others—at the moment we are putting arguments to Michael Wooldridge and John Herron to say how important those centres are.

Mr SAWFORD—Are there opportunities for young people to be trained in health care skills, in hygiene and sanitation skills and in preservation of water and of food skills in those areas? You mentioned the abattoirs before.

Mr Toyne—There are two aspects to health care. With clinical health care, we have had a pretty well established structure for training Aboriginal health workers, and that has been quite effective in getting a bicultural practice in health. For lots of reasons we are not getting the outcomes, but the mechanism is there to bring Aboriginal people directly into the health services. Up here at least, there have been reviews of the models of health delivery which might open up much more potential. The other thing is environmental and community health and health education. Typically, they have been based more on the women's centres and adult education programs. You need both.

You even need to go beyond those because, when you are looking at health problems that are related to

substance abuse and diet, you have got to bring the whole community structure to bear on that, because it is a lifestyle that you are looking at and you have to somehow change the direction of the lifestyle. That means the store manager has to stock food on pricing policies where good food is more competitively priced than bad food and you can challenge some of the basic elements of the lifestyle, like smoking roll-your-own cigarettes and eating fatty food and sugary food which are leading straight to diabetes and heart problems and so on. It gets down to what we were saying earlier about the scope of the initiative. If you do not have a broad initiative in the first place, you cannot chip away at this. It has got to be done in one quantum leap.

CHAIR—We could continue to talk to you for a long time, but you know what hearing schedules, aircraft schedules and all that good stuff are like. We thank you for coming, and we value and appreciate your input. We are going to try and finish at the end of June and bring down a report in August or early September, and we will make a copy available for you.

Mr Toyne—Good luck with it. You are taking on a really difficult area.

CHAIR—It is, and we are really trying. We are making a conscious effort to go all over Australia, and not just to the capital cities. You can see that, because we are here.

[10.10 a.m.]

WASTELL, Mr Glenn, Central Australian Tourism Industry Association, PO Box 2227, Alice Springs, Northern Territory 0871

CHAIR—Welcome. I would like to say that our inquiry is not about unemployment; it is about employment. Essentially there are two factors. We are looking at, firstly, how we can help young people themselves become more employable, and, secondly, how we can encourage business, industry, commerce and, indeed, the public sector to make more opportunities available for youth employment. Would you like to make a brief opening statement on the issues we are here to address and tell us what employment opportunities are available for youth in your industry in central Australia?

Mr Wastell—Depending on the age of the youth you are talking about, it varies. At 18 years and below it is very limited and at 18 and above there is a certain amount. In addressing both issues—I do not know how you want to go about it—I can point out the pitfalls of 18 and below and also the positives associated more with the 18 and above. Ideally it would be best for you to question me because I do not really know what track you are going down.

CHAIR—One of the things we have heard consistently throughout Australia, whether we are in a major city or we are out in the bush, is that young people today do not seem to understand the world of work in two respects. Firstly, they seem uncertain about the work ethic itself, to some degree, and secondly, we seem to have done a very poor job of explaining to young people what jobs are today, what career opportunities are available, and where, indeed, they might go in the world of work and what kind of work is available beyond just going to university and being a doctor, lawyer or teacher. Would you care to comment on one or both of those?

Mr Wastell—When you say the information is available to up and coming kids who want to get into the work force, there seems to me to be adequate services, agencies and people available to guide them. I have very little to do with the schools but my understanding is that they have guidance counsellors and other avenues for them to talk to. To me, no, I do not think that is an issue. They seem to be able to make up their own minds which way they are going to go. They talk amongst their peers and other people. That is how they survive in the world. No, I do not think that is really an issue.

CHAIR—Do you have any training initiatives?

Mr Wastell—In the tourist industry as a whole?

Mrs GASH—In CATIA.

Mr Wastell—CATIA, in its own office situation, does encourage and have training schedules. Do not forget that when they are employing people, they are more of an interpretive and information service and a marketing tool of Alice Springs. The people who are relating the information across to tourists have to be trained in Alice Springs. It is very limited because people who are wanting the information want to talk to someone who they think is wise in the interpretive service and they would not have much faith in a 16-year-

old or 17-year-old doing that.

Mrs GASH—Does CATIA itself provide training services?

Mr Wastell—A training service? Only so far as the office goes.

Mrs GASH—What office?

Mr Wastell—Our office is an information service and a marketing tool.

Mrs GASH—How many people would you put through that training program?

Mr Wastell—That depends on the turnover of staff.

Mrs GASH—So you are only talking about within your own office? You do not provide training services outside the area?

Mr Wastell—No. They are willing to assist anyone who wants to go through some training program. They will push them in the right direction, show them the right agencies but, as in actual training, no. It is not in their charter to—

Mrs GASH—So how do you recruit and where do you recruit from? Do you use the CES or group training programs, or how do you do that?

Mr Wastell—It varies. It can be group training, CES or whatever means are available.

Mr BROUGH—This is just a marketing organisation?

Mr Wastell—It is a marketing organisation, virtually, and that is—

Mr BROUGH—Basically, you have pooled your funds and helped have a thrust for the whole area rather than individuals trying to chip away at it—is that the angle?

Mr Wastell—That is correct. We attend road shows and that sort of thing.

Mr BROUGH—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—What is your view of the education system here in Alice Springs?

Mr Wastell—It is very good. They try extremely hard to service what the kids need. They have all the infrastructure that is available within a capital city. Whether the kids want to follow it through or not is another thing.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you have any comments about the balance between academic and vocational

grouping?

Mr Wastell—I do not have an opinion. To me, it seems adequate. I have managed to visit the colleges and schools in different roles. Most of the people who work here are very dedicated in trying to get the outcome. As I said, sometimes it is the students who do not wish to pursue all these avenues that are open to them.

Mr SAWFORD—How much contact do you have with young people in that 18 to 25-year age group who are looking for work?

Mr Wastell—Depending on who you are talking about, a lot.

Mr SAWFORD—What is your view about their attitude and their literacy and numeracy skills?

Mr Wastell—You have to understand that the people I associate with want to work within the industry. I do not have much contact with people who do not want to work within the industry.

Mr SAWFORD—But, of the people you come in contact with, do you find any problems with literacy and numeracy?

Mr Wastell—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—How inhibiting are those factors in employing those people?

Mr Wastell—Academic qualifications are sometimes not a prerequisite for employment in the area I know best, which is hotels.

Mr SAWFORD—How many young people from other countries do you employ—Kiwis, Canadians—

Mr Wastell—I worked in Kakadu and ran a resort where itinerant people were coming through. We employed quite a high proportion of English people, New Zealanders and Canadians. The reason was that they were willing to work in a remote area to earn good money. There were also Australians who were itinerant travellers. The same happens here in Alice Springs. Most of our staff in casual positions are itinerant people, so there is a very high turnover.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Looking at long-term opportunities in the tourism industry, what emphasis is placed on traineeships and apprenticeships, as distinct from short-term, dead-end jobs?

Mr Wastell—Traineeships are important. You also have to remember that in Alice Springs—and I am only talking about Alice Springs now—we do not experience high occupancies. So all hotels are very cost conscious. They will monitor or juggle everyone to the best of their ability. If a trainee is available, they will certainly slot them in, because of the cost saving factor, and also they can see the long-term factor of having an experienced person. We do not have a problem with getting apprentices. There is always a willing person to step in.

Mr MOSSFIELD—In the tourism support industries there should be a lot of opportunities for apprenticeships, even in the maintenance of hotel equipment, and with cooks and a whole range of things.

Mr Wastell—It depends on the size of the hotel, of course. Larger hotels are able to put on, as you said, apprentice electricians, plumbers, carpenters, horticulturalists, et cetera.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Do you feel as though there are enough apprenticeships being created in those occupations?

Mr Wastell—We were once accused of having too many.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Who accused you of that?

Mr Wastell—The trainee people. That really was an oversight on their part. We do try to encourage it. You are looking down the track all the time of having experienced people available. With chefs, for instance, which is mainly what I am concerned with, if you are looking for an executive chef, sous chef or chef d'partie many times you bring them from outside because they are not readily available in the town. To have them here is to our advantage.

Mr BROUGH—The casino apparently has a very high percentage of young people working for it. One of the croupiers we met last night, obviously not at the tables, was just straight out of school. If you look around you find that most of them are only 18 or 19. Is that something that you do in your own hotel? Do you employ a lot of young people?

Mr Wastell—It is not deliberate. They are the ones that are available to you. In many cases, as you probably experienced being a guest in the hotel, you want someone who is experienced and mature to look after you and give you an experience of dining out, say. A young person is not really capable of doing that. If that is all that is available to you, do you try to take hold of them and train them to do the job.

Mr BROUGH—That seems interesting for a hotel that has a casino which would have one of the highest profiles with international style guests. You say it is not a deliberate decision, it is a case of need. That hotel has been open 10 years. Does that mean that we are not keeping the young people here and that they are staying for a year or two and then moving on and therefore the staff is changing over and you are continually getting the young ones through?

Mr Wastell—As I explained before, a lot of those people would be itinerant, they would be travellers—they would stay here two or three months and then move on.

Mr BROUGH—That short a time? So the turnover in your business and for you as a hotel manager is extremely high?

Mr Wastell—Yes. When you look at key roles such as reception, accounts and payroll, the turnover is very low.

Mr BROUGH—So is it higher for the work force in Alice Springs doing more menial tasks than the industry average throughout Australia?

Mr Wastell—It compares with areas—

Mr BROUGH—With like areas that are remote or whatever else?

Mr Wastell—You can take Broome or the east coast of Australia, the islands, and you will find that they are all itinerant.

Mr BROUGH—This young lady obviously came straight out of school to here. So this is her first job and work experience. What break up of those people who are short-term workers would be first time workers, regardless of whether they are itinerant or not, and what break up would come to you with a fair array of experience?

Mr Wastell—First timers?

Mr BROUGH—Yes.

Mr Wastell—Most of the first timers would have been through a training program at the Centralian College.

Mr BROUGH—What sort of percentage of the total would that be?

Mr Wastell—Very low.

Mr BROUGH—So most have already got experience and they come in knowing what they have to do, they stay a few months and then they move on?

Mr Wastell—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—In terms of itinerants, do you advertise any wider than Alice Springs for positions?

Mr Wastell—It depends on the role. A high senior key role would be advertised outside, yes.

Mr SAWFORD—What about wage rates here in your industry? Are they—

Mr Wastell—They are comparable with everywhere else.

Mr SAWFORD—How available is housing for young people who come up here?

Mr Wastell—One of the major reasons we lose people is that housing here is very expensive.

Mr SAWFORD—So it does not become attractive after a while?

Mr Wastell—Especially when they can move to an area where accommodation is provided, meals are provided or there is a rent subsidy.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Do you have any Aboriginal young people working for you?

Mr Wastell—When you say young, no. But we do have one person who is part-Aboriginal. She works on reception and is probably the best receptionist we have got and probably one of the best I have ever seen.

Mrs GASH—I notice that the young people are mostly women. Would that be a fair assumption, in the ratio of women to men?

Mr Wastell—In hospitality?

Mrs GASH—Yes.

Mr Wastell—You also have to remember that it depends on what area you are looking at. If you look at the east coast of Australia, they are very image conscious.

Mrs GASH—I am talking about Alice Springs.

Mr Wastell—It is not deliberate.

Mrs GASH—It is just what comes up, and that is what you take?

Mr Wastell—Yes. Maybe next week it will change. It is not a deliberate thing. We have very few to pick from as far as experienced people are concerned. We are willing to do training courses, we are willing to put people through courses, but somehow they are not willing to sacrifice to do it.

Mrs GASH—You might choose not to answer this question, but how much of your budget would you spend on training?

Mr Wastell—Last year it was in excess of two-odd per cent. It was nearly three per cent. Do not forget we also have cross-training; where we have hotels in Malaysia, we send people there to train. That is available to young people if we have someone who is willing to participate.

CHAIR—Thank you for coming to talk to us today. We certainly appreciate your input. We are going to continue our travels around outback and regional Australia. We hope to finish our inquiry at the end of June and to bring down a report in August or early September. We will certainly be pleased to send you a copy.

Mr Wastell—One point I should make is that the opportunities for a person leaving school at 15 or 16 to 18 are really limited in the tourist industry. The opportunities for those 18 and above are a lot higher.

Mr BROUGH—We understand that.

CHAIR—Yes. Thank you for that.

[10.35 a.m.]

PAPALI'I, Mr Laqui, Branch Manager—Alice Springs, Top End Group Training Pty Ltd, Suite 75, Alice Plaza, Alice Springs, Northern Territory 0870

CHAIR—I want to thank Top End Group Training Pty Ltd for appearing before the committee today. Essentially, as I said before, we are here to talk about employment, not unemployment. We want to know how to help kids become more employable and we want to know how we can make more jobs available for youth. In what capacity do you appear before the committee today?

Mr Papali'i—My capacity here is to provide some information about how we employ the young people here in Alice Springs and, of course, throughout the Territory. I also wish to talk about the roles and objectives of the company.

CHAIR—Would you like to tell us about that?

Mr Papali'i—Certainly. 'Group training' refers to an arrangement by which apprentices and trainees are employed by one company, and that is termed the group training scheme. We actually place into the workplace with various enterprises trainees and apprentices, and the employers are termed host employers. That provides them with on-the-job training as such. Our objective and role is to establish and maintain employment and training through the use of apprenticeships and traineeships and through the quality assurance principles and practices in order to provide long-term employment and produce a more skilled work force. Our role is specifically with entry level employment; that is, the youth who do leave school. We then try to place them into a working opportunity through the traineeship and apprenticeship scheme.

CHAIR—We have heard all around Australia, not only in the capital cities but also in regional Australia, that frequently young people today seem to have a less than adequate concept of what jobs might be available and what career paths they might seek beyond the general objective of everybody going to university. In your experience in Alice Springs, do you think young people are given good careers advice at an early age? Do they know what opportunities are available, or are they still searching?

Mr Papali'i—My answer is yes and no; that is because we work very closely with a number of particular high schools. We have established something similar to the student traineeship system within the schools, where they can actually access through the group training scheme a process whereby they can go in and do work experience in various workplace areas in Alice Springs. That works with the year 10 students onwards. Usually with work experience they go in and they might work their full week or two weeks. They do not really understand the real situations involved in employment.

So this particular system that we are using allows them to be there for half the day. They spend half the day at school and half the day at a workplace. That might go on for three months in order for them to experience what it is like in the workplace and the various situations that would come up in a particular workplace area. That has been established through a particular high school, and has worked very well with our company to date in terms of allowing the students to really have an opportunity to try out a number of vocations and work experiences so that they can make a decision as to where they would like to go.

CHAIR—How many kids?

Mr Papali'i—Currently, I have 21 from this particular high school.

CHAIR—What is the total student population?

Mr Papali'i—I am not sure of what the population is?

CHAIR—Is it 200 or 300?

Mr Papali'i—It is probably around 300 at this particular school.

Mr SAWFORD—You set close links with schools. People who come from different backgrounds—educators, training providers and perhaps government services employers—often have a perception about each other. Are there any perceptions that Group Training found working with schools, teachers, career guidance officers, et cetera, that needed some management in terms of understanding where both of you are coming from?

Mr Papali'i—No, not particularly.

Mr SAWFORD—You got on like a house on fire straightaway?

Mr Papali'i—Yes. I suppose it just depends on the individuals who are involved in this. I came into the group training scheme in July last year and met with the careers people at this particular high school. We have the same objectives.

Mr SAWFORD—Who initiated that? Who started it? Your company?

Mr Papali'i—Yes, I went out to the high school. I will give you my background. My career has always been in administration with education. I had 17 years with the department here in the Territory. I came out of that and went into this group training scheme. I did have contacts with the high schools as such. That enabled me to work a lot more freely with this particular careers officer. Our relationship is such that we really have developed some good initiatives to achieve some employment opportunities for the young people here.

Mr SAWFORD—What is your relationship like with the employers in this town?

Mr Papali'i—Very good. Prior to my taking on the management of Group Training in Alice Springs, the former Group Training company had gone into receivership. That was through mismanagement. Unfortunately, the name of Group Training was associated very poorly in the town. Because it is a small town, people did not really have any faith in the Group Training system. I have had to establish that and to get a rapport going with the business houses in town and the organisations within Alice Springs, and in both Yulara and Tennant Creek. We service all those areas. It has been a slow process. We have a very good working relationship now, and our reputation has improved greatly since I have taken over.

Mr SAWFORD—Would you like to comment on some of the attributes of the 21 young people you have recently had involved in work training? I am looking at things such as literacy and numeracy skills, communication skills, technological skills, social skills, confidence levels and so on.

Mr Papali'i—All right. Maybe I can focus on two in particular who are outstanding Aboriginal students. I have been able to work very closely with one in particular. They had completed their high school certificate—one was a young Aboriginal man. I heard Peter Toyne mention that just a year ago someone graduated from Centralian College, but from my knowledge this particular young fellow, who graduated last year, has been the only young Aboriginal male who has completed his high school certificate for some time.

Their literacy and numeracy skills are of a high standard. Because of that, I have been able to place them. The young girl is with the Department of Correctional Services. The young Aboriginal man is taking on an apprenticeship in the mechanics field, but he would like to take on two apprenticeships. When he has finished this one, he would like to do another one. That shows the eagerness and the keenness that they have in the career path that we can set them on. We establish that within the school through the Group Training company and, of course, the host employers that we place them with.

Mr SAWFORD—I have one last question. As the horse racing industry here is developing, are there any opportunities for young people to move into that industry?

Mr Papali'i—I do not see why not. In terms of group training, we will take on—

Mr SAWFORD—You do not have any involvement?

Mr Papali'i—I do not have any. There was a horse riding instructor, and I tried to establish a traineeship in terms of taking care of that area. I had someone who was keen on doing that, but there was not an opportunity. I think if that does develop, most certainly as a group training company we will take on whatever is possible in terms of making an opportunity available for young people to go into training and employment and, of course, improve their skills.

Mrs GASH—How many people in your company, Laqui?

Mr Papali'i—Just in Alice Springs?

Mrs GASH—Yes.

Mr Papali'i—There are only two of us.

Mrs GASH—Do you have any difficulty filling your training courses?

Mr Papali'i—Training courses?

Mrs GASH—The group training that you provide—do you have plenty of applicants for that?

Mr Papali'i—Most certainly, yes.

Mrs GASH—Do you turn any away?

Mr Papali'i—They register with the group training company and then it is my job and my assistant's job to try to find them an opportunity to move into a traineeship or an apprenticeship of their preference. On our registration form we have three preferences, and we try to find one that would suit that applicant.

Going back to numeracy and literacy, there are inadequate basic skills that we identify when we are actually interviewing the applicants. When we note that, we put them into what we call bridging courses, et cetera, in order for them to reach the level or standard that is required before we can place them in a traineeship or an apprenticeship.

Mrs GASH—Do you have a good relationship with the CES?

Mr Papali'i—I would say yes, we do have a good relationship with the CES. I work very closely with one particular person—he is the manager of the CES operations—and that is just a matter of course. That has to happen in order for us to facilitate a smooth operation and in order for us to be flexible and negotiate employment opportunities, funding and all those areas. If we did not have a good relationship with them, those things would become difficult.

Mrs GASH—What happens to the ones who fall through the net—the ones that you refuse?

Mr Papali'i—Which ones do we refuse?

Mrs GASH—You have just said that you have three criteria. Do all the applicants fit those three criteria?

Mr SAWFORD—Three preferences.

Mrs GASH—Three preferences. Do any not?

Mr Papali'i—Yes. At this stage I have had to establish a waiting list. If I am not able to place them, most certainly the employers that I approach when I find out there are opportunities—maybe not in a traineeship or an apprenticeship, but in terms of a casual opportunity—can take that up if they wish to. But we still have them on registration so that we can, in the future, advocate them for a position whenever one comes up.

Mrs GASH—Of course, the punch line: how many would you have on your waiting list?

Mr Papali'i—I could not answer that accurately for you now, but I certainly could get that information to you.

Mr SAWFORD—On the same track, how many young people have you placed this year?

Mr Papali'i—I have taken on 58 trainees and apprentices.

Mrs GASH—So far this year? In the three months?

Mr Papali'i—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—And last year?

Mr Papali'i—When I started, probably 16.

Mr MOSSFIELD—My question is along the same line, I guess. In looking at total numbers, could you tell us how many people you have actually got placed in traineeships and apprenticeships and in what industries and classifications?

Mr Papali'i—We have got 108 in traineeships and apprenticeships, and they vary. I have trainees in Aboriginal communities who work in the arts areas.

Mr MOSSFIELD—How many would you have in that area?

Mr Papali'i—Four. I have a couple who are working in a garage as garage operators and bowser operators.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Are they following a structured traineeship?

Mr Papali'i—Yes. The normal ones, if you want to call them that—mechanics, carpenters, chefs, kitchen hands, painter-decorators—and the traineeships in office-clerical, retail sales—

Mr MOSSFIELD—So you have got them right across the board, really?

Mr Papali'i—Yes, and there are small business traineeships. You may or may not be aware of the small business traineeships that are structured for specific outcomes for the industries—for the small to medium businesses that require specific tasks or outcomes. We just make up the small business traineeship. For example, yesterday I had an inquiry for someone to work in retail, along with making handcrafts—jewellery, for example, and those sorts of items. So I am going to formulate a small business one for that. There are a lot of areas. I cannot pick them all.

Mr BROUGH—Do the young people who come to you today seem to know the difference between their rights and responsibilities in the jobs before they take them on? Is that something that you strike as not being a real problem—that they have a fair idea of what work is about?

Mr Papali'i—As part of the requirements of the state training authority—for example, the training agreement—we have to explain the regulations, requirements and obligations of a trainee apprentice.

Mr BROUGH—I just spoke to a group of grade 10s outside, and what struck me is that every one of them had had a part-time job, with Woolworths or KFC, for example—every one of them. Yet, in the same age group in Hobart, I think two out of about 20 had a part-time job. They all expressed the opinion that it is very easy to get part-time work here, but that it is not necessarily the work they want to continue with. I was wondering whether that knowledge and experience is coming through? By the time they have got to you they have worked in two or three part-time jobs, so they do know what work is all about and that getting to work on time and whatever else is not an option; it is something you have to do.

Mr Papali'i—No.

Mr BROUGH—You do not get information back from the employers that says, 'You've sent me this person. They started an apprenticeship, and really they don't have a clue about what work is all about'? That is not a problem that you experience?

Mr Papali'i—No. Because the group training scheme is developed so that we can provide a high quality, highly flexible and cost-effective system, we have to make sure that the applicants that we are advocating are of some quality and that they are already assured of what is expected of them and the expectation levels in terms of their skills and their knowledge of what they are going to be expected to achieve. All those things need to be clearly defined and they need to be aware of those things before they go on. That does not mean to say that it always works out—that happens. There is a whole range of reasons why that occurs, but we can only do our best to make sure that the service that we provide to host employers—and, of course, to the trainees and apprentices—is in order so that they are supported, not just at the beginning of it, but through the whole process so we get that outcome at the end.

Mr BROUGH—How many drop-outs have you had this year?

Mr Papali'i—I have had about 12, but I have replaced them. When I say 'drop-outs', that is not accurate: I mean that they have not stayed in that particular field and I have moved them into another one.

Mr BROUGH—So how many have actually dropped out altogether?

Mr Papali'i—Terminations? Four actual terminations.

Mr BROUGH—So that is well under 10 per cent. Thank you.

Mr Papali'i—Yes.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You would have a TAFE college in the town?

Mr Papali'i—Yes, Centralian College.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You are getting satisfactory service from the TAFE college?

Mr Papali'i—Is anyone here representing TAFE?

Mrs GASH—Can I ask another question? With the Aboriginal community, if you had more young people in the Aboriginal community wanting to work, could you place them?

Mr Papali'i—I think that has to do with industry perception. Okay, if you are asking me if I can do the job to get them into a working opportunity—

Mrs GASH—I am.

Mr Papali'i—I can, and that has happened only through working specifically with Aboriginal organisations. One of my focuses is to change that and to move them into the real work force in terms of achieving a real career path. What I am talking about are those traditional Aboriginals that are on the communities, as you mentioned—community Aboriginals—whereas the other Aboriginals that I have in town, for example, the young girl that I have got at Correctional Services, does not have the cultural ties as they do in the community and, because of that, she moves into the normal career path without any problems. She does not have those problems that they do in communities.

I recently placed two traditional Aboriginals into an office clerical position together. They are going through the Centralian College system. It is a real test case or pilot because they are the first from the traditional communities to come in and work within the town itself in an office clerical position and go through the same system as you would expect anyone to go through. I am trying to support that so that they can achieve that and, of course, then be role models for the other young Aboriginals in the communities to come and achieve the same process. That is working very well at this stage, so that is something that is a very positive aspect of what we are trying to do—and hopefully to do our bit in order to change what Peter Toyne was talking about before.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I just want to pursue the TAFE question a bit further and try to be constructive. How many of your 108 trainees and apprentices would actually be attending the local TAFE college?

Mr Papali'i—About 50 per cent.

Mr MOSSFIELD—And how could the TAFE college improve their service?

Mr Papali'i—From what the TAFE college express to me in terms of the way that their performance is constrained, it has to do with dollars and cents. They do not have the number of staff to provide services that we really would like to see. For example, administratively, when we have apprentices and trainees that are called up to attend a trade block, in terms of an industry they need advice of that long before that happens because they structure and plan their work. Sometimes the advice might come on a Friday and it has to happen on a Monday that they attend the training school. For whatever reason, that occurs, and it has been quite constant since I have been there. I have tried to organise that through the Centralian College with their executives but it just has not changed. So that is just one of the problems.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Fair enough. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for coming and talking to us today. You heard me tell the others that

we intend to finish in June, and we will certainly send you a copy of our report. We do not intend to make a lot of recommendations but we do intend to make some very positive ones that we hope the government will see fit to put in place to help give us more jobs for kids.

Mr Papali'i—One of the problems that I do see has to do with the ITABs. Are you familiar with the ITABs? Some of the ITABS are making it very difficult for services like Group Training to provide a service. For example, some of the ITABs feel that the modules that they have are specifically for their area and, if we set up a small business traineeship, they have requested that permission should be requested from that particular ITAB for the use of specific modules.

Imagine trying to set up a traineeship with an employer, trying to access approval for specific modules in making one up, and then getting that processed. That makes our job very, very difficult, and that is what they are trying to bring out. The ITABS are there to represent industry but they are making it very difficult for our sort of service to achieve a simple and effective system to take on trainees. That is just one point I wanted to highlight.

CHAIR—Thank you for that.

[11.03 a.m.]

DOECKE, Reverend Mark Leo, Yirara College of the Finke River Mission, PMB 51, Alice Springs, Northern Territory 0872

STRACHAN, Mr Peter James, Regional Manager, Central Australian Region, Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, PO Box 871, Northern Territory 0871

THOMPSON, Mr Roger Sydney, Manager, Youth Access Centre, Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, PO Box 871, Alice Springs, Northern Territory 0871

CHAIR—I welcome DEETYA, Alice Springs, and Yirara College. Thank you for coming to talk to us today. Gentlemen, our inquiry is not about unemployment; our inquiry is about employment, essentially trying to come to grips with two issues. One is how we can help young people to become more employable and the other is how we can encourage industry, business, commerce and the public sector to make more jobs available for young people.

We have received your submission and I have to say it has some very disturbing numbers. Firstly, can we ask you a generic question? We have had estimates of the population of Alice Springs varying between 23,000 and 43,000. Could you tell us what you think the population is?

Mr Strachan—I think the accepted figure for the township is 25,000 or 26,000. But the broader region of Alice Springs would be perhaps another 12,000 who would live outside of the township in the largest population centres.

CHAIR—We understand, because we have been told by a variety of people both outside and within this hearing, that for the general population there is no real unemployment problem in the Alice. Is that correct or incorrect?

Mr Strachan—There are unemployment problems. It is not to the scale it is in a lot of centres nationally, but where the problems exist they are long term and hard core. But our unemployment rate is definitely below the national average.

CHAIR—Is it then fair to say that if a person, a young person particularly, has a desire to work and the attitude that they want to work, and has some skills or are willing to obtain the skills, then they will be able to find a job?

Mr Strachan—That is generally true if you have a reasonable level of education and, as you say, are willing to work and have something to offer employers. But for a lot of young people, particularly those with limited education—and this is part of the theme of our submission—access is suddenly dramatically dropped. And that is predominantly Aboriginal kids.

CHAIR—I have a feeling from the people we have talked to this morning that young people in secondary schools seem to have a reasonable understanding and knowledge of what work and career paths and

jobs might be available for them—here at least, if unknown outside. We find that, quite frankly, relatively unusual in our hearings all over the country. Is that the case?

Mr Strachan—I will pass over to Roger, who has more direct dealings on this. But my observation, as someone who has been in the township now for about five years, is that that is quite correct, that there is only a limited number of schools and they are quite conscious of post-school needs and, therefore, vocational needs. A smaller population means that there is actually a chance to do something about career development. Roger might like to add to that.

Mr Thompson—That is true. On top of that, being a small town, a lot of word of mouth goes around. The young people in the town are networked. So if a friend of their father's friend has a business, they know that there is a possibility of getting in as an apprentice or something like that. Because it is a small isolated town, the ability to find where the work is is much higher than in a city, simply because everybody knows everybody. When you go to a movie you know half the people in the seats.

Mr SAWFORD—One of the things from your submission, and also from what Peter Toyne was saying this morning, was that huge numbers of programs over the years have been used to address the problem of employment opportunities and literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal youth. I think you said some of these are even being revisited with the Detour program. I suppose all of us know that if you get the right people running a program, no matter what the program is you can make it work. If it is their own program and people believe in it, you can make anything work. What do you think is the major reason for the limited success of programs in Alice Springs?

Mr Strachan—I think part of it relates to what Roger was saying, that the marketable youth pick up most of the jobs so that there is not a huge number of unfilled jobs and the economy of the town has not really progressed in the last few years. It recovered after a fairly horrifying experience with the airline dispute and the effect on tourism. So there is not a great number of jobs there for those who need training programs, and you have to perhaps be a more successful participant in a training program to then knock off a job. In some cases it certainly boosts the confidence, workability, work attitude, work ethic, and all that sort of stuff. But, in the long run, programs are marginal because there is not much there to grab. That is my view.

Mr Thompson—Can I add that, when we are talking about people in Alice Springs, we must make a very clear distinction between people in town and the bush communities and culturally remote people. We are talking about two completely separate issues there. So Peter Toyne, who used to be principal of Yuendumu school and has had a massive amount of experience in the bush, was probably talking about programs in the bush—and there programs do not work. I was a field officer for five years and there are a lot of good people, with a lot of good intentions, trying to make a lot of programs work. The results are very limited.

Mr BROUGH—Why, in your opinion?

Mr Thompson—There are heaps of reasons. As soon as you leave Alice Springs you are going into a different country. I will give you an example. I used to live in Adelaide; I come from Unley. If Unley was run by Moscow and the town council had to learn Russian and the cyrillic alphabet, if they had to understand the

Russian programs in Russian and there was nobody else in Unley that could speak Russian, whatever program was put in would have a very serious disadvantage. That is reason No. 1. That is what we are doing in the bush: we are speaking Russian.

On top of that, the culture of the Aboriginal people creates a lot of differences, and Reverend Doecke can probably fill you in a lot more on that. The programs are just missing the point—and on and on and on it goes. Then there are things like the breakdown of the culture. A lot of people in communities have lost their base culture and have not gained a new one, and this comes out in the petrol sniffing. You do not sniff petrol unless you have got a pretty dreadful base life—and we are having an epidemic of petrol sniffing. So all those problems together mean that, with the best intentions in the world, the programs are missing the mark.

Mr SAWFORD—Can I put this question to all three of you: in your opinion, what should those programs focus on and how would they be structured? You are saying they have been unsuccessful, unsuccessful, unsuccessful.

Mr Thompson—As I wandered around in the bush doing my bit for God and country, I had a lot of time to sit and think. I am an administrator, and the programs I was administrating were focused on primary education in the bush. So I said, 'Why isn't this working? Why are we still getting, year after year after year, people going to Yirara after six years of education with barely the ability to write their name? We are trying our best, so why don't they work?'

I reckoned that it was not necessarily for lack of money, because a lot of times heaps of money would be thrown into training programs and education programs, and nothing would happen. It was not necessarily for the lack of goodwill or good people to do it. I came down to the fact that we simply were not focusing on the program. You would get a person into a community, say, a good administrator, and they would work their guts out. They would set up a framework to do something, not necessarily education, but starting a CDEP program or getting internal job skills going—something like that. It would work as long as that administrator was there; if that administrator left it would disappear. The reason the administrator disappeared was that they were worn out; they were working 16-hour days, seven days a week, and really trying hard.

What was missing was a real focus. We would say, with a government program, 'Okay, this is the program, let's do this.' The money was given, it was put out, but the people that had devised the program had never gone and, say, lived for a year in Yuendumu and said, 'Does this program, which sounds good in theory, actually fit the circumstances?' To me, ultimately the way to solve the education problem in particular would be to do that, to round up some experts from ANU, plunk them in Yuendumu and say, 'Live there for a year and come up with a viable answer to the disaster of education.' You cannot do it from ANU; you cannot do it from looking outside in.

Mr SAWFORD—Surely over the last 20 or 30 years you have had people in that situation, who have been living in those communities? Or do they just get up and go?

Mr Thompson—A few stick around but I am buggered if I know how they get the energy. Peter Toyne is an example; he has been there for 20 years and he is still standing, which is amazing. There is another woman in Santa Teresa, Miriam Dieudonner; she has been there for 25 years trying to put something

in. But there is a disconnection somewhere along the line. There are people working in the communities trying to fit programs in and they are so busy trying to fit the programs in they do not have time to address the issues.

Mr SAWFORD—You might have the outcomes delineated but the rationale is wrong and the process is wrong.

Mr Thompson—I do not think that.

Mr Doecke—I think it starts more basically than that. There is no culture of work. Traditionally oriented Aboriginal people do not see the importance of work. Things were better 25 years ago. All the time I have parents and grandparents come to me and say, 'I can read and write but my kids can't read and write.' Kids have not gone to school for the last 20 to 25 years because everything is given to them. So much of our whole attitude to work is because we are individuals. We work for our families, we have ambitions and that sets all those things in place. But they work as communities. Things are shared. The whole culture is different. While the government gives them what they call sit-down money—unemployment benefits, family allowances and all the things that Australians get—they pool those resources. They have what they need; they do not have great ambitions. They do not want the same things as we do so why work? I think that is what we have to get down to—this huge cultural gap that exists between traditionally oriented Aboriginal people and ourselves. All the programs in the world are not going to do anything.

Mr SAWFORD—I come back again—and perhaps we will take Roger's point up—to the focus. There are basic needs. I take your point about the work. There are needs called food; there are needs called water; there are needs called shelter; there are needs called child care; and there are needs called aged care, in any community. Is that where the focus ought to be?

Mr Doecke—They have got those. They say, 'I've got enough food; I've got money to go into town; I've got a child care centre.' The government gives them a house and they wreck it. After six months the government gives them a new house. They have everything they need.

Mr SAWFORD—And in terms of health care and life expectancy?

Mr Doecke—Those things are not important to them.

Mr SAWFORD—Not important?

Mr Doecke—No. What is important to Aboriginal people are family and traditional ceremonies. For example, at the moment I have three boils under my arm and they have been hurting me. Aboriginal people would not even bother to see a doctor about something like that until it got to the stage of impeding their necessary activities. Health is not important to them; education is not important to them; work is not important to them. What is important is family, being with family. They want to be with family. Traditional ceremonies and sport are very important too so anything that restricts those things will take second place. Therefore, if the family decides to go in for sport—into town for an AFL weekend—forget about work commitments. If there is a sporting carnival out at Kintore, forget about school for the term. In fact that is what they will do for the

next two terms; they will go from one sporting carnival to another because that is more important, in their mind, than education.

Mr BROUGH—That is Aboriginal activity. As you know, that is their tribal activity and that is why it is bonding. Work is an individual activity, not a team activity. That is what I was alluding to before you were here.

Mr SAWFORD—Would you make any recommendations about the cash payment system for Aboriginal people?

Mr Doecke—This might put me at odds with my colleagues here.

Mr SAWFORD—That does not matter!

Mr Doecke—My own opinion is that on the bottom line the alcohol problems, the lack of education, the lack of work—all of those things are related to the easy money that they have had since, basically, the welfare system was dismantled. I think, to be fair, you can apply it to Australians. I agree. What will most of the kids say to their teachers or house parents, if you ask them, 'What are you going to do when you finish school?' They will go on sit-down money. We have parents who pull out their kids at 16 from school because the kids can get more money for them going on youth allowance. If they stay at school they do not get anything. We use some of our ISEP funds—Aboriginal education funds—just to try and keep the kids at school to give them a bit of pocket money.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Can I just pursue this area, too? Some of the members have been trying to develop the important health and community needs of the Aboriginal people. We could use them to build a training or learning culture—but you are saying that they have got all those. Could we go back to the sporting culture which they are very interested in? Can we use that to build upon and, maybe, get role models who have been successful in the sporting field from among their own Aboriginal people to try to convince young people. Sport is good, but let us develop it a bit further. To be a really good sportsman, you have got to go into the scientific side of it, and that needs education. Could we develop some interests along those lines?

Mr Doecke—There have been a few limited programs that have had some success. We have had a few students who have gone through various training courses and things to do with sport when they have really got too old, or they have felt that they have been too old for secondary school and that has been reasonably successful. Yes. It is a start.

Mr SAWFORD—Is the family ceremonial a start, too? Are there any opportunities there?

Mr Thompson—This is the type of thing that I am saying about not getting—

Mr SAWFORD—The focus is wrong?

Mr Thompson—Yes. We were saying—and I think quite rightly—that education is a basis for everything. That is our focus. As Mark is saying, it is not necessarily theirs. And in some cases the basis of

everything is ceremony, absolutely. Nothing comes above ceremony, except family. So we are talking one language; they are talking another. But the problem is not necessarily insurmountable.

I was born in Canada and we had the same problem. My father finished school at grade 6 because my grandfather needed him to bring in the crop. Economics was much more important than school. I remember that we had truancy officers. If you jumped school and you were caught, you were literally taken back to the parents, and the parents were told that they could be fined for it. We had to force our generation into school. It has basically been three generations if you look, between our culture thinking education is good, to thinking that education was a thing that got in the way. It has taken us that long. So it essentially is the same thing.

The government forced us into thinking that education is good and now it is absolutely vital, but we went kicking and screaming into that idea. Aboriginal people see no point in education at all because it has nothing to do with ceremony, or their families, or their economy, because you get a university education and what then? You leave your family. A lot of people can see education as a threat. 'They have taken away our kids.' If you get a good education, where are you going to go? You are not going to stay in the local community; you are going to leave, and that is at cross-purposes.

So that is what I mean about the focus. We have to start looking at where the common bits are and then use them. It might mean that we need some form of compulsion. We have done that in the past in our own society. You know, we had truancy officers when I was a kid—fair enough. But if we say that we are going to get all these kids into school but still for no apparent reason, it is not going to do any good. We have to have the reason, and the reason has to be based on the Aboriginals' reason eventually, otherwise it—

Mr Doecke—Those who do want to access education do so. They can access whitefella systems to have enough literacy and numeracy to fill in the various social security forms and do those things they want to do. They will get an education and jobs if money depends on it and if there are no other handouts. Perhaps we could apply the same thing to education that we do to immunisation, or the family allowance: you do not get the family allowance, or you do not get as much, if you do not go to school, or get immunised. That is the sort of thing we have to look at. If there is money involved, they will do it.

Mr MAREK—I want to go down another track of native title. I mentioned this to someone before. In years past now, the Aboriginal people have picked up Ayers Rock through native title, et cetera. As far as employment and those sorts of things are concerned, would you have an opinion on whether it has stifled business, or has employment grown?

Mr Strachan—I will quote an example with the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. With this project, a Tanami mine, I was seconded by the Central Land Council to go and work with a new mine. They had an agreement written under the auspices of the land rights act which actually had employment written into the contract. Without the requirements of the land rights act, there was no compulsion on the mining companies to be genuine about Aboriginal employment. That was a clear negotiating point. The companies that were invited to tender were all told, 'This is a part of the contract that you must fulfil. It will be measured and monitored like every other part of the contract.' To me, that is a simple local instance of Aboriginal people getting access to jobs that would not otherwise have been possible. The simple commercial argument that it is easier to import experienced labour may have won out again. I know that in any literature

you can read about the success of the Jawoyn association, and all that they have been able to do is directly as a result of the land rights act.

From my observation of the Century Zinc negotiations, I also think that the only positive outcome for Aboriginal employment will be the process of native title. That gives—despite what I think some of the rhetoric says—finality and certainty, because the parties have to negotiate some sort of commercial agreement. In the end it is the commercial agreement—to come back to what Mark is saying, that dollars and cents will often sway the argument. So I see native title and the land rights act as, in fact, very strong positives towards long-term jobs, and other arguments I discount.

CHAIR—What has happened at the Rock in terms of employment and growth?

Mr Strachan—It has not been a total success story, but what has happened is that there is certainty to all parties as to the management of the park. So not only jobs themselves but also reinvestment of the gate money and other royalties are there to look after the country itself as well as create jobs.

CHAIR—What do you mean by 'it has not been a total success'?

Mr Strachan—There are not a whole lot of Aboriginal people who are working down there. If you go down there, you will not see many Aboriginal people working there, but it is a successful tourist venture.

CHAIR—Why is that?

Mr Strachan—I am not sure that I can really give you an answer. I think part of it is the complexity of getting the access of the local people into the sorts of jobs that are on offer down there.

Mr Doecke—One interesting outcome of the Ayers Rock thing is that they are starting up their own Aboriginal secondary school this year, which they would not be able to do otherwise. Some of them do not want to send their kids to boarding schools such as Yirara College, and the only way they can do this is because of the funds that they have got through the management of the park.

CHAIR—The tourist number is maintained?

Mr Strachan—Absolutely. It is probably one of the single biggest tourism pullers Australia wide. Also, it is very clear that most tourists go to Uluru and Kata Tjuta because they want to experience the Aboriginal world. So there is obviously then no loss at all in what I think is called an icon in the industry—none at all. On the contrary, it has probably enhanced its Aboriginality and, therefore, it is a tourism destination.

Mr BROUGH—Do the elders still play a big role in these communities or are the elders losing their—

Mr Doecke—The answer is: in functional communities and in smaller family out-stations very much so. For instance, they are the ones we have the most success with in keeping students at school. They are the most likely to get jobs. They even have some jobs at home but some of those will move into town and get

jobs.

In the larger communities—such as Hermannsburg, Papunya, Yuendumu—where a whole lot of people have come together, generally that has fallen apart. Where they have gone out on their own, they have retained much more of an authority system. Grandparents and elders still carry a lot of authority. The communities are functional. There is less drunkenness and fewer other social problems.

Mr BROUGH—What is the total number of unemployed registered with DEETYA at the moment?

Mr Strachan—We actually have some figures because we thought that might come up. Our total register of allowance clients is 3,400. On our register beyond that, I think there are about another 1,200 or so that we have who are non-allowance, so they are not on the newstart allowance. Of those who are on the allowance, 75 per cent are Aboriginal.

Mr BROUGH—How many of those are long term?

Mr Strachan—I do not have the figures, but off the top of my head, it would be the bulk.

CHAIR—Of the non-Aboriginals, are many youths?

Mr Strachan—No. We tried to get the youth figures. Our youth figures are relatively low.

Mr BROUGH—Sorry, what was the long-term unemployed per cent again?

Mr Strachan—I do not have a percentage, but the last time I looked it was in the order of 75 per cent.

Mr BROUGH—Seventy-five per cent of the total are long-term unemployed, and obviously the biggest representation there is within the Aboriginal community.

Mr Strachan—Yes.

Mr BROUGH—And those white people who have drifted towards Aboriginal communities?

Mr Strachan—No, there is minimal—

Mr Thompson—Most white people who drift towards an Aboriginal community get a job.

Mr BROUGH—I was actually referring to the ones that drift towards the Todd River.

Mr Thompson—They do not get a job.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What part does government employment play in the total employment situation in Alice Springs? Also, in relation to youth employment, what career opportunities are there in government employment for the young?

Mr Strachan—Historically, I think the government—whether it is federal, territory or local—has been a fairly significant employer in the region, because Alice Springs is obviously a major regional centre. It is the same in Tennant Creek, if I can speak on behalf of the Barkly region.

Historically, those levels have been reasonable levels of employers for local people, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. They are all downsizing to various extents. So access at employment point is limited. I think, for young people, we have no-one under 21. I would not think any of the federal agencies would have anyone under 21. Youth access to government jobs is pretty limited. I am not sure if it is a distinct discrimination. I think it is just a factor of process of selection.

Mrs GASH—Mark, your submission was very comprehensive. I would love to have seen some recommendations. How long have you been at the college?

Mr Doecke—This is my fourth year.

Mrs GASH—Has it been getting better or getting worse in those four years?

Mr Doecke—The college or the Aboriginal situation?

Mrs GASH—Both.

Mr Doecke—Our challenges get bigger. We enjoy a lot of support financially from the federal government in particular. That makes the job a lot easier. In our view, in the time that we have been running the school, the social problems in Aboriginal communities have accelerated much faster than we would expect them to. Communities are really breaking up, and we are feeling those effects more and more in school.

Mrs GASH—Have you ever been approached by a government to participate in putting your points of view across?

Mr Doecke—No. I put in a submission on truancy two years ago, just from our angle.

Mr BROUGH—Is school in at the moment in the Northern Territory?

Mr Doecke—No. They are supposed to be on holidays, but we finished a week ago. So we had two weeks.

Mr Strachan—Mrs Gash, we are hoping to build on a recommendation by Tracker Tilmouth, who is the Director of the Central Land Council, to see if it is possible to work with Yirara College to encourage older students—perhaps even under some sort of transition between school and work: vocational education transition—so that young people are attracted to the mining industry. It is early days thinking. Mark, Tracker and I met late last year. He is still interested, and I had discussions with people yesterday. I think amongst the gloom there are a couple of things that we want to do with Yirara and its students—

Mrs GASH—That is good to hear.

Mr Strachan—to give at least some opportunities, either at the apprenticeship or traineeship level or through to professional levels, if that is their aspiration, because it is an industry that will be in the country where they live.

Rev. Doecke—I would like make one further comment that I think is relevant. A lot of businesses in town are willing to employ our students on a part-time basis—places such as K-Mart and Woolworths. They are happy with our students, and it is good that we enjoy that support. They are willing to train them. Increasingly, we have found that the only kids who can work in those environments and who are willing to do it are northern kids who have no families in Alice Springs. We had many capable students, particularly from the Hermannsburg area, who started working in those places, but they got so tired of their relatives sitting outside K-Mart on a Saturday morning and, as soon as they finished the work, asking for money. There is no incentive for them to work like that when they get hounded by relatives. That happens so much in Alice Springs. The young Aboriginal students—as I say, some of them have come through Yirara College—really want to work but, if they want to get somewhere, they almost have to leave the whole area, and that means sacrificing family.

CHAIR—Are the ceremonies and the funerals in particular also a problem? When this committee was looking at this a couple of years ago—I cannot remember now if it was group training schemes; I think it probably was—in Kalgoorlie in particular, I recall being told it was almost impossible to keep Aboriginal apprentices or trainees on because the business needed some certainty. They were under pressure to perform for the mines and, if there was a funeral, the young person would go walkabout. It made it almost impossible.

Rev. Doecke—Businesses, any employers, have to be extremely flexible. I think many in Alice Springs are willing to try—certainly we do our best—but often people do not understand the nature of the obligations. Going to a funeral is not a matter of a choice; it is an obligation—you have to go, you have to participate in this. The social pressure is enormous.

CHAIR—It does create a dichotomy, though, doesn't it? The financial pressure on the employer is such it makes it almost impossible for even people with the best goodwill in all the world—

Rev. Doecke—That is right.

CHAIR—to sustain the absence of a pair of capable hands. And yet, as you rightly point out, the young person has obligations that exceed their industrial relations obligations to their employer.

Mr Thompson—I am flying back to Canada in June because it will be my parent's 50th anniversary. If, for some reason or other, Strachy said I could not go, that I had to go to work, I would quit, because my parents are an obligation that is stronger than work. So we have to make sure that, when we look at Aboriginals, we realise there are actually more similarities than there are differences. If we are blinded by the differences we will not understand the similarities—we have to watch that.

CHAIR—I understand all that. We are going to have to close down and get to an aircraft. Gentlemen, thank you very much both for your submission and for coming to talk to us today—we appreciate it very much. You have helped make our visit to Alice worth while.

We intend to finish by the end of June. We are making a concerted effort to visit rural, regional and outback areas in all states and territories so we that we can compile a full rounded report. We have not just covered the capital cities, which is too often the case with other inquiries. With this inquiry, because we have young people all over the country, we thought it was important to find out what differences existed here, what sorts of problems there were and what sorts of solutions we would find. There are some good encouraging stories from the Alice, and we will certainly take them aboard. Thank you, once again. We will certainly send you a copy of the report in August or September whenever we manage to get it together.

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

That the committee receive as evidence, and authorise publication of, submission No. 107 received from the Reverend Mark Doecke, the principal of Yirara College.

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

That the committee authorise publication of the evidence given before it at public hearings today, including publication of the proof transcript on the electronic parliamentary database.

CHAIR—I thank *Hansard* and SAVO, staff, participants and colleagues.

Committee adjourned at 11.42 a.m.