



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities

MONDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2003

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS
Monday, 17 February 2003

Members: Mr Wakelin (*Chair*), Mr Cobb, Mr Danby, Mrs Draper, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Dr Lawrence, Mr Lloyd, Mr Snowdon and Mr Tollner

Members in attendance: Ms Hoare and Mr Wakelin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Strategies to assist Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders better manage the delivery of services within their communities. In particular, the committee will consider building the capacities of:

- (a) community members to better support families, community organisations and representative councils so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities;
- (b) Indigenous organisations to better deliver and influence the delivery of services in the most effective, efficient and accountable way; and
- (c) government agencies so that policy direction and management structures will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people.

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Committee met at 9.26 a.m.

AUTY, Dr Kathryn Helen, Senior Magistrate, Victorian Magistrate's Court

BRIGGS, Mr Daniel, Koori Justice Officer, Koori Court Division, Shepparton Magistrate's Court

MURPHY, Mr John Martin, Magistrate, Shepparton Magistrate's Court

MOHAMED, Mr Justin, Chief Executive Officer, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs into capacity building in Indigenous communities. We do not have a quorum today, but we will collect evidence as if it is a formal hearing. Welcome to the hearing. The first Koori Court has been going for approximately four months.

Dr Auty—Since October last year.

CHAIR—In starting this hearing off, I would like people to introduce themselves with a quick 20-second summary of what you do and where your interest comes from.

Mr Murphy—I have been a magistrate in Victoria for 10 years. My first interest in Aboriginal matters occurred in the Northern Territory when I was a magistrate from 1980 to 1984. I was also a magistrate in Canberra for five years in the late eighties.

CHAIR—Do you have any particular Indigenous interest?

Mr Murphy—Yes. You cannot spend 3½ years in the Northern Territory and not come away enriched, and that is what I felt.

CHAIR—Warren Snowdon will regret that he was not here today. You probably know Warren.

Mr Murphy—I wore my old Territory tie! Paul Everingham gave me that 20 years ago.

CHAIR—I had a son play for the Waratahs, so that is my claim.

Dr Auty—My background in all of this is that I was fortunate to be involved with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service in the 1980s, with the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales, and then with Pat Dodson's inquiry in WA. After that, I have been involved in developing Aboriginal cultural heritage packages at the Deakin University's Koori institute. I started as a magistrate in 1999 and was assigned to Shepparton at the time that the Aboriginal justice agreement had been signed. Basically, I came to Shepparton on the basis that we were going to be dealing with an Aboriginal court at some stage.

Mr D. Briggs—I am the Koori justice worker with the Koori Court at the Shepparton Magistrate's Court. I have not been in this field long, only since the Koori Court has been going—and that has been roughly six months or so. Before that, I coordinated the mental health team here at Rumbalara for about three or 3½ years. I was then successful in applying for the Koori justice worker position at the court and have been there since, and it is going well.

Mr Mohamed—In my role as the CEO for the Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative, I have been a part of the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee—RAJAC—a bit of a mouthful. I was elected as its chairperson. During that time the Koori Court was mentioned and, being the people that we are here in Goulburn Valley, we put our hands up and said that we would love to be a pilot group. From there we have been a part of the advocacy, giving the initial start to the program here. These other guys actually do the work.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Dr Auty—We always start our Koori courts by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians. We acknowledge both the Yorta Yorta and Bangerang people every time we commence the Koori Court, and we sit fortnightly—that is the nuts and bolts of it. The Koori Court arose out of the Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement, which was a peculiar Victorian initiative. You may or may not have seen the paperwork—I do not know if anyone has shown it to you—but that is the agreement. There was a long process of consultation with the previous government—the Kennett government—and now the Bracks government about the Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement. It involved the participation of lots of Aboriginal community groups in forums all over the state, and that is the document that ultimately came out of the process. Out of that process, the court was given a number of tasks. The first was to establish an Aboriginal liaison officer position, which we had never had before. We established that position first, and there is now an Aboriginal liaison officer in the Melbourne office who is liaising with the magistrates and also all justice service providers.

CHAIR—Would you develop that a bit further—what the role is and the way that it covers a whole lot of issues.

Dr Auty—It does, and that is exactly what happens. That liaison officer position was filled in September last year, or a little earlier.

Ms HOARE—Is that in the Department of Justice?

Dr Auty—He is actually a court employee but employed through the Department of Justice. His function is literally to provide magistrates with insights about Aboriginal offenders who come before the court; to assist in making connections to Aboriginal people and their communities for the purposes of the court and sentencing exercises; to ensure that we engage in continuing cultural education, to make sure that magistrates are aware of things like NAIDOC week, for instance, which we have not been very good at being aware of or celebrating in the past; and to ensure that any initiatives in the Aboriginal community are conveyed to the chief magistrate and his executive team so that there is a filter down process. In terms of introducing Aboriginal people to the court, in particular in Melbourne, it has been a very proactive position.

CHAIR—And not just introducing Aboriginal people to the court but introducing the court to Aboriginal people.

Dr Auty—Yes, introducing the court to Aboriginal people. It is a two-way street. We are no longer monocultural in the court, as far as I am concerned—and I think I speak for John on that—and we are not even necessarily bicultural, but we are making sure that we are bicultural when it comes to Aboriginal people who come before the court. We have taken the view that we are listening—and we have not been very good at that in the past. I suppose, in some senses, that is capacity building in an organic fashion and that is what we hope to continue to work on.

The second task was to be involved in the Aboriginal bail justices training program. In the court, for a long period of time, we have had a state training officer who trains all the registrars. Their function has been to train registrars over many years. The Aboriginal bail justices training program is in fact a function of that state training package, but the court and the magistrates were very actively involved in having input into training up Aboriginal bail justices. In some respects we have two systems here. Pursuant to the Bail Act we have an after-hours service which involves bail justices, and those positions have always been filled by non-Aboriginal people until very recently. The court was involved in the development of the curriculum and in the manner in which the curriculum was delivered to Aboriginal people who participated in the first and, subsequently, the second of those education processes. The court has made sure that its doors are open to Aboriginal bail justices when they are in town, and in fact a number of them have popped in. The bail justices program was part of a recognition that Aboriginal people were not in the justice system in positions of power or in positions where they were having their knowledge recognised, and also their knowledge of the manner in which their communities could be assisting in bail processes. But they are judicial functionaries; they are judicial officers. There are now 13, which came through in the first batch, which was a significant achievement, and then I think there were nine in the second batch.

CHAIR—That is very important in the context of the disproportionate number of Aboriginal people in custody.

Dr Auty—Yes. It is one of the ways in which we are trying to remedy that—no question about it. The Aboriginal bail justices nevertheless appear in out of sessions bail hearings for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It is an across-the-board arrangement and it was always intended to be so. Again, you have Aboriginal people having their capacity built in the justice system because they are judicial officers for everybody after sessions.

Ms HOARE—What do they do?

Dr Auty—They engage in after-sessions bail hearings. So if the police pick up somebody after four o'clock, when the courts generally are closed, we try to have somebody as a duty magistrate until five. But if we do not have somebody on duty after four, a bail justice is called to the police station after a sergeant has refused bail or has taken a certain view of it, and the bail justice then literally conducts the bail hearing in the out-of-sessions court. We have had one person here in Shepparton, but all over the state there are Aboriginal bail justices located in their communities.

Ms HOARE—So from 4 p.m. until 10 a.m.?

Dr Auty—Quite literally until nine the next morning, and also in weekend out-of-sessions courts as well. The third task we were given—which we do not really regard as a task but that is what it was called initially—is the Koori Court. Justin has spoken about the way in which they

came to be in the Shepparton region. The RAJACs, which are the regional Aboriginal justice advisory committees, which arise out of the Aboriginal justice agreement, met and determined that Shepparton would be the first pilot. We then adopted that as our function in respect of establishing the Koori courts. John and I agreed that we would do it and we have taken on board as our Aboriginal justice worker—and we are very fortunate to have him—Daniel Briggs, who is a Yorta Yorta man in this community.

We literally set aside, where possible, fortnightly hearings where we have only Aboriginal matters in the court but we also deal with whatever comes through the door and family law matters. So we have recognised it, and we are taking more time. As a function of the establishment of that court we have trained Aboriginal elders and respected persons—we use those terms mutually so that we are not excluding people who might not be regarded as an elder. We have taken the view that Aboriginal people in this community who are respected who might not be Yorta Yorta or Bangerang people could still be a respected person or elder. In fact, we have one, I think, on the panel in Aunty Kellar Robinson. What transpired is that, having gone through the training package for the Aboriginal elders and respected persons, we employed Daniel as the Aboriginal justice worker—Daniel works for the court, and you might have some questions for Daniel later—and then we started the court process.

The way we run it—and John will have something to say about this—is that we acknowledge people's connection to country before we start. The bench is the bar table, which is an oblong or oval table. At the bench we have seated with us a respected person and an elder. We have been conducting the hearings with two people at this stage and we hope to continue to do that. They are paid a nominal amount for attending, which is unusual and different from South Australia, where it is all voluntary. We call upon all of the people who attend court—and they could be family members, extended family and respected members of the community who are not in fact a respected elder for the purposes of the hearing—to have input if they wish to do so. We have now had about 40 or so hearings, I think.

Mr D. Briggs—Roughly.

Dr Auty—In those hearings we have had Aboriginal elders and respected people at the bar table with us with the prosecutor, the Office of Corrections, the Aboriginal Legal Service solicitor and the defendant, and a member of the defendant's family always sits at the table as well. The Aboriginal justice worker, Daniel, also sits at the table and on either side we would have a respected person. Everybody has input.

Our sentencing dispositions are the same as they are in the sentencing act for any other person but we have different means of getting to them when we involve community input. What we have been doing is actively going out into the community and discussing matters with the Rumbalara drug and alcohol workers and the local community health service and asking them to come and meet with us so that we can work out ways in which we can deliver orders in a more culturally appropriate—those are the words we use—fashion and, hopefully, ultimately a more successful one.

The South Australian experience has been very helpful to us. We went to South Australia. We observed their Aboriginal sentencing courts. I also went to Murray Bridge, and I think John went over—

Mr Murphy—No.

Dr Auty—Certainly, the Aboriginal community have been over and had a view, as have the police prosecutors. What we were intrigued by in their situation is what they say happened. They say it increased participation rates for Aboriginal people who are defendants but also increased participation rates for Aboriginal people who are not—so the community come along and acquire the respect that the court can give people who otherwise would be excluded from the process. That is not to say that they are not respected in their community but we are sharing the respect that the court warrants. We were also intrigued to find out that what else has happened is that reducing the fail-to-appear rates also means that Aboriginal people are not necessarily automatically going to find bail refused because they are a flight risk.

So there are little steps to get to the resolution of Aboriginal people's representation before the justice system and there are big steps. The big steps are that we are affording respect to people who are respected in their communities and we are saying that we respect their contribution. So in terms of capacity building, getting back to your particular interest, we think that what we are doing is ensuring that the respect that people have previously had afforded to them in their communities is carried in through the doors of the courts. As a function of that, we hope that young Aboriginal people, in particular, will say, 'My elders are respected by the colonial legal system'—if that is what we want to call it. As a consequence of that, we hope to see fewer young people before the courts.

CHAIR—That is wonderful, thank you. You have given a great summary of what has actually occurred. Can I hint at the way I would like to derive some information this morning? The Aboriginal community in Victoria is a smaller part of the state community than it is in most other states of Australia. In an administrative sense and in a general approach to the issues sense, is there something in that? Where should the parliamentary committee spend its time? It is not as a reflection of this that there are only two of us here today. It is just the way it has worked out after a long sitting fortnight, and one of our members is ill. There is just that perception about how the Aboriginal community sits in Victoria. The other issue is the formality of the law. As you were talking, it occurred to me that a lot of mainstream Australians—if I can put it that way—would welcome this less intimidatory approach.

Dr Auty—Yes.

CHAIR—The law is very intimidating. As a layman, I find the law intimidating. The legal process has a language of its own, and the lawyers seem to have a monopoly on the language et cetera. I intend no criticism at all; I am sure there is a very good legal base for it. But therefore the informality and the acknowledgment and—I will not say the comfortableness of it—the process where people are starting to understand what we are dealing with are addressed in your program. Those are the things I would like to start off with: Victoria's setting in the Commonwealth and how you see that, and the real relationship with the community that you have developed in a short period. No doubt you will draw something out of that. The approach to bail itself is something that you are already picking up on in that area.

Ms HOARE—I would be interested in exploring whether, from the 40 hearings that you have already had, you can provide us with a couple of examples where the outcome has been more positive because it has been under the Koori Court system rather than under the traditional colonial type system. It would be all of them, I presume, but perhaps we can hear about a couple

of examples. You have all been working with this for six months. Can you see room for an expansion of the principles and ideas into other areas of government service delivery to Indigenous communities?

Dr Auty—Justin and Daniel, with John and I, can answer some of those questions. Justin, you probably want to talk about the issue of why Victoria.

Mr Mohamed—Yes. Following from some of the comments which have been made, one of the things which has been a factor in the effectiveness of the Koori Court is having the community as a part of it. A lot of the times when members of our community, the Aboriginal community, would attend court, they were attending for something they had done and they were answerable to the whitefella's law. They thought, 'Okay, we'll get the fine or we'll get put in prison or put on probation,' but they did not think, 'This is whitefella's law, so fair enough.' They just had to go to court and be answerable to that law. The Koori Court has not only pushed that aside but also made the people responsible for their actions and accountable to the community. The elders and other people who attend the court—who can be uncles and aunties and a whole range of different people, including spouses—are asked by the magistrate whether they would like to say anything. Usually, the uncles and aunties or spouses or mums and dads say things. It has a huge effect. I have attended one court hearing, and from the response of the individuals you can see that they have turned from saying, 'Okay, I'm only here to be tried because the white law has seen that I've done something wrong.'

CHAIR—A fait accompli.

Mr Mohamed—That is right. They turn up and they say, 'Now I'm here in front of my relatives and my community, and they think this is not right as well.' So it has a far deeper impact on the individual. They are not just given a probationary period or whatever; there is a far higher responsibility they have in the community outside of that. That is something which the normal court, the traditional court, has not been able to achieve.

CHAIR—You are really adding value to the whole deal.

Mr Mohamed—That is right.

Mr D. Briggs—It is important to point out that to get to Koori Court you have to plead guilty. So, as Justin says, it is about taking ownership and responsibility for your behaviour, actions or whatever. Pleading guilty is the only way you can get to Koori Court. You will have a normal mention in a normal court.

CHAIR—It is very important to understand, isn't it?

Mr D. Briggs—Once you plead guilty in the normal court you will have the option of going to Koori Court if you wish to. A lot of people say that it is an easy option—a soft option for Kooris—but in fact it is pretty confronting because you are dealing with a lot of the lifestyle issues that you would not normally have dealt with. You would not put your hand up and say, 'Yes, I have drug issues'—or alcohol issues or anger management issues or domestic violence issues. When you go to Koori Court it is all about addressing those underlying issues.

I can answer that question about the difference between the mainstream court and the Koori Court. One example that always stands out—and Kate and I have used it as an example a couple of times—is a young kid who came to Koori Court. He was a co-offender in a crime. He came to Koori Court with quite a lot of support. There were different agencies present and quite a lot of people from the community—aunties and uncles were standing up and talking about the kid—basically saying what sorts of services and assistance were available that would be more appropriate for this kid based on the sort of lifestyle he was living.

He walked out of there on a program that has been set up in the community—the stepping stone program. He was a kid that generally would not stay in programs long. He is only a young kid. He dropped out of school. He has gone there and walked out of there very supported in the stepping stone program, and now he is on a job placement. He has received a certificate for 100 per cent commitment and attendance. It is quite a turnaround for this young kid, given the sort of background environment he has been living in for most of his life. I should point out that it was a Children’s Court matter so that it is noted for the record that the Koori Court does not deal with Children’s Court matters. The Koori Court was closed, the Children’s Court was open, but everyone was still sitting around a table like they would in the Koori Court.

CHAIR—The same principles were applied.

Mr D. Briggs—Yes. And Kate, as the magistrate, still allowed for input from the community and others sitting in the court. His co-offender went to the mainstream court; he wanted his matter dealt with on the day. There may have been a juvenile justice worker there, but the juvenile justice worker was not really assisted in trying to investigate what services could provide programs and assistance for this kid. That kid walked out of there with a good behaviour bond, and he is still struggling in the community. So it is just a difference. One kid goes in to Koori Court and comes out very supported, with a lot of different options and people in the community willing to assist and give him a hand. Another kid walks out very unassisted and still lost, in a sense, in the loop.

Ms HOARE—What happens to the other children—the children who do not have the access? You said the Koori Court was closed and that the Children’s Court was open. What happens to all of the other kids who do not have access to the Koori Court type of system?

Mr D. Briggs—Generally they go through the Children’s Court as it is, and there still are services available. They always have juvenile justice workers there and whatever else. It was lucky for the kid that the Koori Court was sitting on this day and that his matter was there. It was allowed to be heard in court 3, where we have Koori Court, so we stayed pretty much in the same setting. It was just that the Koori Court was closed, the Children’s Court was open, and he had the benefit of having us all there on the day.

Dr Auty—And he had his elders present.

CHAIR—That was really almost by accident, by coincidence.

Dr Auty—He managed it a bit by having it listed on that day.

CHAIR—Fair enough.

Dr Auty—It is important to recognise that the Koori Court deals with guilty pleas and it is also an adult jurisdiction court. We have a split jurisdiction in Victoria, with the Children's Court and the Magistrate's Court. John probably has something to say about the Children's Court, because he has also been sitting in Mildura.

Mr Murphy—Can I just go back one step. It is important that you mentioned that you are a layperson, Barry. Twenty years ago I used to fly into Papunya, out of Alice Springs, and we would set up like this, and you would hold court to an empty courtroom. But before court I would meet with the tribal Aboriginals under a tree and they would discuss not cases but problems in the area. It occurred to me that that was ridiculous—here I am; I fly in once a month. So I said to one of these fellas, 'Why don't you elect one of your fellas to come in and sit with me?' They elected this guy and he came in and sat at a table like this. We went from an empty courtroom to a packed courtroom. A woman called Alison Anderson, who was involved with the community up there—she is now on the ATSIC committee—

CHAIR—Yes, we know her.

Mr Murphy—used to sit in court with a clipboard. She would put her hand up and say: 'Don't send him to Alice Springs jail. I can get him work here or there. If he has got a grog problem, we will send him 300 kilometres away to a place called Kintore.' The thing that occurred to me then—and it is coming back to me here—is the very important part played by the elders and respected persons in our system in Victoria. I can still recall that whenever I would speak to a defendant at Papunya they would look at me; whenever the tribal elders spoke, they would hang their head in shame. I must say that in the short period I did do that I certainly was not locking up as many people; up there lots of people were being locked up.

In Victoria, we have our Koori Court. There is a need—and I hope that this does come about—for the Koori Court to sit as a children's court. I go to Mildura for six weeks a year, and there is a large Aboriginal population there. I told the police prosecutor and the Aboriginal legal aid solicitor that I intended to conduct an informal 'Koori Court'; it was not the Koori Court but I intended to do the same thing. I came off the bench, very informally, and had a couple of defendants there; I listed them from two o'clock in the afternoon. It was just like this. I had three defendants sit beside me. I had three lots of families—mums and dads—there. There was the Aboriginal legal aid solicitor and the police prosecutor. There was an American Negro—that was interesting; he was with juvenile justice—and another juvenile justice worker.

We still went through the plea of guilty, the summary by the police prosecutor, the defence counsel making their normal submission and then a magistrate would give the decision. Here I invited them all to participate, like we are now, and it was wonderful. The Aboriginal legal aid solicitor was addressing the defendants and bringing up things that I had not thought of—the justice workers did likewise. I thought this was important. I remember one girl with a young baby who was there, standing at the end of the table, and she said, 'In a normal court sitting, I would not have been heard.' She was there for her brother. When it was over he said: 'Can I say something? I would like to thank you, and can I shake your hand?' That is the sort of atmosphere we had. In Shepparton also we are trying to make proceedings as informal as we can. I hope we are getting the message across to people that they should feel welcome. I forget the term you used, Barry—that the law is intimidating, or whatever.

CHAIR—Solution based rather than adversarial based.

Mr Murphy—Very much so.

CHAIR—Not that you always get the solution, but you are seeking it.

Dr Auty—We do not think we are going to have a 100 per cent success rate with everybody who comes into the court.

Mr Murphy—No. In Victoria, just out of Shepparton, for instance, we have the Percy Green Centre. We have been using that informally over the years for persons, say, with a grog problem. Instead of remanding them in custody to Melbourne, they can go out to the Percy Green Centre. The prosecutors are quite happy to simply have the person go out there. They might go out there for 12 months; 12 months is probably long enough, and that is the end of the case. That seems to work.

Dr Auty—You asked a question that I do not think we have addressed yet. You asked, ‘Why Victoria?’ and you also asked whether this could be extended to other groups.

CHAIR—It is pretty much similar, but there may be some differences.

Dr Auty—This could be extended to other groups. There is absolutely nothing to stop us dealing with people who come from Afghanistan or the Horn of Africa in exactly the same fashion. I would take the view that we ought to be asking people who are senior in their communities for input. In fact, at Cobram we have a very large Iraqi population, and we have a large population of recent immigrants here in Shepparton. There is nothing to stop us doing that.

You also asked: why Victoria, and how could Victoria be in any way a model? Everything will be different: Victoria will be very different from South Australia, there is no question about that. South Australia’s Nunga Court and Aboriginal sentencing courts vary as well. So, in fact, people from the lands might have their matters dealt with in a particular court, as in Port Augusta, compared with people in Port Adelaide. It is quite different. The hearing is conducted in much the same way, but there are many different ways that people have input and there are different ways in which people are selected for input.

Over the long history I have had with the Victorian Aboriginal community in the law, it has always struck me that we do not listen and that we have not been very good at making our environments in the legal system open to people. Shepparton court now has seven Aboriginal respected people and elders who come in when they have a matter on. They pop in at any time; they are in our corridors out the back. They come in, they sit down and they have a chat and a cup of tea, and we are all involved actively in trying to promote community spirit in the court about what we are doing. As I understand it, that was not the experience before.

Mr Murphy—No.

Dr Auty—The other thing happening is that Aboriginal people who are senior in the community—and, Justin, I think you have been into the court, and you are not an elder or a respected person on the tribunal—have felt that it is possible to come and be involved in what the court is engaged in, and they feel able to drop in at any time. Daniel’s office is in what used to be the library, and it is constantly peopled with Aboriginal people who are there to have their

finances organised through the sheriff's office or who have called in to discuss matters or to talk about next week's court case and to talk about the prospect for rehabilitation in the community.

That simply cannot be underestimated. By having Aboriginal people work in the courts we have effectively stripped it of its white veneer. We have said that it was always a veneer and that we are not interested in returning to it. Coming back to your point about Victoria, capacity building is the same anywhere but it is different everywhere. In building capacity for Aboriginal people and justice in Shepparton the answer is to have the door open and your ear open as well, and that is what we are trying to do.

Mr Mohamed—Shepparton was selected partly because of the willingness of the community to say, 'We would like to improve this system in some way, and this is the way we would like to trial it,' and to go through the different hoops and barriers that might be there. One of the evidence based things that pointed towards Shepparton and the Goulburn Valley area was the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people within the justice system, right through from juveniles to contact with police, how many people were on warrants—a whole range of things. We had a high level of all those within the state of Victoria.

Approximately 6,000 Aboriginal people reside in Shepparton and the Mooroopna, or Goulburn Valley, areas; whereas in that same catchment there would be 60,000 people in the mainstream. So we make up about 10 per cent of this community, which is fairly high for a Victorian community. The issues that have faced the Aboriginal community up until this stage are that in the major places that we have contact with, such as the courts, the police and those sorts of areas, we have had very little input, other than going in and being at the receiving end of some sort of discipline. That is the only time you go into those places.

CHAIR—Receivers.

Mr Mohamed—Receivers of whatever the worst outcome is. Where the Koori Court has changed, not only with the court but also with sheriffs and police, is where there has been interaction through which the Aboriginal community can have another line of access that is not always, 'Because I've done something wrong, I've got to go to this court.' We have Aboriginal people going to the court for the hearings or going in to visit Daniel or Kate for support, or they might just be dropping in to see how things are or planning and developing further programs and to assist in trying to change or modify how the system works. It is more of a development phase. Up until now, I would say that the majority of Aboriginal people in our community had entered the court because either a relative had offended or they themselves had offended.

There was none of this social and informal part. I have been working in Rumbalara for 10 years—a juvenile justice worker for about 18 months of that time. It was only this year that I went behind the courts and into the back corridors. That is the sort of change that has been made, letting the community have a bit of that.

Mr Murphy—Another thing that I think is very important is that the magistrates and police officers have to be committed to it.

Dr Auty—Just recapping, because we have to get back to work, one of the things that we are trying to do is recognise the extraordinary generosity that Aboriginal people have always extended—to me, in particular, and to other people. In engaging in this process we are

recognising that generosity and making a place for it so that we are not always treating people as offenders and as culpable and accepting the mentality that because you are Aboriginal you are a defendant. It does not always work like that. As we know, many Aboriginal people are not drinkers; but we all think that all Aboriginal people drink. So the perception is significant.

CHAIR—In fact the evidence is quite—

Dr Auty—That is exactly right. We are recognising that. I would like to refer to one of the cases that Daniel has raised, and I will finish with this point. It is about the young men who were involved in those two cases, where the young man went off to the stepping stone program. Stepping stones had a discussion and decided to present the court with a painting. The young men all got together and put together the painting and provided it to the court last week. They wanted to gift it to us. Because we want to make sure that they can take it at any time to exhibit it, we have said that we cannot accept it as gift; we will accept it as a loan. We have accepted it as an exhibited loan, so that if they want to take it for an exhibition then they can go ahead and do so. So we have not accepted the gift but accepted the gift. We are doing things in a different way.

CHAIR—Very good.

Dr Auty—What was fascinating about that is that, as I drove past them that morning to get to the court where the presentation was being done, I looked at the front door and there was this raft of Aboriginal youth, and I thought to myself, ‘Oh no, what’s on today?’ then I realised that they were all there at nine o’clock to give us this painting. Some of them had arrived at a quarter past eight, I think. That is a tribute to the community here and also to the Aboriginal justice worker, whose role in all of this cannot be underestimated.

CHAIR—You have changed that perception. I have one quick question, and I think you may have already answered it, to do with cultural matters and what they mean. I do not expect you to go into great depth on this but I want to talk about the Indigenous law and the common law, the colonial law—whatever you want to call it. I think you have covered this in terms of the practical things you are doing. If there is there one thing that comes out this it seems to be the strength of the Indigenous law, the capacity of the colonial law and their coexistence—‘the workable relationship’, as my secretary puts it.

Dr Auty—We can work together and we are demonstrating it in our small way in the Shepparton Magistrate’s Court.

Mr D. Briggs—What happened on Friday was a good example. In our last sitting we had an elder point out and make it very clear to the defendant that his offence was understandable to a certain point but he had to understand that there are laws that we have to live by: ‘Yes, we have our Indigenous laws, but ultimately we live under Australian law, which does not allow someone to drive without a licence.’ It was pointed out that that sort of behaviour—breaking the law—would not be acceptable under Indigenous law or in the community.

That is an example of how the elders and respected persons play a role in laying down the law and what the community code of conduct is. They are the ones who say: ‘No, that is not acceptable to our people. You’re in our country now, and you go by our laws. If you disrespect that then you are breaching our cultural laws. You are also breaching Australian laws.’ That was

made very clear to this lad. It is good having a magistrate who is able to hand down sentences and also speak about what the law is which we live under but then our elders and respected persons can also speak about the cultural laws and how they are linked.

CHAIR—I would love to talk for longer, but you have to go.

Dr Auty—We do have to go. We extend an invitation to you to call in to the court if you get the chance. We have the court there, and you could see the environment in which we conduct the court. Feel free to stop by. We close the court at 5 p.m. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you.

[10.06 a.m.]

MARTIN, Mr John William, Chief Executive Officer, Goulburn Valley Community Development Employment Program; and Chief Executive Officer, Koorie Employment Enterprises

CHAIR—Welcome, Mr Martin. I understand that you have not actually made a submission, but you have some interesting issues here, some dynamic outcomes, by the look of it. Would you like to give an outline of your activities?

Mr Martin—I am the CEO and director of the Goulburn Valley Community Development Employment Program. We have been in operation for 10 years. I will just give you a quick snapshot of the organisation and leave more time for questions. We are celebrating 10 years of operation on 1 July this year. It has been a long journey for us. There have been a lot of issues along the way, but we are quite proud of where we have come to. We were born out of the Rumbalara organisation and auspiced under Morwell, which is some five hours away from here. We broke away from Morwell within a two-year period and then, one or two years after that, we broke away from Rumbalara. We had our core functions to deliver and we got mixed up a fair bit in health and housing issues, so in order to establish an economic and employment type of initiative it was seen to be important to separate. A lot of political issues went with that. There were a lot of factions within the community, but we overcame those issues to establish a new image and a new philosophy for the CDEP.

Out of that came Koorie Employment Enterprises. We thought it was appropriate to better promote ourselves. As you can understand, ‘Goulburn Valley’ is the whole alphabet, whereas Koorie Employment Enterprises basically is what it says. That is our core function; everything we do is around employment. We have established a number of small enterprises for our participants to participate in. We have a photocopying business and we have KEE Homes, where we manufacture our homes in partnership with another mainstream business. We are launching the first new home which we have built for this organisation on 7 March. It is a double-brick, low-maintenance, culturally appropriate type of home where the landscaping, the furniture, everything, have all been done—when you walk in, it is ready and established—by the participants on the program. We are quite proud of that. We have another business, KEE Promotions, which produces embroidered products and that type of thing.

Ms HOARE—Does KEE stand for ‘Koorie Employment Enterprises’?

Mr Martin—That is right, yes. Another initiative that we have been successful in is producing and distributing the CDEP national newsletter, where we showcase all of the good stuff that happens within the CDEPs across Australia. We were instrumental in the first newsletter because we had been distributing a newsletter locally that really got momentum. It was a layman’s way of putting together a newsletter, but it was a well bound one and it would go to national forums, promoting us. Other people got hold of it and liked the idea. We would individually mail them to other CDEPs, and they wanted more of the information. We initially promoted the CDEPs within Victoria and it just grew from there.

CHAIR—Into a national newsletter?

Mr Martin—Yes. It then became an ATSIC initiative. We lost out on the first tender but we let it go by and then picked it up in the second round. We have held it ever since.

CHAIR—You are persistent!

Mr Martin—Yes, we persisted. That was born from people who wanted to be active. When we had the newsletter the participants would come in and feel good and say, ‘That’s what we are doing.’ A lot of the time the CDEPs are not promoted in a positive way. The people who are in it come in—they lift their feet and their chins—and want to participate in the projects.

CHAIR—There are those that would argue that the CDEP has some structural flaws that could be improved upon.

Mr Martin—It definitely has. I am not a believer in having CDEP participants waiting on CDEP for their long service leave and things like that. We were quite fortunate here—I was a director of this organisation; I am now back on the board of management here at Rumbalara—too often we go straight to the objective without thinking out the methodology. When we got the program here as part of Victoria it was too much a case of: ‘Let’s get some programs happening.’ I basically sent everyone home; I had 40 people waiting on the doorstep. There were no policy procedures, there were no guidelines, no ‘Where do we want to take this program; what do we want it to do for our community?’

Ms HOARE—No business plan.

Mr Martin—Not even to that detail—more some boundaries within which could participate, and where we wanted to take it. Within the first two months we had a community get-together which we facilitated ourselves. We had Centrelink, we had the taxation department, we had all types of stakeholders come in, and we workshopped it over a three-day period. We established a mission statement, a vision, and identified the key stakeholders and made sure they were on board too.

CHAIR—Would you just give us, say, three dot points from your mission statement?

Mr Martin—It is mainly to establish Koori owned and operated enterprises to make ourselves sustainable. We have a vision statement—I cannot remember it word for word—the essence of which is to gain respect within the wider community, being responsible for our own actions, making ourselves self-reliant so that we are not dependent on handouts all the time, taking control. It is one thing to have the vision but another to have the ability to act on it and follow it through. Information and knowledge is powerful but only if you want to follow it through. We are quite proud on that. I see us as one of the leaders in the organisations around here—along with Rumbalara and a couple of others—in that people can dance around the table and rampage and so on but basically the decisions are taken for the betterment of the whole community and the whole of the organisation, not just the individuals.

CHAIR—What do you reckon are the main blockages to further progress, from an employment perspective?

Mr Martin—We have participated at a national level with the establishment of the IECs—Indigenous employment centres. I think that is an exciting new initiative whereby DEWR has

fully consulted with the CDEPs and the CDEPs have been able to give quality input. We have tailor-made the program. The 10 CDEPs across the nation have really been involved, and there has been an open and transparent approach by government. There has been a feeling of safety, trust and respect through it. The CDEPs have a holistic approach. We have learnt from other CDEPs—being only 10 years old, we are quite young for a CDEP. From that experience we have learned to first put in place the groundings; we have not gone out and promoted ourselves heavily. What frustrates us is that a lot of different programs might come in from behind us and try to promote employment initiatives when we have got the long haul; we have had the long vision. If we say, 'These are some of our stepping stones,' and another organisation is established or receives funds and comes in at the tail end of it, that throws everything out of whack. I am all for competition—you have to have it—but as long as everyone is playing by the same rules, as long as everyone is told that it is a competition.

CHAIR—Can I just go to the next stage of my—

Mr Martin—Yes. I did not quite answer you then, did I?

CHAIR—I think you did; you picked up the point of the IECs, and they are important. But I have got a responsibility, as you would understand, to the broader community and the broader Aboriginal community. I am interested in what the main blockages are. We are talking about community capacity. Is the main blockage education? Is it literacy and numeracy? Is it retention rates? Are many Aboriginal people just not interested, for example, in trades and apprenticeships? I suspect they are, but maybe it is the way they are presented. It is really about how we engage and about asking you what your experience is and asking you to share it with us in terms of how Aboriginal people see it, whether they want to be part of it—and I am sure some do and some do not—and what is stopping us from maximising that energy.

Mr Martin—I do not have to tell anyone it is a hard task to engage our people in meaningful employment. But I think it is the marrying together of the two cultures. Within employment you have got so many cultures—you have got industry cultures, you have got cultures within government agencies that are supposedly providing us with support. There is an array of cultures there. It is about having leaders, I suppose, or a number of leaders, showing our people that we can trust white people and getting rid of some of our own racism. It is about exposing ourselves to philosophies and values, whether they be those of a business or just of being in employment. It is about showing our people that it can be good stuff and about showing the benefits of being in meaningful employment, because, as you say, not 100 per cent of our people want to do it. A lot of our people might want to be community leaders—the old saying about too many chiefs and not enough Indians. It goes both ways. It is about exposing our people to that and having success stories there to tell the rest of the brothers and sisters, 'This is what I've got. I've got my own home now. I have got this. I can support my mother and my father because I have got reasonable wages to do it'—all that type of warm and fuzzy stuff. I think we need to be able to marry that.

I am not saying that there is racism so much as cultures out there blocking us from engaging. One example is that our CDEP has continually asked for business plans to look into potential economic approaches but it is dependent on the business and then you have got the people within ATSIC or subcontracted by ATSIC to look at business plans and stimulate some enterprises and it is dependent on the personality of the individual. If our people have got a vision or a passion for a business—

CHAIR—So the ATSIC consultants, you feel, may be depending on their particular view of the world and it may not match up—

Mr Martin—And if their trend or their preferences from their own upbringing might be to go and open a car yard then they are not going to let you go and start an orchard. It is more about opinion and I feel that—

CHAIR—Who would overcome it? There might be one view sitting over here with the consultant and then you could test it against something else.

Mr Martin—I think you have got to engage more Indigenous people that are entrepreneurial at that level side by side, if you have got the expertise that ATSIC are contracting in. We have got to have those shared opinions, that shared vision so that you are not losing the passion—the fire in the belly—of the entrepreneurs. After the way through, when it gets to the stamp of approval, you have lost all the important values about running a business and why you would want to start a business. Then, all of a sudden, it is the vision of an individual sitting in an office or someone else's vision. I think we lose that a lot of the time. Of course, you have got to scrutinise—

CHAIR—You lose it through the bureaucratic—

Mr Martin—Yes, you have lost it—

CHAIR—There is a fine line here.

Mr Martin—There is.

CHAIR—It would be ideal, for example—if we are sitting here and relying on government, relying on the bureaucratic system, relying perhaps on ATSIC and submission writing—if we set alongside it the capacity to go to the private sector and, say, borrow the money from the bank; something which sat the two alongside and gave a bit of diversity to the system.

Mr Martin—That is more to the point. That is the approach we need to—

CHAIR—That is more entrepreneurial maybe.

Mr Martin—We need to harness it. We have got a lot of good entrepreneurs in our ranks, within our own mob.

CHAIR—I am sure we have.

Mr Martin—For some reason, they get frustrated and it gets lost along the way. There needs to be trust. It is like any relationship, whether it be a marriage or a business partnership; there needs to be that trust and you need to earn it. They have to work side by side.

Ms HOARE—Does KEE, Koorie Employment Enterprises, utilise CDEP? How many participants are there?

Mr Martin—We have, on average, 200 participants.

Ms HOARE—In relation to business enterprises and setting up business with support from private enterprise and government, do you use any other government program such as NEIS?

Mr Martin—We have looked at supporting that with our business incubator.

Ms HOARE—You have a business incubator?

Mr Martin—Yes, we have built our own business incubator. It is now a business and learning centre. Getting back to NEIS, it depended on a business incubator and we worked in conjunction with a local business incubator. Our mob felt threatened or uncomfortable about going to another one. We continually applied for all the different types of support for the business incubator but we feel that we did not have that support. We had some individuals come through. Although it was a worthwhile experience, a lot of them did not succeed, but it was good because they did not go out and commit to a loan or hurt themselves going through that process. Getting back to NEIS, there is a whole array of support around business but not enough Indigenous involvement—I am not going to say control—or influence.

Ms HOARE—In the support provision?

Mr Martin—Yes, across the board. All those mechanisms are there for mainstream non-Indigenous people, but it does not seem to be there—there is no influence on the Indigenous side. In every other area, we have officers within Centrelink, the Koori courts and everything else. When you talk about employment and business, it ain't there, yet we are talking about economic development. In a lot of our small businesses, all we can gather is 10 grand profit here and there. It is churned back in so we can buy books for our participants that we cannot get. It is all these other little add-ons that we have always done, which are not funded by ATSIC, that we get profits from. We had to do a ministerial report when we started up in business. The local business community said it was unfair competition. Did they want to see us in the gutter or did they want to see us be self-reliant? These are the types of things we are fighting against.

Ms HOARE—You celebrate 10 years in operation on 1 July, and there are some listed businesses here. You also spoke about KEE Homes and the national newsletter. Are there currently any businesses which started out using CDEP through Koorie Employment Enterprises which now do not use it or which may be on the way to saying, 'We do not need CDEP anymore'? You can use that to pursue other areas.

Mr Martin—Every activity we have is a CDEP or ATSIC funded program. We have not received business grants from any other department. The only other source of funds that we receive at the moment is for the IEC, which is our first involvement with DEWR. Before that, we continually got funded through VECCI, the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, for the apprenticeships and traineeships. Every small business that we have is an ATSIC program that we have registered as a small business. As far as stepping away from CDEP, I do not see any of them doing that.

Ms HOARE—What are the barriers to that?

Mr Martin—We do not see it as a need. None of them are big enough and it is not their sole purpose. On average, if we have about, say, 500 grand recurrent to run our total operation, our vision is to collectively add on a number of programs to provide a revenue that can replace that. It might be 10 or 20 small businesses. Another component is to have a training area so that, if they have office administration or counter experience, they can then be employable. It is part of job preparation but it also provides a small revenue. It will never return the types of outcomes or revenue that we would expect. Where we would go in, buy a business and not even put a Koori face behind the counter—it is purely a cash cow—that is the type of thing we would like to see happening. Once again, we want to be self-reliant but we are not putting our hand out to ATSIC. We are talking 500 grand roughly. It is quite achievable. So they are the tasks.

It is not about separating the business, because there are other avenues for individuals to get ATSIC loans or business loans to start up their own business. This is for the total organisation as a community to have these as vehicles rather than as an enterprise for pure profits. So we return an income, but whatever extra revenue there is goes back in for the totality that we do not get funded for. So, yes, we would like to do that, but that is where we have put in place business plans and investigations about bigger scale type enterprises, because we do not have land to negotiate with or infrastructure to power with—we do not have a lot of things.

Ms HOARE—The chair referred to reaching out to private enterprise for partnerships as well. Has there been any discussion or thought about possible microcredit schemes?

Mr Martin—Yes, there has. We can talk until the cows come home, but it is about establishing yourself in an arena or in a community as credible, through things like partnering up with a newspaper, which we did to gain the first newsletter, or with the largest AV Jennings like building company. It is not about being on TV but building up that good knowledge and showing that you are credible. I think sometimes we can talk too much in the sky without walking first, and I think the community is ready for that. But if different players come along and then throw things into disarray, we lose our confidence. It has to be built up, and I know the community is only as good as the individuals and as good as the organisations. It is about credibility, back-up, being on time and doing the things that count. I think that is where our philosophy or our values have to be in place.

In terms of microbusiness, we are trying to facilitate a national purchasing group. There is one in place—it is called NIDA—but it does not put the rewards back into the communities. Why should a central body influence all of us CDEPs buying from a car dealer when we do not get any benefit? That goes to the central group so they can build an infrastructure. No—why can't we all have a non-payable membership of CDEPs where we have influence on buying the goods? It is not about getting extra money.

CHAIR—Where is NIDA based?

Mr Martin—I am not too sure. It is a collection of businesses. Given that we get limited funds, it is about being smarter and controlling the outgoings and not so much our ingoings. That is where our newsletter comes in, and we have forums—we are having a forum here for the Victorian or the eastern CDEPs—where we network and talk about the positive things. It is not very often that we get an opportunity to do that.

Ms HOARE—Is that to see what specific projects are working for which groups and for what reasons?

Mr Martin—Exactly. Nationally, CDEP is a family. There is a sense that, ‘Yes, we have the same mission, we have the same goals.’ If you break it down to states, there is that feeling of togetherness. But there is not enough networking because, for whatever reasons, different political leaders try to keep us apart and throw us against each other: who is better than the other? It is not about that.

CHAIR—We need to start winding up. Does Indigenous business link across? It does seem to have a corporate connection.

Mr Martin—It does, but—how can I say it? For some reason it is not filtering down—at least, not to Victoria. I have not seen a lot of stuff happening in Victoria, especially on an organisational basis. I am recruiting and I know I am being criticised for having non-Indigenous managers on the place. I did have 100 per cent Indigenous management and I am talking about a team of 10 to 15 people, because we are the largest CDEP in Victoria and because of the activities that we go into—we do the education and so on. I say I have the best accountant in town. He is a tax agent as well. That is my colleague over the back here. I have recruited another guy who worked with employment in a chamber of commerce. I brought him on to help us with the Indigenous employment centre. So it is about white and black working together and trying to stimulate some economic stuff there. We will trip over some things, whether by accident or on purpose.

CHAIR—But you have captured what to me really resonates—the coming together and getting the best from both, if you like.

Mr Martin—The initiatives, whether it be the IEC or others, are good in theory. You might get half a dozen big land projects there, but down here at the bottom end we have got jack, if I can say that. We have to go and talk to banks, and that is why we need entrepreneurs on both sides of the fence coming together and forming a team. It is not that our white team members are not passionate. They do not pretend to be Aboriginal but they are definitely passionate about the cause. It is a partnership and we all work together. That is one of the biggest issues.

Some of the other issues I have are about helping government to work better with us. We were talking about COAG and it came to light that there is a committee that forms, a working group or whatever it is. How do we get information back? There is information that has been gathered at all different levels that is not being disseminated so that it can be used and can be meaningful.

CHAIR—This is the current COAG pilot—

Mr Martin—It is going to be addressed at another level, but I am using that as an example.

CHAIR—I think that is a fair question. It is very important that the community develop confidence in it and in what it is trying to do. As I understand it—and we are just getting our heads around what is happening at the moment—they are struggling nationally, the states, about how to do it and where to do it. Hopefully, over the next six months we will see it become much clearer. One thing that I would be advocating is that they really need to communicate back to

their communities in a very concise way as to how this can come together for the advancement of the issue, if that makes sense.

Mr Martin—It does.

CHAIR—We are just at that stage where things are a bit confused. We are really grappling with a new beast, if I could put it that way.

Mr Martin—Another area that creates a bit of a hindrance for us is the lack of representation on different things. For example, there is no feedback from the area consultative committees. We might have an individual representative of the Koori community, but unless he or she takes it back to the community and spreads the information and data that has been collected—we are a Victorian Indigenous employment service, we get nothing back in the form of data collected. There are also applications that may be put forward to the committee that get funded without consultation with an organisation that has been established here to provide that same thing. There is a lot of duplication of services.

CHAIR—You might be very interested in the future to see how some of these applications are going to go. So just keep an eye on that.

Mr Martin—I will be keeping a close eye on that.

CHAIR—Are you aware of the changes that are coming through?

Mr Martin—No.

CHAIR—I think by July there will be some changes there, as I understand it. I am not sure that I am pre-empting things, but I chair the government backbench committee and I am familiar with what the minister and the government have in mind. So just watch that one.

Mr Martin—You talked about economic advancement, and until we get that sorted out—that is where they operate and that is where everyone participates. We are not engaged in that, and it needs more than one individual to put his own hat up and get his own funds and then compete. If we are going to compete in the Indigenous environment—because there is always going to be a loser, and our people do not deserve that, if we are going to get behind an organisation, then let us all band together and support it, and not go around a corner and develop another one to go into competition against it. I think the duplication of services puts division in our communities. If we are talking about leadership, those who create duplication are putting great division in the community, and there is a lot of heartache.

CHAIR—You have made an excellent point there about duplication.

Mr Martin—It is about economies of scale, whether it be in business or whether it be in an organisation, at the end of the day we will be going for the same doggy bone in trying to fight for the same thing. Once you put that in front of a community, you have division. I read somewhere that there are 2½ thousand to 3,000 Indigenous organisations across Australia and that probably half of them are in trouble, and half of them we throw money back into to get them re-established when we could have had double the number of organisations.

CHAIR—It is a really interesting issue. We have had the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations—

Mr Martin—I think that was the one I was reading.

CHAIR—You make an excellent point.

Mr Martin—Being involved with the ATSIC council—if an organisation puts in for infrastructure funds and for some reason it does not get supported but it still runs; we come back, kick it back, and we have doubled the amount of money they originally asked for. There is something wrong there and we have to look at it. When grant controllers have come in and tried to re-establish, there is no Indigenous involvement in that either. We do not call upon our own expertise to help decide on it.

CHAIR—In my experience, grant controllers too often perpetuate that.

Mr Martin—Yes.

CHAIR—They might make some corrections, but quite often it is very late. Quite often the organisation just gets through, and the people struggle and struggle. Then, within not too long, a grant controller may be back again. That is my experience, but yours may be different.

Mr Martin—I have racked my brains about this. There are certain protocols within each community, and I only see that different departments are actually supporting duplication by giving in to certain lobbyists, depending on how strong or loud their noise is. They give in and let things be duplicated.

CHAIR—There are problems with accountability and transparency.

Mr Martin—Yes, there are. Where we are going to have that type of arrangement, let everyone know. Let me know so that, if I want to apply for a grant for health and housing, I will compete against this organisation—not that I would ever think of it. If they are the protocols we are going to have, everyone should be aware of them. Let us all compete. It is no good—especially in the employment sector, which has a long vision; and the Goulburn Valley Community Development Employment Program is only 10 years old—if someone comes in during the last two, three or four years, at the tail end, and undoes a lot of the hard work that we have done. We have been cleaning up our own yard, putting things in place and getting infrastructure, and we are ready to promote and really start to reap the benefits of the hard work. If someone can come in and take that away, what is it all about?

CHAIR—I need to be quite clear that we may not, and probably cannot, influence directly local or regional issues, but we can keep the general principle.

Mr Martin—That is it. There needs to be a philosophy, and capacity building has to be at all levels, not only at a community level.

CHAIR—Across the country.

Mr Martin—Everyone has to be prepared for a general attitudinal swing, at all levels.

CHAIR—That is terrific. You have been largely enthusiastic and passionate, and we really appreciate it.

Mr Martin—Thank you for the opportunity.

[10.41 a.m.]

APPO, Mr Adrian John, Chairperson, Koori Economic Employment Training Agency

CHAIR—Thank you for being with us today. In my briefing notes it says that KEETA is non-profit, self-funded and has been a key player in an enterprise partnership employment project, the Shepparton and Mooroopna community skills audit and the ‘Ladders to Success’ employment project. My notes also say:

The result has been the employment of 120 plus individuals into sustainable employment within the last 36 months and the establishment of 5 Indigenous businesses.

That is a pretty exciting period, and a busy one!

Mr Appo—It certainly has been.

CHAIR—Even though this is sort of a Clayton’s inquiry at the moment, because there are only two of us, we will proceed as if it were not. Could you describe for us what has created your situation?

Mr Appo—I am the Chairperson of the Koori Economic Employment Training Agency. As you were told in the brief, the agency was established in 1997 following a feasibility study conducted in the region. The study looked at what was happening with trends in employment, economic development and training for Koori people in Shepparton and Mooroopna, and that has extended a little bit where we have been asked to be involved in stuff in Echuca and Healesville as well. It has kind of stretched the boundaries, so to speak.

CHAIR—Could you just remind me of the distances involved with Echuca?

Mr Appo—Echuca is about three-quarters of an hour away, and when you go across to Healesville that takes about an hour and a half. So it is a fairly big region that we operate across, but it is more concentric to Shepparton and Mooroopna, obviously because of the larger population base here, which is typically taken as being around 5,000 to 6,000, which is 10 per cent of the wider population.

In talking about KEETA, one of the significant things is the fact that we are not-for-profit. The other side of it is that we are not actually funded by a particular agency or body. That has worked in two ways. One way has obviously been the negative impact, which is that not having the funding there means that we rely very much on volunteers in terms of the board members. Also, we have got limited resources that we are able to draw upon. It was not that long ago, in 1997, that we actually started on the sniff of an oily rag. We have got a fair amount of funding at the moment, which we have actually created ourselves, which means that it is KEETA’s money that we are actually distributing to the projects that we see as being viable for the community.

Ms HOARE—How were those funds created?

Mr Appo—They were created through a range of things where we have actually entered into fee-for-service-delivery arrangements. I must admit that the first bit of money we got to actually establish this was a \$1,000 grant where a person heard about us and said, ‘We think you are going to do some good things in the community and we would like to give you a donation.’ So that saw us through for the first couple of years, and from that we have then gone into enterprises in our own right and have built up our resources and our finances.

Whilst you say that there are detracting parts, the advantage is that we actually have pretty much stood the test of time. We are still around, we are still developing and delivering initiatives. It is significant that we are not tied to an organisational structure—we are not tied to a funding regime—so we can determine what we see as best way to represent the community. We do not have to look at any particular line or sway in any particular direction because it is politically correct, or because it is not politically correct, to please funding bodies. I have to acknowledge that KEETA would not be around if it were not for the support of two organisations during our infancy. One was the local employment agency, Work Trainers, which provided a lot of our infrastructure support. It is a mainstream employment body very concerned with Indigenous community outcomes.

CHAIR—Are they in the Job Network?

Mr Appo—They are in the Job Network now. They started out in the Department of Community Services, dealing with disability services.

Ms HOARE—Are you in the Job Network?

Mr Appo—We are partnered with them in terms of the local Job Network contract in the Goulburn Valley and some into the Goulburn/Ovens region. The contract we have is called Working Partners Employment, of which Work Trainers is one consortium partner and KEETA is the other. We are pretty much with them. And the R.E. Ross trust gave us some initial financial start-up capital which got us going across those early stages.

One of the strengths of KEETA is that it has been able to work outside the frameworks of Job Network and others, so we have been able to look at what is working specifically in employment and then develop a strategy that we feel best suits the community—that is, the Indigenous community plus the wider community. There is a lot of talk about empowering the community, encouraging partnerships and bringing the community to the table as equal partners—as in the COAG stuff. The concept of that is in the people’s minds but the practicality does not actually reach the grassroots level because a lot of that relies on a community that has low economic standing and minimal resources that often are stretched to the limit. There is an expectation in coming to the table as equal partners—and I am talking generally about community organisations—that we are both able to sustain ourselves and also develop these new strategies to meet the needs of our communities. We usually find that the funds available are channelled into the typical Indigenous programs or the typical Indigenous organisational structures. In many cases, when we actually have that and the services that come out of that sort of regime, it is based on the fact that the offer is coming from the top down; it is not actually receiving what is needed at the grassroots level. We are then forced into delivering a service that separates us very much from the wider communities that we are living in.

Ms HOARE—What do you see as a possible solution? I have my own ideas on this. What do you, as a community working with other Indigenous organisations in this community, see as the solution to having those funds directed in a better way?

Mr Appo—When we talk about community organisations I am talking, to this point, about Indigenous community organisations working with wider mainstream community organisations or businesses. If we are talking about building the capacity of this Indigenous community in a regional base we need to be presenting the Indigenous community as an asset, not a liability, to the community.

The new employment program that we have initiated from here, which now has three-year funding, was pushed out as a partnership between the Indigenous community, represented by KEETA, and business and industry. It is about getting the wider community to accept and adopt the issues—and also the benefits for themselves—surrounding the Indigenous community. In portraying that, we have a commitment from at least 60-odd businesses within this region to create 100 positions over the next three years.

One of the reasons the partnership is there is that, obviously, we have people who are unemployed that need the opportunity to go into employment. Businesses in this region are facing a skills shortage, so we are marrying our need to their need. They are seeing the Indigenous community as an asset. It is getting away from the idea of knocking on the door and saying, ‘Please give an Indigenous person a job.’

CHAIR—A real change in perception.

Mr Appo—Yes—and it is not drilled along the lines of reconciliation or anything fuzzy like that; some of them are looking at it and saying, ‘In two or three years we will be running businesses and we will not have people to work in our businesses.’ Preliminary findings are that around the Shepparton area unemployment is running at about seven per cent. If you talk to most of the major businesses they will tell you that at five per cent unemployment they will not have workers, because there is always a percentage that will not go into work.

CHAIR—Absolutely. So there is a real need and you are there in the marketplace.

Mr Appo—There is definitely a need. I think that strategy is underpinning those better representation partnerships. When we talk about the funding going into the Indigenous organisations, it is not about the Indigenous organisations being funded to run a little program within the Indigenous community but a case of how we actually marry that.

CHAIR—Going back a step, I think you have drilled into something really important here—that is, what is full employment and what is the need of this community, and that is what you are about, and how do you make that a positive. To drill a little further, in your experience what is prohibiting some of those five per cent, or others, from working? How do you find literacy and numeracy; how do you find attitudes towards apprenticeships? You mentioned a community skills audit. Are you able to comment about some of the difficulties or challenges in that?

Mr Appo—Certainly. I have bought a copy of the audit for you. I also have a publication that was put out by a number of the community organisations which puts that positive story about

what they are doing, how they are interfacing with the wider community. In terms of the issues involved around literacy and numeracy—

CHAIR—And retention rates.

Mr Appo—and retention rates, part of our findings are that Indigenous kids find it very difficult in the schooling process. They probably come from backgrounds in which you are looking at generations of unemployment. So when they get to the point of, ‘School is getting difficult for me,’ and schools are saying, ‘We’re finding it difficult dealing with Indigenous kids,’ what the kids are probably expressing—and they are expressing it in terms of low retention rates—is, ‘If there’s no job in the future for me, I may as well be unemployed now rather than go through five or six years of an educational process.’

CHAIR—For the sake of education.

Mr Appo—Yes. The dream of ‘do the right studies, do these courses and you will get a job’ is not represented in the number of Indigenous people being employed. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy: the lower the skill levels that they come through with the harder it is for them to get those real jobs.

CHAIR—I am interested in the Job Network and the agency that you work with. In the last five or six years have you found any ways to utilise, develop, finesse, encourage, cajole—whatever—that may have made that bit of significant difference?

Mr Appo—There certainly is that difference. First of all, there is the partnership with an Indigenous organisation, that Indigenous communities look at the process, that if an Indigenous organisation is involved it identifies that. We are the gatekeepers of good service, by being involved with that. I specifically mentioned Work Trainers, but we have worked alongside others, like Mission Australia, which is non-Job Network but provides state funding. We have done stuff with the Salvation Army, which is a Job Network agency here as well. When we are working with those organisations, the community sees our involvement as an endorsement that these guys will provide good service. Similarly, we have to be careful that we are not putting our name against organisations that are not able to contribute good service to the Indigenous community. That is part of the process.

The other side of it is looking at the limitations of the funding or the outcomes that are sought from Job Network. In many cases, the reality is that it is quick outcomes, it is looking at a numbers game of the more you can put through the more money you can make from it. The better the numbers are, the better it looks in terms of a tick. We had 100 Indigenous clients. We had an outcome where we got 100 people into jobs. The reality is that it is no good if those 100 people are turning up in six months time still looking for that same service, because all you got them was a short-term outcome. With the latest projects, we have explored taking a longer term view of getting those outcomes. It is about realising that a lot of those individuals will come through with low skills. If we can work with them, develop their skills and put them into long-term sustainable positions, these provide better outcomes for the whole community—the Indigenous community and the business community we are working with.

Ms HOARE—We have been to a lot of communities and are going to be visiting a lot more. A lot of those communities, including my own, do not have employment agencies for

Indigenous people. The Job Network providers are expected, as part of their contract with the government, to provide the same services to Indigenous people with the same outcomes as they provide to non-Indigenous people. That does not happen when there is no Indigenous employment agency. How can you get better outcomes when you do not have an Indigenous agency within a community? My community in Lake Macquarie only has the mainstream agencies, which (1) do not employ Indigenous people and (2) do not have the skills to achieve those long-term outcomes. How can government better provide employment services to Indigenous communities?

Mr Appo—Certainly that is an issue here. I come from Queensland, and they have the same issue within those regional centres where a services is being provided. It is not only in terms of Job Network. The state put a lot of dollars into employment services within the region as well. The question I keep throwing out, but I have not heard an answer yet, is: where are the checks and balances in terms of service for the Indigenous community? In Job Network 1, there was a lot of concern that there was no specific Indigenous service within this region to service the Indigenous community.

CHAIR—A national issue, as I recall.

Mr Appo—The attitude was very much that Job Network would do all things for all people, but that was not actually occurring. In fact, large numbers of Indigenous people were being referred to the IA providers within the region. They were simply not turning up and they were getting breached, which created a massive issue. The Job Network providers and the community then met to talk about the issue. The question was put to the Job Network providers—not by me; I think it was by Lois Peller, who was the then chair of the Binjirru Regional Council—as to what strategies the Job Network providers had to sign off on about how they are going to deal with Indigenous people. Where are these strategies? Can we see them? As a community, can we access them? Can we see the numbers of Indigenous people they are dealing with? Can we see the results that are being achieved by the agencies? The answer to those questions was, ‘They are commercial-in-confidence agreements.’ We were all sitting around the table saying, ‘Hey! There is a major issue here.’ The various players were sitting there, but when it came to discussing the checks and balances on this, the response was—and still is, to this day—‘Sorry, it is commercial-in-confidence.’

CHAIR—To this day?

Mr Appo—Yes. I have been involved in employment for the last nine years now, with a large Indigenous population in Shepparton. You have to write in how you will service the community. No-one writes a bad report about what they are going to do. When they have a review on their contracts and have to write and submit evaluation reports about what they are doing, people do not write bad reports—‘I have failed in this area’—because that impacts on the dollars that are coming through to them. Compared to a number of other areas, I think Shepparton is fortunate to have KEETA, which operates independently of any sort of funding. It is involved in Job Network, but it also picks up other funding and does projects in other areas. It runs things, such as a skills audit, which is something that other people do not actually look at. KEETA has an IEC to assist with Indigenous placement.

CHAIR—Can you give us a quick thumbnail sketch of what the skills audit told you?

Mr Appo—In the short term, it identified that employment services, Job Network and the state funded services were not meeting the needs of Indigenous people. It identified that there were extremely low retention rates within the education and training environment, and a lot of that was linked to the fact that individuals could not see that there was an employment outcome at the end. It verified that there is a need for the IEC and for the likes of KEETA to deliver specific services to the community. It also identified a very limiting factor: communities are not able to sit equally at the table with the various levels of government, the other providers who are around and also business and industry. The perception is that we are there at the need level, and that very much influences people's perceptions of who they are speaking to. If the Indigenous community turns up at a meeting represented by the chairs of five organisations, those representatives will get a different reception and will be treated differently than five business executives would be.

CHAIR—That leads to my last question. You have mentioned five businesses. Can you give us a clue about the types of businesses they are and how they are going? That is quite exciting.

Mr Appo—The businesses are very simple. It was pretty much about assisting individuals, people who wanted to work as a single unit, to set up their own businesses. This was not about going and creating a massive business. It looked at assisting individuals who had skills—some of them in trade areas, others were in consultancy and contracting areas—with the process of establishing their business. Obviously, if they have got the skills, they are looking then at the next processes in establishing their businesses, and KEETA has provided them with advice.

One of the individuals that set up a business developed and produced a booklet called *Culture, community and a common fate*. This girl went through her cadetship at the *Shepparton News*, so she was from the newspaper industry. She became the chief of staff there and then, as her next career move, wanted to establish her own freelance business working on that sort of thing. For her, it was pretty much a matter of saying: 'This is what I want to do. How do I do it? What is the next step?' That is how we assisted those individuals—by saying, 'This is what you need to do to get your business started.' At the moment, KEETA is exploring establishing a study into what business opportunities exist within the Goulburn Valley that could be accessed by individuals or organisations within the community.

CHAIR—You are sort of an incubator.

Mr Appo—Yes, very much so. That is borne out by the fact that we are not actually funded into an area, we are not locked into satisfying a contract, because we can actually move to where we think there is actual need. I jotted down four points.

CHAIR—We will need to move through and wind up with that. Thank you.

Mr Appo—These are four quick points that I thought about. One of the components of capacity building that we have experienced in terms of our development is that the community has given money to do a feasibility study of what this community needs in terms of employment, education and training and that after the feasibility study there was nothing there, so KEETA gets up, survives and struggles and is now developing programs that, at a national level, people are starting to take a long, hard look at and are saying 'Maybe we could talk to the people in the Kimberley about this.' I know that has happened, because I was talking to Pat

Dodson about an initiative we established here. He said, 'That's on the table when we go to our next COAG meeting.'

These are the four points that I noted. The first point is: resourcing the community to develop initiatives so that we are not merely having to respond to what is being offered. In many cases, in terms of our direction in employment, health, education, justice—all of these issues on which we seem to represent at the wrong end of the scale; either too low or too high—we are responding to what is being offered. Normally, those decisions are made at the top; they do not take a lot of consideration of the specific needs of our community. So we are not developing the initiatives, even though sometimes we think we are, because we are saying, 'There is a new initiative coming here,' and we put up our hand to run it. Basically, we are responding to what is being offered. The second point is: developing levels of community acceptance to ensure that organisations and their representatives are received with the same levels of credibility and respect as their non-Indigenous counterparts. I have spoken a bit about that.

The third point is: a review of funding allocation to enable ongoing sustainable outcomes to be achieved. Generational issues cannot be resolved in short-term outcomes and they do not fit neatly into boxes. In many cases it is about people saying, 'We want to hear about community initiatives,' so we go and talk to the various levels of government, we talk to whoever, and it is: 'Oh, it doesn't fit within our box. This is what we are delivering.' In terms of the employment initiatives that we have been developing, it has taken something like five years of long and hard negotiations to get to a point now where we have a three-year contract to deliver on sustainable outcomes, not the 'quickly roll them through the gate and tick them off' ones. These are the things that we want to see. We deal with an individual once and we do not have to deal with them again.

The fourth point is: active promotion of community partnerships, with levels of resourcing to allow the community to come to the table as equal partners. That is a major issue that we are dealing with day to day. In many cases, we are being asked to come to the table and we are stretching our resources to the limit. They are the four points.

CHAIR—That is excellent. We appreciate that and we appreciate your time today. All the best to you.

[11:16 p.m.]

BRIGGS, Mr Paul, Chairman, First Nations Australian Credit Union; President, Rumbalara Football/Netball Club; and Committee Member, Common Fate Endorsed Program

CHAIR—Welcome. We will be talking about the Common Fate Endorsed Program and its association with Pat Dodson. It is pretty interesting stuff. For 20 minutes or so, could you give us an overview of how you are going?

Mr P. Briggs—I will try and summarise how it works and what the intent of Common Fate is. The notion of Common Fate embraces all of the work that we have been doing on capacity building here in Shepparton in building resources, partnerships and relationships that are broader than just Indigenous and encourages the ownership of a ‘well community’—not just Indigenous but across private sector, industry, local government and other industry leaders here in Shepparton.

CHAIR—What was the catalyst? Was it an AFL initiative, or was it Pat Dodson, or local—or a bit of a combination?

Mr P. Briggs—A bit of a combination but primarily led by Pat. It has some of the characteristics of reconciliation. As the name suggests, we all share in a common fate. If there are aspects or elements of our community that are not operating as well as others—and this one goes to the Indigenous community—then we all have a responsibility to ensure that areas in which people are suffering are addressed. In the end, we all suffer if they are not addressed.

CHAIR—Is there something in particular about the overarching organisation and the Rumbalara Football/Netball Club? You have captured some of this: people have been able to get in there and work and develop under the umbrella of the football and netball club a love of sport, fellowship, the generating of good community spirit and that sort of thing.

Mr P. Briggs—The Rumbalara Football/Netball Club has a close relationship with the notions of Common Fate in that it provides an opportunity for young people to express themselves and show pride in their identity, outside what might be the cultural stereotype. Young people are encouraged to participate in dance, art or football. The football club has also been one of the main tools of social interaction and social connectedness, in a sense forcing the issue of communications—Indigenous people talking with the non-Indigenous communities. At the moment our relationships are primarily with elements of service delivery through government bureaucracy; that is our main communication and social interaction with the wider community.

The football club has been able to develop a forum where our community comes into contact in a social and a sporting sense with other communities and towns and is building an understanding and a relationship between them. That has been a huge element of success of the football and netball club. In most small country towns and communities in Victoria, sport revolves around sporting and other clubs, whether they be Rotaries or Apexes. In the main, they are an important means of communication. As an Aboriginal community, we have not had that

opportunity, because largely we do not participate in the RSLs, the Apexes, the Rotaries, the local camera clubs and so on that local communities have. We have been very much isolated in that respect. Putting a body like the football and netball club into that social mix in the broader community has forced an interaction. It has been a very healthy and positive one, but it has not been an easy one.

Ms HOARE—What happens in the program, Paul? Are the teams wholly Indigenous or are there Indigenous and non-Indigenous members? Are there male teams and female teams or just one team?

Mr P. Briggs—On any given weekend, there are about 200 people involved. Eight teams operate in the club: four of which are netball teams and four of which are football teams. There are two junior football teams: the under-17s and under-14s. There are junior netball teams. We have worked really hard to encourage non-Aboriginal people to embrace it and be involved, but there is a tendency from the broader community to keep us separate. Encouraging non-Aboriginal people to come and play in the club, be on our committee, be supporters, volunteers, participants and members—not to mention sponsors—has been very difficult. We were quite conscious of the fact that our vision was that the club be one for all people but representing Indigenous people. That was the general thrust of how we started. We are still breaking down and addressing the stereotypes that keep the Indigenous community isolated. It has been tough, but we have non-Aboriginal people in all the teams and on our board.

CHAIR—It is really interesting. I am absorbing what you have just said about encouraging the broader community to come in. That is brilliant, and difficult.

Mr P. Briggs—The broader community have a stereotype of who Indigenous people are. As I was saying earlier, our communication and relationships are not necessarily with the broader community in their social interactions. Our kids are not in school after year 8, so their social interaction and communication is diminished. We have something like 80 to 85 per cent unemployment. We are not out there in the workplace, we are not in the tearooms, we are not a part of that culture so, again, our communication is diminished more and more. People's understanding of what 'Indigenous' is and what Aboriginal culture is is primarily driven by what they read in the media. They have this perception that we are a red, black and yellow isolated group that sits over there and that you only interact with us if you have a special reason to. We have been trying to break down that perception to say that no matter who you are, what culture you are from, you are welcome to participate and be involved, because it is healthy for us to have that involvement. That is still a difficult thing. One of the most obvious things is that most sporting clubs in country regions depend on their local businesses for sponsorship and their lifestyle, and we have found it very difficult to encourage non-Aboriginal businesses to get involved in sponsorship of the Rumbalara football club, because of the stereotypes that exist. It is about breaking down that communication barrier. We are in our seventh year of operation this year and only now we are starting to see a change in the understanding of how the club operates.

CHAIR—It must be encouraging for you, having struggled, to see that starting to change. It would be discouraging if you were telling me things were going the other way, but you are seeing a change.

Mr P. Briggs—We are just starting to see it, but it has taken things like the Common Fate Endorsed Program and the participation of external people and bodies. Having the likes of Pat Dodson come in here to talk to this community and having Premier Bracks endorse the Common Fate Endorsed Program and be here with the community—and other people like that—has meant that people have taken notice of it in a different way. It has been a challenge. It took us 15 years to get the club accepted by the competitions here.

Ms HOARE—15 years?

Mr P. Briggs—Yes, it took 15 years to get accepted as a sporting club and to be included in the competitions. But persistence and perseverance paid off, and an opportunity arose in 1997 for us to come in. Since that time, we have become one of them and we are starting to build a commonplace relationship, where people accept our place.

CHAIR—How is the premiership ladder?

Mr P. Briggs—The club has been really successful. We have got eight teams and, over the last six years, I think that across all the teams—both netball and football—there have been something like 15 premierships, in different grades. That has been a really healthy thing. One of the challenges for the club is to get people's acceptance so that, when a senior or junior team wins a premiership, it is celebrated not just by the club but by the community. We are working now to ensure that civic leaders, and others, celebrate for us and with us. That is the next step in trying to get acceptance and promotion of the Rumbalara Football/Netball Club included in the mainstream matrix of the social and economic way in which this community works.

CHAIR—You have a strong philosophy of encouraging all.

Mr P. Briggs—We face issues because, as I was saying before, the non-Aboriginal community out there stereotypes the way we operate and the Indigenous community, at times, certainly does not want white participation. Because we have been so isolated for so long, it is a very challenging and fearful thing to come together when you have all these cultural biases, stereotypes and racism existing. Our first five years of operation was fraught with all of that. We had issues about racial vilification in all our teams. After any given Saturday, we could have gone to court umpteen times over racial vilification issues.

Ms HOARE—We see that even with our national sporting teams. The sporting field provides an ideal opportunity for some people to take out their racist aggression.

CHAIR—Sometimes it is deliberately used, inappropriately, as gamesmanship. A person may not even be racist but deliberately use racism. There is gamesmanship around it, which is not to be encouraged but which has long been a part of the sporting scene.

Mr P. Briggs—It is part of the opposition teams' ploys. If they create a situation the Rumbalara teams will react, and if they react in a certain way the umpires will respond.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr P. Briggs—Therefore, you get caught up in that sort of scenario.

CHAIR—I used to play centre half-back, so I knew how to try to upset a centre half-forward.

Ms HOARE—Nobody wants to put themselves in that confrontational position, so it is really good that you have so many teams and so many young people willing to go out and play.

Mr P. Briggs—We have done a lot of work, especially with our juniors, about dealing with racism and anger management issues and about how to best respond in a healthy way so that you are not physical in your response but you—

CHAIR—As tempting as it is.

Mr P. Briggs—There are other ways to do it that are healthier. The way we have responded has also been to provide education and information to opposition clubs and teams and to this community, because things do get reported in the media in a different form. The post-mortems on our games in lots of ways highlight the strengths of our club and our community. It is good for the young people to see written the pre-match deliberations by the press about the strengths of our club and our community, so it is not just media information about native title, justice issues or other things that are happening around that. So it has been a good exchange. But we have had to work with the media too, to talk with them about what might be seen as a bias in media reporting and about how they might be more even-handed in the way in which they report. They have taken that on board as well.

CHAIR—Although I do not underestimate the challenge and the tough times, there has really been a healthy development of respect. There have been a lot of wins along the way.

Mr P. Briggs—Yes. Sometimes this notion of our community meeting in a social sense with the white community is met with fear, and that gets supported by the fact that we do not have many people working in the private sector, because Aboriginal people feel that—

CHAIR—Can I ask whether you work in the private sector?

Mr P. Briggs—No, I do not.

CHAIR—But you are aware of its importance—

Mr P. Briggs—It is usually important for us to hold a sense of place here in this community and to have respect and value placed on Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal people's participation here. Those three things are what the football club strives to do, what Common Fate strives to do and also what the First Nations Australian Credit Union strives to do. It is about a sense of respect for Aboriginal people, valuing their participation and contribution and about Aboriginal people having a sense of place and ownership of this community and how it works. That has been sadly missing. We see the symptoms of that in poor participation in education. Certainly, because of the issues about school retention and lack of skills and so on, we find it difficult to compete in the mainstream employment market.

Ms HOARE—Going on from that, you mentioned that year 8 is basically the drop-out year. I want to ask about the participation rate of people in year 8 and above school-aged young people, or even those just below year 8, in these teams. Could the club be used as a vehicle somehow, if the club got involved in the school sport scene, to keep young people at school?

Mr P. Briggs—One of the things that we have been working on is a senior leadership program within the club. We deliver a very strong health promotion focus in the club and health promotion programs around smoking and alcohol, and we work with the Aboriginal medical centre on diabetes prevention, immunisation and things like that. So our aim with the eight coaches across those eight teams, their assistants and the team managers that work with the teams is to run a leadership program and skilling them up to be able to do almost ‘train the trainer’ type things so that they have got the skills to work with the group of kids that they have got under their umbrella.

Some of those kids may be in the justice arena and coming before the Koori Court, some are out of the school system or on the verge of dropping out of the school system, some of them have mental health and emotional issues; they are coming out of circumstances of poverty, especially in single parent families, where the need for strong male role modelling is important. We expect our senior members to work with the junior members and encourage participation in the education system. The AFL might send up players from the AFL teams, and we are encouraging the policy that they do not go into the schools unless one of our members go with them. Then there is an exchange of role modelling and the lifting of the profile of a young leader here in Shepparton with the junior members. There is a constant focus on that sort of stuff. The football club has been instrumental in promoting a state-wide leadership program. The leadership program that we are operating here at the football club has now been picked up by five other communities.

We have worked with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, under their emotional and spiritual wellbeing charter, to look at the notion of leadership among senior Aboriginal people in Victoria and at what the next 20, 30 years might look like for Indigenous culture in Victoria—how we are going to do it; how we are going to define it. There is that style of upstream work and not just having all your resources dedicated to a crisis. Sure, you need that, but you need to separate some of it and take it upstream and try to fix some of the issues that are causing such despair among young Aboriginal people. The footy club is one of two football in Victoria showing leadership in Victoria and elsewhere about how to use your resources in a more innovative way; it is not just getting out and playing football and netball on a Saturday.

CHAIR—Can I presume to say that you have helped me see a lot of things differently when it comes to encouraging people. You have explained to me, with greater clarity than I think anyone ever has, about social interaction with Aboriginal people through the schools, through the work place, through a whole lot of mechanisms, with football being the main one. The people do not have that contact. If they do not have that contact then how do they relate, how do they develop? It works both ways. I think you have answered the question, but just to restate it: when it comes to the priorities of capacity building, given the realities and the practicalities, you really could not find a better mechanism. In reality, I do not think there is a better mechanism—is there?

Mr P. Briggs—Part of it is not just inspiring our leaders and Aboriginal young people but inspiring other leaders to see that there is a way of doing this that does not necessarily focus on the same culture or the way in which we have done business in the past.

CHAIR—I do not want to overstate it but, if I have got it right, is it fair to say that you are seeing progress, you are confident that you are seeing step by step progress in a way that is encouraging?

Mr P. Briggs—We are seeing change, but it is incremental and it is very sensitive. The pressure for change ebbs and flows, and you have to be careful about how you manage the interaction and the fears that exist.

CHAIR—Yes, that is right. The ebb and flow is an organic thing: sometimes it is time to back off, sometimes it is time to go forward; sometimes it is time to say, ‘Cool it,’ because you are working at it all the time.

Mr P. Briggs—Yes.

Ms HOARE—It is great.

CHAIR—It is brilliant, isn't it? In an administrative sense, how do you operate—through a committee, a board, a CEO?

Mr P. Briggs—I am the President of the Rumbalara Football/Netball Club. We have a Healthy Lifestyles program, which is funded to deliver health promotion activities. From that, we are able to run a management system. Nobody funds us to run a football club, but people fund us to run health promotions and those types of things. We run our management system off the Healthy Lifestyles area. There is a part-time—0.5—CEO attached to that. We have a program coordinator for the leadership program, which is funded through the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, and we have a health and fitness person funded alongside that. Another person works in the area of youth suicide prevention, and that person is our club operations manager as well. They make sure the teams are on the ground and on the courts and that things are working, as a part of our approach to youth suicide prevention. That is how that works.

CHAIR—You have clubrooms and an administrative centre, I think.

Mr P. Briggs—We have clubrooms and we are in the process now of building social rooms—you may see them later—so that all of the social activities of the Aboriginal community here in Shepparton have a focal point. We will be able to run the birthdays and the weddings; we have run funerals there already, but we will be able to do the good news stuff as well.

Ms HOARE—You mentioned various aspects of health. Does that include sexual and reproductive health issues, such as encouraging young men and women to practise safe sex by using condoms so that they do not have to have a baby when they are 16 years old?

Mr P. Briggs—Yes. We acknowledge the role that we all play—including the roles the Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative and the medical centre play, in terms of their birthing program, their immunisation program and their other programs. They use the vehicle of the club to get access to the young people. They run programs through that, and we support those programs. Through our leadership work, we encourage our senior people to take a role in assisting in the delivery of those things. That is a strong emphasis.

Ms HOARE—I was also wondering about the role of women. We have had meetings here this morning and other than the magistrate we have not met Indigenous women in leadership roles. I think we have a couple on the program for this afternoon. Do you have Indigenous women leaders in the netball program?

Mr P. Briggs—Yes. Two women are on our board, and we work with the Goulburn Valley Aboriginal Women's Resource Group. We also work with the Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative on their birthing programs and other things. The netball club is a pretty vocal and strong place where a lot of that work gets done, but I think there is still a long way to go to make sure that we have the right infrastructure in place to allow people—women and men—to come together for family stuff and to get things done.

CHAIR—Paul, we are indebted to you. Thank you for your time, and we may see you again a little later. We intend to go to the football club this afternoon.

Mr P. Briggs—I will leave some information on the football/netball club and the Common Fate Endorsed Program. It gives an overview of how things work in Shepparton. I will also leave some information on the First Nations Australian Credit Union.

CHAIR—I forgot to ask about that.

Mr P. Briggs—That information is there for you.

CHAIR—Can you talk about the credit union for a couple of minutes? How it is going? Pretty well, by the sound of things.

Mr P. Briggs—It is going okay. I would not say it is where we would like it to be, according to our aspirations for where we thought it would go—we did not have a benchmark to work with—but it is going really well. It has got about 3,500 members Australia wide, and out of the Shepparton office it is servicing something like 700 people who are based at Fitzroy Crossing, in the Kimberley. It is running a significant part of our loan portfolio with the Torres Strait community. What started out as a Shepparton focused idea became a national financial management institution. We talked to the annual general meeting of the Credit Union Foundation of Australia maybe six or seven years ago, and then the Australian National Credit Union group offered their organisation as a mentor and incubator for an Indigenous financial institution. They put their expertise and resources around it. In May this year we will be four years old, and we are continuing to grow. The seed funding for the first year came from ATSIC in the form of a seed grant, and since then the Australian National Credit Union have been picking it up and mentoring it.

We have contributed to the Indigenous banking conference, and we are still working on the best model and the best way to ensure that people, whether they are in Melbourne, Sydney or Fitzroy Crossing, all get as good a deal as the people here in Shepparton. It has been a great learning curve for me about how to deliver into remote and regional areas, given the way in which our people have been doing business and also given some of the historical and generational changes that are taking place for Indigenous people. Those changes are about fitting into a new culture, whether that be through the use of IT, information technology, or through putting banking services into Indigenous communities and having people take ownership of them.

CHAIR—They also need to pick up understanding. We regularly run into issues about fees and PINs and all that stuff. There is great difficulty.

Mr P. Briggs—There are difficulties with the practicalities of Visa cards and other things sitting in hip pockets out in remote areas and with people losing their PINs. We have to get out to people how they actually put the card in and out of the slots of ATMs, the costs associated with that and how to minimise those costs. One of the great things is running a clan account so that families can take responsibility for family finance issues, whether they be deaths in families and costs associated with funerals or whether they are saving up for family initiatives, such as weddings. Running a clan account has been one of the great things to come out of it. The Rumbalara Cooperative certainly has had a huge demand on the provision of welfare type services, in terms of payments of SEC bills, rents, gas bills and other types of things. This is encouraging families to take responsibility and giving them a tool to work with. People say that they can walk in barefooted and not feel shame about talking about their personal financial issues with First Nations Australian Credit Union. They cannot do that in any of the major banks, where there is mainly a deposit and withdrawal relationship. With First Nations Australian Credit Union, financial literacy and community education have been classics. It fits; in terms of capacity building, it is another one of the building blocks that you need in your community.

CHAIR—You mentioned expectation versus performance and a benchmark for where you would like it to be. It is treading water and holding its own, I presume?

Mr P. Briggs—Yes, it is. It is a bit of a chicken and egg type of thing as to whether you have got the resources to put infrastructure into a community and build or whether you need to build participation first and then put the infrastructure in. It is a real business dilemma, I suppose.

CHAIR—It is a judgment, yes.

Mr P. Briggs—The majority of our people are operating on Centrelink type payments, CDEP, so servicing that is a huge cost. There is a balance between corporate participation and personal participation of individuals to offset a lot of the costs associated with running it. That is a huge challenge.

CHAIR—Thank you. We will see you again this afternoon.

[11.55 a.m.]

MARTIN, Mr John William, Board Member, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative

MOHAMED, Mr Justin, Chief Executive Officer, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative

MORRIS, Ms Lena, Manager, Aged Care, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative

CHAIR—Welcome. Justin, maybe you could take us through how the cooperative works.

Mr Mohamed—We will go through the booklet I have here—I have copies for you. I will talk a bit about Rumbalara and then open up the discussion for questions. I will try not to go on too much. This is a brief summary of Rumbalara's history. This facility here, which we will take you around, was a residential area before the services were established. I will show you some of the houses that were built here in 1958. From 1958 to the seventies, people lived here. In the seventies, people moved to Shepparton and Mooroopna. In 1980, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative Ltd, as we know it now, was incorporated. In 1981, we established our first service, which was a health service in the front house.

There is a page in the booklet that shows the structure of the organisation. We have four main service areas, apart from administration, which is a part of all of them. We have our health services, which are located here at Rumbalara. We will show you that. We have our aged care and disability services, which are also located here at Rumbalara. Lena is the manager of those areas, which provide support accommodation and programs. There are elders luncheons, linedancing, water aerobics and those sorts of things. We have a housing area and a couple of works project areas. Our housing is funded through the ATSIK CHIP program. We have 52 properties which are owned and operated by Rumbalara on a normal rental basis in Shepparton, Mooroopna and a couple of other smaller towns. There is the youth and family services area which looks after community justice programs, our foster care programs and family preservation. There is a whole range of youth and family areas, which sometimes deals with the Department of Human Services or courts but also deals with the preventative side of things. Those are our four main areas and our core business. If the government comes up with programs that do not fit into one of those four areas, we emphasise that this is our core business and our programs focus on that.

CHAIR—There are other services available elsewhere. This is what you focus on.

Mr Mohamed—This is what we specialise in. We do not specialise in employment or education. There are other organisations which do that.

Mr Martin—But we work in partnership with those different areas. We had a very proud moment recently at our AGM. The auditor got up and made a statement, which was pretty bold. He does a lot of local auditing of local SPCs and so on. He commented that it is the most well-organised and professional audit that he has ever seen in the whole region. That is a big statement from an accountability perspective and in terms of the infrastructure that is in place.

CHAIR—It supports the credibility of your organisation.

Mr Mohamed—Especially with the kind of publicity Aboriginal organisations get all the time about their financial accountability.

Mr Martin—I thought I would just flag that.

CHAIR—That is justifiable pride.

Mr Mohamed—I will quickly touch on the health service. We have a fully functioning medical clinic. We have three full-time doctors at the moment. We have visiting specialists who come from around the area. Rumbalara is the only bulk-billing clinic in the whole region, so it has a lot of demands on it. The specialists who work in the Shepparton region might have their own consultancy suites, but all of them do their rounds at the hospital because there are not enough specialists and medically trained people to service both. We have a lot of those specialists coming to Rumbalara to hold some of their clinics. We have obstetricians, paediatricians, optometrists—a whole range of specialists. It is a pretty unique sort of service.

CHAIR—Do we know whether this service is an AMS, Commonwealth funded?

Mr Mohamed—Yes, it is Commonwealth funded. We are trying to put a bit of pressure on the state; we say that it has a bit of responsibility. The state funds a lot of local hospitals, and we say there is a responsibility.

CHAIR—In another parliamentary committee two or three years ago, of which I was the chair, we did an inquiry on health, and we had a few things to say about that.

Mr Mohamed—Victoria's state health body seems to have a different approach from other states that we know have contributed to AMSs. But in Victoria they keep a fair distance and say, 'That's a Commonwealth responsibility.'

CHAIR—We will remember that for Wednesday.

Mr Mohamed—Another part of the health service covers the emotional and spiritual wellbeing side of things, not just the physical part, and that is a very important program. Daniel Briggs, who is at the Koori Court, was the coordinator and there is the stolen generation program. So the health service involves not just the physical; it is trying to deal with the whole body, the whole family.

Lena's area deals with aged care and disability services. We have a whole range of services covering home care, personal care, garden maintenance—some very practical things—as well as psychiatric disability services. We do respite work, and we do a lot of activities during the week that I talked about so that the elders can get out and about—you will be having lunch with the elders after this. This happens on a weekly basis. We have been fortunate enough to be one of the only Aboriginal organisations in Victoria coordinating and augmenting the community aged care packages.

Ms HOARE—You are the only one in Victoria?

Mr Mohamed—We are the only Aboriginal organisation that has been given that responsibility.

Ms Morris—There is one more that has just come on.

Mr Mohamed—Yes, just recently. So we are changing the concept: if an organisation is operating well enough then, instead of going to mainstream organisations, trying to get access and being the third person in line, it can have control over those things, under the guidelines stipulated. We can show that we can run those services as well as any other organisation. That has been recognised now throughout the state.

Mr Martin—I think that comes back to the credibility within the central administration. If you have the appropriate structures, you can pick up those types of initiatives.

Mr Mohamed—One of the major projects in the pipeline in relation to our aged care and disability services—and which we have done a fair bit of work around—is the Rumbalara multi-aged care complex, which we will be looking at making residential. At the moment, when our elders—and we have a large community—get to a point when they need permanent care, they need to go to Melbourne, and some of them have been in the mainstream facilities around here, which are very heavily booked as well. So we have made some very important partnerships with some of the major mainstream aged care providers. They have assisted us with the development of the plan, right down to the finer details of establishing our own aged care facility in this region. One of our short- to medium-term visions is to get that up so that we can have our elders living here and spending their last days with the community, and we want to have that set up appropriately.

Ms HOARE—What about care and respite services for younger people with severe disabilities?

Ms Morris—There is a demand because there are not many places around that cater to the disabilities. For our community trying to access them, sometimes they need emergency accommodation for respite or sometimes they need it for other things, it is so hard to get in. You are very limited around the Goulburn Valley in being able to access services if you have a disability. That is also another project we will be looking at. We are looking at working with the state department in trying to set up some disability services and packages down the track.

Ms HOARE—Would you see that being incorporated into the multi-aged care complex?

Ms Morris—Yes.

Mr Mohamed—Some of the people who use aged care and disability services are younger people, not elders. They are younger people who come along who we support. We support their carers—their parents or their grandparents—in caring for them. The other area we spoke about was youth and family services, which provides a lot of support in the drug and alcohol field and supported accommodation for young people. We do a lot of work with the justice system. It is probably the major contributor to the Koori Court. This program area in the region has a lot of dealings with the police, the court, the sheriff's office and so on. As you could well imagine, it is sometimes pretty taxing working with those sorts of departments. Next week for two days we have cross-cultural training with the police. Ten local policemen—it is compulsory for them—are going to spend time at Barmah, where the main family groups here originated from. They

re going to spend time at Barmah, where the main family groups here originated from. They are coming over here for the day to do some cross-cultural training with the police, giving them a little bit of knowledge about the local community and not just the text book stuff. It will give them a little bit more face-to-face and hands-on experience. The other program it looks at is housing and emergency accommodation—

Ms HOARE—What is IHSY?

Mr Mohamed—IHSY is Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth.

CHAIR—Do they also do sex education?

Mr Mohamed—Yes. They do a lot of things like organising immunisations for school groups, which they bring here, and doing up STD awareness packages. They work generally across the other programs and give support where they can.

Ms HOARE—Is teenage pregnancy an issue in the Shepparton community?

Mr Mohamed—It has been and still is. In our health service, we have a ‘minimis and burris’ program for children and babies. Fortunately, work has been going on in that area for over 10 years. When they started, there was a huge problem with teenage pregnancy. A lot of the mothers were not breastfeeding, the babies were underweight and all the rest of it. So there was a lot of work with the local hospital, because in this region—like in a lot of regional areas—when you are born, you are born in the hospital and when you die, you are probably going to die there. The starting point was not very effective. There was not a lot of contact. People would just present to deliver their babies. There was no history or antenatal sort of stuff. Our worker has done a lot of work with the individuals and the hospital, as well, to improve those things. The worker has encouraged the hospital to be a little bit more supportive and to provide more culturally sensitive services. Antenatal and postnatal care is now conducted here at Rumbalara, and their paediatrician and their obstetrician come out here. With teenage pregnancies, they are able to work with the younger mums and support them and their families through those times, and the Aboriginal worker provides that crucial link. Education may not stop it, but it provides support.

Ms HOARE—So over those years have you seen a decline in teenage pregnancies?

Mr Mohamed—There has been a decline. Also, the health of the babies being born has increased and the birth weights have lifted. Those sorts of things have been targeted. Breastfeeding rates have increased, and a whole range of women’s issues have been targeted within that program. Those mothers who were teenagers are now probably on their third or fourth child and are going through that whole process now. So they have improved insofar as when they fall pregnant and the care they need to take, which the program has been working towards.

Ms HOARE—Congratulations!

Mr Mohamed—The other area is youth and family. The family side of things is the ‘burri’ program, which is about four years old now. ‘Extended care’ is the other term we use for foster care, because foster care is sometimes not a very positive term. We work with families and the

local Department of Human Services. We know that some kids will need to be removed. We try to educate and train up a group of foster care parents from the community—some are Aboriginal and some are not. We make sure they culturally keep to our values and principles. On the other side of it, the program works with the family where the child may have been removed from to get them ready to have their child back. That is our whole philosophy behind it, and that seems to work fairly well.

We have embarked on a couple of other programs which include the family in decision making. So when children are removed or orders are put on them we get the whole family to sit around the table—a bit like the Koori courts—with DHS and we say, ‘This is why there has been a notification made and these are the things which would stop the notification going any further.’ It may be that the child needs to attend school more regularly, and when you have a group of family members around maybe a brother or someone will say, ‘I can pick them up and make sure they get to school.’ That saves the whole mess of going through the system and getting involved in the courts and all the rest of it. That has worked very well. It is only a new program; it is being evaluated as we speak.

The main focus for the youth and family services area—probably at the other extreme from the aged care area—is Yalka Farm. We are just about to launch a feasibility study and a business plan for this. We are developing this farm, in conjunction with CDEP, as a place where young people who may be at risk or in trouble with the courts and so forth, for a number of different reasons, or getting expelled or suspended from school can take some time out.

CHAIR—How far away are we from this farm?

Mr Mohamed—The plan will be launched on Friday.

CHAIR—I meant in terms of distance from here.

Mr Martin—It is about a 15-minute drive.

CHAIR—It is convenient.

Mr Mohamed—It is convenient for support workers to get there. We have had support from the courts, the police and so on. At the moment, if a juvenile gets picked up on a Friday night and needs to appear in court on Monday then they will be taken to Melbourne, spend the weekend in Melbourne and be driven back up here on Monday for court. That costs a lot and they also get into an environment from which they come out probably even more street-wise.

CHAIR—So you are trying to create a diversionary program to have a positive outcome.

Mr Mohamed—Yes, and we are looking not only at the issue at hand but also at the underlying issues, whether it is anger management, dealing with grief and all those sorts of things.

Mr Martin—Preventative stuff rather than reactive.

Mr Mohamed—They might be upset because they have never known their father and that is something that has caused them to get into a lot of strife. The other part of it is that when our schools suspend or expel kids, the kids do not have a family base where someone says, ‘Okay, now you are in trouble. You had better stay home.’ So they end up down at the mall and just get into more trouble.

CHAIR—Good luck with that. I have a suggestion to make. Because you want to show people around, I think it might be good to go through the next three or four minutes and then wind up it up so that we can stick to the schedule. I have some media commitments which I have to honour for the next half-hour or 20 minutes.

Mr Mohamed—The last point to make is on housing and capital works, which is very straightforward. This is about providing accommodation for our community. We are looking at new ways of encouraging home ownership—encouraging people to take buying their home or getting ready to buy their home as a responsibility. We think this is where the future is. There are just not enough houses provided by ATSIC every year to house everyone.

CHAIR—That is very interesting.

Mr Mohamed—If we get one to four families a year taking up this initiative and saying, ‘We might be interested in buying a home,’ then I think that, in 10 years time, we will have made a big difference.

CHAIR—How is it going? Are you getting a few?

Mr Mohamed—At the moment, we are on the verge of really pushing that. We have about four families who have said that they would be looking at doing it.

Mr Martin—It is about finalising effective strategies so that we engage all the stakeholders: the financial institutions, the individuals and the cooperative.

CHAIR—And I guess it comes down to practical things like accessing the first home owners grant and all that.

Mr Mohamed—Rumbalara may get to the point where we can go to First Nations Australian Credit Union and the other banks and say, ‘These are the systems which are out there.’ We are talking with people and working with people who have never had anyone in their family line own a home. So it is not as if they can go to mum or dad and ask them how to do it or go and speak to their bank; those structures are not there.

Mr Martin—It is about giving families equity in their own right.

Mr Mohamed—If we can provide that support through our business and say, ‘We recommend you go to this bank’ and then ask the bank to look after these people for us then we are playing a similar role to that of parents in the wider Australian community, which a lot of our people do not have.

Apart from the services we provide, Rumbalara as a community organisation is looked to by the rest of the community to respond to and deal with local, regional, state and national issues that come up. A lot of the members of the community look to Rumbalara to respond to different things. If it is about reconciliation or native title, or if there are issues in the mall with young people, the community expects Rumbalara to take a stance, talk with politicians or local government about how to deal with these issues and respond with our stance as an Aboriginal community. That is another responsibility which Rumbalara has always had: it is the parent organisation. It was the first Aboriginal organisation—

Mr Martin—It is the mother organisation.

Mr Mohamed—and the other organisations have grown since then, so it has that cultural spokesperson role on behalf of the community. The rest of the booklet basically shows the links we have with the mainstream organisations in the town. We are one of the larger organisations, white or black, in the area in terms of the financial contribution that we make to the town. That is seen, along with the networking we do with the different groups around the place—the hospitals, the councils and other mainstream organisations which deliver services.

CHAIR—How does your governance work in terms of board structure, elections and so on?

Mr Mohamed—This is a community controlled organisation, so our members are Aboriginal people. To be a board member, you have to be Aboriginal and then you have to be voted in by the members at an AGM. We have a three-four rotation at the moment.

CHAIR—What about the chairman?

Mr Mohamed—The chairperson is voted in by the board once the board are elected.

CHAIR—Who is the executive officer?

Mr Mohamed—I am the CEO and I am appointed by the board. The managers are appointed by a couple of board members in conjunction with me. The rest of the staff are then appointed by me.

CHAIR—What staff do you have?

Mr Mohamed—We have about 72 staff on our payroll. About 56 of those are full time, and the rest are casual or part-time workers. They range anywhere from a dentist or a GP to part-time maintenance workers.

CHAIR—You have top line management, don't you?

Mr Mohamed—We do. We have five managers, who handle all those programs, and about 52 programs fit into those areas, which is a fair bit of accountability.

Mr Martin—And servicing the funding agreements, too—how many acquittals would we be doing at any given time, Justin?

Mr Mohamed—We have about 28 acquittals just to state government from DHS. With COAG, we are trying to get some stuff worked out there.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Mohamed—So if you want to make our life a bit easier, please send 28 acquittals to the one office, basically! I have listed the programs, because they are all in bits and pieces.

CHAIR—I suppose there are a few federal acquittals in there too.

Mr Mohamed—There are a few of those, yes. Most of our dollars come from the Commonwealth department of health. OATSIS is one of our major funders; DHS and the state government are the other. And then ATSIC, Vic Police and a few other, smaller ones—trust funds and those sorts of things—make up the rest. OATSIS and DHS would probably contribute close to 80 per cent of our funding, apart from our housing purchases, which are one-offs.

CHAIR—I have to stop the committee there. Lena, thank you very much. Justin and John—again, thank you.

Committee adjourned at 12.18 p.m.