



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities**

WEDNESDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2003

MELBOURNE

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**  
**Wednesday, 19 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:** Mr Danby, 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 8.46 a.m.**

**CAHIR, Mr Anthony Vincent, Executive Director, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria**

**MILWARD, Ms Karen, Director, Planning and Development Branch, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into capacity building in Indigenous communities. I welcome to the hearing the representatives from Aboriginal Affairs Victoria. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, you are advised that these are legal proceedings of the parliament and have the same standing as proceedings in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Mr Cahir, would you like to making an opening statement?

**Mr Cahir**—Yes, thank you for the opportunity. Aboriginal Affairs Victoria is the state government's agency within government reporting to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Gavin Jennings. We have a whole-of-government responsibility to monitor the government's policies and programs as they impact on Aboriginal people, as well as a responsibility for culture and heritage management and the legislation around that. In everything Victoria has done in Aboriginal affairs over many years, we accept as a truism that it has to be done in genuine partnership with the communities. One of the strengths in Victoria is that both parties have adopted a bipartisan approach to Aboriginal affairs, recognising that, whatever the politics and the arrangements of the white fella, if you are not working with the communities and getting their views it is not going to work. That bipartisan approach has enabled the communities in Victoria and AAV within government to take a longer term view as to the type of approach that is best to meet the needs. As I said, we do that on the understanding that the only way for government to succeed at representing the communities and responding to their needs appropriately is in genuine partnership.

The focus on community capacity building, which your committee is looking at, is certainly a focus that the Victorian government have taken up in a way that is an extension of that commitment to partnership. Put simply, the communities have been saying: 'If you want a partnership, if you want our input and if you want our views, we welcome that; but let's be fair dinkum; let's be equal at the table. You as government are fully resourced in many ways, and we in communities are volunteers, and you're calling on our expertise. We need the capacity to come to you equally.' That is the basis to take the partnership beyond just consultation and involvement and to be, as I say, fair dinkum in supporting the communities to be that equal partner.

In the budget of 2002 the Bracks government increased the allocation of funding to Aboriginal Affairs Victoria by some 36 per cent, focusing on three particular initiatives: the government's commitment to a comprehensive response to the stolen generations report and responding to community requirements in Victoria; the necessity to develop an appropriate and community based Indigenous family violence strategy, which is another high priority; and, most important of all, to give real support to the concept of community capacity building. Funds of \$1 million a year over the next two years were allocated for community capacity-building programs. They fall into four particular programs at the moment. The first program is the establishment of a chief executive officer network. That will try to say to all Aboriginal

community organisations in Victoria that their CEOs need support by networking with each other, sharing experiences and getting a more strategic approach, rather than feeling isolated in their businesses and their dealings with government. If we can support the CEOs and hence the organisations, it should lead to better partnerships with government. The second, and I suppose connected, initiative within the community capacity-building funding is the establishment of an Internet portal to enable communication between all Aboriginal organisations on issues that affect them across the state. Clearly, training and support for staff of organisations and for board members is important in developing capacity. I think that any definition of community capacity building would recognise the need for appropriate training and support.

The fourth initiative within the government's million-dollar allocation is the one that we believe is the way forward—that is, the establishment of an Indigenous community capacity-building fund at a local level. Within that allocation of \$1 million, \$500,000 a year has been set aside for this fund. We will be adding an additional \$500,000 of that from an existing program in Victoria called the Koori Community Fund. So there will be \$1 million available simply for local initiatives. We will be saying to families, clan groups and any grouping of people or Aboriginal organisations, 'Tell us what you would like to do at your level to meet your needs and to enable the capacity of your grouping to be better equipped to deal with the issues you face and in dealing with government.' We expect that grants will be provided of up to \$15,000 for family groups or individuals and up to \$100,000 for organisations out of that \$1 million a year over this year and next year. We have deliberately defined community capacity building in a broad sense in the information we will be sending to communities. I will quote what we are saying:

For the purposes of the fund, the definition of Community Capacity Building is:

'Strategies/programs/initiatives which seek to empower, motivate and enable individuals, families and communities and provide them with the necessary skills, resources, networks and information to allow them to pursue their own development goals.'

We have left it wide open for groups to respond to this availability of funding. We have said that the types of projects that may be funded include, for instance: community information; leadership and professional development; governance and ways to improve change governance processes; youth-focused projects; culture and arts projects that strengthen communities; small capital collaboration and partnership development; technical advisers, including facilitators, researchers and project coordinators on a fixed contract; reconnecting with community projects; seed funding; pilot projects that lead to sustainable projects; and strengthening identity and culture.

I would conclude on the point that the government believes that the way to be fair dinkum—I keep using that phrase—in partnership is not to stipulate what a community needs or what we think is appropriate to develop that capacity, but to have them identify the best way and to come to us with what they regard as something that will develop a sustainable approach to enable that community to increase its capacity to achieve its objectives and to work with government. The minister, Gavin Jennings, is about to release the fund and call for submissions during the month of March. We would hope that, after a month of applications, the funding can be effectively allocated and out the door before, obviously, this first year on 30 June. There will then be a second tranche for next year's allocation of another \$1 million for this part of the program in the next financial year. So hopefully \$2 million for projects that the community has identified will make a substantial difference to their operations in Victoria.

**CHAIR**—Karen, would you like to add anything?

**Ms Milward**—I am happy to answer any questions.

**CHAIR**—Karen, is your role to support Tony or do you have responsibility for a particular section?

**Ms Milward**—The community capacity-building fund and all the new initiatives come under my area.

**CHAIR**—So you are an executive officer within Aboriginal Affairs Victoria?

**Ms Milward**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—We have been to Shepparton and Warrnambool over the last couple of days, as you would know. We are fairly impressed, I must say. We know that there are about 25,000 Aboriginal people in Victoria. I am not sure how many there are in Greater Melbourne; I think it is about 12,000. What are the numbers?

**Mr Cahir**—It is about 50 per cent.

**CHAIR**—In my opening gambit, I would like to try to flesh out the difference between metropolitan and regional and rural areas and, as a South Australian, I would dare say perhaps not quite remote areas. You would have limited remote areas, if I could put it that way. Can you help us to understand the issues of metropolitan Aboriginal people versus the issues of regional Aboriginal people? We have been to the regional areas and—I think Kelly and I agree—we are quite impressed with the regional Aboriginals' attitude, their sense of themselves and where they want to go et cetera. That is one part of it.

The other part is that you have had a really good go at defining capacity. That is something we are wrestling with, and I am not quite clear about it. What does it mean? Part of it, of course, is education and the wider issues of welfare and disadvantage. How do we encourage dignity and make it worth while from an Aboriginal perspective? How do we engage? I will come back to that, but that is just an opening gambit of where I am trying to come from this morning. Maybe we could talk about the differences between the metro and rural and regional situations and how you see those differences, because I think there are some quite different approaches.

**Mr Cahir**—Karen will certainly have some thoughts on that. I will start by slightly twisting your question before getting to it, because it is an important issue to Victoria and to Victorian Aboriginal communities. You are right; whilst Lake Tyers and Framlingham probably do meet the criteria of rural and remote communities, we would say that in the rest of Victoria—metropolitan Melbourne and the other centres of Aboriginal population—Aboriginals are in urban situations, even outside of the metropolitan area. We do argue in many forums, generally with the Commonwealth and probably in competition with our fellow states, that the issues facing urban populations are different from those facing rural and remote populations. We get a little frustrated and concerned when people talk about the issues of lack of potable water, isolation, poor housing and Third World conditions—all of those terms are bandied about. We have no argument with that, but the issues faced by the urban Aboriginal population, relative to the rest of the population in Victoria, are very real and in need of attention.

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We do not make the comparison with rural and remote communities but, unfortunately, in terms of funding or perceived need there often seems to be a distortion, in our mind, to those very different issues facing rural and remote communities. I take the opportunity to put that on the record. We think that diversion of funds to those rural and remote communities as a high priority is, if you like, asking the Aboriginal people in urban situations in Victoria and New South Wales—and Perth for that matter, and Adelaide—to pay for the totally different situation facing rural and remote Aboriginal communities. We say that that is not the basis on which to look at the situation.

Aboriginal people in urban situations are, by all the indicators we apply to urban situations, the most disadvantaged in the usual way. That might be in different ways: lack of access to home ownership; overcrowding in private rental; inability to afford private rental accommodation; disproportionate representation in public housing; poor school retention rates related to inadequate housing; and low self-esteem because of racism and discrimination, particularly in country towns, which is very real when you are part of an urban country town rather than in a remote community. So I take the opportunity to say that, in the first instance, those issues I have just outlined face people in a rural centre such as Shepparton, Echuca or Bairnsdale as much as people in a metropolitan part of Melbourne.

If there are differences, one of the big differences in the country centres around Victoria is that there is a greater sense of cohesion and ease of maintaining identity. That may come back to the traditional owners. The people in those areas have links to traditional ownership and therefore the cultural heritage and connection is stronger with them than perhaps it is for those who have drifted, over time, to the Melbourne metropolitan area, where they are no longer in their country, if you like. It is likely that people in the country centres of Victoria have that connection back to the land more than those who have come to Melbourne for a variety of reasons over a length of time.

I think that an examination of the types of organisations that have grown up in Victoria would show that the community has jelled, if you like, around a co-op or an organisation in a country town far more than the way they jell around organisations in metropolitan Melbourne. You do not have co-ops in the same way—you have your state-wide services like the legal service and the health service and the housing board operating from Melbourne but providing state-wide services. You do not have an individual cooperative in the same way.

I think that is changing in that we are seeing in places like the western suburbs the emergence of things like the Fitzroy Stars Gym, the Fitzroy Stars Football Club, and the Worawa Football Club at Healesville—organisations are emerging to meet specific needs. That is happening now, whereas the co-ops in all those country towns emerged 30 years ago in response to an absolute need across all aspects facing the community, so they were seen as a vehicle for change. Now we are seeing the emerging vehicles in Melbourne as not for change but as an opportunity to develop particular aspects. I will ask Karen to add to this, but I am not sure that, other than what I said, there is a great difference in the situation facing Aboriginal people in metropolitan Melbourne and in country towns. The socioeconomic indicators are similar; the discrimination, the sense of alienation, the need to bond together within the community is across all parts of Victoria.

**CHAIR**—It is something that we wrestle with in the committee—across urban and regional experience—as our members come from different backgrounds. We really wrestle with this and

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I know our secretariat does too. What is the appropriate balance? That is a trite question; perhaps it is more a case of: how do we endeavour to strike a reasonable balance? We are wrestling with the same thing, so that was the purpose of my question. Victoria has a small, discrete group and, as you say, it is split fifty-fifty between metropolitan and country. Clearly, Shepparton and Warrnambool are urban communities, to all intents and purposes, although they have those differences. The Rumbalara Football/Netball Club, which you would be familiar with, was for me quite an interesting experience as well.

**Ms Milward**—In the last five years we have done a lot of consultation around community capacity building—in particular, state government delivery of programs and services mainly to country Victoria. It is still apparent, if you look at the difference between metropolitan and country Victoria, that racism is still the No. 1 barrier. For example, we have a lot of senior bureaucrats who might go out to, say, Shepparton and state: ‘What’s the problem here? Shepparton’s flourishing; look at all the infrastructure development. People are clothed; it doesn’t look like there’s any disadvantage here,’ when it is quite apparent that Shepparton, which has the largest Aboriginal population outside of Melbourne, does not have that presence. So, when you go there, you do not see a celebration of Aboriginal culture in that area. It is starting to change—for instance, on the drive into Shepparton the local council has welcome signage acknowledging the traditional owners, and they fly the flag on a permanent basis. But that has taken years and years of the community going in to talk about it.

Another major issue has not so much to do with access to services—even though there is quite a large service delivery in Shepparton and there are transport issues—but with education issues. The rates for keeping kids in schools are quite low, and seem to have decreased in the last five or six years. A lot of that does have to do with racism and the majority of Aboriginal people on CDEP not moving on to other employment or, when they do move on, experiencing racism at that end and wanting to come back onto CDEP. We now have third generation Aboriginal people on CDEP, which I do not think it was set up to do in the first place.

Therefore, kids in school are saying: ‘This is what I’m seeing: my parents, my uncles and my aunts are on CDEP. What do I have to aspire to?’ So we have to try to give Aboriginal kids other opportunities to look at. That is why we hope the community capacity-building fund will cover some of those gaps and why we want to focus on individuals and families, not just on organisations. As we know, a lot of individuals sometimes do not want to access their organisations, due to factionalism and disagreements and those sorts of things. So we are trying to cover every base, and the community really is embracing what we are trying to do with community capacity. I would say they are the major issues we are tackling at the moment in trying to get government departments, both Commonwealth and state, to work together to streamline how they deliver programs and services, rather than this individual way of doing things.

**Mr Cahir**—I am sure that someone may have raised this issue with you in Shepparton when you were there, and to reinforce what Karen has said—and it is a quote I use quite often—most of the Shepparton community is committed to education. You may have met Mary Atkinson and some key people who have worked very hard on one of the key indicators of school retention, which you would be aware of. They were having considerable success throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, with kids staying on longer, including to year 12 and then moving on to tertiary education.

From my understanding of the advice, in the last five years or so the figures have actually gone backwards—they peaked and have dipped. The explanation from those who have worked so hard to get that improvement is as Karen said: it worked with the eldest kid in the family who was at the forefront of that retention. That person left school, either to seek employment or to get tertiary qualifications in Melbourne or in other centres, came back to Shepparton, as is their wont, and even with year 12 or with tertiary qualifications was not able to get employment. The community is telling us that the siblings are now saying: ‘What’s the point? I saw the eldest struggle through and make all these sacrifices to achieve this education standard and they are on CDEP or on the dole. So why don’t I leave at age 15 or 16 and take up that same position?’ That has had a very real impact. At the end of the day, in rural Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne, as ever, employment and access to employment is the key. As Karen has just indicated, you are aware of the COAG process and the 10 trials, and that Shepparton will be the location for the Victorian trial; we are supporting that trial with money from this capacity-building fund.

**CHAIR**—Will you see Peter Shergold on Friday?

**Mr Cahir**—No; it will be Peter Boxall and Terry Moran. So there will be another set of suits hitting Shepparton on Friday! People in Shepparton, like Paul Briggs, are emphasising what has to happen in rural towns—and this is a huge task. In so many country towns in Victoria the only people who are employed are those employed by the Aboriginal organisations that are funded by government or ATSIC to deliver services. Very few, if any, people are employed in the mainstream. If we are to make the breakthroughs, the community has been acknowledging that the answer is in mainstream employment, and the answer is clearly not education alone, as evidenced by the story I just told about Shepparton retention rates. So more has to be done in breaking down the barriers, and the community has to break those down. Governments in Spring Street or Canberra cannot come in and change the way that Shepparton employers view their responsibilities or their attitude to Aboriginal employment. We have to have that change from within. We need local government. The Shepparton experience is an interesting experience of a turnaround in a local government’s attitude. There is no doubt that Aboriginal people in Shepparton would have said a number of years ago that there is no recognition or support from local government. I do not think that is the case now. There is very real commitment and support at the local government level, which is a start. That is where it is all happening. Now we need the community to feel confident, empowered and able to make the changes within their broader community that for so long they have been isolated within.

**CHAIR**—In relation to the Shepparton experience, the fellow from Rumbalara, Paul Briggs—

**Ms HOARE**—And Justin Mohamed.

**CHAIR**—really impressed me when he said—and I do not hear many people from the Aboriginal community saying it—‘The mainstream community is important to us. We go out of our way to welcome them and bring them with us.’ I do not hear very much of that, and I thought here is someone with leadership quality who not only is respected in his own community but has that all too rare capacity, in my opinion, of saying, ‘We really want to be out there in this community.’ I found it quite refreshing, so I share that with you, for what it is worth. Another one, the mighty Essendon Football Club, of which I am not a fan but I respect—

**Mr Cahir**—You just lost my respect!

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**CHAIR**—In Warrnambool they have introduced the employer mentoring approach. They made the point to us—which we thought might be the basis of one of our recommendations—that, by explaining the benefits, a liaison is formed between employers and the wider Aboriginal community. Of course, being there just for one day, you tend to get a positive view, but a lot of it you cannot feign either. I wanted to just share that with you because it was refreshing to hear comments such as, ‘This community is important for us. We want to work with it.’ It is really up to that community to put the onus back on the community. It was not giving the mainstream community any excuses. They are saying, ‘We are here; we are prepared to do business. Can we do business?’

**Ms HOARE**—Your local community capacity-building fund sounds like a brilliant idea. I hope it all goes very well. I will be looking forward to following the outcomes of that. What is the process, then, for assessing the outcomes of the fund? Also, you talk about the mainstream employment prospects—the increased retention rate at school so that we have people with school leaving and tertiary qualifications going back into CDEP employment. I think it was yesterday in Warrnambool that we spoke to host employers out of a group CDEP program about their employment of Aboriginal people. The one that stands out is the Essendon Football Club. I cannot think of the gentleman’s name, but I spoke to him about how the Essendon Football Club could be used to promote employment of Aboriginal people, maybe by using football stars’ names—the chair and Mr Danby know more of them than I do, because I come from New South Wales. How can that then be used to promote the employment of Aboriginal people? My third question concerns the possible duplication between the programs that the Commonwealth government and ATSIC provide and the Victorian government programs that you are providing. ATSIC’s program delivery and the structure of ATSIC are currently under review. As a state service provider in a state government department, how do you see your role in a possible restructure and review of ATSIC? They were the three points—the monitoring of the fund, the employment of Aboriginal people and the review of ATSIC.

**Ms Milward**—In relation to your first question on how we are going to assess these submissions when they come in, we have in the past involved community members. This time I think we are going to take more of an internal approach to assessing, because we do have individuals and families. Is that what you meant?

**Ms HOARE**—Sorry, I meant more the monitoring of the outcomes.

**Ms Milward**—A team of people within my branch will be seeing how the actual project goes. We also have money within the fund to employ another person to specifically look at the fund, so we will be doing that as well. We have money in here for seed funding, which is specifically to enable organisations or individuals to pay somebody to put in a really good application, because we think that is where Aboriginal communities are let down a lot. They do not have access to that type of service. So we have an evaluation process set out. As in the beginning, we have gone around and talked to everybody and promoted it as much as possible to ensure that we are looking at the gaps. Also, we do not want it to be rigid, like other grant programs are. Then I suppose every two months, depending on the length of the project that gets funded, we will certainly have an evaluation process.

**Mr Cahir**—If I could add to that, the arrangement will be that the successful organisation signs a funding and service agreement with us which sets out agreed desired outcomes. So at the start of the project we will have the community identify the outcomes. The basis of the

agreement will be to deliver those outcomes and we will monitor how they go. So there will be clear expected outcomes at the start of each project.

**Ms Milward**—I am not sure about the football question. Did you mean—

**CHAIR**—I will just give you a clue. A fellow from Essendon was there with the father of one of the budding stars out at Warrnambool—that is the impression I got.

**Ms Milward**—Is that John Collyer?

**CHAIR**—No, it was another chap. The father came down to Melbourne and works in hospitality and support services. This has been going on for, I presume, a year or two and, as they described it, was more or less informal and accidental. The Essendon fellow commented: 'If we'd understood better what was available with the financial incentives, we would have been a bit quicker off the mark.' And he thought if others understood this better they would be quicker off the mark as well. As it has been described to us, they are really very pleased. It linked the father with the son. When kids go away, it is good if they have at least someone around who is a familiar face. Clearly, this fellow said, 'I've been unemployed for a hell of a long time'. He was going nowhere. John Collyer drew him out on the public record, and he was a really decent, quiet man. There has been great improvement and movement forward in this man's life because of the effort that the Essendon Football Club have made in an informal sense. They think there is an opening there right across the AFL. That was really the bottom line, if that helps.

**Ms HOARE**—Further to that, the fellow from the Essendon Football Club says that this man is now indispensable. If the support funding were taken away—the employment wage subsidy—I get the impression that this person would be in full-time work. The fellow from the Essendon Football Club was enthusiastic, saying, 'Let's give these guys a go; it can work out, and it opens up a whole resource out there for us, for employers, that we do not know about.'

**CHAIR**—But it is going to take time. There is a subsidy, and things will change gradually.

**Ms HOARE**—I was thinking that it would be similar to football or sports stars coming out and saying, 'Domestic violence isn't on.' I think that was a Commonwealth funded media campaign. That was the kind of area that I was looking at for promotion.

**Mr DANBY**—I was not there, so I am not a hundred per cent sure what you are talking about. The father was employed via a subsidised scheme with the social club of Essendon, and he came down at the same time as his son came down to play football?

**CHAIR**—It was linked. I am a little bit unclear on the detail, but that is the principle. He was working out of Essendon and had become, over time, an important part of their backup team.

**Ms Milward**—Are you saying that was done as a trial? It was something they just tried?

**CHAIR**—I do not remember the exact program. It was under a Commonwealth program which offered about 50 per cent wage subsidy, I think.

**Ms HOARE**—It is about using employers who have had good experiences employing Aboriginal people—and the football club comes to mind because there are, apparently, members of football teams who are well known in the community—to promote employment of Aboriginal people.

**Mr Cahir**—I think we could spend days on the issue of employment. As you have said, it will be a long-term issue, and it has to be attacked on many fronts, including through mentoring and role modelling. The linkage through sport is a great way to capture young people and perhaps get them on the right path. We find the CDEPs fascinating, even though they are not a state responsibility. We think that some succeed and some do not. The measure of success is people moving off the CDEP and taking up careers or starting their own businesses. There are great examples of success all round the state.

I would like to mention two other things. In Victoria, as part of our innovation in regional development, we have the Koori Business Network, which is set up to specifically support Koori entrepreneurs. It offers them the networks, advice and connections to other advisers that, I suppose, mainstream businesses take as a matter of course. You ring up Small Business Victoria for advice on an export licence; you chat to fellow tradesmen at the golf club; you are a member of Rotary. None of these connections are available to Koori entrepreneurs. So we are actively encouraging businesses in that way, which hopefully will generate employment in its own way.

The state government has launched Wur-cum barra, which is its commitment to employing Aboriginal people in the Victorian Public Service. It has set a target over the next two years of two per cent of the Victorian Public Service being Aboriginal people. That will be a net increase of 230 Aboriginal people in the Victorian Public Service. It will then be extended to the off-line agencies, such as hospitals, community health networks, schools et cetera to try to generate a lead, through public sector employment, to overcome Aboriginal underrepresentation. I think that employment has to be tackled on all fronts, and we are happy to learn from everyone and to try things.

**CHAIR**—How do you find the literacy/numeracy area in employment? You are aware of the Collins report, no doubt. I do not know what the Victorian situation is but, clearly, employment in today's world requires that that basic issue be addressed, doesn't it? We had a wonderful comment from a fellow who was very reluctant to come before us. He said, 'I liked school because I met all my mates. I didn't go to class, but I met all my mates.' The whole place erupted, of course. I said, 'I can relate to that.' Back to you, Kelly.

**Mr Cahir**—Ms Hoare, I think we are up to your third question.

**Ms HOARE**—That was in relation to the review of ATSIC and the relationship with Aboriginal Affairs Victoria.

**Mr Cahir**—Yes. The Victorian government is not making a submission to the review. It feels that the terms of reference are predominantly the preserve of the Commonwealth government and ATSIC; however, I know that the review committee is meeting and, in declining to make a formal submission, the Premier indicated that he would be happy to have my minister meet with the review committee, and we may make a submission on the draft report of the review

committee. I know that the committee is meeting with the minister in the next couple of weeks, so I suppose on a more informal basis we are naturally interested in the directions.

I think that what has happened in Victoria, almost by osmosis or default, is that the key funding agencies have found their levels in terms of the relationships. If we look at programs that are funded, ATSIC is clearly responsible for the CDEP; therefore, in some ways, there is no crossover in that. OATSIH, the office within the Department of Health and Ageing, clearly is the driving force in a lot of the health programs within Victorian communities, and I suppose the rest of service delivery in terms of education, health and human services and cultural heritage management comes from various state agencies. So everyone has, if you like, known what they are doing. That does not make it efficient. Whilst we do not get the blatant inefficiencies of people replicating and duplicating, equally we do not get a coordinated strategic or holistic approach.

That is what the COAG pilot in Victoria, at Shepparton, is going to focus on. It is going to say, for all levels of government, for all of the silos and the funding programs within those levels of government, 'Let's take a horizontal cut to meet community needs, rather than the different milk bottles and everything like that.' That is the objective and that is really what the community have been saying: 'We are sick of running Rumbalara co-op with 47 different acquittal processes each year.'

**CHAIR**—That did get a mention.

**Mr Cahir**—I am sure it did—and so it would. It goes back to whether we want the community organisations improving the outcomes and driving community needs and expectations and responding to them or whether we want them filling in forms to receive funding and then filling in forms to justify the expenditure of the funding?

We have high hopes for and a high commitment to this pilot in Victoria, because we believe that, if we can get this horizontal cut—if we can get all levels of government not only understanding their roles but also integrating in a way that gets more strategic outcomes and more responsive partnerships—we can take what happens in Shepparton and apply it to every other part of Victoria. This is why we did not want a project based at Lake Tyers or Framlingham—because it is of limited use subsequently.

If we can get this model working in Shepparton—with the biggest community outside metropolitan Melbourne, a number of key community organisations and a fair bit of money coming in from both the Commonwealth and the state—then we can hopefully apply the model elsewhere and get better outcomes and more strategic coordination. So I think that we are looking for better coordination with all players, including ATSIC. I think we will get that and the pilot will demonstrate that. We will be looking with interest and hoping that the outcomes of the review and the changes to ATSIC will reinforce that partnership. But we will wait and see.

**CHAIR**—There has been the minor point made that the ABS talks in terms of 1,500 people, whereas they assure us there are 5,000 or 6,000 people.

**Mr Cahir**—In Shepparton?

**CHAIR**—Yes. What is your take on that?

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**Mr Cahir**—We accept the 5,000 figure for the Shepparton area—we really do.

**CHAIR**—It is obviously an issue—it must have some implications for funding applications. I do not know whether it does or does not.

**Mr Cahir**—It does not, in a way. If we go down to the local level, which is where we build up all our programs, as I said the start, in partnership—

**CHAIR**—But there is something fundamentally—

**Mr Cahir**—I suppose if you look at health programs, whatever the so-called broad population is, it is really the contacts with the co-op, the service delivery and the amount of files, if you like. That is a better indicator. So we do rely on that.

**CHAIR**—That is right. That is why it does not rely on numbers.

**Mr Cahir**—Clearly in certain forums and generally with the Commonwealth or with grants commissions you are reduced to that—you have to try and make the case. It is self-identification or fear of identifying—

**CHAIR**—We should clearly be asking the ABS what is happening. It just struck us as quite out of kick.

**Mr Cahir**—It is out of kick.

**Mr DANBY**—Karen, can you give me some examples of the kinds of racism that people encounter that lead to this disillusion in education? When people get degrees, are they in the wrong area? Are they too academically oriented? What is the experience of people—when you say there is this racism, is it over a period of time or is it incidents? Can you just give us a bit more background?

**Ms Milward**—It is a bit of both. I will keep referring to Shepparton at this stage. In Shepparton, a simple thing could be where a mother is walking down the street with her young daughter. A non-Aboriginal person walking towards them might quickly move her own daughter in close to her. Then, of course, the other child will think, ‘Okay, they have a problem with us.’ Then they might cross the road or move across the street. That is just a simple thing—that happens every day up there and in a lot of other country towns. Going into the bank provides another example, where people are made to go down to the bottom of the queue. A lot of teller staff will actually approach a pregnant woman and ask her to come to the lower counter and take a seat, whereas Aboriginal pregnant women are made to stand there. These stories are told all of the time. There are things like not being served in the newsagent—‘No, get out of here, I do not want your money’—and that sort of stuff. I can give the example of when Cathy Freeman was being sponsored by Australia Post and was in our local GPO here. She was actually on the counter, but people refused to go and be served by her. So even with someone who is famous and well respected and that sort of thing, that was still there. To me, that is just blatant—it does not matter what you have done or what you have achieved, it is just purely because you are black.

Racism is taught; you are not born racist. Within the schools themselves, families are constantly telling their kids, 'Don't play with those kids; don't talk to those kids.' There are programs within the schools, but parents tend to not want their kids to participate in those programs. I am not saying everybody is like that, but when a kid first experiences that they automatically shut down and a whole stream of other things comes from that, such as getting into trouble with the law and those sorts of things. I do not know whether Paul spoke about it, but they have lots of kids—eight- and nine-year-olds—going into shops and trying to hold the shops up and that sort of stuff. That is really bad stuff, and that is all based on not wanting to go to school because of what they are experiencing there. Even though the Rumbalara Football/Netball Club are doing really well—they are getting heaps of Aboriginal people involved, especially during footy season—there is still heaps of racism on the field. They are still experiencing racism through the newspapers and there is publicity up there about efforts to try to kick them out of the A-league.

**Mr Cahir**—A number of umpires have gone to the league and said they will not umpire Rumbalara matches. The league, to its everlasting shame, has said, 'Fine. You don't have to.'

**Mr DANBY**—But then they put a different umpire in, surely?

**Mr Cahir**—Yes, they do. They have a rotation system, so they make sure those umpires who come forward are never rotated to Rumbalara. It is not because the umpires think they are a violent side or whatever. The umpires said, 'I do not want to umpire a team of Aboriginal people.'

**Ms Milward**—They have 10 footy teams and eight netball teams, and last year they won eight out of 10 finals. They all got into the finals, so there would be a lot of that anyway.

**Mr Cahir**—I think a few of them barrack for Essendon, too.

**Ms Milward**—They are just some of the little things. Even just accessing services and going into mainstream buildings is still a huge issue. I noticed that, in Shepparton, they have actually taken down the signage in front of the main building, and now it is just called state government offices. They do not have DHS or any of that sort of thing up there anymore, so they are getting more people coming through the door now it is just a red building. It does not have those logos on it, so more people are coming in. But then they have got more Aboriginal people employed in there too.

I have been going up there quite often to promote this trial and using the local hotels. We have community meetings in one of the flash hotels there. In the beginning, Justin and Paul and others were saying, 'Oh, we can't have meetings there. They won't have more than 10 Aboriginal people in their hotel.' I said, 'Why not?' and I went in there to do the chitchat. We really had to talk them into it, because at the time they were the only hotel that really had the facilities for us to have regular meetings. We went to others as well, but they were mainly booked out—although they could have been saying, 'Yes, we are full,' when they were not really.

They have fallen over backwards now for us, and the community are saying, 'This is really good. We can come in here now; we are on a first-name basis,' and so on. Even the kids are now starting to play together. Auntie Geraldine Atkinson—I think you met her yesterday—was

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saying that things have changed a bit with that. In Shepparton itself, there are five major Italian families that own most of Shepparton. Hence they own a lot of the hotels, and there have been issues of racism there, too, because they make up a lot of the footy teams as well. So there is all that stuff, but one family in particular are starting to change the way they do things. The connection with the CDEP and with John Martin, who runs the show there, is changing some attitudes. Overall, it is huge, and we are seeing little changes but we are not seeing massive changes.

**CHAIR**—We went to Manega Aboriginal School at Gowrie Street Primary School. They were in the process of changing things when we were there. There was stuff going everywhere, and we created or helped add to the confusion. But it was really very valuable, and they were so welcoming and very keen and, in fact, terribly disappointed that we did not sit down to have a cup of coffee with them and talk about it. It was pretty good stuff, and the way they responded to the separate development argument, the apartheid argument—you would have heard all this stuff 10 years ago, or whenever it was—by saying, ‘No, we’re offering choice,’ was something I had not considered. It was the way they presented it. The principal said, ‘No, we’re offering choice,’ and we delved into that a bit, in an informal way. It is really quite good, because there is intermingling and yet there is a separate approach if you want to try it and use it. It is tricky stuff, nevertheless I thought it was quite encouraging, in many ways. You have given us another insight into some of the tough struggles that have gone before—but all due credit to them.

**Ms Milward**—The community up there will not give up. They are constantly in there, so that is good.

**Mr Cahir**—I think there is an important point there. We have talked a lot about Shepparton and Warrnambool because you were there. You mentioned the word ‘leadership’ in one of your previous comments, Barry. I could name—but I will not—a number of other towns, with significant populations, that just do not have the positive feel that you have got from your two visits. If we were to put a finger on why those towns have not moved in the way that Warrnambool and Shepparton have, it would be because of leadership. As Karen just said, they are a bunch of tough nuts in Shepparton, and you have people such as John Collyer, and others, going hell for leather down in Warrnambool. It does worry us, and that goes back to why capacity building is so important. Are leaders born or they made? How do you throw them up? How do you ensure that Paul Briggs’s replacement or Justin’s replacement is able to maintain the thrust? We have seen other examples where we have thought, ‘Gee, that’s going all right in this location,’ but then we have realised that some fella or some woman has gone and, within a very short time, it has gone backwards. You have to look at leadership. As great as everything is that is happening in Warrnambool and Shepparton, you would point to the leaders. They have generated leaders. Let us hope we get the next generation of leaders into those towns that do not have them. Let us get them, because without them it does not happen in the way you have seen over the last couple of days.

**CHAIR**—We had a very good fellow come in towards the end, when we had a pretty informal session after lunch. His name was Max Hall, and he reminded us of this in relation to the CDEP. He said that, inevitably, many CDEP leaders will move on. That is what the CDEP is supposed to be about, but it does mean new leaders have to come in and learn, create and develop their own approaches, and understand what they are dealing with. That can cause an ebb and flow in the program. On the national front, you would be aware of the Dodson initiatives and some of that stuff. There is quite a lot of good stuff happening there as well.

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**Mr DANBY**—Karen, I wanted to persist with speaking about Aboriginal people who get degrees and who have finished education. If they are from Shepparton or Warrnambool, is the experience mainly that they come to Melbourne or that they stay in those towns? Is the problem them not being absorbed into the mainstream work force up in Shepparton and Warrnambool or is it down here? You have talked about a disillusionment process with younger kids. Have you got some suggestions and has your organisation got any ideas about what measures you can take to get graduates from CDEP back into the mainstream work force?

**Ms Milward**—As far as getting a degree and moving further on, you need a strong support base. Most of my family are from Shepparton but I grew up in Melbourne, and all my cousins, one by one, would come down to stay with us, get their degrees and then move on. There were seven or eight cousins coming down and doing that every year as I was growing up. We provided them with a roof, food, support, chitchat and that sort of stuff. That does not happen a lot, because most families that are living in the country do not have that support mechanism in Melbourne. That is something that we, as a community, need to talk about—especially people, like me, who are quite okay, have had that support all their life and have not really gone through some of those struggles that other people have. We have our own network to talk about that.

Another issue relates to those who do get their degrees and whether they get them in the country town itself and whether they get a scholarship from the state government. We have a number of scholarships through Justice and DHS that provide a living away from home allowance, money for books and that sort of thing, but there is no family support around that either. So family support is the major issue in getting people, especially young people, through and maintaining that. I have found that all those who get jobs in the Public Service have got those support mechanisms. Those who are moving through the VPS levels have those support networks. These are things we need to look at it.

We also have community people who are part of the stolen generation and who have mental health issues, and getting them through those stages is very difficult when you are trying to provide other services for them. Hopefully, through the Stolen Generation Program we will be putting together a new organisation specifically for the stolen generation which can address some of those issues. I think it is also a matter of choice, and there are those who choose not to do study.

At Melbourne University there are 95 Aboriginal people currently studying in all areas, but I would say that the majority are in the service delivery area. People are doing environmental health, architecture, graphic design and those sorts of things. We try to make that link by finding out who they are—and there are confidentiality matters around that—so that we can assist them by linking them to other opportunities. That is what we are trying to do under our employment strategy. It is passed by word of mouth, and people ring up to say, ‘We’ve got someone in Bairnsdale who wants to come down. Do you know where they can stay while they are studying?’ So there are a lot of things associated with it. I think the universities are quite supportive these days, because they all have Aboriginal liaison units. We have them in every university now, and they are very supportive. It is making that link: having the transport down, being able to survive while studying and having that support.

**Mr DANBY**—If you were an Aboriginal graduate in environmental science from Melbourne University, you had successfully transitioned and you had stayed in Melbourne, even if you did not have a family, could you go back to Shepparton and work at the council, not in the

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Aboriginal community but on the Shepparton council, as an environmental science officer? Does that happen, or is there still resistance?

**Ms Milward**—It is very rare, but people have done it. But once you get your degree, it is more attractive to work in the mainstream down here because the money is better.

**Mr DANBY**—So you cannot go back?

**Ms Milward**—Not really. That was an issue raised under COAG—it would be nice if I could go up all the time; we want more Karens in Shepparton and how do we get that? That is something we can work out. We can sponsor an individual to come down, but it has to be somebody who really wants to do that, and we can find someone they can stay with and provide them with that support mechanism. As to whether they want to go back, how do you ensure that happens? We have a couple of doctors who do not want to work in, say, our health service or in any of our other regional health services. They work in the mainstream, because the money is better and they are entitled to. So it is a mixed bag, really.

**Mr Cahir**—Of course, the opportunities in the bush are inextricably linked to the state of the bush. While it is struggling and contracting, as so much of it is, we may have missed the boat for employment opportunities.

**CHAIR**—The Victorian government has improved the state of the economy in the bush.

**Mr Cahir**—Absolutely, and it will continue to do so.

**CHAIR**—I have two more things, and then we are going to have to wrap things up. In terms of Wur-cum barra, the 230 real jobs and careers et cetera, it might be useful to talk about the number of Aboriginal people in the public service and the approach to that. The other issue, tacked onto the end and totally separate, is that later in the day we are dealing with some of the corporate people linked to the approach known, for want of a better phrase, as the Pearson approach to welfare. We have to come to grips with some of this stuff. Returning to the public sector and the creation of 230 jobs, how is that going? Can you just give us a few words on that?

**Mr Cahir**—Everyone focuses on the 230, because it is a very real target. We have no doubt that that will be achieved. There is a cross-government commitment from secretaries and ministers of all departments, and each department has developed a strategy to achieve its component of the 230. The Wur-cum barra initiative is more than the 230, because we have had instances in the past of targets being set. When we were developing Wur-cum barra with the communities, the community members said that, while it would be nice to have a target, the people have to be in real jobs. It has to be sustainable employment. There must be training and development opportunities, cross-cultural training in the workplaces in which Aboriginal people operate, mentoring and the chance for Aboriginal people to network with other Aboriginal employees to feel secure and comfortable et cetera. We need to create a sustainable target rather than just a number. The number is there and that is good, but really we think the main part of Wur-cum barra is that it is for sustainable, long-term career satisfaction, career attraction and career achievement. There is a commitment to the target and it will be achieved, but we are more interested in the longer term underpinnings that Wur-cum barra identifies.

**CHAIR**—I think that is wise.

**Mr Cahir**—With regard to your left-field comment, you heard yesterday—I think you said you were told this in Shepparton—that the future is in the broader community. If we are talking about employment and the breakdown of racism barriers et cetera, there is no doubt that the future is in the broader community. The Pearson hypothesis or view, as I understand it, has to be different in Victoria, because Pearson is looking at an isolated part of Cape York and what the self-contained communities there do. We have to look at solutions within mainstream urban economies and environments. By definition, they will be different. If you take participation in the broader economy as your starting point, we agree. But the way that goes here will be very different from where Noel takes the Cape York community.

**CHAIR**—He is coping with substance abuse. We met, in an informal sense, with one of the corporate players, and it is really quite exciting that they have made some progress. There is no fanfare—they accept how difficult it is—but it is quite exciting to hear some of the results to this point.

**Mr Cahir**—Can I give you an example that is quite exciting? In one of the most beautiful parts of Victoria, the Grampian-Gariwerd, there is an isolated community at Halls Gap. The mainstream community is isolated—it is 1¼ hours each way to either Stawell or Ararat. There is a cultural centre there, Brambuk, which is just magnificent. There are now 40 Aboriginal people at Halls Gap who are employed, or whose families are employed, in the cultural centre and with Parks Victoria. There is now an Aboriginal isolated community within the already isolated community of Halls Gap. Aboriginal Affairs Victoria has funded a building for that Aboriginal community, Budja Budja, to run a health service one day a week and to run other programs from ATSIC and OATSIH. Because there is no doctor and there are no services in Halls Gap, the CWA and the local traders group have now joined with the Aboriginal community to attract services that will be offered to everyone in mainstream Halls Gap from the Aboriginal organisation. Instead of the organisation growing up because of discrimination or lack of service—for example, you establish a Rumbalara or whatever because the hospital is not doing what it should—it is growing up because the community is saying, 'Here is an Aboriginal community that can lead to our broader community receiving services.' That is an exciting development and change.

**CHAIR**—That is exactly right, and yesterday we heard the words 'credible', 'genuine', 'fair dinkum' and 'no bullshit'. It is really quite refreshing to hear those words, especially against the backdrop of a lot of the other stuff that has been around for many decades. On that positive note, thank you very much for appearing this morning.

**Mr Cahir**—Thank you.

[9.57 a.m.]

**CARTER, Mr Colin B., Senior Adviser, Boston Consulting Group**

**RIMMER, Mr Benjamin J.H., Project Leader, Boston Consulting Group**

**CHAIR**—I welcome the representatives from the Boston Consulting Group, Australia and New Zealand. Would you like to make a short opening statement?

**Mr Carter**—I am here in two capacities. One is that I am involved with Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships. I am a director of that. This group is committed to trying to find ways of taking corporate support to Indigenous communities. At this stage we are just focusing on Cape York, on the basis that we might as well figure out whether something works before we try to be too grand about it. I am chairman of that activity at the moment. Probably because of that but in a separate capacity, BCG—Boston Consulting Group—is involved up there. Ben, for example, spent most of last year in the north under one of the arrangements that we have with our staff to offer them a chance to work up there. If you are interested, Ben can talk about some of the stuff that he has been doing.

**CHAIR**—We are very interested.

**Mr Carter**—I will make a few comments and then we will move on as you wish. First of all, let me make it very clear that we do not regard ourselves as experts in Indigenous matters. However, I do not think we are completely naive either.

**CHAIR**—I had some time with Mike Winer last Thursday, when I heard exactly the same message coming through.

**Mr Carter**—However, we regard ourselves as experts in organisation capacity in a bunch of different areas. We can see lack of capacity with our eyes closed, so that is one of the skills we bring up there. I have also personally been involved in a project with Indigenous leadership training in New South Wales, so while I would hasten to say that we do not regard ourselves as experts, we are not completely naive either. That is by way of background.

Our involvement with BCG has been there for more than two years—we will leave some notes for you—and it is now formalised in a partnership with the Cape York structures. Essentially, for the next three to five years our firm is viewing this as one of our projects—trying to work on something that is a bit more long term rather than on an individual project basis. That is what we are trying to do. The way we have structured that, the way we facilitate the movement of our staff up there, and the details of the sorts of projects we have been working on are contained in the document that we will leave with you, so I will not go into all that sort of stuff.

Without necessarily trying to find the most profound issues, I thought I might table four or five pretty obvious problems that we see with capacity building up there. Before I put those on the table, let me just take as a given some issues which strike you quite vividly up there. The first is that there are not actually a lot of real jobs up there. It is very difficult in some of those

remote communities to conceive of what a sustainable economic structure, with jobs, would be. The remoteness and the lack of an obvious economy there make it very difficult. The second is that I take as a given the social problems that Noel Pearson has been very articulate on, so I will not talk about those things. They include the grog epidemic and the fact that even if you provide jobs in a particular area you do not necessarily find a lot of people who want to work in them. I take that as a given, and I do not think we can add anything profound to that. The third thing which strikes me is in connection with another hat I wear, which is that of an AFL commissioner. The AFL has been seriously engaged—and I think one of the successes of the AFL over the last bunch of years is the way in which Indigenous footballers have become a pretty important part of our game—in observing—

**CHAIR**—We keep running into your people—in Darwin, in Warrnambool.

**Mr Carter**—Quite parenthetically, and off the track, I think sport and art are two of the ways in which you can clearly light a fire under young Indigenous kids. I observe, for example, with the Auskick program up in the Cape, where you have to pay \$10 to participate, every Aboriginal kid turns up with the \$10, whereas extracting money from Indigenous people for other services is a pretty hard ask. So there is some interesting stuff there which can be built upon, and one of my objectives this year is to get Noel more seriously engaged in the role of sport as a pathway for some of the kids. The other thing that I was going to say by way of background—and Ben would probably agree with this—is that one of the realisations I have had is how incredibly divided and fragmented the Indigenous community is. For example, we have the Indigenous people on our board, who are not from Cape York, constantly having to justify to their colleagues in the south here why they are ‘wasting their time’ working with that mob up there.

The relevance of that to business is that there is a great resistance to learning from best practice elsewhere, even in the Indigenous community. The natural instinct for us as business advisers if, for example, you were going to have a credit union or provide some financial institution in the Cape would be to say, ‘Where is it working somewhere else, and can we borrow from that and get them to expand their operations to here?’ That sort of stuff tends to get really bound up in all the clan and local group loyalties, even at the microlevel. I do not know how many of you saw the *Australian Story* thing, but—

**CHAIR**—We had that brought into the committee.

**Mr Carter**—even at the furniture factory in Aurukun, which is actually a little success, all the people working there are from the same family group. So one of the things which really is a dysfunctional parameter around business and employment creation is what I guess to be a characteristic of a lot of demoralised communities: they are very balkanised and turn in on each other. That basically means that, if I were to set up a bakery and the other families did not like the idea of me doing that, I would not get support. A lot of initiatives grind to a halt because of this factional stuff, which I think is very sad. So any things which build a sense of common purpose and unity—for example, the Aboriginal Allstars playing essentially as a nation—are, to my way of thinking, really important.

**CHAIR**—I would have given anything to have been there—half an excuse was all I needed, but I could not quite find it. I should have got up there myself.

**Mr Carter**—I realise now not only how unusual and uncommon that is, but also how important it is. There is a sense in which people do not feel any responsibility, commitment or particular desire to help the next mob up the road. In business terms that is really unfortunate, because you actually need scale and the capacity to trade to get volumes. When you have squillions of language groups in a very small community that is difficult.

**Mr Rimmer**—Can I give a very practical example? Aurukun, as Colin said, has a furniture workshop and Coen has a T-shirt screen printing facility. One of the things that happened through Balkanu's business hubs in Cape York was that these two communities connected with each other and had that fundamental realisation, 'We need furniture and you need T-shirts; let's actually trade with each other rather than both of us buying this stuff in Cairns.' It sounds facetious in the way I have described it, but that kind of local level small-scale economic activity is incredibly important.

**Mr Carter**—If we identified four or five things which are obvious problems, one is that there are none of the obvious job or career pathways that we take for granted. They are invisible to us—you start at kindergarten and somehow finish up working for the Boston Consulting Group and you have navigated your way through a whole bunch of structures. None of those things exist up there. Comalco have made a commitment—I do not think they have much chance of delivering on it; that is my personal opinion, not an official view—and they have the challenge, which is very exciting, that 30 to 35 per cent of their employment will be Aboriginal in X number of years or quite a short period of time. But if you look at the processes whereby people work through the development pathways that make them employable at a level that Comalco needs, those structures that we take for granted do not exist. One of the big challenges, I think, is to find ways of actually creating pathways for people.

**Ms HOARE**—Are you saying that the structures that do exist are taken up by non-Aboriginal people?

**Mr Carter**—No, they just do not exist. If you live in Aurukun, unless you are on Work for the Dole, and if you have managed to get through high school—which is highly unlikely; you probably dropped out—

**CHAIR**—That enterprise culture just does not exist. They do not understand how it might exist.

**Mr Carter**—And there are no jobs, so the transition points are not really there. I think this is one of the challenges that we would like to get our minds around. Just to give you an example, there is a very successful, high-risk, but very entrepreneurial Boys from the Bush program, dealing with young offenders. What is not clear to us—and Ben might have a better view—is what happens to those people. This is a ridiculous example, but if you can imagine a pipeline, it might go from Boys from the Bush to the furniture factory to something else and then you are ready for Comalco. That is how I would get ready to work for Comalco, if you know what I mean. But those transitions do not work. Does that make sense to you? Ben knows more about the detail than I do.

**Mr Rimmer**—That makes sense to me. If you were to put it in a political context, the invisible pathways that we are talking about are the sorts of things that lead people from one

role into another into preselection or whatever. It is the same kind of idea that there is a map, whether it is explicit or not.

**Mr Carter**—In the absence of that, I think it means that people become high casualties if they get thrown into something which is beyond their preparation. To use a football example—

**CHAIR**—They are bound to fail. It is really back to this idea of capacity. What I would be really interested in—and you people come from this background—is a definition of capacity or capacity building. We have already touched on it, but can we explore it a bit more through your experiences? We have just touched on capacity and expectations, but what are the foundations and the building blocks?

**Mr Carter**—The building blocks depend a bit on where you are going. If you want to be an accountant, there is a great dearth of financial expertise up there and you have to go through a series of steps to get that. The more general thing—and this is unrehearsed—is that I see an enormous lack of what I call project management skills in the Indigenous community. The capacity to say, ‘We’ve got to get to there, so what are the things we have to get done to get from A to B?’ is lacking. To some extent, that is an acquired skill and there are very few opportunities for people to learn that. It is getting change done where you have got institutions—

**CHAIR**—Can I get you to hold it there? I want to really grab that. You say there is a lack of opportunity to learn that skill. It is just not in the mind-set. I have never had it explained to me better than by a chap with the Rumbalara Football/Netball Club. He went through some examples. When you put them together—there was secondary schooling, perhaps a family example, the community they came from—there were about four or five examples. If you do not see that or have any concept of it, how can you make a step from here to there? Back to you.

**Mr Carter**—You learn a lot of that stuff subconsciously by working in organisations. There are obviously a lot of people with good leadership skills in the Indigenous community, but the skills to enable them to take bureaucratic structures and wrestle them into the changes required to deliver outcomes are really lacking. That leads to another observation I was going to make. Some of the talented young Indigenous people we have seen get sucked into a vortex—‘You are a young Aboriginal leader’—and they do not actually do real jobs. I have gotten to know, and am a sort of mentor to, a couple of young Indigenous people in New South Wales, and I can see that they regard education as the great goal because, in a sense, that is what they have been deprived of. But they place too much faith in what formal qualifications do, and they underestimate the value of going and working for Coles Myer or for BHP and having their tail kicked: ‘You have to get A, B and C done on a certain day or you don’t get paid.’ They lack experience of real jobs; they get sucked into what I call, perhaps unfairly, ‘the Indigenous bureaucracy’. Mark Rose, who is a lecturer at RMIT and who is on our board, is very articulate on this issue. He talks about the terror of finding yourself, at the age of 40, being asked to run an organisation, such as a school, when you do not have the building blocks to do it. Giving young Indigenous people real work experience is, we say, one of the challenges. It is an area that corporate organisations and governments can support. I will give you two examples from Cape York. Tammy Williams, who is on our board, is the youngest ever barrister. She is 23, and she is now at the bar.

**CHAIR**—Yes. Michael mentioned her.

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**Mr Carter**—She is a very talented person, but again probably a fair bit of pressure has gone to work. Her first job is with the public prosecutor in Brisbane, and I think she is bang-on with that. She is working in a mainstream job and getting experience. The pressure would have been to work for Aboriginal legal aid or whatever, but she wants to get good training and she is absolutely committed to using her skills to work for her people. Daniel Grainger is another young bloke up there who has a lot of talent. He has come down to do an MBA at Melbourne. Westpac have a reverse secondment—they have one of their guys up there from their IT place in Sydney. We see a need for a lot more of that.

**Mr Rimmer**—Going back to the chair's question about what capacity is, when I went up to Cape York my initial thought processes about capacity were really about individual capacity—that is, the capacity of an individual person to do a given range of tasks. What became apparent, just from working in the organisations, was the fact that some of the dysfunctionality of Cape York communities, at the community level, impacts on the organisations and the people in a way that strips whatever capacity is there out of the system. So it is not only at the individual level but also at the systemic level that capacity is lost. I think that is incredibly important when it comes to government action. There is a lot of focus on getting kids into school and on Indigenous leadership, but building capacity at the organisational level is also absolutely critical, to my mind.

**CHAIR**—Can you feed in there, Ben, and have a real crack, which would not be a word you would use, at government? That is, where do governments fail to understand this from the welfare point of view? Should we keep pouring in Commonwealth or state money? Perhaps we do not pour in enough in appropriate ways. Can we talk about the Commonwealth and state governments—any formal governance structure really, particularly the parliamentary structures.

**Mr Rimmer**—I think Noel and others are better placed to talk about some of the more political aspects.

**CHAIR**—You are a great team; that is exactly what Mike Weiner would say.

**Mr Rimmer**—No question. I would like to talk about some specifics that I have personally observed. One is a practical issue in relation to funding arrangements for Indigenous organisations. A large number of the organisations up there are funded on a project basis, which creates enormous administrative complexity and overheads that are not particularly functional. It does not achieve a better outcome. Some other models might be pursued—for example, block funding. A second specific is the lack of funding, or lack of funding at the right level of resources, to support management and financial infrastructure. If you are trying to attract people to the Cape York communities to work as accountants in, say, Aurukun or Lockhart River, with relatively low levels of pay it is difficult to attract talented people, and that has a direct impact on the ability of that person to transfer capacity to the local community.

**CHAIR**—You will have less chance of moving out of a systemic failure.

**Mr Rimmer**—Yes. But they are just a couple of examples that we have come across.

**Mr Carter**—Another example would be that a lot of the agencies of government are ill positioned to be investing in things that, by themselves, have high risks attached to them. One of the things we have argued about with Noel, who has been really committed to enterprise

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development and new business creation, is that 80 per cent of new business start-ups in the mainstream community fail, so it is probably going to be 98 per cent in this community unless we do something absolutely amazingly different to try to deal with that.

It seems to me that, whichever way you go, there are high risks—the bakeries are going to fall over, because they do everywhere. It seems to me that government has to figure out different ways of delivering those services, because by its nature government cannot be directly involved in sponsoring that sort of failure.

**CHAIR**—We are not really good at it, are we? We have to be smart enough to find a way of delivering those services. It seems to me that we are not instinctively good at it.

**Mr Carter**—There are tensions—a slightly different example would be the Boys from the Bush program, which is a quasi-commercial venture. I have argued to Noel, who is frustrated beyond description about the way in which the government departments are dealing with it, that in a sense your average bureaucrat is on a hiding to nothing because there are very real risks associated with a project like that. It is a fantastic program because it is dealing with an area for which there were only despairing alternatives. I suppose the general point is that, if you are trying to get involved in organisation creation and business development up there, you have to realise that there is going to be a series of catastrophes and failures. People say to us, ‘How successful is it?’ We have a very phlegmatic long-term view about this. We can go five steps forward and four back.

**CHAIR**—Yes, because you have a 10-year or 20-year perspective on that.

**Mr Carter**—Yes. I have been involved in business start-ups myself that have collapsed. So I do not have any problem with an Indigenous business falling over. The only way to get success is if the premise upon which you are involved and the way in which the support is delivered are absolutely cognisant of the fact that those are the risks. If the people providing the support are in any way risk averse and have to be risk averse, then it cannot succeed.

**Ms HOARE**—I am conscious that we are running out of time. I am trying to get my head around the Boston Consulting Group. You have spoken about the observations you made in Cape York, your discussions with Noel Pearson and the perceived problems in that particular region. We have heard Noel speak about them and about possible solutions, and we are hearing you say the same. Can you expand on who else you have consulted with in that community and then in the wider community in general? Also, why Cape York—why concentrate on an area where there are not obvious career paths and that is a very isolated community? Why not concentrate on career paths within CDEP, for example? So my questions are: why you; what is your interest; why Cape York; and what other opportunities can you offer Aboriginal people?

**Mr Carter**—Let me try to answer that, and if I have missed part of it, pick it up again. The Boston Consulting Group, in one sentence, is a consulting firm that works almost entirely with major corporate companies. We do some government work but at the policy level. Basically, we work at the big end of town, so in one sense our involvement is a bit odd—but we are very interested in implementation issues; we are not theoretical in that sense. The reason why it is Cape York is that Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships, whose board I am involved with, was started by a discussion between Graeme Wise at the Body Shop, Noel Pearson and people up there.

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Noel had identified the lack of jobs as a huge issue. He has a social program. If you get the social issues under control but people do not have work, they slip back again. So in a sense Cape York was chosen because we see Indigenous leaders there who are realistically trying to tackle the problem. As management consultants, we believe very strongly that, if you can identify the problem clearly, you are three-quarters of the way to a solution. People often do not face up to the problems and, therefore, do not get the solutions right. We were very impressed by the courage with which the guys up there were naming what they thought were the problems. It seemed to us that that was worth supporting. Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships has a long-term commitment to trying to support Indigenous people throughout Australia, but you cannot do everything at once. As consultants, we are incredibly committed to the notion of focus.

Our attitude is that Cape York is a receptive area where our support is welcome and where there is a set of Indigenous leaders who we are able to work with and happy to support, so let us see whether some things work. We do not have grand views; we are incredibly cautious. My nightmare is waking up in the morning to find we have been involved in this great froth of activity on the surface but we have just become another part of the chain of whitefellas dispensing good to the Indigenous community. It makes no difference whatsoever to things on the ground. We prefer to be cautious until we have some real runs on the board. Then we would very much like to see whether these ideas can be taken somewhere else. We have a funding problem ourselves. We have a board of 10 and one employee, which is the inverse of what you would expect. Mike Weiner is our chief executive and 100 per cent of our staff.

**Ms HOARE**—I was going to ask who pays you.

**Mr Carter**—We were running out of money last year just to fund ourselves, and Colonial Foundation came up with some money, which covers our core funding. Part of the problem we have is that when our people go up there, we pay a third of their salary, Balkanu pays a third, and the employee gives up a third of their compensation to go up there and work for a year, which is what Ben did last year. We are running on the smell of an oily rag. Cape York is more than we can handle at the moment on our own. Does that answer your question? We would love to prove some things work and take them elsewhere.

**Mr Rimmer**—Could I answer a specific aspect of your question about who else we have consulted with up there? One of the things that is very important to us—and one of the things that makes this engagement work—is that we work through and report to Indigenous owned and Indigenous run organisations in Cape York, like the Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation and, at times, Cape York Partnerships, Cape York Land Council and Apunipima Cape York Health Council. Those organisations are owned and run by Indigenous people, and they have a strategy that is set and articulated by Indigenous people. It is not our job to do the strategy, to decide what the direction is. We literally say, ‘In which direction do you want our support?’ and we help with that. Through that process of engagement with, say, Balkanu, we engage with a whole range of different Indigenous people in different Indigenous organisations.

**Ms HOARE**—Different families?

**Mr Rimmer**—We engage with different family groupings and a whole range of things. I am not saying that Cape York Indigenous politics is straightforward; it is clearly not. Balkanu is run by a board with representatives from each of the 16 Cape York communities, and in a sense they

are the people who set the direction for the work we do up there. The fact that we are doing stuff that is consistent with the Indigenous vision for the region gives us a sense of comfort.

**Mr Carter**—I should add that one of the things we like about it is that we demand that our relationship with them be the same as it is with our other clients. So, if we think they are wrong, we want to argue with them about it and to have that sort of discussion. At the end of the day if they say, for reasons which are credible, 'This is the way with want to go,' we will support them in doing that. It is not simply a question of them saying, 'This is what we want to do,' and us saying, 'We'll help you do it.' We have a pretty mature relationship with their leaders up there, which I think is important.

**CHAIR**—You have robust discussion from time to time.

**Mr Carter**—Yes. To give you an example, Noel and Richie Ah Mat—and they listen—were very keen to get a bakery going in Hopevale. We said that your chance of getting that to work are probably next to nothing, given the general failure rates of things, but you would increase your chances a lot if you could say to someone: 'Don't just ask us for money to set up a bakery. If you are going to get the money, first you have to go to Cairns and work for three or four years in a bakery.' It is about trying to convey a sense of the realities, based on our experience, you have to deal with before it can work.

**Mr DANBY**—Ben, I have a question for you. You were up in the cape for a year. I understand that Westpac was giving you some kind of assistance. Was the main idea of the Boston Consulting Group to get corporates to give pro bono assistance to the Cape York community or was it to identify employment possibilities that the Aboriginal community up there could start up in the future with private employers?

**Mr Rimmer**—One of the main objectives of Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships is to get corporate engagement with the communities through such schemes as the Westpac program and, indeed, Boston Consulting Group's own program. The outcome that we are all looking for is economic development and real jobs. The numbers of jobs that are needed to make an impact in Cape York are actually pretty low. Comalco employ today 30-odd Indigenous people, plus or minus 10. Setting up a medium-sized business that employs 10 Cape York people is a real achievement in terms of the labour market up there. The objectives that we are all working towards are really economic development ones and a range of other social development ones goes along with that.

**Mr DANBY**—In the year you were up there, did you spot any niche that needs to be filled amongst the Aboriginal community? In employment, is there some area that they have not thought of, that people in business had not thought of, that might productively employ people?

**Mr Rimmer**—Not really. In a sense, the types of economic activities that have some prospect of success in Cape York are not particularly rocket science. There is a cattle industry there today; there is a fishing industry around it; there is clearly tourism potential; there is clearly transport, infrastructure and service delivery potential. In a sense, identifying those opportunities at the broad level is not particularly complex.

**Mr Carter**—One thing that goes to the heart of the capacity-building discussion is that the instinct of a lot of people engaged in those things is to think big, whereas our advice is to start

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small. If you think of tourism, the immediate thought is, 'Let's get some money and buy a hotel,' or something like that. Our argument is consistently that you build capacity by having the person with the tourism idea start out by renting some seats on the bus that goes past in any case, and once that has been going for a year and you have learned how to look after your customers, then you might buy a four-wheel drive. Then, after that has been going for a while, the hotel will be down there. One of the occupational hazards that we see in these sorts of ideas, as they relate to the Indigenous community, is that people have these 'think big' schemes which inevitably will fail because of a lack of experience in running them and because there is no proven market for them. You have to build that sort of stuff. Every successful entrepreneur that we know has started small and grown or—

**Mr Rimmer**—And failed a couple of times.

**Mr Carter**—Yes. They have also worked for someone else in the industry and then gone out and done it. One of the things that we are really keen to do is provide real jobs for young Indigenous people coming through, and that can then spawn a bunch of these things.

**Mr DANBY**—In one sentence, what is Westpac's project up there?

**Mr Rimmer**—Westpac is better qualified to answer this question, but Westpac sends 50 people a year, for about one month at a time, to assist individuals or family groups with specific small business proposals.

**Mr Carter**—This year they are going to send a couple of people on a longer term basis, like we are.

**CHAIR**—We need to wrap this up, but there was something I did not want to miss. You talked about barriers to capacity, and our secretary reminded me that you had four. You have mentioned one, we think. Have you got three—

**Mr Carter**—I might have merged a couple. The first was no pathways. The second was talented young people promoted too rapidly. The third was lack of access to good advice—Ben talked about what you would have to pay to get an accountant to Lockhart River. The fourth was that, to us, government investment in high-risk ventures is a conundrum—someone has to figure out ways of having government involved in ways which are sustainable for government. The fifth was that the short-term funding cycles encourage a grant mentality. Those are the barriers.

**CHAIR**—Wonderful.

**Mr Rimmer**—We will also table a document for the benefit of the committee which outlines the specifics of the activities we have been involved in up there, and which has some more comment on those issues.

**CHAIR**—We are deeply appreciative. Thank you very much.

[10.35 a.m.]

**AUSTIN, Mr Troy, Commissioner, Victorian Zone, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission**

**BROWN, Mr Gavin Thomas, Deputy Chairperson, Tumbukka Regional Council, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission**

**POLLACK, Mr David Peter, Manager, State Policy Centre, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Mr Austin, congratulations on your recent election.

**Mr Austin**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—We met Tim yesterday, so there has been a knock-on effect. There is Geoff, you and Tim in terms of representation, as I understand it. Have I got that right?

**Mr Austin**—Yes, that is right. Geoff is the national chair, I am the Victorian commissioner and Tim is the chairperson for the Tumbukka region. Gavin Brown is the deputy chairperson for the Tumbukka region.

**CHAIR**—Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Austin**—First, I acknowledge the Kulin Nation, the traditional owners of the land. In this particular area, at the Melbourne end, the lands are those of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong tribes. We pay our respects to their elders and descendants. I am the recently elected Victorian commissioner—I was elected at the end of January. Prior to that, I was in the position that is held by Chairperson Chatfield. I was the Tumbukka chairperson for four years, and I have been part of the ATSIC regional council for the last six years.

**CHAIR**—Do you want to say a few words about how you see our inquiry into capacity building? There are a number of interesting things happening, including the ATSIC inquiry itself. We have already had some meetings with some of the national representatives. We are interested in your views about where things are headed and in what your priorities are.

**Mr Austin**—I would like to register an apology for Chairperson Daphne Yarram, who represents the eastern side of Victoria. She is off on carers leave at the moment; her husband is sick. Today, we predominantly want to talk about Victorian based issues. One of the concerns that I have—and this was my reason for running for commissioner of ATSIC in Victoria—is to try to lift the awareness of issues in Victoria. We see in the public arena the issues of isolated and remote communities, traditional type problems of communities located in the Northern Territory, northern Western Australia and the Torres Strait Islands, but in Victoria we have a different set of circumstances, mainly around access to public housing, health, employment and education. David will talk a little bit later about the work we are doing with various government agencies in the state to try to get a whole of government perspective, but out at the grassroots there are still community members having difficulty getting into private housing and accessing

the education system. We are looking into why not many people go through, complete VCE and move on to tertiary education, for instance. There are different circumstances, which are not necessarily highlighted in the media, so we certainly welcome the opportunity to present today.

Another outstanding issue in the community is that in 1996 there was a cut to the community youth support program, which was run through ATSIC in each of the Indigenous communities. That youth support program allowed communities to determine how they wanted to use funds, and the majority of the time funds were used for youth based positions or to try to run activities for local communities. Communities were able to be reactive on the ground. When they took the \$480 million from the ATSIC budget across to health, the focus—and it was needed—was on primary health issues. OATSIS now administers those funds on behalf of communities.

The community organisations are now struggling to maintain their administration and their operations. A testament to that is the fact that along the Loddon Mallee we have six community based organisations and four or five of those are in difficulty. We have had appointed administrators go into the organisations, and that is costing us in the hundreds of thousands of dollars each time. That is due to the inability of organisations to employ quality auditors, accountants or bookkeepers. We are finding that the administrators and the bookkeepers are community members who have put their hands up and have been thrust into those positions.

We are looking at trying to come up with a capacity-building project in the state. We have been working with the state government for a resource centre that will be based in either Loddon Mallee or Gippsland. We are doing a desktop study at the moment to identify where the greatest need is. The resource centre would provide administrative support for our citizens with financial management and administrative controls. Even things that seem quite easy tasks, such as going through an interview process, can land organisations in trouble. They have been taken to the Industrial Relations Commission et cetera. They are only skimming off the top of a grant—getting, say, 10 per cent, 15 per cent or 20 per cent of a grant; that is how a lot of the organisations in Victoria are operating. For them to then go to court and have to pay out \$5,000 or even \$3,000 is a huge dent in the administrative component of their funding.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. You used that very practical example of how people found themselves in those health organisations. What I am hearing from you is, if you go back in a more formal way and do a desktop study as you mentioned, how do you best develop stronger administration. That would envisage taking existing people, or even new people coming in, through a process of defining what was needed and then trying to meet the demands of the task, which would enable a better outcome. That is what we are talking about, I guess. It sounds like your view has come from some experiences—you mentioned the industrial issue—that are less than ideal.

**Mr Austin**—It has mainly come from a lack of training. One of the things we are trying to do is to incorporate leadership and training components within the organisations. The administrators as well as the boards have not been advised of the steps to release someone from their duties, and we have found that the courts usually lean towards the person making the complaint. Gavin will talk a bit about the leadership issue.

**Mr Brown**—Firstly, can I say that at our recent council meeting in Ballarat we identified capacity building as something we wanted to look at over the next few years in our term, so this is quite timely. My other hat is State Director of VAYSAR, Victorian Aboriginal Youth, Sport

and Recreation. We have been involved in a whole range of community projects, one of which is mental and social wellbeing through VicHealth. A large component of that was five leadership projects for young people around the state of Victoria. Five communities were involved in that pilot. There was also a group called Network of the Future and an imaging project.

To a certain extent, some of that was centred around capacity building of young people to be able to move into organisations, relationships or a whole range of things to create a better quality of life and to be able to become the next leaders. Those projects varied. As a result of their successes, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, prior to the election, were negotiating with both parties to take that on board. Because VicHealth picked it up as a pilot, it has now become capacity building in that sense, with leadership and training. All of those things have also been picked up through Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, which we thought was quite good.

**CHAIR**—A question that I throw in pretty regularly—and I do not know the situation in Victoria—is in relation to some work that Senator Bob Collins, a former federal minister, did for the Territory government. He found some pretty serious issues in relation to literacy and numeracy and operating in today's world. Could you go into that a little bit in a policy development sense? It is an Australian issue; it is not just an Indigenous issue, but it is at least as much an issue for Indigenous people as for anyone else. Do you have a view on that?

**Mr Brown**—My experience in Victoria is that a lot of the Koori educators are working on that. A strong framework within education deals with that, although we are still to identify it in some areas, especially early school leavers—

**CHAIR**—Yes. The commissioner was talking about that.

**Mr Brown**—and the prison system.

**CHAIR**—That is very important.

**Mr Brown**—My experience in that area is not great. My main background is sport, but we do come across it in some areas, especially within employment. People lack confidence in going for positions because they do not have these skills.

**CHAIR**—I am raising it in the sense of understanding where ATSIC might—if not at the moment, in the future—come from in terms of policy development. We need to look at some of those issues.

**Mr Pollack**—Troy has asked me to speak about the organisation of government to address the issue of capacity building and the capacity to organise to actually implement it. I do not know whether the Victorian government has made a presentation as yet.

**CHAIR**—It has.

**Mr Pollack**—At the top echelons, the Premier's Aboriginal Advisory Council comprises the Premier, the elected arm of ATSIC—the commissioner and the two regional council chairs—and representatives from Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and the administrative arm of ATSIC. I understand that there is a budget allocation for that to meet four times a year. It provides ATSIC



with an opportunity to meet with the higher echelons of government within Victoria. Unfortunately, there has been a little bit of slippage in recent times, which is mainly due to the Victorian government going to an election and also ATSIC going to an election. We have been a bit disappointed with that forum because of the agendas that have been established. We do not feel as though ATSIC have been listened to in that forum. Below that is a forum called the Premier's Aboriginal Advisory Committee, made up basically of the administrative arms of government that meet. The concept is that some of the issues are thrashed out in that committee before they go to the PAAC.

**CHAIR**—The representative from Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Mr Tony Cahir, said on the public record that, when the Victorian government sits down with Aboriginal people, it sits down equally and in partnership. You have heard that a few times before, no doubt, but those were his words. We touched on that this morning, so it is interesting to hear your concerns and to compare them with what was said this morning. I just thought I would share that with you.

**Mr Pollack**—That is my experience in dealing with the elected arm within ATSIC. Like I said, conceptually it is a great idea. Our disappointment, I guess, is that there has been slippage in this arrangement. We are a bit concerned within ATSIC about how the agenda is set.

**Mr Austin**—I would like to expand on that. We have recently met with the new Victorian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Gavin Jennings, and taken up some of those issues. He gives us an undertaking that things will improve. Certainly at our early meeting he followed up on some of the issues that we have raised so, hopefully, as David has indicated, things will improve.

**CHAIR**—Good luck. I am sure you will be helping them to improve.

**Mr Pollack**—Like I said, the concept is great, particularly in terms of government's ability to address issues like capacity building, enabling government to implement such things.

I want to lead on to the organisational infrastructure within Victoria. We understand that about 58 organisations are incorporated under the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act within Victoria. There are also the Victorian government cooperatives, of which there are about 28. Some of these overlap—some are incorporated under the ACA Act, but very few. More recently, there has been an increase under the ACA Act, mainly to do with organisations incorporating themselves to hold title to land purchased through the ILC. So it is a new strand of capacity building, I guess—though not necessarily one that ATSIC has to look at. The ILC is a build-up of organisations not so much just in Victoria but around the country.

Unlike other states, we in Victoria do not have a build-up of organisations that stem from the Native Title Act called 'prescribed body corporates'. In some states, I think, there could be some growth. We hope to have one very soon—there is an in-principle agreement. We were going to try to steer away from native title in terms of capacity building, because it is a separate issue that ATSIC is examining.

**CHAIR**—There is a specific federal parliamentary committee on that, as you probably realise.

**Mr Pollack**—We are working very hard at present in Victoria to capacity build our native title rep body; there are certainly some changes going on.

**CHAIR**—It dovetails with that. We are quite happy to discuss native title as it relates to capacity building, rather than the issue of native title per se.

**Ms HOARE**—Congratulations, Commissioner. You seem to have stood for election, and been elected, for some very honourable reasons—as I think we all do. You outlined some of the issues that you think need to be addressed across the board in Indigenous communities, particularly in your home area. What kind of things, or restructuring, would you hope would come out of the ATSIC review to address some of the issues that you have seen and provide greater benefits for Indigenous people?

**Mr Austin**—ATSIC has been going since 1990 and there has been one review before, but we welcome this review. From a state perspective in Victoria, we have not had a chance to debate the issue of whether we maintain our program responsibilities or whether we just become an advocate and a gatekeeper, I suppose, for Indigenous programs, monitoring the work of Commonwealth and state governments. My personal view is that we should maintain responsibility for our programs. I say that for the reason that I gave in the opening address: we need to empower local communities to make some of their own decisions and to be self-determining.

One of our concerns is that, when there are new funds available, there is a formula. I will take housing as an example. With the housing program, any new funds that are made available are going to go to addressing the needs of remote and traditional communities or isolated communities. Immediately, Victoria is isolated from accessing those funds. We do not have a bilateral agreement in this state. We have been knocking on the door of the state government to try and fast-track that bilateral agreement on housing, because it has been explained to us by Minister Vanstone that, if we do not get our act together and sign up to a bilateral agreement in the near future, funds for housing in Victoria will be jeopardised. So we are in the process of doing that and we have signed an MOU.

We are also at a disadvantage in that those remote and isolated communities do have access to things like royalties. Also, big companies are willing to go into those communities to assist with the situation. Something we are going to be pushing for over the next three years is for ATSIC to advocate on behalf of Indigenous communities so that we get some corporates—we have a lot of them at our back door here in Melbourne—involved, as well as philanthropic trusts and private sponsors. So we are looking at the whole community being able to contribute.

There is a whole range of things that we will be talking to the ATSIC review about on Friday. We have not met with the review team yet, but certainly the separation of powers is one issue that we need to discuss. There is talk that there might be a reduction in the number of councillors or more full-time regional councillors, so that may be considered. There are border issues—once we had three regional councils in the Victorian zone and now we have two. There is even talk that we may go back to three, or to one, because the issues in the Melbourne area are quite different to those in regional Victoria. Whether Gavin and I sit on the regional council making decisions about issues in rural locations needs to be reviewed. As Gavin said, he has an area of expertise and we certainly know the needs of our communities in Melbourne. So there are those types of things.

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On the issue of education, we are trying to work with the state government minister on Partners in a Learning Culture. ATSIC is a respondent to that document along with VAEAI, a community based organisation which welcomes ATSIC's involvement, which I think will be speaking to you later today. We certainly have a role to play within education, but we also support the Victoria based organisations—the state-wide education group has 30-odd local education groups around the state and they have a great structure. We will certainly sit down with them at a stakeholders' forum and have an ATSIC input into education in the state. I am not sure how much longer we have.

**CHAIR**—We will need to wrap up in three or four minutes.

**Mr Austin**—One thing I did want to get across was about CDEP, our biggest program. The concern I have is that, if someone has an idea and they want to set up a CDEP to get it running, they are not able to do it. You have to have 100-odd participants to be a viable CDEP organisation. In this state, we have had to come up with clusters of organisations so that we get our numbers up to 90, 100 or whatever the minimum is. That has caused some problems because then those, say, six communities are responsible for administering the 90 positions. It would be beneficial to be able to say to Wathaurong Glass out at Geelong, for instance: 'Here are 10 positions. You manage those 10 positions.' It takes away a little of the self-management of a small business. If they have full control over their positions then they are able to—as you were hearing before—come up with partnerships with strong existing organisations and get those people into meaningful employment. If you want to be able to put a young person who is interested in mechanics, for instance, into the local garage, you should have the flexibility to do that.

**CHAIR**—We are going through a review of CDEP now. Do you know if that has been presented to that group? Maybe it is an internal thing—although ATSIC would clearly be involved, because you are so closely linked to it. Maybe it is something that we will be a bit too longwinded to pick up in this latest review; however, I strongly recommend that the review be made aware of those views and that you feed them through your own system as well. We will take it up.

**Mr Austin**—I will be attending my first board meeting on Monday. While I was not successful in getting on the economic working group for that review, I will certainly be making those views known.

**CHAIR**—I think determination of this new CDEP policy—certainly on this rural and remote issue, which is an issue for the large and the small, as you would appreciate—is months off. You raised this issue earlier in terms of how you manage it and how you give the best impact.

**Mr Austin**—The other major project we have that we are endeavouring to establish is the Victorian Indigenous investment foundation. We are hoping to get contributions from ATSIC and the state government that will provide a bit of a leg-up for people who are interested in going into small business as well as invest in young people so that they are able to obtain scholarships in commerce, business, accounting or whichever field they want to go into, and the investment foundation can provide support.

**CHAIR**—We met a bright young accountant yesterday. You would probably know her. Her name was—

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**Mr Austin**—Jodie Ryan?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mr Austin**—She is on our regional council. So those types of opportunities are opening up, as well as the ability to generate some of our own capital wealth. There is no reason why an Indigenous community could not own a property in the centre of town, have government agencies renting that and distributing the rent back to the Aboriginal community in Victoria.

**Mr DANBY**—Mr Austin, congratulations on your appointment. We met last year in Elsternwick, when you spoke at that very moving ceremony, and I appreciated what you said that day. You have spoken about the unintended consequence of transferring health funding out of some of the organisations being that they now do not have the administrative capacity to continue. We have a generic question here: how do you think government can best deliver assistance to Aboriginal organisations? Should it be through family units, the traditional owners or community organisations—what is the best way of doing it?

**Mr Austin**—It is certainly something we have considered. Different working groups in the state have discussed it at different times. I think it needs to be a mixture. There is still a need for Indigenous health organisations in the state to deliver health programs, so their capacity needs to be developed at all levels. Families are something Gavin and I talked about on the way over and talk about on a regular basis. If you are building the capacity of the young people coming through—for instance, if a single mother were able to gain employment or lift her education levels—then that capacity is going to filter down. There is also going to be a generational change in families. In non-Indigenous communities, there is, say, the bricklayer who has maybe three generations of business sense. We do not have that in our communities. It is just starting to come now, as people have reached various levels of tertiary education and business.

The other thing is that traditional owners need to be able to represent their views. We have seen with the Yorta Yorta case that they were able to do so, but a lot of funds had to go into that. Certainly, traditional owners need to be able to identify other sources, such as the ILC and Indigenous land use agreements. Their capacity needs to be built so they are able to negotiate Indigenous land use agreements and also able to fight a case in court, if they think that their case is strong enough to win a native title case. I was at the Yorta Yorta Survival Day gathering up at the Barmah Forest, and the myth that the tide of history has washed their culture away is certainly just that: a myth. There was a very strong presence, and the local knowledge and the leadership of the traditional owners is quite prevalent in that area. Being able to articulate that in a court setting is important. I think it is a mixture of all those three areas.

**Mr DANBY**—I would like to follow up on something else you said before. Excuse me if I am being dense, but I do not understand how this works. Were you saying to us that, if you have a young Aboriginal man—or woman, for that matter—who wants to work in an automobile shop or in panel beating or something like that and he has people there who want to teach him to be a mechanic, in the period when he is maybe not doing a formal apprenticeship but is doing some training, you cannot get him funded through CDEP, because he is an individual off in a particular body shop or mechanic's garage? Does a whole group of people have to be funded?

**Mr Austin**—It can be done, but you would need to go through a lot. The Tumbukka area, for instance, has four grantee organisations that we have to put a minimum of 90 or 100 positions in

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to. Under the united structure, there are six satellites of that. Each of those have their own priority—it might be a gallery et cetera. They could negotiate a host agreement with a mechanic. I am suggesting, though, that a young person should be able to go in there and negotiate. They should be able to say, 'I'm interested in an apprenticeship,' because there can be apprenticeships with Abstudy attached et cetera. That person should be able to be put on a CDEP or some sort of traineeship program. It might not be a CDEP; it might be something else. We had the old TAP program, for instance, which allowed full salaries for Indigenous people. That was run through the old CES system.

**Mr DANBY**—How long did those TAP programs last? Were they just one-year programs or was it till the end of the apprenticeships?

**Ms HOARE**—Up to four years.

**Mr Austin**—We would like to see that sort of flexibility, I suppose, rather than having to go through CDEP.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much gentlemen, and all the best in the future.

**Proceedings suspended from 11.09 a.m. to 11.19 a.m.**

**GAWLER, Ms Janina M., Manager, Aboriginal Relations, Rio Tinto Ltd**

**CHAIR**—I welcome the representative from Rio Tinto. I ask you to give a short opening statement for the purpose of our inquiry.

**Ms Gawler**—I am with Rio Tinto Services based here in Melbourne. My role as manager of Aboriginal relations is as part of the Communities and Aboriginal Relations Unit that coordinates our work across Australia. Perhaps I can briefly introduce the Rio Tinto Group in Australia and then the work that we do, particularly in relation to Aboriginal communities and community capacity building. The Rio Tinto Group are a global group with assets throughout the world, and about 45 per cent of the global assets are based in Australia. We have mines, particularly our long-life mines, in Northern Australia; we have the Comalco Weipa and Gladstone operations; we have coal in the Bowen Basin in Queensland and at the Tarong mines in the Hunter Valley; we have operations in Western Australia, including the Hamersley Iron large iron ore operations, the more recently acquired Robe operations, and Argyle Diamonds; and then there is a combination of additional minerals through Dampier Salt and luzenac, which is talc.

We also have exploration interests throughout Northern and Central Australia. Rio Tinto Exploration is based in Western Australia and has interests in the Giles Range and the Pitjantjatjara lands and right through the Northern Territory, operating particularly in Arnhem Land and south-east Arnhem Land. We also have other operations but, by and large, the areas we are interested in talking about are interfaced with communities in Northern Australia.

The Aboriginal relations work is part of the global commitment under our policy by which we commit to local communities to find opportunities to work together for mutual benefit, in recognition of their needs and to enhance and support community development beyond the life of the mine. So it has quite a significant overview. The Aboriginal relations unit was established in 1995 in recognition of the need for the company to change direction and to recognise Aboriginal land in response to the Mabo decision of 1992. In 1995 after considerable discussions, both internally and with senior Aboriginal leaders, a policy was formulated that articulated the commitment of the company to recognising and working with Aboriginal people on their country and acknowledging their traditional connections and custodial responsibilities. The company also committed to economic independence through direct employment, business development and training as part of the advantages that Rio Tinto would offer in working with Aboriginal people on their country. Most importantly, we start from a position of doing what is right in working with Aboriginal people on their land for our access to mining on their country.

On the basis of that policy, we have established three key areas that we work in. We have a land access and negotiations area, and we have recently concluded an agreement with the western cape communities and Comalco that was five years in the making, and it was on this significant basis that the partnership program for Cape York—which you may be familiar with—was also developed. We have also been involved in a major land access agreement around Century Zinc, prior to its being sold to Pasminco. At the same time, we were involved in the Yandicoogina agreement, which is a new mine at Hamersley Iron.

All of these agreements, and certainly the most recent agreements, have been designed to be involved in Indigenous land use agreements, looking at long-term engagement with communities and a number of benefits, particularly around community capacity building, employment, education and training. Most recently, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Kimberley Land Council and Argyle Diamonds to refresh an agreement that was developed 20 years ago and to recognise that, after that time, we needed to address changes in relationships, and those negotiations are under way. I earlier neglected to include ERA Ranger in my list, which is a mine we acquired two years ago. That mine is based in Arnhem Land and is part of our responsibilities in this area as well.

If you want some specific details about the agreement making process I am happy to elaborate, but I would like speak about the capacity-building programs, given that that is my area of particular responsibility in the group. I am tabling a document, which is our Aboriginal policy and programs briefing note, for the committee, and I would be happy to follow up any questions that arise from that.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Can we just browse through that?

**Ms Gawler**—Yes, certainly. It is set out in two parts: a brief summary or synopsis of the key programs involved and then some more detail at the back, including an attachment that outlines the number of agreements that we have and our engagement with Aboriginal people in a more formal setting. The community capacity-building programs are on page 4. All of these are part and parcel of our engagement with communities in terms of opportunities for employment at our mine sites.

Some three years ago, in conjunction with the federal government and the local communities, we developed an employment strategy which has seen an additional 181 Aboriginal employees brought onto sites, with a high level of retention of between 75 per cent and 80 per cent. We regard this as one of the significant indicators of the development of a strong relationship with Aboriginal people, our mining operations and mining culture being open and accepting of Aboriginal people, and indeed these opportunities, from the individual's point of view, increasing their economic base and developing skills that they can take back to their own communities. Those changes are becoming rapidly apparent in Western Australia—in the Hamersley Iron range and increasingly around the Argyle mine.

The employment strategy has been particularly important because it required the company to make a contractual commitment not only under any agreement associated with land access but also to the Commonwealth with regard to a contract under the Corporate Leaders Program. A wholesale commitment across all of the business units required substantial cultural change internally and a recognition that employment is not just about numbers but also about participation, productivity—from the company's point of view—and long-term retention. To ensure that that occurs, we have established some family support programs so that people coming into the company know what they are getting involved in, the families feel comfortable living in a mining environment and existing families are aware of and participate in the changes. We undertake mentoring of our employees. Wholesale organisational change in workplace communications has been very important to ensure that there is clear communication between all parties, as has cross-cultural education, specifically about policies and programs historically.

Aboriginal people seek to be involved in mining as miners first and foremost. That was very strongly driven home to me the other day. A young man who was one of the first beneficiaries of a training program that Hamersley ran in the early nineties, graduated at the end of the course nearly ten years ago and has been in constant employment since that time, mining right across Western Australia, regards himself as a miner first and then talks about his family and his connection to country elsewhere—and that is indeed the language that we are seeking to incorporate into our relationships.

In recognising that the employees are part of our work environment, we have ensured that our HR policies and programs are consistent, and that employees are selected on merit. We undertake significant training to ensure that Aboriginal people are given the skills that they need to participate in the workplace. We are not reducing the capability or capacity of our work force; we are in fact skilling up people to participate in a highly skilled work force that is operating at world-class level.

Part of the relationship with government has been around the establishment of traineeships and apprenticeships and, underpinning that, extensive education programs. I will just turn to those briefly. You would be aware from your discussions that access to education and retention through all years of secondary school is difficult for Aboriginal students. Hamersley Iron, Dampier Salt in conjunction with Woodside, and the state and federal governments, under the auspices of the Polly Farmer Foundation, have established an innovative program that looks at participation and retention of Indigenous students through school. It is called Gumala Mirnuwarni, which you may wish to have further details on. It has been in place for four or five years as a coalition and arose out of the community's desire to see their children participating in schools.

Its unique characteristic is that the students and the parents contract with the organisation to participate. The benefit that flows from that is that the federal government has agreed to aggregate Aboriginal training tutoring funding so that they can run a program that does not need to run through lots of administrative hoops to ensure that the students gain after-school programs, additional leadership activities, camps—both culturally oriented camps and those with general access for the community—and employment placements.

The program has seen remarkable changes. Within the 10-year period prior to its commencement, only one student had completed year 10 at Karratha High School. Currently there are six students who are completing their tertiary studies, there are in excess of 12 students in year 12 this year and overall there are some 30 to 40 students currently in the program. The student retention rate is increasing markedly, and overall there is a real sense of achievement. In fact, one of the achievements was recently acknowledged by the Deputy Prime Minister when he awarded an Indigenous employee under the Corporate Leaders Program. Clinton Walker won the employee award and was one of the beneficiaries of the Gumala Mirnuwarni program. As the first person who had ever completed year 12 and gone on to an apprenticeship, he acknowledged the benefits the awards had given him, and the opportunities for him and his family. So we see some real life stories that show these changes.

The final area where we developed significant community programs is through the Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation. It was established six years ago and allocates \$1.4 million annually. It is independent of the organisation of the company but it receives its funds directly from the company. It is not a foundation in the sense that you have a corpus of money that you distribute;

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it is a line allocation in our budget. There are three Indigenous trustees: Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue, who would be familiar to you as the former head of ATSIC; Dr Sandra Eades, a medical doctor and graduate of the Newcastle program, who is currently completing her PhD on child health; and Mark Ella, renowned for his sporting capacity and, more recently, his business capabilities.

Internally, we have three members of the Rio Tinto Group: Leon Davis, former CEO, now deputy chairman of Rio Tinto and chairman of Westpac; two general managers—one in Comalco and one in Argyle Diamonds; and a general manager for Aboriginal and community relations. The chairperson is former vice-president of Aboriginal relations and I am the executive officer of that organisation. It provides funding and opportunities for communities to access resources in four key areas: education, health, sport associated with a healthy lifestyle and cultural renewal. In these programs, we tend to develop partnership programs either with Aboriginal organisations or through an Aboriginal organisation, with one or two other organisations to provide support.

One significant program has been a kidney health program designed to address the endemic condition of kidney health failure in Northern Australia. That was a joint project between the Kidney Health Foundation, Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation and the federal government through the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health. We have also been involved in an Indigenous affinity group, which is a network of philanthropic organisations, both here in Victoria and nationally, seeking to promote opportunities for Aboriginal development and working with Aboriginal organisations.

One particularly interesting program that has come up as one of the opportunities arising out of this relationship concerns the *Tribal Warrior*. You may be familiar with the *Tribal Warrior* as the boat that delivered the statements on Reconciliation Day 2000 at the conclusion of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. *Tribal Warrior* approached Rio Tinto seeking assistance for their around Australia journey—they are currently in the process of crossing the Bight—which they are making as ambassadors and to recognise that circumnavigation of Australia by Aboriginal people is occurring for the first time.

Rio Tinto has a shipping unit which controls our global shipping. Shipping was very keen to participate in this relationship and has assisted in providing equipment and advice and support and information regarding weather conditions. More recently, Shipping has decided to augment this relationship and form a formal partnership in conjunction with Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation for the development of Aboriginal mariners, and the first two potential trainees completed the cross-Tasman run about two weeks ago and two more are currently undertaking that crossing to see whether they would like to go on and do full maritime training. So that is an example of the opportunities that come out of these relationships. I am happy to address any questions from the committee.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, Ms Gawler. It was a comprehensive opening statement. I am a little overwhelmed by this large—one of the largest in the world no doubt—mining house and the thoroughness of its long-term commitment. What do you believe have been the benefits for your company? You mentioned the native title changes and some earlier times. Maybe out of some difficulty came some enlightenment, some challenges or some significant positives. Can you take us through that journey from the perspective of the board? Did Rio Tinto see it as an imperative and then perhaps as a significant advantage?

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**Ms Gawler**—I think the board has seen that it should do the right thing in working with people. Globally, Rio Tinto had no difficulty working with Indigenous people and people who had sovereign rights over their country over time, recognising those changing times. Indeed, the development of the dual listing and also the appointment of Leon Davies to chief executive officer in 1995 brought the Rio Tinto experience globally to Australia, and certainly the recognition that there was a need to change what was happening was quite significant based on Leon's position that we needed to do right and recognise Australia's history and also find a new way forward.

In terms of the benefits to the organisation, the improved relationships that we enjoy with Aboriginal people have been quite significant. I think the opportunities long term at operations at remote parts of the country of having a locally skilled work force will be quite significant economically and is certainly part of the business case, if you like, for this process. But it starts from the position of doing the right thing, and I echo that because that is constantly what I hear from the senior executive.

**CHAIR**—The employment outcomes for Aboriginal people are quite significant, from looking through the reading notes. Can you give us a snapshot because it seems to me that you have relatively ambitious targets?

**Ms Gawler**—About 10 years ago, if you were to seek information on Aboriginal participation in the work force, you would have found that there were relatively few people who identified, or were willing to be identified, as Aboriginal people. More recently, because of the company's commitment to working with Aboriginal people and our commitment to a contract that increased numbers, we have set about targets and, being an organisation driven by targets, this has engaged many people. The senior executive and the managing directors of the various business units in Australia which are run independently of each other—they report through to the board—set targets and assess the performance of their employees against those targets. So we set about a process of establishing a target and of recognising the local demographics of the population in which we are working so that Aboriginal people could see that the benefits were flowing through to them and their families, and we were gaining the benefits of having a relationship with them and ensuring that they were participating in our operations long term so the skills remained in the region rather than people moving on to other mining operations or other employment.

Certainly our productivity has been enhanced and we can start to see long-term benefits in those areas. That is not to suggest that it has been an easy pathway, by any stretch of the imagination, in providing skills and training in remote areas. That would be the case irrespective of the groups you would be working with. For Aboriginal people in particular, their lack of access to education has been one of the areas in which we have had to seek support from the Commonwealth in terms of getting access to additional benefits around literacy training, and additional trainees, to ensure people get skills. But the population has been the driving force. I think one of the most recent agreements, the Comalco Western Cape Communities Coexistence Agreement, set a target of 35 per cent as a requirement in the agreement to ensure that local Aboriginal people—not people from elsewhere but local families and local traditional owners—were the beneficiaries. That has been picked up by more recent agreements, and there is an expectation that it will be met.

**CHAIR**—My final question is to do with the prioritisation of capacity building. Going back one step further, the definition of capacity from a corporate sense is to be skilled, to be able to perform to meet the needs of the company in delivering the targets. Clearly, many Aboriginal people have been able to meet those performance levels. You have touched on literacy and numeracy. In terms of the people themselves, their communities and government—it is a big question and basically it is from the government—what could we do better? Clearly, along the journey you have had to work with government in training and that sort of thing. Were there things that you ran into with the government which were more difficult than they needed to have been, and could we do things better there? I am sure we could. For capacity building in terms of the Aboriginal community within the general community, what sorts of issues are there?

**Ms Gawler**—From our operational point of view, we want a robust regional economy. We want something in which we are going to see long-term opportunities and Aboriginal people as a part of that. If we were to look at the needs from the community's point of view, they would be access to resources that are timely and a flexibility about the delivery of those resources. One of the areas that I find I am constantly working with government on—and it does take some work at times—is ensuring that the resources that would be available, and indeed are part of policy commitments of either a state or federal government, are able to be accessed by local people, given that their skills in networking into government may not be at the highest level. So ensuring that government services do listen to what the needs are is an issue.

Aboriginal people have come to us saying: 'If we go together, then people might listen. We have been trying for some time and we have had no success.' Certainly we have had a degree of attention paid to some of the concerns that we have had. We found, once we started to engage in communities, that there were many things happening but they were not necessarily coordinated, nor were they were focusing on what people themselves saw as being worth while to achieve an outcome on. There might be five or six quite good programs but they did not actually enhance or develop something long term. We think that the access to employment and the opportunities in education and training are not so different from one part of the country to another. We have been seeking to develop, in conjunction with communities, models that they think will work and then perhaps adapt those and seek additional government support.

If I was looking to provide some advice to the inquiry, it is needing flexibility from government and a responsiveness. The time frame for delivery on agreements in terms of contracts and in moving from the policy to the program has a huge delay. As you have indicated, productivity of companies is critical and the train is well out of the station. Our experience with government is that the needs of the communities are well articulated, and have been for some time. The corporation and the group working with them, the community relations group, agrees. Programs are designed and developed. We have some resources to put in. We need some resources from the other side. Our train is four stations ahead and we are just starting the discussions back at the beginning of the line. The level of frustration that occurs in those scenarios is quite high. However, we have people who are skilled in patience.

**CHAIR**—I think it invites the further question: what are the main blockages? Why doesn't government just hop on the train and come along? We are probably entering into a political argument here, but it seems to me that bureaucracy is not responding and ministers, governments or politicians are not able to respond because they get caught up in some inertia. What is the experience?

**Ms Gawler**—My experience, and I think the experience of others in the business units, is that we have a recognition from politicians across the political persuasions that these issues need to be addressed. It is, however, the delivery of final contracts, final programs, that has quite a delay. It might be between eight months and a year from the time the submission goes in to the time the funds actually flow. The funds are not flowing to our corporation; they are flowing to an Aboriginal corporation or an organisation that has been designated as the auspicious body. You only do half the program, so you have only one leg to hop along on until you get the other half of the resource, and that is what people find particularly frustrating.

We have been encouraged by the commitment of the federal government to a whole-of-government arrangement and, indeed, some of the breakthrough changes where they have the senior executive sitting in a region to work across a number of areas I am optimistic about. However, it is relatively early and I have no examples of that change. But certainly a minister will come and visit and say, 'Yes, this needs to happen, let's go ahead with it,' but it takes time before you actually get the opportunity coalescing into a real change, a real program.

**Ms HOARE**—Congratulations. It looks like a great program you are running with, despite the obstacles that are put in front of you. I have two fairly minor issues with Rio Tinto's Indigenous policy. In your opening statement you talked about—I could be wrong here—Napranum Preschool having contracts with the families. Can you expand on that? It might have been some other educational facility.

**Ms Gawler**—It is the Gumala Mirnuwarni program. It is a personal commitment contract. The document is, 'I, the child, agree to go along to school and I, the family member, agree to support my child going to school.' So there is a reciprocity contract, I suppose, rather than a formal legal document.

**Ms HOARE**—What happens if the contract is broken? Does the kid miss out on school?

**Ms Gawler**—If the child does not participate in school, then they are not welcome at the after-school program, the special program, that has been set up for them. So there is an expectation that their participation in school will lead to enhanced benefits. They can go to school. Their going to school is not an issue. There was a very low school-participation rate, and if we are going to offer employment outcomes, unless students are going through the school system, we are always going to have a catch-up. So the discussions from the communities' point of view—and they were the ones that looked at this as being the way forward—were that if they and their children agreed to participate then there would be some benefits that would come the other way. So it is not contractual in a formal sense.

**CHAIR**—It is a good question. I noticed that.

**Ms HOARE**—Thanks for that explanation. The other point is that Rio Tinto is said to be providing services to these communities which, in my view, should be provided by governments—out of hours school care, education services such as school and preschool, and health services. Why is that? Further—and this will be my final point—in a previous inquiry we came across communities which were expected, for some reason or other, to use the royalties they gained to provide services which governments should be providing. Rio Tinto have an Indigenous policy. Is there any expectation from the company that communities must use their

royalties for whatever purposes? So would the company say, 'We'll establish out of school hours care, but you've got to put some of your royalty funding into it'?

**Ms Gawler**—The answer to that is no. Any decisions about financial benefits that flow to communities and their trusts are their business and outside of our area of responsibility in the first instance—and in all instances that would be the case. If we are going to demonstrate our good faith and long-term relationship then it is very much hands-off from any trust that has been set up from financial benefits. In fact, those documents clearly outline what is expected from the company's point of view.

In terms of the question you asked regarding government services, the company has a very clear view about the provision of government services. That is what government is there to do, which is to provide education services, health services and its programs for long-term implementation. However, there are areas where Aboriginal communities have identified opportunities that could augment programs that government is already providing. The company have taken a position that if there are opportunities that some injection of resources from the company can assist in moving forward and developing a new strategy then they will support those programs, but ultimately they must be the responsibility of government to take on. I can give you an example of that.

The Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Health Services wanted to set up a mums and babies program. They thought that the mainstream government program that was available in Townsville was not meeting their needs. They saw very few antenatal visits for mums, there were a lot of low birth weights and there were some issues regarding births as well. The government provided the service but Aboriginal mums were not using it. The Aboriginal and Islanders Health Services approached our foundation seeking some support to set up a program that they thought would be tailored more to their needs. We and the Ian Potter Foundation provided that resourcing for two years, and there were substantial changes in mums attending the clinic prior to the birth of their child and subsequently. Indeed, the health and the birth weights of their babies were much improved.

During that time, we and that Aboriginal organisation lobbied the government to seek support for long-term continuity of that program. Eventually the federal government came in with funding for that program, and I think in due course the state will follow. We would maintain a watching relationship to ensure that that is available over a few years, but then we would withdraw. So that is the nature of our work in the health arena. Our business is not about the provision of health services; that is the government's responsibility. Indeed, in any remote part of the country, people are entitled to the services that they should be able to access anywhere else. So the company has drawn quite a clear line about what is our responsibility and what is government responsibility. However, in development areas and capacity building, we will take a role where we are invited to. We will not impose.

**CHAIR**—That is fascinating. You enhance something in the relationship with the people. I do not have anything else, other than to say thank you for such a comprehensive presentation. When all the efforts go in, I hope we can do credit to your ideas in our report.

[11.57 a.m.]

**LOTTON, Mr Tony, Economic Development and Training Coordinator, Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust and Bungyarnda Community Development Employment Projects Co-op Ltd**

**CHAIR**—Welcome, Tony. Thank you for coming today. You have come a long way, so thank you for all the effort that has gone in. Would you like to give a short opening address? Then we can have a chat about how things are going and how you see things.

**Mr Lotton**—Okay.

**CHAIR**—We respect the fact that this organisation has a long history.

**Mr Lotton**—It has, yes. I have an outline of some things to go through with you, and you can ask questions from there. My background is that I have previous experience in credit and risk management in the finance and banking industry as well as in a number of other management positions in different private enterprises. In 1998, I was appointed by the Victorian Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs to work with Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust community. Lake Tyers, as you may know, is a discrete community of approximately 200 people. Services there include administration, health, day care, home care, 83 CDEP positions, a training centre and approximately 30 residential homes on 4,000 acres of land, which is surrounded by native bush, Lake Tyers and its tributaries.

Part of my charter in this position was to develop programs and services for the organisation and to develop capacity building within the community. It also involved consultation, research and development of enterprises, and economic development for the community and for the state. The outcomes required were the establishment of a number of programs—for example, enterprises such as a nursery, an aquaculture training program and a training centre. A Centrelink office and a rural transaction centre were established. A medical centre is about to be built. New homes were also on the agenda. One of the main areas—

**CHAIR**—Is this centre being built by the state?

**Mr Lotton**—It is state and federal. There was recognition of the need for on-site training because of the distance from mainstream education facilities. It is a one-way trip of approximately an hour to the main tertiary institution, which is a TAFE in Bairnsdale, and getting people there has been a major problem for many years. There was a need to develop appropriate strategies to implement training that is more appropriate for the community. That brought out the need to establish a training centre, which is funded by ANTA, and we are about to open that this year.

Over approximately the last 4½ years the Lake Tyers community has networked with a number of other community organisations, both regional and state wide, that have similar issues to Lake Tyers. The main issue is that there is a 9.7 per cent unemployment rate in East Gippsland, and it is much higher in the Indigenous communities. The opportunities for any Indigenous person in East Gippsland are extremely limited. The terms of reference state:

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... 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;

... ..

(c) government agencies so that policy direction and management structures will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people.”

I think that is extremely good to see. Strategies I would recommend in supporting community members to deliver better outcomes for people require a long-term approach from government of a minimum of three to five years—a strategic long-term plan that needs to couple that commitment. We need to utilise advice, assistance and training from mainstream professionals in a mentoring capacity. I have found that the transfer of skills under a mentoring arrangement achieves better outcomes in the long run. It also requires an appropriate skills audit to be carried out to ascertain the key areas that need training and skills development. We should endeavour to reduce the number of mainstream professionals employed on a PAYG salary basis. Instead, we should look at contracting external professionals—via government agencies, under contract or through some other arrangement that is external to the organisation—who can work with individuals, groups and communities. This would basically reduce the problem of being tied up in the political family and in the internal issues of the organisation, which impact heavily on the achievement of outcomes. It would also increase the accountability of the mainstream mentor.

I believe that one-on-one development of Indigenous management by way of accredited training and hands-on mentoring by mainstream professionals is essential. Again, it requires a commitment by government over a three- to five-year contract basis. This may include the appointment of independent mainstream professionals who may possibly offer that mentoring in the governance area. Again, there is that requirement for a commitment over the long term. Having three-year contracts for mentors would ensure consistency of the organisation’s achievements in the corporate memory. It is anticipated that this will assist organisations to develop strategic long-term approaches to capacity building.

Realistic targets should be set to ensure that outcomes are achieved by the end of a three-year contract which, again, requires a commitment from government for a two- to three-year period to develop the relevant strategies on a diminishing basis. A commitment from government agencies to take on the recommendations of mainstream professionals in conjunction with the key players within the communities, the funding bodies and the organisation is, again, a high priority.

There is also a need to review the process by which funding organisations develop their program guidelines. Most of the time they do not fit in with what the organisation really needs. Individual communities and organisations require a consultative process to develop program guidelines that are in line with specific areas requiring assistance. This will ensure that funding agencies and the organisations achieve the intended outcome for all of those involved and also achieve value for money. More flexible guidelines will assist in developing programs and

services by being designed to complement and support specific needs of the organisation. Under the current structure, an organisation can apply for support and assistance only in areas that do not specifically address the particular community's needs. There is a need to think outside the box and tailor guidelines to suit the people and the workers in the field.

Training and mentoring is a high priority which, again, requires a long-term commitment and flexibility in its delivery, with particular emphasis on the area of management and financial control skills development to ensure accountability. To ensure sustainability, intensive one-on-one mentoring and accredited, flexible, hands-on skills development are required.

In summary, I believe that the key areas for effective development of strategies that would improve skills development and capacity building in Indigenous communities include the development of strategic long-term plans—three to five years, or preferably longer—and documented commitment by government to support those plans. Possibly, departmental heads could as part of their employment contracts agree that a whole-of-government approach will be taken to developing strategies and guidelines. There could be long-term objectives set that are part of the charter that they have to achieve.

Other key areas include securing mainstream professionals as mentors and advisers who are contracted externally to the organisation, and flexible delivery of hands-on accredited training and skills development by culturally appropriate professionals and also people who have gained the respect and trust of the community involved. There should be flexibility in the development of program funding guidelines that address the specific areas of need, rather than the program being designed and the community then having to apply it to that area.

Lastly, there should be a commitment by government to achieve a whole-of-government approach, taking into consideration the recommendations of the workers at the coalface. A whole-of-government approach is a required to achieve diversity of funding, which in turn reduces the level of input required by each funding body. It will also complement risk management, strategic development and, again, value for money. That is it in a nutshell.

**CHAIR**—That was first class. Thank you very much for your time and your submission. It came in on 5 December 2002, and I guess it is still fairly fresh in your mind. Can I just go to your summary points. You would be familiar with, for example, the ATSI regional plans over the years.

**Mr Lotton**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I wonder whether it would be worth trying to understand why they were not as effective as they might have been. What were some of the weaknesses in that strategic planning—because, to be fair about it, that was the theory of it to a degree, was it not?

**Mr Lotton**—Yes. I suppose a lot of the time—and I can only speak from my experience with the communities I have dealt with—communities have difficulty relaying their 'wish lists', for want of a better term, or what strategies they are looking for. There is a constant bombardment of bureaucracy in relation to strategic development and so on. There are a number of different funding organisations going to each community, which gets to the stage where I think there is a bit of an overload situation. Community members, who have a lot of input initially, find that their input is not getting anywhere and is falling on deaf ears. Because of that, the next time a



strategic development workshop is convened it is more than likely that they will not put up information. They think it is a waste of time, in a nutshell.

**CHAIR**—It really is interesting—and I am probably getting a bit ahead of myself here—in terms of the ATSIC review. I am going to be quite interested to see how it comes through. We have been hearing that there is a lot of focus on programs and chasing programs rather than stepping back and having much more focus on policy and developing and really fighting for policy in a more strategic sense, with a long-term approach. I think we will all be watching with great interest to see how this comes out in the ATSIC review.

**Mr Lotton**—It will be interesting. It is hard to say how it will come out. It is a challenging task, but I think the communities themselves, in relation to the trust, for 30-odd years have been saying the same things. Policies have developed around what they perceive the community want or what they see the politicians or the media or the public or whomever at the time require certain outcomes, which might not be in line with what the community want. It is a very difficult process. I do not necessarily envy the policy developers.

**CHAIR**—Can we talk a little bit about the politics? You are probably someone that has seen things fomenting and working—the contesting and competitiveness, if you like. There are a lot of competing issues in the air in the politics of it. It is a difficult issue, but my understanding is that we need to face up to some of this stuff and step back. This is where you talk about leadership in your original paper. Can we talk a little bit about the politics of community and region, which make it difficult and build the cynicism? It goes round and round and foments and things are not delivered.

**Mr Lotton**—A lot of the time, because the communities have struggled to a great degree for many years, a leader who develops out of the community will find it extremely difficult to continue to be a leader, because he is seen as a tall poppy. Potentially, if that person does educate himself—or herself—and proceeds out of the community to become educated and build his skills to come back to the community, quite often the communities will see him as a sort of a traitor or someone who has been influenced by white society, or what have you, and has lost connection to the real issues of the people.

**CHAIR**—It seems to me that you have put your finger right on it. Are those real issues of the community? Sometimes they are perceptions, which in a sense may be false gods.

**Mr Lotton**—Correct.

**CHAIR**—A person comes back with a capacity which will mean a significant change, which in turn may well mean significant improvement, but very few are convinced.

**Mr Lotton**—Very few see the outcomes that are preached about. Possibly, change for everyone is a difficult process. In particular, people who have been dominated by having those sorts of progress put in place where they do not see it, may perceive this person as a leader who could be an enemy because he comes back with stricter accounting accountability and financial management et cetera, which—

**CHAIR**—And it may challenge vested interests or certain old orders and that type of thing. I will quickly move on. I think the second point, about mainstream professionals and mentors and

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advisers contracted externally, is an excellent point. It is going to be really interesting. I think you have touched in some way in there also—in that last point—on greater cooperative effort amongst the whole of government.

**Mr Lotton**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Are you aware that COAG is looking very seriously at this?

**Mr Lotton**—Yes, and I am aware of the pilot at Shepparton.

**CHAIR**—And you would think that that was a useful thing to do?

**Mr Lotton**—Very much so.

**CHAIR**—Can you see the weaknesses? Where are the weaknesses?

**Mr Lotton**—I suppose I have to reserve my opinion in relation to that particular project.

**CHAIR**—We will take Shepparton out of it, so just in the general principle.

**Mr Lotton**—In the general principle, over the last five years that I have worked with Indigenous communities the whole-of-government approach has been preached by numerous heads of departments et cetera, but when it comes to the bottom line that does not happen. On the ground, in trying to coordinate a whole-of-government approach between agencies, you find there is a difficulty. You do not have the power base, I suppose, to say to the bureaucracy that Human Services, ATSIC, AAV et cetera need to put in a component of this particular program to support it. Getting them to talk to one another is like trying to get opposites to meet; it just does not happen.

**CHAIR**—It is a bit like mustering cats.

**Mr Lotton**—Yes, that is probably a good definition.

**CHAIR**—All I can really say, Tony—and I invite you to add some final comments—is that I really compliment you on that. It is a terrific effort. I hope that we can do something that reflects the credit of your efforts. I wish you good luck in the future.

**Mr Lotton**—If the COAG agreement and the pilot project in Shepparton are successful—and I have heard some positive things about that—I would just add that the western districts quite often get more airplay, so to speak. The East Gippsland and Gippsland regions are second-string cousins to the mob up there even though the opportunities in the Shepparton area are more numerous than they are in the East Gippsland area, particularly now with the issues relating to marine parks and the logging reductions and with unemployment so high and business success so low. And now we have got the bushfires and the drought, so the list goes on.

I believe there needs to be more focus for this region, because the regional areas are losing out. There are difficulties in trying to get a whole-of-government approach. If there is a commitment by government to basically tell the bureaucracy that that is their charter and it is

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written into their contract in some way, shape or form, there is some sort of accountability. There is a hell of a lot of accountability required from communities, organisations and individuals, which is fair and reasonable. Sometimes it may be too onerous, especially when you do not have the same level of accountability from the bureaucracy. Trying to get assistance on the ground is extremely difficult when you have got to fit in with certain guidelines. When it comes to building the capacity of the community, if you do not have the respect and trust of the people and you do not put forward certain strategies that cover all of the areas and people's issues, a lot of the time the programs just do not work. In my opinion—and it is only my opinion—CDEP is not necessarily working. I have got people at the trust who have been on the CDEP for 10 to 20 years and they consider it as almost a long-term job. It is extremely difficult to try to break that mind-set.

**CHAIR**—What should CDEP be?

**Mr Lotton**—I think it should be a wage subsidy to develop small business, obviously again with the mentoring of professional skills development from outside and with identified leaders in the group who develop the business, especially in areas of high unemployment. There may also be a possibility to subsidise the labour component for current mainstream businesses or larger corporations, such as Rio Tinto.

**CHAIR**—In other words, it should not be sit-down money and it should not be permanency, as you correctly summed it up; it should be part of the pathway to somewhere.

**Mr Lotton**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—It should be a pathway that is coming from somewhere and going to somewhere.

**Mr Lotton**—Yes. The problem has been that when people get on the CDEP there is a continual education system that puts them through a barrage of courses and accredited training for short periods of time in areas which do not actually provide an opportunity for employment at the end. People from the community that I work with and a number of the other communities that I have worked with have numerous qualifications from courses with certificates, but these are mostly from short courses. Some of them are longer courses but they are never designed on a structured staged process that actually builds our skills to become employed or self-employed.

**CHAIR**—Tony, we very much appreciate that. Thank you.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.21 p.m. to 12.56 p.m.**

**MURRAY, Ms Beverley Joy, Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. We thank you for your submission and invite you to say a few opening words.

**Ms Murray**—Thank you for this opportunity to speak at the public hearing of the inquiry into capacity building in Indigenous communities. I have some comments that were raised at a meeting of peak Aboriginal organisations based in Melbourne. We discussed the inquiry, and representatives said that they wanted to put some short, pertinent comments forward to the inquiry. I will go through the list of those.

We, Aboriginal people, still see ourselves as a dispossessed race of people. Our basic human rights are still not being met. In Victoria, we feel that we are a marginalised and disempowered group of people. We know that, despite the funding that has been provided by government, there are still massive problems in the Aboriginal community. Why is that? We believe that we need to have our own voice; we do not have a major voice in this country at all. We in Victoria do not believe that we are recognised by the Commonwealth. In fact, we see the Commonwealth as trying to assimilate us. We do not believe that we are recognised as an Aboriginal nation of people.

We continue to be stereotyped and defined, and we are expected to assimilate into mainstream society. As far as we are concerned, mainstream society has its own major problems. It cannot meet its own people's needs let alone try to meet the needs of Aboriginal people. Mainstream society is about creating conflict between people. It is about competition, selfishness, greed—and none of those values are acceptable to Aboriginal people in Aboriginal communities. Mainstream society is about those who have and those who have not. Aboriginal people in Victoria have a unique history, a history unlike that of any other Aboriginal nation in Australia. We faced the brunt of the invasion. We have very little Aboriginal owned land—I think there are three parcels of Aboriginal owned land in Victoria today. We are not paid any royalties, and the Aboriginal community in Victoria owns very few assets. We believe that it is up to us to maintain our culture, and it is up to us to decide how that should be done. There is still racism in Australia today, certainly in Victoria, at all levels. It has become more subtle, but it is still there.

The small number of submissions received from Victorian Aboriginal organisations was not because of a lack of interest but because we just did not have the capacity. After we discussed those sorts of statements, we said: 'Let's talk about what we want. What do Victorian Aboriginal communities want? What do Aboriginal organisations want? What do Aboriginal people want?' We said that capacity building must be about assisting us with sustaining our own culture and maintaining our own communities. That is the bottom line. Our cultural needs go hand in hand with our human needs, and one cannot be satisfied without the other. Our human needs must be met, and our human needs are about having basic housing, good health and education.

Aboriginal organisations must be provided with proper funding and resources. Aboriginal organisations should not be scrounging around all the time for bits of money from here and

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there. We are struggling to keep up with meeting the worst-case needs in our communities. There is no scope to develop preventative practice or plan growth. Aboriginal organisations face obstacles that no other community organisations face, yet we are expected to compete equally with those organisations.

We certainly want mainstream services to meet our needs and to be culturally appropriate. We are prepared to help them to do that, but we are not prepared to let them take over and replace Aboriginal community organisations. We must have the right to choose. As Aboriginal people we want to reaffirm our own values, beliefs and principles in our own way. We will be organising our own meetings in order to develop our own charter that will enshrine those sorts of values, beliefs and principles that we as Aboriginal people want. We intend to develop that ourselves over that next 12 months.

Finally, ATSIC was never designed as the voice of the Aboriginal community. It was developed specifically by government for government. It is not the voice of the Aboriginal community. We do not have any say about what it does; we do not have any say about its priorities. We want governance over our own affairs in our own way and in our right. We want structures like the Melbourne Indigenous community organisations network, networks that we set up ourselves for ourselves which are independent from government. In Victoria there is also a recently established elders council. Those sorts of structures are providing the voice for us as Aboriginal people.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for that. Can you explain to me the structure of the Aboriginal Housing Board? How does it work? How much stock does it have? Does the available money come from the Commonwealth and the state? Perhaps you could talk about some of the issues in relation to private rental, which is very difficult—and, I would imagine, particularly difficult in Melbourne. Could we go through some of those housing issues?

**Ms Murray**—The Aboriginal Housing Board is an Aboriginal community organisation. We have been established since 1981. Two years of steering committee meetings formed the organisation and decided how the organisation was going to be structured. There is an elected board of management, which makes decisions about allocations, legal action—anything to do with that program. We do not accept rent. We do not own the properties; they are owned by the state. We work in partnership with the Office of Housing. The properties are administered like all other public housing properties, except we make decisions on management, allocations and the rest of it. The board also makes decisions about the funding of the program. Funding is made up of \$3.6 million from the Commonwealth and over the last few years we have received an substantial amount from the state. The Commonwealth funds have not changed in the last decade, so in real terms the Commonwealth funding has decreased. We also know that hanging over our heads is the real threat of even that little bit of money being taken away from Victoria.

**CHAIR**—How much do the Commonwealth and the state provide? What is the annual budget?

**Ms Murray**—Last financial year it was \$12 million. Out of that, the major priority for our program is to buy and build houses.

**CHAIR**—Approximately how much of that is administrative costs?

**Ms Murray**—The board's own admin costs would be about \$250,000 to \$300,000. The state admin costs are absorbed within their own program.

**CHAIR**—The balance of the money goes into purchase and into—

**Ms Murray**—building housing stock.

**CHAIR**—How many properties approximately would you get for that?

**Ms Murray**—There are about 1,200 properties all up, situated throughout Victoria. That \$12 million is also maintenance money that is available for the upgrade program. We would have purchased about 100 properties last financial year.

**CHAIR**—Would the maintenance be half the budget?

**Ms Murray**—I am not sure.

**CHAIR**—There would be a public document on that. We might just have a look at that.

**Ms HOARE**—In case people are wondering, that noise outside is the state library workers campaigning for higher wages.

**CHAIR**—Looking for new books, are they?

**Ms Murray**—Who would have thought they would be so radical?

**Ms HOARE**—They must be really angry. Beverley, there are a couple of points you made in your initial statement that I would like you to expand upon. You talked about human needs and cultural needs. Can you expand a bit about the cultural needs?

**Ms Murray**—It is about us as Aboriginal people in Victoria. We faced the brunt of the invasion; a lot of our culture was taken off us and a society was imposed on us. So our kids do not have the language, as other communities may have, and that is a great loss to us as a people. It is much harder for parents to maintain that cultural identity for our children. Victoria and Australia have become so Americanised; kids know more about America than they do about their own culture. We want to be able to look at ways and means of maintaining our culture, because what is happening now is not working.

**Ms HOARE**—And regaining it.

**Ms Murray**—Yes.

**Ms HOARE**—The other point you raised was the establishment of an elders council. We had the great opportunity in Shepparton to witness the new Koori Court. Speaking to others following that, I saw a role for a similar style of consultations which could be expanded into other areas. For example, I was talking to somebody about domestic violence and I saw a role for a similar structure with domestic violence victims. Can you talk about the role and the mission statement of the elders council?

**Ms Murray**—The elders council is an initiative of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service. It is a recent initiative, so it is early days, and we are just talking about what its role could be. I see it as being a forum for individual Aboriginal people to go to when they need assistance with decision making about their family or if they have a family problem. I see it as providing families and individuals with some expert advice, assistance and support—'expert' in terms of them being a collection of Aboriginal elders who have wisdom, experience and the respect of the community; people to go to whose advice we would listen to.

**Ms HOARE**—Thank you for that. Finally, you made the comment that ATSIC is not the voice of the Aboriginal community. You would be aware that a review is currently being undertaken of ATSIC's role and structure as the main service provider and policy maker for Aboriginal people. What recommendations would you make for the provision of services and the development of policy for Aboriginal people?

**Ms Murray**—I will just clarify that statement about ATSIC: ATSIC is one voice but not the only voice. There needs to be recognition that there is not one Aboriginal person who speaks for everyone all the time and there is no group of Aboriginal people that can speak for everyone on everything all the time.

**Ms HOARE**—We would say the same. The Prime Minister does not speak for all of us either!

**Ms Murray**—That is right. Also, ATSIC is a government structure—it is a group of elected people—so we recognise that there are restrictions and limitations on what it can and cannot do and what it can and cannot say. I have heard about the ATSIC review. I do not know how you could make ATSIC, say, more acceptable to me as an individual, given that it was set up by government for government. I do not believe it is something that was set up for us. I do not think it could ever have the status of, say, a group that was set up by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people; it could never have that. So I do not know how you can compare ATSIC to a structure that is set up by the Aboriginal community for the Aboriginal community, because it is a government structure and nothing is going to change that.

**Ms HOARE**—Now that I have posed the question, it would be good if you and your colleagues could put some thought into it and maybe make a submission to the review.

**Ms Murray**—We could if we had the resources. I am the CEO, so basically I am the policy officer, I am the submission writer and I am the person who heads up and manages the organisation. We do not have time to put in submissions. We do have our own policy officer now. We are probably one of the very few Aboriginal organisations that have one. That is something that we really need in Aboriginal organisations. If you want to hear our voice, we need to have the resources to do that.

**Ms HOARE**—Thank you.

**Ms Murray**—I want to say too that the Aboriginal Housing Board have a strategic plan that we have been implementing over the last three years which is about us gaining control, gaining ownership, of the Aboriginal housing program. Over the last three years, we have been developing the infrastructure of the organisation and the expertise and knowledge of the board of management. We have devoted a lot of our time and effort to implementing the organisation's

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strategic plan so that it can take on the ownership and management of the Aboriginal housing program in its own right.

That is why we did not say much about the Aboriginal Housing Board, because we are getting on with the work that we need to get on with. We know that there are housing issues and how they can be resolved and we know that some of them cannot be because we just do not have the resources. It would be wonderful if we had low rents, but in order to run a feasible housing program you have to have that income coming in. So we know all about the issues and how we can address some of those. We are on the last year of our strategic plan, so we are getting there gradually.

**Ms HOARE**—Good luck with it.

**CHAIR**—I join my colleague Kelly Hoare in thanking you for the effort you have made and the passion that you have put into today's contribution. I hope that the future may offer you some of those aspirations that you have. It is very important, as they say, to keep the fire in the belly. Thank you for coming and being with us today.

**Ms Murray**—This is the first time I have been to something like this—it is a bit scary.

**CHAIR**—I hope it was not too overwhelming.

**Ms Murray**—It was a bit.

**CHAIR**—I usually say that we only bite each other, we do not bite everybody else! Thank you very much.



[1.15 p.m.]

**GALLAGHER, Ms Jill, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation**

**JAMES, Mr Daniel Travis (Private capacity)**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Thank you for coming to be with us today and for your submission. Would you like to give us a few opening comments?

**Ms Gallagher**—First of all, thank you for inviting us to attend and have this discussion. Like Bev, I am new at this, too, so please forgive any slip-ups.

**CHAIR**—We make them every hour or two here, so that is all right.

**Ms Gallagher**—Our organisation made a written submission to the inquiry. I am an Aboriginal woman from western Victoria, and I have worked in government for almost 20 years. I now work in the Aboriginal community controlled sector and enjoy it immensely. That is me in a nutshell.

**Mr James**—I formerly worked for VACCHO. I currently work as the secretariat coordinator for the Victorian Aboriginal Advisory Council on Koori Health, the forum for the framework agreement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in this state. Jill asked me to come along today to help her out, as I wrote the submission in the first place. I took leave from my other position to be with her here today.

**CHAIR**—I appreciate you being with us. Is there any particular thing you wish to talk about?

**Ms Gallagher**—Basically, in our submission we talk about capacity building. Just before I go into that, the term ‘capacity building’ is bandied around. It first came out through government as one of their new buzz words. We thought it was a good buzz word, but we find that the issue with that terminology is that no-one defines what capacity building is. So when government and community talk together and we use the same language, we have a different interpretation of what capacity building is. That causes a dilemma for the Aboriginal community controlled sector here in Victoria. Basically, our written submission tried to define it from our point of view: capacity in the political arena, capacity of our communities in the economic development area and capacity in education, training and skilling up our communities.

I do not know whether you are familiar with how the Victorian Aboriginal communities are structured. VACCHO are a peak Aboriginal organisation in Victoria. We operate under the banner of 27 Aboriginal community controlled organisations. Most of those 27 Aboriginal organisations, based around the state of Victoria, are multifunctional; they do not just have a health program. They are mainly cooperatives, which also have programs such as CDEP and programs in areas of employment, education, housing and so on. But they do have a health component. To try to take into account and to encompass the whole range of issues that affect Aboriginal people today is pretty daunting. We try to do it to the best of our capacity. If I ramble on too much, please tell me to shut up.

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**CHAIR**—You are going extremely well. You summed up that whole issue perfectly. We wrestled with it. ‘Community capacity’ is a bit of a buzz word; what does it mean? You are spot-on.

**Ms Gallagher**—One of the things that we have identified as a big issue for our organisations is that they lack core funding. By that, I mean that any organisation, whether it be an Aboriginal organisation or a mainstream organisation, has to have the fundamentals in order to function properly and deliver services in a quality way. If you do not have that infrastructure, then you cannot deliver services or programs. I heard you talking before about the review of ATSIC. As everyone knows, before ATSIC had the responsibility for the health portfolio taken away from them and given back to the Commonwealth government—I do not know whether it was taken off them or they gave it back—a lot of the money that they gave to Aboriginal organisations provided some core funding for organisations to employ a CEO, an accountant, a basic receptionist or an admin person. When that was ripped out, ATSIC had to decide where the cuts were going to happen and most of our organisations floundered terribly. A couple of them actually closed. This was not just in Victoria but nationally. Our organisations are still suffering the effects of that issue.

When you talk about capacity building, the biggest problem is for an organisation to employ a CEO without robbing Peter to pay Paul—that is, without taking an admin levy off a health program or a CDEP. Having a proper structure to run an organisation is what I see as a big problem, when you talk about Aboriginal community capacity building. The other problem—I think I heard Bev mention it, and it is a very valid point—is that, although we have the basics to run an Aboriginal organisation so we can deliver quality services, I am not aware of even one Aboriginal organisation in Victoria that has the capacity to employ policy development officers, skilled people to develop policies on our behalf.

**CHAIR**—That is an absolutely critical area.

**Ms Gallagher**—It is.

**CHAIR**—You need people to look over the hill a bit, do a bit of research, sit down and work out which way to go.

**Ms Gallagher**—That is exactly right. Bev said she is the CEO of the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria. She is; and she is also a submission writer and a policy development officer, and she also provides advice to government and runs to about a thousand meetings a week. I am in the same boat as CEO of VACCHO. Those broader capacity issues are big issues.

The other thing that VACCHO currently grapple with—we are also a registered training organisation—is trying to build the skill base within our communities. We run three training programs. They are mainly health focused, because we are a health organisation. We are running programs around training Aboriginal health workers, around training Aboriginal mental health workers in emotional and spiritual wellbeing and around women’s and babies’ health. These are three training programs that we have up and running. We have been running training programs for the past four years. We want to branch out, and we will be doing this with some funding from the state government out of their capacity-building funding. We have applied for some funding, and it looks like we will probably get it. It is not only about training specialist health care people but about the need for skilled CEOs. We need the managers of those health

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organisations to be skilled up, so VACCHO are looking at developing training programs aimed at management and middle management within the Aboriginal community controlled sector.

**CHAIR**—It is a really healthy thing to accept the need for good management and to encourage people to manage as well as they can. Then you give yourself a much better chance.

**Ms Gallagher**—That is exactly right. If you look at the history of Aboriginal organisations in Victoria, at how they have developed and evolved—very slowly, I might add—you will see that in the very early days there was a lack of capacity and the skill base in our own communities was very limited. It still is, but we are moving on and we are getting the skill base. Our problem in the community controlled sector is: how can we retain those skilled people in our sector? We mentioned in our written submission that state governments—and we recognise the need for this—are developing employment strategies to recruit Aboriginal people into the public service. That is great, but it is also taking the skill base away from our organisations. So, what is our strategy for dealing with that?

**CHAIR**—Getting the numbers so that you can draw on a broader skill base.

**Ms Gallagher**—That is exactly right. I know we cannot do everything ourselves as an organisation, so it is important to develop very good links and networks with mainstream services not only in the health sector but in the education and training sector and to look at scholarships and traineeships and giving opportunities to our people to access universities in a more appropriate way.

**CHAIR**—Maybe we will ask you a few questions.

**Ms Gallagher**—That would be good.

**CHAIR**—Daniel, would you like to add anything?

**Mr James**—I will wait for the questions.

**CHAIR**—Okay. I will start off with a question for Jill. Aboriginal health services developed because Aboriginal people wanted to relate to their own people, because they wanted a service that was culturally appropriate and that people would be inclined to visit and use effectively and because there were those who would not, did not or could not access mainstream health services. You would already be delivering some, if not most, of these specialist services already—remember, we were in Shepparton and Warrnambool over the past couple of days. I am interested in the mainstream services in the state and particularly in the metropolitan areas, remembering that half of the Aboriginal people in the state probably live in Melbourne and the other half outside in quite big—by my standards as a South Australian—regional centres. In terms of those mainstream services, what is the relationship and where are the blockages and impediments in regard to access by Aboriginal people? You still need them for support in those skilled—

**Ms Gallagher**—Very much so.

**CHAIR**—How is that going?

**Ms Gallagher**—You are right: Aboriginal community controlled health centres were set up when we recognised the need that, for a number of reasons, people were not accessing mainstream services—and I will not go into those reasons because they stem right back, historically and prehistorically. There will always be a need for us to have community controlled health services, but we also still need to be able to provide our people with the option of accessing mainstream services. We still need to work on developing mainstream services, ensuring that they are not only culturally appropriate but also accessible. A lot of our people find them very daunting. I will tell you a story, which comes from the Shepparton area, of what I mean by ‘very daunting’. A lot of the elders talk about it, and it is written in a number of reports. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Aboriginal women used to present at the Shepparton Hospital to give birth. They were not allowed in the main wards. They had to be placed out on the verandah because they were black. That was the mind-set at that stage; I was not around then. We now need to move away from that. A lot of our people still have that—the treatment that our people got by presenting to government or mainstream services—in memory. You also have to keep in mind—and it is still in the mentality of some of our elders today—the fear they have of presenting to a public hospital or a mainstream service, because they see it all as government. Those fears still exist today—although not among the young, like me. There are a lot of reasons why our people did not and still do not access mainstream services.

**CHAIR**—I asked the question because, while that is an important part of it—and we have spent quite a lot of time talking about the capacity of Aboriginal people—turning it on its head, we have to talk about the capacity of systems and of mainstream society. You could use any example that you like, but in your case it is the capacity of the mainstream health services of Victoria being able to move forward. Do you see what I am saying?

**Ms Gallagher**—I know what you are saying.

**CHAIR**—You might have a couple of clues for us about how a health system in Victoria would assist that.

**Ms Gallagher**—First up, we could assist that if state government took more responsibility and accountability for Indigenous health in this state. That is fundamentally the pivotal area. VACCHO is a part of that. VAACKH, as Daniel mentioned before, is the peak forum to deal with Indigenous health issues in this state. There are other forums nationally right across the board. State governments sit on that forum, but they always seem to shrug off responsibility for Indigenous health. I have not got the answer to how we move forward, but a lot of our organisations are showing the way. A lot of our community controlled health organisations are starting to develop very good networks with mainstream services within their own area. That is how you do it. Our organisations need the capacity to be able to engage with mainstream services.

**CHAIR**—In some ways you could make a case that you should not have to, but that is where the leadership is coming from.

**Ms Gallagher**—That is right. It is not just the cliché phrase of ‘let’s provide a public hospital with some cross-cultural training’. That is not the only answer. Hospital liaison officer positions are vital to that. They can engage in our community and inform people about accessing public hospitals to their full potential. There are issues around that, but that is one way of developing those networks with our services and public hospitals. The important thing is our organisations

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having the capacity to develop good networks with mainstream services within their own areas. Before I go on, are you aware of Primary Care Partnerships, which is an initiative that this state government has implemented?

**CHAIR**—I have not heard of it.

**Ms Gallagher**—Primary Care Partnerships is a program that DHS implemented. They have set up catchment areas in Victoria where all health providers come together and work in partnership. That has been going for four or five years now, but at the very last minute when developing that program they had a light-bulb experience, which was to say: ‘There are Aboriginal health organisations out there that need to be engaged in the Primary Care Partnerships. They could benefit from that.’ So the train has left the station and we are running alongside, trying to jump on. Big demands have been placed on the CEOs of these organisations. DHS say: ‘We need you involved in the Primary Care Partnerships. We need you involved in the statement of intent’—that is another policy initiative—‘We need you involved in this.’ We cannot cope with the demand. The need is there and it is important that we do cope with it, but we cannot cope with the demand placed on organisations to have input into every government policy.

**CHAIR**—I think Victoria has one of the largest, if not the largest, educational and health systems. They are the two big ones. They need billions and billions of dollars, and alongside that you are saying that you are small organisations and that they are asking you to respond to this large beast, if you like?

**Ms Gallagher**—Yes; that is exactly what it is. Our organisation stood back and said: ‘We don’t really understand what this Primary Care Partnerships program is all about. We don’t understand whether it’s going to be good for our people or whether it’s going to be bad.’ And that is where it is at.

**Ms HOARE**—I want to pursue another area, but still on this issue. When you were talking about partnerships with mainstream health care providers and you said that it is not about providing cultural awareness training to staff in the local hospital, could it be about providing exchange programs for staff on, say, a 12-month-swap program? Do you have a non-Indigenous person in a mainstream hospital who comes out to work with the Aboriginal Health Service and vice versa? Does that happen?

**Ms Gallagher**—To my knowledge that does not happen. The idea has been bandied around for many years, but no-one has taken the initiative to run with it. I think it is a great concept but I do not think it is the only answer, because you have to change the mind-set. I do not know how you change mind-set. For example, Jill Gallagher has presented at the Brunswick Community Health Centre, and they say, ‘But you’re Koori; you need to go to the Aboriginal Health Service.’ Anyone Koori or anyone black gets told, ‘You need to go to your own services.’ That is the mind-set, and public hospitals have that mind-set.

I think I raised before that hospital liaison officers are pivotal in encouraging our people to access public hospitals. But there is a dilemma in that if you stick an Aboriginal person in a big public hospital and the role of these liaison officers is to engage Aboriginal communities to access these services—and I mean all the services of the public hospital system, not just one little service—what happens when I go in to St Vincent’s Hospital is: ‘I don’t treat you. I don’t

see you. You've got to go and see the hospital liaison officer.' That is not the role of the hospital liaison officer. So it is about changing that mind-set.

I can give you examples of where a lot of our people have not accessed all the services offered, especially in the social work area. It is all expected to fall on one person's shoulders. Because you are black, the response is, 'We don't provide the service; the Aboriginal liaison officer does.' How do you change that mind-set? I do not know.

**Ms HOARE**—That is the challenge.

**Ms Gallagher**—That is the challenge. I think your suggestion about exchange programs is a great idea.

**Ms HOARE**—Thank you, Jill. We have had a lot of discussion around economic capacity and education and skills employment capacity, but we have not had a lot of discussion about political capacity. Your submission has spoken about this capacity; can you expand on that a little further for us?

**Ms Gallagher**—Daniel, feel free to jump in.

**Mr James**—I guess one of the main issues for Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal people is that we look to senior public servants within the Public Service to make decisions or make recommendations to senior decision makers on our behalf. One of the great frustrations is that we do not actually have people in senior enough positions within the Public Service, within political parties or within the political process who we can rely upon to advocate on our behalf at the highest levels. That is what we were trying to point out in the submission—it would be great if the Aboriginal community could be encouraged more by political parties or by governments to engage in the political process a little bit more so that we can have a real impact.

As I said, it is quite frustrating and it puts senior public servants in an awkward position. The community actually blames the public servants for a lot of decisions that the government has made and stuff like that, so they are caught between a rock and a hard place. I guess what we really need is Koori people, Aboriginal people, in the decision-making areas, where they make the decisions and they are then fully accountable to their constituents and, to a certain extent, the community and their party. As long as they are in a decision-making process, that is very helpful to any cause that Aboriginal people might have. I know that they may be restrained by their duties to their political party or their party, full stop. But it would be nice to see more Koori and Aboriginal people involved in the political process at a parliamentary level.

**Ms Gallagher**—One example is that some time ago the local government in Victoria had a big campaign to recruit Aboriginal people into local government. To me that is a foot in; that is a start and makes it easy. They actually employed an Aboriginal person at the local government area to look at developing strategies across Victoria—that is, how can we recruit or encourage Aboriginal people to engage in the political process?

**Ms HOARE**—It is a vexing question, because I believe that we as members of political parties have a role in encouraging Aboriginal people to be members of and participate in political parties as well as providing a career structure within our own parties. However, once

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we are elected we have a constituency to represent. I think Senator Aden Ridgeway found himself in a difficult position. Is his constituency the Aboriginal people or is his constituency all the people of New South Wales? Then we have members of parliament who do have a large Aboriginal constituency, such as Barry Wakelin, Warren Snowdon and Barry Haase, who do go in to bat for their Aboriginal constituents because they are part of the constituency that they are there to represent—or do you have designated Aboriginal seats in the parliament where the constituency of that person is Aboriginal people?

**Ms Gallagher**—It is interesting. I do not have the answers.

**Ms HOARE**—I do not either.

**CHAIR**—But it is something that is very worth while discussing—

**Ms Gallagher**—I think so.

**CHAIR**—and you have brought it forward because it is very important to Aboriginal people's future as well as the nation's future.

**Ms Gallagher**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—It is well worth canvassing because I suspect, from Daniel's perspective about the advocacy at the senior level, that it is a frustration that many constituents feel, regardless of their background. They feel that there is a sense of powerlessness wherever you sit. In fact, we had a corporate person in earlier who was talking about Aboriginal people coming alongside, say, a Rio Tinto, saying: 'We're not making people listen. Can you help us?' Rio Tinto said yes, and they can make people listen. So that is an example.

**Mr James**—We need to be realistic in understanding that, if an Aboriginal person does make it to the federal House of Representatives, they are not there solely for Aboriginal people. But what they do bring is their experience, contacts, expertise and advice. That will inevitably help shape government policy in one way or another. I think it is a point that needs to be discussed further.

**CHAIR**—It is good to have these discussions. We are not going to resolve this issue here today, but we highlight it and we see the importance of it. We had your new commissioner appear before us earlier today and it was refreshing to hear what he had to say. Yesterday, at Warrnambool, we met his replacement on the regional council.

**Ms Gallagher**—Tim.

**CHAIR**—Yes, that is right. There was also a lovely young woman there called Jodie Ryan, who is on the regional council and is an accountant. She was a very good advocate. You have got many good advocates.

**Ms Gallagher**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I do not have anything else to add, other than to thank you very much. You might like to sum up.

**Ms Gallagher**—In closing, another issue we are grappling with—I do not know whether we identified it in our submission or not—is VACCHO, which is the Aboriginal peak body for health in this state. It is supposed to provide a policy direction for government and our own mob and also advocate on behalf of Aboriginal organisations that have a health focus and so on. We are frustrated by the mechanisms that are put in place to enable a peak body such as ours to provide that advice to governments. We find it frustrating, in fulfilling our responsibilities and duties to our member organisations, to have so many doors to open, mostly within the state government. In the discussion that you had with Bev earlier she talked about ATSIC and how it does not reflect the voice of all people. There are broader issues around that point, but from a health perspective we find things quite difficult here in Victoria because we have—and you are probably aware of this—the PAC, the Premier’s Advisory Committee.

**CHAIR**—That was mentioned earlier.

**Ms Gallagher**—The PAC advises the Premier on all issues to do with Aboriginal communities. ATSIC have an environmental health portfolio but they do not have a health portfolio. The issue that I have been grappling with since I have been CEO—which has not been a very long time; only 18 months—is how I open up those pathways so that VACCHO, as the peak body, can go to government at the highest level in this state and say, ‘These are the issues that are out there in the community. How can we deal with them?’ We cannot do it through ATSIC because the mechanisms are not set up for that to happen, yet you have got the PAC advising the Premier and there is no advice going up to him on Indigenous health issues.

**CHAIR**—That is an excellent point. It just shows where the weaknesses are. Thank you for that. It picks up that point of mine about how we regularly talk about community capacity with Aboriginal people but how we do not talk about the other end, and that other end is equally important. In many cases it is more important because that is where some decisions can be made which can make a stronger difference. Thank you, Jill and Daniel.



[1.53 p.m.]

**ATKINSON, Mrs Geraldine, President, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.**

**BAMBLETT, Mr Lionel, General Manager, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. You have a statement prepared, by the look of it.

**Mrs Atkinson**—I have.

**CHAIR**—Maybe you could make a precis of that—take a few minutes and pick out what you think is relevant.

**Mrs Atkinson**—All right. I will talk about who we are and what the organisation is that I represent. It is a state-wide Koori controlled, community controlled organisation. It comprises 27 local Aboriginal education consultative groups that are located across the state. We have five office bearers and eight education specialist representatives. Those eight include representatives of early childhood education, primary schools, secondary schools, tertiary education, independent schools, Catholic schools, TAFE—vocational education and training—and I am trying to think of the other one. I know there are eight. What have I missed, Lionel?

**Mr L. Bamblett**—It covers all the sectors from early childhood right through to tertiary.

**Mrs Atkinson**—We have representatives that cover all sectors of education. As I said, we are the peak advisory body to the state government in relation to education policy and strategic programming. So at local, regional and state levels we are represented. We make sure that we provide education and training that reinforce our community's cultural identity.

**CHAIR**—How often would you meet? You would have a local and a regional meeting. Then, at the state level, are you down to two or three key people? How does it work in terms of feeding into the department, into the ministerial—

**Mrs Atkinson**—I will give you an outline of how we are structured across the state. In our local areas we have local Aboriginal education consultative groups, which are made up of volunteers—parents and other people interested in the education of the Koori students in their communities. They meet regularly and discuss the current issues in education—what is impacting on schools within their area.

Those LAECGs, the local Aboriginal education consultative groups, are represented on a regional Koori education committee which has representatives from the schools sector, the department of education and at principal level. The chairs of those LAECGs are represented on the regional Koori education committees. We meet about four, perhaps five, times a year, depending on circumstances and what issues are arising with education and what decisions have to be made. We meet about four times a year on a state-wide basis, as VAEAI, with the

committee of management. That is as an entire committee of management, which is the 27 LAECG specialist representatives.

Then we have other meetings of just the office bearers. We have subcommittees which are made up of the specialist representatives, the office bearers. For example, if there were an issue like early childhood, we would have an early childhood subcommittee. We meet with the Department of Human Services representatives, who are responsible for early childhood in this state. We had the status previously of being an industry training board, so we also have a subcommittee made up of specialist representatives—our vocational education and training representatives—and adult and further education representatives and office bearers, to discuss issues relevant to TAFE training in the state. We have tertiary higher education meetings. We were represented on higher education committees. I do not know whether you have heard of the Deakin program at the Institute of Koorie Education—as president, I chair that board. We are also represented on the Koori boards of other tertiary institutions. So there are those meetings. As a matter of fact, there seem to be meetings forever in relation to Koorie education in this state. That is not all of it, but that is an example of what we do.

**CHAIR**—There is a great active interest across the sectors—across, as you say, the various specialty areas—and to the senior levels.

**Mrs Atkinson**—If you look at the Yalca partnership document, that is reinforced. We had a policy document from 1990 that gave us a partnership with the Victorian state government on Aboriginal education. That Yalca document has reinforced that partnership. We had it with the early Kirner Labor government and then with the Kennett government—they also signed and agreed to the partnership—and we reinforced it with Premier Bracks in 2001.

**CHAIR**—It has your signature and that of Premier Bracks, so it is given that status and strength.

**Mrs Atkinson**—Yes, so any decisions that are made regarding Aboriginal education within this state and which are going to be made by policy have to come to our organisation and we have to—

**CHAIR**—So there is a very clear message of community linkage right through?

**Mrs Atkinson**—Yes, that is right.

**CHAIR**—That is very important.

**Ms HOARE**—Has the Premier been out to Gowrie Street?

**Mrs Atkinson**—No—he has been to Shepparton, but he has not been to Gowrie Street.

**Ms HOARE**—I think that the Premier should visit Gowrie Street.

**Mrs Atkinson**—He should!

**CHAIR**—So that Lionel knows what we are going on about, we were there on the big day for Manega—as I keep saying, not to be confused with Manuka in Canberra, which some of us are familiar with—and, for me, anyway, it was really quite inspiring and exciting. We ended up having a cup of tea and holding you up—you had to go somewhere.

**Mrs Atkinson**—Yes, I had interviews.

**CHAIR**—There was quite a buzz there. The explanation of the separate development issue that the principal spoke of was that everyone mixes on the ground and that it is a choice. I thought that it was really good to give people those options—they could go that way if they chose to. It was quite exciting and interesting for me and I think for Kelly as well.

**Ms HOARE**—The reason I asked whether the Premier had visited was that you are the peak advisory body to the government and I think that, during our discussions the other day, you said that Gowrie Street is the only school in Victoria which has—

**Mrs Atkinson**—An annexe, yes. But we do have other schools. I may have mentioned the other day that we also have Koori Open Door Education schools. We have four within the state. We have one in Mildura, one at Swan Hill, one here in Glenroy and one at Morwell. The principle of those is similar to our Manega annexe, but they have prep. In fact, some of them have kindergarten through to year 12.

**Ms HOARE**—Sorry, I misunderstood. I thought that there were some obstacles to the program being expanded.

**Mrs Atkinson**—It is just that Manega has been going for over 20 years and the Koori Open Door Education schools have only been in operation since—

**Mr L. Bamblett**—I think it was 1987.

**Mrs Atkinson**—I do not think so—I think it was about 1997.

**Mr L. Bamblett**—It is one of those sevens, anyway.

**CHAIR**—Your enthusiasm and passion comes through. What can we do? These are predominantly state matters, but we are acutely aware of how important these issues are. You heard me prattling on about literacy and numeracy to the principal the other day, and we were talking about focus and function. We had a wonderful experience in Warrnambool. I was talking to an Aboriginal lad and I said, ‘I don’t know about school—it is a bit of a pain in the butt.’ He said, ‘No, school is good, you should come along and meet my mates—but the classroom staff, I hate that.’ That broke us up. But therein lies our dilemma. It is not just Aboriginal kids; it is every kid. How do we engage them and make it relevant? We talked a bit about the retention rates and how you link to the high schools and all of that stuff. We talked a bit about it earlier today. Can we just talk a bit about where we are at with it and how we challenge them? It is a state matter, I know, but we are acutely aware of it at the Commonwealth level and we sometimes try to support some of the programs. How do we develop the capacity or whatever word you want to use—how do we engage?

**Mr L. Bamblett**—It is actually a Commonwealth matter. The 1967 referendum made the Commonwealth responsible for policies to do with Aboriginal people. In education and training, it is about growing and empowering the community to be involved. Structures and systems have been put there. One policy document, Yalca, outlines partnership. As Geraldine touched on, we think the partnership in education in 1990 was probably the first one in the country between Koori community representatives and government. This is a flow-on from that, but it also fundamentally shifts the focus. The 1990 partnership was about provision to the services and making the services more amenable to accepting and welcoming Koori students. This is saying, 'We've done that. We've had 10, 12 or 15 years of that, so let's now look at making the student the centre of all planning and activity.'

In Victoria, we have some innovative programs, which will welcome students and provide outcomes. There has been a great increase in participation rates. Most policies, from the Commonwealth to the state level, have been focused on participation rates and not that heavy concentration on outcomes. What we want now are outcomes. The focus is now being put on students and outcomes. We are saying, 'Let's focus on the student; let's get the student to the table.' You can have the best programs in the world but, if you do not have the students sitting at the desk in the learning environment, they are not going to learn. The national absenteeism rate is abysmal.

We should concentrate now—through IESIP, the AEP, state policies and state programs—on revisiting how to access the community and grow the community's participation at all levels. The attempts through those structures that Geraldine spoke on—the Yalca, the regional, local and state formatting, and structural and policy arrangements—are about that: having the community participate. When I came to this job in 1985, we had representation from about five communities across the state on our management committee. We now have 27 communities represented. That is not because of me; I am not saying that. It is because of time and involvement from the communities in growing that participation. We now want the outcomes.

Another strategy is about running early childhood centres. In 1990, our two key priority areas were early childhood and adult education. To this day, that has not changed. They are still the priority areas. We would like to grow the capacity for a community to be involved in the management of early childhood centres and steer that.

**CHAIR**—Lionel, what is the literacy and numeracy rate for Aboriginal people in Victoria?

**Mr L. Bamblett**—It is below the benchmark, but it is building to a target.

**CHAIR**—I saw some figures today on the retention rates.

**Mr L. Bamblett**—I am not quite sure of the actual levels. What I was going to come to eventually—I get a bit longwinded sometimes—is the targets. The targets that people from the Commonwealth and the state are agreeing to are remedial. All policies and programs in relation to Aboriginal education, coming from the Commonwealth and the state, have a remedial base. The state is addressing the IESIP targets and policy, but that is a remedial base and it is a catch up. Equity—if that is your target and your focus—cannot be achieved. When we aim for something, that group aims for something else. When we get to that, they have gone to something else. It is forever a catch-up process. We are talking about growing the community's involvement so that community members are party to the decision-making and planning

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processes and have ownership. We are also talking about being adventurous in setting limits and targets that we want to achieve so that we can get to that point.

**CHAIR**—I appreciate all of that. If it should be exclusively the Commonwealth then we need to explore that, but the reality is that at the moment we have a state structure and state administration. I am really interested in the practical—or what one fellow called the ‘natural evolution’—and the difference between getting someone interested in education and their seeing the value of education. We talked about what happens if they do not see the value or they do see the value. We had comments from a corporate earlier about an incentive in a certain community being linked to the child going to school and achieving a certain attendance record and to the parent. That was in a discrete community for a couple of years. Corporates are very wary—and rightly so—of being seen as interfering but, if they have some different and innovative approaches and take different risks or whatever, why not? I am just trying to find out how we engage people. What are the things you have learned over the last 10 or 20 years?

**Mr L. Bamblett**—We believe we are on the right track. On our web site—it is in one of those documents there—there is a study we did in about 1997 that we called ‘Communities are building solid foundations’. The reason we gave it that label is that, when we did that study, we found that three-quarters of our population in Victoria were in some form of education and training—three-quarters of our population—but they were not getting the outcomes. They were not achieving the VCE rates and they were not getting the outcome rates in TAFEs, although they were in universities to that level. Per head of population, the TAFE participation by our community is probably the highest in the country, but we are not getting the outcomes. Now we have a strategy that we hope will address that.

At the same time it is about valuing. We are now saying to the system that the states have a constitutional responsibility to deliver education to our people the same as anyone else and it is about time the states lived up to that. The Commonwealth also has a responsibility from the 1967 referendum to support and develop that. We are saying to the Commonwealth and the state, ‘Live up to those responsibilities.’ Our communities are saying that they are willing to participate; you cannot have three-quarters of your population in education and training unless they want to be there. We are saying, ‘Sit down and talk to our community. Our community has worked very hard to put in place a structure and a process that will grow our community’s participation. Let’s work together to do that.’

I have to say that some of the states are working to do that—this state is working to do that—but it is also a resource question. We are saying that, if we want to move the target from there to there, it is most certainly a resource question, because to be ambitious and get to that point we have to also make sure that we put the resources in place to do it. It is no good doing it piecemeal. If we do it piecemeal, we will be back here in another 10 years saying the same thing.

**CHAIR**—You made an excellent point about so much of the Aboriginal education targets being remedial.

**Mr L. Bamblett**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—That one word sums up what we have to gradually move away from towards the same base level. We have a way to go, but that surely would be our aim, wouldn’t it, to move away from ‘remedial’?

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**Mr L. Bamblett**—Yes.

**Ms HOARE**—You mentioned a study which showed that three-quarters of Aboriginal people were in education and training. I do not doubt that at all, so please do not take this as being indicative of any doubt. But a lot of the little kids who are enrolled in school are not going. How do we get them there? It is a big question but it is one that this committee have asked many groups who have come before us, particularly when we have travelled to more remote communities—not in Victoria but in South Australia and in the Northern Territory. The kids are not going to school, and their folks are not making them go.

**Mr L. Bamblett**—That is right. We sat in a meeting about three years ago and negotiated targets. We attend all of those meetings between the state and the Commonwealth about the targets for IESIP. They were talking about absenteeism rates. The target was to achieve half a percentage point increase per annum on attendance rates. I nearly fell off the chair. I actually burst out laughing and said, 'If you set those target levels, we'll come back here in 20 years time'—not 10 years time—'and still be talking about the same thing.'

We do live in a society that displays racism—let us be honest and open here. Schools reflect the communities that surround them. Racism is rampant throughout Victoria, the same as anywhere else. Our kids are not made to feel welcome in some of those places. We are saying that the system has a legal responsibility to make our kids feel welcome. Targeted funding needs to be increased to make sure that we are getting the kids to the schools, getting them to the learning environment; and, if we cannot get them to the learning environment, taking the learning environment to the children, taking it to the community, taking it to community education centres. Let us grow the literacy rates, because if we do not have the literacy rates in those early years of schooling our kids are marking time until they are legally able to leave school. The statistical data shows our kids looking like they are falling off a cliff face at the end of year 9. They go along from primary to junior secondary, and at 15 they are gone.

**Mrs Atkinson**—It is because they have not been engaged and because of low literacy and numeracy levels.

**Ms HOARE**—I will take this one step further, and I know we are pressed for time.

**CHAIR**—That is fine. This is very important.

**Ms HOARE**—At the moment we have the kids who are not going to school, who are not being educated, under whatever circumstances. Their parents had not been educated, so their parents are not encouraging attendance at school. I understand about the racism. I have it in schools in my own community. But the generation of children who are supposed to be at school, being educated now, are themselves going to be parents.

**Mrs Atkinson**—That is right, and the pattern will continue. There has to be a change. That is what we are working to do within our communities. You visited our community and saw what we tried. We have alternatives. You have to look at alternative ways of doing things. We do need more resources. That is just one community that has had a resource.

**Ms HOARE**—We need more square pegs, don't we?

**Mrs Atkinson**—Yes. People have screamed heaps and said, ‘We want this situation addressed.’ There are communities where that does not happen. We need to be able to resource communities throughout the entire state—the entire country, as far as I am concerned. We have had Aboriginal education workers in this state from 1982, I think. We call those education workers Koori educators. Lionel, how long has it been that we have had the one level?

**Mr L. Bamblett**—1976.

**Mrs Atkinson**—Since 1976 we have had no increase in the numbers. We have had them in schools. In some towns we have had one education worker, one resource, trying to work with over 400 kids. We do need more resources. We were given in the new IESIP funding some positions for Koori home-school liaison people so that we can address the attendance problem. How many were we given for the state?

**Mr L. Bamblett**—Four.

**Mrs Atkinson**—It was four—to address how many Koori children within the state, Lionel?

**Mr L. Bamblett**—Please do not ask me that! A lot.

**Mrs Atkinson**—We have 700 in—

**CHAIR**—I think there are 5,000.

**Mrs Atkinson**—We have 650 in Shepparton and Mooroopna—so you can imagine. There has to be a way of looking at this. We want to put in place education centres so we can change the pattern, so we can change parents’ attitudes. We want to work with parents and say, ‘It is important that your children attend school every day. They have to be there for the literacy and numeracy lessons. They can’t come late because schools are structured in a particular way and there’s a lesson your children have to learn.’ We work in the early childhood area and that is where we have to start. We have to start at the very beginning to ensure that our Koori kids are getting through and completing VCE, or even getting to year 9 and being able to read and write and become numerate.

**CHAIR**—Do you feel that you have made significant progress?

**Mrs Atkinson**—Yes, but we have to make sure that the model that operates is similar to models that are operating throughout the country.

**CHAIR**—Can I go to the next stage in terms of employment and the linkage—the impossible dream, it would be fair to say, and the perception of the young ones who ask, ‘Where am I going to get a job?’ The impact is debilitating and they ask, ‘Why?’ The big challenge is in developing employment opportunities for the 17-, 18- and 20-year-olds. Have we made much of a dent in that?

**Mrs Atkinson**—No. You have highlighted to me that we have a lot more work to do.

**CHAIR**—I am sorry about that! This is 200-year stuff here; we are not going to come by with the moon tomorrow.

**Mrs Atkinson**—That is true, because you have to take into consideration all the other factors that impact on our kids within country towns, within regional centres. There is a whole range of things: racism is there. You have to say that that is one of the things that impact on our kids and the reason they do not attend school—why parents will not send their children to school.

**CHAIR**—But you were beating it, largely by your own efforts.

**Mrs Atkinson**—That is right, because we are working to make sure that our kids get those opportunities.

**CHAIR**—It is all about picking up one or two little clues. We know it is resourcing; we know it is the Commonwealth and the state working together; we know it is offering a little more hope than was there before; we know it is about parents who say they are committed. At Manega the other day we saw that those things are little clues to the future.

**Mrs Atkinson**—That is right.

**Mr L. Bamblett**—It goes back to what we were touching on. Our communities have been involved in this process for many years now and we know the answer—it is within those documents—and it is about growing. It is about growing communities' participation and involvement as equal partners in policy and planning processes.

It is also about targeting and it is support. It is a resource question, and it is a resource question that has to be addressed by the Commonwealth and state working together; otherwise it is a scattergun approach. You are not going to achieve the outcomes that people want and desire in the short and medium term unless the resource question is advanced. It is no good saying that there is this usage of taxpayers' dollars over there and it is overused at the moment, because it is not. At the moment there is a remedial focus and it is about access, not outcomes. There are a couple of national strategies that can be rejigged to actually fit that. One is Partners in a Learning Culture—that is ANTA's Aboriginal and Islander training strategy—and the Victorian response to that, and we have presented that to you, and the other is the IESIP arrangement.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for coming.



[2.30 p.m.]

**BAMBLETT, Mr Alfred John, Chairperson, Aborigines Advancement League; and Executive Officer, Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd**

**MITCHELL, Mr Colin, Manager, Koorie Diabetes Service Victoria**

**SMITH, Mr Doug, Project Worker, Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr Smith**—I am a project worker with a men's program which is auspiced through VACSAL.

**Mr Mitchell**—It is my job to think up better strategies for prevention and management of diabetes for Aboriginal people state wide.

**CHAIR**—That is a pretty important issue.

**Mr Mitchell**—Yes. It is a big problem all round but, at the moment, in the Koori community it is a big problem. The strategies we come up with will hopefully empower the health workers and the medical services and get through to the regions that way. Hopefully, we can teach them how to look after themselves.

**CHAIR**—Thanks, Colin. Alf, can you describe your organisation? You might like to make an opening statement. You have probably done this sort of thing before. To kick things along and get things going, we want to know the situation with your organisation and your main message to us.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—The history of the organisation and its structure is outlined in the papers I gave you. It started out as a government run committee that involved Aboriginal people with the Victorian Department of Community Welfare Services, now the Victorian Department of Human Services. We went through a process and decided that, if it is about us, it should be run by us. At the end of 1991 an Aboriginal organisation was established—the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association. Using this organisation as a vehicle, in the area of community welfare and support programs Aboriginal people were able to say, 'This is the way we'll do things.'

We went through a whole history of negotiation and debate with the state department about what should happen and about how we should be a peak organisation that actually runs programs and those sorts of things. The network of Victorian Aboriginal agencies that were, and still are, members of VACSAL have a number of programs. The latest of those is an employment service. We have developed to a place where we have been able to tender through the national Job Futures network, and we hope that next month we will get a favourable response to our bid.

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There are a number of other things, including men's programming. At least 50 per cent of the population are men, but you do not find 50 per cent of the resources for men's programs. If we are going to resolve some of the issues in our communities in this state and nationally, because we also do things nationally, and if we are to be involved in family violence—we have been involved in that, as one of our key things, over time—then there is a need to make sure we have men's programs so that we can do something about family violence.

The state of Victoria funded a Koori diabetes program for a period of time. It was almost defunct. We came along and got involved with it. So under the aegis, if you like, of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association, the Koorie Diabetes Service is now happening and getting bigger. We have employed Colin Mitchell and a young lady for that.

There is a juvenile justice program that we are funded for. We provide accommodation as an alternative to juvenile justice centres. We have access and advocacy workers. It is about trying to make sure that if someone is picked up by the police there is a response to it from our workers. Our people visit juvenile justice centres. They do court advocacy work with the young people in terms of trying to look for jobs and education programs and so on, so it is a support base and a support agency for them. There is an accommodation program and, can I say, a program arm to it.

**CHAIR**—Short-stay accommodation.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—Yes. So if the kids go to court and the offence is something that is not too serious then, in fact, there is an alternative to being incarcerated. That is the juvenile justice program. We have a number of positions around community development. Some are based in the country and some are based in the city, so it is about working with community groups that can be anything from age care to early childhood programs or whatever, assisting communities in a support role. We let people across the state know that in fact they are not on their own. So those sorts of things are a central part of what we do. We can be involved in industrial relations issues and provide support for organisations in that way, and then there are incorporation issues and those types of things through to submission writing, referral to appropriate agencies and so on.

We are involved in a number of other programs. There was the establishment of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee under recommendations 1 and 2 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. We had that under the funding of ATSIC for a time as one of the programs that was based at our centre—ATSIC sought funding for it three years ago—but we have managed to secure some funding, so that still happens. We were instrumental in the development of the justice agreement that Victoria in its record of achievement refers to as a notable—

**CHAIR**—That is quite a list. The Koori courts—

**Mr A. Bamblett**—The Koori courts, which you heard about at Shepparton, were one of the programs that actually came out of that justice agreement.

**CHAIR**—We dropped in and had a chat to them. We talked to them in the morning and we dropped in during the afternoon.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—It is quite an achievement. South Australia has a Nunga Court, and Queensland has a Murri Court, but it is certainly something that we figure will bear some real fruit for us in the longer term.

**CHAIR**—Yes, it is quite remarkable, isn't it? In fact, I sat around the table like they do and then they said, 'Go and sit up where the magistrate sits.' It is quite different, isn't it? The body language and everything is different.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—Yes. In some of our capacities in different things, either through business or through the organisation and involving VACSAL, we have run cross-cultural for the judiciary in this state. We have had them go away for the weekend and stay at the one place. They have been able to have the sort of program where they are exposed, if you like, to the stories from Aboriginal people, the things that are there and the things that they need to be aware of when Aboriginal people front them. It has borne some good fruit. We have made some good friends out of it, and there are people who have worked pretty well in terms of the Koori Court and other things. One of the other things that has been really important has been the breaking down of the barriers or the mystique surrounding court, because when you go to court there is someone in that seat you sat in yesterday—the powerful one—and in many ways courts are a foreign place to most people.

**CHAIR**—The elder is sitting there and you have the young bloke across there. It is totally different from before. You have the family at the back or just alongside. It is a totally different ball game.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—That is right. Some of the people who have been involved, such as Kate Auty—I am not sure whether you met Kate in Shepparton—and Robert Kumar, one of the people who will be out at Broadmeadows Magistrates' Court, which is being opened on 4 March, are quite good. Nonetheless, I have some statistics that say very clearly that the overrepresentation rate continues to rise. You are about 12 times more likely to be in a juvenile justice centre if you are an Aboriginal person than you are if you are a non-Aboriginal person. Removal from families at an early age, leading to introduction to the justice system, is a great problem. A lot of the young people we get are kids who have been removed from their families. I am not sure whether you have spoken to the Aboriginal Child Care Agency?

**CHAIR**—I do not think so.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—There are about 500 Aboriginal children in this state, at this time, who have been removed from their families.

**CHAIR**—I saw that written in a document. I have not spoken to them, but I have seen the numbers.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—About half of those children have been placed outside their family, outside their extended family and outside their community. They have actually been placed with non-Indigenous families, and that will create, in time to come, the situation where we are regurgitating stolen generations.

**CHAIR**—We have been there and done that.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—That is right. It is a regurgitation of stolen generations. Those are the sorts of problems that we face: removal of children from families in early childhood, and all the problems that go with that, and then graduation to juvenile justice. I was told today that out at Port Phillip Prison, one of the prisons here in Melbourne, there are 17 inmates under the age of 25. Twenty-five is still the age of youth. All of those figures are there. I would like to cover the bigger picture stuff first, and then we can go through it. In Victoria, we had a 16 per cent increase in the Aboriginal population in the latest census. We will not get a 16 per cent increase in resources to provide services. The population increase comes from two things. One is natural birth figures and the other one is more people identifying. It means that our organisation, along with other organisations in this state, will be looking—now and increasingly as we go through—for service provision. That is the way things go.

**CHAIR**—I am glad you touched on that, because we have not touched on that enough. We need to think about that. I am so glad you have mentioned it.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—I have two sheets of figures here. Fifty-seven per cent of the Aboriginal population in Victoria are under the age of 24. The other 43 per cent are 24 to 60-plus. We have a very young population. We start having children from 15 on, and we will have a greater demand on the agencies for service provision. In five years time we will have to start to think about how we are going to provide services for young—and in lots of cases single—mums or dads; that is actually increasing. There is a thing about supply and demand, and I have drawn a couple of diagrams. I have one here that is, I think, pretty indicative. On one side I have shown demand and, on the other, supply. It is pretty rough and not to scale, but it gives you a picture of where we are. We are not funded for the group shown, but we are expected to provide a service to those people. It is not our way not to, and it is not the sort of thing where you can say, ‘Okay, we’ve only got enough money to deal with this level of need, so everybody else—see you later.’ If people come to the agency, then we have to provide a service. That is why we are in business. We will forever be behind the ball with this. With an increase of 16 per cent in the Aboriginal population, unless we also have an influx of resources we are going to be further behind in the provision of services. We will not be able to do our job properly, and people will say, ‘You are only looking after a particular mob.’ Those are the sorts of things that will go on.

The other thing that goes with that is that we are seriously understaffed for the things we would like to do. We do not have the programs. We want to try to meet everybody’s needs with a men’s program, a diabetes program, a housing program, a health program and so on. If you go through Victoria, you will see that the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria has done an incredible job with the provision of housing. Once upon a time you could drive down the street and say, ‘That’s an Aboriginal house.’ They were old fibro cement things with wire fences, green in colour—shocking looking things.

You could tell; they were in Wilcannia or somewhere else like that. You would know it was an Aboriginal house. It was the same in Sydney, even. Today, that is not the case, because people are housed much better. The quality of housing has really improved. The quantity is the problem. Looking at education, you would have been told about the needs but also the achievements. People are staying longer at school, and we have people doing things we have never had before. Forty years ago, when I was in third form at Shepparton tech I was the most senior Aboriginal student. Admittedly, that is 40 years ago; nonetheless, that is the history of Aboriginal people. Yet Aboriginal organisations have done wonderfully well. When the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service started here in Melbourne it was basically a GP practice.

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Today, it runs a myriad of programs—prenatal, antenatal, diabetes, senior citizens, youth, dental services and other types of health programs; some of the names I cannot pronounce. All of those things have happened because Aboriginal people have made them happen. The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service was a little shopfront and today it does quite a job in making sure that there is representation for Aboriginal people across the state.

My point is that the Aboriginal organisations have become established and have proved, very clearly, that they can do the job. Before we came in here, I was talking to some young fellas about their history and the things they have seen. I raised the point with them a few days ago: just imagine, if we had been resourced properly, where Aboriginal services would be today. For the last 30 years, Aboriginal people have been making it happen with a minimum. I read somewhere—I am not sure I can quote the source, but I know it was in an article—a speech that someone presented. From the research they had done, they said that if a non-Aboriginal person gets a dollar Aboriginal people get 75c. So we are a quarter behind immediately.

**CHAIR**—We have seen some health figures which are not dissimilar to that. I do not even think they were as good as that, and this was back three or four years ago. Kelly, would you like to come in with a question or two?

**Ms HOARE**—I am going all right. Alf is explaining very well.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—We have a whole heap of statistics, and I can source those and tell you the things that are happening. I want to make it very clear, on behalf of the Aborigines Advancement League and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd—and, I guess, on behalf of Aboriginal Victoria—that we have proved, without a doubt, that Aboriginal people can make things happen. We do not always succeed; we have had organisations fall over.

**CHAIR**—What organisation always succeeds? What mob always does?

**Mr A. Bamblett**—That is true. The comparison to small business, which is what government wants us to run our organisations as, is pretty good. There are successful small businesses, and there are people who have fallen over.

**CHAIR**—We had some people in from the Boston Consulting Group. Have you come across them? They are working with Pearson. They made the point to Pearson that 80 per cent of small businesses go 'head over duck', so we will not get worried about what happens with Indigenous organisations.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—Yes, I understand. Perhaps that is not a good comparison, if 80 per cent go under. That does not happen with us.

**CHAIR**—It is high-risk stuff. All I am saying is that we should not be worried about things going wrong now and again.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—They do. Years ago we took a proposal to ATSIC and the state government to develop a resource agency, so you would be able to do training for community members and establish their roles and responsibilities, you would be able to establish the roles and responsibilities of board members and of CEOs or managers. They told us to have a look at

the Western Australian model and at what they were doing there, and then we could talk again. We declined to do that, because this is Victoria.

**CHAIR**—You have been going along pretty well for a while now.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—Yes. There have been hiccups

**CHAIR**—You have had your moments. How long has your organisation been going for?

**Mr A. Bamblett**—The organisation has been going since 1991. There are heaps of other issues around it. The ATSIIC-funded Community Support Fund ceased to exist, and that took so much out of the administration of and support for Aboriginal organisations.

**CHAIR**—I am interested in the Aborigines Advancement League, which was formed in 1957. It is the oldest Aboriginal organisation in Victoria.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—That is right. In 1938 there was a meeting in Sydney where Aboriginal people came together. It was the introduction of Aboriginal people to national politics. It was trying to do something about the plight of Aboriginal people. From that movement, which was very much a watershed in Aboriginal affairs, came the establishment of the Australian Aborigines League. From the Australian Aborigines League came the Aborigines Advancement League. In the early days, the Aborigines Advancement League was run by non-Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people. It had 53 branches in Victoria, and most of the people—

**CHAIR**—Were they mainly whitefellas?

**Mr A. Bamblett**—Yes, Sir Doug Nicholls, Sir William Wentworth—did he get a knighthood?

**CHAIR**—The former minister, yes.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—He was one of the people, and there was a whole heap of other people. When I first came to Melbourne, when I was but a lad many moons ago, Sir Doug Nicholls was a field officer with the Aborigines Advancement League. There is a whole history of the Aborigines Advancement League. It in fact was pretty much a forerunner organisation—it used to cover court advocacy, health issues and so on; Aboriginal people would go there. In the 1970s, during the Whitlam era, Aboriginal organisations were established, so you had the health service and so on. There is a whole history in Victorian involvement in all of those things, with the Aborigines Advancement League being pretty much a central part of it.

**CHAIR**—Let us move on to the diabetes program. We know diabetes is a serious issue and there is the development of a new program. Six or seven months ago people talked to me about new pharmaceutical techniques. These are quite exciting developments, but they need to be cost effective. Do you know the ones I am talking about? I will not mention the company name, because I do not think the techniques have even been approved, but I am making the point that there needs to be representations to government about the options that are available.

**Mr Mitchell**—At the moment the Koorie Diabetes Service is, more or less, trying to hand it back. We are designing programs where we will train up the health workers, so we are handing the power back to the health workers in their own communities. I have an office based at VACSAL. Naturally, I am not going to test every diabetes patient in Victoria, so my plan is to empower the health services—our medical services. They are the first point of contact for the diabetes patients. If we empower them and make sure they have a diabetes clinic in their own service then we will see a lot more Kooris accessing the services. In the cross-cultural context, next month we are going to Mildura to talk to GPs, specialists, endocrinologists and dieticians about how to work in with the Aboriginal community regarding diabetes.

A lot of Koori people will not go to hospitals, and that is why Aboriginal medical services were set up. We asked them what were the main problems with diabetes management, and they said there were no Aboriginal nutritionists in the state, or virtually in Australia. What has come out of that is that, as we are doing health worker training and so on, we are going to train Aboriginal health workers to take another path—that is, to be nutritionists. They can then be implemented into their own medical services, or wherever they want to work, but the point is that we will have Aboriginal nutritionists working amongst Aboriginal people.

**CHAIR**—Critical primary intervention.

**Mr Mitchell**—It is like a five-year plan. That is the direction we want to go in. Some services have a really good set-up. That is in Melbourne and in a couple of country areas like Rumbalara and Mildura.

**CHAIR**—Rumbalara!

**Mr Mitchell**—In the other areas, if they have not got it, I will go there and talk with the local mainstream GP—

**CHAIR**—If you worked with Rumbalara on this as well, you would get—

**Mr Mitchell**—We fund Rumbalara. They have their program and I have mine. It is designed to give better access to Aboriginals with diabetes. But what is coming out now is that they want to know not just the basics but the full-on stuff from an endocrinologist. That is good. It shows that they want to empower themselves. Instead of coming through to the health service when they are really crook, we want to encourage them in that sense. That is one way we see of helping to fix the diabetes problem—to empower them in their own services and have them accessing the mainstream services as well as the Koori ones. Like I said, some towns do not have their own services.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—There are some other issues. The medication issue is one area where improvements have been made, but at the other end of the scale we have type 2 adult onset diabetes actually coming at an earlier age.

**CHAIR**—Doug, did you want to say something?

**Mr Smith**—Yes. I will add to what I touched on before. I am involved with the men's business. In many ways, it is not new for us—Aboriginal men—to get together and talk. I have been involved for the last 12 months in organising dry gatherings of men talking about men's

issues and taking a stance on issues within the community—for example, zero tolerance to perpetrators in the community. It is very empowering to get together and do that. We are not going to turn our backs on those perpetrators that are in our community—some horrible scenarios, some not so horrible. There are a lot of attitudes out there and past practices that have isolated people, and we are trying to break down that type of isolation and get things like anger management and counselling in place. But for that to happen—and we know that you have probably heard this all day—it needs to be culturally sensitive, it needs to come from the Aboriginal community in a way that can be accessed by brothers et cetera.

The other important point that sticks in my mind through these gatherings is that we are going to work in with the women's business and work together on those issues. So there is no 'secret' men's business as such when it comes to those real social issues of concern. One of the things that comes up is that there are no refuges as such for Aboriginal men. When things do go wrong, for all those other reasons you would have heard today, sometimes—it would appear to be most of the time—it is the wife or the female partner and the kids that get moved from that home environment.

There are big myths out there that we have to deal with. I do not think it is just Aboriginal men that cop this, but it is said that men have the hotel, the local pub, to go to and debrief, have your game of pool, do your blokey stuff. For many of us our experience is that going to the pub creates a whole other ballgame of issues; it perpetuates the problem. Most of the time, as a lot of people have said, we actually meet someone with bigger problems and get drawn into that. So there are quite a few myths out there that men have this place to go to, and that is something that needs to be provided.

Once again, it is at an early stage; it is not new. At this point we are working under the auspices of VACSAL on trying to implement a coordination unit. We have set up a central database, and that needs to have more information coming in. If we can get that information flowing, every Aboriginal man will know or have a card on their fridge with a number to call for all sorts of help. Or they can go to the local co-op and get the secretary or receptionist to look on the Net to find 'Men's Business' and perhaps see that there is a camp or an issue. They need to get that feedback going and break down that isolation.

**CHAIR**—How long have you been going, Doug?

**Mr Smith**—With men's business, I have only been involved for 12 months.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—Since there were men and women—to date, around 46,000 years. They found Mungo Man, and now they have found Mungo Woman.

**CHAIR**—That is a good point. But have you inherited this, or is it a new program for service delivery?

**Mr A. Bamblett**—It is a program for which we received funding under the Office for the Status of Women, I think, for a family violence program. We wanted to focus on children's safety, and we went from there. We said: 'If we're going to do all of these things, we have to have the men involved. We can't isolate people.' We have been involved in the family violence area for a number of years, but it has been in fits and starts, because today you might get



resources but next year you might not, so the program falls by the wayside. We have been going for 12 months with this one.

**CHAIR**—I think this links back to the courts and the whole deal?

**Mr A. Bamblett**—Yes. I do not want to take up too much of your time talking about other things, but there are some things we have done where there have been heaps of problems—for instance, population issues. The laws of supply and demand are very great. We will see more of a focus on that over time. The Commonwealth and the states have a responsibility. The Commonwealth has only had a responsibility since 1967, but the states have had it for a while longer. What is this about? If you talk to these young fellas they will say that they were born as Australian citizens—as national citizens, I guess. That is an indication of where we are coming from.

There is underresourcing of service delivery. We do not have, for instance, access to a policy officer position and we do not have access to research, yet we are called on more and more by government agencies at both the national and the state levels to provide advice, assistance and direction. While we are busy minding the house, we are not able to direct the traffic in the way that we should. We need to make sure that we actually get to the point where we write our own policy, so if a government body or department has a program we would be able to say, 'Here's Aboriginal policy and Aboriginal programming.' We need to have the ability to do that, but we do not have the resources.

I will leave you a copy of details for the leadership program that we ran, and both these young men here were on it. This hearing is not part of the test, but I think they did very well. I said to them, 'Come and have a look.' The results of that program have been great, but it is a one-off program. This year we have 20-odd people who want to go on the program but we have no guarantee of funding. Expectations have been raised and they have seen others do well, but now where do we go? That is the sort of thing we have to think about for the longer term. I do not know whether the social planners that governments use have even begun to think about the direction of Aboriginal affairs in terms of population, growth and the need that is there today and will be in the future.

**CHAIR**—I do not know what can be done, but I do know that is a significant issue.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—We cannot continue to perpetuate the sorts of living conditions that we have for people. We started a thing called the 'Charcoal Institute'—

**Ms HOARE**—Chair, I am sorry, but I have to leave because I have an plane to catch.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, Kelly.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—We had a thing called an 'institute for burned-out blacks'. We laughingly talked about it, but there needs to be the resourcing so we do not get to the place where we continually burn out Aboriginal people. The issue of salary level is always a problem. If good people want better conditions of employment, they can go to government; it is no good being in an Aboriginal organisation. So there are all of those things. There is much more, and it is almost—

**CHAIR**—It is that time of the day. I would love to spend some time just having a yarn, but that is the way of it.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—If you are ever in this part of the country again—

**CHAIR**—Where do you live?

**Mr A. Bamblett**—Our office is at 171 Smith Street. There is always a cup of tea and a yarn there, if you can find someone there.

**CHAIR**—I shall take you up on that.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—You are quite welcome. There are solutions and they are Aboriginal driven—not systemic, not government agency driven—solutions. If we have proven we can make those happen, that will help resources and push the thing for us.

**CHAIR**—Fellas, it has been terrific. Thanks for your time. Good luck with it. I will see you at Smith Street. It is not named after you, is it, Smithy?

**Mr Smith**—No.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—One thing we know is that politicians come and go.

**CHAIR**—Yes, they do.

**Mr A. Bamblett**—Aboriginal issues and Aboriginal needs remain.

**CHAIR**—Right. I have to tell you a story. I was trying to learn some Pitjantjatjara at a course about a month ago—these people have heard this story before and they are sick and tired of hearing it. The Pitjantjatjara term for a stream that is going a bit crooked is ‘kali kali’, and the word for a man is ‘wati’. So if I am a politician, I am a ‘wati kali kali’. They thought that was a hell of a joke, to have politicians a bit crooked!

**Committee adjourned at 3.06 p.m.**