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Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL
AFFAIRS

Reference: Crime in the community

WEDNESDAY, 11 JUNE 2003

WADEYE

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Wednesday, 11 June 2003

Members: Mrs Bronwyn Bishop (*Chair*), Mr Murphy (*Deputy Chair*), Ms Julie Bishop, Mr Cadman, Mr Kerr, Mr Melham, Ms Panopoulos, Mr Sciacca, Mr Secker and Dr Washer

Members in attendance: Mrs Bronwyn Bishop, Mr Cadman, Mr Murphy, Mr Secker and Dr Washer

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The extent and impact of crime and fear of crime within the Australian community and effective measures for the Commonwealth in countering and preventing crime. The Committee's inquiry shall consider but not be limited to:

- a) the types of crimes committed against Australians
- b) perpetrators of crime and motives
- c) fear of crime in the community
- d) the impact of being a victim of crime and fear of crime
- e) strategies to support victims and reduce crime
- f) apprehension rates
- g) effectiveness of sentencing
- h) community safety and policing

WITNESSES

BLISS, Mr Rick, Housing Manager, Kardu Numida Incorporated..... 1071

BRYSON, Divisional Superintendent Richard, Northern Territory Police Force..... 1108

BULLEMOR, Mr Terry, Town Clerk, Kardu Numida Incorporated..... 1071

BUNDUCK, Mr Felix, Joint Chair, Thamarrurr Regional Council 1071

**DEMOS, Ms Suzanne, Helper/Coordinator, Ngepan Patha Centre (Women’s Centre), Palngun
Wurnangat Association 1071**

**McMASTERS, Senior Sergeant Dean, Officer in Charge, Wadeye Police Station, Northern
Territory Police Force..... 1108**

MELPI, Mr Leon, Member, Thamarrurr Regional Council 1071

NARNDU, Mrs Theadora, Joint Chair, Thamarrurr Regional Council..... 1071

Committee met at 10.40 a.m.

BLISS, Mr Rick, Housing Manager, Kardu Numida Incorporated

BULLEMOR, Mr Terry, Town Clerk, Kardu Numida Incorporated

BUNDUCK, Mr Felix, Joint Chair, Thamarrurr Regional Council

DEMOS, Ms Suzanne, Helper/Coordinator, Ngepan Patha Centre (Women's Centre), Palngun Wurnangat Association

MELPI, Mr Leon, Member, Thamarrurr Regional Council

NARNDU, Mrs Theadora, Joint Chair, Thamarrurr Regional Council

Mr Felix Bunduck—Ladies and gentlemen of this committee, welcome.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Before commencing the formal part of the hearing I ask Theadora Narndu, a senior community women and an owner of this country, to welcome you.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—On behalf of the traditional owners of this land, I welcome you on your visit to our community. I ask Mrs Bronwyn Bishop to open the meeting.

CHAIR—Theadora, thank you very much for your very warm welcome. I thank everyone for being here to take part in our hearing and help our committee gain greater knowledge of what is happening within the community and the things that perhaps need to be done in the wider community that we need to know about. We have agreed to begin with a briefing, which Terry will lead and various members of the community will take part in. We will ask questions at the end of the presentation.

Mr Terry Bullemor—On behalf of the community, I will rattle off some statistics about the conditions we live under and about other issues to do with community life. We are one of the largest communities in the Northern Territory and, to the credit of these people, we are at the forefront of innovations in community development. We are fortunate to have been selected as one of eight areas in Australia to take part in an Indigenous communities participation pilot. It is an initiative of the Council of Australian Governments. We see that as a very important exercise, and there is quite a strong commitment from this community to participate in it.

We recently had the signing of a shared responsibility agreement in which Minister Vanstone participated. The Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Clare Martin, and 78 of our community leaders signed a shared responsibility agreement, looking at working together to achieve better outcomes. This community chose to study issues affecting family and women, issues affecting youth and further development of the construction industry. The community chose these issues so that the parameters could be kept as broad as possible, enabling a whole-of-government approach to be taken. We have stayed away from specific issues like health and education because, even with a whole-of-government approach, if mention is made of a main department like the health department, we quickly end up at the health department door with everybody else saying that it is not their responsibility. We are working hard to ensure that this

whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach happens because, in places such as this, there is a great need for improvement in community development outcomes.

The community started off as a mission back in 1935. There was no real permanent housing here until the late sixties and early seventies, so a lot of these people lived very much a traditional life until that time. In 1994 this community had a fairly serious financial and administrative breakdown. That happened because the administration was buried under the weight of trying to service the community. After that breakdown a reconstruction process was started, and it was found that no money had been misappropriated by any community people. Leakages occurred because the community, as a local government structure, was providing and propping up services for either the Commonwealth government or the Northern Territory government. One of the biggest leakages came through our running of the community clinic; it amounted to approximately \$250,000. The grant to the community for that service was well below what was needed. We provide staff accommodation. We also run Centrelink agencies at a substantial loss to ourselves. Some of those things have been corrected and some are still being corrected.

Mission settlement and then the development of the community have caused people to be centralised in this location. These people come from 20 different landowning groups. The structure we work under is Thamarrurr, which is a traditional structure. The elders of the community have delegated responsibility to the middle-aged to turn the structure into a contemporary one, recognising that a need exists for younger people to be participating for the future wellbeing of the community. The mission or incorporation era, when all these places were incorporated into a single group so that governments could do business with them, had a serious impact on the people.

The people originally had a traditional structure like Thamarrurr, where landowning groups came together as a federation to discuss issues. This structure pre-existed white settlement and dates back thousands of years. When the people came out of the crash they said, 'We once had better control of our lives but in the last 20 years or so we have lost it,' and they wanted to regain control. They have made a big effort and have now regained that control. We now work under a traditional structure. It has been recognised by the Northern Territory government under its Local Government Act as a structure for regional governance. It has the support of the people.

The people are very pleased to be participating in the community pilot program out of COAG, because they recognise that both the Territory and the Commonwealth governments have difficulties in getting real outcomes on the ground for the community. Certainly the discussions we have had with the Commonwealth as part of this agreement have shown that the Commonwealth government is a bureaucracy set up to service 20 million people. Of that 20 million, probably two per cent are Aboriginal and two per cent live in remote regions, and the Commonwealth are not particularly good at getting outcomes for them on the ground.

The Territory government adopted mainstreaming policies in the eighties. That also had an impact on community development outcomes in the Territory. Over the last 20 years the front yard of the Territory has got a long way ahead of the backyard, or the backyard has got a long way behind the front yard. The problems we have are horrific and there is certainly a need to address them. Crime in our community is a symptom of the problems that we have today.

Housing occupancy rates here are approximately 17½ persons per three-bedroom house. Over the years we have been building urban type houses that are very difficult for the people to live in, particularly in those numbers. The culture of these people means that they have to practise avoidance procedures, and that is very difficult. In the same house we have young boys and young girls who are not supposed to come into contact with each other, and the shape of the houses makes that difficult. We can change housing designs but, more seriously, it is not likely that we will ever meet the housing needs. For us to achieve an optimum occupancy rate of seven people per three-bedroom house, which would be the norm in an urban situation—or even less than that—we would have to build approximately 280 houses tomorrow. Current funding and funding over the last 10 years indicates that we are not likely to get more than 10 houses per year, certainly in the next 10 years. So we have to get this information out to people and look seriously at ways of making life better.

One way to improve life here is through decentralisation. That is often hard for those in Canberra to understand. Because our need for housing in Wadeye is so high, they say that we should build all the houses here. We say that we have to decentralise—let people get back to their own country where they can live totally different lives. On their own country, people are strong. They have normal structures for control and management within their own families.

We cannot underestimate the damage we have done to these people by dominating them with a series of government type structures, starting with the church and going into the incorporation era. We have also caused something like 90 per cent of these people to be living virtually as migrants on this land—land which belongs to Felix and Theadora. Under their code of ethics, when you are on someone else's land you do not talk out and you do not do certain things. These people are still very gracious and are following codes of ethics they followed over thousands of years. We have created a difficult situation for them. But to their credit they are coming out of it, and they are coming out of it well. I think they have a great future.

Things can happen. A good indication of this is that the food you have just eaten comes from the people's bakery and takeaway business. It is a commercial operation. They negotiated a commercial loan with ATSIC of a bit over \$1.2 million. They meet those payments and they run a tight business. They are tough. They do not give the money away; they put it back into the business. People are helping themselves, but they do need help.

The community has issues with education and health. There are about 800 school-age kids in the community, and regular attendance would be below 200. The Northern Territory government, through its Department of Health and Community Services, is finally starting to address that issue now and accept that it has a responsibility to do so.

When it comes to crime, one of our difficulties concerns the people's understanding of the criminal justice and civil law systems. They understand that both governments, Commonwealth and Territory, are opportunistic about the particular issues they might act on. The governments are active in lots of areas. Northern Territory law is active in the areas of property damage, the Liquor Act, the Traffic Act and things like that, but we have never seen it active in the area of the Education Act. Governments appear to have a problem. When they step onto Aboriginal land they suddenly decide that normal things do not exist any more and it is up to the people to deal with issues of concern. Fair enough; lots of things are up to people, just as in any urban situation. But you have to let people know about the law and there must be some continuity in the system.

We have asked both the Commonwealth government and the Territory government to give us more information. These people need to know about more laws. The laws we have seen in action generally relate to damage, the Liquor Act, the Traffic Act and things like that, but there are a range of laws. These people are starting to workshop the laws. They started off by workshopping governance in Australia. They are very familiar with where this committee comes from, who you are, what you do and that type of thing. They see their own structure as a federation that comes together with the Commonwealth and all its members. When you look at Aboriginal law and contemporary law you can see lots of similarities. We all come from a similar situation, and not so long ago we were probably all living more traditional lifestyles. So these people need information.

We will talk about crime, crime statistics and other things shortly. But crime is only a symptom of other conditions. The coming of the missions had a big impact on these people. The missions brought with them a new God and lots of new commandants, which in some ways seemed to be more powerful than anything the people had out here. That impacted on them. Other things that have happened along the way have pushed their own structures 'under the ground'—in their words—and those things are just gradually returning.

To address the community's problems—and not just crime in the community—you have to look at these people's ability to address their own problems. I have been working with these people for about 20 years. I have every confidence that, if you were to put on the table a number of issues that need to be resolved, these people would come up with the most practical and cost-effective answers.

We hope that, through the COAG initiative, the governments will truly work together. You guys cannot do it by yourselves. We are sick to death of getting program after program in these places which cannot be implemented. One of the reasons for that is that a program starts at somebody's perceived entry level, and we generally know that we have a different entry level. Unless we work to bridge that gap, we cannot make that program work.

It is the simplest thing in the world to bridge that gap. It is often just a matter of conceptual education, allowing people to see where they fit into Australian society, allowing them to get an understanding of the accepted norms under our law and citizenship structures and allowing them to progress. Once they get to that point, they can progress as quickly as anybody. But if there is an information gap—and that is all it is—you cannot help them and then you get frustrated with them. They look at you and say, 'These buggers don't know what we're talking about,' and they get frustrated with you. Then everybody says that the Aboriginal problem is too difficult.

It is not too difficult. You have to engage these people. Look at where they have advanced to today. When they found that they had had a crash and owed \$1½ million—a lot of which was unpaid group taxes, superannuation guarantees, supplies and whatever—they were shattered to think that they had been dishonoured in commercial life. They repaid all of that money without a single cent being given to them by either the Territory government or the Commonwealth government. They worked. They went into the construction industry. They improved their collections and did lots of other things. They repaid \$1½ million over around five years. That is a pretty big effort.

They have kept going and have now further developed the structure of Thamarrurr, in which they are comfortable. Thamarrurr gives every landowning group here their identity back. People are now working for themselves and are looking forward to working with government to resolve some of the problems. On the housing issue, for example, it is easy for someone to walk away shaking their head and saying, 'We can't do anything; the problem is too big.' But, if you work with the people, any improvement is a big improvement. We can work together to achieve things. This is a place where things can be done—and they have to be done. In lots of ways these people are leading progress in getting better community development outcomes, but it will take quite a lot of work to get there. That is where we are coming from. We have places we want to go. Other people might want to add to what I have said, and then we will go through your questions.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—I will comment on some issues that follow Terry's points. For 61 years I have lived here on my land with my people. I was not born in a hospital. I was born near here at a place called Wadey Creek, and that is a very big and important part of me. My spirit comes from my birthplace. My identity comes from where I was born.

I was brought up in the dormitory era of the convent system. I remember things very strongly. I have knowledge that comes from my experiences in the place where I grew up as a child. The first violence I saw was here, with my mother. The kids said to me, 'Your mother's hurt.' I ran from the convent and saw my mother with a spear sticking upward into her throat. The people pulled me back and covered my eyes. I kept saying, 'I want to go to my mother to help her.' That was my first experience of violence and I know what it meant to me. I compare that with violence in today's world and I know what that violence stands for for me today.

I have a big responsibility to work among the women and the children. I have seen the violence that comes from having different intervillage families; it has happened in front of my eyes and I have seen how terrible it is. In my mind is a picture of a person's family with the kids around their mother. Every time, that brings me back to the experience I had when I was growing up. I remember when they started to build a supermarket at Garden Point; I was growing older and I was lucky in that my mother was a supervisor. She ran that big supermarket to feed the kids in the dormitory.

Those experiences from when I was a child have built me and motivated me. Today I have a responsibility to care for the families and the women in whatever struggle they have, even if it is with the people in those other clan groups. Again, the land gives me a very solid foundation to say, 'Yes, I have a responsibility to look after these women and families.' It is from there that I have my identity and I gain strength. From growing up as a child and seeing that first act of violence to when I stand on my land today, the responsibility is very powerful. I feel it every day, whether it comes from the young people as they are growing up or from the older people. I look around and feel their spirit, their identity, coming from their background.

I have read about this inquiry about crime and fear. That has never changed. The fear is there. People are taken away from the court to the jail and the fear is still there. You try to put good programs into communities like this. This community is growing fast. Back in 1997 I was the first woman to be made chair by the population of 2,000. It was a very tough job but I had to do it, especially to help the women and the children. My first priority is to help get support for those people. Just recently I decided that the women and families need support. I felt confident enough

to say to the government, 'You've got to give us support.' If we run good programs out here, when I die I will feel more comfortable. I said, 'Yes, I can do it.'

To add to what Terry has mentioned, all these years we have had to sit down with the women, the kids and the younger people and put those issues down on butcher's paper. With that happening, the strength could be felt more and more. Even though the people had concerns, they were pouring out the things that had been in their hearts all that time. They had been carrying it and living with it. Now they have said, 'Let's do it; let's give it a real good shake.' Their attitude is the same: 'Here it is. We have those needs. We can run programs.' We identify with our own people and our own land. That is our people's way of life and we are connected to that life and to where we belong. The spirit tells me that it is good that you are all here so that you can hear us, the grassroots people, saying that this is a very isolated community and we need the support that you can give to us.

CHAIR—Thank you, Theadora. I can hear your strength coming through.

Mr Felix Bunduck—To help you to understand, I will talk about the history of this place. In 1935 when the mission started, I was not born. I was born in 1938. I went to school and then I left school. I was not a lazy man. Back then there was no program like the one we are talking about now. Now we need to have programs. Since that time I have worked real hard, but that work did not pay me lots of money. We are talking now about this program. As I understand it, we are talking about domestic violence and things like that—and it does not matter about that. But we need a program for the young people that we can work with, like the lady was saying. We have to look to our young boys and girls. We would like to have a program to guide our people, our young boys. I was a real hardworking man; no mucking about. With this place we started off working real hard and we have continued to work that way.

I have heard a lot about local government and about the Commonwealth government. We did not worry about the Commonwealth government, but we knew about the whole of the land of Australia. We have here 2,500 people. We would like to know how we can handle that. We would like to know how we can find a budget to separate these people. We impact on one area in the town of Port Keats, but we would like the separation of these people—that is what we would like to do. Our people had the Kardu Numida council and that was working okay, but now we have formed a model council. Last year lots of important people were here talking to us about a program, how we could organise or run this place. But those people were looking from the outside at the Wadey/Port Keats area. Those special people were looking around at this place, and we have to speak up about what we want.

I will now mention programs. We need programs. Like the lady was saying, we need a program for the women. We also need a program for the men; we need one for the young boys here. All right, we will do that. Then we need to provide for proper running of business. For the young boys we could have adult education instead of having them damage things. We have to give them real exercise in understanding the ways of the town and in looking after the town. I am not saying that we want white people to look after it—no; we have to look after it. As we are now, we need help. We have good staff looking after us, but we are all working together to develop this town. That is what we want, not the young ones damaging things. It can be done a little bit at a time.

We need to have programs. We are working things out in our minds now. Now we have the Thamarrurr Council. We give lots of assistance in helping out. There are a couple of houses that we are helping with. With assistance from this area, Leon has set up a place. We helped Leon to build up his subdivision. That is what we would like to do with the outstation people; we would like to help them with a program. Part of that program would be a budget for what we would like to do in our town.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Felix is referring to a time when people were much more active. The impact on the community of sit-down money, or social security payments, has been quite horrific. These people work for their everyday life. They are not scared of work. These people are not afraid when the government talks about mandatory Work for the Dole programs or such things. They feel they lost responsibility for their lives when the government started giving them money, and they will lead the charge in things like Work for the Dole programs.

I will talk about people's participation. Crime in the community is really symptomatic of boredom, living conditions and other things. Perhaps Leon will tell you about what his people are doing. Felix has referred to a subdivision that we have been able to build recently. That group are back on their own land and they want to do things for themselves. We utilise the community. We have a CDEP program and we utilise that. Eighteen ladies have formed a group with a Work for the Dole program. They have taken on contract work from our council and they undertake local government duties. People are regaining confidence in their own control structures. There is a link there: when people are allowed to put traditional structures in place and regain control, property damage and other things cease to occur.

Mr CADMAN—What is the name of Leon's group?

Mr Leon Melpi—Manthaphe. On that land there are about eight or nine in a CDEP group and the women are with a start-up Work for the Dole scheme. It took us nine years to put this together—roughly from 1995 onwards. We were waiting to clear that area to be able to build there. The council helped us. It helped to convince the government that we really wanted to make a move. Since that time we really have made a move.

CHAIR—You took the initiative to get the council to help you to clear the land and build an area away from the township?

Mr Leon Melpi—Yes.

CHAIR—Has that given you better quality of life?

Mr Leon Melpi—In that way our people can control their own lives. The mission put everyone here on this land, and I want to break that cycle.

Mr Terry Bullemor—We are trying to give you an understanding of the impact that comes from living on somebody else's land. To allow these community members to get their thoughts clear, can they talk in language for a moment?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Theadora, where do you get your strength from?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—My spirit is of two different places. When I am standing on my land—this is my father’s land and my birth was here—my spirit recognises that and gains strength from it. This land gives me my strength and voice. Even though services are being built on this land, it belongs to all the people who come under the Thamarrurr structure. Sometimes you feel that you cannot be responsible for these people. My spirit is also from right across to the south side of the country, which is my husband’s country. I would make my visits and I would say, ‘I might go to my husband’s country because of the kids.’ I have six sons and 23 grandchildren. That is my choice. Again, the spirit is very strong and it is something that you have to follow. It is the way of life. You are dedicated to, and feel responsible for, your kids. So my spirit also comes from that side because of my marriage, my kids and my grandchildren.

CHAIR—Do you feel part-ownership or involvement in your husband’s land, then? Do you have two lands?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—I feel that I have two lands. There is the spirit of recognition of my birthplace and of my marriage.

Mr Leon Melpi—I feel the same. Because my wife is from this area, I had to make that kind of decision 10 years ago. There is my birthplace and that of my father and, really, my heart is here and my spirit is back over there.

Mr CADMAN—Is your spirit over with your father’s land?

Mr Leon Melpi—Yes.

Mr Terry Bullemor—What is interesting is that many of the elders have delegated to the middle-aged the responsibility for building a better life for the children. You are politicians by choice; these people are politicians because they have to be. That happened on the day that they were born.

CHAIR—But Theadora had to be strong to get to be an elder. She had to fight to get that position. She has told us that she is the first woman to hold that position.

Mr Terry Bullemor—She achieved that position out of the community’s respect for her. Certainly the people tend to be dominated by male oriented stuff. When we are talking about youth, we tend to concentrate particularly on boys rather than girls.

CHAIR—That is what is different about Theadora. Theadora, I heard your words very clearly. You said that you had to do it for the women and the children, including the girls. You have earned respect.

Mr Leon Melpi—My father did not ask me to build where I have built. It was a choice that I had to make. Because this community was growing and getting bigger, I thought about what would happen in 10 or 20 years time. If I do not make that move now, my children will still be going in circles later. Someone has to break that cycle. We have always had this barrier.

Mr CADMAN—When you say ‘this barrier’, do you mean the barrier of being here?

Mr Leon Melpi—Yes. Here, there is always someone to save for us. But I have said, ‘No, this is too much humbug. Someone has to make a move.’

Mr CADMAN—It would be easy to stay here though.

Mr Leon Melpi—It is easy to stay here. But I chose this because I thought about my kids and their kids; I thought about their future. What is amazing is that I feel I have taken the path to where I want to go.

Mr CADMAN—You have said that you gain strength when you are on your own land. You have cleared that land. Is that as far as it has gone? Have you started any construction there?

Mr Leon Melpi—Yes. We have eight houses on that land.

Mr Rick Bliss—Leon’s place is like Palmerston or wherever. Everything is tidy and looked after. People want to be there; they feel comfortable there. It is their land. Patrick’s place at Kuy is the same. That is his little spot in the world and it is completely different. There is a stark contrast between how things are here and how they are in his spot. His place is beautiful.

CHAIR—We can all identify with that. If you own something, you put everything into it and you want to look after it. So it is important for you to have your land on which you can build.

Ms Demos—This goes back to the days of the mixing of the cultures and the clans. Leon’s move has allowed people not to be mixed up any more in that sense.

CHAIR—Is there still intermarriage between clans?

Ms Demos—I think there are marriages across clans.

Mr Leon Melpi—Owning your own land means that you can take control of your life and the lives of your people. When they look at you, you get respect. You do not get that when you are here. Back there my kids, Toby’s kid and the other people have respect for me. They have respect for their clan and their elders. I will not find that respect here; I will find it back there.

Mr Terry Bullemor—The impact of white law mixed up the traditional structures of the Kungarlbarl, the Kubiyirr and the Thinti; things got terribly mixed up. People were left with no control. People cannot speak up on land belonging to someone else. It is difficult. Theodora, if you had to go onto land belonging to someone else, would you talk while you were there?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—No way.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Our people found it difficult with ATSIC. They thought that the Commonwealth government at the time was finally recognising that they had traditional structures, and they said, ‘This is good.’ Gerry Hand flew around Australia in 21 days, or whatever it was, and collected a lot of information, and some of it was very good. But when he

got back to Canberra someone said, 'Oh, there are too bloody many of them; we'd better draw up boundaries.' If they had followed traditional boundaries, ATSIC would have worked well.

CHAIR—They did an Africa.

Mr Terry Bullemor—They should not have done it here. It was a sad thing. It could have been good for lots of people, particularly for us. The people lost control.

Mr CADMAN—But young people do not have any control. There are no rules any more.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—You cannot make the kids go to school. People say, 'Sending our kids to school is a culture stop. Why do we have to send our kids to school?' Again we hear, 'Because of the law' —and whose law is it? You cannot be responsible for getting kids to school every day; it is very hard. Education is very important. We have to have education. But in this population it is very hard now because of the conflicts that are happening every day of our lives. We have to live with them and sort them out so that we can make the kids go to school.

CHAIR—Are you telling me that, if they are within their own clans and on their own land, you have the authority to make them go to school; but, when your clans and your territory are mixed up, you cannot make them go?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—That is right.

Mr Terry Bullemor—One difficulty lies with the education system and concerns bilingual education, which began about 20 years ago. There are now eight totally separate, active languages in this community. The language that Theodora and Leon use is different from that used by Timothy. Whenever white people get too involved in these people's affairs, we bugger them up. Of the eight languages in the community, our school chose Murrinh-Patha out of respect for the people of this land. With their kids having to learn someone else's language, the other people felt that this was a kind of cultural imperialism.

Mr CADMAN—You can understand their difficulties. It would be like us having to live in France.

Mr Leon Melpi—It would be like living in Africa when the Germans, English and French took over.

Mr Terry Bullemor—If in today's Greek community in Melbourne you were to tell the kids that they had to learn Vietnamese, they would say, 'What are you doing to us?' In dealing with this situation, you must recognise that we have a number of nations here. In Thamarrurr we come together as a United Nations structure. Recently we workshopped the United Nations charter; it was good fun when we realised just how many similarities our structure has with that of the UN.

With crime, our issues are more about sentencing. Most of our energy is being spent at the other end trying to correct the problems that have been caused to these people. They have the capacity to handle situations if we just give them back the power. Our main issue is probably the effectiveness of sentencing.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—A child goes far away from the community because of damage from crime. On day one in jail he finds a different identity inside himself. When the kid comes back he says, ‘I’m a jailbird.’ He feels strong. ‘Don Dale’ and ‘jailbird’ are important terms to the kids. He says, ‘I had big tucker down there. I had good tucker. I had a lot of tucker. Every day I eat tucker.’ Back here there is no food. The family have often come so low, and that affects their pride. It is a cyclical life for the young people. They experience prison life and come back, and then they go and do it again.

Ms Demos—The young boys go to jail for good tucker. When they go to Don Dale, they have a bed and food. They have breakfast, lunch and dinner—Christmas dinner.

Mr Terry Bullemor—They have people who are interested in them 24 hours a day.

Ms Demos—When they come back here, they have a new identity. Being inside a jail helps them to form a new identity; they are a jailbird. That makes them feel strong.

CHAIR—So they go back.

Ms Demos—Yes.

Mr Leon Melpi—Back in the days when the mission was running the show for us, we had no option; we were taken away from our parents. We were locked in dormitories. It was okay for us—but also it was not okay in that we missed out on a lot of our culture. Some of us were taken away as young as 10 or 11. The dormitory system broke up in about 1968 or 1969. We came back from college in Darwin and were told that the dormitories had been demolished. College aside, we missed out on a lot of education. We have a lot of catching up to do. But we had no option; we were forced to go into the dormitory system.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—Because of the dormitory system, it took me 30 years to understand my culture—where I come from and what my identity is. It took me 30 years to do my research.

Ms Demos—And learning how to be a parent after not being able to learn it from your own parents.

Mr MURPHY—How can we make food more plentiful here, particularly for young boys who might want to go to jail to get better meals and better housing and to have a bed? What can be done to stop young boys contemplating committing a crime to get into jail?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—One very positive thing has come from the club and the health clinic. A big issue and worry for the community has been the kids joy-riding, gambling and stealing every day. We got together and said, ‘This is affecting our community and it is very important that we do something about it.’ In our own way we have to find the right people—the right authority—to deal with this problem. It was a hard struggle for us to find the right authority to deal with this problem. I took on that responsibility on behalf of the senior women. I did my job and said, ‘Let’s get the right authority, the right people, to look after what happened here on St Patrick’s Day and stop the boys from stealing and gambling.’

Mr MURPHY—There is something I want to understand. You said that some of the young boys think it is good to go to jail where they have a bed in a cell and get three meals a day and that they come back and beat their chests, proud to be a jailbird. That is terrible. What is so wrong that we cannot provide better housing? You have spoken of the issue of food, which so fundamental.

Mr Leon Melpi—It comes down to responsibility. There is reliance on welfare money and all that. Responsibility needs to be put back with the family. That is where it starts.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—Whatever happens in the community affects the whole family. Money goes to ganja, so the poor old parents have no money to buy tucker for their kids.

Mr Terry Bullemor—In this community, money for spending by the local people comes via CDEP wages and other benefits and wages. It comes to around \$12 million a year and we only trap about \$7 million of that, so we have a leakage in our local economy of \$5 million. That indicates clearly to us that we are not servicing as well as we should be. Food is quite expensive, but wastage sometimes comes from the blokes escaping—going off to have a beer somewhere else occasionally. People playing cards might also account for some of it. In a game of cards people control their own environment and white fellows cannot interfere with that.

A lot of this is not just about food but also about where people spend their money. Some people live good, comfortable lives and can see a future. In white society lots of people blow their dough at the TAB or whatever. By doing that, they are escaping from something. A lot of this money is wasted by people escaping situations. We have talked about people being able to live a more relaxed life on their own country, and there are definite reasons for people to try and achieve that sort of life.

The women have a program to help families manage their income. It helps them to recognise what is happening—that we are poor because we are not managing well. Things are in place that are being worked on. Eventually community stores will have to be considered as part of the health system and not just as a profit-making mechanism. We will have to look at doing things. Our balance of trade with Darwin is pretty horrific. Yearly, we probably spend combined funds of \$20 million in Darwin, and Darwin probably buys \$1,000 worth of didgeridoos and other things from us.

Mr CADMAN—You have said that a brickworks used to be here. Could you set up a sawmill for processing timber?

Mr Terry Bullemor—We used to have a sawmill too. There used to be an industry here. We are now studying further development of a construction industry. With our housing we are going into Concrete Tool Box. In case you are not familiar with construction, this is mostly used in commercial situations in other places. We need to standardise housing. We have to build economy housing and bring the cost of it down. With the Concrete Tool Box, we can have an industry. We can use the natural resources that are owned by these people and we can use the kids in a factory situation. That is being studied at the moment. Food is a difficult issue. You ask why we do not have much food. With 17 people living in one house, it is not possible to store food. People have to shop every day.

Ms Demos—Very few of the families here own fridges.

Mr Leon Melpi—We have a lot of family groups here. When someone in the group is broke, you have to share. That is done just to keep the family going. That is where the problem is. You people have your own houses for your own families. That is it; end of story. But with us it is not about charity, it is not about getting food; it is about relationships and keeping the family going. You have to look after your family. You do not have to ask them for food; they just share with you. It is okay to say, ‘What about food?’ When you look at your family, you look at yourself. In white society it is altogether different.

CHAIR—It is the one-talk system. The extended family come in and they are all equally entitled—cousins, aunts and uncles.

Mr Leon Melpi—Yes. On your own little block you have a wife and a kid, and that is it. I cannot explain more than that.

CHAIR—The food that you have bought for your wife and child might get eaten by the cousins and the aunts. You might have bought food thinking that it would feed your wife and two children, for instance, and an aunt, an uncle and some cousins might come in and eat it.

Ms Demos—Share it.

CHAIR—Therefore, there is less for your children.

Mr Leon Melpi—Yes.

CHAIR—There is a problem with the older people too, isn’t there?

Mr Leon Melpi—There is a problem with everybody.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Some of the acts that we are going to workshop are those of the Commonwealth and the Territory in relation to welfare. We have to establish some norms; we have to look at these things, because we are living under conditions that we have accepted as normal. We have dominated the hell out of these people and caused them to live in extremely abnormal conditions, yet we expect them to be normal. The answers to these things are not as simple as more food.

Ms Demos—That question begs another million questions.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Everything goes right back to situations that need to be resolved. In a contemporary situation we are looking at family budgeting. But we have caused these people to be virtual refugees without any hope. It is only in the last few years that people have started to see that there is structure—and it is their structure—and there is hope for them.

Mr CADMAN—Would the young people be happy to be broken up into smaller groups? Would they be happy living in smaller groups? Don’t they get attracted to where there are brighter lights and more young people? There is something that pulls them apart but there is also something that pulls them together.

Mr Terry Bullemor—There is. In other places the out-station or homeland movements have been more successful, but this place is in the backblocks. With places like the Nhulunbuy homelands over in the Gove area, people thought about the impact on where the young people would stay. They found that the young people are staying in the homeland. If any of you are from a rural area, you probably know that the young kids from cattle stations love to hit the towns on a Saturday night but then are quite happy to get home.

Mr CADMAN—A lot of them also leave the country altogether; they clear out.

Mr Terry Bullemor—These people are not likely to leave their country.

Ms Demos—You do not hear of very many young people leaving and not coming back. A fair few stay here.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Certainly food is a big thing in people's lives. Food makes it extremely costly to live here. There is reasonable variety, but so many people are wasting their money escaping and then coming back to families wanting their food and that type of thing. That causes food to be a fairly important issue.

CHAIR—I want to ask about the age of young girls when they become pregnant and what effect that has on them. Is the concentration of 20 people to a house exacerbating that? What can be done to help those young girls have fulfilling lives? Perhaps we should leave that for now. How much marijuana is around? Who brings it in and makes money out of it?

Mr Terry Bullemor—In the last couple of years it has had a serious impact on the lives of the young people. Back in the 1980s there was petrol sniffing in this community. These people very quickly said, 'Petrol is for motor cars and not for people,' and they knocked it quickly on the head. We might have an isolated incident every now and again, but it is not an issue. However, ganja is a worry.

Ms Demos—Women say that it has affected the young men's participation in Kardu Kigay.

Mr Terry Bullemor—It has. A few years ago the community felt concerned that the young boys were dropping out of school at a very early age. In conjunction with the Christian Brothers they set up another education system called Kardu Kigay. That means 'teenage boys'—'Kardu' being the name of the people here. Certainly the ganja had a big impact on that; we virtually lost a classroom of 40 kids. The police are dealing with it as best they can, and we will get onto policing. There is a good relationship between the community and the police. Perhaps the community are becoming more seriously concerned and are more prepared to dob people in. That is the only way the police can react. Generally the supplies come from Darwin, and local people—and other people, obviously—are involved in the deals.

Dr WASHER—What is happening with this pilot program? You have identified community or social breakdown as the major reason for crime here. Because of the people's close affiliation to the land, the plan seems to be to return them to land they feel a strong affiliation with or love for and rebuild communities on those lands. I am trying to summarise this. If I am wrong, please correct me.

Mr Terry Bullemor—That is the long-term plan.

Dr WASHER—While these people are returning to their lands, we are initially going to look mainly at construction trades, because they need to build housing and physical infrastructure—water supplies and the whole thing. So they will build towns on these lands and, from doing that themselves, they will learn trades. Is that correct?

Mr Terry Bullemor—For the blokes, yes.

Dr WASHER—What is the plan for the women, or what have they planned for themselves?

Mr Terry Bullemor—The women are concentrating on their social, political and economic development. They have a role. Like everywhere, the women are the backbone of the community. They are leading the charge in the social and economic development of the community.

Ms Demos—Much of this information is in a couple of documents that Theadora will be happy to give to you when we break for lunch.

Dr WASHER—Thank you. As people get their identity back, communities are built, crime is reduced and people gain independence from the slavery of social security—because what we had with social security was a form of slavery. Mr Cadman has alluded to a vision of the future for the children and the grandchildren. If you do not have an education system that is universal—matching that in cities and other areas throughout Australia—the children will become almost locked into these regions. They will lack the flexibility and freedom to travel and participate. Can you understand my concern? I understand that we have to go through this change, but I also want them to be free one day.

Mr Terry Bullemor—We recognise that we trap ourselves on this land, but we are coming from so far behind. In education we will have layer upon layer of conception of different issues that will allow for a depth of understanding. When Leon's age group went to school, it was all English. You did social studies and you knew about the geography of Australia and citizenship and those sorts of things. The education system has got totally lost over the last 25 years. We are now struggling to get people to a basic level of numeracy and a level of literacy where they are capable of reading their own name. Social studies have gone out the window. The world view of the younger kids in Port Keats is what they see on videos. We do not have citizenship education in the schools any more. It is hard to know the expected norms if you have never been shown them. While we know that people will be happier and more socially cohesive and active on their own land, we also know that we cannot get out of the norm. But in the meantime we have to use what we can to allow every kid to have a chance.

When you came into the community you might have seen the sign out the front. This community operates on two themes: one is to give every kid a chance; the other is to have local jobs for local people—and they are working that way. We have a long way to go and we are all going to have to work together to do the catch-up. As Leon has said, we have a lot of catching up to do. We are not going to be able to save every kid but we certainly have kids—boys and girls—who are going well in primary school now. We only have primary school; we do not have a secondary school. But the kids are doing correspondence and they are achieving real grade 10

levels. We have to show them a career path. We hope that all of you will go back to Canberra and pledge that you will support this COAG initiative forever and a day. If we do not have a win, we are going to slip further behind.

Dr WASHER—It is a great idea, but I want to get it clear in my mind. Let us assume that we have progressed not far ahead but just to where we have individual communities learning trades and skills and building pride. Is there a further plan afoot to get the young people together—in sport, for example? Are you going to have competitive sports like football which enable people to come together and learn to be more tolerant of one another?

Mr Terry Bullemor—That is happening now. Within the community we have six football teams. Generally those teams would go back to family.

Mr CADMAN—Do they play rugby?

Dr WASHER—Football.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Those sorts of things are happening. Our six football teams almost go back to family or clan groups. They run their own league and local people umpire. If somebody plays up, the judiciary throws them out for a week or two. They are running this themselves. That sort of thing is happening. More has been achieved since the people developed Thamarrurr than previously. In Thamarrurr every group is equal. They do not have a president or a chairman. If they meet on somebody's land, the normal courtesies of respect are shown to those people. It is a great structure of governance but, more than anything, it gives people an identity that they had lost.

Mr SECKER—Is that an advisory group?

Mr Terry Bullemor—It is a governing group.

CHAIR—It is a bit like a federation.

Mr Terry Bullemor—It is a federation. We had good fun when we workshopped the Constitution of Australia. These people know more about the Constitution of Australia than you do. We are not all republicans, but it was quite amusing to think that the poor old Queen had to worry about us when she had trouble with her own kids over there. It is that level of conceptual education I am speaking about. When an indigenous culture is dominated, its first awareness is what is called magical awareness. White people came here on the *Margaret Mary* with a drum of flour. It took perhaps 10 days to make a decent amount of flour by harvesting and soaking zamia palm seeds. When somebody just walked off with a drum of this stuff, the people here would have said, 'This lot are magic.' Domination has had a big impact on people's lives. Now they are becoming more aware. We have to make up a lot of mileage in the next five or 10 years. The age group of the people who are here have had a good education but have not had the chance to use it; but the age group behind them do not know much at all about contemporary Australia.

CHAIR—Is that because the education system has failed them?

Mr Terry Bullemor—Yes, and it is also due to social changes. It has become a bigger community and that has made it more difficult. The missions were strong. Back in their time it was law that everybody had to go to school.

Mr Leon Melpi—If we did not go to school, we were not given supper.

Mr CADMAN—So it was not all bad back then?

Mr Terry Bullemor—I do not think so. I have worked in Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist and Anglican places. None of them were any different. It was not all bad. It is just that we dominated these people. We could not tell people about our own culture, about the way we existed and where things came from. People have no understanding of the distribution system in Australia. We see a barge pull up here every two weeks and throw out a lot of stuff, but there is no real understanding of where it comes from. There is no real understanding of the difference between wholesaling and retailing and other things. We have ignored the need of these people to understand us, yet whitefellas study the hell out of them. We have here Roberto, who is meant to be studying anthropology and is busy working with the community.

Mr Leon Melpi—There are negatives and positives.

Mr CADMAN—But then you seem to go through a period where nothing happens, with everybody doing anything they want.

Mr Terry Bullemor—You cannot underestimate the impact sit-down money has had on a people who have worked for their daily livelihood. Without doubt, that has had the biggest social impact. These people tried to fight it. They said, ‘You tried everything else; now you’ve finally found the answer.’

Mr MURPHY—Theadora, how much do you have to pay for a litre of fresh milk?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—Something like \$2.70.

CHAIR—Do you use powdered or fresh milk?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—We use cans of powdered milk.

Mr MURPHY—Does anyone here buy fresh milk?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—No.

Mr Leon Melpi—No.

Mr Felix Bunduck—You go in the shop and, fair dinkum, it is more than \$5. For \$200 we get lousy meat; there was one lot for \$127.

CHAIR—Where does it come from?

Mr Felix Bunduck—It comes from a Darwin shop, and when it gets to our shop they raise the price.

Mr Leon Melpi—But a litre of milk would not last long; it would just go. It would not even last a day.

Mr MURPHY—Can you buy just one litre of milk here?

Mr Terry Bullemor—UHT or frozen milk can be bought.

Mr MURPHY—How expensive is it?

Mr Terry Bullemor—I do not know but, if you get a chance, have a look over in the store. There are reasons why things are expensive.

Mr Leon Melpi—You can get small tins of milk.

Mr Terry Bullemor—There are studies done from time to time on the cost of a bag or trolley full of groceries.

Mr MURPHY—Is this a dry area?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—Yes.

Mr MURPHY—Can people here still go somewhere to get alcohol?

Mr Leon Melpi—Yes.

Dr WASHER—One problem we have been told of is that people who have committed crimes for which the law says they should go to jail are taken away from here. Would it be wise to have a jail somewhere around here, or would that defeat its purpose? Would you prefer to look after your people yourselves rather than have them taken to a more remote area?

Ms Demos—Yesterday Theadora met with Mr Wallis, who is the magistrate for this area, and that is one of the things they talked about.

Dr WASHER—It would seem sensible to confine people locally and regionally. Their conditions would not change much; they would just not have the freedom to move around so much.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—That is a future vision for us.

Mr CADMAN—Should jail be a happy or a sad place?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—Jail should be a sad place.

Mr Leon Melpi—We have to drive for about an hour and a half from here to get to jail. People want to live normal lives. A while back we had a club. It was broken into three or four times. We tried a bush club and that worked for a while. We brought this club back again. We sent out permits for the out-stations and they were burnt or ripped up or whatever. The club broke down; I do not know the date but I think it was around 1995. It just stopped. We are trying to normalise life here and get the club back. But at the moment when we talk about the club people say that it is too hot to handle right now. At the moment there is no way we can bring the club back. If we talk about wanting to be normal, we need to talk about permits. Our staff have permits and they drink here. The local people in this area said that permits could be had by the whites but nobody else. Now that a lot of our people are moving back to their own areas to live a normal life, it is time to talk about this.

Mr CADMAN—Are you saying that whites can have permits on your land?

Mr Terry Bullemor—Not so much ‘can’. Various communities in the Territory decided to have their areas declared dry. Under the Liquor Act, in a dry area a permit can be given for a person to consume alcohol in their own house.

Mr CADMAN—But that destroys the authority.

Mr Terry Bullemor—The people who grant the permits are the leaders here. If they wished to grant a permit to a community member they could do that. It sounds like inequality in that white fellows get a permit and Aboriginal fellows do not, but the people brought that in themselves and they can change it. If they wished to, they could declare the place wet or grant permits to their own people. It is controlled by the elders, not by the NT Liquor Commission. An application is made for a permit. That goes to the council and they either approve or disapprove it. It then goes to the police station. The police generally approve it if the council have, unless they know of some reason why this person should not have a permit. Then it goes to the commission and the permit is issued.

We are talking about normalisation; that is what we want. We want to normalise more services here so that people can live normal lives. We expect people to be normal in extremely abnormal conditions. We all work together. At the end of the day we say to each other, ‘It’s been a really great day; what are we going to do now?’ I say, ‘I’ll probably go home and have a beer.’ Leon says, ‘I’ll climb on the back of a truck. After an hour and a half on the back of the truck we get to where we’re going and I’m lucky if I get home in the morning.’ So there are things that we have to handle here.

Mr Leon Melpi—The club opens at five o’clock. By the time you get there it is 5.30. You have a beer there and then pull off and come back here. It is about 10.30 when you get back here.

CHAIR—Can’t you come here and have a beer with Terry?

Mr Leon Melpi—No.

Mr Terry Bullemor—The conditions of the licence are that somebody from outside the licensed area can be a guest of somebody who has a licence. But a person from inside the restricted area who does not have a licence cannot be the guest of another person in the restricted

area who does have a licence. That is the one thing that splits us here. Everybody works together, lives together, fights together, fishes together; we do everything together. This is just the saddest thing, and change can only come from here.

Mr Leon Melpi—No-one can run your life. We want to live a normal life. When I am over there, I do not want this council to be talking about my area. They have no right to do that, because that area is private property. If I were a visitor at your place, it would be okay for you to shout me a beer. But I would have to say, ‘Sorry, I can’t shout you a beer because I have no permit.’

Mr Terry Bullemor—There was never any trouble with the club, as a club, when it was running. The difficulty came when we had 1,500 cartons of beer and somebody broke in. They pinched one and left the door open, and then we lost the lot. That created problems—but they do not last forever.

Mr Leon Melpi—We are trying to set a standard so that people want to live a normal life.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Gradually people will explore certain issues and see how they go, but that certainly causes a great drain on our local economy.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—This is a dry community. People are allowed to drink over the boundary, which is the other side of the Moyle River. The white people here work very hard and at the end of the week they have good refreshment. We are with them every day. Why can’t the rules be changed? The community is dry from here to the Moyle. We say, ‘Let’s have a wet area and they can take the grog out to wherever they wish to go in the country.’

Mr Leon Melpi—That is where Thamarrurr comes in. There is no problem, but individuals will probably have their say on this. Because we are on somebody else’s land, others always have a say in this sort of thing. Individuals have a right to say what they think about this.

Mr Terry Bullemor—They will do their own thing. The sooner that happens the better, because we have to normalise.

Mr Leon Melpi—We have said that the dry area is from the Moyle. If this is really going to be a dry area, get the permits off these other people and make it a dry area. There should be one rule for everyone.

Dr WASHER—But when your club was running it would have had the same rules as we have in Perth. Where I come from, if you are serving at a club and someone is drinking excessively and becoming drunk, you are not allowed to serve them. I know that is our law and I assume it is yours. You stop serving them. They are told, ‘You’re drunk and we’re not serving you.’

Mr Leon Melpi—If you are drunk you cannot drink any more. But we are talking about wet areas and dry areas. If this area is meant to be completely dry, why is it that some people have permits to drink here but we have to drive out to the Moyle?

Mr CADMAN—If it is dry, it is dry. Forget the permits and the favours and forget the family and friends; it is dry. I have seen a community destroyed by somebody abusing that.

Dr WASHER—Even in the southern states of the USA there are large dry areas where you are not allowed to drink.

Mr SECKER—No, you are not allowed to buy alcohol; you can drink it in your own home.

CHAIR—We have alcohol-free areas in Sydney.

Mr Leon Melpi—We are not here to talk about the USA or wherever. Let's just concentrate on this. You seem to be getting off the track when you talk about the USA.

Dr WASHER—Yes, but I am saying that it happens.

Mr CADMAN—How many miles do you have to travel to get to the furthest of the communities?

Mr Terry Bullemor—The furthest one is about 45 kilometres away. Leon's place is within four kilometres.

Ms Demos—You are not talking about the access point for alcohol?

Mr CADMAN—No, I do not mean the access point for alcohol. How spread out are all the groups that make up your community? Suppose you were to establish your own rules on your own land—how far away would the furthest community be?

Mr Terry Bullemor—From here you would be looking at a radius of 45 kilometres in a straight line, but it is a greater distance than that. You would pick up Nardidi and Fossil Head. Nardidi is the furthest away. It is on the other side of the Moyle, except for the Mahihn side. Thinti is on the coast. Geographically we are part of the Daly River-Port Keats Aboriginal reserve. Looking at the map, that goes generally from the Daly River down to the Fitzmaurice River and around a couple of pastoral leases.

CHAIR—I am a little familiar with the Daly River situation and Miriam-Rose Baumann, whom I know.

Mr Terry Bullemor—They are outside the reserve and in mainland Australia. We are part of the Daly River-Port Keats reserve. This is the southern part of the reserve, which goes down to Leon's country and the coastline is along there. Theadora's and Felix's country goes down from one creek to here and then comes back and joins up with another creek. Timothy's country, Perredeer, is just on the northern side of the Moyle River. These people are landowners and they identify with their land. They have a relationship with each other but they go back to their land. They are handling many situations better now. There are difficulties between some of the leaders who own this land and people like Leon who want to do certain things. Just like the situation with the Liquor Act—it is law that there are other communities, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, that have permits. Here they have chosen not to have liquor, but they had a club and the club worked well.

CHAIR—Would they do it again?

Mr Terry Bullemor—They are talking about it, but the older people got scared. The last time the club was opened there was a strong emphasis on local matters—‘You have to do it.’ They wanted a club but not the total management responsibility. There is a distinct demarcation through the ownership structure of the club. The licensee would be responsible for management. Back when the club was running, we put the licence in to the Liquor Commission and they expected us to do it. They told the people, ‘Don’t just say, “It’s your responsibility”—do it.’ To be a committee member and to ban somebody from the club was hard work. We have people who say they want it dry because they want to normalise and they need white support.

CHAIR—They need someone to propose the rules.

Dr WASHER—Is ATSIC performing its function adequately now?

Mr Terry Bullemor—It has been an expensive learning curve. It has been a shame, particularly for traditional Aboriginal people. I will give you a copy of the document that we put up. Take the regional councils; they mixed up our area. There are people who are much more urban in outlook than our people. Traditional people will not argue, and the people who were more articulate got more.

CHAIR—You are saying that it would have been better to have many more smaller councils right from the beginning?

Mr Terry Bullemor—Back in 1997, I think, a review of section 26 of the act was carried out. They intended to look at regional authorities which were smaller areas. We put up a submission to that review based on the Thamarrurr structure. That did not see the light of day, unfortunately, because the more urban people did not want anything like that. You will hear Leon say, ‘Don’t worry about the rest of the bloody world; just look at us. We’ve got a problem and we want to sort it out.’ We believe that we could run a reasonable authority under this structure with a funding mechanism based on needs and along the lines of the Grants Commission. Utilising population figures for Aboriginality, remoteness and all those other things, we could do it well. We could create steady growth.

These people think ATSIC is like lotto. Sometimes you win a prize; sometimes you do not. On the whole, there does not seem to be any coordination. I think that ATSIC could have worked very well if they had seriously considered regional authorities where there is a traditional structure, but that would not suit the city people. You will not have one size fits all under ATSIC, and I think that is the problem. Some of the stuff that we put up horrified the urban New South Wales people. ATSIC had a study done in 1992 to look at different methodologies and different funding. It was really good stuff but, once again, it did not see the light of day because it would have taken money from those urban centres and given more equality up here.

CHAIR—There is a strange psychology in this. When urban non-Indigenous communities look at ATSIC they do not see it as assisting Indigenous people who live in remote areas and traditional lands. I believe that they have a great deal of goodwill towards resources being given to Indigenous people living in their own lands and they feel that ATSIC stops that happening.

Mr Terry Bullemor—It does. These people do not say, ‘We’re one mob; we’re one this or one that.’ Under ATSIC it isn’t just one big mob. I do not think we will ever have an independent

government of Aboriginal people and I do not think these people want it. They have a structure that they work well within and they want it as a regional authority. They could do business with the Commonwealth and Territory governments without a problem based on a funding methodology in line with other funding methodologies.

Dr WASHER—What about forgetting about ATSIIC and having local governance? You would apply directly for funding for what you want. You would say that you need so much for housing and so much for other things. There would be direct accountability—“This is what we have spent on the ground, and we are accountable.” “Here it is; now you’ve got it. Have a nice day.”

Mr Terry Bullemor—Under this COAG initiative we are exploring many things. I hope that it will give us a chance to try some of those things.

Dr WASHER—You state your needs and they go directly through a filtering process. You tell them and then there is accountability. They have to give you the funding or you get it directly.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Certainly some Commonwealth funding could come directly to the community. We know that the Territory siphon off a bit. On the topic of crime, I will talk about imposing restitution conditions. Someone who has done \$10,000 worth of damage might only be able to pay it off at \$20 a week, but there is a capacity to pay. You cannot say that there is no capacity to pay. People will not learn otherwise—and Theadora, Leon and the rest can explain it better than I can. If these people commit a crime of damage against property, it saves them from damaging a member of their family or somebody else. It is an exhibition to go and damage something. That is done, they go to court and everybody seems to think it has been fixed up—except that the community has been left with a debt of thousands of dollars. There is a capacity to pay. There are mechanisms for garnishing wages or paying through Centrelink’s Centrepay. We use Centrepay, and it is one of the best things that has ever happened. There is a capacity to pay, and that debt should be paid until a magistrate or somebody else has ruled that it has been cleared. Sending somebody to Don Dale or Berrimah is not necessarily effective sentencing.

CHAIR—What is Centrepay?

Mr Terry Bullemor—Centrepay is a system that Centrelink have whereby they make deductions at the source and deposit them into a bank account. Most of our rent collections are now done by Centrepay. But currently there is a problem with that, because Centrepay respond to a telephone call but somebody might say, ‘I agree to pay you rent today and not tomorrow.’ That is something we will pick up under COAG. However, the mechanisms and the capacity exist to do that. That is probably the main thing we are looking at in that area. There must be effective sentencing.

Mr Leon Melpi—I have been with the council for almost 20 years, from when I was 18, and I have seen the damage. I feel strongly about it. I have been told by people, ‘You cannot make that person do that, because they have a lot of family.’ But they can pay it off within five or 10 years.

Mr CADMAN—There is nothing to stop them doing damage. If I can go and do that and nothing happens to me, I will keep doing it.

Mr Leon Melpi—The system needs to be changed. Someone does three months in Don Dale and comes out and says, ‘I’ve done that. I’m clear now.’ Then something comes up again and he does it again.

CHAIR—There are now diversionary programs. Do they work? Also, what was mandatory sentencing like?

Mr Terry Bullemor—I might plug the diversionary programs.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—I have been here for 10 years and I have experienced what has happened to the council.

Mr Leon Melpi—We have seen it go from one thing to another, and nothing has changed. The time is right for us to tell the legal people that the whole thing needs to change.

CHAIR—That includes the new system?

Mr Leon Melpi—I am talking about damage to council property.

Dr WASHER—Is there anything stopping the magistrate from making orders for restitution?

Mr Terry Bullemor—The offender’s legal adviser puts up the argument that they do not have the capacity to pay. We argue that people do have the capacity to pay—not to pay \$10,000 immediately but to pay \$20 a week perhaps. If a son asks his father, ‘What do you do with your money, Dad?’ and the dad says, ‘I have to pay \$50 a week because I wrecked a car 10 years ago,’ the son will say, ‘Boy, I won’t do that then.’ The victim is forgotten about entirely in the criminal justice system.

Mr CADMAN—We have talked about council property, but what happens with private property? Is it exactly the same?

Mr Terry Bullemor—It is exactly the same.

CHAIR—In criminal law there is no concept of making financial restitution to a victim. There is the concept of fining where the money is paid into consolidated revenue and you do not see the benefit. What we are talking about here is adapting a civil law principle into criminal law so that a magistrate could make a finding that a person had to repay so much a week for the next 10 years by way of restitution.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Or we end up having to use both jurisdictions and take civil action against everyone.

CHAIR—That is very costly.

Mr Terry Bullemor—It is a means of education.

Mr CADMAN—The courts have educated them to get away with it in some ways, haven’t they?

Mr Terry Bullemor—These people find it difficult to handle the existing criminal justice system. In their justice system it is an inquisition. People ask them questions; they tell the truth and take the punishment. The older people cannot understand how somebody can advise somebody to plead not guilty. That is teaching them to lie, saying that they did not do it when we know he pinched the car because he was driving the bloody thing. But someone says that you plead not guilty to that. These people have law and it is very distinct. But with the criminal justice system it is a contest on the day and they just think that whoever tells the best story on the day wins.

Mr Leon Melpi—If that had happened 20 years ago, before the mission came, they would be dead.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Another problem is that the legal aid people are often young and trying to go somewhere. They seem to think it is the Aboriginal against the system. They also disregard the fact that the victim is often one of the organisations that these people own. This needs to be addressed, because it costs us hundreds of thousands of dollars. As Leon said, this needs to change. They do not want their kids to get into trouble; they want them to learn lessons. They want to normalise things and they want people to have a greater appreciation of the property of others.

Mr CADMAN—Do you have to go to Darwin for hearings, or does the magistrate travel around?

Mr Leon Melpi—He travels around.

Mr Terry Bullemor—I think we have court on this week. That goes to the effectiveness of sentencing. At the moment the people are not recognising that these crimes are against the community; they feel that these crimes are against the magistrate or the police. They do not understand sufficiently.

Mr Leon Melpi—The stuff that kids are breaking really belongs to the community. We all hold it together. We cannot do much about it, because it is just the way the system is.

Mr Terry Bullemor—As for the impact of this, our greatest fear with crime is having things broken into or stolen. Ten per cent of our gross effort in the work force is associated with security. In some ways, council or organisation property is seen as fair game. That is sad, but it is the case. The biggest fear is of things being stolen. It is not so much household property, kids breaking into whitefellas' property; it is mainly organisation property that is held in common. That is a problem. There are some concerns—people are cautious about being here. Some of the non-Aboriginal ladies might feel a bit concerned, but only the normal concerns you would feel anywhere. My wife says that she would rather walk around Port Keats than walk up Mitchell Street in Darwin. People live a relatively comfortable life here. An indicator of that is that the staff turnover in our organisation is around three to four years. Families live here and have good lives. Peter is with the council now, although he was with the school. The school has quite a good retention rate of non-Aboriginal staff. There is not a high staff turnover at all there.

Our juvenile diversion program is funded by the Commonwealth through the Territory. We are keen for that to continue. It has certainly allowed us to have a good relationship with the

Northern Territory police. Those who run juvenile diversion in NT police are some of the more lateral thinking people in the public service. They are very good value. There are some difficulties in implementing it because, when the Commonwealth give the Territory government money they are—as you would appreciate—as scared as hell, so they are really conscientious about making sure that the t's are crossed and the i's are dotted and so on. Under COAG we want to look at a more appropriate method of running juvenile diversion, and we will work with the police to do that. We enjoy working with the juvenile diversion people there, because they have learned a lot in the last couple of years—such as that you cannot put just any program into an Aboriginal community and think that it is going to work in the way you want it to. Also, they are prepared to communicate with the rest of the police force. So that area is working well.

I would say that in Port Keats the apprehension rate would be 100 per cent. Not many kids commit a crime without getting caught. That is an indicator that apprehension is not a deterrent. If they were getting away with it all the time, you would think they were being clever. But if something were to happen one night I am quite sure that I could go to Leon or Theadora the next morning and ask, 'What happened there?' and I would be told, 'So-and-so did that.' It might be done under the cover of darkness, and there are some funny stories in this area. I remember one of the old blokes telling us that years ago the kids broke into the old bakery here and the next morning one of the old people walked in, looked at the footprints and said, 'It was so-and-so and so-and-so.' It is a little harder now that there is bitumen; but people in the community are awake a lot of the time, so there is not much undetected crime and the apprehension rate is good.

CHAIR—I am not sure, but I think that your crime rate per head of population is one of the highest in Australia—correctional services could give an indication of that. Is there a lot more nuisance type crime than serious crime? The incarceration rate is reasonably high. In the rest of Australia there is nothing like a 100 per cent apprehension rate. Most crime against property goes undetected.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Not many are not caught. That is just life. The difficulty is that that indicates that what is happening after apprehension is not working particularly well. We really need to address that. There is a good working relationship between the community and the police and we have quite good policemen. They are prepared to listen to the community and consult about issues. I think we have a good bunch over there. We also have a very good bunch of nurses and Aboriginal health workers. We are lucky in those areas. The police would like to be more proactive. They get caught up quite a lot now.

When mandatory sentencing came in under Dennis Burke as Attorney-General, we were looking for something better than what was happening. We had lots of kids going to court and, once again, there was no understanding. We were putting up with an unacceptable level of crime. We could not get comprehensive insurance for vehicles. There were so many things we could not do. Mandatory sentencing was not something that the people feared much, because in their own criminal justice system there is mandatory sentencing. If somebody has done something, there will be a punishment; so their system makes it virtually mandatory.

There was a big blue between the Northern Territory government and the Aboriginal legal services, and they used the courts as a battleground on which to argue these kinds of cases. That caused difficulties here. Under the 'three strikes and you're in' system we used to have kids who would commit a crime and, say, four of them would go to court and plead guilty. When a single

case was contested they were not all handled together. You would often find a kid who thought he had got away with two crimes. He did not catch on until he committed a third one and all of a sudden he went straight to jail. He would say, 'I'm going straight to jail. What happened?' It really caused a lot of problems. Many issues are now contested. If there were access to people in the criminal justice system, there would probably be many more practical outcomes.

Mr CADMAN—Could you see the council having extra authority to deal with low-level crime?

Mr Terry Bullemor—That is something that needs to be talked about and something we must take responsibility for. If we have a governance structure that has the respect of the people, as Thamarrurr has, it could possibly start dealing with some of these things locally. In some situations where there are crimes the people will get together and deal with things in conjunction with the police; they will handle some things. But we have to be careful, as there are always opposing sides. Lots of people want to get involved in Aboriginal politics. There will always be somebody from, say, the Ngarla side or a civil liberties group who will say that they should not be doing this. These people might decide that a young bloke needs a bit of a hiding and that they should take him out and give him one, but there are lots of other people who will say, 'You shouldn't be doing that.'

Mr Leon Melpi—I can remember Uncle Felix giving me a good flogging.

Mr MURPHY—What did you do to deserve that?

Mr CADMAN—You were misbehaving.

Mr Leon Melpi—You cannot do that these days.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—We did that a couple of times in front of the office and people did not like it. But that was when the family came in—none of this business; this is hurting them more than the extended family hurt them.

Mr Leon Melpi—It goes back to about 1970 when the family thing came in.

Mr Terry Bullemor—It does not have to be flogging; there are other ways. Probably one of the best ways is to ensure that if somebody does a crime they pay for it.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—I am sure that there are many ways it can be dealt with better.

Mr CADMAN—What if, instead of going free, they were indentured to the council and had to work for the council for nothing for the next six months?

Mr Terry Bullemor—It is going to have to be something like that.

Mr Leon Melpi—It is coming. We are going to put things in place.

CHAIR—Apparently that is what a community service order was.

Mr Terry Bullemor—You have to understand what ‘community’ is. Community is not the right name for such a thing here; it would be a local name.

Mr Leon Melpi—Who are we trying to satisfy with this—the town clerk, the police or ourselves? Nowadays we often wonder, ‘Why are we doing that?’ We know that we have to do it, but we want to know who we are doing it for.

Mr Terry Bullemor—You want to know whether you are doing it for somebody else or for yourselves. I think what Leon is saying is that, if it comes under the jurisdiction of Thamarrurr, they will do it their way—not because the town clerk or the bloke whose car was pinched says that the kid should get a flogging.

CHAIR—When mandatory sentencing came in, you were getting a lot of community service orders, the amount of crime was increasing and you could not get insurance, so you were looking for something else. Did mandatory sentencing act as a circuit breaker? Did it break that pattern?

Mr Terry Bullemor—It might have done if it had been allowed to be implemented. But every case was contested, so the police were just doing more and more paperwork.

Mr Leon Melpi—There was no circuit breaker.

Mr Terry Bullemor—It became a problem because so many offences were piling up and not being dealt with that the kids were up to their third crime before the first one had even been handled. From a cut and dried perspective, mandatory sentencing was fairly simple. It is just that it became political and they just sort of scrapped it.

CHAIR—But from your point of view it was not necessarily a bad thing?

Mr CADMAN—You are saying that the implementation was more of a problem than the idea.

CHAIR—The idea was that if you do the crime you have to pay. That was good. When mandatory sentencing came in, was less crime or more crime committed, or was there no change?

Mr Terry Bullemor—Towards the end of it, when people started realising that it was fair dinkum, I think it was a deterrent. It took a while before it clicked in because of the amount of argument that went on in the courts. But when it clicked in people started to realise very quickly, ‘If I do that and I’ve already got this, one more offence and I might be gone for three or six months.’ It was then that it had an impact. Initially people probably thought, ‘I’ve only got to do two weeks or one month.’ Then all of a sudden they realised, ‘I might be there for six months,’ and it really made them think again.

CHAIR—Now that it has been taken away, have things gone back to the old situation?

Mr Terry Bullemor—I am not sure where it is right now. They are probably looking at priors.

Mr CADMAN—Are diversionary programs the alternative?

Mr Terry Bullemor—Only for a select group, not for everybody. Juvenile diversion is only available for a small select group of offenders.

CHAIR—Juvenile diversion is a pre-court program.

Ms Demos—Yes.

CHAIR—But it is very limited in its application.

Ms Demos—Yes.

Mr Terry Bullemor—We drew a picture some time ago which shows where we are coming from. We said, ‘Little kids, sometimes very young ones, are getting into trouble. Big kids are getting into trouble; they have already decided that they are adults and are going to make their own way in life.’ We believe that some of them could be saved through diversion and we are looking at having cultural, educational and other programs that may be good for them. More importantly, we need to ensure that these kids do not have a trouble-free apprenticeship in crime. The courts cannot do anything with them until they are about 13. Some of the little kids tag along with the big kids—they might be the little kid who gets pushed through the wire to open the door. All the big brothers or cousins might get pulled up. The little kids say, ‘What about us?’ and they are told, ‘You’re not old enough; you’ll have to come back later.’ Some of the bigger kids have no option—they are just going straight to jail. But they have worked it out for themselves. What is more important to us is what is happening with the little kids at the lower end of the scale than what is happening higher up.

CHAIR—Is anything that you are doing working?

Mr Terry Bullemor—We have to create a stronger community by following the women’s example. The women want to make a stronger community by having stronger family units. People are gaining more self-esteem because they are working in a structure where they get recognition. We need to look at prevention. We are not going to save every one of them. For some of these kids, getting into Berrimah or wherever is like a rite of passage. For some it is horrific, but a lot of them get through it. Their getting into trouble is mostly a symptom of other issues. To put this in perspective, if 20 of you were living in the one house you would drive each other crazy. Would you want to have 20 members of your family living in the house with you all the time?

CHAIR—Only if my house were the size of Buckingham Palace.

Mr Terry Bullemor—The houses here are not Buckingham Palace. It is difficult. Crime is a worry to us. We must get more effective sentencing to make sure that if they do the crime they pay—and not just do the time but also pay the dollars and understand that it is crime against the community. We must also give these younger kids a chance by making the education system work better and helping with what the women are doing in creating better families. People have a chance now. Under this COAG initiative we want to look at the construction industry here. It does not necessarily need more money but it might need changes in procurement policies. In trying to get better conditions we argue that we are geographically and economically isolated to some extent. Instead of going for public tender with the cheapest tender winning, there has to be

provision for these people to do something for themselves. They need that opportunity. They had an industry before.

CHAIR—The community do not want others coming in to do the work; they want to do it themselves.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—Yes.

Mr Terry Bullemor—That is being picked up. If we concentrate on the older children, not much will get done. If we concentrate on the younger children, there are many things we can do. We may need to ensure that the welfare acts are being implemented here. To give a kid a chance, we may sometimes need to tell a parent, ‘All right, get fair dinkum with them.’ Theadora has spoken of the Education Act.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—The new program is the foundation for what we want to do. Terry has just mentioned the kids. We want to get to them before they get into trouble. That is what we are trying to develop here. We are trying to get our young people involved in family, going out into the country and seeing things like that. It is very important. This is a family program and a cultural way which is more appropriate for the family to develop. Already there are people from outside trying to jump into that program. I fear all the time that it is going to be the same as in mission times, when people came and dominated our culture. Our program must be more relevant, more appropriate and more cultural. I am starting to get the feeling that people are trying to jump in. That feeling is very strong, and I am saying, ‘Stay out of it.’

CHAIR—Do you have a concept of the community itself developing its own charity organisation? It would be your own organisation and it would say, ‘All right, it’s our job. As community people we will group together. We will raise money. We will have programs and we will help people.’ No matter which clan they came from, you would provide help for them. Is anything like that starting to develop?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—We have that position already. Under Thamarrurr we have our own organisation which all the women belong to. We are very charitable people and I am sure that we can support other programs. So I say, ‘Let’s do it; let’s build our program and help the families.’

CHAIR—That organisation would provide food and clothing when needed?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—Everything—whether it is food or clothing or anything else, it is there. That is why, in the documents we put up for various certificates, I said that our wealth is family.

Mr Terry Bullemor—A more important part of that is that they are teaching people to stand on their own two feet. By developing a stronger family, they are addressing the problem at that level.

CHAIR—But you will always have people who slip through the net. There will always be people, no matter what community it is, who cannot make it on their own. You have to be able to reach out and help such people. Someone has to help them. Government can do certain things,

but government is always impersonal. It always has to be the people who are part of the community who reach out to their own.

Mr Terry Bullemor—We are doing that here. Our town is run by four charitable institutions, and they are extremely charitable.

CHAIR—Who are they?

Mr Terry Bullemor—Kardu Numida Incorporated, Murrin Association, Palngun Wurnangat and Mitrinbata Tribal Development Association—KNI, MA, PW and MTDA.

Mr Leon Melpi—They are our organisations in charity business. Under Thamarrurr we have the clan groups. When we talk about family, let us not forget that within this group, even though we have these organisations, we also have the family groups. It is not everyone's responsibility to go around chasing money for Thamarrurr. It is really up to the individual groups. If a group has a problem, they need to get back to Thamarrurr and say, 'Look, we're in strife. We need someone to step in here and help us out.' The council get together to discuss what they can do.

CHAIR—And those groups?

Mr Leon Melpi—We advise certain groups, 'This is what you can do.' We have a council meeting and then feed back to this lot. These people are right in the middle of whatever is going to happen.

CHAIR—Do the people on those four charities come from all the groups?

Mr Leon Melpi—The people in these four charities are members of Thamarrurr. We are all members of the organisation.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—That is the level where the committee sits.

Mr Leon Melpi—It does not matter which group you are in; these associations are owned by us. We are these associations. There are two things really. We are members of Thamarrurr but, when you talk about this area, we are the traditional landowners. To get this into perspective, if you want to make things happen, if half of this group are out of there trying to support these people without the others there there is really no point. But every one of us is a member of this area.

CHAIR—Where does the money for those charities come from? Do you raise it?

Mr Terry Bullemor—When the community were looking for some good news stories back in 1994, we looked at what was going on. In the past 10 years, 25 per cent of the new housing has been built by community organisations. They run Murrin Airways. You did not fly here on Murrin Airways, and we are going to talk to you about using that airline the next time you come here. The community runs its own airline and its money goes back into housing. When the club was running, its profits went back into housing. At the time of the store, profits from that went into housing. Kardu Numida builds houses. As a local government authority, we are the only ones who receive government funding. Kardu Numida is the local government part of

Thamarrurr. MTDA is a totally private enterprise. PW is just starting to get government money but it is private enterprise. The Murrin Association gets a little bit of government money but is mostly private enterprise. If we did a pie chart, our income from the Commonwealth under the federal assistance grant and from the Northern Territory government would be something like six per cent of our budget. For most other stuff we take on other services, collect local revenue, win contracts and that type of thing. Give us the ability to win more contracts and we will be able to be more charitable.

CHAIR—Would they be contracts in your own area?

Mr Terry Bullemor—Yes. We are not going to tender for work outside the area. Under further development of the construction industry, we are looking at having a locally owned Aboriginal construction company. We would keep the money here, utilise local resources—sand, gravel, wood and so on—and gradually build up a local economy. We want to normalise. We want to establish a system to keep the money here. We have a local chamber of commerce.

CHAIR—‘Normalise’ is a word that you use all the time and I quite like it. You want to normalise. It comes through in so many of the things you say.

Mr Terry Bullemor—People want to live normal lives. People ask what sort of housing community people want, thinking of the sergeant of police or the council clerk, say—a husband and wife and two kids living in a house with a nice yard. They think we want something like that. But when you put 20 people in there—or 30 in some cases—it is not normal. We have a good working relationship with the police, but they desperately need a new information technology system. The police can spend four or five hours a day trying to hook up communications between here and Darwin. Because they have a particular network, they cannot use Telstra’s BigPond or that type of thing. They want to be out and involved in the community more, but they might have to spend their time trying to hook up with Darwin.

CHAIR—Do you have a location device?

Mr Terry Bullemor—We get a letter every day from somebody offering something, but it does not seem to hit the mark. We are desperate for communication. We would argue that we ought to have a mobile telephone link here to let everybody have communication. The difficulty these people have in their lives is that bloody whitefellas have got the keys to the telephones, the motor cars and everything else, and they want to normalise. They just want to have a normal life.

Mr Leon Melpi—In this new area I am trying to get around that problem so that things can be normal over there.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Things are happening in that area.

Mr Leon Melpi—Instead of having a telephone or a satellite over there, all I have is UHF.

Mr Rick Bliss—This is a town of 3,000 people. It would be the only place of this size in Australia without mobile phone coverage.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Talking about normalising, another abnormality is that we do not have any access to public rental accommodation.

Mr Rick Bliss—On the issue of communication, this is a black spot.

Dr WASHER—A mobile phone can work from a satellite antenna.

Mr CADMAN—We have programs that can do that.

Mr SECKER—We have Networking the Nation; you should be fine in qualifying for that money.

Mr Terry Bullemor—We have received some funding from Networking the Nation. The equipment in the corner of the room is hooked up for videoconferencing, and people are starting to use it. It is particularly good for young kids who might be in Alice Springs jail when a family member dies. The family can come together and comfort that kid. We have things but there are still some difficulties. While there is technology that can do a lot, we do not seem to be able to get it here. We can do it in a one-off situation. We might say, 'We'll give the community one teleconferencing unit,' and expect the whole community of 2,000 people to have access to it. We want Leon to have Telstra BigPond over there so that we can start talking together by email and all sorts of things. We want to normalise. But it needs to be a bit more widespread than just one-offs.

Canberra people have the concept that communities like this one are just nice little places. We get lots of different people up here, generally in the winter. We get between 10 and 15 government visits a week, so we do not get much work done then—only on the weekends. We had a Treasury mob come up just to see where the money was being spent. We were talking about the clinic up here. At the time it was seeing 2,000 patients a month. We have people delivering babies and dealing with road trauma; we have natural deaths and all sorts of illnesses and whatever. Because we call it a clinic, this guy from Canberra said, 'But it is not a hospital, it is a clinic.' In his mind, a clinic was where his wife took the baby, got it weighed and had a cup of tea.

Mr SECKER—It is a bush hospital really, the same as those in Victoria.

Mr Terry Bullemor—We spend most of our lives trying to change people's perception of what life is like in these places. We keep saying that all these people want to do is to normalise. That is all they want. They are not a special case. They do not want to be treated like: 'Oh, what are we going to do with those poor old Aboriginals down at Port Keats?' It is not like that at all. We just want to live normal lives. On that, perhaps you can say to the police that you will buy them a new communications system.

Mr Leon Melpi—The Territory health service walked away from us, and it is a good thing that we had experienced health workers here. One lady gave birth here without the assistance of any medical people.

Mr Terry Bullemor—There must be dozens of midwives in the community.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—Yes, there are dozens of them.

CHAIR—Let us talk about Telstra BigPond.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Telstra BigPond is excellent.

Mr SECKER—You say that you have dozens of midwives in the community. They would be natural ones?

Mr Terry Bullemor—A lot of them would be trained. We have had people running the clinic for years and years. They are not medically qualified midwives, but they know all about it. Telstra BigPond is great. We have some installations of that in the community and it is really good stuff. If they doubled that again—

Mr SECKER—You have BigPond by satellite?

Mr Terry Bullemor—Yes, the send/receive stuff. That is tremendous.

CHAIR—So it is satellite, but you do not have the little towers.

Mr Terry Bullemor—That is right. Everybody has to have an individual installation.

CHAIR—You mean that everyone needs a little dish.

Mr Terry Bullemor—Yes.

Dr WASHER—What sort of radius are we talking about?

Mr Terry Bullemor—It is only straight from the satellite down. Everybody has to have a discrete installation.

Proceedings suspended from 1.37 p.m. to 2.12 p.m.

CHAIR—We are continuing our public hearing in the women's centre.

Ms Demos—I will give a little background and Theadora will follow on from that. The women in this building are planning to have more sewing training. Many local women have a skill in sewing, and we are looking to them to be future trainers. The women are in the process of building a training room. Because of the mixed cultures in Wadeye, there must be a place where all the women can come together. The women's association wove the mat that is hanging in the next room. The map is a symbol of all women coming together in this centre, and that means white women and Aboriginal women. It also means that all the clan groups in Wadeye can come together in one place. The women plan to put up a false wall in the first room you walked into to make a computer, admin and office training area. We have the trainer; we just need the wall put up. The women also have Kardu, which is a family program. That program will operate from another building that is in the process of being renovated.

CHAIR—Is that the old takeaway?

Ms Demos—Yes. The women's association also own the takeaway and bakery. They have just had a change of manager and there are a lot of plans to have local trainees working inside the takeaway and bakery. Those plans are rolling now with this new manager. The women are very happy about that. That is a very good business.

CHAIR—On behalf of everybody, I congratulate the bakery. The food for morning tea and lunch was lovely. We would like you to know how impressed we were and how much we enjoyed it.

Ms Demos—The women used to staff the bakery in this very room a long time ago, and the women themselves were the bakers of the bread. That is one of the reasons why they wanted to diversify their takeaway into a bakery.

We have made up some documents. The women did a huge consultation about 11 months ago of all women in the community to try to find out what issues families in the community were facing—what issues were of concern to the local women. The document called 'Our Family' is pretty well a reflection of the comments that came from the community. That consultation was conducted using the right cultural processes for this community. There is a bit of methodology at the back of it. It is very important to conduct your business in the right way culturally; otherwise you do not get anything done. You will see the women's comments in the document. Things like programs and projects that do not involve our people will not be effective. It is very much about what the women have said rather than what anybody else has put. The family program has now received funding from the Commonwealth government. I believe it is \$440,000 across a three-year period. This document was written to base that program on.

The women told me that they tried to start a family program a long time ago in this community. The name of that program was virtually the same as the name of this one. The whole community really wanted this program to operate some time ago, but there was no funding around for it. This is a culture-strong program. It operates within camp areas. Even though you fly into Wadeye thinking that it is one community, it consists of six distinct town camp areas, each with its own name and its own authority over its camp area. Generally speaking, people do not mix up business in the community. For example, it would be difficult to find a group of young men to go over to another camp to paint, say, six houses. You cannot do that. You have to swap workers, if you know what I mean.

CHAIR—It sounds like a demarcation dispute.

Ms Demos—On the ground, it is quite a lot to work with. You are consulting constantly in order to determine whether you are working with the right person at any given time. All of that information is inside this document. The women want their program to work as a culture-strong program. They are used to programs coming in from the outside, but this program has been built from here upwards. Part of the program will be the production of things like a 'true story board', which is a painting. When local people look at that, there will be a huge amount of information that they will understand immediately. Theadora can tell you more about that painting.

Mrs Theadora Narndu—It was very hard for me to explain to the people from the Commonwealth how I would express my knowledge and my vision under this new development program called The Whole Family. We sat down and I consulted with the other women. I suggested that we could paint something to make a clear picture for those government people of what this family program is all about. It is my program and I have had the vision of this happening for a long time. The vision has come true. The picture is of symbols. You can see the roots of a tree. These roots make a strong foundation for that tree. It is solid ground that the roots are in and the tree is standing on. The earth and the environment give it life. Its roots represent someone like me being a leader of the community. You have to become like this root, a foundation, and then you will grow into that. The branches represent all the families around Wadeye. All the outlines are the boundaries of the land belonging to the individual families around Wadeye. I told the Commonwealth people that this is the foundation of my program. Every time I look at this, it gives me a message. It tells me that you have to stand like this root. The women were very excited about that.

Ms Demos—In the past, all of the resources that have come here have not really been culturally relevant, appropriate or sensitive. This is perhaps the first time that the people here have received recognition from government that they have their own ways of working. The women are being allowed an opportunity to try to run their own programs. Theadora is the coordinator of this program. There are no white ladies employed in the program. If there were, the program would not work. There is a senior family worker in each camp area. Underneath the senior family worker there are many other family workers who are not as senior and do not have as much authority. Kate Longmire, one of the ladies who work in that family program, has just told me that all the kids who never went to school are starting to go to school now. She is the right person with the right authority, the right cultural affiliations, to speak to those children and to the rest of the family who can get that group of kids to school. Doing things in the right cultural way in this community is a complex process.

CHAIR—Theadora, were you the one who went out and picked these people?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—Yes. I asked them if they wanted to be in that and they said okay.

Ms Demos—Theadora has a group of strong, spiritual women who also work with her in healing. That is another committee of healing women and senior women. All of those women are working with Theadora to get this program in place.

CHAIR—I would like to talk about the young girls who are getting pregnant. How we can help them?

Mrs Theadora Narndu—To my knowledge, this is where that has to be done. Everything has to be done under this program. The senior women or the ceremony women help in taking those young people out in the bush—out in the country. We can talk out there and tell them about things.

CHAIR—Do people use contraceptives?

Ms Demos—Just recently the women wrote a letter about their concerns about Depo-Provera in this community. This is a very sensitive issue. It is not something that is usually discussed around men. It is a little bit difficult to tell you about it with men present.

Evidence was then taken in camera, but later resumed in public—

BRYSON, Divisional Superintendent Richard, Northern Territory Police Force

McMASTERS, Senior Sergeant Dean, Officer in Charge, Wadeye Police Station, Northern Territory Police Force

CHAIR—Our formal public hearing is now continuing at the Wadeye Police Station. We have been talking with community leaders about the sorts of plans they want to put in place. We understand that the individual communities, rather than being ‘mixed up’—which is the term they use—have a need for separateness within the larger community. How do you see the situation?

Supt Bryson—Dean is the officer in charge on the ground and he is well placed to answer. You have had an opportunity to talk to Terry Bullemor and community members. In my view, the work done in recent times by Bill Ivery and Associates in relation to the new council formation is a move in the right direction. Historically, many of the problems existing in Port Keats stem from the fact that there are many family groups from other geographical locations physically positioned here. If we factor in Aboriginal cultural considerations, that does cause some problems with making decisions about what things happen and how they happen as far as Port Keats is concerned.

I presume that you will have the opportunity to be taken through where those groups reside and where they originally come from. The reality is that, of the up to 20 family or other kinds of groups that reside here in Port Keats, only one group owns and is responsible for this part of the land historically. Developing and making some forward progress with the council concept has been a long haul, because its complex and foreign nature is such a departure from the norms as far as the local people are concerned. But now we are at the point where all those parties are on board and can see future possibilities to address some of the problems of the community and the out-station parties in the medium term.

CHAIR—What is the nature of the criminal acts you see here?

Snr Sgt McMasters—With any given court program, they are mainly violent crimes such as domestic violence assaults or assaults stemming from family arguments and involving young men.

CHAIR—Is it more likely to be assaults by young men on young men?

Snr Sgt McMasters—Yes. It has turned around a bit. When I first got here, there was a lot of intimidatory assault where the old men were talked down or threatened by the young men and there was a lack of respect. We have turned that around a bit. Now we will not tolerate any sort of violence towards the older people. We have adopted a kind of zero tolerance policy on that and the message has got through. Consequently, I believe that the old people feel a lot more confident in coming to me now, reporting incidents of assault—family assault and assaults that happen at the drinking club—and saying, ‘Look, my young fellows are doing the wrong thing; can you talk to them?’ They are not scared of telling us about such things, whereas in the past they were.

CHAIR—Is it the older people who are coming to you?

Snr Sgt McMasters—Yes. The older people are more confident now. The other crimes are petty crimes—mainly unlawful entry, car stealing, criminal damage and that sort of thing by juveniles. There is never any sinister sort of motive. The basic motive is either hunger or boredom. If they break into the school or the store, they are not after computers or cameras; it is just food and tobacco. They leave the computers and the money. The crimes are of that nature.

CHAIR—I suppose there is no market for computers.

Snr Sgt McMasters—No; that is right. It is for stuff that is readily usable.

CHAIR—Do they take cash?

Snr Sgt McMasters—Yes.

CHAIR—There is a very high pregnancy rate among young girls here. Once it happens, it seems to happen again very quickly. How much of it is rape and how much of it is agreed to?

Snr Sgt McMasters—There is very little rape.

CHAIR—Is it all young people together? Is there much incidence of the older contractual relationships?

Snr Sgt McMasters—They have the promised bride sort of thing, but it is very rarely adhered to. That has abated a lot in the last two months as well. The young fellows walk the streets until three or four in the morning whistling and enticing the young girls out, and off they go and do whatever they do. It is just young people in a small community with very little to do. There is a lot of pregnancy among young women and it does cause certain problems with rivalries and jealousies—someone was not supposed to be with that particular woman; she has a boyfriend already who is in jail. It causes jealous fights. But mostly it is agreed to by both parties. There is very little force; it does occasionally occur but very rarely.

CHAIR—What about contraception?

Snr Sgt McMasters—I do not know. Kids always seem to be carrying a condom; whether or not they use them I do not know. I suppose the clinic nurses would be able to answer that. From talking socially to the nurses, I believe sexually transmitted diseases are prevalent. I guess they do not use condoms as much as they should.

CHAIR—We have heard tales of condoms being used as water bombs and so on.

Snr Sgt McMasters—And slingshots.

CHAIR—In your view, does the high population density per house lead to increased domestic violence? I understand community people do not like the term ‘domestic violence’ very much.

Snr Sgt McMasters—Definitely. For any sort of normality in society you need your own space. You can imagine what it would be like with 17 people living in a small house. You are each allocated a very small area. These guys are subjected to the everyday pressures of life just as we are. If I had to go into an environment like that, I am sure I would be far more tense and prone to being more short-tempered. The economic factor of housing has a lot to do with a lot of crime here, not just the crime of domestic violence. Very clearly, the kids do not have a chance to get proper sleep or proper meals or to go to school. A lot of the break-ins occur because of hunger and boredom.

CHAIR—What about marijuana?

Snr Sgt McMasters—That is a problem.

CHAIR—Where is it coming from?

Snr Sgt McMasters—This time last year we had two or three regular dealers coming from Darwin who were loosely associated with families here who would sell in Darwin. It goes in cycles. We manage to catch them selling their wares. We do not put them away but we discourage them from being here. It still goes on in small local ways. People here will collect money, buy it in Darwin and bring it back by plane, car or whatever. We are talking about small personal amounts. We have our eye on a couple of people now who have come back and are reportedly selling it. As for profits, a roll from which you might be able to make eight rollies costs \$50 in Darwin and here the kids will pay \$50 to \$100 for one rollie. It is a problem not so much in creating crime as in draining resources from one end of the community.

CHAIR—It destroys the brain. Is a joint here cheaper or dearer?

Snr Sgt McMasters—It is 10 times the price here.

CHAIR—So there is a price incentive to bring it in.

Snr Sgt McMasters—Yes, and it is impossible to police such a huge geographical area.

CHAIR—Do they grow it here?

Snr Sgt McMasters—Not that I am aware of; it is not that organised.

CHAIR—What about the alcohol problem? We have heard about permits. Some have said that they would like the club back and some have said that they would not.

Snr Sgt McMasters—The club here closed six years ago, I think. It did cause a problem. Thinking about it logically, the guys go and get drunk at the nearest licensed club, which is at Peppimenarti 100 miles away, and still bring problems back. It is a lot harder to control that far away than it would be here. They could be here in a controlled environment with responsible drinking. But therein lies the problem: the community have to demonstrate through this new council that they are willing to make hard decisions and be responsible about it. If drinkers were in there doing the wrong thing, the club committee or whoever had that responsibility would need to be strong enough to say, 'Right, you're banned.'

CHAIR—They made the point today that it would be much easier to do that if the licensing bloke were to come and say, ‘Here on the wall are the licensing laws. If you breach those laws, the licensing court says you have to go,’ rather than their having to say to a relative—a cousin or whatever—‘You have to go.’

Supt Bryson—I have spoken to Terry before about this. The police are not about prohibition; we are about responsible consumption. Other social clubs in other communities like Oenpelli or Tiwi islands have been very successful in teaching responsible consumption.

CHAIR—Last time I visited the Tiwi islands it was a Friday and I was told that I could not go to the pub because it was too dangerous.

Supt Bryson—I was talking about Pirlangimpi, certainly not Nguuu. Nguuu is far from being a model. Oenpelli and those sorts of places are very successful and have had long-term success with people being responsible with their consumption and in putting something back into the community. Those sorts of profits can go back into the community and flow on to the standard of life by providing funds for sporting competitions and all those sorts of things. In Port Keats those hard decisions need to be made in relation to proper management and administration of such a complex. Historically that has been quite poor and not of a very good standard. It appears that the community is starting to indicate that it wants to move back to that sort of arrangement and, as Dean has just said, if they get to the stage where the council works out to be quite successful and they have the will and the fortitude to make some hard decisions, it is certainly something that is squarely on the table as a real possibility.

CHAIR—The reputation that Port Keats has Australia-wide is not a very attractive one yet there are people here who are really trying hard.

Snr Sgt McMasters—It is very unfair. People ring up when they are coming out here—‘Are the roads open? How’s the Daly? What’s it like in Port Keats?’—and I tell them it is fine. Then they say, ‘Oh, I’ve been reading about it in the newspaper.’ I think, ‘Well, what newspapers have you been reading?’ because there is very little in the newspapers. The historical stuff is what puts that image in people’s head. Sure, it has had its share of problems. But I have a young family and I am quite happy for them to live here. I do not feel threatened by the locals at all. Sure, you get angry drunks but that is just part of policing. But in general I do not feel unsafe taking the kids for a walk down the street. They are lovely people, by and large. It is just that a few bad instances, a few bad things have made the press and have been sensationalised. I would say that more violence would have happened at Groote Eylandt than here.

CHAIR—How do you find it here? You have responsibility for the whole area.

Supt Bryson—A lot of the crime here is in the vein that Dean was talking about before. It is not of that extremely complex threshold. It is more opportunistic or needs based where, say, the kids are hungry because they have not had a feed but they target the food that is in the store or the take-away because they know it is there and they take that opportunity. But, as for serious infliction of violent injuries, certainly it is nowhere up near some of the other communities.

Snr Sgt McMasters—It does need a certain style of policing where you have to be on the spot straight away. Family violence situations do have the potential to flare up. I have been here

for a year now and for the first seven to eight months there were teething problems with them getting used to me. But now we have a working relationship where they know I am not going to take any sort of rubbish. They know that, if there is an increase in that sort of thing, we will do it the hard way and they will get locked up for it. They know that now, a lot of the bad guys. It is continually the same element. Twenty per cent of the population cause 90 per cent of the problems. At the moment we seem to have sort of negotiated them on side.

A most significant thing has happened here. One particular family, which were sort of the top of the tree at the time—the men were the strongest and causing most of the trouble. There was nothing I could do to stop it. I would lock them up or send them away, and they would come back and just continue on with this family stuff. I went to the head elder for this group and I told him that he had to do something about it; I told him that I was not getting through to them. He said, ‘We are scared; we do not want to do anything or we will get payback.’ I said, ‘You will have to trust me.’ To cut a long story short, all the names of the troublemakers were put into a letter signed by the group saying, ‘We don’t want you in Port Keats until you are ready to play the game.’ We got a task force of the TIG guys in and about 20 of us went down and evicted them and put them all on a truck and they went out and lived on their outstations for two or three weeks—it is pretty harsh out there—and then they said, ‘We’re ready to come back and talk.’ That set a precedent. All I have to say now is, ‘If you keep mucking up and not doing the right thing, I am going to take you to the old people and they are going to ask you to leave until you are ready to come back.’ It seems to have worked. There is a lot more happening here now. The old people seem to have a little bit more respect. They were all there that day, quite proud that they had written this letter and they were seeing these guys being taken off. But you need to be constantly on to it. With this sort of policing you cannot just sit back. As soon as there is any hint of trouble, I have to be out there in their faces saying ‘I’ve heard that there is trouble between you two and you’re going to have a fight.’ You have to jump on it.

Supt Bryson—The example that Dean has just spoken of was a huge turning point with some of the things that were happening here at Port Keats. For people who have never had much to do with Aboriginal communities, it would seem rather simplistic. But it was a huge stand on behalf of the local people to say to these people who come from the outstation area, ‘You must go off our land until you learn to behave in a socially acceptable way.’

CHAIR—Was that the elders of the owners of this land who said that they must go back to the outstation?

Supt Bryson—Yes. For many, many years they had not had the fortitude to stand up to these people and say that to them. Having done that gave them a little more respect in the eyes of some of the younger people who had formed some of the gangs. I am sure that you have had a chat with some of the community members about some of the juvenile gangs that have formed over the years. That was actually a very telling time. At the end of the day they knew it was not their land in the true sense of the word and the writing was on the wall. Since they have been back, to a degree they have been pretty well behaved.

Snr Sgt McMasters—There has been no incidence of gang or family related violence. We still have assaults and little fights going on but not on an organised, large family scale, where huge family groups go and seek retribution from the family they are fighting with.

CHAIR—When I was doing aged care and going into aged care homes down in Alice, a number of residents could be in there comatose but there was still payback.

Snr Sgt McMasters—There are different sorts of payback. There is justified payback where someone is sleeping with the wrong skin and that sort of traditional stuff. The payback we are talking about here is connected with something as simple as Peppimenarti. One bloke has had his quota and another bloke has a can left. The first asks the second for his can of beer—and this actually happened—and the second bloke would not give the first bloke his can of beer. That turned into a fight which then erupted into a 200-person melee three days later. That is not payback; that is not traditional.

CHAIR—Are you saying that taking that very strong stance appears to have been really effective?

Snr Sgt McMasters—I believe it has been.

CHAIR—When did it happen?

Snr Sgt McMasters—I think it was very early this year, just after Christmas. Five white policemen in a community of this size are not going to make a lasting impression, other than with reactionary sort of policing. To make it effective, people here have to learn to police themselves again to get normal standards of living back. They are only going to achieve that by making their own decisions. It is still hard to get them to do that. It is a cultural thing. You are not allowed to make a decision about another family member if you have nothing to do with that family, and everyone wants to stay clear of doing that. The one positive thing to work on is the fact that it is not the land of probably 70 per cent of the people who live here; they are here by invitation. I have really worked hard to try and get the Diminin people on side—Bonnifus and Theadora—and it seems to have worked.

CHAIR—I am not familiar with Bonnifus. We have talked with Theadora, Felix and Leon.

Snr Sgt McMasters—Bonnifus Perjer will go to some meetings and not to others. Is Felix the president of the council at the moment?

CHAIR—Theadora is. I think they swap the role and back each other up.

Snr Sgt McMasters—That is right. Bonnifus Purjer is the head elder of the Diminin people. He is like the commissioner of police. In terms of real law and order, he is the one I go to, even though he does not hold any official council position. He is the man I talk to and no-one else; that is it. In Aboriginal eyes, he is the head lawman.

CHAIR—So you have got him and the others to sign up?

Snr Sgt McMasters—Not necessarily to sign up; just to give them some confidence again—just to be able to say, ‘Hey, look, it’s not just the police and you mob. We want to work together. If I have a problem, Bonni, I want to be able to come to you and I want some help. These are your people and you need to make some decisions about them because I’m having no effect.’ And he has been good. We have sat down with some of the old people and we have had big

meetings. An incident occurred out there that was quite unsavoury and it caused a bit of tension. We sat down and they were honest with me; they said, 'Look, we're scared; we don't want to get flogged or bashed up. We're scared of making complaints or doing anything about it.' I said, 'You have to trust me; you have to draw a line in the sand and say, "We want you to do this, Sergeant," and trust that I'll do it.' The day that family got evicted, all sorts of threats were coming out the back of the truck as it was going. It was in language and translated it was, 'We're going to come back and get you.' I made it quite clear to those guys that if heard that any of those people got hurt I would go out of my way to make sure that they would be going to jail.

It might all seem a bit melodramatic or what have you, but it built the confidence of those local people up. I can now go and say, even about the kids, 'Look, Boni, this kid has broken in so many times; he's starting to sniff petrol and there is nothing I can do; what can you do about it?' A couple of times he has come and said, 'Give him to me' and they send them out to the outstation for a while. It does not solve every situation, but it gives me an option. They are talking about forming a night patrol again, which is a good move. The Aboriginal night patrol has failed here on several other occasions. It needs to be set up properly and it needs the full backing of the Thamarrurr council. Everyone needs to be behind it. We had problems with the vehicle being used and taken to Darwin by the men for drinking purposes.

CHAIR—We took evidence down in Geraldton where they have a night patrol. They have Aboriginal kids on the streets at 2, 3, 4 o'clock in the morning. One of the problems is that the homes are very violent and when you put the kids back into their homes you are putting them back into a more violent situation and they are actually safer on the streets. Is there anything like that here?

Snr Sgt McMasters—There is violence. It is often that dad will be at Peppimenarti drinking and mum will be playing cards. The kids are not getting a meal into them at night. Cards are a big thing here. A lot of money gets spent on card games. Dad gets the money to go to Peppimenarti, mum gets a certain amount to play on cards and that leaves the kids. I am just a policeman and this is a very hard social problem. The family unit, as we know it, is just not there in a lot of cases.

CHAIR—How can we call it a family unit when there are 20 people to a house?

Snr Sgt McMasters—Exactly. What sort of a chance does a kid have of growing up normally and healthily, of playing and kicking a footy and that sort of thing? That was not even happening when I came here. But this year they had a footy competition running and the kids seem to be playing, getting out and kicking a footy in the street and things like that. Simply with things like that it is slowly improving. It is not just happening with us; a lot of things are happening with the community slowly getting things up and getting a bit more normality back.

Supt Bryson—Dean might want to mention his youth club work with Norforce.

Snr Sgt McMasters—I have been in the reserve for 20-odd years. There is a depot here and at the moment I have 25 cadets on the books. They are going down to do their training, their recruit course. I have signed my ACPO up; she is becoming a cadet officer and will be going over with them. They turn up in their uniforms and they enjoy it. Perhaps you would have some political

sway. I am trying to talk the CO of Norforce into giving me a couple of vehicles so I can get some of the local boys interested and get them out there patrolling.

CHAIR—Two vehicles?

Snr Sgt McMasters—Two vehicles would be great. At the moment it is an empty depot. If I am going to get people interested, I have to have something to get them interested in.

CHAIR—Where is the empty depot?

Snr Sgt McMasters—Down the back, next to the power plant.

CHAIR—That seems a simple request to me.

Snr Sgt McMasters—Do not get me in trouble. We have a lot of things started up. The disco is a very regular event. A youth thing is happening. There is a Wednesday movie night.

CHAIR—You have given them something to do.

Snr Sgt McMasters—We are trying to. The big problem with Port Keats is the lack of resources in the town itself. If you want to get quality people to do work, there is just no housing, no non-Indigenous housing. I put people up in my police cadet cubicles—workers who come out here to do road works, health staff, dental nurses and people like that. We put them up here because there is no accommodation for them in Port Keats. That is a real problem; it affects everyone. My other officer here, Carmen, is a female. She has been here for nearly two years. She is heavily involved in the community. She has the soft ball girls up and running. She takes them into Darwin. There was a big Daly River arts festival and I think they came runners-up in the grand final. The women here are a lot more switched on and together than the men.

Supt Bryson—Theadora has done a lot of work in that regard.

CHAIR—She is quite impressive. Miriam Rose Baumann, a friend I have up here, is sensational, and Theadora is a similar sort of woman. They have internal strength. They have taken their education and put it to good use. That is one of the other things that came out of those discussions this morning, that there seems to be a whole generation of kids who have missed out on education.

Snr Sgt McMasters—I do not understand. I was told by Terry the story of why there is no public education here. It is Catholic, the old school—for a town this size why there is no actual public education.

CHAIR—We have been told that it is the sixth largest town in the Northern Territory. Is that right?

Snr Sgt McMasters—That is right. It is one of the biggest Aboriginal communities in Australia. There is no department of education and no primary school or high school. It is all run by ALSCH (or ULSCH). There is history behind that and I am not sure what it is. I was told once by Terry. I cannot understand it. The attendance rate is not very good, from what I have been

told. With juvenile diversion we make kids go to school. It is a difficult place to live. It is very easy for people to misunderstand and say that the Aboriginal people just sit down and take sit-down money and they should work. But what work is there to do here?

CHAIR—If they had their own construction business, they could build their own houses and become owners. The point they made is: when there is work to be done here, do not put it out to tender; let them do their own work here and judge it. This is not a place where there is a competitive economy functioning enabling the building of an economy.

Supt Bryson—There does not appear to have been in recent times that I am aware of any capacity to up skill people at a local level so that they can learn to stand up for themselves.

CHAIR—They have said that, after the 1994 experience when they went bust and money went missing, they repaid \$5 million and they did that out of getting construction. They were talking quite sensibly about building their skills.

Supt Bryson—Certainly when I have been to a couple of the council meetings, Terry has said that one of the big ticket items as far as the community is concerned is that they want to see some skills in those areas where they can do some things for themselves.

CHAIR—What we are perhaps looking at here is for the Commonwealth to get value for money, which is the criterion in letting tenders, rather than simply getting the job done the cheapest; in an area like this it would be creating work and social capital in this region. That would give a good outcome to the money they are spending.

Snr Sgt McMasters—There are a lot of good ideas here. A case in point was the Thamarrurr rangers, which was a scheme of Scott McIntyre, a European bloke. He had about 10 to 15 Aboriginal people working for him in connection with weeds, pests and feral animals, and it was working quite well. But often they would shoot themselves in the foot because their car would be stolen and absolutely trashed, and they depended on that car to get them to places. They just did not have the money to replace it or fix it. It had been stolen by local guys who knew what the car was for; they stole it to get to Peppimenarti and they cooked the engine.

CHAIR—That sort of thing happens in Sydney where people will trash a handicapped person's vehicle. There is no sort of monopoly on that behaviour here. But presumably the car was not insured.

Snr Sgt McMasters—That is right. Every big crime that is committed here has a direct effect on the rest of the community. The school was broken into over Easter and the home economic room was absolutely trashed and thousands of dollars worth of food perished. They left fridges and freezers open. They used to feed the kids up there; they would feed the kids breakfast and lunch. The kids would go in and cook it themselves. Because of that, no food is now left on the premises. So now the take-away here cook tucker for the school, which costs the take-away money, which is run by the women's centre. So plainly earnings are now going as a result of someone's crime. The message needs to be got across that every crime committed in the community like that has a ripple effect on everyone else. It is very hard to get that message through.

CHAIR—We were discussing with the council earlier that where they are caught there should be some way of making them start to pay.

Snr Sgt McMasters—Restitution is a big issue. About six months ago there was a bit of a riot. After the incident about eight houses had been totally trashed, and there was about \$350,000 worth of damage. It was rather ironic. That sort of money had been set aside to actually improve the houses of the people who had trashed these houses in the riot. So the money got taken off them to fix the damage that they had done. For the courts to try to get that sort of restitution out of a local person here is just impossible.

CHAIR—They were saying that they use Centrepay to withhold a percentage of their pension, because they have to pay it off even if it is going to take 20 years. They thought that a certain percentage being taken out of their pension to be given back would have some effect.

Supt Bryson—It certainly could. But in some of the situations here, ultimately the children pay the price for that. Dad would still visit Peppimenarti and drink and mum would play cards; it is just that by the time it gets to the bottom of the food chain the children would do without.

CHAIR—Except that the person who is more likely to do it is the age of a kid. The major perpetrators Australia-wide are 17- to 25-year-old males, and they are the biggest victims too.

Snr Sgt McMasters—It is a very hard one. The point my boss is trying to make is that money does not belong to one person here; it belongs to the family. Everything is shared. It is a real communist approach, I guess. If you take money off the 17- to 25-year-old, ultimately you will affect his mum and his dad. That 17- to 25-year-old, because of his position in the family, will demand that money from them. Therefore the young kid, whom the mum does care for and support, will suffer, because it is only, say, the 25-year-old who can demand that money to go and drink of course at Peppimenarti. The Aboriginal people have this real family bonding thing where you cannot refuse somebody who asks for something. It causes a lot of fights and it is a big problem.

CHAIR—That is the way they are. That is their culture. But you still have to find a way around it.

Supt Bryson—Graham Waite is going to talk to you tomorrow.

CHAIR—What sort of programs do you put them on here?

Supt Bryson—The units were funded basically as a coordination role. They were supposed to tap into other possibilities, other programs and things that were in existence. The reality is that in a lot of these places there were no programs and the overall program was not funded on the basis of inventing new programs.

CHAIR—So there is a problem?

Supt Bryson—Yes.

CHAIR—Are there programs here?

Supt Bryson—There are informal programs. We have tried to use our initiative, and informal programs work out to a certain degree for the kids.

Snr Sgt McMasters—There are four official programs but they are not ongoing. There is the Kardu Kigay secondary school. It is basically the only secondary school these kids will have. It is run by the Christian Brothers for the 15- to 20-year-old age group. There were the Thamarrurr rangers, which are now incapacitated. We have an alcohol and drug awareness program run by old George, which is mainly for people with substance abuse problems. And there is the old school, which is basically an informal program. It is not signed up and registered with all the insurance aspects covered. It is just a program that is most appropriate for us to send kids to. We are not limited if a kid has to go to a program. Diversion can be anything. If we think there is a worthwhile course that a kid can go to and benefit from in Darwin, we will send them to that. That is where you need a good person and that is what has been lacking with the juvenile diversion units—consistency with a good person in there coordinating, wanting to stick here and access all these different programs and things that kids can go on.

CHAIR—Have you got such a person now?

Snr Sgt McMasters—For some reason, it is very hard to keep personnel. I have just had a nightmare run with the people who work there. I think the salary offered is a big problem.

CHAIR—How much is the pay?

Snr Sgt McMasters—It is \$40,000-odd—\$42,000.

Supt Bryson—The appropriate sort of person obviously has to have the drive and initiative to bring everything together. They have to be prepared to live here in the first place, and then they need to have the skills to be able to deal with all the cultural issues we have just talked about in the last hour. That person is a rare species.

CHAIR—Is there no way they can take someone within your own service and top up their pay and use the experience as an adjunct to the job? At least they would be here on the ground.

Supt Bryson—I do not think anything that would stop that happening other than the mere staffing situation. As an organisation, as I said before, we are having a review at the moment in relation to levels and staffing across the Territory.

Snr Sgt McMasters—Excuse me if I speak out of turn, but it is something that I asked for. We had a resources review here. I said that we were not asking for a lot more people. Just one person solely dedicated to juvenile diversion and admin here would be beneficial. It would just give juvenile diversion that consistency. That person could be a police auxiliary. They would not have to be a police officer. Their sole role would be to handle this diversion program. We have not got the time. It is a cumbersome process paperwork-wise. I believe that it can work, but it is personality driven. Anything out here in a community like this is personality driven. Perhaps the salary is not the important thing. We need someone who is motivated and who would do a good job. Just putting someone in that spot means nothing. You have to get the right person who is willing to do the work.

CHAIR—I think you are more likely to get someone like that within your service.

Snr Sgt McMasters—Who wants to come? There are many associated resource issues with that—housing, pay. You cannot rob Peter to pay Paul, sort of thing.

CHAIR—Perhaps the provision of an extra house and that person could come out of Commonwealth funding. That would make a lot of sense. Would that make it easier for you to work it?

Snr Sgt McMasters—It would. That is one breakdown—I do not know the history of the policy of having a separate unit as a juvenile unit. But we did have teething problems with the procedural expectations of the police and with the people out there. So many people were going through juvenile diversion and going to Darwin to be trained. You would get one person trained up and then they would go and leave, and there was never any consistency. But if you had someone out here from our department, they would be at least on a two-year tender and you would get consistency. That is all it needs.

CHAIR—In our discussions they said that their attitude to mandatory sentencing kind of fitted their traditional law because that is mandatory. They said that they were not opposed to it and in certain ways it did work.

Snr Sgt McMasters—Graham Waite is the person to speak to about the reason for the Wadeye juvenile unit being separate from the police. There was to be the handing of it over to the people again. That just has not been happening. For the last two months we have had a local field officer, but before that there was not a lot of local involvement.

CHAIR—Some good issues have come out of this inquiry, and we are trying to work on some good practical outcomes. There is much mythology to overcome.

Supt Bryson—We are trying to get out the message of the reality on the ground.

Committee adjourned at 3.50 p.m.