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STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND
FORESTRY

Reference: Rural skills training and research

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY
Wednesday, 7 December 2005

Members: Mr Schultz (*Chair*), Mr Adams (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Martin Ferguson, Mr Michael Ferguson, Mr Forrest, Mr Lindsay, Mr Gavan O'Connor, Mr Secker, Mr Tuckey and Mr Windsor

Members in attendance: Mr Adams, Mr Martin Ferguson, Mr Michael Ferguson, Mr Forrest and Mr Tuckey

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

- The availability and adequacy of education and research services in the agriculture sector, including access to vocational training and pathways from vocational education and training to tertiary education and work.
- The skills needs of agricultural industries in Australia, including the expertise and capacity of industries to specify the skills-sets required for training, and the extent to which vocational training meets the needs of rural industries.
- The provision of extension and advisory services to agricultural industries, including links and coordination between education, research and extension.
- The role of the Australian government in supporting education, research and advisory programs to support the viability and sustainability of Australian agriculture.

WITNESSES

GALVIN, Mr David John, General Manager, Indigenous Land Corporation 1
McCARTHY, Mr Stephen, National Capacity Development Manager, Indigenous Land Corporation 1

Committee met at 5.07 pm

GALVIN, Mr David John, General Manager, Indigenous Land Corporation

McCARTHY, Mr Stephen, National Capacity Development Manager, Indigenous Land Corporation

ACTING CHAIR (Mr Adams)—Welcome. I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for its inquiry into rural skills training and research. This is the 10th public hearing for this inquiry, as part of an extensive program. Our public hearings and visits are designed to gather information from people directly involved with the main issues of the inquiry. Today the committee will be hearing from the Indigenous Land Corporation.

Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. Do you wish to make a brief statement about your submission?

Mr Galvin—No, thanks; I think it speaks for itself.

Mr McCarthy—No, thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—We will go straight to questions.

Mr FORREST—Thanks for your submission. I am still trying to understand what the Indigenous Land Corporation does. Could you just give me a quick few sentences, as education, on the role of the corporation and then the link to this inquiry?

Mr Galvin—The Indigenous Land Corporation was set up in 1995 as a response to the Mabo decision. It has a remit from the parliament to purchase land and then divest that land to Indigenous corporations. It also has a remit to manage Indigenous lands throughout Australia. Since 1995, the Indigenous Land Corporation has purchased 176 properties across Australia, amounting to about 5.2 million hectares of land. It also has the remit to assist Indigenous groups to manage Indigenous-held land that has not been purchased by the Indigenous Land Corporation. That may be land granted to Indigenous groups through the NT land rights act or through the various land rights acts across the states and territories.

With the amount of properties that we have purchased, particularly in the rural areas, what has occurred is that, in the initial inception of the Indigenous Land Corporation, properties were purchased for cultural reasons and then divested to traditional owners. Not a lot of thought or property management planning went into those purchases. The benefit was to go to the land: you buy the land, you divest it to the Aboriginal corporation and you have your benefit. Unfortunately, in, say, 85 per cent of cases, that did not occur. The benefit was not in the land; the benefit was from what you could derive from the land.

So we conducted a full stocktake of our properties between about 2000 and 2002, which was then about 156 properties across Australia, and we found, as I just stated, that only 15 per cent really developed into providing groups with benefits. A lot of them were actually a burden, because you then became a landholder. You had rates; you had taxes; you had to comply with pastoral administration acts across Australia; et cetera.

We have gone back and had a look at those properties from the stocktake, and we are now conducting a remediation program across those ILC properties. That program is just going back to the basics with a lot of those groups, saying to them: 'What did you want from the property? We need a property management plan. What are your goals? Those goals might not be consistent with what the property can actually produce.' So it is quite a rigorous process that we are going through. That ends up developing property management plans and the capacity to run the properties—what people want to do.

We can put the properties that we are trying to assist in three categories. For a third of the properties, we find it very difficult to deal with the groups. The groups are dysfunctional, in conflict or do not want deal with us. Then we have a middle group where the groups do not have the capacity but they have commitment, so we are working with them to develop those properties. That could mean just leasing the properties under a fair process to the next-door neighbours who have the skills. A lot of those properties are not economically viable as stand-alone properties. We then have a group who are go-ahead people—they would be the other third of the larger group—who are getting in and working hard. They have the capacity and the commitment; they just need assistance. So really we are working with the group in the middle and the group at the end. As for the group who do not want to engage with us, we have enough to do with the other two-thirds. So, until they want to engage and assist us in assisting them, we just say, 'You're open to it.'

ACTING CHAIR—That is good. We are interested, of course, as a committee in your needs in the training and skill areas. I see from your submission that you have gone into some processes with state governments—and maybe the federal government; I am not sure—regarding Yapala Station in South Australia, Gaythorne Station and Hillgrove Station in Queensland and the Top End Aboriginal Land Management and Employment Strategy 2004-2006. Can you tell us a little about that?

Mr Galvin—I will pass over to Steve on the FarmBis program in particular, which is a major program, and in-depth maybe a little on—

Mr TUCKEY—Just before you do, my recollection from when this program was announced to the parliament and I was present is that it was a response to the fact of virtually urban Aboriginal people because under the land rights legislation most of the land was freeholded and therefore not claimable. It seems from my observation and your recent remarks that, nevertheless, a lot of the land purchases have been made in areas where land claims might have been possible. Further to that—and you make the point of people just wanting some land—a particular pastoralist known to me thought all his Christmases had come at once when they bought the property and then let him take all the cattle off it. The only value of the property was the cattle. That was a pastoral lease. There were issues like that and, I presume, issues predating you guys that were unbelievable.

With another farming property I dealt with, the property was made available but no cash to buy livestock, buy plant or put a crop in. Those people I think might be in your good character list because they let their neighbours share farm the property, so they got a financial return and they used that money to buy sheep. They were people who managed in that situation. While you are explaining all this, because this is a training inquiry, could you explain how we link your land purchases and grants in making sure the people that go on to the property are, if I can use the words, the good guys? Is there a preparatory approach you would recommend to us?

Mr Galvin—There are two angles to that. What you say is correct and very sensible. The process of acquiring land is now completely different than it was previously. Under our act we say that you have to acquire land for social, cultural, environmental or economic benefits. So you now have to state to us the major benefit that you want from that land and then demonstrate to us a business plan or a property management plan before we acquire that land. For instance, if it was an economic purchase, where you wanted to run sheep and cattle et cetera, you would have to come up with a business plan that showed that it was economically viable and you had the skills or, if you did not have the skills, that you had a partner to do it with. That is the first part of getting the right program.

The social stream, for instance—and this addresses what you were saying about the majority of properties bought in rural areas—is now being approached predominantly in the urban areas, where people who have a good skills base of delivering good services now are able to apply to the ILC and say, ‘We’ve been working for five, 10 or 15 years in pretty cramped conditions et cetera. We’d like to expand and go into a new building.’ We say: ‘You’ve got a proven track record. We’ll purchase in urban areas for you.’ It has changed around. At the moment 75 per cent of our purchases are now in urban areas and the rest are in rural areas, whereas before it would have been 85 per cent in rural areas and 15 per cent in urban areas.

ACTING CHAIR—I would like to bring it back to the training and—

Mr TUCKEY—Yes, I think we are anxious to hear from you.

ACTING CHAIR—There was that station that I mentioned—

Mr TUCKEY—A whole property was destocked because the people for whom it was being purchased could not handle the cattle. We consequently had a tragic example of people who just went walkabout. That was very embarrassing. In your program, what do you say we should be reporting on in making economic land ready? Do you see any opportunity for us to recommend in that regard?

Mr Galvin—Yes, definitely. One of our big aims now is going back to the vast majority of Indigenous land that has already been held and is being underutilised in exactly the situation that you have stated. Basically, with state and territory partners, we are funding property management plans and skilling people in their capacity to run properties. If they have proven that they can run those properties through that training, then we will look at purchasing livestock et cetera for them. We have the FarmBis program to which we contribute between 30 per cent and 50 per cent for property management planning and business planning for people on the properties.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Has that been successful?

Mr Galvin—Yes. It has been very successful across Victoria. What are the other states, Steve?

Mr McCarthy—Victoria, South Australia and NT are the key ones.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Why is this program successful?

Mr McCarthy—There is a bit of concept behind this. The needs of the 66 per cent of people that we are talking about have changed dramatically since they have acquired this land—sustainability and all of those issues have come into it as have family and peer pressures: ‘We need jobs. We have a property; why can’t we have a job.’ The reality on these properties is that, in my time, they might have run 10 staff, the generation before me might have run 30, now they run one—and they are struggling to make a quid out of it as well. So they have all of these other needs and social programs that they need to be doing. It is quite complex. On the rural side of things, property management plans are critical to any business. Whether it is a business plan or a property management plan there is a slightly different spin on these things.

Mainstream service providers were going out there with a deal in their wheelbarrow, so to speak, and saying, ‘If you undertake this program it is going to be like taking a tablet and all your problems will go away.’ These programs are pitched at levels 5 and 6 in terms of Australian competency standards. You are dealing with a group of people rather than individual landowners. So they are getting out there and there is a myriad of skills, capacities, experiences et cetera, going from some people who have not had the opportunity to experience good literacy and numeracy programs to some quite well educated people. So what was effectively happening was that service providers would rock up, think they were doing the right thing, write up a technical plan on how much dry feed per hectare there was, write up plans with a change to the pastoral industry but did not have a lot of benefit and future sustainability for the group on the ground.

Rather than the ILC becoming a training agency, there are plenty of people out there doing that. There are a number of programs, like some of the whole-of-government stuff, at 70 per cent. Somebody then comes up with 30 per cent and shows some commitment on how to get into these things. A lot of our clients, as a group, were not in a position to meet those costs. The ILC saw the specific benefits that could come out of some of these programs. We would get in there, extend the dollars and make it available to our client base.

Rather than the ILC becoming trainers, we got alongside the programs and their service providers to make sure that they were familiar with and understood the people, the clients and their needs. The training programs were tailored rather than just off the shelf. They were quite prescriptive, becoming quite flexible and open and frank with the group and doing some scoping so that the group knew what they were getting themselves into before they signed off on an extensive program that somebody had foisted on them. The programs have been successful because they have been based on mentoring and training and development, which FarmBis is exclusively based on. So people develop a relationship, it is property specific and able to focus on income generational sustainability.

ACTING CHAIR—So the goals are sustainability and fitting into a management plan as such?

Mr McCarthy—Correct. Effectively, a key relationship with FarmBis has been specifically for property management plans. One of the key things that we now have in property management plans is to identify skills and needs requirements—what they have got, how they might use those cohesively and where they are going to get those over a period of time rather than all right now and send them back to a town where they run into other—

Mr Galvin—Going on from that is the question: how can the committee help with that? As we have just said, we have not been able to tap into FarmBis nationally. While the grant funding is being provided to state and territory governments, each state and territory government has its own way of doing things. I have previously taken these issues up with the secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and I have been told it is quite difficult once the money has been provided. From our perspective, because the program has been so successful and is based on the rural skills and industry that Steve spoke about, we would like to see it being rolled out nationally and in a consistent fashion.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes. Other people have given us the same evidence.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Some of the stations that have just been left have now got weed difficulties. National heritage funding has been used to train rangers. How important is that in the overall scheme of things in terms of getting some skills?

Mr Galvin—It has been very important in the Northern Territory in particular.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—That is where I first saw it—at Wadeye.

Mr Galvin—Yes. We co-fund those programs there. It has been immensely important. We tap in. We provide the project managers and funding for each of those projects—I think there are between seven and nine of them across the territory—and they have been immensely successful. As Steve was saying, there is the capacity development side of things there. What we have seen through that is some 30 jobs created, both part time and full time. But, more importantly, groups such as the Timber Creek group and the Gumbalunya-Oenpelli group and a number of groups in Arnhem Land have spun off into local enterprises such as pig shooting, fencing and weed control on neighbouring properties. I think the Timber Creek group was booked up for a year on these tasks. So they are becoming a little bit self-funding.

ACTING CHAIR—After they get the skills they take them out and use them?

Mr Galvin—Yes.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—So that funding can see the skills development and discipline at work which you then use to transfer those people to lasting employment?

Mr Galvin—We hope so. Absolutely. That is a great program. It is a real whole-of-government program. It has the NT government behind it.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Does that happen only in the COAG trial areas?

Mr Galvin—No. This is across the Top End of the Northern Territory.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Could you please supply the details of where it has been, how many people it has employed and what success it has had?

ACTING CHAIR—Could you take that on notice for us? We would be very keen to report along those lines.

Mr Galvin—We can take that on notice.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—We now have quite a few stations which are owned by mining companies because they have mining activities on them. What about the relationship with mining companies in terms of Indigenous employment? The mining companies use them as holding paddocks effectively because they have their mining activities there.

Mr Galvin—That is correct.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—So what about getting people some skills to maintain those properties and then move them onto stations you want to run economically, such as in Central Australia?

Mr Galvin—I will have to go back a step there because it is a very good question. We have done things in the Kimberleys and the Northern Territory and we are starting in Cape York. In the Kimberleys, we run the Kimberley Indigenous management support program, which is a combined program run by the department of agriculture and us. It targets those 30-odd Kimberley properties that are on Indigenous held land. I will give you some quick statistics. There are 100 properties or thereabouts in the Kimberleys. Thirty of them, or 30 per cent, are Indigenous held and they turn off eight per cent of the cattle of the Kimberleys. Of that eight per cent, the ILC turns off five per cent. So the rest of the Indigenous pastoral properties are only turning off three per cent while being 30 per cent of the Kimberleys.

This is an intensive program of getting in skills and providing mentors for those communities that want to work with us again. The ILC is also providing capital, once communities have demonstrated fixing up waters, yards et cetera. That has been very successful. It has just won the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Service Management. We have seen herd quality going up. We are seeing jobs being created.

In the Northern Territory, we have the IPP, the Indigenous Pastoral Project. In the Territory now, Indigenous properties are running, say, 80,000 head of cattle. Conservatively, they should be running 220,000 head of cattle. We have gone through a process of engaging with communities whose properties have not been working for up to 20 years—

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—This is principally central, is it?

Mr Galvin—No.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—North too?

Mr Galvin—It is north and central. This program is divided north and south. We are now getting communities to lease their land out to neighbours, because they have been run down

completely. Then we have training and skills programs with that. A good example is Kildirk Station, Amanbidji, which was a Durack Station close to the border. It had not been going for about 15 years. Half of it is now leased out to Consolidated Pastoral Company. The other half is with a private owner. There is a little bit left for the community to run 500 head of cattle. It is working extremely well, and the private operator is a mentor and teacher to get people back. That property can run 20,000 head of cattle. It is a magnificent property. That was the first one we brokered through the Northern Land Council to lease out.

Now we have done Balbarini, Carpentaria Downs and Hooker Creek. We have used the land trust for another property. That has created four jobs, with fencing and communities getting into it. Ooratippra and Namul-Namul have both been leased out. People are working. We are starting to roll the program into Central Australia. Harts Bluff will come out shortly. We got Elsey Station going. Hodgson Downs and Robertson River we hope to have up next year. It is a process that now has a really good flow-on. It has the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association fully behind it. It has brought people together who have not been talking for years, because properties have not been run and feral animals are going on to properties that have. We have a feral animal shoot-out program with it. We are getting a spin on it now.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Have you seen our report on pests and feral animals?

Mr Galvin—I have not personally, but—

ACTING CHAIR—Make sure you get a copy.

Mr TUCKEY—We will send you a copy—

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—There might be some recommendations which lead to you chasing program funding.

Mr Galvin—That would be excellent.

ACTING CHAIR—There are some recommendations in there, which we hope—

Mr FORREST—We will get you a copy before you go.

Mr Galvin—We have had good success with mimosa in those mimosa programs.

Mr TUCKEY—I am encouraged by the remarks you have made, because all of my experience is of the properties not running any stock, and I gave you a specific example. In that case, in the original deal done, the owner—the vendor—was prepared to stay on the property for a year to help the people manage it. In the end, somebody somewhere decided that all the livestock should be removed from the property and he could sell it. He got paid twice.

You mentioned how people were staying with 500 cattle et cetera. I do not want this misunderstood, but going back in pastoral history, the Aboriginal community that lived on a station was a labour pool. There was a bit of synergy in that, contrary to all the claims that were made in later years about exploitation. When the owner of the property, typically a white man, wanted labour, he went down to the elders and said, 'We need four or five tomorrow. We'll go

fencing; we'll go mustering; we'll do all these things.' That passed away, I think quite tragically for some people, because they found themselves as fringe dwellers in the town. I saw it all. Nevertheless, there are some cultural advantages in that type of employment.

I know it is a bit outside your responsibility, because you are land managers, but I have always wondered, and you might like to comment on this, when we are talking about rural skills training and talking about the now very recognisable shortage of skilled and even semiskilled people in agricultural areas, whether you could see an opportunity for that community—and, as you just said, it does not take too many people to run a property these days, but then there is this fluctuation in wanting employment—where, as a group, to use a word that will frighten the hell out of Martin, they could become involved in skills engineering or something like that. In other words, they became a labour hire group for their own people—

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—And therefore unionisable!

Mr TUCKEY—and, in so doing, taking the time off they like for cultural reasons, in between the peaks, so that they would meet the demand. As I said, I appreciate that that is not your specific line of business but, if you could comment to the committee on how we might talk about that in our recommendations, I would appreciate that.

Mr Galvin—It is a very good question and a very relevant one for the Indigenous Land Corporation right at the moment. In fact, it is high on the agenda of the board. We run 47,000 head of cattle ourselves as a business in the Territory, in Queensland and in Western Australia. One of our great concerns is getting labour which will stick and which will be around when we need it. If it is our concern, it is the next door neighbour's concern as well. Shirley McPherson, our chairperson, is going to raise this with our minister, Senator Vanstone. She has also had discussions with Dr Shergold recently. I have had discussions with DEWR. We wish to implement a national Indigenous employment and training pastoral program. In relation to the point that Mr Tuckey is making with labour, in the pastoral industry it is quite critical at the moment. In the Northern Territory this year, for mustering, companies had great trouble getting labour. In the Kimberley, for example, most of the properties are using backpackers as labour at the moment as the season goes.

ACTING CHAIR—So this is an Indigenous pastoral training centre.

Mr Galvin—It does not necessarily have to be a specific centre. What we are looking at is a strategy. On Roebuck Plains Station, where we run about 22,000 head of cattle, just outside Broome, we have had quite an extensive study into it and we are now pursuing it to run a specific Indigenous pastoral training centre, which would not be just Kimberley confined but which would draw people from around Australia. We are also thinking of establishing one in Queensland as well.

The board realises that there has to be some sort of change in regard to CDEP and social welfare in respect of this because we are not getting people sticking. We are getting people who are starting and then drifting off because it is too easy to go back. Or they might work Monday and Tuesday—we are paying a full-time wage, might I add—but the critical days are Friday and Saturday for the mustering. That is when the trucks are coming et cetera, but people do not turn up on Friday and Saturday. It is about having the labour force there when you want it. As Mr

Tuckey has said, there was a tradition out there of people being stockmen and being proud of it. Those people are the most disappointed people in a community that has that history because they cannot see the younger people taking that up anymore. It is something the board is very concerned about. It would be good for the communities, because if we can get people back working then the kids can see what their dads or their mothers are doing and it will give them a role model. Right at the moment, the social malaise has to be broken through.

Mr TUCKEY—That is all great. What I was asking is whether you could visualise this. You take a community that once lived on a property and was a labour pool, and that suited a lot of those people because there were times when, to use a term, they would go walkabout and did not want a full-time job. You mention the problems, and now it has got down to Saturday and Sunday. But, in a community with 500 cattle and the neighbours now running other parts of the property for them, is there still enough authority amongst the elders, as there once was? The pastoral boss did not go down and say, ‘Who wants to work tomorrow?’ He went to so-and-so, who said, ‘You, you and you will work tomorrow.’ That was the cultural order of things. Is there still an opportunity to re-establish that so that you have a group of people and whoever the relevant person is says, ‘Yes, I can send you three stockmen tomorrow,’ and they will stay on the job, because there will be a bit of community pressure over that? Do you see that opportunity as one of the options not only to the labour shortage but to creating an employment opportunity that better fits that cultural situation?

Mr Galvin—I see that opportunity. I have examples where I can say that we have two or three blokes from Hopevale community who contract to us at Crocodile and Welcome stations for fencing, which is a great thing. We have people from Laura who are contracted to do mustering for us at Merapah Station. Unfortunately, a lot of those people are between the ages of 35 and 40.

Mr TUCKEY—Tell me about it.

Mr Galvin—I think it is over-wishful thinking that, right at the moment, the community can say to these young blokes, ‘You go out and do this right at the moment.’ There needs to be a twofold approach to that. There needs to be a concerted effort by government and there has to be some change in CDEP and welfare. People cannot just go back, as you say, to the community. That is what most people in the community want to happen, but it is not happening at the moment.

Mr TUCKEY—Even under CDEP, if there were an obligation to go out with those blokes and do the fencing, in terms of training, they could be CDEP people while they picked up the skills, provided they went with the old guys who know the job. I can take you to Cocos Islands and show you all the old blokes there who would desperately like to harvest the 30,000 coconuts a day that fall on the ground. I have seen the way they can do it. We have educated all the young people even to doctorates but there are no jobs for doctors on Cocos Islands. It is heartbreaking.

Mr Galvin—It is something that we see as a real goal for us to achieve. We are looking at mentors to do it, whether they be elders or former stockmen et cetera, particularly at finding people in those communities who can mentor the young adults, the adolescents, and get them up and running.

Mr TUCKEY—Thinking laterally, there are still a few retired white pastoralists who have dealt with those people under the old rules. Some of them would be quite active 70-year-olds but it would be interesting if some of them could be inveigled back to try to carry that through.

ACTING CHAIR—So some money for mentoring programs would assist in your particular circumstances?

Mr Galvin—What we are saying in the concept of a national Indigenous pastoral training strategy is that money is set aside for Indigenous people for mentoring.

ACTING CHAIR—The extra.

Mr Galvin—I think the program of Dick Estens at Moree has proven that mentoring and close liaison with the people he has found success with is critical to achieving success. I will let Steve say something; he is a training guru.

Mr McCarthy—Following on from what Mr Tuckey was talking about, I come from a pastoral background and experienced the changes that he was talking about at that particular age, so I am familiar with what you are talking about. The reason why I point that out at this time is that I have spent most of my life on pastoral properties and we have run and designed our own training programs et cetera and done things in spite of all the complexity of doing business with the various agencies that are out there. Any strategies will need to be medium term—three to five years. The programs that are out there include the CDEPs, which are a here and now type of thing, and there is a move away from the safety net. A factor is that it actually causes a number of problems, because it is a safety net. These people, as everybody else in normal life, experience personal trauma—they cannot be away from home for too long et cetera.

My experience, going back to the old Commonwealth Employment Service et cetera, is that we had 26-week training programs. That is all great. Some of those people have been fortunate enough to have had good experiences through their lives and go on to have good jobs, good careers et cetera or pick up piecework through contracts and that sort of stuff. More and more people are doing that. More and more people do not do that and there are myriad reasons why they are not doing that. One reason is the pure complexity of all these things.

I ran some of our own programs, using some of the South Australian Premier's funds. We ran our own on-property pastoral training programs and we made sure the individuals had jobs when they were finished. That has proven to be quite successful. On an individual basis, which is what David was talking about before—the mentors and that sort of thing—you will find it very difficult to make that happen for 20 hours a day, seven days a week. The complexity was not working with the people; it was working through all the programs and the fact that things run out very quickly. Then there is a cut-off. So where do people go? They go straight back to the immediate safety net et cetera. If we are going to do those things, we need to set up programs and say, 'You can sign on for three years. It might take three years rather than one year to do a certificate II and some of those things.' We keep people gainfully employed.

On top of that, we have the training programs. All the well-meaning people talk about extension based training. The other side of the coin is competency based training. My experience is that there is a large gap between those two when you get out in the bush. People say that they

deliver according to competencies—they are cowboys sometimes—and others have well-meaning extension programs. Some of our client base who work on some of the properties—not only on our properties but in rural industries—are some of the best trained people there are. They have had 25 fencing programs and they have been through 15 welding programs. None of those things actually lead to any sustainable jobs. The type of thing that I would be looking for in the training centres that we were talking about is that the training actually helps people to build their career, not just to get them a job. We string those things together. Those things need to be medium term—putting in place three- to five-year strategies—and they will become sustainable. People will have a reason to stay in the bush and then they will go on and do those particular jobs.

ACTING CHAIR—I have also had mentoring experience, not only with Indigenous people but with kids who have serious problems—being homeless or coming out of youth centres. You can mentor them into a job, with somebody getting them there, looking after them and building the capacity that you were talking about, but it takes some money to achieve that over a period of time.

Mr FORREST—What I get out of the submission and the discussion is your suggestion that training is not like the old way. You do not learn how to do a fence out of a textbook; you learn it on the job. So you are looking for on-the-job style recognition. You have teased us with some good outcomes. Could you advise the committee of your experience? One of the other things that I am attracted by is that you are dealing with different states as well, but I can imagine that the system says, ‘But it has to be accredited and you’ve got to have a ticket at the end of it,’ which is completely and culturally irrelevant. Share a bit more about how you progress the reality of a mentor process. What we need is a system so that, by the time they get to the next property, the new employer has some confidence that they know how to do the fencing. The employer has to have some idea of that. Tell us a little more about some successes that you have had.

Mr McCarthy—You will notice a couple of properties that we have listed there. When I talk about extension and competency based training, one of the principles that I would like the ILC to stick with is this: in the training that we do, everything is competency based. There is no reason why it cannot be. It does not have to be assessed but, if it is mapped to a competency and delivered according to a competency appropriate to the level of the skills of the people we are working with, then ultimately and collectively people will finish up with a skill recognition for that particular experience. It does not have to be assessed on the day. Having undertaken some training on my own, I know that you go out and talk with some people and you get halfway through a session and they say, ‘We’ve actually done that.’ Well, when did you do it? Who did it for you? What was the background to it? Some people are fortunate enough to have a book somewhere so they can go and blow the dust off it and you can start to map it.

There was one particular program where we were piloting some corporate governance, which of course is critical to these people in the days of compliance and everything that we have got now. One of the most effective outcomes that came from that particular group was from the one person who actually did not achieve a qualification. Of seven people, we finished up with five with a certificate IV, one with a diploma and one with a range of competencies. We did all the training et cetera according to the competencies. That person is the chairperson of the organisation. There is nothing he does not know about the constitution and there is nothing he

does not know about basic corporate governance principles, and it works very well. I suppose the point behind that is that if we actually put the effort and the time into that, and it is mapped and delivered accordingly—it does not have to be assessed—then most people will get that. If we went back to the community now and did some work, I would expect that the only thing that would be holding that individual back from gaining his competency recognition would be the fact that he did not spend very long at school. But he knows how to use it.

We now have ways, through video evidence and experiential evidence—we turn up to their meetings and watch their activities—to map all those competencies and give them accreditation for it. The self-esteem that comes out of it is incredible. It also says to a number of other people, when they rock up in their white cars and shiny pants, that these people actually do know what they are doing. My experiences are that some of the clients we are talking to are more experienced at having high-level meetings than I am.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—They could buy and sell the lot of us!

Mr McCarthy—Correct. So there are ways that we can do that and I am particularly keen to make sure that wherever training is out there with our people it is delivered accordingly and will not necessarily be assessed on the particular day. I had an Indigenous shearing team in 1982 on a property in the Flinders Rangers. A number of those fellows still shear for a living these days. One of those fellows has kept his wool-classing certificate current. It was interesting, recently, watching somebody testing this particular individual. He said, ‘I’ll be back in a second.’ He came back with this particular certificate. It took him three years to get it and he has maintained the currency of it. He knows the importance of it. When he puts his stencil on the wool bale, that is his wool bale. So it is particularly important we do that.

Mr TUCKEY—I have another question in this regard. The Green Corps program is a very good program for the purpose of green outcomes, but of course it is a skills training program and a lot of it tends to be directed towards fencing and those things. Have you taken any opportunity with Indigenous people in that program?

Mr Galvin—In fact I think our major opportunity has been in Murrayfield in Tasmania, where we have run quite a successful program. We have 14 people on the program or maybe more.

Mr TUCKEY—We fund them. They are highly regarded by the government. We all like going off to a Green Corps launch or something.

ACTING CHAIR—They are good photo ops.

Mr TUCKEY—Yes, they are.

Mr Galvin—We just had one in Tassie.

Mr TUCKEY—It seems to be a program that continues to work and the leaders are people who have got the basic skills. Within the pastoral area, there is no reason why you cannot have a Green Corps team that might work in that regard. I always seem to come out of committees having answered half my own questions! The idea of an employment agency in an Aboriginal community would, in my mind, have a lot of benefit: ‘Billy is not around at the moment, but we

have Jack and Joe.' By the way, when you talk about those old days, I used to have to rely on the skills of a lot of those stockmen to tell me which racehorse I should buy off the station for the North-West bred team.

Mr Galvin—We see a lot of benefit in subcontracting workers—not only those who are on stations but people who could do fencing, drilling for water and bore drilling. I think there are a lot of opportunities in subcontracting out there for Indigenous people. The old saying that you cannot get somebody to fence your property or drill for water for love or money is true, because there is a shortage of people out there. I think we entirely agree with the concept of subcontracting and small businesses spinning off mainstream pastoralism and Aboriginal pastoralism.

Mr TUCKEY—People need to be organised and someone needs to have a phone number as an employer. It will not be the same people all the time and some of them will not be working 12 months a year. That is where the old system worked but was decried because it did not fit our idea of employment.

Mr Galvin—We have been very successful in that, as I was saying to Mr Ferguson, in Timber Creek in the Northern Territory. That is one of those programs where the community is doing that. It is subcontracting. It is doing fencing and weed management and all sorts of things. That has been quite successful there.

ACTING CHAIR—That is a trend that is occurring right throughout rural and regional Australia.

Mr McCarthy—I just want to pick up on your point, Mr Tuckey, about employment centres in rural areas. From an Indigenous perspective, that actually exists but—and I say 'but' with respect—it is associated with the CDEPs and Indigenous employment outcome centres. CDEPs tend to be focused on urban works et cetera. I suppose if you were to look at a map, you would say, 'That actually exists; we don't need to do that.' The reality of it is that we do not have something that is quite specific to that rural-agricultural-horticultural background, whereas it is there with those urban type programs in town.

Mr TUCKEY—Yes, to sweeten up the street.

Mr FORREST—In your submission, you talk about the training providers operating in a mixed mode. They are in a classroom for a little bit of time, but they are out in the community for most it.

Mr McCarthy—Correct. One of the principles of the ILC is that all training is done on the property, wherever possible. The business that we do is done on properties.

ACTING CHAIR—You do not need expensive classrooms.

Mr McCarthy—No.

Mr TUCKEY—We should never discount the skill of machinery operators either. These guys can do it. I have employed many of them. In local government, we tried to get kids out of school

as sort of tea boys on a patrol grader. That was 30 years ago. We never seemed to be able to make the connection. But those kids were able to do straight grading in no time at all.

Mr Galvin—I think that is another very important skill. Plant operating and technics et cetera can take you wherever, really.

ACTING CHAIR—It is about understanding that these are skills. Being able to use a grader properly is just like using a dozer or a backhoe properly. Another example is a wool classers certificate. They know what you put in a bale. The feeling they get having that knowledge is important.

Mr McCarthy—I just have one last closing point. Talking about mentors, I have lived through a number of generations and I have a bit of experience in this. I know about the need for personal mentoring for some of these people. A lot of these people are disenfranchised from a number of family aspects. They have seen groups become incorporated through need, and that has been an unpleasant experience for a number of people as they were growing up. The next generation should willingly be stepping up to become chairpersons and all that sort of stuff, but they do not want to do it. They have had very torrid experiences in a lot of cases. We have seen a couple of generations become a bit removed from that. People are sitting back in their own little networks and thinking that they have enough of their own personal issues that they do not need to be dealing with that. If they are away from home picking up patrol grading work and that sort of thing, they think, ‘What’s happening to all my problems back home?’ I think it would be useful if some mentoring could be put alongside particular skill development for some of those people to actually help them with their personal development.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, that could be part of the process. Thanks very much for your evidence. It will add to our deliberations and hopefully some of our recommendations might assist federal and state governments and help with opposition policy development.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 6.00 pm