



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities**

WEDNESDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2002

MOA ISLAND

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**  
**Wednesday, 6 November 2002**

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

**Members in attendance:** Mrs Draper, Ms Hoare, Mrs Hull, Mr Wakelin

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

**WITNESSES**

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**Committee met at 12.50 p.m.**

**FORDHAM, Mr Michael, General Manager, Torres Strait Regional Authority**

**GEWAI, Mr Roy, Deputy Chairman, Kubin Community Council**

**MISSI, Mr Billy, Kubin Community**

**NEILMAN, Ms Matilda, Chief Executive Officer, Kubin Community Council**

**SAVAGE, Mr Saila, Chairman, Kubin Community Council**

**TRINKOON, Mr Lama, Housing Officer, Kubin Community Council**

**CHAIR**—Good afternoon. We come from the Commonwealth parliament. We have lobbed on your doorstep, and we have been here in the Torres Strait since Monday. Yesterday we were at Poruma—I am trying to get my pronunciation right. In the morning we were with the Torres Strait Island Authority getting a picture of how it is going and how people feel it is going. We were over at St Pauls earlier today. So that is what we are doing, and we are with you this afternoon. We are just looking at how it is going in the community and any issues that are outstanding. We have had a wonderful introduction to the print art, which we thoroughly enjoyed. We are learning something every day.

Essentially, is there anything anyone would particularly like to say—particularly you, Mr Chairman—in terms of how the services are going? You seem to be going pretty well. No doubt there is always room for improvement. Over to you—anything in particular? Mr Chairman, would you like to make any particular opening statement? Do you have any questions for us?

**Mr Savage**—I did not prepare for this properly, because I was supposed to be travelling to Adelaide this week but they cancelled my trip.

**CHAIR**—We would welcome you to Adelaide. It is a really good place.

**Mr Savage**—We are really doing all right here at Kubin. Everything is going real smooth. I have no problems with the workers, even my council staff. It is really okay.

**CHAIR**—That is great.

**Mr Savage**—I have no complaint—maybe a little slight one, but not really very big ones.

**CHAIR**—We would be interested in that. Would you like to talk about it now?

**Mr Savage**—Not really, no.

**CHAIR**—We can just continue with this.

**Mr Savage**—This is really supposed to be Lama Trinkoon and Matilda Neilman here.

**CHAIR**—Lama might continue. Mrs Hull is going to be asking some questions about the general structure.

**Mrs HULL**—What is your objective?

**Mr Trinkoon**—To get the housing up to scratch.

**Mr Savage**—Up to standard.

**Mr Trinkoon**—Healthier housing to improve health.

**Mrs HULL**—Fixing homes for better health. And we are talking about 120, at about \$5,000 each—is that right?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes.

**Mrs HULL**—And how long would it take you to do it?

**Mr Trinkoon**—About two months.

**Mrs HULL**—Really?

**Mr Trinkoon**—That is the survey side of it. We have to gather the information first before we can start any work.

**Mrs HULL**—How long would the actual works program take once you commenced it?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Six months.

**Mrs HULL**—What would it consist of? What sorts of works would be carried out on the houses to get them up to standard—for example, bathrooms and toilets—

**Mr Trinkoon**—In this survey we found the main priority was drainage because the ground of the island is not very good for drainage and some islands are low. It has to do with the water table and all that. The water stays in one spot. We found on Mabuiag that drainage is very poor because the island is volcanic—nothing will drain away. A lot of septics were blocked up.

**Mrs HULL**—So there is no sewerage?

**Mr Trinkoon**—There is no sewerage and a lot of the money went towards that. It will not cover the work.

**Mrs HULL**—Will any of your CDEP programs be used to do the changes and modifications or upgrades to the houses?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes.

**Mrs HULL**—All of it?

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**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes. Everything that has to happen in that community for those houses will use licensed labour and CDEP workers.

**Mrs HULL**—All labour from inside your community? None from outside?

**Mr Trinkoon**—The only labour from outside is the trades. That is the only labour.

**Mrs HULL**—Do you currently have any trades within your community—any people who are skilled tradesmen?

**Mr Trinkoon**—We have one—he is a carpenter.

**Mrs HULL**—Are there any being trained in a skilled trade?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes.

**Ms Neilman**—There are two apprentices. They are level 4.

**Mrs HULL**—So you would basically be able to use the program in order to try and upgrade the houses?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes.

**Mrs HULL**—How has it been accepted by the owners of the houses?

**Mr Trinkoon**—I am glad you brought that up. Because I had to train to be an area manager, that involved me going across to another community to work. I could sense that they were thinking: what is he doing here; he is not from this community. They did not want me sticking my nose into their affairs and all that kind of stuff. That is the only problem. We went to another community and they did not like the work. They told us, nicely, to go away. So you get mixed reactions.

**Mrs HULL**—If you are trying to upgrade and make conditions better, why is there a lack of acceptance?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Maybe it is to do with how long they have to wait for something to actually happen—for repairs and maintenance to be done. In some communities nothing is being done and all of a sudden—bang—we roll up in trucks with a whole lot of gear in the back, ready to do something straight away. They say, ‘No. Where were you before?’ There is all that kind of stuff.

**Mrs HULL**—How are you going to overcome that?

**Mr Trinkoon**—We will get around it. It is an issue of more awareness between the housing officer and the tenants.

**Mrs HULL**—Is it about building relationships?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes.

**Mrs HULL**—How many are doing this work? Is it just you?

**Mr Trinkoon**—No. There is one with St Pauls and one with Mabuiag.

**CHAIR**—Which community did you go to?

**Mr Trinkoon**—I went to all three.

**CHAIR**—And there was a similar response at each?

**Mr Trinkoon**—They were supposed to do the same too, but they didn't. I fulfilled my end of the bargain; I went to every house. I do not think it is fair. They should have come over and given me a hand here.

**CHAIR**—Nevertheless, would you agree with the principle that it is a good idea?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes. It happens every six months too. There is a survey in February as well.

**CHAIR**—Okay. We would be interested to see how all that comes along and to see how the survey goes. With your agreement and the chairman's support, we might ask that a report be sent to us as time goes on. It seems a good idea to give support to a community, just to say, 'Let's keep it up to scratch.' That is what you are trying to do: not to let it slip back too much or at least to try to get it up to scratch. You have some flexibility—you can shift money from one to the other, where one is a bit better and one is a bit worse.

**Mrs HULL**—Have you got families that are really keen to progress with the program?

**Mr Trinkoon**—About 85 per cent of the people are all for it. That is just about all the work we need. It just about covers all the work. Don't forget that some houses are new. There is not much you can do when you survey a new house and you cannot find any faults.

**Mrs HULL**—Were the people hesitant to do the surveys?

**Mr Trinkoon**—No. Do you mean the survey teams?

**Mrs HULL**—No. Were the people in the houses being surveyed hesitant to allow you to do the survey?

**Mr Trinkoon**—No, they were all for it. They were telling us what was wrong in the houses.

**Mrs HULL**—Do you think that builds an expectation in them that you will be able to fix all the things they need fixing?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes.

**Mrs HULL**—Will you be able to deliver on that?

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**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes. I give them a brief report. At every house that gets surveyed, I talk to the tenant and tell them what we have found and what can be fixed and what we have done already during the survey.

**CHAIR**—Are there some things you would not be able to do?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Of course.

**CHAIR**—That would be obvious, and you would probably tell them?

**Mr Trinkoon**—That is the whole idea of the survey. There is a lot of work to be done with plumbers, electricians and carpenters. We get that work for them to be done. We use local labour also.

**Ms HOARE**—I am interested in the work that you are doing with the surveys and in the discussions you are having with the families that live in the houses. Are you coming up with any data or information in relation to design and materials that would be helpful in the construction of new houses?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes.

**Ms HOARE**—How would that be filtered through to whoever needs that information?

**Mr Trinkoon**—The first part of the survey is to ask the tenant questions about how many dogs or cats they have and all that kind of stuff. The second part is for us to go outside the house, climb up on the roof, go into the ceiling and have a look and pace it out to see how big it is and whether there is shade planting or food planting and whether there is enough verandah. All this gets put into the computer, and the computer can come up with a better design for the house or show how it should have been designed and things like that. That survey can actually say that a house is not suitable, because there are too many people in it or it is not big enough or that there is no hot water or not enough drainage—all that kind of stuff. That is especially true of Mabuiag because they have kept a lot of the houses from years ago—I am talking 20 or 30 years ago. There are still people living in them and that is where the majority of the problems are.

**Ms HOARE**—Mr Chairman, is it okay if we go to general housing?

**CHAIR**—Please do; it is wide open. This was just a suggested starting point. I have other questions about industry and business in Kubin. Go ahead.

**Ms HOARE**—When we drove around your community, we saw a fair bit of construction going on. I am wondering what the population is like and whether you see the housing as adequate for the current population. What more needs to be done, or are you travelling at a fairly even keel at the moment?

**Mr Trinkoon**—At the moment, we have a waiting list here of about 50 names. We are currently getting three houses a year. It does not work. Look how small our community is, and

there are 50 names on the list. I would say about 70 per cent of the names on the list are families.

**Ms HOARE**—Where are they currently living?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Some of them are currently living with other people or with their parents.

**Mrs Neilman**—It is overcrowded.

**Ms HOARE**—Does the housing funding that is coming through come from ATSIC?

**Mr Trinkoon**—It comes from ATSIH, which is a state body, rather than ATSIC. I am pretty sure of that.

**Ms HOARE**—So the funding comes through from the state department?

**Mr Fordham**—Yes, under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement.

**CHAIR**—Each state seems to have a slightly different agreement. I know that in South Australia there is the coming together of state and Commonwealth, so one presumes that ATSIH is doing it with Commonwealth money as well.

**Mr Fordham**—That is right. There is a bilateral arrangement in the Torres Strait. I think it is in some of your briefing stuff. There is a Joint Torres Strait Housing and Infrastructure Committee whereby we pool the funds and ATSIH dishes it out, to be blunt about it. Everything is done jointly. All the macro planning and allocations and stuff like that are all done jointly with the TSRA.

**Ms HOARE**—So what is the response from ATSIH when you say that you as a community require 50 homes and you are only getting three a year? What is the bureaucrats' response to that?

**Mr Fordham**—Are you asking me?

**Ms HOARE**—No, I am asking our housing officer.

**Mrs HULL**—Do they think they have only got so much money?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes.

**Ms Neilman**—I think it is really based on the population in the community, because our population here is only 280 from the last census. But we have 50 of those on the housing waiting list.

**CHAIR**—Is that actual? That is reflected from the census, but I presume there is variation.

**Ms Neilman**—That was only on the census night. That is how we came up with the figure. It could be more than that now, with people moving in.

**CHAIR**—Is your feeling that it may well be more?

**Ms Nielsen**—Well it could be more than 280.

**CHAIR**—Because people may want to come back and there is all that movement. You know better than I—anecdotally or because of your gut feeling—what is actually happening. One presumes that the 50 that are waiting are part of your normal stable population, reflected by the census. Do you believe that the number of houses provided—or, to be more accurate, the number of houses wanted—has been influenced by an increase in population or has there just been a significant shortfall over a long period?

**Ms Nielsen**—The way ATSIH were looking at communities was really rental based, on a monthly basis. That is where the improvement is. If this community was very low in getting income in from rental, we would not be allowed to get any more houses.

**CHAIR**—Are there any other mechanisms available to you to try to get additional housing?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes. You can go through Queensland Health. If a person on the list got ill—had a leg cut off or something like that—they would be entitled to a disability house straight away. Right now, council would not be able to cover that, because of the extra costs of a disability house, compared to a normal house. A recommendation can come through health, saying, 'It is recommended that this person gets a house suitable for a person with a disability.'

**Mrs HULL**—Who in your community does the negotiating with the state departments for housing? Who actually sits around the table to discuss the requirements and the needs of the communities here with respect to housing?

**Mr Fordham**—Each community has a housing officer and they are coordinated by the Island Coordinating Council. It is basically fed into a formula which comes up to the JTSHIC, ultimately, to determine what the allocations are, and then the state minister actually signs off on them. The state is putting considerable amounts of its own money into the big pot, if you like. The ground up stuff is that they have a lot of data. They are getting data from the housing officers, and it is being collated at the ICC level into the JTSHIC committee and then up to the state minister.

**Ms HOARE**—How many levels is that?

**Mr Fordham**—I know that sounds a little bureaucratic, but it is not so much the levels. For once, I do not think that bureaucracy is necessarily the issue. It is more that there is just not enough money. Let's be blunt.

**Mrs HULL**—Some of the problems associated with the housing were caused by drainage and the fact that on some of the soils there was no absorption and no capacity for drainage. How are you looking to fix that? How can you change the circumstances of that drainage?

**Mr Trinkoon**—I do not know how the sewerage system works. On Badu Island, they sent some people out.

**Mrs HULL**—So somebody else comes out and gives you the expertise to fix that?

**Mr Trinkoon**—To see what you can do—whether to have a sewerage plant, if you want to go that way, or not. The only other way you can do that is by building up the area—the ground on it—pouring and keeping going in layers until you build it right up so that you have enough drainage in the soil.

**Mrs HULL**—Obviously it has implications for health though, doesn't it? If you have bad drainage around your homes and you have your children and everyone playing around, that has some serious implications for your health. Is the health department assisting in trying to bring about this whole process that you are undertaking?

**Mr Trinkoon**—We have also coordinated with environmental health officers. They look after the area outside the house and also areas like the beach, the dump and stuff like that. They go around and let tenants know what they can keep in their yards or what they cannot keep. They say, 'Throw away all this rubbish. Don't keep it here. When it rains it makes mosquitoes,' and that. For example, they are looking for diseased dogs inside the yards. They try and control them. They are trained to do this too—they go to TAFE. I have two officers with me now. We work together when we do our housing inspections. We have housing inspections once every 12 months, say. They come with me and we spend about three or four days inspecting all these houses and we come up with a separate report, one for their side and one for mine, and we hand it into the council.

**Mrs HULL**—Is your better health and housing project the most important project in your community at the moment?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes. It is helping us with our repairs and maintenance. Some communities do not have repairs and maintenance. I have seen people cry when we put in a shower rose. They have not had a shower from a rose in years.

**Mr Savage**—They have been doing this thing on the mainland. This is the first island in the strait where they have done it. They were only doing it on the mainland.

**CHAIR**—Do you feel as if you have missed out a bit?

**Mr Savage**—I reckon we missed out way back.

**Mrs HULL**—But why is that? Why did you miss out?

**Mr Savage**—It has never been introduced to the strait.

**Mr Fordham**—Particularly with housing, and perhaps less so with health funding, when governments allocate additional funding for Indigenous programs—and this applies to the \$75 million additional for housing over three years, of which ATSIC automatically got a cut of \$40 million, I think—we have to get in line with the states to get our cut for the Torres Strait. We do not automatically get any of that money and we are just not in the minds of government. They think that if it is going to ATSIC we are getting some of it. If we go cap in hand to ATSIC, they say, 'No, go away; you are a separate statutory authority,' and that is right. But, of course,

DOFA and others say, 'Well, we've given the money away; bad luck.' In those additional tranches at least, we are always trying to find other ways into the funding pool.

**CHAIR**—So none of that infrastructure comes through the Torres Strait Regional Authority at all?

**Mr Fordham**—Not automatically, no.

**CHAIR**—Not as a base fund—it has all got to come via that other pathway?

**Mr Fordham**—In terms of the housing funding, we would not want to change that process, because ATSIC are running a separate housing program to each of the states. That is crazy. We just run one and we all participate in it. It is more in terms of additional funding, which this was. This is part of the additional \$75 million over three years. We were lucky. We argued pretty strongly and said, 'We are not getting a good enough deal here. We should have got some of that \$40 million.' So Queensland got substantially more than the other states, and a lot of the money is going to end up in the Torres Strait. I think we will only end up with \$2 million or \$3 million or something here.

**Mrs DRAPER**—Is it \$9 million, over three years?

**Mr Fordham**—That's the whole FHBH component. The FHBH component we got here was \$750,000 in this first program, for three communities.

**CHAIR**—We are going to need to understand that system better. It certainly dawns on me that I am used to dealing with ATSIC and that infrastructure budget, which you are not part of. Therefore you then get that top up, if you like, or additional money, which you have to argue for within a state context really. It took me a while to get there, but I can see now why that is the case. I think we are going to have to actually do a bit more work to understand that, because there is a state formula that is quite clear, where the Commonwealth money—through ATSIC—and the state money and other money floating around goes into a state priority, which you are not part of in terms of a Queensland situation. As you say, you are a separate entity and so you would not want it to be any other way. I can understand that, but it is important that I get that picture.

**Mrs HULL**—Is that a historical agreement? How did that whole agreement come about?

**CHAIR**—It is the nature of the autonomy of the Torres Strait. That is a feature of it.

**Mr Fordham**—It is the good with the bad, I guess. We are talking specifically about \$75 million for additional housing, but it is not uncommon for other things. There must have been some formula used. The government said—rightly, I think—that the bulk of that money had to go to rural and remote Indigenous housing, so ATSIC automatically got \$40 million. There must have been some formula by which they got that \$40 million, and one would have thought that that formula would then apply to TSRA. We would automatically have given that money into the ATSI Housing pool anyway. What we have had to do, then, is go round cap in hand and argue the case, and we have had access only to the remaining \$35 million.

**CHAIR**—That is the issue for us.

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**Mrs HULL**—That is the issue that I am trying to get to the bottom of. Is this historical? How did it actually come about? Is that something that the committee should—

**CHAIR**—It is historical, but the key issue, as I understand it, is that there is no automatic access to that funding for Torres Strait Islanders, and there should be.

**Mrs HULL**—That is right; that is what I am thinking.

**CHAIR**—We are just getting our heads around what is actually happening here.

**Mrs HULL**—I am trying to get an understanding of it. The committee needs to understand how this works so that we can look at whether or not there should be recommendations.

**CHAIR**—We can. We can simply ask the question and then get to the structure within our own federal departments. We will make a point of doing that. I will move on to the motel. You are well into that. Tell us how it is going. Are you able to cater better for your visitors and people coming through?

**Ms Neilman**—We have a four-bedroom motel. All the rooms have ensuites. We were not lucky enough to get more funding—this was all happening in the previous council. We could not wait long, because of a lack of accommodation for visitors and contractors coming into the community, so we just had to go ahead with what TSRA could give us.

**CHAIR**—Where exactly is the motel?

**Ms Neilman**—When you travel out to the airport, it is on the right.

**CHAIR**—It is functional and being used?

**Ms Neilman**—Yes, it is going well.

**CHAIR**—We will have a look at that as we go along

**Ms HOARE**—Is that bringing in a regular income, Matilda?

**Ms Neilman**—Yes. It is full every week.

**Ms HOARE**—How much does it cost to stay there?

**Ms Neilman**—It is a basic rate of \$71.50 per night per person. You can fit two people in a room.

**Ms HOARE**—While you have all this construction going on, it is a regular income for the community. That is good.

**CHAIR**—How many people in Kubin would have an apprenticeship or traineeship?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Four.

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**Ms Neilman**—Four, but they have not passed yet.

**CHAIR**—Is that apprenticeships?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Is it two apprentices and two trainees?

**Ms Neilman**—No, four apprenticeships.

**CHAIR**—What trades are they doing?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Building.

**Ms Neilman**—Three in carpentry and one in plumbing.

**CHAIR**—Are they in their first year or their second year?

**Ms Neilman**—It is very hard to explain.

**Mr Trinkoon**—They have been on and off.

**CHAIR**—That is okay. We are just trying to get a picture of how it is going.

**Mr Trinkoon**—They have been on and off for the last three years so I reckon they are three-quarters complete.

**CHAIR**—Do they need to go to Cairns for some of their block training or are they able to do it here?

**Mr Trinkoon**—They had a tutor come here. They sat in there and did it. They spent a couple of days with him.

**Ms Neilman**—Our apprenticeships were more or less based on the Cairns region group training. Have you heard of them? They take trainees and apprentices at all different levels. This council is more or less based on them. That is how we got our local guys into that. But the on and off element was not a very good show for a council.

**CHAIR**—Approximately how many building projects per year would you have? Half-a-dozen? Ten? You have a motel and I have seen two buildings. There is a big new building going in.

**Mr Trinkoon**—I think it would be fair to say that we have about five a year. Plus the houses that are coming up—three houses every year.

**CHAIR**—Are they all done by private contract?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes, they are tendered out.

**CHAIR**—Would they be done by a private contractor in Cairns?

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**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes. They have to go through a process in ATSIH in Cairns. They select who is going to build a house.

**CHAIR**—Over at St Pauls, they have a building company. Do they sometimes tender for your jobs?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Only the painters.

**CHAIR**—They did the emergency services in one of the communities. Do you have emergency services here?

**Ms Neilman**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Who did that one? Who built the emergency services building?

**Mrs Neilman**—St Pauls council.

**CHAIR**—Your council administration brief mentioned you had some trainees coming through the council office. Are they some of your people?

**Ms Neilman**—Yes, in administration. The council has to look at bringing someone in to train the local staff. We have a high staff turnover and it has not been a success. They just come in for two or three years then leave without training the local staff like me or other staff members in the office.

**Mrs HULL**—Why is that so? Why is it not a success? If you have someone come in and stay within your community to train your people to do the administrative tasks, why is that not succeeding and why do you have no succession workers or trainers out of your own community now?

**Ms Neilman**—It is hard because the ICC contract brought a person in to train the local staff to run the council—the workers in the administration area. In this case the person comes in and lives on the island for two or three years, but they do not train local people in the office. If something comes up they just leave and then the council have to bring another person in. It is just a continuing thing that never is a success. It has always been very unsuccessful since I have been living in the community and working with the council.

**Mrs HULL**—Mr Chairman, how do you propose that you as the chairman could fix that problem so that you do have administrative skills being developed here by the people who come to supposedly train your people?

**Mr Savage**—I just bring more trainers in.

**Mrs HULL**—Have you put in a policy to say that when you are on this island and you come to work in this administrative area you must train the community members to take over the tasks?



**Mr Savage**—If you become aware; if you sit around the table and talk first. It all depends. As Matilda has said, it has always happened that way.

**Mrs HULL**—So there is no way that you can control it? As the chairman of the council, can you make a directive that this training must take place?

**Ms Neilman**—The contract is put out by ICC. They do not get paid by the council; they get paid by ICC. So we do not give them their duty statements. If a person comes and works in the council as a finance officer, I am not their supervisor. My position as the council clerk is just to report to council. I am more or less an overseer but I am not the direct supervisor. The officer works by coming to me and saying, 'Okay, Matilda, this what I have to do for this council.' I am very familiar with those sorts of areas but training is not happening. It makes it very difficult because, if we happen to clash, the officer can just walk out tomorrow and leave this council with nothing, because no training has been in place for the time the officer has been working for the island council.

**Mrs HULL**—So is the fact that you cannot get your people trained in administrative, building, mechanical or engineering skills a major problem for this island?

**Ms Neilman**—It is not a problem. It is just based on what individual people wish to do. If they are interested in administration or other work, that is really up to the individual. Council does not have the right to force people or to choose people and say, 'I am putting you on a traineeship.' We ask for expressions of interest and people that wish to apply do so in writing and we just select and take it from there.

**CHAIR**—We will come back to that if we can. I want to ask Roy about the CDEP and how it is going—I think you have 67 places approximately?

**Mr Gewai**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—How is it going? What sort of projects are there? Where is it at, do you think? Can we improve it to help you?

**Mr Gewai**—I work purely in the community as an overseer. I work closely with the foreman. During the week when the boys are at work on the site doing their job, the foreman and I sit together and we try to make another project for another week. We are always doing that. Then we come back and ask council if it is okay. We are always partners working together in the community. If it is okay, then we can carry on. At the moment, as you can see, there is no-one here. Everyone is on the site, working. They know that they have to finish their work before five. This is how I do my job. I am very close to the foreman and what he is doing, and I am also his eyes and ears. That is all I can say.

**CHAIR**—That is good, and it is pleasing that it is working for you and that you feel as if it is delivering for your community, doing useful things.

**Mr Gewai**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Are there many opportunities for people to go on to full-time work?

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**Mr Gewai**—A few. I presume that Matilda knows how many.

**CHAIR**—That is fine. We are just raising the issue because the hope is that, where there is an opportunity, they might go on and have a full-time job.

**Ms Neilman**—Here in the community there is a lack of employment. People in some instances are working purely on CDEP projects. The other opportunities are working for health, if you are a qualified person, or at the supermarket, IBIS.

**CHAIR**—How many of you were educated down south or have spent some time there?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes, I have.

**CHAIR**—You did, Lama?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes. I went to school in Brisbane.

**CHAIR**—Did you come back in recent years?

**Mr Trinkoon**—Yes. I was in Brisbane for about 21 years before I came back here.

**CHAIR**—So you know Brisbane pretty well.

**Mr Trinkoon**—Fairly well.

**Mr Savage**—Matilda, you do too.

**Ms Neilman**—I lived in Brisbane and then I moved to Canberra. I worked for Aboriginal hostels for seven years, and then I resigned and moved back to Kubin.

**Mrs DRAPER**—I bet you are happy to be home, away from Canberra.

**Ms Neilman**—Not really. I want to move back to Canberra.

**CHAIR**—How did you find the Canberra winters?

**Ms Neilman**—I am used to the weather.

**CHAIR**—Okay. You are all set.

**Ms Neilman**—It is like summer to me.

**Ms HOARE**—You talked about your tradespeople and apprentices—the people you have working on the CDEP. What do your women do? Do your women work on the CDEP?

**Mr Gewai**—Some women are training at child care.

**Mr Trinkoon**—One is a CDEP clerk in training.

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**Ms Neilman**—We have very few ladies who work for CDEP child care.

**Ms HOARE**—So what do the women do?

**Ms Neilman**—We have three on childcare traineeships. We have a CDEP clerk. She is on a traineeship as well as being a Centrelink agent. We have a trainee in the council office who I supervise. She has the role of purchasing officer. But these are only for 12 months. We are getting the funding from DEET, so it is only on a 12-month basis.

**Ms HOARE**—So there are traineeships happening for the young women. That is good.

**CHAIR**—Are there any hassles with native title? How is it going?

**Mr Savage**—Not too bad.

**Mr Gewai**—Everything runs smoothly.

**CHAIR**—Good.

**Mr Gewai**—Regarding native title, the council is joined together with those people. We are working very closely. There is supposed to be someone here with us as a spokesperson on Moa native title, but she is not here. She went to Cairns this afternoon.

**Mrs HULL**—What are the major health issues that you are confronted with here?

**Ms Neilman**—Diabetes is the major one.

**Mrs HULL**—The major one is diabetes?

**Mr Savage**—Yes. It is the only problem up here, big time.

**Mrs HULL**—Does the council have programs in place to try to manage diabetes and educate people about it?

**Ms Neilman**—Health runs them.

**Mrs HULL**—What sorts of programs do you make available for young people here? You have your chairman here, you have some leadership in the council—how do you bring on board the young people, to make them aware of their future responsibilities and to get them educated and skilled to lead communities in the future?

**Mr Trinkoon**—We do exactly what we are doing right now: sit around and have a discussion. We usually bring speakers in.

**Ms Neilman**—We had two young blokes who were involved in leadership in the council during the last three years. It happens when it is voting time, I suppose.

**Mrs HULL**—Does it work to get the young people together and start looking at leadership skills and picking out some people who might have the ability or the will to lead the community in the future? Does that work?

**Ms Neilman**—The parties all come in campaigning and all that. I was in the council with these two young blokes that were involved in the leadership. They both went through high school and then came back here. One had been working as a public servant with Customs. They have a different potential in working with people and communicating. It is different to what the chairman and deputy have been going through, because this is their second term, while this is the first time they have been in the council as leaders. So they are, more or less, both learning. It is an everyday questioning sort of thing.

**Mr Trinkoon**—I suppose you can never prepare yourself for it.

**Ms Neilman**—For a meeting like that, they were not prepared for being asked questions. They always see me first and I am, more or less, giving them advice.

**CHAIR**—We thank you very much for the time you have given us. We are very grateful.

**Mrs HULL**—I am just trying to understand how it works.

**CHAIR**—We bounce in and wander around and so we are very appreciative that you can spend some time with us. Please know that. I think we should insist that Matilda come to see us when she is next in Canberra—when she comes down.

**Mrs HULL**—When she goes to Canberra to live.

**CHAIR**—If you come to live you are certainly more than welcome. I do not have anything more to say. It is up to you if you would like to say something to us about the way you see it. Essentially, all we are about is just seeing how we might do it better. We have at least a couple of issues here today that we need to do more work on, but it is only by talking to you that we get a bit of a picture about where some of the good things are and where some of the difficulties are. We really do thank you for that. We could not let the chance go by of asking how the Torres Strait Regional Authority was going. We could not resist that, could we?

**Mr Trinkoon**—It is your chance for revenge.

**CHAIR**—I have to tell you that everyone else said they were doing a pretty good job and they do try pretty hard within what they are able to do. Mr Chairman, you are on that authority, aren't you? Are you finding it pretty challenging and interesting?

**Mr Savage**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Does anyone want to say any more?

**Ms Neilman**—I have something to say in relation to what Kay was asking before about traineeships. There is one major problem with this council because we do not have any bigger enterprises that can help us in setting up other enterprises in the community or running a small

business. We are finding it very difficult because we really want to send nine or 10 local guys to TAFE to learn in lots of different areas—welding, plumbing, electrical or whatever. Council needs to look at the airfares: they are looking at the 10 blokes flying to and from TAFE maybe six or eight times a year, and that is very hard for this council.

**CHAIR**—It is expensive. Would it be any good for a trainer to come here?

**Ms Neilman**—Because the funding we get from TSRA is just based on a 12-month sort of thing, it is just not worth it. It is a continuing thing. It all depends on this council. In two years we will probably have another council with different plans.

**CHAIR**—But it is obviously very important. You see it as very important.

**Ms Neilman**—Yes.

**Ms HOARE**—What about funding through DEWR, as it is called at the moment? For example, if there were a Job Network provider providing training for an unemployed person, then that Job Network provider would put that person through that particular training to get a particular job at the end of it. I do not know whether or not it would be appropriate, but it happens on the mainland so I do not see why it could not happen. Have you had a look at that?

**Ms Neilman**—We did apply through that department, mainly based on having an artist for one or two years maybe. They would bring in a consultancy and really set up a business for this community and then have a local person who is trained take over and carry on. We have been waiting for that for the last nine months. We have not heard yet if it is successful or not.

**Mrs HULL**—What do you see as the strengths that you might have to build economic development or autonomy so that you can bring some industrial or economic stability into the community? I know you have your art and it is going very well, but is there anything else you have thought you might be able to attract into the community?

**Ms Neilman**—Our council have a three-year community development plan, but again it relates to funding. It is a matter of council getting a good person in to help as much as he or she can and getting funding. That is the real difficulty.

**Mrs HULL**—So that is where it is not working, Matilda: basically, you get somebody in, they do not actually teach and they do not bring people along and develop things so that people can use their own skills. Maybe you have not had the right person in.

**Ms Neilman**—That is right, yes.

**Mrs HULL**—So it is a matter of finding the right person to come in—someone who will assist you and stay as part of the community until such time as you are on your feet and who will then leave and let you do your own thing.

**Ms Neilman**—Yes, that is what we are looking for.

**CHAIR**—I need to wind it up there, unless anyone has anything they particularly want to say. I particularly want to thank Lama, who was thrown in at the deep end. I really must thank you. Thank you, Mr Chairman, for being with us without any forewarning, and thanks to you, Mr Deputy Chairman and Matilda. Good luck. I thank Billy Missi and Victor, who came earlier. That was terrific, too. That was a highlight of our day to see that happen. It is very much appreciated, so thank you very much.

**Mr Missi**—I have something else I want to add in relation to funding, where we are finding some difficulty. As Matilda explained earlier, the other consultancy application that has been going into DEWRSB—now through the Indigenous Small Business Fund based in Townsville—has been in progress and is in its final stages. That is the only one we have been waiting on so we can run our collective as well. We have done our bit to promote the enterprise but our business has a structure that is not up and running well enough to apply for funding in a number of areas. I think that by getting those funding applications approved and having someone here setting up the business structures—where the money should go, through other avenues associated with the council—we should see good results.

I have an application to the TSRA for funding to help us with the establishment of the old supermarket. I have another application for a big project printing out the stocks for the exhibition that is touring currently and the new one we have just launched. I will be seeking funding from the TSRA. I was wondering how they were going about it. Maybe you can get a report and see how you can help or something.

**CHAIR**—I would not want to mislead you. We have to see a national picture and leave the specific programs to the various authorities and various responsible agencies. We have an oversight role. We pick out those things that are obvious to us and make recommendations where we might improve them. We cannot get too much into the specific but, if there is a weakness in the general program, we like to know about it. That is about as far as I can take it.

**Mr Missi**—That is I wanted to know—to be familiarised with how it works.

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

**Mrs DRAPER**—We will get on to Warren Entsch for you.

**Mr Missi**—No worries. Thank you very much.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs Draper**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 3.51 p.m.**