



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 11.21 a.m.**

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

**HODGSON, Mrs Suzanne, Financial and Training Consultant, St Pauls Island Council**

**KRIS, Mr John Toshie, Chairperson, St Pauls Island Council**

**PAIWAN, Mr John David, Chief Executive Officer, St Pauls Island Council**

**PEDRO, Mr Wilhelm, Deputy Chairman, St Pauls Island Council**

**Van RYSINGE, Mr Donald, Councillor, St Pauls Island Council**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. I have really appreciated the generosity of the welcome of your people and thank you for picking us up this morning and for the openness and the way you have shown us around. Thank you very much for your hospitality. We will introduce ourselves and tell you where we are from. Mike suggested that we might do that. Yesterday at Thursday Island we just started ambling into it and we did not actually get around to introducing ourselves, so we will do that today with apologies to the people of yesterday. My name is Barry Wakelin and I am from South Australia. My electorate is Grey, which is 90 per cent of South Australia and it joins the Northern Territory border, hence my comments in connection with the colour of the house this morning—that it was like Uluru.

**Ms HOARE**—My name is Kelly Hoare and I am a Labor Party member from New South Wales. My electorate runs down the west side of Lake Macquarie. Lake Macquarie is between Newcastle and Sydney. It is the largest saltwater lake in the Southern Hemisphere and it is a very beautiful place, too.

**Mrs DRAPER**—I am Trish Draper and I am from South Australia. My electorate is just underneath Barry's electorate, nestled between the Barossa Valley and the City of Adelaide. Apart from being on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, I am also chairman of the health and ageing committee, which is a backbench policy committee for the government. Before I was elected and became a politician I was a nurse. I did my nurse's training in the Navy. So my interest on this committee principally is in health issues for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

**Mrs HULL**—I am Kay Hull and I am the National Party member for Riverina. Riverina is halfway between Melbourne and Sydney and it is about three hours away from Canberra. My electorate has intensive irrigation so a lot of the production and industry is fruit and vegetables, horticulture, wineries and vineyards. So it is intensive irrigation. The other half of it is very much dry land farming. I have defence and university facilities in my major town of Wagga Wagga. I am also the chairman of the Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs. I am chairing an inquiry on substance abuse that was started by the chairman of this committee, before he moved onto this committee and I took on that chairmanship. We have looked at substance abuse. That is certainly in communities right across Australia. I am very interested in that. I have about 4,500 Aboriginals in my electorate but they are only in two towns—Wagga Wagga and Griffith. They have some significant issues that they need to deal with.

**CHAIR**—I could add, of course, that the land in my electorate is mainly Aboriginal land. Pitjantjatjara and the Maralinga Tjarutja are significant Aboriginal lands and they make up the largest percentage of my electorate. It is a very significant site.

There are some important issues that we would like to talk about. As you know, we are interested in community capacity and the ever-evolving changes that are there. The government has indicated a review of ATSIC and that will come on stream in the next few weeks or months. The autonomy of the Torres Strait region and the way it operates is of great interest because it is an excellent model. It has some great advantages in being a discrete community in the way it can operate. But I think the autonomy offers some great lessons for Australia. You have great challenges ahead of you as we all do. But, in what we have seen so far in our brief visit and in the submission from the authority, there are some great lessons for us. I thought perhaps it might be useful to understand a little about your history as well because it is quite important in the way it now plays out in terms of your planning, your future, the advantages and perhaps some difficulties that it creates. Perhaps I should just lead in by asking you to describe to me the history of St Pauls and how it came about. It is important that we put that on the record.

**Mr Kris**—I should have asked an elder to come in but I will do what I can. We were established around 1904 under the Anglican Church. There was an agreement with an elder from the local tribe that has seen us established where we are today. In 1984, we came out from under the church and established our full corporate local government within the community. That used to previously work under the church and now it just operates as a local government.

Our native title is a unique one within the Torres Strait because we are not the claimant or the native titleholders of the whole island. We are actually doing a ‘piggyback’ ride on an agreement with the traditional owners of the land, who are the Muralug, who you will be meeting this afternoon. We are working in partnership with them the way we used to work before, through a gentleman’s agreement. It is just more established in black and white that native title has achieved its goal.

We are a very young community; our age group is very young. There are a lot of motivated people. We are a registered training organisation. We deliver training to other communities in the Torres Strait. We are also a registered building organisation. We are looking to establish training within the community to develop tradesmen that can build on economic development to help us move towards achieving the communities’ goals and dreams. Would anyone like to add any more?

**Mrs Hodgson**—The council did not do this off its own bat. In 1994, it started this project and it was started with a community meeting. It asked the community what they wanted and what issues and problems were facing the community. There were things like health, education and very poor wages—there was no economic base whatsoever in the community. At that time, people were living 12 to 14 to a house and those houses did not have inside toilets or electricity. So it was a pretty grim situation.

**Mrs DRAPER**—That was in 1994.

**Mrs Hodgson**—Yes, 1994 in Australia.

**Mrs DRAPER**—Any TV? I need to know.

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**Mrs Hodgson**—The odd house that had electricity got one channel for television.

**Mrs DRAPER**—No toilets?

**Mrs Hodgson**—No inside toilets, no running water. They went outside to a tap and filled a bucket. Things were pretty grim. The community assets at that time were worth just over \$3 million. Today, they are worth almost \$17 million, so that tells you how far the community has come. The council decided that, to address all those issues, they needed to look at adult education. Even though the community is very young—the average age is about 24—they felt that they had no skills. Tradespeople and professionals were coming in, doing the jobs, and taking their skills and their money away with them. The community said they did not want that to happen; they wanted their own people to be skilled up to form an economic base for the island. From that, we were able to address health issues such as JE, which is a major problem here, and asthma. These are very serious health issues that we have been able to address because we put emphasis on them. We have built proper housing. We have built roads. We have put in infrastructure.

**Mrs DRAPER**—What are your three main health issues?

**Mrs Hodgson**—Asthma, JE, diabetes.

**CHAIR**—Does anyone else want to add to Toshie's comments in terms of the history? We have a picture of the native title and there may be some implications there on access to land. You are working on formal agreements and it would be interesting to understand if there are any impediments. Obviously, since 1994, there has been huge progress. You have seen dramatic change in terms of improvement, but no doubt on the health issues you have a way to go.

**Mr Kris**—Native title is across every community. The real issue is understanding what native title is.

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mr Kris**—It is not how you operate and other things; it is just understanding the whole perspective. I think we are very lucky that we have those open communication lines between the native title holders and ourselves.

**CHAIR**—You are reasonably confident that you will resolve anything that may be outstanding.

**Mr Kris**—Any issues that we need to discuss with them are put on the agenda for the PBC when they sit for their monthly meetings.

**Mrs HULL**—Just for clarification, what is JE?

**Mrs Hodgson**—JE is Japanese encephalitis.

**Mrs HULL**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—When you talk about health, you immediately also talk about housing. This morning I have heard variations in the cost of housing of between \$40,000 and \$500,000. I am sure that is right—there would be different standards and so on—but one of the big factors is freight, and there are issues of training and how you get the locals involved. From our inquiry's perspective, we are extremely interested in how that is delivered. I would like people to talk a little bit about your housing program, because there are quite exciting things happening there. The vegetable project is another great community enhancing project that will also have benefits for the standard of living.

On housing, could someone draw a picture? You have at least three means of delivery: you have those state—and Commonwealth probably, but particularly state—functionaries who build in certain ways and come in; you have contractors, who bring people in and do not involve your people; and, going to your model, you no doubt have CDEP, apprenticeship training and probably trainers as well, and you are getting prices down significantly, to a much more sensible level, and you are involving your own people and developing your own people's skills. You showed me a \$40,000 option—and we do not have to be tied to the figures—where people had actually used a lot of local product. Can we just go through those three things: the building of the house, the involvement of your people and the training? I would love to get on the record just how you have done that. It is pretty good stuff.

**Mr Kris**—I never really got to work with or for the council until late in the 1980s. Because of a lack of employment, we had to go and seek employment elsewhere. Before then, we used to get what we got from the department—it was the department of Aboriginal and islander affairs then, before it became the department of family services. You just got what you got; the council got the material, contractors came in, they built it up, and we ended up with families of 15 living in three-bedroom houses. All the health factors are just there; we do not have to go into the details. I can only speak about St Pauls Island Council. Then, when ATSI Housing was established, things worked a bit better, with the department establishing building where our subcontractors actually came in and they employed, I think, 10 per cent local people, just to say that they passed on the skills.

Back in around 1996, we found there was a major problem with our skills. We had brand new houses with huge defects. At one stage, the council nearly went to court because of the defects. That is when we identified, through the community development plan, that we really needed to get our boys into that area. Then, with the CDEP program, we tapped into the apprenticeship program and started putting our boys in by bringing in local tradesmen. That cut the costs down; we could actually build an extra house with the budget that we got. Previously, we would only get a budget of \$358,000 or \$500,000 and so on a year for building a house. If you bring in an outside contractor, that will only give you one house. But, because we did it locally, we could build two houses—a four-bedroom and a three-bedroom house, or a different design that would actually cater to our needs. The difference in the costs gave us an extra house, although it really did not meet the need at the end of the day.

This established employment within the community and got our people trained and qualified; it achieved the goals of what the community wanted, in a way, although it was not enough for us. It was a way of expanding, taking a step further and building into the future and also creating employment for people who were coming out of school. As in all other communities, the more infrastructure you put up the more population there is in the community. The needs are ever growing.



A self-help housing project was run back then by the ADC. It was one way for our family members to get into building their own homes. Housing is such a great need. If it is not the top item it is the second item on every community's development plan, regardless of the population. This program was a way for people to get a house and take the load off extended families and improve overcrowding and health factors. After we went into the traineeship program, established our tradesmen and started the ball rolling towards where we are today, we never looked back when it came to self-help housing.

**CHAIR**—Excellent. There was an issue with ADC. Just remind me what happened to ADC and what its impact was.

**Mr Kris**—I would be glad to tell you—

**CHAIR**—Please do.

**Mr Kris**—but it was before my time.

**CHAIR**—But it was a broader ranging issue, wasn't it? Can you say what the issue with ADC was, how it impacted and whether it carried on.

**Mrs Hodgson**—ADC was there one minute and gone the next. The funding stopped just like that. It actually was about self-help. For instance, they would pay for the roof of the house and you had to provide the rest; the family had to actually get in and build the rest. You have seen those houses—they were mud brick or they were made from ant beds; there was never any extra money to put in kitchens or anything like that or to do them properly. Although it seemed like a good idea at the time, it actually caused more problems than it fixed, with health issues and stuff like that.

**Ms HOARE**—The process that we saw seems to be working brilliantly. But, as you said, Toshie, when we were touring around we saw that inadequate housing still exists, and there are still more people requiring housing. How long do you think it is going to take for you to adequately house all the community members? I would think that it is going to be a bit faster now, with the concrete block processing plant.

**Mr Kris**—You can never draw a line or put a dot point at the end of when you are going to fully establish housing for a whole community. It really is an ongoing issue. With the system we have in place now with the community members, we actually get them to sit with the council to look at the designs of the houses they want. They get to pick the colour scheme, whether it is high-set or low-set, whether they need to put another room in, revamp the whole design of the house to their liking. We negotiate with them. It gets that feeling of ownership of the building, and you find out the infrastructure then has an extra year in the life span, whereas before, with the contractors, people moved in and they saw a house that they had no input into and the life span was basically cut in half. Doing all of these little things within the puzzle has really created a feeling of ownership amongst community members. But, going back to your question, I do not think we can ever put a full stop behind the sentence to say that we will fully house everyone, because the more houses you put up the more families move back in. People have moved away because of lack of employment, and now they are moving back because of a lack of money to pay bills down south.

**Ms HOARE**—That was going to be my next question in relation to housing: the population migration to and from the community.

**Mr Kris**—It is not just people coming back to live but also traditional visits, traditional events. People come into the community and put a load on the infrastructure, and that really does take its toll. But you really cannot stop it; that is just how it is.

**Mrs HULL**—When we drove around, I noticed the majority of the houses were built up. Are you making provisions for your elderly people in the future so that they have got good access for when they become older or disabled? You are a young community now, but you are not going to stay young.

**Mr Kris**—I am not too sure whether it is a requirement, but the minimum standard for the design says that to cater for the future you now have to have a disabled bathroom and toilet, a ramp, a step and so on to cater for disabilities.

**Mrs HULL**—Have got your own island planning laws, or do you have a Queensland planning law?

**Mrs Hodgson**—It is ATSI Housing, state government minimum requirements. When the community member who is going to be on that list for the next house comes in, the council negotiates with them in regard to their age and whether they will have elderly people living with them that they will need to cater for within the next 10 years. That is all taken into consideration, and they have got that input before the house is built. We have several houses that have ramps—they are not needed at the moment but they are there, because they will be needed within the next two or three years.

**Mrs HULL**—I notice in your handout that you have reduced the costs from \$180,000 using contractors down to \$90,000 utilising your own resources, your own labour and skills. Has that enabled you to build more houses? It stands to reason that you can build two for the price of one. Are you actually building two for the price of one?

**Mrs Hodgson**—That is right. That is what we are doing. That is why we have got the housing issue addressed as well as it is. It is still not good, because people want to come back. The more services you put on in the community, the more people want to come back to their homeland, and St Pauls has the area to cater for the people.

**Mrs HULL**—Do you have some sort of criteria that says that if you come back you need to be employed? Is it like a form of immigration criteria, such as when you come into Australia you need to be able to get gainful employment and you need skills? If they move away—and perhaps they do not get enough money when they are away—and then they want to come back to the community, do you have some sort of policy that ensures that they either join the CDEP program or try to get gainful employment on the island?

**Mrs Hodgson**—There is no actual structured policy along those lines, because if people are born here then they are entitled to come back anyway. However, there is no-one that I am aware of who is on the dole in St Pauls. So you have that pressure from the rest of the community; the council does not need to do anything. The rest of the community encourages each other to participate in the work that is going on in St Pauls and be a part of it.

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**Mr Kris**—As I have explained before, we cannot really stop families moving back. What they normally do is get in touch with their relatives and then the word gets around. When they do get back, they come up to see the council. We have an open door policy where we sit with them and discuss the issue of where they will be living and what we can and cannot do.

**Mrs HULL**—If a three-bedroom, one-bathroom house was designed and built to house a family of six or eight and then that looked like increasing to, say, 16 or 18 people, do you now try to dissuade people from doing that?

**Mr Kris**—To an extent we do, just to remind them. But if they want to they can.

**Mrs HULL**—If they want to they can, but you try to dissuade them from doing that.

**Mrs Hodgson**—We point out the problems. Also, a lot of the houses are built high-set, so they can enclose the bottom and extend that living area down there quite reasonably, at a reasonable cost.

**CHAIR**—I am just looking at the handout and a whole lot of other things have become quite clear. Council tendered for and won the contract for Edmiston and Taylor to construct ambulance and SES shelters not just for your own island but for 13 other Torres Strait islands.

**Mrs Hodgson**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—I had not cottoned on to that. The tender with extras was for \$500,000, and you have also successfully completed tenders for IBIS, main roads et cetera. Can you give us a picture of how that team works? Would it be on business lines? Would it have a manager and structure under the council? Could you just take us through how that structure works?

**Mrs Hodgson**—There is a business plan for the construction company that belongs to the council, but it comes underneath the council; it must relate back to the council. It has got a building supervisor, it has apprentices and trainees, it uses the council's facilities in the office for its marketing and its book work. It is all part of the accountability that council has to have. So it works directly under the council and it is responsible to the council.

**CHAIR**—No doubt it is building the accommodation that we saw earlier, and there would be promotion to the rest of the region that you would hope would come from that eventually. I knew that you were doing extra work, but I had not quite picked up on the breadth of this function. In relation to timing—you have probably mentioned it but just remind me—when did you start with this?

**Mrs Hodgson**—We started with a construction company in 1998. Ours is the only Indigenous council that is in its own right registered as a building contractor. Normally, the registration is held by the builder. So if the builder leaves, the council is in serious trouble, isn't it? The council itself holds the licence here. It took us some time to do that.

**CHAIR**—Can you take us through that. What were the challenges?

**Mrs Hodgson**—There was a lot of negotiation with the Queensland Building Services Authority as to why we should have the licence. We had to prove that we had X amount of dollars and that we had a human resource policy to ensure that we were employing the right type of people, and we had to give guarantees and make sure that we were paying the right insurance. It was quite a lengthy process.

**CHAIR**—Surely the really telling blow in the discussion—probably a bit more than discussion at times—was continuity, in terms of establishing something which was going to stay with the community.

**Mrs Hodgson**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—You say here that in 1994 you had four apprentices, carpenters et cetera, and today there are five carpentry apprenticeships, three painter and decorators, two plumbers, two mechanics, six trainees in office management skills and general horticulture et cetera.

**Mrs Hodgson**—That needs to be updated. It also says in there that the project officer had completed his studies and got a diploma in environmental health. He now has an advanced diploma in environmental health and he is no longer the project officer; he is the chairman. There has been a lot of extra growth in just the last two to three years.

**CHAIR**—That reminds me that, in regard to the make-up of your community, much of your community—and, Mrs Hodgson, you may be able to guide me on this—goes away for education. Toshie has been able to share with me—and I hope he does not mind me saying this—that he did his additional training and focused on environmental health in Warwick. We know that there are approximately 8,000 people here of which 6,000 are of Torres Strait Island descent but, as Mike was saying yesterday, there are 20,000 or more Torres Strait Islanders spread all over Australia. You are a migratory people, and you go away to obtain skills and to help your education. Could someone comment on how important that is? Many of you go to Cairns and sometimes to Townsville. Do most of you do that?

**Mr Kris**—There is a lot of us. When the deputy came back, he was probably one of the first heavy plant operators. The first time people got to see one of our own blokes sitting on and driving a grader was back then. He used to work in Western Australia. John did his course through James Cook University, as did Donald. Back then, high school on Thursday Island only went as far as grade 10, so you would have to go on to grades 11 and 12 down in Cairns or wherever.

**CHAIR**—That is an important part of developing your skill and your education, and you would see that continuing.

**Mr Kris**—The other great issue was how to bring the skills back to the community. Establishing the training program within our community, we started focusing on kids who were leaving school after grade 12, or consulting with them even before they achieved grade 12—what were their goals, where were they heading and what could we as a local council offer to the community.

**Ms HOARE**—Particularly now—when you have your young people growing up in such a well-run community with good housing, good facilities and good local industry—those that

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leave to go to high school or further education will have an incentive to come home, knowing that will be coming home to a well-run community with good facilities and opportunities available to them. That is a great thing to happen.

**Mrs Hodgson**—There is one step further to that as well. Because the council is a registered training organisation we said: what is the point of our people being qualified and only ever working here? We want to be able to pass on skills that people can use anywhere in the world, not just in the Torres Strait. So we encourage everybody to go away for 12 months and learn from other people as well and see how things are done differently down south—learn something, bring it back. What that does is expand their experience and they have got more chance of helping the people up here.

**Mrs HULL**—What kind of skills do you further require in order to continue to build capacity in your community?

**Mrs Hodgson**—People are never in one place forever, so there is a continual, slow movement and changeover. We need to make sure that the young people are there, groomed, ready to take over in those positions. We have attacked all of the areas of administration. The St Pauls Island Council is probably the only Indigenous council that has passed its audit continually with commendations from the Queensland Auditor-General over the past eight years. I do not know of another council that has been able to do that and get a commendation each time. In fact, the Queensland Auditor-General did our audit last year and they said that our corporate governance was better than most large firms in Brisbane. That is a huge feather in the cap of the staff in the office because it shows that everybody is dedicated to their work. We need to ensure that that sort of thing continues so we can provide the services to the community. The council would like to take over the role of providing all things, including law and health, to its own community, because they are separated from the council's role at the moment. The council would be better running things like the IBIS store. So there are lots of—

**Mrs HULL**—Are there youth leadership programs in place that are looking to place somebody moving into an allied health field? Obviously if you have got diabetes you will have lots of foot and skin and associated problems. Are you looking at leadership programs that build the capacity to come back and treat those problems?

**Mrs Hodgson**—Yes.

**Mrs HULL**—Could I just ask how?

**Mrs Hodgson**—Because we can earn our own dollars, we put money aside for our staff development but also for community development. The children are sent to the community council twice a year with the school. They come in and have a look at the areas and work with everyone. They do that from grades 6 and 7. They are already picking mentors out and people then encourage them in that role and we have set money aside for things like universities and further education for the children of the community. So we are hoping that that is going to start it off and then we can add on.

**Mrs HULL**—So you have mentoring programs to sustain your community in the future in areas where they are really needed such as health and allied health. Do you have mentors in Cairns or other places that children can go in and spend time with?

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**Mrs Hodgson**—There is a program on the Web called Pathways.

**Mrs HULL**—Yes, I know that one.

**Mrs Hodgson**—That has got all of the mentors and we introduced that to the school. The schoolchildren now have access to the Web. They can get on it and choose these people that are down south, talk to them and send them emails and actually get encouragement.

**Mr Kris**—It is also important that children are attending some of the schools down south.

**Mrs Hodgson**—That is right.

**Mr van Rysinge**—We have established an SES cadetship group at the school. A lot of the leadership things will be developed when it starts next year. We have got a good SES and rural fire brigade and the only volunteer marine rescue unit outside of Horn Island. The young ones learn what fire is and what are good fires and bad fires. The cadet program will introduce the kids to leadership, first aid and so on.

**Mr Kris**—Because the majority of our kids spend most of their high school down south, the SES play a major role. Donald and the other staff have to get in touch with the SES to let them know that they are there and see if there are any activities that they can join. Because they are still registered under the cadetship they can participate in the events that they have down there and also in the Jobs Pathway.

**CHAIR**—I note you also intend to take on people from other islands for training through your apprenticeships. So you are bringing people in as well.

**Mr Van Rysinge**—We had a few students come last year. Again, with the overcrowding of accommodation, the families could not cope. We had to send them back to their communities.

**Mrs HULL**—In my electorate, we have a program that puts some young Aboriginal students into placements with doctors each year. They live in the family home of the doctor for three months at a time. Each 12 months, they go and live in the family home. It could be a psychologist, a psychiatrist or a skin specialist or someone like that. The doctors agree to have a young person live in their home and then they become a mentor through the program. We now have six students who are studying different allied health services because of that program. I wondered if there was a possibility that you were using something like that.

**Mr Kris**—Through the environmental health program, the health department are doing that. They are working with the council. The council sponsors the worker to attend all the curriculum—the subject is done in TAFE—until they get a qualification and they come back to the community and deliver the program. When I was doing environmental health, through Queensland Health, I was working with the council. They subsidised my wages and my position within the community and I got the qualification under the program that is run by Queensland Health to come back into my community and be the qualified person as an EHW—the same with the generalist in the health centre or the nutritionist. They have different categories that you can study to get your diploma. It actually goes up to the degree level.

**CHAIR**—There is another wonderful paragraph here.

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Until August 1996, the council conducted its business from an old tin shed erected in 1973 by the then Department of Community Care to house machinery. The rats would run over our feet while we tried to work and we were constantly fighting the elements and the geckos who were both determined to deposit what they could on our book work.

**Mr Kris**—During the wet, we had to put a tarp over the roof.

**CHAIR**—That is progress. That is wonderful.

**Mrs Hodgson**—We had one computer and we had it for three months—it seized up in three months. We sent it back to Cairns and they refused to fix it because they said that we had had it sitting in the salt water.

**CHAIR**—I would like to go on to a couple of other things. I do not want to be too formal about matters but I need to understand. You have the Torres Strait Regional Authority, the statutory body, and you are a board member, as chairman of your council. That is the main body for this region. How successful do you think—I know Mike is out there and I am not really too troubled, because I think the Torres Strait Regional Authority is working very well—the general structure of the community organisations is? Are there too many, too few, or is there a better structure in governance? You have your own council that seems to connect well to the authority, but there are other organisations. There are state government organisations; there is probably an odd Commonwealth government organisation roaming around there somewhere. How does it work for you? Where are we at with that?

**Mr Kris**—At the end of the day, it was always TSRA. It was the bus stop for everything, even the state departments. TSRA has been a great help to the whole region. It has really improved things. I can only tell from having been the chairperson and now being a board member in terms of the work we have done as portfolio members since Mike got in—I will not say anything good about Mike; it is never true anyway! The portfolio members are getting more involved in their field and that has helped a lot at the board level to get a basic understanding of the whole region and all the organisations within the region that benefit each community. Just from hearing from other chairpersons and previous chairpersons, TSRA was the bus stop for everything. At the moment we could better it; it is just a matter of how we are going to go about bettering it. We still need the other organisations within the region. It is a matter of them pulling their socks up, playing their part and working at getting the partnerships to a level where we do not need to go knocking on Mike's front door to ask for funding for every little thing.

What we have done here in the local government on St Pauls is establish communities within our community which will cater to people's needs. Every third month, we have a public meeting where the council looks at matters that concern it and the other organisations report to the community on what they are doing and where they are heading. It is about sharing the responsibilities. We cannot knock TSRA on the head, because of the major improvements it has made in the Torres Strait. You only have to look at the MIP program. We did not have a septic system before; now we have one. Now we are moving to a sewerage system and an expansion of electricity provision. It is huge.

**Mrs HULL**—Are you looking at having a sewerage program on the island?

**Mr Kris**—It is up and running already. A few of the communities already have sewerage. It is in the program. The dams—

**CHAIR**—Are you contracting some of that work?

**Mr Kris**—Our community took on the plumbing and the reticulation system. We are in the second round of the MIP to look at sewerage.

**Mrs DRAPER**—I have two brief questions for Suzanne. When she was speaking earlier, she spoke about how the council would dearly like to see law and health coming under their auspices. What do you mean by law exactly? When you have answered that, I would like to ask you a question about health.

**Mrs Hodgson**—The nearest law and order is on Thursday Island or Horn Island.

**Mrs DRAPER**—So you mean looking at funding your own community police?

**Mrs Hodgson**—No. We are looking at putting a person from the community through the state police program and then having a police station at St Pauls or in between the two communities. As there are two communities on the one island, we have a great opportunity to put these services in so that they are totally organised by the local council and, in that way, make sure that they work.

**Mrs DRAPER**—The other question is about Japanese encephalitis. It is the first time I have heard it raised in all of the meetings we have been at. Are there specific geographical conditions or is something different here? It has not been mentioned or noted by any of the other communities we have visited on the islands.

**Mrs Hodgson**—It is a mosquito-borne virus and we had 12 families who tested positive for it. Fortunately we had no deaths. Badu had three or four deaths.

**Mr Kris**—We are on the flight path of the birds which carry the mosquitos around.

**Mrs Hodgson**—This thing attacks people. It does not care about age or anything—it just attacks anyone and causes a brain haemorrhage.

**Mr Kris**—We are hoping to get funding from the state government to put a dome up so we can divert the birds around it!

**Mrs DRAPER**—It won't happen.

**Mrs Hodgson**—Just on the TSRA, before the TSRA was actually recognised and separately funded, the funding would go through ATSIC first and we would get the crumbs. We would get the leftovers. Since the TSRA was actually allowed to fully take care of all of the issues up here, it has been a godsend.

**CHAIR**—I do not know the area well, but it stands out clearly. It is great to see.

**Mr Kris**—On the ICC, because it is under the state, on numerous occasions there are a lot of councillors suffering on what we call the state government funding—the SGFA. We discussed the health workers earlier. Under the health program you get people in the community that can

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actually get a qualification up to degree level at national standard and then the council lose them because we cannot give them the correct amount of wages to do the work. That is the biggest downfall for us with CDEP people. You become a participant of CDEP, you are fully qualified and you cannot deliver the program.

**CHAIR**—That is exactly what we are looking for. I think we have taken particular notice of that.

**Mr Kris**—That is one of our biggest issues. With our council, we cannot put our environmental health worker on full time because of that situation.

**CHAIR**—I just repeat that that is exactly the sort of issue we are really interested in. We heard yesterday that health is a very important issue here. There are a range of issues that I will not go into but that issue is exactly the sort we need to be noting and putting into our report.

**Mr Fordham**—The committee might like to look at the Morton report. You have probably heard of it. I believe it was commissioned by the state. It raises and analyses the whole issue. I am not sure that there have been any outcomes from or anything done with that report.

**Mrs DRAPER**—When was that done?

**CHAIR**—Three or four years ago?

**Mr Fordham**—I think it is about two years old.

**Mrs Hodgson**—I was going to say 18 months or two years.

**Ms HOARE**—I have been really impressed by what I have seen here at your community and the progress, particularly since 1996. Over the past six years, there have been huge leaps and bounds made. Can you give me an instance of any other fairly isolated community like this? If you had a bucket into which you could put the basic ingredients of what has made it work for St Pauls, what do you think would be the four or five basic ingredients to be able to make a community like St Pauls work.

**Mr Kris**—I will give you two, off the top of my head: good leadership and motivated people who want to work.

**Mrs DRAPER**—How do you know that?

**Mr Kris**—Through the leadership.

**Mrs Hodgson**—We have a saying at St Pauls: as a horse trainer says, ‘When the horse that you’re riding dies, get off.’

**Mrs HULL**—What should or could the Commonwealth, state and council bodies that are working together in a tripartite partnership achieve that they are not currently achieving?

**Mr Kris**—Economic development.

**Mrs HULL**—Could you explain that further.

**Mr Kris**—That will really help us to not only build up our own dollars but also bring skills and create employment. It will help the council to have better bargaining power when it is looking at fixing problems such as housing, infrastructure programs and all these other little things that really do make up the whole community. That is my belief. If we can better our economic development there are a lot of things we can achieve.

**Mrs HULL**—How would you start your own business? You have got a business here currently with your pavers and you do your own main roads—you have got a road authority depot down here that is going to pave surfaces, put bitumen on the roads et cetera. What sort of economic development would you like to see enterprise basically be able to set up here through the council or through a tripartite agreement? What is the type of industry or business that could be set up here to bring your economic development closer?

**Mr Kris**—I will describe our side of the picture for a bit. The near western communities of Badu, Mabuiag, Kubin and St Pauls had a meeting in Tiwi—and Mike will get to know about it soon—where we agreed that we will work together as a cluster. In the Torres Strait our four communities interact more than any other communities in the Torres Strait. For example, Mabuiag should not start any fishing enterprise because that is already established on Badu. We will try not to duplicate each other; we are looking at sharing resources.

**Mrs HULL**—Yes, and if you compete with one another and you get lower prices for your goods.

**Mr Kris**—We are looking at sharing resources and establishing economic development within the community, not duplicating each community.

**Mrs HULL**—Very good thinking; I wish the states would think like that as well. Because you do not need to—

**Mr Kris**—That is the issue here. It does not have the money to give us. That is why TSRA gets that famous knock, knock, knock on the door. I am not saying that the state is bad; it is just that it is in a different state of mind.

**Mrs HULL**—I just think they are irrelevant at this point in time. That is excellent; you are actually working as a cluster, working in partnership, to determine what your strengths are and you deliver your strengths and let the weakest part that you have go to another island's strength.

**Mrs Hodgson**—What happened historically was that if somebody got a good idea everybody else tried to copy it and then it was no longer a good idea; it just became another thing that everybody else had. So what we and Tosh, in particular, have been trying to do is form these cluster groups and get people to identify what they are good at and what they have already got established and then address the areas that they could actually fit into and do. By doing that we are not competing with each other, we are not setting up the same things all over the place, and it is working much better.

**Mrs HULL**—That is fantastic. Looking at your garden project, do you have enough water to sustain that?

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**Mr Kris**—Yes.

**Mrs HULL**—Could you trade with the other islands with regard to what you can grow locally here? Yesterday we were on Poruma and nothing can grow there because it is all sand, whereas, on the way in here, I noticed that you have got lots of good soil and things like that. Do you intend to grow and deliver fruit and vegetables and that sort of thing?

**Mr Kris**—Through the health management committee, we have got what we used to call ‘whole community day’; everybody gets out and cleans the community up—beautification of the community. That has now been put over to the community garden, where everybody gets together every Saturday fortnight and works for half a day in the gardens. Whatever heavy work we cannot do on that day, we hand over to either CDP or main roads and when they have a day off, they help us out. We have also established a day every month for market day—that is for bringing in your arts and crafts and selling it. Although we have started small, we are actually looking at the whole cluster group. Badu has a hydroponics garden, so we could not go into hydroponics. We therefore looked at root vegetables. But in the near future we will also be looking at combining things—where they bring some of their vegetables over and we have a huge market and move it around.

**Mrs HULL**—Where does your sewage outfall go? Do you reticulate it? What sort of sewerage process are you going through?

**Mr Kris**—We are looking at ponding.

**Mrs HULL**—At the end of the ponding, there will be sludge at the bottom. What will you be doing with that water?

**Mrs Hodgson**—We are in the second half of that. Once that is up and running, we hope we will get what they call grey water and that will be reticulated through into the gardens. That is all part of the plan that is up there.

**Mr Kris**—But remember that we are in Queensland where there are different laws on grey water.

**Mrs Hodgson**—That is right; there are laws on what grey water you can use.

**Mrs HULL**—On the way that you can use it, yes.

**Mrs Hodgson**—That is right. There are certain things that you cannot use it on. You cannot use it on root vegetables or leaf vegetables. But we are aware of that legislation.

**Mr Kris**—You must have it so many metres away from your town reticulation system.

**Mr Fordham**—You could have a golf course.

**Mrs HULL**—Then you can fly people in; there is the Japanese market. Then you will need houses.

**Mr Kris**—Is that a submission you want to see?

**Mrs Hodgson**—One thing we should mention just quickly is that the council won the Employer of the Year in 1998. That was the only year we put in for it. The problem with those types of things for states is that you have to physically sit down and fill out all the forms. They expect it to be in a format that is correct and pretty and looks good. We find that you are either doing the work or filling out those forms. We did it once to prove that we could do it. But I think somebody should talk to these people and say, ‘Hey, there are people out there who are doing the work and need to be recognised. And how often do we hear horrible stories about Indigenous councils? Let’s try and focus on the really good ones’—and there are lots of really good ones.

**Mrs HULL**—Yes, that is what we are trying to do.

**Mrs Hodgson**—We need to promote it more. If people like Training Queensland could get their act together and get a committee like yours to go and have a look at communities and decide, without the community having to sit down and do the work, we might get better results.

**CHAIR**—An excellent point. Perhaps we can tackle one more issue, and one aspect of it concerns a group like IBIS. I understand that it is based in Cairns. Does it service the whole of the Torres Strait?

**Mrs Hodgson**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—That is one aspect of it. What comes to mind is your business development with your building company and what you might do in the future and how you might do it. CDEP is part of this business development as well, isn’t it?

**Mrs Hodgson**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I want to try to understand the future direction for business and the opportunities that you see for some tourism—it will be in your plan and you have already spoken about it, particularly with your building company. We have already looked at the facility you hope to use. You are already having visitors, so accommodation would be an issue. What is the future direction and what are the future opportunities for your business? We have the golf course under way!

**Mr Kris**—I gather that is guaranteed.

**CHAIR**—Perhaps as one way of starting this, someone could describe IBIS’s history as an organisation. I come from a region which has a number of stores and has had issues over the years, so I have some understanding of how some of these things can work or not work and how they may work better. I am not going to single out IBIS because it is so obvious that it is a business entity giving a good service. But there are other models, no doubt. What is IBIS and what does it do and what is its connection with the Torres Strait? Perhaps we can then open up discussion about business generally and opportunities in the future.

**Mr Kris**—I can always start, because I have only just got in—I have come from the meadows, through to the forest and I am just coming out of the forest. When we sat down and

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looked at the new plan for the IBIS shop, we stated that we would really like to take over the shop. In 10 years time, we want to have the operation of the shop fully under the council umbrella. We also asked the builders to put the shop in an area where we can extend it when we take it over. I think that is one good aspect about the new buildings, that we now actually have an agreement to say that the future direction of the council is to take over the shop. Other than the managerial side, I really cannot answer your question. I guess the community garden is an indication of where we are and what we want and of what we want that we are not getting.

**CHAIR**—Your building program clearly is an excellent model. You will just take it step by step, I am sure, and take it through as your people are trained and able to deliver. I am interested in the future. Can someone please describe who or what IBIS is? What is IBIS to you? Has it been around a long time, delivering services to the community in this way?

**Mrs Hodgson**—IBIS has been there forever. It is the Islanders Board of Industry and Service. It was set up to make sure that communities had access to fresh produce from a store. Family and community services used to run the stores in Aboriginal communities in Queensland. IBIS had that role in the Torres Strait and in the MBA. It never really lived up to what it was supposed to do. Shortages of fresh food are still common, quality of food is not good—all of those issues. Their buying power stinks! ‘Why can’t we have Coles?’ is the comment from the community. In the council’s development plan, there is an area for a shopping complex.

**Mrs DRAPER**—Next to the golf course?

**Mrs Hodgson**—Yes. What is envisaged is a proper supermarket that sells the stuff that is actually grown here—the meat that goes to Bamaga, for instance, because they have got the abattoirs there. We will incorporate those things that the chairman is setting up with these cluster groups and also have something like a little bakery there. Local people will have that as their own business and we will just lease it out, so it will be encouraging economic development within the community itself. There are some very entrepreneurial people at St Pauls; they are capable of doing all of these things, they just need the infrastructure to be put in.

**CHAIR**—And you can see the need for the garden vegetables at some future point?

**Mrs Hodgson**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—How well is the CDEP going, and how well does it connect? Are you satisfied? Do you think it is working well enough, or could it work better?

**Mr Kris**—It is looking pretty good for us. I guess they are all qualified in improvisation in CDEP. Basically, that is what everybody uses it for. Eighty per cent of employment in Torres Strait is through a CDEP. There has been a call for funding to put people in full-time employment. It goes back to what I said earlier about economic development. Only then will you ever be able to have a cashflow with no constraint attached to it.

**CHAIR**—That is a good comment. Does anyone want to add anything?

**Mrs Hodgson**—Here at St Pauls Island Council, any full-time positions are offered to CDEP employees first. CDEP employees are encouraged to apply for full-time positions. The CDEP

actually does work; it is not a sit-down CDEP. It contributes to the development of the community. It does real work, it does not just rake the yard. It is actually involved with the building and the roads and in the office. It is real work and it has been the backbone of the growth. CDEP and the CTP, the Community Training Program, from the TSRA have provided the funding that has enabled us to do what we have done here at St Pauls. Without them, we would not have been able to do it. ATSIIC stopped CTP, and I think it was the biggest mistake ever. If you do not train and continue to upgrade people's skills, then your community can only go backwards.

**Mr Kris**—That is true. Departments such as DEETYA or whatever they call themselves now should come to the party and help TSRA out by providing funding for training programs within the community. At home, TSRA is the only one providing training funding for the whole region. We are the only one supporting training programs throughout the region and that has really been our downfall. We need the state department to come in—whether it is on a fifty-fifty basis or whatever—and contribute, because training is an ongoing thing. There is no end to it. We can only train people now to meet the future and train others who come along after them. It is always there.

**Mrs HULL**—I would like to congratulate you. I think it is exciting to be listening to what you are doing and feeling, 'Yes, this is fantastic'. I congratulate you all because I think it is absolutely fabulous.

**CHAIR**—Mrs Hull has stolen my thunder. I was going to acknowledge the outstanding success of the annual apprentice dinner held in Cairns. I was also going to acknowledge the two outright winners and, the highlight of the year, the fact that the council won the prestigious employer of the year award. It is nice to have that on the record forever in the *Hansard*. Thank you very much.

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

That, pursuant to the power conferred by section 2(2) of the Parliamentary Papers Act 1908, this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Hoare**):

St Pauls Community Council policy documents and development plan presented by St Pauls Community Council be received as exhibits to the committee's inquiry into capacity building in indigenous communities.

**Committee adjourned at 12.33 p.m.**