

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES

REFERENCE: Review of annual reports 2001 –02 of the Department of Transport and Regional Services and the Department of the Environment and Heritage.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE: PUBLIC HEARING FRIDAY 28 MARCH 2003

INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORIES

Q1. *Senator SCULLION – In this so-called normalisation process, is there some sort of process that takes into account unique aspects, such as geography or the positions of services? You could therefore say, 'In the normalisation process, we have to give this particular area a particular category.' Normalisation is supposed to be a positive thing. Have you considered saying that there are some examples or communities or circumstances which we would exempt from some of the normalisation processes? Have you considered some of those issues? (page NCET 166)*

Response

From discussion with the Western Australian Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) the process of 'normalisation' is a major policy-driver for provision of essential services in remote Aboriginal communities. Therefore, it may be relevant to outline the principles of normalisation, as developed for remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia, in order to make comparison with processes adopted by the Commonwealth Government for the Indian Ocean Territories (IOTs).

Normalisation, as defined in the 1995 *Report of the Chief Executive Working Party on Essential Services to Aboriginal Communities* (the Hames Report) means "providing and maintaining essential services to Aboriginal communities in the same way as they are provided to a non-Aboriginal town or community. It does not result in the 'normalisation' of an Aboriginal community, but in the normalisation of the delivery and maintenance of services to that community." It is a means of ensuring that services are delivered and maintained effectively and equitably.

The Working Party defined Essential Services as:

- water
- waste water disposal
- power
- housing
- communications/access (internal and access roads to communities)
- health
- education
- community support; and
- law and order.

The 48 communities profiled in the report, with populations varying from 11 to 750, included localities such as Jigalong and Warburton, and outstations such as Blackstone, Jamieson, Wanarn, Warakurna, and Wingellina.

The report outlined a framework to achieve the outcomes for the provision of essential services, which incorporated four principles underpinning the normalisation process:

- (i) the development of Community Plans by, or in consultation with, the community;
- (ii) the development or incorporation of the Community Plan into a Town Planning Scheme (TPS);
- (iii) the development of Infrastructure Management structures and procedures, including responsibilities for the ownership and management of physical facilities identified in the TPS; and
- (iv) individual payment of service charges for essential services; that is, the people who use the service pay for the service – as occurs in non-Aboriginal communities.

It can be arranged for a copy of the report to be forwarded to the Committee.

Q2. *Mr SNOWDON – Under these current arrangements, how do the families of people on Christmas Island and the Cocos Islands get access to the full range of family services they could otherwise expect if they were on the mainland? ... it becomes fairly obvious that there are no arrangements currently in existence which provide people to the same level of service they could expect if they were on the mainland. What I am seeking guidance on is how we could achieve that objective.*

Response

The current Service Delivery Arrangement (SDA) with the Department for Community Development (DCD) does not provide the full range of services as would be available to a remote community in Western Australia. There are reasons for this, which have been provided under separate cover to the Standing Committee.

In WA, services to be provided by DCD to WA remote localities are planned. This process involves a network of departmental officers familiar with local issues.

In the IOTs, specific issues relating to community development matters are identified by the IOT Social Worker and these are generally discussed with the DCD Social Work Supervisor in order to address the problems. The DCD Social Work Supervisor provides an annual performance report to DoTaRS which flags issues which need attention in the IOTs.

There is potential for the SDA to be varied to provide appropriate services for the community. A recent example is the identification of the need for a child care service on Christmas Island. DoTaRS and DCD have investigated the requirements for the service to be provided and work is currently being undertaken to vary the SDA.

In answer to the question of how families in the IOTs can get access to the full range of services provided by DCD:

- (i) It would be useful to know what are the crucial services the IOTs are missing out on compared with what is provided to remote communities by DCD on the mainland. An audit of services provided and gaps in service provision might be helpful to identify the issues which are of greatest concern to the Committee.
- (ii) The IOT Social Worker could have a proactive role for planning for services to deal with children, young people and families.
- (iii) A new office for Children and Young People's Policy has been established within DCD. It may be helpful for this office to be approached regarding services to be provided for the client groups identified in (i) and (ii).

Q3. *Mr SNOWDON – In the context of submissions we had on the Cocos Islands, you might want to contemplate the lack of children's services and recreational facilities for the community generally. I am not certain as to where that falls, but there was a very strong submission from a person on West Island on the Cocos Islands about the lack of services like no basketball court, no real football oval, no indoor recreation facilities, and the same is true on the other Cocos Islands. There are large numbers of young people, a lot of whom are unemployed, and clearly there are attendance issues which go with that. The same is not quite true for Christmas Island because money is going to be spent by the Commonwealth on a recreation facility, but it is true for the Cocos Islands. Knowing how to address those issues would be useful to us.*

Mrs Miller – I know that on the mainland those types of services are quite often provided by local governments.

Mr SNOWDON – I understand that, but there are also Commonwealth services and state services currently available that they do not get access to. You will come back to us on that? (NCET 167)

Response

It is understood that the WA Department of Sport and Recreation (DSR) provides funding for community recreational facilities.

There is no SDA with DSR. Should the Commonwealth be interested in assessment of community funding applications for recreational facilities, arrangements could be made for this to be discussed with DSR.

There is an arrangement in place with the Lotteries Commission of WA to assess community funding applications and make recommendation to the Commonwealth.

Q4. *CHAIRMAN – I have a question with respect to the department's responsibilities, which include monitoring the phosphate mine and the marine aggregate mine on Christmas Island and their infrastructures, particularly with respect to roads. Two directives were issued by the DME officers in 1999 and 2000 that dealt with mine defects. Are you familiar with them at all?*

Mrs Miller – I might not be familiar with the particular issues, but I know that the department does investigate mines.

CHAIRMAN – Perhaps you can take this question on notice. The defects at those two mines – one is a quarry and one is a mine, albeit open cut – involved excessive dust, and what was termed 'structural integrity of the ship leading plant'. The committee would like to know whether these defects have been rectified and whether any further inspections have taken place since the orders were issued in 1999 and 2000. Would you take that question on notice? (NCET 16)

Response

Two directives under Section 22 of the *Mines Safety and Inspection Act (WA) (CI)* were issued to the management of Christmas Island Phosphate Mine by Inspectors of the Department of Industry and Resources (former Department of Minerals and Energy). The first directive related to excessive inspirable dust escaping while bagging phosphate. The second directive referred to the structural integrity of the two ship loaders.

Dust Issues

The directive was issued by the Special Inspector (Occupational Health) in July 1999 to deal with excessive amounts of dust escaping during bagging fine phosphate.

To protect the health of the employees, the directive required all employees to use suitable dust respirators while in the area. Follow-up inspections revealed compliance with this part of the directive.

The directive also required the management to take effective measures to reduce the dust levels during bagging. Many initiatives were trialed by the management with partial success only. These initiatives included modifications and upgrades to the plant and bags used.

On 15 May 2003, the management initiated use of a new type of bag to reduce dust in the bagging area. Results of this trial are awaited.

As the dust level has not been consistently maintained below the stipulated level, the requirement for the use of dust respirators in the area and monitoring of dust at more frequent intervals has not been revoked.

Structural Issues – Ship Loaders

In June 2000 a directive was issued to the Registered Manager, to carry out a risk assessment and formulate a management plan for the two shiploaders and also to undertake rectification works, which were identified in that plan. That directive was made because these shiploaders had severe corrosion issues and possible fatigue and overstress issues, created by the fact that the machines were built in the 1960's and had operated in a highly corrosive environment and very little maintenance work had been carried out since that time. Also, many modifications had been carried out without checks by a design engineer to ensure structural safety. The purpose of the risk management plan was to identify all the corrosion, fatigue and overstress issues and list remedial works with completion timeframes.

The requests to the mine to carry out this work, actually dated back to May 1998. The work was not carried out, and the instruction mentioned above, dated June 2000, was issued to ensure that the work was undertaken, because the safety of workers at the port and on the ships relied on the structural integrity of the shiploaders.

The requested risk management plan was completed in April 2001. Follow up inspections were carried out in June 2001 and June 2002, to monitor repair works identified in the plan. A further inspection and monitoring of the shiploader repair work, is planned for June 2003.

The repair works have not been strictly in accordance with the timeframes detailed in the risk management plan, and the Department is closely monitoring this work.