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Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS
Wednesday, 18 June 2003

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

Members in attendance: Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Mr Snowdon, Mr Tollner and 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

BRODIE, Ms Kate, Director, Strategic Directions Team, Indigenous Group, Department of Education, Science and Training 699

HOFFMAN, Mr Shane, Branch Manager, Business Management Branch, Indigenous Group, Department of Education, Science and Training 699

WILLIAMS, Mr Shane, Manager, Indigenous Group, Department of Education, Science and Training..... 699

Committee met at 4.54 p.m.

BRODIE, Ms Kate, Director, Strategic Directions Team, Indigenous Group, Department of Education, Science and Training

HOFFMAN, Mr Shane, Branch Manager, Business Management Branch, Indigenous Group, Department of Education, Science and Training

WILLIAMS, Mr Shane, Manager, Indigenous Group, Department of Education, Science and Training

CHAIR—I declare open the public hearing of this Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee inquiry into capacity building in Indigenous communities and welcome representatives of the Department of Education, Science and Training. I remind you that these are proceedings of the parliament and that the evidence given in public will be publicly available. Mr Williams, do you want to make a short opening statement?

Mr Williams—Thank you. Mr Chair, we have provided a submission to this hearing. I would like to build upon that submission by providing a very brief strategic framework which will capture the theme, which is the capacity building agenda, in the context of how DEST is trying to think, in a very forward-thinking agenda. I would like to proceed by saying that this discourse surrounding community capacity building, or capacity building, goes across government agencies, individuals, community et cetera. I cannot call it at this particular point a theoretical framework; it is conversations that are occurring. I do not have a definition at this point, but I would like to share three important characteristics that emanate from this discourse: issues regarding individuals and families, issues regarding regions that contain communities that individuals and families are members of, and the government and non-government agencies and their response to those issues. If I talk about community capacity building, I look at it from across those three levels.

For the individual and family, the issue for us within DEST is ensuring that they have the appropriate knowledge and skills to engage and work within their communities and add value to the life issues there—social and community activities et cetera. For the region, I would translate it more to a community capacity building agenda, so that we have individuals with the knowledge and skills to be able to make a difference, to make decisions as citizens within their community at a regional level. The third level, the major issue for us, is obviously the capacity of government and in particular the bureaucracy who are working with these communities to understand and respond to the individual circumstances surrounding those communities, based on location, issues of economic and social disadvantage or what have you.

The three elements—individual, regional and government agency responses—translate into a DEST agenda. We have a corporate vision that talks about a better future for all Australians through learning, science and innovation, and for the Indigenous Group, which was established only very recently—in March last year. I came to the department in November and I brought to it an enabling vision. We have the DEST vision for Indigenous people. Education and science is the core business for this department. Therefore, we would like to see ourselves as active citizens in a learning society. We would like to see Indigenous people as active citizens in a knowledge economy and a learning society. ‘Knowledge economy and learning society’ are very significant

words as far as I am concerned because we have to ensure that individuals, systems and schools et cetera provide our children and young people with the knowledge of and skills to engage in that vision agenda.

CHAIR—But we cannot really do that because we rely on the states to do that.

Mr Williams—Absolutely, but we need to put in place the enabling mechanisms.

CHAIR—The states will not take much notice of us, will they?

Mr Williams—The states have certainly taken notice recently with the MCEETYA focus on a comprehensive performance framework.

CHAIR—The states will do it if we pay for it.

Mr Williams—There is that view of the world.

CHAIR—I would like you to tell me it is not.

Mr Williams—I cannot say yes or no at this point, because there is a mind-set shift that is required. What is occurring is the shift, with the MCEETYA task force, to a reporting framework that says to states and territories, ‘You have a constitutional responsibility here. We at the Commonwealth level are investing our Commonwealth resources into the education and training agenda. We want to see what the outcomes are.’ It is that type of mind-set.

CHAIR—How do you measure those outcomes?

Mr Williams—In the years 3, 5 and 7 through standardised tests that are conducted nationally; through schools providing information; through a system, on levels of attendance—that is only very recent; and through the number of Indigenous people employed within those systems, the nature of the curriculum that is being provided and how the Commonwealth resources are being utilised.

CHAIR—Are we getting a picture of the total Indigenous population or only the urban Indigenous population?

Mr Williams—I talk with confidence because I come from the state system and, having come to the Commonwealth, I am sharing with you how I managed it from a state system view of the world. You certainly do get remote, rural and urban data.

CHAIR—In terms of the measurement?

Mr Williams—That is right. It is very important to understand that there is variation and diversity amongst that particular data.

CHAIR—Very much so, I would imagine.

Mr Williams—Absolutely.

CHAIR—I am endeavouring to move it forward so that we can come to our questions.

Mr Williams—I will leave it there.

CHAIR—You did mention the NGOs and the issue of governance. You might like to give us a couple of minutes on that. You have touched on some of that. Do I take it to be NGOs or do I take it to be the general issue around governance?

Mr Williams—When I talked about the three tiers associated with capacity building, I was talking about agencies and how agencies respond to community needs and aspirations. In terms of the agencies, I was saying government and non-government, because the communities in rural, remote or urban locations depend on various kinds of services. It is the capacity of the staff within those agencies to understand the distinctiveness of the issues and needs that the community is requiring. In many cases, with governance agendas, the agencies have come in and used a very broad community development approach, saying, ‘This is our government program. These are our activities; we would like to implement them,’ without coming from what one could argue was a place management approach, which is going into a community, doing an environmental scan and identifying the social, economic and poverty issues in the community, and then designing or tailoring programs that best focus on that region or location as opposed to assuming one size fits all.

CHAIR—I have one question and then I will go to the Collins report, *Learning lessons*. I am probably cramping Mr Tollner to a degree and I trust he will forgive me; he will have a view about it as well. But, clearly, that is one of the more recent measurements of this whole issue around literacy, numeracy, the interest of Indigenous parents and Indigenous students in education, attendance issues et cetera, and some of those results are of huge concern. They are just appalling figures.

I think everybody would agree that unless we can get some kind of a handle on this, which we have briefly discussed before—some kind of remedial approach—we cannot hope to make any worthwhile progress. So much effort, apparently, has gone in over a couple of decades and we are left somewhat shattered by this sort of very credible information from very credible people. Can you comment on the value of something like the Collins report and the signposts for the future.

Mr Williams—For the Commonwealth, Mr Wakelin?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Williams—It is a very important reflection on our national policy. We have a national policy on Indigenous education which talks about education decision making, providing access, participation and outcomes. For the Commonwealth, the Collins report reflects that in many instances the national policy has been perceived as an add-on agenda. There is national policy regarding education for all children, but the governments of the day recognised that a concerted effort is required for Indigenous children because of cultural difference; therefore this national policy is there. It provides additional resourcing. Those resources have gone out over a period of

13 years under this national policy. Has the system taken the policy and its objectives and placed it within the system or assumed that Indigenous children will continue to carry on their lives and the system will just do an ad hoc agenda to it? The Collins report reveals the latter to me: that the system did not seek deeper change within itself; rather, it assumed that Indigenous people would join in with the system as it sits. Do you know what I am saying?

CHAIR—Yes, I think I do.

Mr Williams—That is the most revealing comment from the Collins report. It says, ‘Enough is enough.’ We have been receiving Commonwealth dollars in this area—and other dollars from the Territory. The data reveals the distance travelled over the last five or six years. Whatever longitudinal area they have investigated shows minimum change and significant gaps.

CHAIR—Appalling outcomes. People are unable to function at a reasonable level.

Mr Williams—There is a multiplicity of reasons. What are the appalling functions? Is it the system’s commitment to making change or does it come right down to the smallest possible unit, which is the classroom?

CHAIR—I suspect it is all of those. What is the ‘how now’?

Mr Williams—The ‘how now’.

CHAIR—The ‘how now’ yesterday.

Mr Williams—The Commonwealth takes this very seriously. We are a member of the Learning Lessons Committee. In fact, when I came on board in November last year, the minister insisted that it have senior representation from the Commonwealth, and so I sit on that committee. I must admit I have only been to one meeting so far, but it has been quite interesting sitting there and observing how Mr Collins goes through the various recommendations and really has significant conversations with the system. I am there, certainly, in the Commonwealth’s role to observe how we can value add to it, but it is the system’s responsibility to seek change within itself.

CHAIR—I agree with that, but if this system is not prepared to change and it is going to continue to deliver these sorts of outcomes, we cannot as a Commonwealth, nor in our recommendations, endorse what has been happening, surely, unless we are satisfied there is going to be some kind of improvement, giving people a half-decent chance.

Mr Williams—I have to be honest with you: the system is under a new leadership agenda, the leader is working quite collaboratively with us, and it is very fruitful.

CHAIR—Good, but I need a little optimism. Do we think we can do better?

Mr Williams—Yes. I am glad you used the word ‘optimism’.

Mr TOLLNER—A couple of meetings ago, my good friend and colleague Mr Haase, or maybe the chairman, asked someone a question which went along the lines that Aboriginal

people tend to have good literacy and numeracy skills but that in the last couple of decades we seem to have lost something somewhere along the line. I think that probably applies to the whole education system itself. I am curious: have you formulated opinions on what may have led to that decline in learning? The answer that was given at the last meeting was that we have lost the missionaries and the almost forced learning for Aboriginal people.

Mr Williams—You are right, Mr Tollner; there is a change in environment out there. My parents come from a second language background, so they do not speak fluent English, but I was able to acquire that by going into the state public system and learning English. When we look at the generations of people who speak English, we see that there are pockets of them across the nation. Some of them have been in environments where they have been influenced by religious factors and have used the rote learning agenda. I am not saying that my parents are not religious—they are in many ways—but they were not part of that mission structure which forced learning through a Christianity agenda.

The other issue is that there has been this change in society, with a focus on individuals, and even a change in the way the universities prepare our teachers. The different types of teaching methodologies that are out there now have somewhat shifted from teaching the three Rs to a focus on teaching what we want kids to be in the next 10 years, and focusing on skills and what have you. There is a multiplicity of issues impacting on what happened in the past and what is happening today. But I have to be honest: you are absolutely correct, Mr Tollner, that the influence from the Christian angle has enabled certain groups within society to acquire competency with literacy, but there are other examples—and I am speaking from my own personal life experiences—where it just has not worked.

Mr TOLLNER—I had the very good fortune a couple of weeks ago of opening two new school buildings in remote parts of the Northern Territory. I was quite surprised that both these schools had attendance rates of between 70 and 90 per cent, which is certainly not the norm in Aboriginal communities. I am wondering what they could be doing that other schools are not.

Mr Williams—Are they primary or secondary schools?

Mr TOLLNER—Primary schools. One of them had added a building in order to teach early years of secondary school. One school was just outside Katherine and the other was near Roper River. Gilmingan was one of the schools. I have forgotten the other; I apologise.

Mr Williams—I was asking, Mr Tollner, whether it was secondary or primary because the way attendance is measured in both of those sites is done differently. The data reveals that between 75 per cent and 92 per cent of Indigenous students attend school, but that is at a national cohort level, whereas above that 86 per cent were saying 95 per cent—and I am talking about the primary sector in that context. What is revealing is that it depends on location, so you may get a discrete rural or remote location such as the one you have just mentioned, where the attendance is pretty high because of the mechanisms of the school and the community being closely engaged. But as you drift across the nation, there is no long-term data to say, 'These are the attendance records over the last five years.' As I shared in my opening, the Commonwealth has now put measures in place and we are calling on this data. We have data from 2001 and we are now getting data from 2002. In terms of what you shared, I think that is a pretty marked achievement in student attendance.

Mr TOLLNER—I would have thought so, yes.

Mr HAASE—Where do we start?

CHAIR—It is daunting, isn't it?

Mr HAASE—I wrote a few things. Our achievements out of this dialogue are going to be directly commensurate with the frankness of the discussion. In that interest, the first question I wrote was: what is your department selling? What product are the personnel that are involved in Indigenous education at a Commonwealth level selling? Are they successful in that sales campaign? Assuming they are, how do they know they are? What personnel resource do you have at grassroots level? When I visit independent schools, for instance, and give money or cheques, or witness openings of facilities et cetera, how do I know that those facilities are going to be used? As I move around my patch—which is a big one; it is a third of Australia—how do I know that the money we are paying for attendance is genuine? Anecdotally, I find that many schools that are suggesting they might have attendance between 70 and 100 per cent have, most often, attendance around 30 to 40 per cent. The records, anecdotally, in my opinion, in my experience, are rorted on numerous occasions. What are you selling, how good are you at it, how do you find that out, how often do you get down to the grassroots, and how different would the landscape be if there were no Indigenous section of the Department of Education, Science and Training? It is a big call, I know, but you are up to it, I am sure.

Mr Williams—First and foremost, the Commonwealth has constitutional responsibility for the social and economic wellbeing of Indigenous people across this nation, and so within various Commonwealth departments there is an Indigenous unit, office or an agency for the Commonwealth to sustain its commitment. The Department of Education, Science and Training takes Indigenous education and training very seriously. It established the Indigenous Group, which I am responsible for. My task since coming on board in November last year has been to conduct a series of reviews, in the very spirit of what you just shared, Mr Haase, to understand what we have done with our Commonwealth resources, what we have invested, how far we have travelled with it, what are the achievements—but, importantly, where are the gaps and what are we doing about it.

The Commonwealth is looking at these reviews, and having very careful and critical conversations with states and territories, to say, 'The data has revealed this.' Our programs have been out there and have administered some very innovative activities since 1989 when the national policy came into being, which is the one that I was sharing. I believe we have a network of very competent staff in our state and territory offices who are working collaboratively with our system colleagues in each state and territory.

Mr HAASE—Who are your system colleagues?

Mr Williams—The state education systems; Catholic education; the independent schools. It is utilising our suite of Commonwealth programs to value add to what the systems are currently responsible for.

Mr HAASE—What checks and balances do you have at grassroots level?

Mr Williams—We have introduced a national report to parliament. The first edition was last year. The minister presented it to the House to indicate that with the implementation of the national policy there have been achievements across certain areas, but there are gaps. We use the data that is generated through our monitoring mechanisms—

Mr HAASE—Which is state, and other independent organisations on the ground.

Mr Williams—Yes.

Mr HAASE—Reporting to you in theory.

Mr Williams—I am hoping they report to us on the actuals.

Mr HAASE—I would hope so, too, but I find ample evidence that they do not. This is why I am wondering what resources we have on the ground to verify it, ever—even once a decade. When do we ever put our agents on the ground to verify it? How do we verify the information we are being fed, which most state people do not give a toss about?

Mr Williams—I think, Mr Haase, the government has called for these reviews, to actually respond to your question. I do not have the evidence from the reviews at this point in time. We call them reviews because we are looking at what we have done, where the money has gone, where the gaps are, and how we can move ahead.

Mr HAASE—We do not put people on the ground?

Mr Williams—We have people on the ground.

Mr HAASE—How often?

Mr Williams—They are out there, across the nation. They are full-time staff.

Mr HAASE—And how many to this great nation? How many people do you have visiting schools and counting heads, and seeing what has been done with our dollars and whether our programs are working?

Mr Williams—I do not have that data to hand at this point in time.

Mr HAASE—You ought to have it, because that is where we are concerned. We are concerned about making a difference and building capacity. It is all very well to have lofty ideals about the theory required to do that, but if we are dealing with an Indigenous population that can neither read nor write, it is little truck. That is my concern. As a person who has 14 per cent of their constituent body Aboriginal, and a very large proportion of that body that can neither read nor write, I want to see changes made. It is a beautiful report, a marvellous submission, but it tells me nothing in practical terms about hardcore grassroots changes that allow somebody to learn to read or guide somebody to learn to write. I do not wish to be simply philosophically critical. I simply look for guidance that we may put into this report that can become a yardstick for the future.

Mr Williams—We have approximately 180 staff across this nation, located in state and district offices.

Mr HAASE—That is problem No. 1. We perhaps need 10 times that.

Mr Williams—Thank you.

Mr TOLLNER—Do you want to increase taxes, Barry?

Mr HAASE—I just want to increase literacy and numeracy. That is what I want to do.

Mr Williams—Your comments are very timely, because our reviews are going to identify where the strengths and weaknesses are within the programs that we administer. Our programs, importantly, are supplementary.

Mr HAASE—To the states, you mean?

Mr Williams—To the states. The states have that responsibility to revive education and training for their constituents.

Mr HAASE—Have any of you come up through the state system? I must inquire for my own peace of mind.

Mr Williams—Yes.

Mr Hoffman—I have.

Mr HAASE—How did each of you find it, how responsive was it, and how responsible did you feel it was? Why have you come to the federal system if the state systems were doing everything right? You know where I am going. I think we keep seats warm. I think the further we are from the necessity to have our nose stuffed in the trough, the less we really care about it and the more nights sleep we have, because we think everything is okay—and I do not have that luxury.

Mr Williams—When you talk about coming through the state system, I have worked both as an educator and as an executive director within the state system for the last 10 to 15 years. I have just recently come across to the Commonwealth. I come from Queensland, which I must add is a very good state and is doing tremendous work—

Mr TOLLNER—A beautiful part of the country.

Mr Williams—along with WA. If I were to look at data across the nation, Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales are doing very well.

Mr HAASE—Good. I have some magic schools, and I have to tell you that most of them are independent. The ones that are really achieving things are independent schools.

Mr Williams—There is a gentleman in WA called Mr Brahim.

Mr HAASE—Adrian Brahim.

Mr Williams—Yes. He is doing some tremendous work with the independent schools under one of our Commonwealth projects for literacy and numeracy. He is presenting a video and saying to teachers and the universities in Perth, ‘Before you come out, have a look at this video. Have a look at the environment, the language, the social and alcohol issues et cetera. Understand where you are going and that you need to change your views of the world.’ This is all very recent, and the Commonwealth can sit up straight and say that it has led the agenda in investing resources into getting states and territories to think differently. Given our report to parliament only last year was the very first, it is too short a time to give that longitudinal argument that you are after.

Mr HAASE—I accept that. Any time that you want to give up your annual holidays and come with me, I will take you on a tour around the Northern Territory or the Pilbara. I would love to escort you.

Mr Williams—I might share with you that one of the first things I did in this job was to travel from Alice Springs to Ti Tree and out towards Tennant Creek. I purposely did that run so that I was on the ground, understanding and listening to the issues. I learnt a lot about the flies! But, apart from the flies, I learnt about the communities and the issues there. So I am with you, and I would love to come out, because we have to be on the ground.

Mr HAASE—Any time.

Mr Williams—That is the whole issue about community capacity building. It is government agencies having an ear to the ground—being out there, sitting there and saying, ‘Right, these are the real issues.’ It is very different from how it operates, say, in Canberra or within the capital cities.

Mr HAASE—I am sure you did hear me, but I simply repeat for the record that the important thing is that, if we are to make recommendations in this report that are to be truly meaningful, they have to be read and understood by people who are literate and have numeracy skills. If we have not got to that first base, all of this will fall on deaf ears. We have a huge problem in communities not with the quality of the education available but with the perception of parents of the relevance of that education. Right now it is sadly lacking. Education falls a long way down the list of relevant activities and, sadly, it is because the importance of education is not understood by the parents of today, given that those parents are becoming younger and younger and that parenthood interrupts schooling. We are getting to a cycle now where we are looking at a disastrous end point, because that education is seriously disrupted and we have no well-informed, well-equipped leaders of tomorrow to take up these blueprints and use them to have a better understanding, a better capacity, to build their future. That is my perception. I am just one of the mob.

Mr Williams—It is a very good perception, Mr Haase. In fact, the views of one of our leaders—Mr Pearson up in Far North Queensland—resonate with where you are coming from. We have to shift from the welfare dependency agenda into an agenda where we are actually

contributing. That is why the very theme for this inquiry resonates strongly with what Mr Pearson is on about. It sits very strongly where I come from as a leader within DEST. We are very serious about looking at the data and having those critical conversations with systems, to say, 'We no longer are here to substitute. We are here to value add. We are here to invest our resources in what is your constitutional responsibility. But, as we do it, here are some very strong performance measures and we want to see change.' We have shifted to an outcomes agenda and Indigenous leaders across this nation are arguing quite strongly, in harmony, that we must focus on outcomes.

Mr HAASE—Thank you, Chair. I have had a very fair crack of the whip.

CHAIR—That was excellent.

Ms HOARE—I will move on to some of the programs that you have in place. You referred in your submission to the Indigenous Youth Partnership Initiative and pointed to some particularly successful projects. Could you expand on what the initiative is. Who is it in partnership with? Are the states involved; if so, how? Who else is involved in the partnership? Could you talk about the successful programs, why they have been successful and touch on some that have not been quite so successful and tell us why.

Mr Williams—Ms Hoare, I will pass this question to my colleague Ms Kate Brodie.

Ms Brodie—The IYPI is a suite of projects across the country. There are 20 of them. They are very different. The main focus is on youth, on transitions. They vary from programs working with students in school to working with students who have disengaged from the schooling system in order to get them back into that system. They are working within the community, in some cases with education systems. There is a mixture. It is probably easier to give you some examples. Western Australia has a very successful program, the Western Australian school based traineeship program, which is linking CDEP and traineeships. That has been a very successful program.

Ms HOARE—How have you measured that success?

Ms Brodie—By the number of students who have been involved, their retention within the program and the outcomes from being involved in the school based traineeships—the gaining of skills through that program.

Ms HOARE—They are then monitored and mentored?

Ms Brodie—They are. There is a very enthusiastic person within the WA education department who is passionately pursuing this. It is a project that has involvement from a number of Commonwealth agencies—DEST, DEWR and ATSIC—as well as the WA Department of Education and Training, and a number of the organisations that the students are then doing their traineeships with.

Ms HOARE—How many students have gone through program? To touch on what Barry was talking about, when they are pulled into that particular program are literacy and numeracy issues addressed as well? What age are we talking about—16- and 17-year-olds?

Ms Brodie—I would have to come back to you with a synopsis on that from colleagues in Western Australia. My understanding is that there has been a substantial number, but I would have to check the records for the actual number.

CHAIR—You can take that on notice.

Ms Brodie—I certainly will take that on notice and get back to you with that. What was the second part of your question?

Ms HOARE—What is the age group? Touching on what Barry was talking about, young people are being pulled back into the schooling system through this program and if they have fallen out at a young age we would presume that they would not have reached the literacy and numeracy skills had they stayed at school. Does this program also address these skills?

Ms Brodie—My understanding is that that would be part of it, but I will take that on notice and get back to you with more detail about that program.

Ms HOARE—Have you got another program?

Ms Brodie—Another one that comes to mind is a program in Toowoomba, where they work with students who are disengaged from the system. It involved the establishment of a school which comes under the Catholic education department—it was part of the Catholic system—and provides an alternative school for students. It was strongly supported by the local magistrate, who applauded it very loudly because it has a focus and a meaning for children. I was at a forum and she said that she was extremely pleased because it would allow youth to re-engage. She said that she could see there was a problem, and that she had the frustration within the area of kids ending up in the judicial system rather than in the education system. It is a project that has re-engaged a number of students and has allowed young women with children to come back in. In some instances it has accommodated the three generations—the 16-year-old girl, her child, and her parents. It is an environment where they have all been welcomed and accommodated and where the students' needs have been met. It has focused on building their literacy and numeracy skills and re-engaging them in the education system.

Ms HOARE—Will both the successful and unsuccessful projects be assessed so that we can see what worked and what did not?

Ms Brodie—Yes. That has happened. With these projects, as Shane has said, the Commonwealth's role is a supplementary one. The idea was that they would gain support and that the projects would be picked up by the systems within those states. Sustainability is always an issue. The projects have been encouraged to look at the building of sustainability. These projects were run not directly by the department but by the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation in Sydney. Their officers were the ones working, in a brokering role, with the other players to establish a level of sustainability. I understand with the Queensland project that there were issues in terms of its sustainability, but I would have to check and see where that finished up.

Ms HOARE—That would be good, if you could.

CHAIR—Mr Williams, you touched on best practice, as has Mr Haase, and you are seeing some outcomes. We are seeing hope and reason for optimism. People are doing it a lot better. From where we sit, maybe we will never be satisfied, but we do know where things are happening a lot better. Can you talk a little about those best practice models—singing from the treetops to everybody else about how we do that. I accept that it is early days, I accept that the first national report has just come out and I accept measurement is probably just starting to happen more appropriately, but can we talk about those best models and best practice.

Mr Williams—To be totally honest, we would have to come back to you with a prescriptive list of where we identify best practice.

CHAIR—And of course, to pick up Mr Haase's point about the how, the why and the where—how would you do that once you find them? What would you have in mind?

Mr Williams—We are doing stuff already. These Indigenous programs have been around since 1989. We have learnt lessons, which is good, because from those lessons we put in place—in 1997, I believe it was—strategic initiative projects.

CHAIR—It is a pretty scary acknowledgment, though, isn't it, that we are looking back at things we have known for nearly 20 years?

Mr Williams—I am going back to 1997, when the strategic initiative projects were introduced. That went across the nation. We said, 'How can we accelerate growth rapidly if the Commonwealth invested money in this area?' We can produce for you a text called *What Works*. That text identifies a multiplicity of vocational learning experiences, literacy, numeracy and parent engagement.

CHAIR—You will come back to us with that?

Mr Williams—We can give you that.

CHAIR—But you will also, in that, hopefully be able to identify who is taking it up, who is not, and why aren't they if they are not.

Mr Williams—No. The important thing is that we have now introduced a second program to take up *What Works* and engage the people at the core of it—the principals. We have engaged all the association principals from across the nation. We met here in Sydney in early April and we pulled them all together and said, 'Catholics, independent systems, primary, secondary and special: this is the Commonwealth's agenda.' As Mr Hoffman has shared, it is a \$3.2 million initiative that the Commonwealth has invested over three years to get principals to be very serious about school reform.

CHAIR—Is this the Indigenous education initiatives program?

Mr Williams—Yes. That is the funding body that it comes from.

CHAIR—What is the take-up rate? Everybody is falling over themselves to get to it, are they?

Mr Williams—I should hope so. It is a very strategic program.

CHAIR—But do we know the measurement of who is accessing it?

Mr Williams—That program is very large. It is broken up with resources that go from the Commonwealth directly to the systems in the states and territories, but there are projects within that. The minister himself wants to see change occur, and one area is principal leadership. That is why he has supported that text I showed you, *What Works*—taking *What Works* out there to principals and saying, ‘Come on, let’s work with this and let’s put in place some measurable outcomes.’

CHAIR—But my question is still the same. Who is taking it up and who isn’t? That is the question that interests us. And, if they are not, why aren’t they? We are interested in the hard end of the question, too. I accept the positive end, that people are doing it, but I am also interested in who is not. Take that on notice. That leads me to another question. What worries me so much about Commonwealth programs—you acknowledged it—is that constitutionally the states are responsible. Why is it that the Commonwealth has to offer these sorts of programs? That is the first point. I could give you a whole lot of reasons, but we will not go there perhaps, unless you really want to. But the real question is: why aren’t the states doing it? The states know the problem; the territories know the problem. Why aren’t they doing it?

Mr Williams—It is a very philosophical question.

CHAIR—No, it is a very pointy question.

Mr Williams—It is a very pointy question, but there would be a range of responses to it. The Commonwealth is doing it because of our constitutional responsibility for the social and economic issues. We are very smart. We are coming in with significant resources, saying, ‘Here we are. The government is very committed to this. States and territories, your data is revealing this. We’d like to invest our resources here, but we want to do it with an outcomes focused agenda with specific measures.’ I talked about the launch in Sydney back in April. It was called ‘Taking it on’. Most of the people engaged are the principal associations from across the nation. They made a very concerted effort. Every state and territory sent members. The message was there, from who was who in the room, because it was very clearly identified if there were people who were absent.

CHAIR—Mr Williams, I have a great advantage over you. You have to work with the states and you need all your diplomatic skills to do that. I do not have to do that. I am just a humble member of parliament that can say, ‘Why in the hell aren’t the states doing it?’ I am interested to know why the states are not doing it. Why are we there offering them the dummy or offering them the incentive when they should be doing that as part of their constitutional responsibility? I just leave that with you, but I am really interested, because we will be finessing a lot of this stuff. We are gathering a heap of stuff over 12 months and we will be coming back to you in four to six months time and saying, ‘Have you got anything more for us on why these jolly states have so much difficulty?’ They might say, ‘Well, it’s too hard.’ We say, ‘Well, why is it too hard?’ We have just said that 20 years ago they seemed to be able to do it better than they are now. We need to know why they are not doing it, and we need to then, I think, offer some incentives—because the Commonwealth has a certain fiscal power, a certain amount of money flowing around in the

system. This is so fundamental that we cannot afford to let it go. I will not push you any more on that, but I have one last question, and that is to do with the corporate program. I am not sure whether you are aware of the Rio Tinto linkages.

Mr HAASE—That is the one that Kate was talking about, I think, wasn't it, in Karratha?

Ms Brodie—No, it is a different one.

CHAIR—But it may link. It may be the same—the corporate sector.

Ms Brodie—Yes. The one that I was talking about, in the first instance, started in—

Mr HAASE—So that was the Rio Tinto?

Ms Brodie—Yes.

Mr HAASE—I thought so.

CHAIR—Rio Tinto involves state and Commonwealth. Are you able to talk a little about the role of the corporate sector. I suppose it is in our general school system—our mainstream, as we call it. Can you talk a little about Rio Tinto. It sounds as if you do know a little about it. How does that enhance the position? Do you have a view about it? Polly Farmer is, I think, quite prominent.

Mr Williams—Yes. I think from the Commonwealth's angle, what is being demonstrated now, particularly through Rio Tinto, is a shift to community capacity building; the fact that we are engaging with industry, local business, schools and the community to build sustainable learning and training outcomes. Rio Tinto is obviously a leader in that agenda, and I will pass it across to my colleague here.

Ms Brodie—There has been acknowledgment that there needs to be the community capacity building. The instance that you have referred to started with Gumala and Polly Farmer. It was built from the industry's requirement and wish to engage, and the reality of what was happening within the education system, and what you have had is a partnership. You have had compacts of interest. People have come together and worked towards a positive outcome which has resulted in winning for both sides. The industry has been able to get people who are job ready because of their staying engaged within the education system and going on to further training. You have the partnering by the community; the community being there with the industry. They are listening to each other, and you have what we have called community compacts.

The government have recognised how successful the Gumala Mirnuwarni project was and we have taken it on board. We have not actually replicated it, but used it as a basis for work that was done under the Australians Working Together banner. Working Together for Indigenous Youth has rolled out the idea of compacts around the country, where you have the important mix of industry and local or regional community interests, or agencies working together with family, with schools, with industry and key partners. We acknowledge the importance of that.

CHAIR—It is great leadership from these people, isn't it?

Ms Brodie—It is. The other area where we come into it is that DEST is working very strongly and very closely with DEWR. The recognition is that we need to work with them so that there is the linkage there.

CHAIR—It is sounding a little bit like the COAG trials, too.

Ms Brodie—It is. There is a lot of duplication—

CHAIR—Across agencies.

Ms Brodie—in the area, especially of the transitions, because you have to have all the key players there together. You cannot do it in isolation. It is very much community capacity building, it is whole of government and it is the joined-up services.

CHAIR—I need to ask just one more question, and that is on the issue of adult education and training, and vocational education—and then university. Can we just get a quick snapshot, Mr Williams? I understand that is more in your field.

Mr Williams—A snapshot?

CHAIR—There are at least four parts. I am not wanting to dwell on it in great detail, but I do need to get something. I could make an observation that in that 20-year gap, or whatever it might be, we have paid a very high price, and we will pay a much higher price if we do not start to get it better now. Because adult literacy and numeracy is not what it should be, we are living with this for 20 years—or for 10 years—until we give particularly Aboriginal people, but adult Australians generally, the opportunity to be literate and numerate, to get to the base level, to live adequately, and to move on to a skill, a trade or a traineeship—or into employment even; just to move into employment, and then go on to tertiary. Could we talk a little bit about what we have got there and how you are going.

Mr Williams—I am going to have to continue to refer back to the national report to parliament last year. For example, 58,000 Indigenous students across the nation are engaged in the vocational education training agenda. The interesting thing about the national report is that it reveals that these students are shifting more towards certificate levels 3 and 4. These certificate levels are beyond the enabling process. They are cert level courses that enable them to gain meaningful employment. They can also use that as a prerequisite for diploma or undergraduate courses within university. In the last five years there has been a significant shift in trend. The national report to parliament provides a synopsis of that trend and we are doing it again this year in the second report to parliament to show you that trend.

CHAIR—Let us move to employment and CDEP. We have evidence from an inquiry two to three years ago in Western Australia where a significant company had very significant Indigenous employment but not one person had come from the CDEP in that region. I just leave that as a thought, because I will be asking about it at a future meeting, but I am quite interested in that path. It touches on the corporate; it touches on all the things we are talking about in terms of their participation.

There is a very clear issue about the capacity of CDEP. We would have hoped it may have worked and moved people from unemployment, to some kind of development of their work capacity, to employment. I do not say it is the same all over Australia, but in this particular case it was very alarming that not one person had moved from CDEP into where the opportunities were in the mining industry. All of that training and all of that work, as I recall it, had to be done by industry and by other providers, and probably by people external to the region, to get them to the competency that was needed. Mr Haase might recall that.

Mr HAASE—I certainly do. I am painfully aware of it. Anaconda at the Murrin Murrin plant had a situation where part of their agreement for access to the country was that they would train local Indigenous youth through their VTEC. That would give them a work force and provide very real employment for the local people. It was not long before all of the local population within a couple of hundred kilometres radius had been canvassed and found wanting and, because the program was built around Indigenous youth, those students going through the VTEC and enjoying employment during the process were having to be brought from up to 1,000 kilometres away. The local population did not have the base skills to go through that VTEC program. But 20 years before Mount Margaret Mission was under way, and all of the people that went through that mission are today employed, and their children are employed. You call it the rote system. I am not an educator, I do not appreciate the differences, but I have a practical understanding of how the education system worked. All I know is that it was effective. Today, we seem to take highbrow theoretical processes of learning and endeavour to ram them down the throats of children who are ill prepared for the cultural concept, and they flounder. I really wonder why.

Mr Williams—Yes, it is a very good point. I want to share quickly that the Commonwealth is engaged in cross-agency collaborations with DEST, DEWR and ATSIC to investigate these issues, to identify how we can leverage the best possible outcomes from CDEP and link it to real economic outcomes for that individual or that community. Those discussions are in train.

Mr SNOWDON—I will not take much of your time. I am pretty aware of all these programs that you have. The chairman discussed the state and territory governments. I can well recall the days when Labor was in government and I had responsibilities in education. We were negotiating the IESIP agreement with the then Northern Territory government. There were times when your predecessors effectively walked out of meetings with the Northern Territory government officials because of the intransigent way in which they operated. They just were not prepared to compromise; they were not prepared to meet the objectives which were set by the policy framework.

As a result, when the Labor government came to office, there was I think \$40 million to \$45 million in IESIP funding sitting there waiting to be signed off which the previous Northern Territory government would not sign off on because they could not reach agreement with the Commonwealth. The first thing the new government did was to sign off—‘Give us the money. We’ll agree on the objectives.’ That raises a significant question, but it also points to a problem, and again this is a case in the Northern Territory. I have just used these figures in the Main Committee.

There are 45,000 students of school age in the Northern Territory. Thirty-eight per cent of them are Indigenous and we estimate between 4,000 and 5,000 of these kids do not have access

to adequate schooling, either primary or secondary. The *Learning lessons* report is a terrific document, but the nub of it, it seems to me, is: how are we going to come to terms with our collective responsibility to ensure that all Australians, no matter where they live, have access to education? I raise this because of the lack of performance, the very poor performance, over two decades by the previous conservative administration in the Northern Territory. We are now left with a backlog of demand.

Your minister was in the Northern Territory last week opening up a \$6.7 million private school, Woolaning. It was a massive cost shifting exercise. Why was it a cost shifting exercise? Because the previous CLP government refused to provide educational services of a high school nature to the kids that live in that area. They approached the Christian schools community and said, 'Can you help us? We need to set up an independent school so we can access Commonwealth resources,' which they did. It was a very smart thing to do. But the rest of the Northern Territory, apart from Nyatjatjarra College at Uluru, does not have that capacity.

There is a message here. Do all of the communities of the Northern Territory seek to become independent schools and is the money provided in funding for independent schools demand driven? Is it budget limited? It raises significant questions, because if you are prepared to accept that it is then there is a prospect that communities around Australia could say, 'Well, the state governments aren't providing us with the resources we need to provide education for our students. We'll go to the Commonwealth and we'll get funding as an independent school. We'll get the support of the state or territory government because they won't be paying for it.'

It raises a significant question. If the answer to that question is, yes, you are prepared to step into the breach and provide the independent schooling, then you must ask the next question: why would you not be prepared therefore to meet the state and territory governments in a negotiating way, where you say to them, 'It's your obligation to provide these services. We'll assist you with funding'? It seems to me there is a whole question here about how you are going to provide these services. The failure of the previous 27 years of administration in the Northern Territory to provide it means that there are now, effectively, a generation of kids, particularly teenage kids, who do not have access to education. All the IESIP programs are terrific, but they do not affect these kids because they do not have a school.

Mr Williams—I will answer in two parts, and I will ask Mr Hoffman to talk about the methodology. But can I say that this government is committed to working collaboratively and productively with the Northern Territory government.

Mr SNOWDON—I appreciate that. I am not being critical of the Commonwealth government's preparedness to work collaboratively. Let me be very clear about that. In fact, I just praised the minister, God forbid!

Mr Williams—Yes. He is doing a great job in terms of wanting to build a productive partnership, to say, 'This is a shared responsibility. How can we take this agenda forward? You have resources there. We at the Commonwealth want to invest and enable and bring those resources forward.' As it relates to government and non-government funding mechanisms, I will defer to Mr Hoffman.

Mr Hoffman—In the instance of the school that you are referring to, funding was made available during the time when those very difficult negotiation processes were taking place and the Commonwealth was unable to reach agreement with the Northern Territory government. The previous minister, Dr Kemp, decided to respond by funding the Northern Territory Christians Association to establish the school. In the meantime, of course, there has been an agreement reached, since about October 2001. The Commonwealth would not normally accept that it has a responsibility to provide a high school facility in every community or every region within the Northern Territory. The Commonwealth would normally expect that the state government or the territory government—whichever area you are talking about—would acknowledge their responsibility to provide education services to all of their citizens.

Mr SNOWDON—The point I am making, though, is that we are in a situation where this community was so desperate that they sought the aid of the Christian Schools Association to make sure they had access to school, and Kemp did the right thing in the end, clearly, because the then Northern Territory government was not even going to talk to them. It basically refused to talk to them. But I know of other communities who have sought a similar path or are thinking of a similar path. It seems to me that there is a real question here, because there is a deficit. If we talk about what the equation looks like and draw a bar graph, you would say, 'There's a debt here. The debt belongs to these people because they don't have services,' and the issue is how you fund them.

I will finish here, but it is fairly obvious, I would have thought, Mr Chairman, that in the context of the Northern Territory, where 80 per cent of their budget revenue already comes from the Commonwealth, their budget is limited. They just do not have the capacity to raise additional funds for these purposes. You will be aware of the Grants Commission report on needs in Aboriginal communities. How do we address this issue of the fiscal needs of your department and the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory to provide the services these people need? Until we do that, we are not going to ever answer the questions which have been raised by the chairman or Barry or anyone else on this committee, because if we do not have the basic concepts—in other words, that everyone has access to a school; everyone can read and write, whatever that means; that they have access to VET or whatever it is—then capacity building is a useless exercise.

Mr Hoffman—Mr Snowdon, you referred to the Commonwealth Grants Commission report on Indigenous funding. The Commonwealth government has in fact accepted the recommendations and it has asked that ministers, in negotiating specific purpose payments, consider how to implement the recommendations, particularly giving greater weight to remote areas in terms of needs based funding. It just so happens that the Commonwealth has commenced looking at the policy to be implemented in the 2005-08 quadrennium and is starting to look at what strategies will be developed. Obviously I cannot talk to the committee about what options there might be, but there is discussion going on between the department and the minister about what strategies might be looked at in 2005-08 to address particularly the Grants Commission recommendations, and those areas of huge need.

CHAIR—Can I thank you very much for your attendance. We have much appreciated it and we would love to see you again before we write our report.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Hoare**, seconded by **Mr Tollner**):

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 6.00 p.m.