

Extract from the Senate Hansard: 20 June 2006

COMMITTEES: Community Affairs References Committee Report

Senator MOORE (Queensland) (4.10 p.m.)—I present the report of the Community Affairs References Committee entitled *Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*, together with the *Hansard* record of proceedings and documents presented to the committee.

I seek leave to move a motion in relation to the report.

I move: That the Senate take note of the report.

In moving this motion I want to restate that this committee was not looking at the evils and the horrors of petrol sniffing. All too sadly, that information is well known to the Australian community, and over more than 20 years a series of reports have itemised the damage that petrol sniffing has done to communities across our country. So, as a community and as a parliament, we were aware of the evils of petrol sniffing. The terms of reference of this committee were quite clear. We were looking at the effectiveness of existing laws and policing; the effectiveness of diversionary initiatives and community level activities; and, most importantly, lessons that can be learned from the success that some communities have had in reducing petrol sniffing. We were also looking specifically at the issues around the impact of non-sniffable Opal petrol.

Our committee was privileged in its deliberations to hear evidence and have submissions from people from across the country, and we are joined this afternoon by a number of those people who gave to our committee of their time, experience, energy and loyalty to their communities so we could learn. But also, by giving those emotions, by giving that strength, they had to acknowledge a sense that in the past there has been betrayal. We have known of the horrors of petrol sniffing for so long; we are also aware that the things that could have been done by a community to react to these issues were there, and we as a community were not effectively working with the people whose knowledge we should value to address these issues and to ensure that the horrors are put to rest.

During the committee process the members of the committee were supported as always by the wonderful work of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee secretariat. Again I put on record this afternoon the support we received from Mr Elton Humphery, Ms Christine McDonald, Ms Kerrie Martain, Ms Jeannette Heycox, Mr Tim Watling, Ms Leonie Peake and Ms Ingrid Zappe. Without their help and support we could not do the job the parliament has tasked us to do.

Now the message is clear for our community. We cannot rely on words alone. The people of Australia deserve and must have more. Our committee has itemised the response. There needs to be consistent, long-term, effective funding and resourcing in communities so that we can work cooperatively with all levels of government to address petrol sniffing. Petrol sniffing is but a symptom. There

must also be acknowledgment that the issues of disadvantage and the lack of hope which is entrenched in some of these communities cause people to turn away. The title of our report, *Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*, contains a message for us all. There must be a renewal of hope and energy, and that must include people at all levels of government and the community, and look at things like education opportunities, employment opportunities and a renewal of community.

None of that is new, and that, somehow, is the worst message of all. It is not new. We know what we must do as a government, as a parliament and as people who share this pain. As a committee we accepted the challenge. When we were met at one of the communities, someone said clearly to us: 'Don't you fellas know how to read?' There have been so many committees held and so many reports written. We have a responsibility now, which belongs to all of us, to accept that we are beyond reading; we now have to act. We have a sincere responsibility and we all have a role to play.