

## Extract from the Senate Hansard: 20 June 2006

### COMMITTEES: Community Affairs References Committee Report

**Senator WEBBER** (Western Australia) (4.37 p.m.)—Thank you, Mr Acting Deputy President. That is exactly what I was planning on doing, but I will do it at the end rather than right now. In commencing my remarks I, too, would like to thank the Community Affairs References Committee secretariat and also each and every one of the committee members who participated in this inquiry. I note that, although we all do not get time to speak in this tabling session, nearly all of us are present for this debate. It must say something about the permanent members of the Community Affairs References Committee that it manages to come up with a reasonably cooperative and harmonious approach to tackling some of the major social challenges that face our community, which you would not necessarily expect in a political process. I would also like to particularly thank Senator Adams because, when we were travelling the country, examining potential solutions to this problem, her constant refrain of ‘I’m interested in practical solutions’ really did help keep a number of us focused on the real challenge ahead—and it is a significant challenge.

The tabling of this report this week is particular timely, given the government’s proposed summit next week that is looking at addressing some of the ongoing challenges facing our Indigenous communities. I therefore urge the government to have a look at some of the practical solutions that our committee has highlighted in this report and see if they cannot take that as a model for tackling some of the other significant challenges.

The committee, as I said, adopted a cooperative approach. It is only by adopting a cooperative approach to this significant issue that we as an Australian community will be able to come up with real solutions. If we do not come up with real solutions, we as a community and we as the Australian parliament are all diminished. We would have failed in our fundamental job. Real solutions are not just the solutions that our recommendations outline and the remarks that others have made about the need for collaborative approaches between the various levels of government; they are solutions that move away from funding pilot programs. They are solutions that move away from models built around personalities in communities. They are solutions that say that, as the Australian parliament and as the Australian people, we are in this for the long haul and we are going to find a real solution to this problem. But, having said that, I know there will be, of course, like anything else in our community, no one solution. And I can guarantee you that there will not be one single solution if we do not work to find those solutions in coalition with our Indigenous populations. The solution is not to be found in this chamber; the solution is to be found out there, working with those communities.

As a West Australian, I would also like to endorse the remarks of Senator Siewert about the need for the roll-out of Opal. I would particularly like to thank those who work in the BP refinery in Kwinana for the hard work that they have done in developing that fuel and for the time they made available to educate the

committee in that process. As I have said, the work of this committee is quite unique in that it does look at having a collaborative approach to things. I would like to thank the committee and the committee secretariat for taking the trouble to come to Western Australia, where we tend to feel a bit overlooked and we all get very parochial. I would like to thank them for taking the trouble to visit two communities: Halls Creek, which is a community facing significant challenges at the moment—I am trying to avoid using the word ‘crisis’—and, of course, Balgo, which has faced significant challenges in the past. It was a good way for the secretariat and committee members to be able to have a look at some ongoing progress.

I, for one, hope that this is the last ever report on petrol sniffing. I hope that we can agree to adopt the recommendations and find the real solution so that none of us here ever again will have to stand up and talk about yet another inquiry and yet another report. If we do, we will have failed what is in the title of this report, which is the need to renew hope for our Indigenous communities. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.