

Senator BOYCE (Queensland) (11.06 am)—It was a privilege to be involved in this inquiry of the Standing Committee on Community Affairs into petrol sniffing and a privilege to visit parts of Australia that not many Australians get to visit—and it is great to see people from Central Australia here today to listen to our report. Within that context that it is a part of Australia that very few Australians get to visit, the communities there can suffer very much from ‘out of sight, out of mind’ problems. As people have pointed out, we have made 18 recommendations. From my perspective, recommendations 12 through to 16 are the most important. These are the ones that deal with developing, monitoring and ensuring that there are activities and programs that are happening in communities which are within the petrol-sniffing zone.

In my view, it is far more important that we develop sustainable activities and programs than to worry quite so much about mandating Opal fuel. I would hope that the availability of non-sniffable petrol ceases to become an issue as we further and properly develop alternative activities. I think we need to keep in mind that petrol sniffing is a symptom. It is great that we have dealt as successfully as we have with that symptom, but it is not a symptom that needs to be our complete focus. I think it is very obvious from the report itself that our focus needs to be on developing the sorts of activities that children, teenagers, throughout Australia should reasonably expect to be available within their communities.

One other point, which is included in our first recommendation, is that it was a surprise to some members of the inquiry—certainly to me—that Opal fuel was available in any community that requested it. This was not, we thought, a well-known fact within the communities, and it certainly was not by the inquiry. We are recommending that CAPSSU and others put some effort into developing this. The other part to this issue is that what happens in those communities—just as the request to have Opal fuel—must be driven by the communities. During our visit to Lake Nash we were shown a steel skateboard ramp that had apparently been funded by FaHCSIA. It was not shaded. It was made of steel. The temperature on the day we were in Lake Nash was 42 degrees, which was pretty average. You could only use this skateboard ramp after dark, but there were no lights at the ramp area. I think it is a small indication of the sorts of problems that develop when you do not ask communities what they would like and what they want.

I share Senator Humphries’s concerns about mandating the supply of Opal petrol. I would hope that public pressure and negotiation by the federal government and by state and territory governments can convince the roadhouses involved in these areas to voluntarily undertake the supply of Opal. We never did get a satisfactory answer as to why they were not—particularly suppliers such as the Rabbit Flat Roadhouse, Tea Tree Roadhouse, Tilmouth Well Roadhouse, the Laverton Roadhouse and other stores: Laramba store, Maryvale Station, Canley Park, Jervois Roadhouse, Ross River Resort and the Urandangi community store in my home state of Queensland. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.