COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Proof Committee Hansard

SENATE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Reference: Effectiveness of state, territory and Commonwealth government policies on regional and remote Indigenous communities

(Private Briefing)

MONDAY, 12 APRIL 2010

WEIPA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

[PROOF COPY]

SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON

REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Monday, 12 April 2010

Members: Senator Scullion *(Chair)*, Senator Crossin *(Deputy Chair)*, Senators Adams, Johnston, Moore and Siewert

Senators in attendance: Adams, Boyce, Furner, Ian Macdonald, Moore and Scullion

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Back, Barnett, Bernardi, Bilyk, Birmingham, Mark Bishop, Boswell, Boyce, Brandis, Bob Brown, Carol Brown, Bushby, Cameron, Cash, Colbeck, Jacinta Collins, Coonan, Cormann, Eggleston, Farrell, Feeney, Fielding, Fierravanti-Wells, Fifield, Fisher, Forshaw, Furner, Hanson-Young, Heffernan, Humphries, Hurley, Hutchins, Joyce, Kroger, Ludlam, Lundy, Ian Macdonald, McEwen, McGauran, McLucas, Marshall, Mason, Milne, Minchin, Nash, O'Brien, Parry, Payne, Polley, Pratt, Ronaldson, Ryan, Stephens, Sterle, Troeth, Trood, Williams, Wortley and Xenophon

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

a) the effectiveness of Australian Government policies following the Northern Territory Emergency Response, specifically on the state of health, welfare, education and law and order in regional and remote Indigenous communities;

b) the impact of state and territory government policies on the wellbeing of regional and remote Indigenous communities;

c) the health, welfare, education and security of children in regional and remote Indigenous communities; and

d) the employment and enterprise opportunities in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 10.19 am

BOUSEN, Mr Shane Mark, Elected member, Weipa Town Authority

GAY, Mrs Caroline, Chair, Weipa Town Authority

GRAHAM, Mr John, Rio Tinto appointed member, Weipa Town Authority

GRAHAM, Mr Peter, Elected member, Weipa Town Authority

MILLER, Mr Peter, Deputy Chair, Weipa Town Authority

PRESSLEY, Mr Ian, Chief Executive Officer, Weipa Town Authority

CHAIR (Senator Scullion)—The Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities is holding this meeting as part of its inquiry into regional and remote Indigenous communities. Given the nature of the committee and the location I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land on which we meet and pay our respects to the elders past and present.

I welcome the representatives of the Weipa Town Authority. Before the committee begins the meeting I want to make clear to all meeting participants that the meeting is being recorded. The transcript of the recorded meeting will be produced and the transcript may be made public. Participant comments recorded and transcribed from this meeting are protected by parliamentary privilege. Any act that disadvantages you as a result of the evidence given to this committee is treated as a breach of privilege. However, I also remind you that giving false or misleading evidence to the committee may also constitute a contempt of the Senate. If you would prefer that the meeting not be recorded, please advise the committee now. The committee prefers to record the session as this allows us to remember your comments better and use them in our report which at this stage will be tabled on 13 May. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been previously provided to you. Would you like to start with an opening statement or perhaps provide some information?

Mrs Gay—I would like to thank you for meeting with us. Weipa is not a remote Indigenous community as such, although we do have a large Indigenous population and our infrastructure and everything in the town is used by the surrounding communities. We have respect for our Indigenous people. We have many, many Indigenous people working in the mine, the health sector and the education sector. It is a very good thing that you are meeting with us because we do have some good things to report and we do have some concerns. One of the first things that I would like to ask is about the 120-bed Indigenous hostel that is going to be built here. We have had very little communication and very little public consultation. It has been on the books now since 2007. Could anyone tell us what exactly is happening in that area?

CHAIR—One of the things about the committee is that we are not necessarily always able to necessarily put rights and griefs. In the past the convention of this committee has been that we will take any questions like that on notice. Individual members of the committee can make a comment but to ensure there is some completeness on that, much to the chagrin of the secretariat, we write an awful lot of letters to ministers responsible, they will then provide

information to us and we will provide a complete response to you on that. As an initial response, some of the challenges as we move around the countryside are associated with the change of government in 2007. This may have been a previous government's commitment as I know some other hostels in Alice Springs, for example, were a commitment then. The current government may have another policy on that matter. It may be an administrative matter but what I will certainly undertake to do—whilst we will write a letter it should be in pretty short order—is to simply find out the status of the 120-bed Indigenous hostel. Is it with the intention of having short-stay accommodation to access services in Weipa?

Mrs Gay—No, this is a hostel that is going to be attached to the Western Cape College so that high school students from around the Cape can attend the campus.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Could I just make the point that these are committees of parliament rather than committees of government. We are not here representing the government, although some of the members are members of the governing party.

CHAIR—I am not sure whether or not some of the government senators may have some more information about that and would be perhaps happy to respond.

Senator MOORE—I am sorry we were not prepared that this was an issue that you wanted to talk about, so we do apologise. We have not come prepared. With whom have you been speaking in the government about this?

Mrs Gay—We have been speaking to Jan McLucas.

Senator MOORE—Maybe we will talk to the minister. I would very much like to have some information about who you have been speaking with and where it has gone. It would be very useful if that is an issue that is important to you.

Mrs Gay—We have had letters that more or less say that things are proceeding and consultation will occur at some stage.

Senator FURNER—Was the exchange of those letters between the relevant senator that you referred to?

Mrs Gay—She wrote back to us when we wrote to her. We were told she was the appropriate person.

CHAIR—As I said, the secretariat will find the department and write to them to put a bit of urgency into it and get an explanation back to you through the committee.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Can I just add that there are four of us in this committee meeting who are senators for Queensland. So you are all our constituents and I am sure any one of the four of us would be happy to help as well.

CHAIR—Perhaps it is best to go to the next issue. Obviously we are pretty vague on any details in that regard.

Mr P Graham—We have had very little input as to what the issues are with you guys coming to town. That is possibly why we are getting off on a bit of a tangent here. We have had very little information about why you people are here, why we are involved and what the hell you are doing. So, if somebody could clear that up for us, we may be on the right track for the rest of the morning.

Mrs Gay—We were never asked to submit what we would like to talk about or anything like that. It was very sketchy.

CHAIR—This is a Senate select committee which in effect stands for the full term of parliament. Some of the motive behind that, as I understand it, was to determine whether the emergency response in the Northern Territory, which was quite well publicised, was positive or negative and what was working well and what was not working well. It is very useful for a committee to continue to go and have a look at that and to make a comparative analysis with places where the intervention does not apply—that is, in Queensland and Western Australia where we have similar demographics. There were some terms of reference attached to that and I will briefly read out the principal terms of reference. The first is:

1. the effectiveness of Australian Government policies following the Northern Territory Emergency Response, specifically on the state of health, welfare, education and law and order in regional and remote Indigenous communities;

2. the impact of state and territory government policies on the wellbeing of regional and remote Indigenous communities;

3. the health, welfare, education and security of children in regional and remote Indigenous communities; and

4. the employment and enterprise opportunities in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

It is probably one of the most broad-ranging briefs on regional and remote Indigenous communities. As we have moved around the countryside, whilst people have read and understood the terms of reference, if there are pressing issues with regard to the delivery of services and governance arrangements for any of those matters to do with health and law and order, people are actually bringing suggestions or submissions in that regard. I am happy to provide some terms of reference to you after this meeting. I understood they were provided, but I hope that gives you an indication.

Mr P Graham—Thank you.

Mrs Gay—On the matter of rehabilitation, when the AMP was introduced, which I know is state government legislation, they also said that they would set up rehabilitation centres for chronic alcoholics. The AMP does impact on our town insofar as, when we have sporting events and all the communities come in, you can imagine the things that happen sometimes. So we have got two issues here. One was that there was going to be a rehabilitation centre set up just south of Napranum. That has somehow disappeared and the latest we have heard is that it is going to be in Cooktown. Cooktown is 500 kilometres away from us and certainly is not a good point for the relatives who live in communities up around here. Has there ever been federal talk of having anything to do with a rehabilitation centre in the Weipa area?

Senator ADAMS—Is that rehabilitation for alcohol or drugs?

Mrs Gay—For drug and alcohol rehabilitation, yes. Not aged care.

Senator ADAMS—Not aged care or people coming out of hospital and having a step-down facility. It is mainly for drugs and alcohol.

Mrs Gay—On that point we would like to thank the federal government very much. They supplied money towards our very first aged-care facility. It is not just for aged care; it is for lengthy times of stay in hospital and respite care. We have 10 beds at the local hospital here. But I was asking more about drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

Senator ADAMS—That is another letter, I think.

CHAIR—We will require some clarification on that. It is quite a broad brief, actually, because there is everything from a reconnect program that deals with young people who are generally reconnected—and part of that is substance abuse—to mainstream rehabilitation in residence programs. What I might do is quarantine that to the ones that are currently operating in the greater gulf area.

Mrs Gay—There are none.

CHAIR—That is why I am trying to quarantine the extent of the letter: so the information comes back around lunchtime rather than at some other stage. I will ask that any proposed government substance abuse rehabilitation programs in the area be included.

Senator MOORE—There is a health roundtable with a number of people tomorrow. It may well be the best place we can ask that question, so, if there are particular issues on health that the council wants clarified or if you are just not sure what is going, please get in contact with us. We are talking with state government people and different service providers tomorrow, so that will be useful.

Mrs Gay—Excellent.

CHAIR—I will ask a couple questions about the roles and responsibilities of the council. This is effectively a mining town. Can I make the assumption that most of the houses are built and owned by Rio?

Mrs Gay—You would assume wrongly.

CHAIR—That is why we are here. Can you correct me on that?

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Can you give us a brief, general overview of the town council, how it operates, what its history has been, where you are going and what you seek to achieve?

Mrs Gay—The town was originally built by Comalco. Everything was owned by Comalco. The town was run by Comalco. That all changed in 1991, when Comalco started to put out to tender all the services that related to running a town. Eventually there was a town committee formed that worked with Rio Tinto. Rio Tinto still had most of the task of running the town, and

over time this has progressed. We are now the Weipa Town Authority. It is made up of four elected members, two appointed Rio Tinto members and one traditional owner member. Anything that concerns the town is discussed at town meetings, just like at a normal council. Decisions are made, and the CEO and his staff implement them. A lot of the town has now been freeholded—the parts that were allowed to be freeholded—and 78 per cent of houses are privately owned. The town is responsible for most of the functions of a normal town. It is true that we could not run the town without the assistance of Rio Tinto, because at this point in time we get no assistance from the federal government or from the state government. I will hand over to my CEO, who is much more versed in these things.

Senator FURNER—On your comment about no assistance: one of the initiatives of the global financial crisis was that the federal government implemented funding towards schools. I note your school here was like a construction site—it certainly was when I was up this way last year. Most of the buildings near there are complete. A lot of the money was funded through the federal government to assist in the—

Mrs Gay—That is correct. The town itself received nothing. We got nothing towards implementing bike paths or facilities for use—all the things that other towns got. It was also promised at the time that a childcare centre would be built. It was supposed to open in July. Not one sod has been turned yet. It is run by the Creche and Kindergarten Association. They have the tender to communicate with the government to get this happening, but so far it has not—but I digress.

CHAIR—Mr Pressley, can you talk about the deeming arrangement? Is this some local government arrangement? Why is this not considered by the state or Commonwealth in terms of the nature of the township and what the process is to change that?

Mr Pressley—Carrie has covered that pretty well, but I will add that the town of Weipa still falls under the Commonwealth Aluminium Corporation Pty Limited Agreement Act 1957. It does not comply with the Local Government Act. There is a term that has been used for a number of years which talks about the normalisation of Weipa. Basically, that means a separation from the mine to come under the Local Government Act, but for all intents and purposes everything else about Weipa is fairly normal. The exception is that, as Carrie said, we do not receive funding. As a recognised local authority we would receive, for example, federal assistance grants and other grants that typical councils would apply for. We do not receive that. Because we are considered Rio Tinto, we are not eligible for those funds. Having said that, recently the Minister for Child Safety and Sport deemed us eligible for funding at the state level in that department. We have in the past received funding from other departments such as the Department of Transport and Department of Emergency Services, but generally we are not eligible and do not receive anything.

We are basically funded by the rates we collect. We do rate every landowner in Weipa. That includes the mining company. That provides the basis for our maintenance of the town and minor maintenance with our infrastructure. Beyond that, Rio Tinto has until recently provided us with the capital funding and major operating funding necessary to maintain the town. The global financial crisis obviously had an impact on Rio Tinto, and that funding has ceased at the present time. That is pretty much how we operate. The governance of Weipa is not normal. That is what is not normal.

At the moment, we are looking at a process for whether we should take the town to normalisation. I know it was explored in the nineties, but we are exploring it again. We are in the first of three phases. This first phase is analytical. It is about the collection of data that we will model. We will put it against whether we should stand alone or maybe be with Cook Shire. We will look at those models with the Queensland Treasury. The second phase is the decision phase, and once we understand the modelling and all the data we will make some decisions, start consultation with the community et cetera. The third phase is the implementation if that is the direction that we are going. We have an aspirational goal of March 2012, in line with local government elections. It is aspirational, however.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I was involved in this in a previous life. Could you or the councillors briefly and without scientific backup tell us what the advantages and disadvantages would be to becoming a local authority council under the Queensland legislation? Why has it not happened before? What needs to be done? Is it simply state government legislation amending the Comalco act and including you as part of the Local Government Act?

Mr Pressley—There have been a lot of issues over the years. If you look back at the history in the nineties, I think many times we got to the eleventh hour and it never occurred for one reason or another. When I look at the history, I think it did come down to the sustainability of the community—whether it would be viable. I guess that is always the question: are you going to be viable; are you going to be sustainable; are you going to be diverse enough to be able to govern your part of the region—in our case, the town? That was in the nineties. We have not done this for some time, hence we want to go back to the drawing board and see where we are at. Carrie mentioned the 78 per cent ownership in the community now. That is a significant ownership of our town now.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—That is bigger than many councils around the state. You have got Napranum next door, which is a regular local government, which is nowhere near as wealthy as this. Was the argument that, if you became a normal shire council, you might lose Comalco or Rio's contribution that is not rates? I understand Rio make a contribution in addition to the rates they pay. Is that correct?

Mr Pressley—They have in the past, but in the last couple of years they have not, because of the global financial crisis, contributed in terms of capital and operating. But they are always supporting the community.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Do you have borrowings?

Mr Pressley—No.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—What happens if you run out of money and cannot pay the staff wages?

Mr P Graham—We beg, or if the hole gets big enough then somebody has to come and fix it. Probably Rio will come with their superhero cape on and fix it. The swimming pool is probably a classic example. There was no way we could access funding in any way, shape or form for a pool. We eventually had to get the swimming club to apply on behalf of the council and get funding that way. Of course, they now think they own the pool and that has issues in itself. I am

sure Peter will enlighten you on the situation where we pay GST on rates on freehold property. I have nothing to do with Rio Tinto.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Could you just explain that for the rest of the committee?

Mr Miller—Because the federal and the state governments do not recognise what we pay as rates, we are levied a GST of 10 per cent on the general rate.

Mrs Gay—It is counted as a service.

Mr Miller—We would be the only people in Australia, I think, to pay a tax on a tax. That tax goes to the federal government and is returned to the states, who return it to councils under the FAGs. We do not get FAGs, so in effect the 78 per cent of people that own private property in Weipa are subsidising the rest of Queenslanders.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—And you do not get Roads to Recovery money?

Mr P Graham—No.

Mr Pressley—Nor the federal assistance grants.

Mr Miller—Roads to Recovery is a direct payment from the federal government, which is unconstitutional, I believe.

CHAIR—Have you made some application to the Queensland government to directly return the amount you pay in rates, given it is a clear case?

Mrs Gay—Yes.

CHAIR—What has the response been?

Mr Bousen—It is a federal issue, so the state does not want to deal with it.

Mrs Gay—We have written several times and I have got answers from Albanese. They have passed my latest letter to Wayne Swan.

Senator MOORE—Have you written previously?

Mrs Gay—Yes.

Senator MOORE—And you have got the letters back from them as well?

Mrs Gay—Yes, for the last two years.

Senator MOORE—Only two years?

Mrs Gay—Well, I have only been in—

Senator MOORE—I am just wondering whether there is a long history, with previous governments as well?

Mrs Gay—I am sure it has been brought up.

Mr Pressley—The GST? We have a file four inches thick.

Senator MOORE—I thought you would. So this has been going on for a long time.

Mr Miller—Certainly as a private person I have been making—

Senator MOORE—Personal—

Mr Miller—Yes.

Senator MOORE—There would be a whole history of correspondence here. It has just gone on too long. That is the problem. Okay.

Mrs Gay—The infrastructure of the town all belongs to Rio Tinto. I am talking about things like water, sewerage, the buildings—it all belongs to Rio. This is a sticking point because the state government do not really want to pay for it, and Rio of course do not want to give it away. So it is something beyond us.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Who pays maintenance on the capital enhancements to the infrastructure?

Mrs Gay—That is shared.

Mr Pressley—We provide the minor maintenance through our rates budget. For major capital and major operating, Rio Tinto have always provided that.

Mrs Gay—Yes.

Mr Bousen—There is no budget for that. There has not been a budget for two years. We do not know about next year or the year after that either, so it is reviewed on a year-by-year basis. It makes it very difficult to forward plan, especially when you do not own the assets—what do you do then?

Mr Pressley—I think the issue of normalisation is about determining your own destiny, as opposed to the mining company doing that. I think that is largely the crux of it. As I said, in a lot of ways we are normal, but on that governance issue we are not.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—That has been useful. Can I go more specifically to the purpose of this inquiry. Could you make a general comment about the role, place, benefits or disadvantages with Indigenous people in your community as opposed to Napranum?

Mrs Gay—I think the Indigenous people in our community are very fortunate because they live here because they want to and most of them already have jobs. Rio Tinto have schemes, traineeships and apprenticeships and a policy to have 40 per cent Indigenous workers in their mine by, I think, 2020. They certainly do have opportunities. The school is fine. One thing that money seems to get poured into is training programs for the Indigenous people in Weipa—they bring them in from Napranum.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Do Indigenous people live in—

Mrs Gay—Yes, we would have 20 or 25 per cent living here.

Mr Bousen—How many of those would be traditional owners? I think Georgia said it is two per cent.

Mrs Gay—There would not be as many traditional owners, that is correct. There is still that gap.

Mr P Graham—Obviously we have a very limited rate base, of about $4 million, and we are very limited in getting assistance from upper levels of government, yet we still have the 35,000 tourists who come here and use the roads and pound them to pieces. We have this influx from other communities around the cape, as it should be—this is the hub for the cape. The government sector is one of our largest employers now. Having said that, we lost our most senior public servant the other day, Kim McDonald from ICC, who transferred down to Coen. We seem to take two steps forward and one step back. The community seems to be getting sucked dry from all these resources going out to communities and so forth but we do not get any replacement funding coming in to assist us with this. We support a lot of Indigenous communities around the area in many ways, but we do not get any chance to get money from the government for these services that we provide.

Mr Pressley—Peter is right, and there are a lot of benefits and opportunities that come. Weipa is the regional hub for business and government services right across the top end of the cape. Peter mentioned government. When you look at government services here, the number of federal and state government employees, at my last count, was approximately 400 in Weipa and the region. That is significant. It is the second largest industry, if you like, after Rio Tinto. The government has recognised that Weipa as a lot to offer and provide, and not just Weipa but the region, and it is doing that well.

Carrie asked the question about the drug and rehabilitation centre because Weipa has the capacity and the ability to provide those services to the broader community here. So when we hear that there is the potential for the rehabilitation centre to go somewhere else, further south, we question that—why, when we have Kowanyama, Pormpuraaw, Lockhart River, the NPA, Mapoon, Napranum and Aurukun all geographically in our area? It is worthwhile thinking about what Weipa can offer, not just Weipa but the region and the Indigenous communities.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Can someone elaborate on the comment about the ICC coordinator being taken out of Weipa, I assume, and put into Coen?

Mr P Graham—I have heard two stories. He possibly asked for the transfer or he was transferred; I do not know which. He has been replaced by a much less senior person at state level. We lost Kim, who was a keystone here in Indigenous operations.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Just for completeness could someone briefly explain what the ICC is?

Mr J Graham—I always get the last C mixed up. It is Indigenous coordinating council or committee or something like that. Basically it is a federal government operated group. I think it operates out of Beerwah, if memory serves me right. Effectively its role is to be a coordinating hub for government services. A lot of the work that Kim did here was things such as hostels, rehabilitation centres, assisting other communities with project work and connecting communities to a range of government services. To Kim's credit, he would often do that across both state and federal boundaries. If he saw a project that required a combination of both, he would try to coordinate both those services.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Could you briefly tell me the number of people in Weipa and how that relates to anywhere else in the cape with respect to the number of Indigenous people in the area in actual terms?

Mr J Graham—The community of Weipa is a bit over 3,000—probably getting up to 3½ thousand people—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—That does not include Napranum.

Mr J Graham—That does not include Napranum. Napranum has a population of around 1,000 people. About 80 kilometres to the south by air and about 215 kilometres by road is Aurukun. It has a population of just over 1,000 people. About 75 kilometres to the north is Mapoon, which has a population of about 350 to 400 people. If you go further afield we have got the northern peninsula area, which has the communities of Seisia, Injinoo and New Mapoon. I am not sure what the collective population is in that area, but it is probably in the order of about 2,000 or 2,500 people. Then you go further afield to the south and you have Coen and then Lockhart to the east. I would guess that Coen has 500 to 700 people and Lockhart is about the same.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—And you have all services? The mobiles work and you have full medical services here in Weipa? You have a hospital and permanently staffed medical facilities?

Mrs Gay—We have a beautiful new hospital. The only problem is: you cannot have babies. As it is a town with so many young people in all the surrounding communities, everyone gets flown out.

Mr Bousen—Half of them have not been paid for the last month, either. There is a doctor up there who has not been paid in six weeks. Plenty of medical staff have been caught up in the Queensland government health payroll snafu and it is impacting on the health workers of this region.

Senator MOORE—They have not go any money?

Mr Bousen—Yes. I have spoken to some of the doctors through my other role in the newspaper.

Mrs Gay—Another facility that really is lacking from the outer communities is transport. There is no transport. Even from Napranum to here there is no bus. If people want to come and get their groceries, because there are no shops out there, they have to get a taxi. I do not know if Napranum has put in for a bus that would offer those services. The whole region is like that. You can only fly or you have to have a four-wheel drive.

Mr ADAMS—What about road maintenance? Do you have your own plant here, or is it done by the mining company?

Mr Pressley—We generally contract that. There are a number of contractors locally that would do that work for us.

Senator BOYCE—But you pay for it? The town authority pays for it?

Mr Pressley—We pay for minor maintenance but any major reseals or upgrades have been paid by Rio in the past.

Mr P Graham—I think you should understand, too, that Weipa is a very, very small area. Cooktown shire comes right up to the shops, right up to the back fence of properties here. We are very, very landlocked here. That is another reason for moving to normalisation: we have no room to expand. We are all living on postage stamp sized blocks in the middle of nowhere, which is absolutely ridiculous. There are no four- or five-acre blocks. They do not exist anywhere. As part of this process, to go to normalisation, or some form of normalisation, we need the land also.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—There would be more people in the Weipa town than there would be in the whole of the Cook Shire, wouldn't there?

Mr P Graham—No, it is about the same. I think I would be pretty close. They have an enormous area. It comes right up to here. All those pastoral areas and so on would be included in that. And of course the revenue from the mining goes south. It is not raidable either. The mine does not release land that was mined 20 years ago, does it? It does not put it back into the system, so it sits in limbo.

Mr Bousen—I think Weipa's town boundary of 11 square kilometres would make it one of the smallest local government areas in Australia. We are extremely landlocked.

CHAIR—Have you had any conversations with the mine? Obviously, over time that is going to become unsustainable.

Mr Bousen—As the general manager recognised at a summit with state ministers present, and federal representation as well, the future of the town is untenable in its current format. That is why we have progressed along these lines.

CHAIR—In terms of the release of some of the already mined areas, what is the process there?

Mr P Graham—It is very difficult because you have overlapping titles, between native title, the mining lease and crown land. It is going to be a mess.

Mr Bousen—There is a facility to do it, though.

Mr P Graham—Could I just raise a subject that is near to my heart. The present system with offenders, even the minor offenders, is that once they have to do time they are flown out of here to Lotus Glen, at the back of Cairns. The problem there is that when they are released they have no income to get home so they become problems in other places, probably more so than they do when they come back here, where they have family support and so on. There is a complex here that I suspect is under the immigration umbrella that was set up as a processing centre for Indonesian fishing boats when they were really thick on the ground here. There was quite a big push and that sort of cleared it out. Since then, this facility that has a clinic, a kitchen and sleeping accommodation for quite a few, in the industrial area, has lain dormant. This is the third group of feds that have come up here and I am still to get some reply in any shape or form. That processing facility lies dormant. We would be very keen to retain these minor offenders, particularly the guys from the communities, rather than sending them out. We could keep them here in that facility, use them around town for mowing lawns, building barbecues around the lake or whatever it might be—and some mentoring and so on. There are employment opportunities for people in the town, with catering and so on. We would very much encourage the extended family, if they want to bring the evening meal to them, by all means, but keep them here in town as a resource. I think it is a win-win everywhere. But I cannot get anybody to get back to me about this facility. It is sitting there with cobwebs on it. We could certainly use it to everybody's advantage.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I was going to say, boy, have we got a deal for you!

Mr P Graham—I think it was only used once or twice, three or more years ago.

Senator BOYCE—So it is still in usable condition if cleaned up, in your view?

Mr P Graham—Yes.

Mr J Graham—Could I just add on that point that when we are suggesting a model like that we are not saying that we can open it up and the Weipa Town Authority can look after it. It has to be resourced. If we are going to use that facility then there must be the resourcing, not just the expectation that we can just open the doors and this group can run it.

Senator BOYCE—It would be a department of corrective services facility.

Mr P Graham—They are quite keen on this program. There are a lot of camps around the state now that are working very successfully. There is some hold-up. They are having a step back and a rethink about it, so they are not committing themselves to anything at the moment. But if we had the facility I am sure we could begin talks with them again.

Senator ADAMS—How many people do you think you would get in there?

Mr P Graham—I think you could get 20 in there without too much trouble.

Senator MOORE—Do you have a big file of correspondence on that also, Mr Graham?

Mr P Graham—No. I have had one letter back from the department saying that they are sitting on their hands at the moment, rethinking the whole concept and how they are going to attack it. That is about it. But I would still like to know what the possibilities are of getting hold of that building. Then the correspondence might start again.

Senator BOYCE—The building currently belongs to Customs, one presumes.

Mr P Graham—I think they possibly lease it. I do not know whether they bought the property or they leased it. Either way, if they are leasing it then it is sitting there with money going to waste. If they bought it, we would certainly like to have a talk with them.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—On your comment that young offenders are sent to Lotus Glen and not given money to get back, which is interesting in itself, does the same apply to people who are transferred to Cairns for medical attention? Do they get their way paid back?

Mrs Gay—They do, with the patient transit system.

Mr P Graham—If you are going with a child and you have three kids at home, English is your second language and you have no financial base, and they lob you in Cairns with four nights paid accommodation at a hostel, then you are on your own. You may have the kids with you or you may not. Dad cannot go to work now—if he does—and there they are.

Senator ADAMS—When do they have to go—four weeks?

Mr P Graham—They are out for a month.

Mrs Gay—You get $30 a day as your living allowance, and that was what it was 25 years ago when I had my children.

CHAIR—Without being complete in my response, I think some of that is due to a change in policy from the royal society of obstetrics. We have the same problem all across remote areas; it does not matter about ethnicity. Unless there is a certain level of amenity—in other words, if there is a doctor, there has to be two, because he cannot be awake 24 hours a day and those sorts of things. There are so many people now who previously we believed the system could handle because of the insurance issues simply because of the determination of the Australian and New Zealand royal college—I think there has been a great deal of difficulty across the board.

Mrs Gay—I know that Nhulunbuy allow births and have two obstetricians and an anaesthetist funded by the Northern Territory government. I do not know whether they are subsidised by the federal government. Do people prefer to live in Nhulunbuy rather than here? I would say we would have about the same birthrate.

Senator ADAMS—How many doctors do you have?

Mrs Gay—We have a medical superintendent and a series of locums who come.

Senator ADAMS—Do they do obstetrics?

Mrs Gay—No.

Senator ADAMS—That is your problem. You have to have two people who are capable of doing obstetrics, of doing an emergency caesar, and you must have someone who is qualified in anaesthetics. If you had those people, yes, there may be some dispensation, but the fact is that you do not. Nhulunbuy can do what they are doing because they have the appropriately qualified people.

CHAIR—I assume your question about Nhulunbuy is rhetorical but they do have the responsibility of Yirrkala, which is quite a large community that falls within—

Mrs Gay—We have the same thing. We have Napranum and Mapoon.

CHAIR—It is clearly needed here, particularly to meet these new policy guidelines. Are there any other services that you think are overstretched simply because Weipa is providing a service centre for a whole range of other areas?

Mr Miller—Policing. There is a lot of monitoring with the introduction of the alcohol management plan, the AMP, in neighbouring communities. I could be wrong but I think we have 12 full-time police, but their area stretches from the Archer River up to Bamaga. In the dry season, when the road is open, if there is an accident on that road, police leave town to attend to it. We are very underresourced.

Mr P Graham—Twelve is a little misleading by the time you take out the one having the baby, the two on long service leave, the one on stress leave—you know.

Mr Miller—As well as relieving in—

Mr P Graham—It is the fourth largest district in Queensland. At one stage there they took one of the two cars away saying we did not need it. You ring up for an assault and you get, 'We'll be back on Wednesday.' It is woefully understaffed.

Senator ADAMS—As far as court goes, do you have a district magistrate?

Mr Miller—Yes, there are five circuits every two weeks.

Ms Bousen—Once a month.

CHAIR—So, just to be up on management schemes that may be in place, the other impact I have found in other parts of Australia is the displaced effort that had because people then move away from dry areas to get access to alcohol—

Ms Bousen—And you get overcrowding.

CHAIR—Have you found that in Weipa as a consequence of that?

Mr P Graham—We did initially. We had quite a few camps around the town.

Mrs Gay—The rainy season is not so bad.

Mr Bousen—When the roads open up again, everybody will be able to travel

CHAIR—Mr Bousen, you mentioned overcrowding and relatives moving in with people who have jobs.

Mr Bousen—I think the federal government signed an agreement in Napranum last week. The mayor was telling me they have signed up for an extra 18 houses to be built by the end of June. It is a bit of a push, I think—a tad ambitious. Overcrowding is rife in all Indigenous communities. It is rife throughout Cape York and it is rife throughout the Torres Strait. I imagine it is rife throughout the rest of Australia as well.

CHAIR—I was just picking up on your comment that this also leads to overcrowding, I was making the assumption—and need to clarifying whether that was correct—that people were moving from those areas to their relatives' houses here and it is actually making it more severe.

Mr Bousen—They will relocate to family members so that they can be closer to Weipa. Mind you, anyone can buy a drink in Weipa, but it is fairly heavily enforced through the new liquor accord that we have just put in place. The publicans are all sort of on-board with that. The police are involved with that as well. So you do not necessarily have the issues with public drunkenness, DVs and the ancillary stuff that goes with it. Yes, people will come up here to buy groceries as well from Woolworths, because of the cost of living in the communities and the quality of food that is available in the shops. You can buy everything in the shops up here.

Mr J Graham—You asked about what was stretched. Probably another service here is the provision of safe houses and refuges, whether it be for cases of domestic violence or family break-up or other things.

Senator BOYCE—What do you have in terms of men's houses and safe houses?

Mr J Graham—There is a Weipa community care group, which has I think, a safe house—Caroline?

Mrs Gay—One.

Mr J Graham—One safe house.

Mrs Gay—One three-bedroom house.

Mr J Graham—There were also refuges in some of the communities. For example, at Napranum there was a refuge called the Draumalon centre, which is now close. What we are

tending to find is that if there are issues in some of the surrounding communities, they get pointed at the Weipa community care group. There are a couple of paid positions but it is largely a voluntary group, and suddenly you have got this group of volunteers in Weipa with effectively one house carrying the load of the regional communities. That is an area of concern for us.

Mr Bousen—Translocation is not just forced by alcohol issues, though. There are many other contributing factors.

Senator BOYCE—Did you mentioned a 'liquor accord'?

Mr Bousen—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—Can you tell us about the liquor accord?

Mr Bousen—I believe it is the only liquor accord in Queensland. It has restrictions with regard to trading hours and what types of alcohol can be sold. It is a point of contention in the community, I guess.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Can you explain it to us. Napranum is dry, is it?

Mr Bousen—Yes, we are surrounded by communities that are under state government legislation through an alcohol management plan. Those 16 discrete Indigenous communities are the only communities in Queensland where they are forced by law to go dry. It is a very complicated issue. Weipa had more or less thrust upon it a liquor accord which has been thrust upon many communities.

Senator BOYCE—By the state government?

Mr Bousen—Yes. 'Encouraged' would be a nice way of saying it to follow through with it. I have been told that if we did not do it George Street would whack a total ban on Weipa. That is how you go. You roll with the punches while you can.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Is the accord under the auspices use of the council?

Mr Bousen—No, it is a community-run project hosted by the licensees in the community. I have interviewed all the licensees. It would make for very interesting reading if I were able to publish their comments.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Is there any legal backing for this?

Mr Bousen—I don't believe so, but, because it is voluntary, it does not really matter, does it?

Mr P Graham—It was strongly recommended by the licensee—

Senator BOYCE—Who were the parties that agreed to the accord?

Mr Bousen—The three licensees. They are signatories to it.

Senator BOYCE—And it restricts—what?—hours of operation?

Mr Bousen—Hours of operation, the types of alcohol that will be sold, who can buy alcohol, the size of alcohol bottles.

Senator BOYCE—What are the restrictions on who can buy alcohol?

Mrs Gay—You have to show identification.

Mr Bousen—You have to live here.

Senator ADAMS—What about tourists? How do they do it?

Mr P Graham—They have a licence that says they live in Brisbane or they have a train ticket, plane ticket—whatever.

Mrs Gay—They don't live in a dry community.

Mr Bousen—It is to prevent a sly grogging.

Senator BOYCE—So if my licence said I lived in Mapoon I would not be allowed to buy alcohol.

Mrs Gay—Yes, you would.

Mr P Graham—You could buy a limited amount and you would fill in a book.

Senator BOYCE—Okay.

Mr J Graham—And if you buy—I can't remember the quantities—I think it is five or more cartons of beer, then they take things like your name, your license number—

Mrs Gay—Even if you are from Weipa.

Mr Bousen—You can buy it here but you cannot take into the dry communities. Then you get things like beach parties, bridge parties and bush parties.

Mrs Gay—And you cannot buy sherry or brandy or fortified wines—very strange things.

Mr Miller—The identification that is required is a driving licence, a passport or a Queensland Card 18+. I know for certain that the Queensland Card 18+ does not show an address, so I question why you have to show ID.

Mrs Gay—They will sell you takeaways if you have got an address in Napranum, but not if it is a large amount. If you said, 'I'm going round to see Ian and I'm buying a sixpack', you would be allowed to do that, as far as I am aware.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Is it illegal for you to bring a jar of sherry from Cairns into your home?

Mrs Gay—They would not know, would they?

Mr P Graham—You could bring it to your home in Weipa but you could not take it into your home in Napranum or Aurukun and so forth. The licensees work together so that if licensee A bans you then he faxes other licensees. It is one out, all out—you are out everywhere.

Mr Pressley—But no fortified wine is sold at all—

Mr P Graham—Nothing is sold in town now at all.

Mr Pressley—at any outlet in town.

Mr Bousen—I cannot buy a bottle of port in Weipa but I can buy a bottle of parliamentary port from Parliament House in Brisbane and bring it into Weipa.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—That is probably why you all look healthier than we do on this side of the table.

Mr Bousen—It is still sitting there. I just did it for the exercise.

Mrs Gay—You give them a copy of the accord. Is it public?

Senator ADAMS—It is public.

Mr P Graham—It puts a bit of pressure on. Obviously they come from dry communities now. Weipa is the shining alcoholic beacon on the cape, and when there is a full-bore carnival on we brace ourselves. It does cause some social issues in town that are not good, and of course when they come down to shop there is the opportunity to binge drink within the community here. It is something that has been placed upon us with very little consultation with the Weipa community and with nothing else. There is no support. As we were talking about earlier, this is why rehabilitation is so important to us here. It is no good putting it in Cooktown. It needs to be somewhere here in the cape area. These people need some support. They cannot thrust AMPs down our throats and not back it up with some of the consequences.

Senator MOORE—That is being a victim of where you live, in terms of the fact that you are surrounded by communities that under law became dry. As a community which is in this limbo position, which I have to admit I did not know about until I came here, being the special place you are you become caught up in that. I think there needs to be a lot more discussion, and it does seem as if it is not as good as it could be. Your point about having the rehab services is absolutely accurate because all the rhetoric in the policies here and in the Northern Territory links the two things that you are going to have. Your view is that you have got this accord 'voluntarily', but in terms of process it is the fact you have got no backup services. That is the big beef.

Senator ADAMS—What impact has this had on your accident and emergency services?

Mr Bousen—Actually, the officer in charge has told me that DVs have decreased in the last 12 months since they have been working on that. That is probably the only statistic I have had available to me.

Senator ADAMS—But that is a plus.

Mr Bousen—Yes, of course it is—obviously.

CHAIR—It may be useful for you to know, so that you do not feel too marginalised, that almost the same rules entirely apply throughout the Northern Territory. If you buy over $100 worth of alcohol you have to provide a licence, all those sorts of things, and as well there are a plethora of other small alcohol management plans. The Western Australian government has conducted a pretty comprehensive survey of a comparative analysis of benefits of the different plans, certainly across the Northern Territory and Western Australia. I am not sure about Queensland. I think it is due out at the end of June. I am looking forward to it being released, so if I were you I would probably keep an eye on that space. It may be informative for you guys.

Mr Miller—In the early days of the alcohol management plans, the local Church of England priest would have been happy to have served time breaking the law so he could deliver communion into the communities that had the alcohol management plans.

Mr P Graham—He was arrested with communal wine going into the community one day to deliver communion to a woman who is dead now.

CHAIR—Are there any other particular issues?

Mr Bousen—There is a lot of pressure on the education system up here at the moment as part of your welfare reforms. I think that is being felt across the community. I know that from discussions with the P&C, with the ICC and with parents and teachers.

I think one of the other big issues that would probably have a significant impact upon the quality of health in Cape York and in communities is the cost of living—the simple cost of living in these remote communities. It is phenomenal. If you are on a pension or a fixed income and you are supporting several family members as well, it is virtually impossible to be able to provide the requirements of a family of that size on the same money that you are getting if you are in, say, Sydney with all the shopping options you have available to you. That translates across to petrol, rents, electricity—everything is expensive up here.

There has been a lot of hype about Weipa having one of the highest incomes per capita in Queensland, but it also has one of the high costs of living per capita in Queensland. The only place that would probably be more expensive than Weipa would be Thursday Island in the Torres Strait, and the difference is probably not that much. Petrol is about 50c dearer up there for some reason. It has been published that Weipa has the highest fuel price in Queensland—even though that is not accurate—but, of the 40 towns that were surveyed in Queensland, that is actually the case.

A combination of all of those factors soon takes away any benefit that could possibly be realised through a high income. So, if you are fortunate enough to be employed and receive one

of those high incomes, you cough it all back just to be here anyway. So to improve health you need to be able to look at the cost of living.

Senator ADAMS—So does rental accommodation cost very much?

Mr Bousen—I was looking at them on the weekend. They range in price from $350 for a one-bedroom flat to $550 for a three-bedroom house that is 40 years old. I think my rates would be less on Bondi Beach than they are here. I think food is definitely cheaper and petrol is definitely cheaper in Bondi Beach than it is up here. So it is very expensive to live up here. If you were to buy a cup of coffee in Hamilton in Brisbane, which has the highest income per capita in Queensland, it would be cheaper there than it is here.

Senator BOYCE—There is probably more competition.

Mr Bousen—Yes—exactly. And that comes back to how the town exists and operates as well.

Senator BOYCE—To come back to your mention of pressure on the educational resources: is that because more children are going to school and they are simply not set up for that level of attendance? What you mean by 'pressure on the education system'?

Mr Bousen—The new pedagogy that has been implemented in Coen and Aurukun has met with some resistance in both communities—and with the teaching staff. Both principals have left. I understand that both teaching communities have virtually rolled over in the last 12 months as well; I think probably one third in Aurukun have remained. I know that the parents of the children are upset with that as well. It could be slightly misleading looking at attendance percentages, even though there are some more kids going—Coen, for example, has always had a very high attendance rate, even before the welfare reform was rolled out down there. They always had above-average attendance. So that is probably an anomaly of that community more than a direct result of any welfare reform implementations down there, but I cannot prove that.

Senator MOORE—One of the things that I am always interested in when I come into places like this is: why are the people here? What are the choices that you have made to be here and to stay? Would you like to share those? Is it a refuge?

Mrs Gay—No, I think it is job opportunities that probably bring people to towns like Weipa. And then you make it your home. People are into third and fourth generations. That is how a town evolves, I suppose.

Mr Pressley—It is the lifestyle factors, I think.

Mrs Gay—Yes, if you like camping and fishing—

Senator MOORE—Is that dependent on the mine?

Mr P Graham—At this point, yes.

Mr Bousen—Personally, I was looking for a small, coastal, country town with a business opportunity with no stock and no staff. I think I found that in Weipa. I would have gone anywhere that had those opportunities. I will be quite honest here: I think I made a mistake.

Senator MOORE—Once you come you stay.

Mr Bousen—No. I should not have come! It is not what I thought it would be.

Mr Miller—I have been here 25 years. Today, before I left, a granddaughter was visiting us with our great-granddaughter. So we have family entrenched in Weipa.

Senator MOORE—Your family stayed here, so you have all your network here?

Mr Miller—Yes.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—If you do not mind me being personal, what do you do? Do you work in the mine?

Mr Miller—I am retired. I came to Weipa to work for Comalco. I purchased a local business, ran that for eight years, sold it and retired.

Mr P Graham—The town changed quite a lot at about the time freehold started to become available. Prior to that it was a bit spooky here. Kids would grow up here with no old people in their lives. Once you finished at the mine, you had to get out of that house because the next bloke was going into it. You could not be born here; you could not die here; you could not be buried here. The kids here still do not see a hearse. Death does not exist for kids in this community; it is not a reality to them. It is only recently—dare I say, by popular demand—that we have opened a cemetery.

Mrs Gay—We have only got one customer!

Mr P Graham—We have one lady who insisted that she would be buried here and nowhere else, so we had to burn the midnight oil and get it done. There was no unemployment here. It could not live here unless you had a job. You would not get accommodation, and so on. It was a very unreal, LSD experience if you came from the outside—'Is this really happening to me?' It is slowly normalising. We try to get away from that word, but it is slowly normalising. We still have the old hangers on. Some things are still in the background that make us believe we are still a little bit remote. If that aircraft stops running, we really start to think, 'What if?' That is a real killer.

Senator ADAMS—As far as aged care facilities are concerned, do you have any or are you looking at putting some in, because people are ageing?

Mrs Gay—The 10 beds at the hospital are fully occupied as far as I know. It is mainly from Aurukun and Napranum.

Senator ADAMS—Those are aged care people?

Mrs Gay—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—What about acute beds—what is the story there?

Mrs Gay—They have 12.

Senator ADAMS—And hostel facilities for the elderly?

Mrs Gay—None.

Senator ADAMS—So they just come straight into a high-care facility, really?

Mr Pressley—There is in aged care package.

Mr P Graham—Fuel is an issue—always has been. It is always a lot dearer here than it should be, considering the fuel is brought directly from overseas by a ship into the bowser here. When fuel was being shipped to Cairns, the fuel would come here, it was unloaded here and the company—which had service stations here and also in Cairns—would barge the fuel down to Karumba, road transport it to Cairns and sell it on the wharf at two cents a litre cheaper. Despite repeated approaches to different centres over the years, there has been nothing. I am convinced, as everybody else is, that petrol companies run rings around politicians. How that money goes from hand to hand and finally disappears is a magnificent exercise in high finance. It really is. The end result is here. It is for no apparent reason, other than private enterprise for the two stations that we have, which are owned by one. There is no competition here and there is no reason why we should be paying $1.60 a litre when it is far less in the southern states, but no-one seems to be able to do anything about it.

CHAIR—At that point, thank you very much for providing the evidence and for your attendance here today.

Mrs Gay—Senators, thank you for having us. It is nice to know that someone cares.

[11.30 am]

ANDERSON, Mr Don, Private capacity

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your appearance here today. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has previously been provided to you. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Anderson—I am the Executive Principal of Western Cape College. I will give you a bit of background. I come from a few generations of cane farmers from Childers and I ended up as a schoolteacher. I was primary school trained and then went through the one-teacher schools and so on. About 25 years or so I got involved in Indigenous education when I was transferred up to York Island in the Torres Strait and subsequently have been involved in Indigenous education for most of my career since, including stints at Lockhart River, Aurukun and some of the Aboriginal community schools in Cairns. I have been executive director schools for the Torres Strait and Cape District, and district director of schools for the Torres Strait and Cape District.

About 10 years ago with the signing of the coexistence agreement I was asked to take on the role to combine the schools of Napranum, Aurukun, Weipa and Mapoon into Western Cape College. I commenced with the Western Cape College as principal about ten years ago. I was referred to as 'the architect of silliness' as I remember in the local papers when it commenced, but after about four or five years we had significant community support, education outcomes had improved and it was considered a good enough model so that I subsequently went to another role as executive director for schools for the Cape District and Torres Strait. Then I was based on Thursday Island.

Our current Premier and Ken Smith, who were then the minister and DG for education, got me into the role of combining the 17 schools of the Torres Strait into one college called Tagai. I spent three years in that role, five years in the Straits and then subsequent to that I was approached by Noel Pearson and by government with the concept which we now know as the Cape York Aboriginal Academy to develop an academy based on class, club and culture in Aurukun and Coen. Following negotiations that ended up being not quite the business case which first went through federal and state government but an amalgamation where I took on the role coming back as principal of Western Cape College and as principal of the academy which brings in Coen. We are one term into the concept of class, club and culture in the Cape York Aboriginal Academy, which is in partnership with Cape York Partnerships, and is largely the brainchild of Noel Pearson and his thinking about educational reform.

CHAIR—Excellent. Thank you very much. I know we have a number of questions. How many Indigenous students—we have some percentages as part of the brief—do you have at Western Cape College?

Mr Anderson—I will just have to do a quick calculation. In Weipa it is just over 50 per cent, so there are about 450 in Weipa. There are about 240 at Aurukun, about 45 at Coen and about 25 at Mapoon. People who are better on the abacus than I am will have that worked out.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. How long has the Western Cape College been in existence?

Mr Anderson—It would be about 10 years old.

CHAIR—In 2009, the senior secondary certificate would give the embedded service guarantee from Rio and access to a career path. The indications I have now—this is from all three Western Cape College campuses—is that there were 10 senior secondary certificates awarded in 2009, but some 29 completed senior secondary school. So is the service guarantee predicated on a secondary certificate being awarded or on actual completion? I am just trying to look at the statistics and it is difficult to glean.

Mr Anderson—The service guarantee was introduced at a range of locations in Cape York and the Torres Strait. I have only been back this term so I cannot give you that specific answer, but I can certainly tell you what it is in the Torres Strait and I would imagine it is parallel. In the Torres Strait, the service guarantee means that, if you complete grade 12, we will guarantee that you will either get a job or get into university or formal training. It also guarantees that you will be supported with your cultural knowledge and cultural learning. If you have got a learning difficulty or you are a special needs students, you will have an individual plan developed for you. So it has those five components. The service guarantee is for everyone. The service guarantee still applies as long as you finish year 12. It does not mean that you have to go to university or employment with Rio.

CHAIR—So you have to complete secondary school. You do not necessarily have to complete it to a certain standard. You have to have attended and completed year 12 to access that.

Mr Anderson—Yes, we will guarantee to do that and trace you for the next two years. Our failure is when somebody drops out of that after two years. I am extremely proud of what we have achieved in the Torres Strait. There is a dramatic improvement. But our data shows that in the Torres Strait after two years our drop out is a concern. There is the bottom end of the service guarantee and there are those who go in the front door of a university. We can all show our prejudices and we can all sit here and say, 'It is fine not going to university. There are lots of doors.' Actually I think there is nothing wrong with everyone aspiring to go to university. You can always have alternative plans. The challenge is to continually up the ante of what that service guarantee is. I am trying to be a bit delicate about this and not put university as the end of it all, but I do not want to be really precious about it. I think it is really important that we have lots of Aboriginal and Islander students who are aspiring to go in the front door of a university. It is fine if you want to be a tradesman too, but you have the choice. If you can get in the front door of a university, you will have a chance to get into a trade as well. If you aspire to get a labouring job, you will not get in the front door of a university.

Senator BOYCE—Rio Tinto have told us in their evidence that they would offer to employ every local Indigenous student who completes year 10. Has that happened?

Mr Anderson—That was done by Sam Walsh with the co-existence agreement when the college was being opened. The blunt answer is: no, it has not happened. But I qualify that by saying there are a range of reasons and that is not meant to be a negative statement against

Comalco or Rio Tinto, or whatever brand name we are operating with at the moment, or Education Queensland. The bottom line is that is has not happened.

Senator BOYCE—What sorts of reasons, because they are sorts of things that need to be overcome?

Mr Anderson—In the early days, at the very highest level of Rio Tinto, at the board level in London, there was a huge commitment to that. There was a huge commitment from Sam Walsh and the management and the general management here, at the manager level. But the systems of employment are such that there are processes where it was hard to get through the actual employment strategy and meet the criteria.

Senator BOYCE—So people were not job ready.

Mr Anderson—They were not job ready and the capacity to change the employment strategy to address that lack of readiness was not in place. That was worked at while I was here but, in the five or so years since I have been gone, I think there has been drastic improvement in that. Data shows there has been dramatic improvement, and so do my conversations with the current leadership of Rio Tinto. The relationship with the school has continued to develop. I think that that relationship and changing processes from a school perspective—because we can blame the employers for not doing the right thing, but I can tell you what, as the person who is accountable for delivery of the product to the employer, we were no innocents; we had lots of things that we were not doing appropriately and hence the concept of service guarantee, and where we have gone there.

So it was an ambitious target which was set, for good reason, and over 10 years it has significantly improved towards that, from both those who are supposed to be providing the product—what I am accountable for—and employer Rio Tinto, and lots of other employers in this town, people like Goodline and Cape York contracting. There are a number of companies where there is good intent.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Can you tell me how you can guarantee the year 12 people university entrance or a job or a traineeship? How does it work? You must have some arrangement with Rio Tinto.

Mr Anderson—Again, my experience is more in the Torres Strait, where we have not got a major employer like we have here. We have not got that advantage. It is not nearly as courageous as it sounds. It is more a statement of, 'You stick with us and we'll stick by you and we'll follow up.' Any Aboriginal or Islander student can get access to university through special entrance access. Then there is always training available. You can always provide training. The reality is that the service guarantee does not say, 'We guarantee you a job that you want with Comalco.' It says, 'We'll guarantee that we'll keep sticking by you and, if you can't get a job, we'll ensure that we get training for you; we'll ensure that we'll job hunt for you; we'll ensure that we'll track you.'

Senator IAN MACDONALD—So that is different to the grade 10 that Senator Boyce was asking you about, where Comalco said, 'We will guarantee a job'? That is different?

Mr Anderson—It would certainly be inappropriate for me to make the judgment, but I would think that there must have been some people in Comalco when Sam said that who would have been a little concerned. There are things like drug and alcohol and the fact that you are not allowed on the mine site until you are—I am not sure, but you certainly cannot go on the mine site at 15. There are a whole heap of criteria. So that was said as an act of goodwill and as a target.

Senator BOYCE—Nevertheless, their submission was done—it says 2008 here; I do not know if that would be right.

Mr Anderson—Maybe more like 2001 or something like that.

Senator BOYCE—No, but the submission which talks about this offer of employment to people who have finished year 10 is a very recent submission.

Mr Anderson—True?

Senator BOYCE—Yes.

Mr Anderson—Rightio. I am talking historically.

Senator ADAMS—Rio Tinto started a program at Roebourne a number of years ago, before they started the one here. That was more hands-on—three days a week at school and two days with a trade, and then the next week was the other way round. I think when that started it would have been a lot earlier than what you are talking about.

Mr Anderson—Yes.

Senator FURNER—What complexes have been completed at the college over the last 12 months?

Mr Anderson—Technically it is stage 3 of the expansion of the school, based on enrolments. The school has basically been rebuilt over the last five years.

Senator FURNER—What has been done in the last 12 months?

Mr Anderson—The special needs building has just been finished. The performing arts building has been finished in the 12 months. There is a science block in the middle of construction at the moment and the assembly hall area is within a few months of being finished. Again, because I only returned in the last few weeks and most of my time has been involved in the academy rather than in Weipa, I cannot give all the details but I can certainly find out. I know there is some handing over of materials happening on Thursday.

Senator FURNER—Would you have a handle on what sort of employment that has generated in Weipa itself over that period?

Mr Anderson—I will hazard a guess, which I probably should not, that it probably has not generated a lot of local employment here. I think it would mainly be external contractors.

Obviously there would be some spillage, but I would think it would be mainly external builders doing the core of it.

Senator FURNER—Was it the science building you indicated was about to be handed over? Is that part of the BER?

Mr Anderson—I think the science building would be part of the BER. As a coincidence, it was mentioned to me today that people were quite happy in Weipa about the BER because there was able to be some merging of the BER with the stage 3 development, so in Weipa it has gone over quite well. In Mapoon there is a relatively little BER project and there is a bit of a concern in the community that the P&C had not been involved in it. That was a local issue, not with anyone else involved.

CHAIR—The figures that the committee has were taken from the My School website. From the evidence you have given, there are 760 students. Out of those, it appears 29 have actually completed senior secondary school. That is not a particular high percentage, and it is one that is often reflected across the demographic, so it is not a slight on anyone in this particular area. Why do you think that that is the case, given that individuals in mainstream schools appear to do astronomically better? What are the issues that go to that fairly poor outcome and what aspects of that do you think are being dealt with in your system and your school?

Mr Anderson—I agree it is nowhere near good enough. I will put the positive spin on it, then I would really like to talk about some deeply held beliefs I have about the fundamental issue. Weipa has gone from having basically no Indigenous children engaging into year 12, and with no change in the demographics of Indigenous people in this area, to having nearly four times as many Indigenous kids enrolled at the school. So where were they, where have they come from? That change has been made over a decade, and I think it is a really significant fact that we are starting to bring through a much bigger cohort. There have been changes in mining, but that has not really been affecting the number of Indigenous people. Obviously there were hundreds of Indigenous students living in this area who were not engaged in formal education to the end of year 12. That is still the case in Aurukun, but in the Napranum, Weipa and Mapoon area it has significantly improved. Basically, people believed you could not get a decent education here, but a couple of years ago we got our first OP1. So there has been a dramatic improvement, with an increasing number of Indigenous students at the school and the number of people finishing year 12 continuing to improve.

So that is a good news story—and not just a story; those are facts about what a structure focused on leadership, with economies of scale, the concept of college and a service guarantee, can deliver. I do not believe, however, that we are going to see the same quantum of improvement in Indigenous education with our current approach. I have a deep belief that the fundamental issue we face in Aboriginal and islander education in remote communities is that there is not enough of it and it is not done hard enough. Can I wax on a little bit about this?

CHAIR—Certainly.

Mr Anderson—It is crazy. Decades ahead, we decide that there are going to be 195 days of instruction between nine o'clock and three o'clock during which we are going to deliver education and, 'If you miss out on that, you've missed out on that.' There is a predetermined 195

days, they are set and they are from nine o'clock to three o'clock. Then we say we believe in cultural support and all this and we respect all that; but, if students are away on cultural business or family business or health business, they miss out on it. I do not know of any other business where, if you are behind, as we are in education—we do not have good enough outcomes—you would continue with that. We say we care deeply about attendance, we are going to make a real difference to attendance, but if a child misses a day we record it and we say: 'You've got 40 per cent attendance.' But what comes next? There are no consequences for a lack of attendance. People will say, 'As a principal you've got to improve attendance,' but what structure is there to make up for lost time?

There is no business sense to this whole concept of Indigenous education delivery and outcomes. If you are behind in any other business, you give more time to it or you put more effort into it, don't you? If a kid has 40 or 20 per cent attendance, what are the consequences? There is no capacity for them to make up that time. So we do not have a structure that makes any business sense. In the Torres Strait I was strongly pushing the concept of 1,000 hours. Why do we measure attendance and get really excited about attendance, when there are no consequences for poor attendance and we want to do something about getting the business back on track? If your house building is behind or your mining is down, you buy bigger machines and you do it for longer.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Sorry to interrupt; I just want to understand what you are saying. Are you saying that we should have a more flexible school teaching system so that if you miss today you can pick it up tomorrow?

Mr Anderson—No, I am probably being even more blunt than that. I am saying that there are 195 days and if a student wants to be a part of the real world there is a rigour to that and they will turn up on those days. However, should they be naughty or ill or have cultural obligations, there should be opportunities to say: 'You are not now punished. Here is an opportunity, and you will be encouraged or maybe even "sticked" to do something about it. So, if you've missed 15 days of schooling, here are 15 days of schooling available for you.' But there is no way—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—So there is no way of forcing kids to go to school for 195 days per year? Is that what you are saying? That is putting it a bit bluntly, but—

Mr Anderson—The data says that—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—When I was young, if I did not go to school I would get caned the next day I did go. We do not do that these days.

Mr Anderson—The welfare reform work is kicking in and making a difference. Attendance is improving at Aurukun. It went from horrendous to no good. It is currently sitting on about 60-something per cent, which is a dramatic improvement but not good enough. I am saying that I support the welfare reform that is going on. There are implications for missing school inappropriately, so I endorse that. But I am also saying: when you miss out on that time, there should be a delivery method to say, 'You missed out on this and you are now expected to do this to catch up'.

CHAIR—A catch-up process in the holidays or after hours or some other mechanism to do that.

Mr Anderson—Yes.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—But you are saying there is no way of enforcing that.

Mr Anderson—Currently there is not, but until a few years ago there was no welfare reform. It has had support from both sides of government, hasn't it? There have been some variations but—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You are saying that you say to the parents, 'They missed 15 days this year so we are going to dock your pay until the kid comes back for the next 15 days'—not that directly, but that is the sort of thing you are saying.

Mr Anderson—Yes. I would put a positive spin on it, but there is a stick and a carrot, yes. I am inferring that.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Or you could say that if the kid comes back you will give them an extra holiday or something.

Mr Anderson—I am saying that anywhere else in this state there is a minimum of 200 five-hour days of schooling. It is 1,000 hours. So why are we so hung up about attendance and sort of saying, 'You will do 1,000 hours of formal learning per year'. That is the story we hear. If you have not done 250 hours a quarter of the way through the year, how are you going to catch up so that you are not behind?

Senator BOYCE—Are you also suggesting that that 1,000 hours does not have to be delivered by 9 am and 3 pm Monday to Friday?

Mr Anderson—My belief is that we should be expecting it to happen then, because I think there is a need for routine, discipline and all that sort of caper, and I think that should be encouraged. But I am saying: if that does not work there should be alternatives as well. I guess that is one side. I do not think our head is right about the amount of teaching. It just strikes me as such a simple concept. We are a long way from making it happen. It strikes me that the concept of summer school has some legs and could have a buy-in. At the moment we are working on the concept of Saturday school. That is my old-fashioned concept that if things are behind you have got to do more of it. The other thing is that you have got to work harder.

I just do not think we do enough teaching. I think there is far too much romance about the actual teaching. Some of you may be teachers. You go into a class and you have got kids who have poor attendance, they are possibly a multi-age group, academically they are very low, they probably speak English as their second language or maybe their third. You are beginning teaching, you are away from home and family, you have gone there because you have got a job and you can get a relocation to a favourable spot in two years. You may be facing some fairly extreme behavioural issues, and then you decide, 'Beauty! I am going to start learning you up!' What do you teach? How do you teach? The average person coming out of university is not taught the trade to get somebody to be literate. You actually need to know that fact and then you

spiral up. What are those knowledge components you need to get so that you can write a grade 12 essay? What are the learning steps?

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Obviously, Mr Anderson, my schooling was very limited, because I understand your passion but I am not quite getting it in simple one-liners that we politicians need. Are you saying that we are not teaching the teachers properly?

Mr Anderson—Senator, I would hate to say that.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You would be a very brave teacher to say that.

Mr Anderson—Yes, I am saying that. There is a trade of teaching and we should be proud of the trade of teaching. If you want to teach somebody to read or spell or write or be good mathematically, there are building blocks. Children need to know those building blocks and grow from those building blocks. It is a nonsense to say you are going to get it from exposure or the environment. A lot of those strategies which possibly worked for my children do not work for children who—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Can I come back to what we were talking about before. Say a kid has missed 15 days and you are going to make it up with Saturday classes. If he chose not to go there for 15 days, what is going to make him come in for 15 Saturdays to make it up? Are you saying that if we make it so interesting or valuable to him or her that is why he is going to turn up on the Saturday and then he will want to turn up for 15 weekdays? Is that what you are saying? I am not putting words in your mouth. I am just trying to understand better what I think is a very good point you are making. I am not quite grasping it.

Mr Anderson—I have been turning up to state schools for 50 years straight now—some of them as a student.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I was going to say you must have started when you were one year old!

Mr Anderson—That is right! I actually believe that kids want to learn. What drives them is not all these other rewards and incentives. I do not think that they inherently think that school is bad and that is why they do not come to school. I believe that kids come to school because they are learning. Direct instruction has only been going on at Aurukun for one term and I have seen the most dramatic changes in those classrooms. We had the most horrific start. We had lots and lots of problems and we still face plenty. But in the classroom in Aurukun we have direct instruction, which is very scripted lessons and children are regimented. There has been a dramatic change. It has been so shocking. You asked me, 'What do you reckon is making the difference?' The best line I had was from the deputy principal. He said, 'I believe that the kids believe that we are taking their learning seriously.' I reckon the average Aboriginal child knows that we have been half gammon about their teaching. We have not had a great belief that they are capable of learning and we have not been rigorous and said, 'The fun of this is about achieving and learning.' Why do people do jigsaw puzzles and that sort of nonsense? There is fun in learning and achieving. I think we undervalue that.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—What you are saying is very, very interesting.

Mr Anderson—I think we should do whatever it takes. Children do want to learn. You see kids calling me Mr Don or Mr Sir Don. We have been trying to make it super culturally appropriate and nice and easy and fun. The attitude seems to have been that we cannot push kids. They are not coming to school, so we have been showing them videos and playing touch football and making it more fun. What is the point of it? That little episode, that romance of the last 20 years, has been a failure. The data proves it has been a failure. Secondly, what does it prove if you are better at touch football? You are coming along to be literate and numerate so that you can have an expectation of a real life by getting into a job. Happiness is not an outcome. But I reckon that there is happiness through achieving and learning. We should take Aboriginal education and outcomes really seriously and have absolute faith in the mob. Either we believe that somebody is intellectually inferior or we are not doing it properly. I know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids are not inferior. We know that is not the case. So what do we do?

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You must have fun at the Teachers Union conferences!

Mr Anderson—It is interesting. The Queensland Teachers Union has been a very significant supporter of reform in remote Indigenous education. I have found the Queensland Teachers Union an ally, not the opposite.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—As I understand you, and I do not want to put words in your mouth, you are saying that the education system we have had for the last 20 years has been a bit of a farce by academics and bureaucrats setting roles. You are suggesting that we should go back to the sort of education I had more than five decades ago. What you were saying is fascinating.

Mr Anderson—I am sort of saying that.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—But you are saying—and I should not have made that comment about the teachers union; those sorts of broad comments are not right—that your peers in the teaching profession are agreeing with you, that is, the union and what makes up the union, which is professional peers in the system. You are saying that they are agreeing with you. If that is right, why isn't it happening?

Mr Anderson—I would not go so far as saying they are agreeing, but there is acknowledgement that what has been going on has not worked, maybe this will work and it is worth cutting some space.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I have been saying that for years, but I have no qualifications and nobody listens to me anyway. It is interesting to hear someone who is at the coalface and obviously well learned in all they are saying.

Senator BOYCE—What is the mechanism for dealing with this? I am thinking of one particular example where we were told that there was no point in trying to run the school when the swimming holes were full, because that is where everyone was going to be all day. What is the mechanism for dealing with that issue within your suggestions?

Mr Anderson—Get rid of the people who said it. I think Senator Macdonald's comments link to that. We have had too much romance about what schools are about for too long. All of us could have said what we might have preferred to do with schooling, but most of our parents

never gave us that option. Even if that were true, where does that conversation take us? No, we do not accept that it is too good to go fishing and we have to change the school year because they are swimming. The bottom line is that, if you want to get ready to get a decent job, you have to work out that you do not go swimming when you are a nine-year-old because that is what you would like to do. I think there has been far too much romance and too much accommodation—we can teach you how to be an engineer by not coming to school, not being good at English, by going swimming in the swimming hole. We have to be a bit honest and say, 'No, there is a consequence to you doing that. We cannot do that.' Some teachers, and there have been plenty of them in the past, have said, 'If you had children you wouldn't blame them for wanting to go.' I have heard it a thousand times. Of course you would want to go swimming. We have to make sure that the teachers who are saying that say, 'That's good. You go to Kenmore or one of the other flash schools in Brisbane, or a private school in Brisbane, and you tell that to the kids who have got the same DNA, the same kid-like wants as any other kid, and apply it there.' You do not get away with that sort of nonsense in a fee-paying school or the higher achieving schools.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I would like to get your thoughts on this.

Mr Anderson—I am not very opinionated!

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Indigenous people over the last three or four decades have been told that they are different, that they have a culture and a tradition that should be preserved and everyone should help them do it, and yet they are now living in the 21st century where you jump on a jet plane and go round the world. If I said to you that we have to stop Indigenous people being treated as different—a different class and even a subclass, a second-class of citizens—what would you say? Does that have an effect on young kids' schooling—that they are brought up in households in which governments over the last four decades have told them, 'You're special. You don't have to work. We'll look after you. Keep your traditions of 500 years ago,' but they see the modern world and want to fly around the world, for example. My forebears 500 years ago in Scotland probably burnt witches as entertainment or something, but we do not do that anymore because time has moved on. Perhaps there has been too much emphasis in Indigenous policy on saying, 'Time has moved on, but you can keep living as you did 500 years ago.' Would you agree or disagree?

Mr Anderson—It has been the essence of my career, I suppose, that issue. It is hard to unpack my thinking about it so I jump to the side and say that the work and the writings of Noel Pearson is where I sit philosophically. His last essay, *A Radical Hope*, I dare say is not everyone's cup of tea but it really hits a chord with me. I think Noel Pearson's essay *A Radical Hope* is probably as good an analysis of where my head sits and it has influenced my thinking and has extended my thinking.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—People seem to accept that sometimes Indigenous people will go walkabout because they have done that for the last 500 years. I am wondering whether in the 21st century there is a different way of ensuring that Indigenous people as citizens of the world enjoy the benefits of citizens of the world.

Mr Anderson—I think there are a lot of racist stereotypes, like that every Aboriginal person here gets a free Toyota and a free Land Cruiser every second week. There is just a whole lot of

racial nonsense. I think the concept that every Aboriginal child wants to go walkabout and cannot attend school for 1,000 hours a year is a nonsense too.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You are saying that does not happen.

Mr Anderson—The students who are not in school at Aurukun, and I suggest anywhere else, are not walkabout. They are within a few hundred metres of the school.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I do not mean actual walkabout.

Mr Anderson—I just think it is old thinking. Part of it is to have a university degree.

CHAIR—We are already well over time. One last question from Senator Adams and we might have to put to rest on notice.

Senator ADAMS—Just looking at the hostel situation, is the hostel for the school full? Is it utilised well?

Mr Anderson—Yes, but it is a very moot point. The hostel is a very current issue. There are plans at the moment to build a 120-bed hostel to open in 2012 here.

Senator ADAMS—There is one now, though.

Mr Anderson—There is one here now.

Senator ADAMS—How many beds and how many students?

Mr Anderson—I recall that it is 20-something, about 30.

Senator ADAMS—Therefore it is really a good news story, the fact that you are going to need a much larger hostel so that students can avail themselves of moving here to study.

Mr Anderson—We could get into a very interesting discussion about the whole issue, the whole concept of hostels and the capacity to serve those students when they are at the hostel, given there are lots of children who are not accessing secondary school now and the aim is to provide that access. The real challenge is: how do you provide quality delivery to those students once they get to the school? We could spend a bit too long talking about hostels and the implications of those.

Senator ADAMS—I come from right down the southern area of Western Australia. How do you deal with the wet season in school?

Mr Anderson—The wet season is the best except in my job to get two campuses is too expensive, you have got to fly there. The wet season is people basically locked in, so it is an advantage.

CHAIR—Mr Anderson, thank you very much for your contribution today. I am sure there are some more questions but unfortunately we are constrained by time. The Senate committee process allows some questions on notice, so we will provide those to you through the secretariat. If you have points of clarification when you read the *Hansard* you may wish to make those back to the secretariat, or points of accuracy. Also if you have some other questions or submissions you would like to make I am sure the committee would accept them. Thank you very much.

[12.16 pm]

SCARINI, Mrs Jo-Anne, General Manager, Weipa, Rio Tinto Alcan

SCHAFFERIUS, Mr Kamball David, Human Relations Manager, Rio Tinto Alcan

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has previously been provided to you. I now invite you to make some opening remarks.

Mrs Scarini—I will give you a bit of an overview of our operation here in Weipa. I will spend some time talking about Indigenous employment and training—some of the things we have been doing in that area and some of the barriers to increasing our Indigenous employment. I will talk about where we would like to take the Regional Partnerships Heads of Agreement, which has been in place for a number of years now. And I thought it might be useful to comment on the residential rehab facility and government support.

Rio Tinto—or its predecessor, Comalco—has been here since 1964. Commercial quantities of bauxite were discovered in 1955. In 1964 the first commercial shipments of bauxite occurred. The organisation has been here for 46-odd years, which is quite a while. Then mining process is relatively simple, but it requires a pre-mining survey, so we actually have to walk the whole of the country in advance of mining. Bauxite is quite different from a lot of other commodities that are mined. In this part of the world at least, bauxite occurs in a layer about three metres deep, so we actually cover quite significant distances when we mine. We do heritage surveys in advance of mining. We have a very simple mining process that involves a truck and a loader. We 'beneficiate' the ore, which means that we run it through a washing plant to take the fines out of it, and we ship it and then we rehabilitate the land.

We are here by virtue of two Indigenous agreements. One of them is an Indigenous land-use agreement and the other one is a different type of agreement. One agreement is with the Indigenous traditional owners of the historic Comalco leases. It is called the Western Cape Communities Coexistence Agreement. This second agreement is the Ely Bauxite Mining Project Agreement. That is the old Alcan lease, which we have acquired through the purchase of Alcan. That is why we have two different agreements. The agreements provide a commitment to economic, education and employment benefits as well as cultural heritage supports and formal consultations between the company and the Indigenous people of the region. In return, that gives the organisation the right to mine the bauxite.

We have a workforce which by the end of this year will be approximately 900 people. Twenty-five per cent of that workforce is female. Just over 20 per cent of it is Indigenous and about 14 per cent is local Aboriginal. We have worked very hard to increase the representation of Indigenous people within the workforce, and we will continue to work very hard to increase the representation of Indigenous people in the workforce.

We have a couple of significant changes that are likely to affect the operation in the coming years. One of them is the Weipa governance review; I understand you talked to the Weipa Town

Authority this morning. There is a working group of the state government, the Weipa Town Authority and Rio Tinto looking at how that might progress over time and to try to get Weipa to be a normal community—whatever that means.

The other one is the south of Embley project. The next major expansion of this operation is for us to go south of the Embley River. That would see a new mine developed at Boyd Point, which is about halfway between here and Aurukun. The initial operating capacity of that new mine will be about 15 million tonnes per year and it will have a mine life of around 40 years. We are currently undertaking a feasibility study including an environmental impact statement on that operation.

In terms of Indigenous employment and training, we have over time tried to increase the number of Indigenous employees within our workforce. We had a particularly difficult period during the end of 2008 to 2009 and we had to reduce our workforce in total. In that process we also reduced the number of Indigenous employees within our workforce, but we maintained the proportion of Indigenous employees within the workforce at that time.

In terms of some of the positives that we have seen and the things that we are getting huge benefit from, we have a very active program of engagement with the local school. We work closely with Don Anderson and his team to ensure that we are doing everything possible to design effective school-to-work pathways, and we are seeing quite a lot of success from that particular focus. We also have an employee support program where we provide additional support to primarily Indigenous workers to make sure that any of their in-work and out-of-work issues can be addressed. It includes managing family support and coaching for some of our leaders.

As part of our recruitment program we use a mechanism called assessment centres. We bring large groups of people in and we assess their competence or their likely capability to perform within the workplace. We have initiated a process where we are doing Indigenous-only assessment centres, because we believe that the Indigenous workers will perform better in that environment and we will be able to see their skills better in that environment than we potentially would if they were in a mixed assessment centre.

We have established an Indigenous training and development team, which has a specific focus on mentoring of Indigenous staff, and we have looked to try and develop what we think are relatively innovative approaches to Indigenous employment. One of those is our Destinations program. A Destinations program is specifically dedicated to employment of people who are from the Aurukun community, specifically because we have had significant challenges over time in employing those people in our business. It is made up of a number of phases and it has quite a significant pre-work component that helps them with any life skills or work skill issues that they might have prior to bringing them into the workplace.

Senator BOYCE—Would you explain to the committee what you mean by ‘significant challenges’?

Mrs Scarini—When people come to us through that program, essentially they have to have expressed interest. So they are keen to get a job and want to come and work for us. When they come to us through that program, typically they will have significant health challenges. So there

will be a number of weeks where people on the program—for instance, the program that we use down in Myuma—will work one on one with these individuals to help them overcome some of those issues. In some cases it is quite severe scabies and things like that, which they have just because of living community life. They also can come with quite significant addiction issues, and so there needs to be some support for them in the initial phase of the program to work through that. They also do not come with the same level of life skills, if you like. They do not know about good nutrition, necessarily. They do not know that you have to get up and make yourself breakfast in the morning if you are going to do a full day's work. They do not have bank accounts, necessarily. We help them work through those sorts of issues. It requires quite a bit of one-on-one support. So that is the Destinations program

We have a range of challenges. Indigenous employee retention is one of them. We have a whole range of reasons why we have a relatively high turnover, but we continue to work on that. We have a high turnover rate of our Indigenous staff. Obtaining increased representation of people from the Aurukun community in our workforce is also a significant challenge for us, and we will continue to work on that. Getting people to move from entry-level positions to leadership roles is another significant challenge that we have with our Indigenous employees. There are a whole range of issues there, including a lack of desire to take on a leadership role, even when people demonstrate capability. Finding university educated Indigenous candidates is a challenge, as well as encouraging kids to take up pathways that would lead to their getting a degree and then holding a senior role in the organisation.

Education levels are a challenge—that is, the literacy and numeracy levels of people coming into our workplace. There is quite a significant change required in the transition from community life to mining life. It is quite different to live in one of the local communities than it is to live in the Weipa community, and some people struggle with that. Some do not; some do. Typically, the challenges are around family who are not participating in the workplace—that is, family coming to visit and causing difficulties. There are also issues with having birth certificates and drivers licenses. There is also having built up over time a regular work ethic—that is, a regular, I must go to work for so many hours a day type of ethic.

One thing we are currently working on is looking at whether we can address some of those outside-of-the-gate challenges more effectively. So we are looking at how we can put together programs that are, essentially, almost pre-work. We are looking at people coming into the Destinations program. We have not had a huge success rate from that. We think that it is a great program, but there needs to be preparatory work before they come into the Destinations program.

We have a series of models for work readiness that are in place that, frankly, are not hitting the mark, so we are looking to influence those wherever we can so that we can get products that actually help people to be work ready and able to participate in the workplace. One way we are doing that is through our work with the Regional Partnerships agreement. That agreement was signed in 2008. The signatories to that agreement are Rio Tinto Alcan, the chamber of commerce, the state and federal governments, the local Aboriginal councils and the Western Cape Communities Trust on behalf of the WCCCA, the Western Cape Communities Coexistence Agreement.

The objective of that agreement is, to the fullest possible extent, to overcome Indigenous disadvantage. Indigenous people are supported to take up opportunities in the mainstream economy. The aim was to place 50 additional local Indigenous people in full-time mainstream jobs within the Western Cape York region each year for the next five years. The initial focus areas for that group were regional transport, youth development, work readiness and business development.

I think it is fair to say that that group has gone through quite a bit of soul searching in its time of being in existence. We had a review session late last year where we invited senior level bureaucrats from the state and federal governments to come together with us, the local stakeholders of that agreement, to have a think about and talk about how we could do better, because we have not made substantial inroads.

There was a refocusing of priorities to looking at major projects in the region, employment and training, and service delivery and coordination across the communities. Those focus areas were chosen for their ability to leverage employment and training. If there is a knowledge of major projects that are happening in the region, both government and private, then there is the ability for local businesses to participate in those projects and there is a higher likelihood that local businesses will have local Aboriginal people working for them than if we have a large building company from outside the region come in and deliver those projects. So there was a desire locally to be able to participate in any project work and, through that, make sure that we are maximising Indigenous employment. There has been agreement to appoint a coordinator for that agreement, and that is state and federally funded. Rio Tinto Alcan will be hosting that role. The role will report, however, to the steering committee.

But there is a need for greater engagement and commitment from the state and federal governments in that process. I think we gained that commitment in the November meeting. In the March meeting we saw some of that fall away. What we were seeking was to have people who actually could make decisions around very innovative ways of looking at the problems that we are facing. If we have mid-level bureaucrats attending that steering committee, that is not going to get us anything different to what we have at the moment.

I want to spend a little bit of time talking about the residential rehab centre. There is a residential rehab centre that is—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Before you talk about that, could I just perhaps ask a question? How many Indigenous people in Rio, or previously Comalco, are there at your level in the company?

Mrs Scarini—I would say there would be zero.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Sorry?

Mrs Scarini—None at my level.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—What about at Mr Schafferius's level? Is he at the same level as you?

Mrs Scarini—No, Mr Schafferius works for me.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—At his level then.

Mrs Scarini—There would be very few. I would say none. Within Rio Tinto Alcan Weipa, we have one Indigenous person at what we call our stratum 2 level, which is the level that reports to Kamball, and then the rest of our Indigenous employees work at stratum 1. That is one of our really significant challenges, attracting—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—What is stratum 1?

Mrs Scarini—Entry-level positions, mining operator roles, maintainer roles—so tradespeople.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You said 20 per cent per cent of your workforce is Indigenous?

Mrs Scarini—Yes.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—And local Indigenous is about—

Mrs Scarini—14.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Fourteen per cent. Of the 20 per cent, how many have worked with you for more than five years?

Mrs Scarini—There would be a proportion.

Mr Schafferius—We have certainly taken on a number in the last three years as part of the expansion—part of focus was definitely to ensure that Indigenous people were part of that. For greater than five years, so pre-2005, there would be a proportion.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Can I cut to the chase, and I am not being offensive, certainly not to you and not to Rio or Comalco. Your presentation was very delicately worded: you have ‘challenges’ here and ‘challenges’ there—you have got a lot of ‘challenges’ all the way through. Not being quite as skilfully delicate, I will say: it is just not working, is it? Why isn’t it?

Mrs Scarini—I think we could demonstrate that it is working over time. One in five of our employees are Indigenous. That is a hell of a lot better than in a lot of other organisations. As I said, we have a lot of challenges working in this region. It is easier for us to place Indigenous people rather than local Aboriginal people into a role, straight from application into our business. Where we are taking local Aboriginal people, typically we have to take them through a very significant development pathway to get them to a point where they actually can take a full-time job.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Okay. I have been coming up here for 20 years now and I heard what you have told me 20 years ago. Things have not changed much. As I said, that is not a criticism. I am trying to identify something, and perhaps you just said it. You are doing

everything you possibly can and perhaps it is working a little bit, but it is not really as successful as you would hope it would be and we would hope it would be. What needs to be done to have the result you would like to see but you are having a lot of 'challenges' getting there? Do you have a view on that?

Mrs Scarini—I think the regional partnerships agreement is a good vehicle to basically change the way we think about this in this region. It has all the right players involved in it. If we get government support at the right level we can actually think about and look at innovative programs, not the same old: 'Let's do some prework development,' or get a chainsaw ticket or whatever. No, that is actually not helpful to get people into paid, long-term employment.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Let me put this to you. If the Indigenous people came to you well-educated and with good life skills, would it then be much easier for you to start them?

Mrs Scarini—Absolutely.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—So that is the underlying problem and the challenge that you face. It is really nothing that you can do. It is what happens before they get to you.

Mrs Scarini—Having said that, we do not accept that there is nothing we can do, so we work very hard at trying to do something about those issues.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Yes, I am sure.

Senator ADAMS—I have some questions about governance issues and where you are going in the future. You were talking about your planning committee. I am interested in where Rio is going and how you see the community of Weipa in perhaps another 10 years.

Mrs Scarini—We are working through the governance review process. That process should give us very good information on which to make decisions about the future governance of this community. One of my significant concerns there is the viability of a stand-alone Weipa community—and I suspect that will be the strong desire of a number of stakeholders—and the financial sustainability of that. But I think we have a good process there with the right stakeholders looking at it to take it forward. It is important for us to look at this. It is long past time that we had a normal community in this part of the world. We have very significant government representation in the community. There are 400 bureaucrats employed in Weipa who are permanently based here. That is about half the size of my workforce. So a significant proportion of people employed in this region is not working for us, and there is a lot of interest from other companies in coming into this region. We need to look at how we can take the town to becoming a normal community and having its own separate governance from Rio Tinto.

Senator ADAMS—We have had evidence about the rate base—$4 million was mentioned. What other businesses are interested? In respect of the viability of it, without your company, how would they actually work? Would you be providing all the infrastructure for the water, the sewerage, the roads and all of that? If that were to revert to the Weipa community authority, how would they do it? They wouldn't.

Mrs Scarini—The governance review process will look at what needs to happen there: whether we can have a sustainable community and what alternative models might be explored as well. There were two models that came out of the governance forum held in the middle of last year. One was Weipa as a stand-alone community; the second one was Weipa combined with the Cook shire. Those two models have not been assessed yet in terms of their financial sustainability. That work is going to occur in the next couple of months. We are working on a process to identify what is going to be possible going forward. We are supporting that process to make sure that we are doing appropriate risk assessments. We are utilising, where we can, research that has been done on sustainable communities and making sure that people can get to a point where we can all make an informed decision about what the future of this community needs to be.

Senator ADAMS—When do you think you will have that master plan?

Mrs Scarini—We have a decision point that we have proposed for around September this year. When we get to the end of the phase 1 activities there is an expectation that we will go to the community for some of their input. So, once we have got information about the viability of the various models and we have a model that people want to take forward, they will put that the community and see what the community wants.

Senator ADAMS—We do not have a map of it. How far from Weipa is the new mine that you were talking about?

Mrs Scarini—As I said, it is about halfway between here and Aurukun.

Senator ADAMS—Yes, I know. But how many kilometres away is it?

Mrs Scarini—Aurukun is about 80 kilometres south of here, so it is about 40 kilometres as the crow flies, but as the crow flies is not a simple thing. That mine would be serviced by the Weipa community. We are not setting up another community.

Senator ADAMS—That was my reason for asking the question.

Mrs Scarini—No, we are not setting up another community. Weipa will be the base for this operation and all of the models that we are developing for employment in that mine are around people being based in Weipa. Alternatively, we are at present exploring people being based in Aurukun and being able to work in that mine.

Senator ADAMS—Do you have land in Aurukun to put the housing on?

Mrs Scarini—We do not have land in Aurukun to put housing on, but we developed the EIS with an assumption that everybody would be based in Weipa. There was a very strong expression from the Aurukun community that they wanted us to include in our EIS how people can participate directly in the mine, either through business ventures or through direct employment, and still live in the Aurukun community. We are currently looking at that.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—On that, would you use the port infrastructure in Weipa?

Mrs Scarini—The current proposal is to construct an additional port.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Down there? So you would not then have to transport the ore body by road or rail up to here. Okay, thanks.

Senator ADAMS—My question is on the construction. A lot of the tenders that are left, especially with what work has been going on at the school, say that a certain percentage of the workers have to be local Indigenous people. Have you been overseeing any of those projects or been involved in any way?

Mrs Scarini—No, only through my participation in the chamber of commerce. There is a lot of concern about the fact that many local companies have not shared in those works to the extent that probably would be envisaged by the clauses that are in those tenders. That is one of the objectives of the Regional Partnerships agreement: to try to turn that around a bit and provide some support to local businesses so that they can participate better.

Senator ADAMS—So they have applied for the tenders but not been successful?

Mrs Scarini—Yes.

Senator FURNER—I will return to the subject of the 20 per cent Indigenous employment. How many classification levels would you have in your agreements or awards—whatever you operate under?

Mrs Scarini—In our organisation, in terms of different levels of employees, including my own, we would have seven or eight.

Senator FURNER—How many of those would Indigenous staff be employed in?

Mrs Scarini—All bar two.

Senator FURNER—So there is a mixture of labouring, trades—those sorts of—

Mrs Scarini—Clerical, labouring, trades—yes.

Senator FURNER—Could you take it on notice and give us a breakdown of how many are employed in each of those areas.

Mrs Scarini—Yes, we can do that.

CHAIR—Including whether they are Aboriginal or local Aboriginal, rather than just Indigenous employees?

Mrs Scarini—Yes, we can do both. One of the things that have been really successful in recent years has been our apprentice intake. We have taken on 65 apprentices over the past four years. Twenty-one of those have been Indigenous, so that is quite a significant proportion. That has obviously been a strong focus of the business. We take on 10 to 15 apprentices a year. We take on 10 graduates or so a year. We take on up to 30 trainees a year. The traineeship program

we have going is purely for local Aboriginal people. That is an 18-month program that allows people to become competent in a job and transition to a full-time paid role. Obviously they get paid during their 18-month traineeship. Obviously you would be familiar with the concept of an apprentice. It is a four-year apprenticeship. We also have an active graduate program. We have not been successful in attracting Indigenous people into that graduate program as such. However, we do a vacation program every year over the Christmas holidays, and we have had Indigenous people participate in that vacation program. So we are keen to try to expand where Indigenous people are represented in our business.

Senator FURNER—Where do the apprentices that are employed do their tertiary education? In Weipa?

Mrs Scarini—In Cairns.

Senator FURNER—How often is that required?

Mrs Scarini—They do one block a year—do they?

Mr Schafferius—One to two, depending on the trade that they are studying. There is a full program with our provider that is based in Cairns. We send our apprentices down. The provider that we use has quite a good pastoral care program as well. The apprentices then do all the study. It is basically next to the TAFE, so they can monitor them daily and provide that support back on site as well.

CHAIR—Are there local Aboriginal people in that program as well?

Mrs Scarini—Yes.

CHAIR—They also went to school in Cairns?

Mr Schafferius—Some of them would have gone to school in Weipa and others may have gone to boarding school.

Senator FURNER—I have one last question. You mentioned retention numbers. What are the issues associated with that?

Mrs Scarini—There are many issues associated with it. Working in a business like Rio Tinto is quite different from working in many other businesses. It can be quite a difficult and confronting experience given the standards that we apply, particularly around workplace health and safety. So that can be part of it. The skills and knowledge of our leaders to lead Indigenous members of their staff can sometimes be an impediment. Typically family issues contribute quite significantly to people making decisions to move on. Typically a member of their family is unwell and they make a decision to leave their job to support that person. It is a pretty complex issue; there are lots of factors. We regularly look at what all the issues that are causing people to leave are, and we make sure that we are addressing those issues.

Senator MOORE—There was a lot in your opening statement, so there could be questions that we have to come back to you on after we consume it all, but you mentioned particular issues

with employment in Aurukun. Were they the things you were talking about later with the questions about expansion or are there other issues with working with Aurukun?

Mrs Scarini—Aurukun community is a long way from Weipa. The Aurukun community probably has a different culture—what a great word!—to the Napranum community or the Mapoon community. Often people who come into our workforce from Aurukun experience quite different challenges from people who are from those other communities. Typically those challenges are around family. The alcohol reforms that occurred in this part of the country over the last few years have certainly meant that we have a lot of migration into Weipa because Weipa is a community where you can freely access alcohol. If you have a family member who is currently based in Weipa for work purposes, family will think that that is okay for them to come and impose on that family member. That gives that employee quite significant issues because they have to manage the behaviour of their family, which is often not an easy thing for them to do, but we require them to have good behaviour themselves—so they cannot indulge in parties and lots of drinking if they have to work. They have to present to work sober. Also, they cannot have other people coming into the community to disrupt other people's sleep patterns et cetera, because other people have to be able to come to work fit to work and be able to perform their duties. So there are a range of social issues that have arisen over time as a result of some of those changes in the alcohol reforms.

Senator MOORE—I was just interested because you made a point of that. In terms of attracting people to come and work for Rio, I know that you do a lot of work within schools. Do you have a high application rate? You mentioned earlier there was a difference between people from the local area and people from outside. I got the impression that there were a number of Aboriginal or Islander people who apply. Is that something you face up here—that people hear that there are job opportunities and apply from other areas? I am interested in the percentage of people who are seeking employment rather than people that you are offering employment to. Do you know what I mean, in terms of people who want to work for you?

Mrs Scarini—We have sufficient numbers of people apply for roles, so the desire to come and work for us is certainly strong. I would not say that holds true for professional-level roles. Really our goal is to get people throughout the whole organisation who are Indigenous or who are local Aboriginal. We do not have the same success rate for professionally qualified roles. But we have sufficient candidates. We then have a requirement to go through and assess those candidates in terms of their ability to meet our basic prerequisites. Often we knock out quite a substantial number of people on those prerequisites. However, it seems to be getting better. As times goes on, we seem to be getting more and more people who actually are coming to us applying for jobs. We had 95 applicants for the recent 15-odd roles that we had for trainees. We have two intakes a year for trainees, with 15 roles each, and we had 95 applicants for the last intake.

CHAIR—I do not know if you have read it, but the Rio submission in 2008 to this committee was most comprehensive and useful. Given the huge investment you make in training, trying to keep people after you have made that sort of investment in time and money is obviously essential. Obviously it is easy for local people to go back to where they were before they started—they just go out the door. What policies do you think the Commonwealth government has that could be changed to ensure that is not as easy and there is some leverage there, talking specifically about the breaching arrangements? Anecdotally I have heard that people basically

step straight out of a job—I have certainly heard that in other parts of the world—and, for whatever reason, are able to move straight back into a level of comfort and get the same range of benefits they had before. Could you make some observations about Weipa in that regard and with respect to potential breach arrangements? What do people think about that? Perhaps you could make some suggestions across the board in terms of ensuring that we have some retention and in terms of what role government could play in that regard.

Mrs Scarini—I do not think that is a big issue for our business. I do not think that people are driven to leave employment because they have some wonderful safety net sitting back in the community. Is that what you are implying?

CHAIR—Not necessarily. You have a culture and a clearly articulated process to have local Aboriginal people working for you, yet there are extremely low numbers. That has all been acknowledged. I am just wondering about what sort of leverage there is to encourage people who actually live in the community here to come off what I am calling the comfort zone. It has been put to me by many Indigenous people that they are quite comfortable within that. Do breaching arrangements occur? You must have a close working relationship with job providers in the community. It is not only about people leaving and going back but also about recruitment in the first place.

Mrs Scarini—I am not sure I am going to be able to give you what you are looking for there. There is sufficient incentive for people to take up employment with us; however, there is quite a significant threshold to overcome from living in a community to going to work for Rio Tinto. But I think people see, 'If I could get that sort of a job that would be good and benefit me, my family, my children et cetera.' So there is an incentive to take up paid employment. Similarly, I have always assumed that there is a disincentive to give up paid employment; however, in a community situation people make that work. They have done that for many years, sometimes many decades. If they have to give up their job because of a perceived concern, a family pressure issue or something, then I imagine they see that as something they can do.

Mr Schafferius—More specifically around employment and training, one of the areas that we have been focusing on more recently is the incentive for government agencies to partner more closely with industry around outcomes. Certainly the funding model for some of the agencies is linked to outcomes, but the outcomes are for a shorter period of time, maybe a 12-week commitment. Generally people can get through three months—that is how long our mine operator induction takes, for example. What we want to see are long-term, sustainable behavioural change and long-term employment. Certainly there would be an opportunity there, and we are working around building better partnerships with those agencies to see how we can tailor their work and their activities to be more aligned with mining related requirements, particularly around drivers licence, alcohol and other drugs and those sorts of things, to ensure that people are ready and also committed over a longer period time.

CHAIR—So you would be applying the same strict liability to those training programs as to real employment?

Mr Schafferius—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you feel that is very useful?

Mr Schafferius—It helps to bridge the transition from community life, from working for a council or local businesses in a community one or two days a week—the old CDEP, I suppose you would call it—to a 12-hour, four-on four-off, day-night roster driving trucks. It is a significant change for some people. We are looking at how to make smaller transitions to help them on that journey, and that is just to get to entry-level roles such as truck driving or labouring type roles. That is part of the work we are doing through partnership with the agencies because, at the end of the day, there is a lot of funding there for agencies in the community, which is great. This is trying to make sure that that funding is being directed to the best outcomes for the people in the area.

Mrs Scarini—We talked before about literacy and numeracy levels, driver education and licences. Those things are currently barriers to having people employed. Making sure kids attend school is a big one for us. If they come out of school, year 12, and they have participated in school and have reasonable literacy and numeracy, we can employ them and get them into a job. Our focus at the moment is strengthening the school-to-work intake. That is a challenge—that word of mine again!—because we do not have a lot of roles for young people, but we are working to try to bring them straight into our business from school because we are having high success rates if we get kids straight out of school. They have some discipline around attending school, so bringing them into the workplace straight after that seems to be quite successful.

We need to do something around alcohol management. The addiction issues in communities are very debilitating. The residential rehab centre that was proposed for Cape York, and actually for this region, would be of great benefit to this area. There is some talk at the moment that it will go to another part of Cape York, which I do not think would necessarily help us.

CHAIR—Mr Schafferius, you mentioned the size of the shifts, which are across the board particularly in the mining industry. We are talking about intergenerational unemployment, and for the first job someone has they have to do a 12-hour shift. We understand the challenges with that. I understand there has been some talk about camp maintenance and being able to do a six-hour shift, particularly to attract Indigenous women into that process. Is there any capacity to have smaller or shorter shifts as a transitional process, or does the system not cater for that very well?

Mrs Scarini—We have shorter shifts. We have a seven-hour, meal rotation type shift, which is a bit of a stepping stone, and we bring people through that. Once they cope well on that and they express interest in going on the 12-hour, we say, 'Right, off you go, move onto the 12 hour shift.' So there is a pathway there for people. Certainly the traineeships have a shorter length of time—we are not putting people straight on the 12 hours—so we do give people that migration, if you like. But, largely, our shift pattern is a 24-hour-a-day operation, split up as 12-hour, day-night. People appreciate that, including people from surrounded communities, because it means they get four days off—it is four days on, four days off—and so they can go back to their community if they want to. It is actually a quite attractive shift pattern, if people can make the transition. We have a number of mechanisms that allow people to get through that transition period.

Senator MOORE—I have a question about employing people with criminal records. If people have criminal records—and they are easy to get—as long as they meet your requirements and come in that would be okay?

Mrs Scarini—If they meet the base requirements and if, once they come into the workplace, their behaviour is okay, they are more than welcome.

Senator MOORE—There is no blockage?

Mrs Scarini—No. They are more than welcome to be part of our workforce.

Senator ADAMS—How many of your prospective employees fail due to health reasons?

Mr Schafferius—Certainly a lot fewer now. Certainly alcohol and other drugs were a significant barrier as little as five years ago. We have found that the pre-employment medical process is not a huge barrier. It still knocks out somewhere between 10 and 20 per cent at times for some of the particular roles, but it was certainly up a lot higher than that five years ago.

Senator ADAMS—Do you do hearing tests?

Mr Schafferius—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—That is something that in another committee we have been looking at with Indigenous people. Hearing has been quite a problem for them right from the start, as babies, then for their trying to learn at school, dropping out of school and then trying to get a job later on, so I was just wondering how that went. Drugs and alcohol as well—do you get many failures and are they a one-off, so that if they are caught that is it, or are they given mentoring and another chance?

Mrs Scarini—Once we have an Indigenous person working in our workforce we work very hard to retain them in our workforce. We have very high standards, though, and we have to have high standards. We have been looking at all sorts of innovative ways to encourage people to overcome their addiction problem and then come back into the workplace. Typically, if you get a high reading or a failure, if you like, on the test, there is a requirement to be off work until you can demonstrate that your levels have come back into an acceptable region. If the reading is for alcohol, that can be quite a short period of time. If it is for THC or marijuana then it can be a longer period of time before you are able to come back into the workplace. But we have a manageable policy there and people generally understand how that works, and we make sure that people get other support on that addiction if they have an addiction issue. It is quite manageable. People understand that there is an expectation if you are working within our operation that you do not indulge in drugs and alcohol. I am sure there are plenty of people trying to work out how to get around that as well.

Senator MOORE—That policy is a formal policy for employees—

Mrs Scarini—Yes.

Senator MOORE—and lots of non-Indigenous employees get caught as well?

Mrs Scarini—Yes, absolutely, and we give everyone similar support. We are probably more accommodating of our Indigenous employees in terms of, if you like, the innovative approaches

we might look at. We might give them a period of time off to go and deal with some family issues that they have told us are contributing to their dependence—anyway, we work with them.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mrs Scarini and Mr Schafferius. I thank you both.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I thought you were going to go on when I stopped you about some other issue. I wonder if there is a moment to briefly give us your message on that.

Mrs Scarini—I was going to talk about the rehab centre, and I did make the point in another comment. I think I have largely covered all of the material that I had here.

Senator ADAMS—So you are very supportive of it being here?

Mrs Scarini—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—Would Rio be putting any funding towards it?

Mrs Scarini—Rio would not necessarily be putting funding. We certainly have identified a location for it and we would be very happy to work with the government to work through traditional owner issues around that location. There would be a need to negotiate with the TOs of that area. You work through the process.

Senator ADAMS—Would there be a problem in getting qualified staff to deal with the issues?

Mrs Scarini—I do not think the staffing is the impediment. I suspect that it is around locating it. Tony might know more on the rehab centre.

Senator BOYCE—Sorry, I did not hear what you said there.

Mrs Scarini—Staffing it is not going to be the impediment. It is about finding a suitable location for it.

CHAIR—Given that the ICC is appearing before us this afternoon, no doubt that will be one of their questions. Thank you very much. I will just put this on notice. I have not got the support of my committee yet, but your submission in 2008 will very shortly be dated by about two years. Given the very prescriptive nature of some of the recommendations, and particularly some of the programs that are working and the processes, I hope to be writing to you shortly to request, if you have the opportunity, that you have a look at it and update it again, particularly in some of those areas that I think would now be past. I think a refreshed submission of that nature would be very useful to us. Thank you very much for your contribution today. If there are any further questions you may have for the committee or that the committee has for you, they will be provided on notice through the secretariat. Thank you very much.

Mrs Scarini—No problem. Thank you.

CHAIR—Could the remaining people stay in the room for a moment. Tony, I might like you to exit. We are going to have a quick, five-second private meeting with the secretariat on some of the process that goes on.

Proceedings suspended from 1.10 pm to 1.31 pm

O'BRIEN, Ms Alanah Patricia, Private capacity

WALLIS, Ms Gloria, Private capacity

CHAIR—Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has previously been provided to you. Would you like to start by providing an opening statement?

Ms O'Brien—I am very pleased to be here, despite the last-minute glitches and clarifications that were required. I think the business of this committee is really important. I think it is really important that you are visiting communities to also gather information from people on the ground and gain some further perspective on the realities of health issues for Indigenous communities in remote areas. I hope that what I contribute will be of some value to better outcomes for those communities.

CHAIR—There seems to be some change in the terminology in mental health, which I am interested in. You talk about the social and emotional wellbeing of communities. That appears to be in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sense more than in a mainstream sense. In the mainstream we still have data, for example, that is collected on particular presentations whereas it appears to me as a lay observer we are now moving towards slightly a different dataset and dealing with it in a slightly different way. As you are working right here on the spot, can you talk about the changes that are happening in that regard?

Ms O'Brien—There is generally an emerging better consciousness of the concept of social and emotional wellbeing within mental health services. I am allowed to say that, given that I am here in a personal capacity. I think this is out there in the broader consciousness too. Mental health has become more out there in the public dialogue. Social and emotional wellbeing is the core of good health. Without social and emotional wellbeing there is no health in a physical sense and the relationship is starting to be better understood I believe.

The term 'social and emotional wellbeing' has its genesis in a lot of different areas, but has come to mean a wholeness of health and wellbeing rather than an absence of mental illness. You will probably be familiar with some of these concepts because they have been out there in the public dialogue for awhile. Within communities here it is an accepted term around a feeling of community and social inclusion and having a sense of personal agency and connectedness with one's important others. In that sense we use it within Health to understand a broader concept of health than just different areas of health like good coronary health, good mental health or good maternal and child health. We try very much to use it as a framework for all of our health programs.

It is always a challenge to move people out of silos, especially where you have specialised areas of health. We are trying to incorporate a social and emotional wellbeing element into everything, especially with regard to the very early intervention and prevention and health promotion end of the spectrum of health care. I am not quite sure what specifics you might like.

CHAIR—In some of the stuff I have been reading lately, mental health—completely—is not referred to as mental health anymore. It is now referred to as social and emotional wellbeing. In terms of reporting, there is a difference between some levels of serious psychosis and mild depression. I am just wondering if, having them all put under that umbrella, is in terms of reporting. I cannot speak for the committee, but as a parliamentarian I understood what mental health was. I just want to know about this new term that is emerging that covers mental health completely in some of the stuff I have been reading. The advice was that that is now how you need to talk about it. Do I have the clear understanding that it is about the full spectrum of mental health issues that I talked about before? I was just a little confused about some of the new vernacular.

Ms O'Brien—One of the interesting things that have happened in the language that is used is that often when people speak about mental health, people hear 'mental health services for people with a mental illness' and they get the two confused. I know that the terminology in a lot of areas of health promotion has become confused as well. One of the key priorities within the mental health plan, which you may be familiar with, is about mental health promotion and prevention of mental illness. It is only recently that they have been articulating that in a very precise way. They used to say 'mental health promotion and prevention', which is actually an anomaly in that you are preventing mental health. You are promoting mental health and preventing mental illness. So that articulation has become a lot more precise of late. I am not too sure if you are familiar with Auseinet. It is like a clearing house and evidence based research. There has been some recent training, which I was privileged to attend with some of my colleagues, around how we improve literacy in that area and that difficulty with the language. It used to be 'psychiatric services' that had a stigma so they are now called 'mental health services'. But perhaps that is a bit of an anomaly as well, because you are saying 'mental health services' but mental health services, as we know them, generally tend to cater to people who have a mental illness. In a sense the words have got a bit mixed.

CHAIR—What things are working really well in your field and what sorts of things are not? What sort of advice can you give us about the directions the good programs are going in and perhaps the ones that are not so good? Where are we getting their resources wrong?

Ms O'Brien—I think the focus on social and emotional wellbeing is a starting point, for universal health promotion and prevention is where we need to target our energies and resources, and we need to incorporate that into all areas, not just within mental health services or just within a particular government department that might have responsibility in that area. It has to be an integrated part of all human services and a recognition of the various social determinants like housing and education and how they impact on people's social and emotional wellbeing. A lot of the work that has been done across government departments looking at base funding and at program development is, I think, a positive move. The more energy we put into bringing all that altogether is, I think, going to be useful. Two of the areas that communities have been working on here—and Gloria can perhaps describe some of that stuff; I am thinking of the social and emotional wellbeing events that were health promotion and community capacity and community cohesion focused that we have run here and which we have started to roll out across Cape communities—have been really useful in a lot of ways. Looking at improving mental health literacy with regard to some of the programs such as mental health first aid, which is being nationally rolled out, has made a difference, and having enough resources to systematically roll that out long term in a sustainable way.

CHAIR—Do you think most of the front-line people in Weipa would have done that course?

Ms O'Brien—I would not say most. We have a fair amount of turnover of staff, so it is an ongoing thing. One of the challenges is dedicated resources not only to roll it out as a stand-alone course but to incorporate it with our other service development and workforce development issues. I know some of the courses that we ran here were attended by community members, service providers, counsellors, Queensland Health staff—

CHAIR—Do you think it would be useful to mandate things like ambulance officers—though less so for them—fire officers and police officers? Do you think we should mandate a first aid course as an occupational health and safety prerequisite?

Ms Wallis—It could be.

Ms O'Brien—I would not know enough about the implications of that or what other courses they may have. Some of the interaction we have with police services in mental health intervention programs, which you perhaps would have heard of—

Ms Wallis—Because of our remoteness we would need something like that mandated.

Ms O'Brien—It is similar to some of the work they are doing in undergraduate training in universities. A greater component is about social and emotional wellbeing and mental health within undergraduate training programs.

Senator BOYCE—For health professionals?

Ms O'Brien—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—All health professionals?

Ms O'Brien—No, it is a broader kind of workforce issue. They are constantly advocating for more of it to be incorporated into the training curriculum.

Senator BOYCE—Are you talking about for all degrees?

Ms O'Brien—From some quarters, yes, the preference would be that that occur. Certainly in my personal capacity as a citizen and member of the community I think it should be incorporated into school. I think every individual would benefit from a greater understanding of those issues and how they impact on their lives and the lives of their families and communities, but that is a personal opinion.

CHAIR—All of my staff have done the course, and they felt it was enlightening and did not take a huge amount of time.

Ms O'Brien—The plan from the mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention program that another colleague and I did was to start with the regional health council and the executive team so that they have a better understanding of how it impacts on their service

planning and evaluation. In that sense it is just within a work environment, but I think there should be a better understanding of those issues across the board.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator ADAMS—Could you cover what area it is that you cover and also what area the council that you were just speaking about covers?

Ms O'Brien—The service here in Weipa covers from Mapoon, which is just north of here, Weipa and Napranum, which is where Gloria is from; down to Aurukun, Coen and Lockhart; Pormpuraaw, Kowanyama and down further on the east coast to Cooktown; and Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal and Laura communities. There are 12 communities in all. Two of them are non-Indigenous communities. Coen is also a township rather than an Indigenous community, but it has a large Indigenous population.

Senator ADAMS—How many staff service those communities—how many Aboriginal health workers, psychologists, psychiatrists? I am from Western Australia, so I am really not familiar with what regions of Queensland Health are what. I am trying to get a picture of how you are staffed and what level of staff you have to cover this area.

Ms O'Brien—Without reference to all my FTE data, that would be a bit difficult. I can certainly speak for—

Senator ADAMS—Just the general idea.

Ms O'Brien—For mental health and drug and alcohol services, with the district restructure which happened a couple of years ago, Cooktown and those communities became part of this district—it used to belong to Cairns. They are configured as service hubs so we have teams based in Weipa and Cooktown which then service the outlying and remote communities. Altogether the team has about 24 staff, some of whom are nurses, allied health and Indigenous health workers across mental health and ATODs. We have an integrated program which is responsive to our demographic, community expectations and understanding of social and emotional well-being. It is not just about mental health issues; it is about substance misuse and also in response to Queensland health directions around integration of those services to meet the high level of dual diagnosis and co-morbidity.

Our structure within this district is to bring those teams together. They are very small teams, given that they have such a large area to cover and a significant amount of time is spent travelling to the remote communities. That loading, on top of additional loadings for a largely non-Indigenous service provider group to what are largely Indigenous communities, adds other challenges for those staff. Also there is engagement with communities, finding their feet, gaining acceptance and respect, and understanding of community and community ways. So it is not quite the same as the team in Cairns which drives down the road to their community. There are additional loadings on the number of FTEs we have which are inherent in the work they do. They travel out to those communities on a regular basis, usually overnight, and they stay in the local community to follow up clients and to do a range of things, whether they are clinical services, health promotion, liaison, and engaging, working with other services to support what they are doing, a fairly wide remit although the core business is to provide case managed

services for people with a serious mental illness or people with the significant substance misuse problem.

Senator ADAMS—To get someone out, if you do not have the expertise or the facilities here to deal with them, how do you go about that as far as your local community emergency services coming in to help are concerned? Can you give us an idea of how you would deal with someone who is perhaps out of control and very difficult to deal with and is not going to be able to be kept here?

Ms O'Brien—We try to take the approach of the least restrictive response for people, to gather as much information as we can around what support might be available in community to support a person, depending on the risk issues and their need for secondary or tertiary specialists intervention, should that be required, all things considered, and what support is there may be. Sometimes the family support is worn out because they have been dealing with it for quite some time. They would go to Cairns. We would work a combination of things with our partners. RFDS provide the evacuation service. They may spend some time in the hospital to settle and to be safe and to gain further assessment before they are flown down to Cairns where the in-patient unit provides the service. We also have people who go further afield to Townsville rehabilitation services and in-patient forensics services, should that be the need. The hospitals and primary healthcare centres provide a lot of support, given that they are there 24/7. Built-in capacity around mental health and how to support people who have serious issues and risk issues is an area of great importance.

Senator ADAMS—What about when they come back? How is that dealt with?

Ms O'Brien—They come back and get followed up by the team and in relationship with the people on the ground.

Ms Wallis—Through us health workers.

Ms O'Brien—The health workers are a critical link because they are the people who are able to build trust and relationships, advise the non-Indigenous staff about what is culturally appropriate, link in with families and promote the benefit of services to people who might not otherwise engage or have a great health literacy, sometimes. The continuity of care is always a challenge and of great importance—trying to link all those services together and keep continuous documentation. It is an interesting area here in that we have so many service partners. We have RFDS and the GP division providing some services as well, and trying to network them to form collaborative networks where we look at service planning, service implementation and evaluation is of great importance to pulling all that together.

Senator ADAMS—Do you have a psychologist or any counselling service here in Weipa?

Ms O'Brien—There are a number of services. Rio Tinto employ a counselling service specifically for their employees. We have a contracted part-time service of a psychologist for Queensland Health. That is a very valuable service in that, unlike some of the remote communities, the demographics of Weipa are obviously different. People have completely different socioeconomic resources around accessing the services that they may need, and the profile that they have is not as much social disadvantage—these are employed people who have

a lot of resources at their disposal. So people can access Cairns services or they can access through Rio Tinto. If they are not a Rio Tinto employee they can access, through GPs or through the team, referral on to that psychologist. That and social work services are very important elements of a broader mental health service. Whilst we are mandated to do the core service around serious mental illness and the case management around that, which becomes more and more complex, having other people who can contribute to the spectrum of care at various stages is really important.

Senator ADAMS—Ms Wallis, could you explain your role in your community?

Ms Wallis—I am the senior health worker at the Napranum clinic. I have about five Indigenous health worker staff under me. I work alongside our clinical nurse consultant. There are three or four nurses that work at our clinic, so we are a big clinic. We do mainly outpatients—that is clinical care and primary health care. We go out in our communities and we support the specialist visitors that come in, like the mental health, ATODs—I could go on forever. We are there all the time. Our role is to get our people engaged, to get them to the health services that are in our community but also to interact with people like Alanah to tell them what is happening with our mob and how they can better their services for our mob. We are different; we are not like Aurukun people and we are not like Lockhart people. I feel that is our job. We have to have this ongoing information that can tailor medical services for our people as well.

Senator ADAMS—Do you get disturbed at night much by people coming for help?

Ms Wallis—Personally, yes, but our clinic does not open after hours. It is because we are only seven minutes away from—

Senator ADAMS—No, I mean personally. Often when I have been at communities the health workers have said that they almost become like a private GP because people think, 'Oh, well, too busy to go to the clinic,' and knowing you will be home for tea or something they will come, and then the health worker gets burnt out so they give up the job. Does that happen?

Ms Wallis—It does happen, but no.

Senator ADAMS—You can control it?

Ms Wallis—Yes. There would have been three or four senior health workers before me. Coming into my job, I just wondered: what can we do differently with the problems in front of us? I do not want 10 people coming to my home at night, so this is out there to say: 'Don't bring bubba up to the clinic at 4.30 when we're nearly closing. Come up early and get their Panadol, and also if you don't feel well.' It is just a change around—maybe because of my personality; I do not know—to say, 'There's something not working; there's something wrong,' and I do not want to be disturbed 20 times at night. It is just common sense. We have been working on things like this. I have been a health worker for a bit over 20 years, but, as I said, in the last seven or eight years or 10 years, being a senior health worker is not just going into the job; it is looking at the fact that you are the supervisor for these other health workers and asking: 'What are we doing wrong and what can we do right? I don't want to be having these problems that just linger on, so let's look at it.'

Senator BOYCE—Having been there for that long, were you involved in setting up some of the social and emotional wellbeing programs?

Ms Wallis—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—Tell us about what they do and what difference they have made.

Ms Wallis—I have worked with Ernest Hunter for a good while, over 10 years. What I can see as a Napranum person is that it is changing—for us to be vigilant. It is not just me, a long-time worker. We have got other workers who have been there for 20 years. We continue to be next to the right people because we want that change for our community. Social and emotional wellbeing was never heard of in our communities—for example, STIs, which were called STDs in those days—because of that stigma on people. We said that we needed to change also and look at different approaches.

When we were approached by the Townsville forensic mental health team about three or four years ago and they wanted a social and emotional wellbeing week for Napranum, the first of its kind, we were like: 'A week!' But this is something outside the consult room, the four walls that our mob are always in. The only time you get our mob in there is before court day, so we said: 'Let's look at this approach. We have people who are sick who need our help.' We went down that line and it took us nine months to get that week to happen.

I saw from our community that it was well overdue to have something like that to promote social and emotional wellbeing. It was something that our community really, really grasped. We had people attending a children's psychologist from Townsville. A fellow came up and did one-hour workshops with all the agencies because our kids from our community are in Cleveland in Townsville, sent out to juvenile detention centres, and all the agencies attended those sessions. We had the same with mental health first aid, a two-day workshop in that week. We had clinics with the young kids on self-esteem at the school and in the clinic, and then we had Mary G as an entertainer for the last night. We had well over 500 people attend. That euphoria, that feeling of emotional wellbeing just—

Ms O'Brien—Everybody kind of came and did things. We turned up on the last night and all of the women were there. They cooked all this fabulous food. Nobody had really asked them to. Everybody just did these things. It was wonderful.

Ms Wallis—In our community we joined in to entertain the entertainer. It stirred something in our community. When somebody in crisis is going through a rough time, it is just a matter of putting your hand on their shoulder to hold them while they wait for help to come. That was an eye opener for our mob. It is out of sight, out of mind in the communities.

Senator BOYCE—In a way that would sort of validate people feeling sad, depressed or just generally unhappy. What about the area of real psychosis? What are the main mental illnesses in Napranum?

Ms Wallis—I think they are mainly due to alcohol and drug intake. That is a major cause.

Ms O'Brien—You would probably have the same sort of level of high prevalence disorders like anxiety and depression which in the general population often go unrecognised and untreated. Indigenous communities are no different, one would expect, because of social disadvantage and a whole range of other history issues. Serious psychotic illness is often exacerbated by substance misuse or there is the whole kind of chicken and the egg business with dual diagnosis. There are significant levels of psychotic illness like enduring serious mental illness. I believe you are talking with Ernest Hunter who has been the psychiatrist up here for quite some time. He has like a database in his head. He would probably be able to give you some more robust figures around that than I would dare to give.

Senator BOYCE—I have one other question in that specific area. Are there any cultural differences between the Aboriginal community and non-Aboriginal community in terms of how you view serious mental illness, say schizophrenia?

Ms O'Brien—I think people have written encyclopedias on that question.

Ms Wallis—Most of our mob look after our family.

Senator BOYCE—Is there a stigma to having a mental illness?

Ms Wallis—I cannot really comment on that. Our community look after our mob that are not well. I do not think there is a stigma in that sense of blatantly saying, 'They're off their head and they're mad. Keep away from them.' They integrate as much as anyone else. When anything goes wrong, we are probably the first to know because the family are concerned that something is not right and something is happening. We do have our cultural differences as in our own black medicine. That plays a big role. We do have our witchdoctors that go into the hospitals. Most of our mob do not know the symptoms and signs of schizophrenia. They will get our black witchdoctors to see that fellow and the witchdoctors will tell you if they cannot help you and you need to get a proper doctor. These are the things that happen in our community.

Ms O'Brien—I think, too, the importance of that relationship is really critical. You need to formalise and support those sorts of relationships, otherwise you are trying to do things in isolation and in competition rather than as a collaborative effort across the cultural divide.

Senator BOYCE—If I am convinced that the black witch doctor can help me and you tell me not to see him it is not going to make me much better, is it?

Ms O'Brien—That is right.

Senator BOYCE—You mentioned the juvenile detention centres and working with those. As we all know, there are much higher rates of incarceration of members of Aboriginal communities. What effects do you see back in the community? What can you be doing to try to stop recidivism? And what do you do?

Ms Wallis—There are programs out there, and there is funding that we try to capture through AMR and our PCYC council. When it comes to juvenile stuff, it is about a lot of vandalism in our community. Talking for our community and as a senior health worker in our community, we have a lot of our mob that need to come up for counselling but do not come. They need to attend

appointments but they do not come. They are always sitting there looking at the four walls, repetitive stuff, until court, say, tomorrow and so, 'I better go up for my appointment.' There is also continuing rise in crime.

I am also a councillor on the Napranum Council, and I think I am supposed to speak to you tomorrow with another hat. We as council also sat: 'Are we going to sit and wait until we have riots?' In our community we, hopefully, do not riot. Are we going to wait? All of us have joined together to say, 'Let's get our sporting stuff going for our juvies. Let's get our women active.' These are the programs that, as with health, pitch in with the PCYC council. That is not too bad. It is going okay. We are experimenting. The social and emotional promotional week we had, as I said, stirred up the lot of things.

Senator BOYCE—Has detention dropped? Has the number of people being arrested and sent off decreased?

Ms Wallis—Looking at our community, I think it has decreased.

Ms O'Brien—There is the diversionary activity and community cohesion and things happening, so you have a community of people who live where they feel supported, have things to do and have housing and employment opportunities and all of that.

Ms Wallis—When they pass the juvie age and go on to 18, they now go on to marijuana or drinking rather than petrol-sniffing, because they are at that age. We see them sitting idle and say, 'Okay, we need to do something to get them engaging in the community and so they can feel important,' so that they are not just waiting around to do another criminal act.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—The statistics show that the incidence of mental health disease, as it is broadly called, is much higher in Indigenous communities than in the general community. As you say, there are encyclopaedias about why that might be. As two practitioners here are you able to give your views on why that is so? Why is it worse in Indigenous communities? Is it substance abuse and, if so, why? Would either of you like to chance a comment?

Ms Wallis—I believe so. And there are also the social factors in our communities: we do not have the services that other communities have; we just have to make do with what we have got. Forever and a day we have had overcrowding, communicable diseases, domestic violence—you name it. That is what sits in our community and festers—until we got a big government kick to build 15 houses in so many months. But that should have been done a long time ago.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Let me put this to you: if everyone had a job they liked and were interested in and got some fulfilment from, would that make a difference?

Ms Wallis—I think so, yes. Not many people can be truck drivers; there are only so many positions in your community. Off the top of my head, we have more than 200 females aged between 16 and 55, but there are only seven positions for a receptionist/secretary in the community.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Isn't your community forever condemned with this problem? You said there were fewer than 10 positions for more than 200 young females. What is the solution to that?

Ms Wallis—Training. You don't just sit down as a secretary; you might become something else. We can get them interested and educated in different fields of work.

Ms O'Brien—And further employment opportunities.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I was going to say that it is no good training them if they have nowhere to go when they finish their training.

Ms O'Brien—We need more employment and social enterprise within communities. Communities need to have some say in that and, of course, support to develop other activities and social enterprises within communities so that there are jobs.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Social and economic enterprises.

Ms O'Brien—Yes.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Do have much interaction with the Edward Koch Foundation?

Ms O'Brien—We have in the past. It is probably my clinicians more so than me at the moment. It is a clearinghouse for information and at different times we have liaised with some of their project officers. I have not had a lot to do with them in the last couple of years, but I am aware that they are still out and about.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You have not had much personal experience with them.

Ms O'Brien—No, but it has always been useful.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for the evidence you have provided today. We may have some more questions on notice. Thank you for your appearance today. If you require any clarification about processes, you get in touch with the secretariat and they will provide that information to you.

Proceedings suspended from 2.19 pm to 3.28 pm

BARNES, Mrs Margaret, Chief Executive Officer, Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council

BOSUEN, Ms Bow Lima, Deputy Mayor, Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council

CHEVATHEN, Mr Roy, Mayor, Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council

COCONUT, Mrs Maryann, Councillor, Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council

WALLIS, Ms Gloria, Councillor, Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council

CHAIR—The Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities is holding this meeting as part of its inquiry into regional and remote Indigenous communities. On behalf of the committee, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land on which we meet and pay our respects to elders past and present. Before the committee begins the meeting, I want to make it clear to all meeting participants that the meeting is being recorded. A transcript of the recorded meeting will be produced and the transcript may be made public. Participant comments recorded at and transcribed from this meeting are protected by parliamentary privilege. Any act that disadvantages you as a result of evidence given to this committee is treated as a breach of privilege. In other words, if you are giving evidence and someone tries to humbug you and say it is not a good thing, it is a breach of privilege of the Senate and it is a serious matter. That is why you are protected in giving that evidence. However, I also remind you that giving false or misleading evidence to the committee may constitute contempt of the Senate. If you would prefer that the meeting not be recorded, please advise the committee now. The committee prefer to record the session as it allows us to remember the comments that you make much better and to use them in our next report, which is going to be tabled on 13 May. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mrs Barnes—The mayor is just asking: should we just make statements about issues we have?

CHAIR—We have a wide-ranging brief. The reason we are here, really, is to have a comparative look. We go to a number of remote communities to talk to people about the issues that they are facing. It gives an opportunity for the community to highlight, perhaps, the priorities, the most important issues that are concerning them, issues about the government of the day, or any governments, about some of their policies. Pretty much anything that is annoying you as a community or that you are very happy about as a community the committee would like to hear about.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Can I emphasise we are not a committee of government so much as a committee of the parliament. Whilst we are all from different political parties in the Senate, it is a Senate committee, not a government committee. We are not here representing the government. We are really here to hear your views on any matters of Indigenous governance, economy or social policy—anything at all that might help us better understand some of the issues you have.

Mr Chevathen—As you know, I was talking about the school when we were going on tour. The school was closed in 2005. Like I said, I do not know what the issue was there. Since then, it has been causing problems for the council. It has asbestos. It is a fire hazard during the dry. On the other hand, it is disappointing to see it get to the point where it has become nothing but an eyesore, because that place has over 40 years of history. For people within the community, seeing it go like that is disappointing.

Senator ADAMS—Is it built with asbestos? All of it? Asbestos walls, or just in the roof?

Mr Chevathen—Just in the roof.

Senator ADAMS—Can you get that removed and then do something with the site?

Senator BOYCE—That has been done to dozens and dozens of schools, as far as I am aware.

Mr Chevathen—We put in a couple of submissions to set it up as more of a community hub.

Mrs Barnes—The Napranum civic centre.

Mr Chevathen—Everyone would be working from the one area. My point of view is that if we need to work for this community then we need to work together. The only way we are going to work together is to work together in an area where we cannot avoid each other and we have to start talking to each other.

Senator ADAMS—Is the asbestos removed now, or is it still there?

Mrs Barnes—No, it is still there. As part of the funding submission we did have commitment from the Department of Education and Training for $400,000 to remove the asbestos, and they are willing to hand back the building. But the council is unable to take it back, because they would have no dollars to do anything with it. Without funding, it would be more of a liability for the council.

Senator BOYCE—How many children go to Weipa every day to go to school?

Mrs Barnes—I think the last number I had was about 197 Napranum children with the Western Cape College. Attendance has gone from as low as just under 50 per cent to as high as, just recently, up to 84 per cent—I think that was what was recorded at our last negotiation table.

Senator BOYCE—So over 100 children catch a bus from here every day up to Weipa?

Mrs Barnes—Yes. The council operate the school bus to get the children from Napranum to Western Cape College. Just recently the WCCCA trust has funded two coaches for us to upgrade it, and one of those coaches was successful with the school bus upgrade program. But, yes, we run that twice a day. With the smaller buses, we are doing three trips of a morning and three of an afternoon—two runs on three coaches, morning and afternoon.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Are those buses available for other things besides the school run?

Mrs Barnes—Not at the moment. There are quite a lot of criteria around your licence as an accredited operator. We always have to have the school as a priority because that is there.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—The $440,000 state government grant was just to replace the roof of this building?

Mrs Barnes—We had a commitment of $400,000 and it was virtually to remove the asbestos and make the shell safe. That is my understanding.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—If you cannot get funding for the rest of it, would you rather someone knocked it down and removed it?

Mrs Barnes—I do not think you want to see it removed.

Mr Chevathen—No, we do not want to see it removed. That is why we tried to put in a submission to see whether or not we could get it established as a civic centre, a place where we could all work together—the government departments and the non-government. Along with the council, we would all be working together from the one area to try and build a stronger community, I suppose.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Do you have any idea what it might cost to get rid of the asbestos and renovate it?

Mrs Barnes—Our submission was $7.5 million.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—That is a lot. Does that involve extensions?

Mrs Barnes—Not really extensions to the main part but refurbishing services around those. The old area which used to be the children's undercover play area was to be developed as a cultural meeting area. There were a few things, like a walk of history and the gardens to have more bush tucker and medicine plants.

Senator ADAMS—Where would the asbestos go? If you got a community group and they were trained in how to remove asbestos, where would the asbestos be able to go to? Do you have a dump or somewhere that it could be placed safely to stop it contaminating anything else?

CHAIR—You can get an exemption to have it dumped at sea, but I do not think you have got 70 metres here. You might have.

Mrs Barnes—I do not know about that. Normally you have to have a site registered if it becomes a dumping site for asbestos. I do not know the process. But, no, we do not have a dump here.

Senator ADAMS—Are any of the other houses made of asbestos?

Mrs Barnes—There would be asbestos in some of our other houses.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—What has happened? You have applied for $7 million. Have you just been told no or 'Come again later' or what?

Mrs Barnes—We put a submission in for the first round of the stimulus package, the $550 million, and we were unsuccessful. We have lodged it for the second one, and I believe Minister Albanese made some announcements just before Easter. We were not successful there. We have not been told no, but we were not in that round of announcements either.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Did you get any sort of official advice? Did they say there was anything wrong with your application or that it did not fit the guidelines?

Mrs Barnes—We actually asked through the federal government to get contact for feedback, and there was very little feedback. There was feedback, but there were only a couple of items which they could comment on. One was that we could not show contingency money, so with this application we have identified a couple of hundred thousand and the possibility of seeking more money if required. There were only two areas.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Could I digress a fraction. You do not collect any rates here, do you?

Mrs Barnes—No.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Your funding as a council comes mainly from state and federal government grants?

Mrs Barnes—Mainly, yes, and mainly state.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Do you get financial assistance grants, FAGs?

Mrs Barnes—Yes; SGFA and FAGs.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—FAGs would be your biggest income?

Mrs Barnes—SGFA is the biggest income.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—What is SGFA?

Mrs Barnes—The state government financial assistance grant. That is our main operational budget that we use.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Just off the top of your head and very approximately, what is your total budget?

Mrs Barnes—I should know that but—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—That is all right.

Mrs Barnes—Without the housing, we would be getting up around the $3 million.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Of which about 60 per cent comes from the state and 40 per cent from the Commonwealth.

Mrs Barnes—Yes. We have not got a lot from the Commonwealth. We have got one substantial grant at the moment from the Commonwealth for Working on Country—our rangers.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You are a regular shire council now; you should be part of the financial assistance grants system, which in most other small communities is about 60 or 70 per cent of their funding. Do you get Roads to Recovery money?

Mrs Barnes—A small amount, yes. Technically, we have only got about 10 point something kilometres of roads registered. Napranum DOGIT is separate portions of lands. We did ask the Grants Commission about recognising some of the roads on DOGIT lands that are used for recreational tourists and by the public in general so as to include that kilometre rate in our financial methodology.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Is the council just the Napranum township or do you take in any of the surrounding DOGIT land?

Mrs Barnes—All of the surrounding Napranum—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—All the DOGIT land?

Mrs Barnes—Yes. The Napranum council is the trustee for all of the Napranum DOGIT lands. The mayor has just printed out a map that will show you that.

Senator FURNER—Can I ask about your partnership agreement that you have ambitions will get 250 people employed over the next five years. We heard from Rio Tinto this morning about opportunities between here and Aurukun for further mining. Would that be an area that you are considering or is it something separate?

Mrs Barnes—Through the regional partnership agreement?

Senator FURNER—Yes.

Mrs Barnes—I imagine there would be some employment for south of the Emberley. That is mainly Aurukun, with the Wik Way people.

Senator FURNER—So what areas are you hoping might contribute towards the 250?

Mrs Barnes—The Weipa and the Napranum area in general.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Could you indicate on this map which is your council area?

Senator BOYCE—Napranum is not the green bit. That is what is confusing us.

Mr Chevathen—All the green bit is the Napranum DOGITs.

Senator BOYCE—But Napranum town is not in the green bit.

Mrs Barnes—It is the little green piece. This is the Napranum community, this small green piece, but all these areas here are part of the Napranum DOGIT as well.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—But you are surrounded by Comalco—

Mrs Barnes—By mining lease, yes.

CHAIR—Roy, you were talking on the bus tour about some houses that are to be provided. As I recall, you said it was 18 houses.

Mr Chevathen—Yes, there were 18, five of which the council was given the opportunity to build and 13 were going to be contracted out, and those were supposed to be delivered and ready for people to move into by 30 June.

Senator BOYCE—This year?

Mr Chevathen—Yes.

CHAIR—How are they going now?

Senator BOYCE—You haven't identified the sites yet, have you?

Mr Chevathen—The sites have been identified.

CHAIR—Has much work been started on any of the sites that you have identified?

Mr Chevathen—None at the moment.

CHAIR—Can you recall whether this is through the national partnership program?

Mr Chevathen—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you know where we are up to with that? Have you had any feedback about when the houses probably will arrive? Clearly they may well be late now, but have you had some indications about when there is a new expectation of perhaps a new date when you would expect them to arrive?

Mrs Barnes—They are still talking about 30 June.

Mr Chevathen—That is becoming an issue, because they are saying it needs to be done by the 30th but what type of houses will they be putting up? Are they going to be worth it?

CHAIR—Did you have some consultation as part of that process?

Mr Chevathen—I think the only thing they consulted with us about was to sign the lease.

CHAIR—Did you—the council—decide to construct five yourself?

Mr Chevathen—No, we had to ask for that, and they were reluctant to give it to us, but we managed to get five.

Mrs Barnes—We asked for all 18—

Mr Chevathen—We asked for all 18 in actual fact, but—

CHAIR—How long ago was that?

Mrs Barnes—We started discussions in January.

CHAIR—Do you think the council, if you had been given permission in January, would have houses on the way by now?

Mrs Barnes—We could have had them started but not all completed, being wet season.

CHAIR—When do you intend to start the houses that the council are going to build?

Mrs Barnes—We have asked for them as soon as possible

CHAIR—So you still have not received permission to start the houses?

Mrs Barnes—No. We have not received our contract. They keep referring to the next financial year now.

Senator BOYCE—The houses are going to be built before the end of the financial year?

Mrs Barnes—No, our five are. We want to start them now, because we are very conscious of the employment and training program that should go with this money. We have identified the program which we would need to deliver it, and we would like to have that bedded down so we can give continuity of employment and training to those apprentices and trainees.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Do you still have the brickworks there?

Mr Chevathen—It is still in the community but it is being run by Nanum Tawap, a corporation of the traditional owners.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—It is working successfully, or shouldn't I ask?

Mr Chevathen—We really do not know, because council really do not have much to do with it.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Are they selling a lot of bricks?

Mr Chevathen—We need to find out from Josh Pounder.

Mrs Barnes—They have got the block works and the sawmill.

CHAIR—When the council does get approval and you are going to build these houses, what sort of houses will you build?

Mrs Barnes—Masonry block homes.

CHAIR—Why masonry block? Why is that a good way to build houses?

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Is it using the local blocks?

Mrs Barnes—It is really what has been delivered here for a while.

CHAIR—And they are working well?

Mrs Barnes—There are arguments for and against every style.

CHAIR—They are deliverable, I suppose.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—And it would create local employment.

CHAIR—That is excellent.

Mrs Barnes—They are very sound, too, so you would expect maintenance to be lower.

Senator ADAMS—Could you tell us a bit about your health service and your aged-care facility and how it works?

Ms Wallis—I am the Napranum senior health worker at the clinic here and also a councillor. My portfolio is health and ageing. We have an independent aged-care facility in town, and it is basically for people who are mobile. There are six to eight residents. Services are provided by HACC, Home and Community Care.

Senator ADAMS—And does that get funding from the federal government?

Ms Wallis—Yes, that is federal funding.

Senator MOORE—Does the council provide that service or do you go through the council?

Ms Wallis—We go through the council.

Senator MOORE—Does that create local employment?

Ms Wallis—Yes.

Senator MOORE—How many people work in that program?

Ms Wallis—We have long-time workers at HACC, our ladies. It would be a staff of about 10, including the groundsman, the bus driver—a couple of non-Indigenous ladies.

Senator ADAMS—Do you have any Community Aged Care Packages?

Mrs Barnes—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—How many?

Mrs Barnes—I could not tell you the total number, but there are quite a few.

Ms Wallis—We have got most of our client files up at our clinic. Most of them are on packages, and there would be 14 or 15.

Senator ADAMS—Packages? Good.

Mrs Barnes—The centre is also in the final stages of having its kitchen refurbished, and it will be starting Meals on Wheels as well. So it will be a fully compliant kitchen.

CHAIR—Excellent.

Senator BOYCE—That is residential?

Ms Wallis—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—How many beds have you got there?

Ms Wallis—Eight.

Mrs Barnes—Eight occupied.

Ms Wallis—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—I guess that is what I was asking: are there any spare beds?

Ms Wallis—Yes.

Mrs Barnes—Yes, I think there is one room spare. They also do respite care, so that is why I hesitated over the bed capacity. Some are identified for respite as well as long-term care.

Senator ADAMS—Are they high-care or low-care beds?

Ms Wallis—Low care. High care is in town.

Senator ADAMS—All right. So you have got so many low-care beds and then, what, two respite beds?

Ms Wallis—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you very much again, Roy, for your hospitality. This has been very informative. If you have any questions or queries for the committee later, the committee secretariat will be able to help you with any further information. This is a very big area and some of the senators may remember later that they have a question to ask, so we might put some questions on notice to you through the secretariat. Mrs Barnes, could you take that question about the accurate number of aged-care packages on notice and get back to us?

Mrs Barnes—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—And could you take this on notice too: how many people does the council employ all together?

Mrs Barnes—Okay.

CHAIR—Thanks very much.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—There wasn't any other burning issue you want to make us aware of before we go?

Mr Chevathen—There is the issue about the AMP and about police, but—

Senator BOYCE—Are there any police here?

Mr Chevathen—No, we do not have any; that is the problem.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—What did you want to say about the alcohol management plan?

Mr Chevathen—I will need to look back over my notes here.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—It is just that it is important that we hear this if it is an issue here.

Mr Chevathen—Some of you may know that the alcohol management plan was imposed on us in about mid-2003, but nothing happened in terms of support for the community, really, when they imposed it. There was no alcohol reduction or diversionary program set up. Even with the rehabilitation, they have been talking about it for over 12 months now and we still have not got anything concrete back. If it is going to happen we would prefer it to happen in our region. Cooktown is a lot closer in proximity to Cairns, which has a lot of these services, whereas we do not have any of these services in our region. That is an issue.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—And there are no police to enforce it.

Mr Chevathen—We do have police but they are at Weipa and it is not a 24-hour service. They have to service three communities: Napranum, with a population of 930 or so; Weipa, with a population of 3,000-plus; and then they have Mapoon out there. I do not know what their population is. It is about 200 people. We do not have the number of police in this area to service those three communities.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—So if there are problems here, do you have trouble getting the police down?

Mr Chevathen—Sometimes we can wait for over 24 hours before we even get a response.

Senator BOYCE—What sorts of problems do you have? What sorts of things do you call the police for?

Ms Wallis—Domestic violence.

Mr Chevathen—Domestic violence, break and enter.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—And it is 24 hours until they come.

Mr Chevathen—Sometimes we need to wait 24 hours before we even get a response.

Ms Wallis—We are only 70 minutes away.

Senator BOYCE—I suppose the problem will have fixed itself in 24 hours.

Ms Wallis—We have been working for the last couple of years on getting a partnership with the police. We had the PCYC come in. It was about motivating our kids and getting them occupied. The only time they come down here is just to be seen or to book us. We asked at one stage if we could have the police rotate. We could provide our old SES building for them. They could spend a couple of nights a week in Napranum, just to show their presence.

Mr Chevathen—We even got what used to be our SES building renovated and refurbished and set up for them to spend at least a couple of days in the community.

Ms Wallis—It could be a couple of hours a night, say 10 to 12. Just their presence would help.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I want to ask you about Billy's Lagoon.

Mr Chevathen—We had to close it down because we were not making a profit out of it.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—What is it?

Mr Chevathen—It was a cattle station.

Senator BOYCE—Near here?

Ms Wallis—Yes.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Was it on your DOGIT land?

Mr Chevathen—Yes.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Why did you have to shut it down?

Mr Chevathen—We never had the money to run it, so we just shut it down.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—But if you have cattle you make a profit and it runs itself.

Senator BOYCE—Oh yes?

Mr Chevathen—No, not here.

Mrs Barnes—That big portion at the top is Billy's Lagoon.

CHAIR—What about leasing this sort of thing?

Mr Chevathen—We are in the process of negotiating some stuff with the ILC. But, then again, a lot of that is dependent on the traditional owners. We as the council can say, 'Yes, go ahead and do it,' but we still have to consider the traditional owners too. They are the people who are in that area.

Senator ADAMS—How many head of cattle have you got there?

Mr Chevathen—There is nothing at the moment. But the ILC is looking at starting up an export business.

Mrs Barnes—Like a cattle fattening and live export business.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Would you clear the land and perhaps plant some pastures or grow crops to feed the cattle? Is that the idea?

Mrs Barnes—They have not mentioned planting but, with the support of the rangers, it would be to tidy up all the pest weed—weed management—and use it as cattle fattening and then live export from Weipa, and also have a fairly large training component around reinstating the place and ongoing training around the cattle industry.

Senator ADAMS—What would you feed them to fatten them?

Mrs Barnes—That is their side of it.

Mr Chevathen—That is their side of it.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Who would we ask about this—the ILC?

Mrs Barnes—The ILC have come to the council with the proposal to lease Billys Lagoon. For the council to enter into a lease, we have to have consultation with all the traditional owners from the area and possibly establish an Indigenous land use agreement, which we all know is quite a process. The council are supportive of seeing something happen with Billy's Lagoon, and this sounds very promising and they like the idea. We have started negotiations with the traditional owners, and we are awaiting feedback from them. We are also seeking other avenues where we can enter into a business arrangement pre leasing, if we can come to some arrangement. Billys Lagoon is a liability for us in that we cannot monitor it and manage it and it does become a real fire risk in the dry season with neighbouring properties. There are lot of people out there who take free access and who have unacceptable behaviour, so we have trouble and we cannot police it.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, and thank you all very much for your hospitality.

[4.05 pm]

ARA, Ms Relena Elimau, PaL Coordinator, Napranum Preschool PaL Group Ltd

MATASIA, Ms Corine Ann, Director, Napranum Preschool PaL Group Ltd

SCHUH, Ms Emma, Coordinator, Napranum/Weipa Recognise Entity

SCHUH, Ms Sonia, Director, Napranum Preschool and Kindergarten

CHAIR—Welcome. Perhaps you could give us a bit of an overview of the sorts of things you do in the PaL process—that very successful program.

Ms Matasia—We brought along some brochures, a CD and some cards, so we will leave those here for you guys. Generally, Parents and Learning is a parent engagement program that was developed in 2001 from parental requests in the community. They wanted to ensure the best chances for their kids as they leave the preschool and go to the big school, which is Western Cape College. The program involves the parents working with their child in their own home environment at their own pace. They get a kit delivered once a week during the school term and it is generally a really fun activity that they do—reading a good-quality educational book and having an activity that ties in with the concept of the book. It also has the links to school learning with regard to activities. The activities tie in with the five senses, shapes, colours, patterns, numbers and games—pretty much everything that the school curriculum covers in the early stages to get the kids ready for the bigger things.

CHAIR—What sorts of ages are the kids?

Ms Matasia—We cater for the parents with children in the pre-prep and the prep age groups. We used to cater for the prep age group and the year 1s.

CHAIR—It has been a while, so how old are they?

Ms Matasia—About 3½ years to 4½ years, and 4½ -year-olds to five-year-olds. We do not like to give them too much before they go to big school, but at the same time we hope that parents engage in that educational process.

Senator BOYCE—How many children are in the program?

Ms Matasia—Here in Napranum—

Ms Ara—There are about 24 families.

Ms Matasia—There are 24 families engaged in a program. There are eight sites across Australia that have purchased the program from us, because we have had to form a company to protect the intellectual property rights. We have three sites in New South Wales; one in Victoria; one in Hope Vale, Queensland; one in Old Mapoon; and one in the community of Roebourne in

Western Australia. There are another two sites coming on board this year, so that will make 10 in total. The numbers vary between the communities. You get anywhere between eight families participating and up to 30 or so.

Senator BOYCE—Does PaL work if parents are illiterate themselves?

Ms Matasia—Yes, only because we have a local tutor who is knowledgeable about the community. They will go out, work with the parents, sit with them and say, 'This is how you'd read the book. If you can't read it, use the pictures to help you. And this is how we play the game.' The tutors show the parents how to read the book and do the activity. There is an activity card in the kit, but it is more as a backup. We currently have a virtual training DVD in process and that will be played for the parents to look at as well.

Senator FURNER—How often do you do the assessment of the training?

Ms Matasia—With regard to the parents?

Senator FURNER—Yes.

Ms Matasia—Once a year we will go out and visit the parents, with Sonia's assistance to get the kids' names from the preschool. We have a behaviour checklist that we ask the parents to help us with, with regard to their child—how they read a book at the beginning of the year, doing PaL for the whole year and at the end we assess how they did, and even how the parents did, from the beginning of the year to the end.

Senator FURNER—On average the results are—

Ms Matasia—They are pretty good. A lot of the parents keep coming back, and they put three or four students through the program.

Ms S Schuh—We can really see the difference between children in our preschool system who are on PaL and children who are not on PaL.

Senator BOYCE—Can you explain what you mean when you say you can see the difference? What can the PaL kids do that the others cannot?

Ms E Schuh—They know the concept of how to read a book—what comes first and what comes second—and what you do with a book. They also know patterning and the early steps of mathematics. Concentration is better than children who are not in the program, and the whole idea of school stuff. They are prepared to listen, they will show the other children what to do so they are modelling to children who are not on PaL.

CHAIR—What about attendance? In the demographic who have had PaL and those who have not had PaL, are they moving through to the other schools? Do you have some data on whether or not that encourages them to go school, or whether it encourages the parents to help them go to school?

Ms E Schuh—That is an ongoing battle for every community. Our attendance has gone up—we do a report every year and we find that our attendance has gone up—but then it drops down mid-term sometimes, and that is just family transitions throughout the different communities around here. This year and last year our numbers have gone up to not an acceptable level but they are increasing because more parents are aware of the importance of education. We do not just play. These are really fundamental times to get kids up into formal school.

Ms Matasia—We have been evaluated about three times in the last five years—

Senator BOYCE—Lucky you!

Ms Matasia—Yes. So data has been collected by the evaluators, but we are also looking at working very closely with the Western Cape College with regard to doing follow-ups. There is a team there that looks after the Indigenous kids and the families here. We are looking at letting them know about the families that have really showed potential. We say, 'They are showing that they really are interested. Would you follow them up or let us know how they are going further down the track?' That is what we are doing.

Ms E Schuh—The first lot of PaL kids are now in grade 9. There was some data collected for those kids on where their literacy and numeracy is compared with the rest of the kids who were not doing PaL.

CHAIR—There is a clear difference then?

Ms Matasia—There is.

Ms E Schuh—Attendance is great for those kids, and the parents support them. But we always struggle in that area, so it is just an ongoing thing for us to continue working on.

Ms Matasia—We have found that it really gave confidence to the parents to go out and look at other options in the community—not just to be happy with being here in Aurukun and doing the same old things that everybody else does. They have actually gone out to look for bigger, better jobs. Some have even left to do further study and things like that. Our staff turnover has been quite high, but only because we have trained parents to be tutors, so they have felt confident within themselves to say, 'There is this opportunity that has come up. I would like to apply for it.' We have not held them back. We have just said, 'You go for it.' We have taught them skills: how to file, how to keep records, and how to be out there doing community relations—building the networking with the families here.

Senator MOORE—Is there any cost?

Ms Matasia—There is an initial licensing fee that each community purchases and that covers them for two years. With that fee we go out and look after them for two years, getting them up and running. The community would initially have to look after the purchasing of the materials itself and putting it all together—the compilation. That is where we go out and help them do that. After two years, if they want to continue with the PaL program, it is another fee, but that is for life.

Senator BOYCE—Would the families pay?

Ms Matasia—Absolutely not. It is all free.

Senator MOORE—So what percentage of the families in this community have signed up?

Ms Matasia—It would have been probably 50 per cent of the list that we got from Sonia.

Senator MOORE—That is good. You are happy with that?

Ms Matasia—Absolutely.

Senator MOORE—How did you get it going? I am fascinated by your story.

Ms Matasia—We had huge support from Rio Tinto. They gave us a seeding grant to go down to look at another program: the HIPPY program.

Senator MOORE—We have seen the HIPPY one.

Ms Matasia—The director at the time went out with another staff member and said, 'While it's a good program and is all sound, it is not really structured for us.' Another teacher at the kindy said, 'Let's make our own program.' That is where it grew from.

Ms S Schuh—The entire community has to want it.

Ms Matasia—Yes. We do not go and say, 'We want you.' We wait until they come to us and say: 'We're interested. Can you come and visit?' We will do a presentation in front of, say, the councillors and a few parents of the community, and if they are interested they will come back to us and say, 'What do we do?'

Senator MOORE—And the dads get involved as well?

Ms Matasia—Absolutely—dads and even grandparents.

Ms S Schuh—Even the brothers and sisters if the mum cannot do the little book with them.

Senator MOORE—So how they use it is up to them.

Ms Matasia—Yes. That promotes quality family time between not one member but a few.

Senator BOYCE—One of the biggest problems as a parent has to be embarrassment about your skills in front of your child. That has to be terrible, and anything that helps to stop that is incredible.

Ms S Schuh—Having home tutors—Indigenous women going out there to the mums—really helps because we all speak one language. We can tell them our way and how it has to be done, so there is better understanding.

Ms Matasia—And they are community people.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Does it end up helping the parents who are illiterate themselves? Do they end up having basic literacy and numeracy themselves?

Ms Matasia—Yes. We have had them wanting to come in and jump on the computer. We have helped one parent with getting her learner's licence. Another parent will do the same. Some have even got blue cards. Parents have come to us to say, 'What can I do about this?' We will direct them to the right place. They come in. If they have problems at school they are normally very shy about it, but we will say, 'This is what you have to do' and they will go and do it.

Ms S Schuh—With regard to school, because we are the only educational facility here in Napranum, they tend to come down and see our schools down there to give them a hand. We might send them to Emerald or to whoever has their specialty.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Who owns the intellectual property? Who designed it?

Ms Matasia—We have formed a company: Napranum Preschool PaL Group. There are three directors: Me, Relena and one of the other teachers. She is not here; she works in town now. We have half a dozen members.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—But who put it together? Whose idea is it that you are protecting?

Ms Matasia—We got some advice from lawyers. That was through the assistance of Rio Tinto. They paid for our lawyers. We thought, 'We'll get this service for free, so we might as well put it together.'

Ms S Schuh—There was the community thing. Most of our children were not grasping the print based literacy in school, so the parents wanted to do something about it. That is when the parents got together and said, 'These are the things that we want.' The program is for the parents. There are so many programs for the children, but this is for the parents to be more engaged with their kids. With no support from the parents, the children will not go far.

CHAIR—You are involved with recognised entities in child safety in the communities. Can you tell us a little bit about how that is going? We saw the safe house on the corner there.

Ms E Schuh—It is going well. It is a big step for us that we have our own child safe house. It is a temporary one that you saw. It is temporary until we get a building. I think the council and the TOs are in negotiation for land and putting up the building. Before, we did not have child safety here. They have a hub here now: the government hub in town. Then we had our recognised entity. They are the cultural advisers who advise child safety when they come in to investigate or do any sort of engagement wit the families here.

So we have a recognised entity. We have 10 members. They represent 10 big families around the community. As the coordinator, if child safety would like to know some information on a family—whether it is the right time to come into the community, what the family dynamics are—I will go to see the RE member for that family, get the information and then go back to

child safety and say, 'This is who you should speak to' and what have you. Having a recognised entity was good. Having a safe house was better.

There is progress, but there are still a lot of issues. I do not think the awareness of the processes of child safety coming in and visiting is out there. We have a hub here that does ongoing intervention. If a child here is removed, it is by the team in Cairns. Our families do not understand that there are all these different teams. I am flat out understanding that there are all these different teams. So who does that parent go to? They will go to child safety in town. The mob in town were saying, 'It's not my area; it's Cairns.' The community need to be more aware of the processes of how child safety works and the concept of all these various teams in child safety.

Now that we have a house here, the parents think that if a child is removed or if child safety comes in the child is just going to go to this house, but that is really not the case. This house here is a three-month stay, and that is for children who are going to be reunified with their families. If there is no chance of reunification within those three months, they will look for foster carers or kinship carers. We do not have a non-government organisation looking after the foster and kinship care—everything is under child safety—so once again it is waiting for that team to come up and do the recruitment, training and assessment of foster carers and kinship carers. If they do not come up and we do not have a bank of carers, the children will go out. It takes a long time for them to come up and do all the paperwork. Getting blue cards for families in the community—everyone in the household needs a blue card—is difficult. You can get 10 or 12 family members living in one house, and everyone in that household must have a blue card for the child who is under the department to live in that house.

Senator BOYCE—I thought it did not take long to get a blue card, but when you are trying to get that many blue cards, yes, it could.

Ms E Schuh—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—There are possibly some interesting histories in there.

Ms E Schuh—If you have child related offences you cannot get a blue card. If you have a traffic offence or something like that, child safety or the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian can work around that, but the community need to know about that. But they fear. They think, 'I was drunk driving' or whatever the case may be and automatically think that they cannot get a blue card, but that is not the case. They need to come out and explain more to the community what they need to do and do not need to do. But we are progressing now that we have the temporary house. It is a four-placement house. I believe we need a bigger place, because families do not just have four kids. That house could be filled up with one family; if they remove one child then all the children have to be removed. But at least we do have something here. We can only build on that.

Senator BOYCE—Can it be just the children moved into the house or can a mother move in there as well if need be?

Ms E Schuh—No. We do not have a women's shelter anymore, and that created a bit of havoc in the early parts when did not have a child safe house. The women would go there with their

children to escape whatever was happening at home. There was a long time between when the shelter was closed and us getting the house. Women were seeking safety elsewhere. But child safety can only refer the kids to that house. You cannot just go there and drop your child off.

Senator MOORE—Do you have any foster carers in the community?

Ms E Schuh—We do. We have kinship carers. We have probably got about five, which is good. We have got more general carers in Weipa. There are probably about seven or eight, but they also have children from other communities as well. Some of our carers in town have got Aurukun children.

CHAIR—Do you have any other issues that you would like to talk to the committee about, things that are of concern to you that we need to know about?

Ms E Schuh—The committee secretary was talking about the justice system. I do not know if this is an issue, but I have got a lot of people who come to see me with their victim impact statements. I do not know if this is the time to say this. The victim impact statement is a six-page document that the victim has to fill in and then fax over to whoever.

Senator BOYCE—Is this in relation to violence?

Ms E Schuh—Yes. During sentencing, the victim impact statement helps the judge to know how the crime has had an impact on the victim. There is no-one here to help the families fill these forms out. As the RE, people come to us because there are only limited support places around here. Whoever sends these forms out should be making people aware of who they can contact for support. There are big words in it and we have been talking about how literacy and numeracy up here is not that great. We have had children receive these forms. That is my big issue at the moment: who is helping these children and their families fill out these forms? You have got a court date a couple of months down the track and this helps the judge—well that is what it says on the piece of paper—know how the crime has had an impact on this person.

Senator FURNER—Going back to the child care, are there any hearing problems within the youth that you have identified over the last few years?

Ms S Schuh—We have a lot of children that display foetal alcohol syndrome. A lot our children also have middle ear infections. My issue is the early intervention for children with special needs or mental health, as in autism and that kind of thing. At the moment, we have a couple of children who have not been diagnosed yet but soon will be. About 80 per cent of our children are showing symptoms of foetal alcohol syndrome in many different areas—lack of concentration and all of that kind of stuff. We are having someone in on Wednesday to give us some PD on it because none of us are trained in foetal alcohol syndrome. Also, with autism, a lot of Indigenous children are not diagnosed because families tend to just deal with it. Sometimes they can be classed as naughty children. Now that we are trying to educate our parents in supporting their kids through school, they have to have these things in place. Autistic children need to have everything in a routine. They have cards and things like that. We can do a certain amount of it, but again we are not special needs teachers. At Western Cape College they have a special needs unit that is not entirely up and running at the moment, but that is for school age kids.

There is nothing here with early intervention, unless you get someone to fly in. Because we are not part of the state school, we are finding it very hard at the moment. We have one child at the moment that is totally deaf in one ear, but we have had children that had to wear bone conductors and all that stuff, and we are looking for assistance. I do not even know how we can get it, but I am talking to Health and all that. You can close your whole room off and have a little microphone thing, but we are not even trained in that kind of stuff. We do not know what these children need. We need parents to support their kids and not just label them 'naughty children'. Autism has really turned our world upside down this year, because we did not really know what it was. We pretty much knew that it is a condition that some children have. The staff are entirely Indigenous down there. So we are going through the process of getting these kids ready to go into formal schooling.

Special needs is a really big issue, and kids need early intervention, with parents helping them. You can only do so much at school; they need that back-up at home too so it does not create a big problem later on down the track when they go into formal schooling. We do not know how to deal with these children at the moment and we cannot see what will happen when they are 10 years old—how the parents are going to be dealing with them, whether they will go into the justice system and all that kind of stuff. At the moment I guess we are all looking for some kind of support or information on children with that.

As for hearing problems, the rate of middle ear infection is very, very high in the communities, with the runny ears and all that kind of stuff. The health team are going around and talking to parents about it, but it is one of those things: what do parents do? The parents do what we do at the preschool. We just get the kids and try and teach them to blow their noses and all that kind of stuff, but middle ear infection is quite a big issue—and foetal alcohol syndrome.

Senator BOYCE—What percentage of kids with foetal alcohol syndrome would have an intellectual disability of some sort?

Ms S Schuh—Like I said, I do not want to point fingers, because I am not trained in that kind of stuff. I can see that foetal alcohol syndrome has touched most of the children; it is just a question of to what level. We are talking about three-, four- and five-year-olds, so their concentration is not all that great anyway. But trying to prepare some of the kids for formal schooling can be difficult when we do not have the kind of stuff we need to be giving them or supporting them with—even being able to give the parents the kind of information they need to have but also some of the strategies they need to use to prepare their kids, even at home, for these kids to be active members when they go to formal schooling.

Ms E Schuh—You cannot stop the mothers from drinking alcohol while they are pregnant. Child Safety Services will step in when the child is born. So you have got nine months there of being exposed.

CHAIR—Canada are currently preparing legislation that will enable them to step in and take over the mother on behalf of the child during pregnancy. You can imagine the difficulties they are having.

Ms E Schuh—We can only report to Child Safety that a mother or a child is at risk, and they will put an unborn child alert on the family. Child Safety, in their investigation and assessment,

may go and talk to the mother, but it is entirely up to the mother. There are not a lot of early intervention and prevention programs in regards to those sorts of issues like child protection and child safety issues here. The house here does have the intensive family support worker in there, but that is to work with the parents of the child in the house. We do not have anything—

Senator BOYCE—No outreach?

Ms S Schuh—No. PaL has now set up the 'mums and bubs' for this same problem. We get the after-effects; we get the children who are already affected by foetal alcohol syndrome.

Ms E Schuh—We have spoken to PaL.

Ms S Schuh—We all got together. They have set up their mums and bubs, so that kind of information about FAS and all this early intervention stuff is going to PaL, because they have got the mums there with the babies. But, again, the babies are already born. But hopefully that message goes throughout the community.

Ms E Schuh—We can only suggest to the families that they come to the mums and bubs group and do some activities, and while they are doing the activities we can get some information to the parents.

Ms Ara—We will have someone coming in from the hospital to have a chat to them about certain things.

Ms S Schuh—The kids from pre-prep to prep are in the program but the mums and bubs groups are for the ones who are not in the program—the three-, two- and one-year-olds. There has to be some kind of early intervention here, because we do not have any.

Ms Ara—There is nothing happening in the community at the moment for the parents of the younger age group, zero to three.

Ms S Schuh—We are trying, aren't we?

Ms Matasia—And then, when we try to set up something, everyone is going to jump on the bandwagon.

Senator MOORE—Did you go to the women's meeting at the weekend?

Ms S Schuh—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Were these the kinds of issues that came up there?

Ms S Schuh—Yes.

Senator MOORE—So the women are actually thinking about it.

Ms S Schuh—They are also looking for employment, but to get that happening we need child care. We do not have child care. We have a preschool for kids from three to five, but we do not have child care. The mums of most of the little ones want to work. That is one of the big things with child care. We need early intervention on that kind of stuff, getting our mums and our dads more interested in the kids and their education.

Senator BOYCE—We do not have visiting speech pathologists or anything like that.

Ms S Schuh—It is very hard to get them. We are trying to work with Western Cape College, the state school. They will only deal with kids who are in their school or going to go there. We have three- and four-year-olds. We are the only centre in Queensland that caters for them.

Senator BOYCE—What about the family and early childhood services? You do not get those?

Ms S Schuh—No. We have a CAFS officer. That service is there, I guess, to help. I am not going to say anything more about that.

Senator MOORE—Is that a state service?

Ms S Schuh—Yes.

Ms E Schuh—Child and family support is funded through the Department of Communities, through the PCYC. That program, child and family support, was originally to assist parents with early intervention and prevention before they went into any sort of system, such as child safety or youth justice or whatever. It was about getting there before that.

Senator BOYCE—But is not working.

Ms S Schuh—I am saying it is not working.

Ms E Schuh—Yes. On paper that is how it is supposed to be.

Senator MOORE—And that is based in Weipa?

Ms S Schuh—CAFS is based out of the PCYC.

Senator MOORE—So it is located there.

Ms S Schuh—Yes.

Senator MOORE—I saw that the PCYC had a sign saying that volunteers are needed for more breakfast programs.

Ms S Schuh—You need to bring that up with the PCYC.

Senator MOORE—But there is a breakfast program? That is one of the things that was funded through that children stuff.

Ms S Schuh—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Do we have them coming in—the PCYC?

CHAIR—No, we do not.

Senator MOORE—I think we should, considering the silence around the table.

CHAIR—Yes, there seems to be a bit of that. Thank you very much for the evidence you have provided today. Given the limited time we have had, senators may well have some other questions, so we will provide those on notice. If you have some other questions or need to clarify anything, please get in touch with the secretariat and they will provide that information to you. Thanks very much for providing your evidence today.

[4.52 pm]

FORDHAM, Mr Michael Nils, Senior Executive Manager, Cairns Indigenous Coordination Centre

CHAIR—Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been previously provided to you. As a departmental officer you will not be asked to give opinions on matters of policy, although this does not preclude answering questions for explanations of policy or factual questions about when and how policies were adopted. I now invite you to make a short opening statement. At the conclusion of your remarks, I will invite members of the committee to put questions to you.

Mr Fordham—I do not have a prepared statement or anything like that. I thought this was a great opportunity. We had been talking with Hamish. Obviously, we want to provide as much support to the committee as we possibly can.

CHAIR—Thank you for the report you have already provided. I understand that it has been comprehensive.

Mr Fordham—Thank you. In my role I wear three hats: as the manager in Far North Queensland for FaHCSIA for mainstream programs, as manager of the Indigenous coordination centre on behalf on the Commonwealth representing a variety of different agencies and departments in that sort of whole of government effort and more recently as a representative of both the Commonwealth and the state in the four welfare reform communities under the Remote Service Delivery Strategy. They are Coen, Aurukun, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge. 'Welfare reform' is a program or a set of programs rolled out for about 18 months and rolling through for us the remote service delivery end of it. That is the broad remit of the office based in Cairns. We have a small office or outpost here in Weipa and we also have people in Coen, Aurukun, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge representing both the state and the Commonwealth in that area.

I presume you have met other ICC managers before and you have a reasonable idea of what the officers do and what we are about. Maybe it is a good opportunity for you to ask me what is relevant in this part of the world. No doubt you have heard a lot today in your meetings with others.

CHAIR—Certainly. Are there any questions?

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You are an officer of a federal department but you coordinate all the federal government agencies and state government agencies dealing with—

Mr Fordham—In the four welfare reform communities that is the case—as I said, in Coen, Hope Vale, Mossman Gorge and Aurukun—and the welfare reform program. In the other cases it is really just the Commonwealth agencies and trying to coordinate the efforts of those agencies and bring services and programs together.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—This is completely out of left field. I had forgotten you were there. I should have spoken to you. Did they fix up the Laura centre?

Mr Fordham—The Quinkan centre.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Where are we at with that?

Mr Fordham—I have to ring Terry O'Shane after this meeting actually and then I have to ring Jim Turnour. They have all finally agreed I believe that that is the way to go forward, so now we will have to find some money to stump up for our end of the bargain.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—From what you say Laura would not be in your area.

Mr Fordham—It is.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You did not mention Laura.

Mr Fordham—No, I only mentioned the four welfare reforms. The rest of it for me is all of Far North Queensland anywhere—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—But federal only.

Mr Fordham—That is right. From Cardwell north.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—The Laura Quinkan centre issue was a bit of a mix. As I understand it the Quinkan centre was funded by the federal government and the problem was with the planned ownership by the state. You are telling me that is close to resolution.

Mr Fordham—We needed to get the community to all agree to get together to form one organisation and then there would be no need to do these land trades and things like that. There is a whole raft of other things rolled into there. There are the housing reform programs and all sorts of other things.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Will the Quinkan centre continue to operate?

Mr Fordham—It will. It has to.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—It will get money from somewhere.

Senator BOYCE—What is the Quinkan centre?

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You should perhaps ask the witness. It is a federal government funded museum display and exhibition in Laura. It is very good and it is not all that far away from Cooktown. If you are ever up that way, go and have a look. There were problems with running it. It was built on land over which the Commonwealth did not have title or nobody had title, but it was built.

CHAIR—I think wherever we go as a committee, one of the issues that come from communities is that we still do not really understand. We have these government people parachute in, take a look and parachute out again. We just had some evidence, for example, which was not so much about Commonwealth issues but issues with regard to child safety. One of the examples was the difficulties in getting a blue card. There is a fear that because I have a traffic offence that is going to deny me a blue card, what the ramifications for that are and those sorts of things.

Senator BOYCE—Or there is a complicated form to fill in.

CHAIR—Or if you are a victim then there is a six-page victim statement. It appears from the evidence provided that the department sends something but there is no indication from that about what sort of support. They are just a couple of examples that we have had in the last five minutes. Are they the sort of nuts and bolts issues that you as the ICC are also asked to provide simply because these are state issues but there is still a coordination fundamental?

Mr Fordham—That is right. Again in the broader regional operations centre model, which is a fairly new construct, we do have much more of a remit to get involved in that kind of thing with the state. I have state people of a fairly senior level embedded in the office. People on the ground are a mix of either state or Commonwealth officers reporting to me. We can more readily resolve that. Other than that, the Quinkan centre is a good example in that it is a lot of relationships. I worked for the state for many years. I have worked for the Commonwealth for many years. You know people and you just do your horse-trading around what it is that you can and cannot do. We are in the same game and I suppose as professional bureaucrats or professional officers we need to try and resolve these things. Some of them are a lot easier said than done of course. I have heard a lot about the blue card one. It is a bit like drivers licensing. Even in mainstream urban locations in Australia these days it is more and more complex legislatively with various tick-off requirements. When you add that level of remoteness and some language difficulties, it becomes so hard.

Senator MOORE—There were a number of quite specific issues raised both here and back in Weipa. Is it possible to find out about them and tick them off? There are 18 houses here allegedly to be finished by June.

Mr Fordham—The end of June.

Senator MOORE—What is happening with the 18 houses? We had a quick tour through the place. There is obviously land and the mayor has committed to saying that they have determined where they should go. Land is always a big issue. What is the story?

Mr Fordham—I would have to check whether it is 18 on the program here because I could not confirm that and I do not want to appear too flippant.

Senator MOORE—There is five that they have to build—

Mr Fordham—By the end of June.

Senator MOORE—The original process was for 18 houses, including five for them, by the end of June. According to the mayor, there still seems to be a view that the 13—that it is not allocated for them to produce—will still be, at the end of June, theirs. Though not confirmed, according to him there seems to be more a view that that might slip into the next financial year. So what is the formal statement on the 18 houses for here?

Mr Fordham—I am not trying to shirk this one. I am not directly responsible for the delivery of the program, but I sit on the joint steering committee for the delivery of the program. As you know, Minister Macklin is very conscious of the need to get the funding and the program rolled out. The targets that were set for Queensland on a state-wide basis were for 65 houses this financial year, and that is essentially what is going to be rolled out this financial year. And the Queensland government is committed as a delivery agency to deliver on them. The first part of that process is to secure the land. I think most communities by now have signed up to either this year's program or the whole of the rolling program. And so, as to those 18 houses—and I could not confirm that now, but I can down the track—if it is five this year then that is part of those 65 to be rolled out this financial year.

Senator MOORE—So you will be able to give us some information about what the current position is?

Mr Fordham—In terms of numbers?

Senator MOORE—Who is actually constructing them—is the state the constructing arm?

Mr Fordham—That is right. They are contracting with builders at the moment.

Senator ADAMS—They have got 10 weeks to do it.

Mr Fordham—Yes, that is right. Are you going to Aurukun, by any chance? We can show you some that we did build down there in less time than that—

Senator MOORE—You actually did construct them in less time than that?

Mr Fordham—Yes, and some in Hope Vale as well. And a wellbeing centre. There were a whole raft of them.

Senator BOYCE—Ready to be occupied?

Mr Fordham—Yes, absolutely. But that was our side of the fence doing it—the Commonwealth side. But I think they are just going to follow a similar sort of model. These were homes constructed by Homefab and Gateway Constructions.

Senator MOORE—We were told this morning by the chair of that group that there had been a promise of a childcare centre at Weipa, and they were of the view that that promise had not been kept.

Mr Fordham—That is not in my space; that is mainstream DEEWR. I do not want to shirk that one; I will find out what I can and come back to you.

Senator MOORE—Okay. We saw the land for the hostel—

Senator BOYCE—For the school—

Senator MOORE—and the chair of the Weipa council felt that there had not been effective community consultation around that and also that there had been little progress. But their main concern was, as I think she phrased it—you will see the *Hansard* but I think she phrased it as: 'We were told there was going to be this hostel but we have not heard much about what is happening, and it was a promise.' Is that yours?

Mr Fordham—That is mine, absolutely. We have just been at a steering committee meeting, actually.

Senator MOORE—Who is on the steering committee?

Mr Fordham—The Weipa Town Authority certainly are, and they have been there right from the start. I think the deputy, Peter, was there today with some of the Weipa Town Authority officers. Rio Tinto, the school, the P&C, the mayors of the surrounding shires—I can give you a full list of who is on that local-level steering committee. And then there is a state-level steering committee, based in Brisbane, which includes premiers and Education Queensland and others.

Senator MOORE—So it is proceeding?

Mr Fordham—It is proceeding, yes. It will be open for business for the 2012 school year.

Senator MOORE—The other major issue of promises was the concern about the resi-rehab centre in Weipa. What is the story there?

Mr Fordham—We are still waiting on the minister to make a decision finally on the exact location for the centre. It is part of the broader alcohol reform program for Cape York. We built the wellbeing centres in four communities and some additional beds for more intense rehab in Cairns and in the new hospital here. And the other leg of it is the resi-rehab facilities. Securing the land, an appropriate site for it, has been a bit of an issue. Cooktown and Weipa have always been in scope for either of the two of them, and a report has been put up to the minister for him to make a decision as to where he would like that to happen.

Senator MOORE—Has land been confirmed in both those communities?

Mr Fordham—A process for establishing land here has been confirmed. Because of the native title implications and leasehold and so on, it is about an 18-month time frame.

Senator BOYCE—But is this an either/or? It seems to be the concern of Weipa that it would go in Cooktown or Weipa, but not both.

Mr Fordham—That is right.

Senator ADAMS—Is Cooktown's land secured?

Mr Fordham—Nothing has been secured.

Senator BOYCE—But the process has been.

Mr Fordham—There is a process there. In Cooktown you can obtain freehold land and serviced land.

Senator ADAMS—That is going to take 18 months.

Mr Fordham—We have tried very hard to find a site here. We have found three or four sites that may be suitable, but servicing those sites and going through the process is costly and takes a long time. An ideal fallback would be to say, 'If we can have two residential rehab facilities, we will have one in Cooktown and follow the path in Weipa.' But, again, that is a decision for the minister.

CHAIR—My colleagues may correct me but certainly the sense of the evidence was that they were keen to also shoulder the burden of the negotiations, because no doubt they are keen on that. They say that they have identified land, and much of the evidence that we have taken in this area says that clearly. If I were to walk out of this room I know what I have been told—that is, there is a great big road from Cooktown camps; they have access to every piece of services in the world from there. So, really, it is starting to have a congregation of infrastructure rather than the allocation of it. As you say, that is for the minister. From your own personal knowledge of these things, are we taking selective evidence or is that what people think around this area?

Mr Fordham—If you have funding for only one facility it is always going to be a toss-up where you put it in Cape York. The people of the NPA might say they should have it there and people around Kowanyama and Napranum might say they should have it there. We have got a small facility that is community grown in the Pormpuraaw area but it is always going to be a toss-up between Cooktown and Weipa. Both of them are hubs for those parts of the Cape so it is not an easy decision.

Senator MOORE—Which minister is it with?

Mr Fordham—Minister Snowdon.

Senator MOORE—The other one that I remember from the Weipa evidence was a concern that the ICC had a senior officer in Weipa who received great praise from all the witnesses, but he was not there, and they believed that they have now been downsized and downgraded—that they no longer have a senior officer there so that means that their status and their importance has been affected by a government decision.

Mr Fordham—We still have the office here. That individual officer has moved to Coen as part of the remote service delivery strategy. We are currently trialling whether we run the all-of-government arrangement with Queensland here, because they have a senior person here, or whether we put someone back in from the ICC specifically to represent the Commonwealth. We still have a junior officer based here, Susie Krall.

Senator BOYCE—Sorry; what are you trialling? Can you explain that again?

Mr Fordham—Having one officer to represent both levels of government—the Commonwealth and the state—in the coordination role.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Like a Mike Fordham in Weipa.

Mr Fordham—That is right. That is what we have in Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge.

Senator BOYCE—Hasn't the person from here moved to Coen from Weipa?

Mr Fordham—The Commonwealth person has, but the state is still here and they have an office here. So do we, and we still have a junior officer here and so on.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—So in the other places where that happens, is the senior officer Commonwealth or state?

Mr Fordham—That is a bit irrelevant.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Who pays their weekly wage?

Mr Fordham—As it has turned out, in Aurukun it is the state, as the senior, and in the other locations it is the Commonwealth. But, if you like, that is just a deal that has been done, putting the money in the pot and working out who is paying for what. They have two or three officers based in Cairns in the office as part of that strategy.

Senator BOYCE—One issue that was raised this afternoon by the childcare centre people was the lack of programs for infants and toddlers and for preschoolers with special needs—and also programs to train staff in that area. What is available for remote Indigenous communities in that area?

Mr Fordham—I apologise. That is not my area of expertise.

Senator BOYCE—The state community services would run it in other areas. I would have thought that FaHCSIA would have some role in remote Indigenous communities.

Mr Fordham—Between FaHCSIA and DEEWR we would. Are you talking about the childcare centre here in Napranum?

Senator BOYCE—The preschool. But I am not talking about the preschools; I am talking about children younger than preschool age—babies and toddlers—

Senator MOORE—In child care.

Senator BOYCE—But not for child care. It was around early intervention services for children with special needs. They have identified children with autism and children who need help because of foetal alcohol syndrome. They are not aware of any programs to assist them to learn how to help these children, or any early intervention programs. I was just asking what, if anything, the Commonwealth has available in that area.

Mr Fordham—I cannot answer that question on the record. If I find out the individuals concerned I will take it up.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, please. That would be good.

Mr Fordham—I was asking who it was who was asking, because I am more than happy to take it up.

Senator BOYCE—It is not about those individuals; it is about what programs are available for remote Indigenous communities around early intervention programs.

Mr Fordham—In Aurukun we are trialling a parenting centre approach, which is combining a number of those related services along with support for the families—which is fairly innovative. It is very early days, so I could not comment on whether it is a success or not. That is run on the back of a really successful Quinkan early childhood centre in that community and a few committed individuals who are running that program. The centre here in Napranum is pretty good. I do not know if you have had a chance to get down there and have a look at it, but they are running some pretty good stuff down there.

CHAIR—The ICC would be the natural body to deal with those issues of the leverage that I understand the Commonwealth and potentially some of the states have with regard to things like school attendance, workforce agencies, breaching in terms of both Centrelink and turning up at work. What sort of role does the ICC play in that and how do you think those are going? What is your view?

Mr Fordham—Queensland puts out a very good quarterly report on the social indicators. There is still a long way for us to be going. The responses and the programs that are run are community specific, if you like. In the welfare reform communities we do have attendance case managers, the family responsibilities commission, basics cards and a whole raft of other programs as part of that broader suite. That has, in Aurukun, largely turned around a really quite bad situation. There is still a long way to go, but we have come from 30 and 40 per cent school attendance up to 60 and 70 per cent. Here in Napranum, for example, being community specific, it is a lot about getting the kids from this community into the school in Weipa, so with DEEWR we are working on programs around school buses and making sure we have got parents, tutors and support to get the kids on the bus, manage the situation—unruly behaviour and so on—and get them into the school. The situation here is not good as far as school attendance goes at the primary levels.

Senator ADAMS—We have heard today from the council about the problems they have. They have applied for grants to remove the asbestos from the old school and utilise that area for something else. Where does that go? You have got all that land and buildings that completely dysfunctional. How do you deal with that?

Mr Fordham—I don't know. I understand Education Queensland have been working with the community council for a long time to try and resolve what they are going to do with that site down there. I am not across it. It is not in my domain, so I just have not been across it for quite some time. No-one has approached us for the funding and it is really a matter for them. I think the council owns the site now.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—They did say they had applied for two rounds of stimulus funding.

Senator ADAMS—But with no success. They do not have anywhere to dump the asbestos. So what happens?

Mr Fordham—Good question. This is the first I have heard of the asbestos issue. I am more aware of some of the issues with trying to dispose of the land or working with those who may have a claim on it.

Senator ADAMS—It is the asbestos that is the start of it and why they cannot do anything. It is at a grinding halt at the moment.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I think they could put the asbestos in a container and take it back to Cairns.

Senator ADAMS—Sure. It just seems so crazy when you have got all that land there.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You started off as the first ICC boss, didn't you?

Mr Fordham—After I left the Torres Strait Regional Authority, I went to Coffs Harbour to set up an ICC there. I worked down in Sydney as the state manager for a while and then got parachuted back to Cairns.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I will not ask it, but my question would have been: is it all working? It seems to be, but I will not ask you that.

Senator BOYCE—I suppose the question to ask might be: what lessons have we learnt that would assist with the further rollout of welfare reform packages if that were to be undertaken?

Mr Fordham—The model in the Queensland context has got a lot of wraparound services with it. It is not just he FRC and I think that is a really important lesson. I do not think you can just expect people to have a tack-on to their day-to-day job as a teacher or social worker or whatever, add that to their workload and expect to reform families, individuals and communities that way. You do have to provide the support services. You do have to provide the framework around it and you have to get local Indigenous authority, involvement and engagement in it, so it is not just a top-down government led thing. People must have some degree of ownership over it and take some responsibility to do it. Those would be the lessons there. When I talk about wraparound services, that is anything from having BasicsCard to having attendance case mangers in the schools, having a breakfast club, if that is what is relevant to that community, and having government business managers on the ground in the territory and getting the right people there. There are huge challenges in all of that. It is remote. It is harsh and hot and a pretty tough environment. We spend a lot of time trying to recruit the right people.

Senator BOYCE—Is one of the things that may come out of the welfare reform packages an improvement in the social capital in Indigenous communities? I am constantly surprised at how well we appear to have trained people in some communities to expect that they do nothing and it is done to them by governments and the like.

Mr Fordham—That is still a huge challenge. I think most people outside the capitals would feel an affinity with that. Governments are doing things to them and they do not necessarily have a whole lot of control over it. We need to try, particularly in the context of small remote Indigenous communities, to work things through with people so that they do understand and we can have a robust discussion and talk through some tough issues but we walk away as friends and we can come back again to that same community and relationships are still strong and we can face another issue. You have got to be around a long time to develop that kind of—

Senator BOYCE—I am thinking more about people having sufficient confidence to take the initiative to set up a little volunteer community program that may not have all the bells and whistles that it would have if the federal government had funded it but just get things started.

Mr Fordham—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—So is some self-esteem building likely to come out of the welfare reforms?

Mr Fordham—Absolutely. It is a good point. People are quite used to putting their hand out and expecting government to fund things 100 per cent, so one of the decisions we made to try and encourage some volunteering was to limit it to 50 per cent so people have to do some sort of fundraising. So the local footy club, to buy their jerseys or their strips, will only get half the funding. In some ways that is seen as harsh, but in other ways—

Senator BOYCE—It is not if people are supported in knowing how to fundraise.

Mr Fordham—Exactly. That is exactly right—and they understand where we are coming from and so on. Our biggest difficulty there, though, is trying to make it clear to others that those are the ground rules that apply in those communities. It is not one size fits all, so don't just wash your other programs through those communities.

CHAIR—I have just had a squiz at one of the reports you referred me to, and that is on the northern peninsula area. I noticed that the report deals with breaches with respect to low-hanging fruit, including the number of assaults, because the police keep them, and the number of people who breach the alcohol management program. But the report does not deal with two significant areas—to me, anyway. One of them is school attendance. Apart from stating what I consider to be the obvious, that nothing has happened—in fact it has got worse since 2008; marginally but still worse. As the ICC you provide these reports and not only for people like me to read. Clearly, they are an indicator for the ICC that some things are not going so well. Let us just take attendance, because I think it is quite a reasonable but startling example. What is the ICC's response to that?

Mr Fordham—The MPA is a case in point. We have been going around talking about alcohol reforms with state officers, and they do provide a pretty good starting point for how things really are travelling. We can get into all sorts of debates and discussions about what data is being collected and how and when and all sorts of things like that. If you just accept that it is consistent month by month and try and measure it that way, it enables us to at least have something of an honest conversation with people and then say, 'What do you think we should be doing to try and address this?' Because a lot of the stuff that we are talking about is not something that I as a

public servant can do. I am not Houdini and nor is any of my staff, although Tony is pretty good! It is about personal responsibility and it is about family responsibilities and so on. It is about what we can do: what settings have we got to put in place; what services and programs can we provide to get there? In some cases, that is not necessarily even well recognised by local leaders themselves. They just do not see the importance of it perhaps. I think Queensland is leading it, largely, compared to the other states, just by publishing that data and having it there. It is extremely useful for us.

CHAIR—Can I just make a comment there. I know a lot of local leaders and communities may not really understand the importance of registering a car, but they do so because it is against the law not to and it is enforced, and there are people who get out of bed every day to ensure that that is the case. Now, I am trying carefully not to go towards policy, but I do want to ask: does the ICC receive directions in terms of compliance—for example, if these reports come in and, clearly, we are not making any movement in terms of attendance? I know you are doing a great deal, and this is not particularly a question for you. I am just wondering about the process. Would FaHCSIA say, after getting the report, 'Look, here are more resources'? I understand six family officers have been employed—as part of the report, not as a consequence of it. So would the process be that FaHCSIA would talk to the ICC?

Mr Fordham—Not necessarily. Whilst I am employed by FaHCSIA—they pay the wages and so on—you are talking about various other agencies, a lot of which are state. Education Queensland would say that school attendance is their domain, as would DEEWR.

CHAIR—That is why I am trying to find out about the coordinating role.

Mr Fordham—Again, it is more about saying—I think these are some of the lessons in terms of ICCs and that sort of whole-of-government approach—'What are you offering? Why should I bother talking to you? What use are you to me?' for example. That is in terms of a good message or some funding to be gotten or something. If it is a bad message, if I am going, for example, to talk to the regional executive director about schools and performance of schools and what is going on, then why would he want to bother talking to me? It is a bit about the leverage as much as about what the connections are, who is making the decisions around this sort of stuff, where it all fits together, what the whole-of-government approach is, where the various steering committees fit and who reports to who. It is complex, but I think you trade a lot on your relationships and a lot on how long you have been in the business and what it is that your office does.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Didn't the ICC have a role in the proposal floated to declare Cape York as a natural heritage area?

Mr Fordham—No. You can go and talk to others about that.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—It is a federal government issue, but you were not involved in that?

Mr Fordham—Yes, it is, but I do not get involved in everything. That is one I have not been involved in.

CHAIR—It had a big impact on employment and a whole range of issues.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—And you are not involved in the wild rivers?

Mr Fordham—No.

Senator ADAMS—On governance issues, like with Weipa and just where they are going to end up—as a proper council or anything like that—do you become involved at all in a sort of advisory capacity?

Mr Fordham—Yes, generally we would on things like that. Again, that is a long and ongoing issue and it is tied up with various acts of state legislation and servicing and so on. I understand there is a process at the moment that is just kick-starting again. There have been a few over the years. I am sure that others are aware of them. We will get involved in it, yes. Weipa is a hub, as you have pointed out. It is an interesting dilemma really, because ideally you need good, strong local service provision from three levels of government to be fully effective. We do workarounds. As an example, today there was a bit of discussion around sport and rec and whether we could employ a sport and rec officer through the Weipa Town Authority, whether they can apply for state government grants for that position and so on.

Senator ADAMS—Can they?

Mr Fordham—Yes, they can, I believe. I have got to confirm that, but I believe they can. So they will be coming back to us to look for another half of the funding or something. In the normal context, it would be local government, depending on the size and the scope and the level of effectiveness of what they are doing. I think in Weipa you have got some great opportunities to develop a good regional or subregional hub.

Senator FURNER—Do you foresee them moving to more of an opportunistic local authority if they make that step that they are trying to?

Mr Fordham—There are an awful lot of forces at play, from what I can gather. If I were a betting man, I would not be putting any money on it.

Senator FURNER—But, if they did make that step, there would be gateways that would open for them.

Mr Fordham—You are putting me in an awkward position here, I think. There probably would be. As it is at the moment, we make sure, wherever we can, that they do not miss out. Put it that way.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Sure, except that they get no FAGs and what is worse they pay GST on their ‘rates’.

Mr Fordham—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Looking at the other issue which was to do with DIMIA and the old site which was used for Indonesian boats, a proposal was put forward by one of the councillors who

happened to be Peter—two of them were Peter—who had a view that that could be translated into a low-security correctional centre allowing people to be closer to their families while they were serving out sentences. Has that been raised with you wearing your ICC hat?

Mr Fordham—No. I would say that is a fairly new idea and I would have thought that immigration would still have some designs over that facility.

Senator MOORE—We are not sure but I thought, that being federal-state, it would at least have been worth a chat about with your office.

Mr Fordham—Yes, normally they would, but I suspect that is a fairly new idea.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—It is supposed to be the spillover from Christmas Island.

Senator MOORE—Many places could be. I understand it has not been used a long time.

Mr Fordham—No.

CHAIR—Do you have anything in particular in terms of what is happening to give us as advice the committee loves to receive?

Mr Fordham—No. I just appreciated the time to provide you with what information I can. You are still around for the next day or so and you have a Tony on board with you. I think it is great that senators get around and get into the real world. I have really enjoyed the opportunity, so thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for attending and providing evidence today. If there are further questions on notice the committee may wish to ask you, they will be provided to you by the secretariat.

Committee adjourned at 5.32 pm