

Chapter 3

Queensland

Introduction

3.1 The committee's second report considered the impact of Commonwealth, state and territory government policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in regional and remote areas of the Northern Territory and South Australia. The committee's third report considered the impact of policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Western Australia and New South Wales.

3.2 In gathering evidence for this report, the committee visited Queensland, holding a range of site visits and meetings in Weipa, Napranum, Bamaga and Cherbourg. The committee also held public hearings in Cairns and Brisbane.

3.3 The committee heard evidence from a range of community organisations, local councils, government agencies and departments and businesses. The committee would like to thank all witnesses who provided evidence to the committee.

3.4 The committee would particularly like to thank Mr Mike Fordham, Mr Tony Martens, Ms Michelle Torrens and Ms Sharryn Howes from the Cairns Indigenous Coordination Centre for their support in Weipa, Napranum and Bamaga. The committee would also like to thank Dr Tim Reddel from the Queensland Department of Communities who assisted the committee in arranging the Brisbane hearings.

3.5 This chapter addresses evidence on the Cape York Welfare Reform trials, education, employment and enterprise opportunities, mental health, alcohol and substance abuse, housing and justice.

3.6 The committee notes that the issues in this chapter are interlinked and interrelated. It is therefore difficult to adequately discuss these issues separately. Where appropriate, sections have been cross-referenced. Taken together, the various issues suggest a high level of under-development in regional and remote Indigenous communities. This situation has long historical roots, but suggests to the committee that there is a strong need to rehabilitate and empower communities and improve community leadership. To do this, communities, governments, non-government organisations and the private sector need to work together in a spirit of mutual cooperation. Communities need to be given the ability to take responsibility for their futures.

Overview

3.7 In Queensland, 127 600 or 3.3 per cent of Queensland's population identify as either being from Aboriginal (77 per cent) or Torres Strait Islander (14.4 per cent)

origin. Of these, 72 per cent of Indigenous Queenslanders are located in regional and remote Queensland.¹

3.8 The Department of Communities is the agency responsible for human service delivery in Queensland. They have a particular role in providing overall policy and coordination through the office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS):

ATSIS...has a unique whole-of-government role facilitating and driving work to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage, with a mandate to drive whole-of-government Indigenous reforms, coordinate improvements to services for Indigenous Queenslanders, gather and facilitate access to Indigenous information, provide expert advice on Indigenous engagement and demonstrate leadership and vision on Indigenous issues.²

Quarterly Reports on Discreet Indigenous Communities

3.9 The committee heard that the Queensland Government produces Quarterly Reports on key indicators in Queensland's discrete Indigenous communities. The Quarterly Reports outline the government's actions to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians in selected regional and remote communities.³ The committee visited three of the identified 16 communities in its visit to Queensland: the Northern Peninsular Area (Bamaga); Napranum and Cherbourg.⁴

3.10 The Quarterly Reports provide statistics across a range of indicators including information about services and initiatives for the quarter and data in relation to community wellbeing. The six indicators are:

- (i) hospital admissions for assault-related conditions;
- (ii) reported offences against the person;
- (iii) breaches of alcohol restrictions;
- (iv) new substantiated notifications of harm;
- (v) new finalised child protection orders; and

1 Dr Tim Reddel, Queensland Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 1.

2 Dr Tim Reddel, Queensland Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 1.

3 Queensland Government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Website: <http://www.atsip.qld.gov.au/government/programs-initiatives/partnerships/quarterly-reports/> (accessed on 28 April 2010).

4 The 19 selected communities include: Aurukun; Cherbourg; Coen; Doomadgee; Hope Vale; Kowanyama; Lockhart River; Mornington Island; Mossman Gorge; Napranum; Northern Peninsula Area; Palm Island; Pormpuraaw; Woorabinda; Wujal Wujal and Yarrabah.

(vi) school attendance.⁵

3.11 The Department of Communities indicated that the most recent Quarterly Report:

...highlighted some good news for a number of communities, showing a decrease in the level of some key indicators, such as hospital admissions for assault related conditions, and there were some other notable issues in terms of improvements in school attendance in communities such as Aurukun.⁶

3.12 In Chapter 2 the committee outlined its concern with the lack of baseline data in many areas of the COAG Closing the Gap initiative. Accordingly, the committee was impressed by the Queensland Government's efforts to develop Quarterly Reports outlining key indicators.

3.13 The Cairns Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC) also commended the production of the Quarterly Reports. The ICC commented on how they utilise the information in the report on a day to day basis:

...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.⁷

3.14 The committee considers that all jurisdictions should produce Quarterly Reports. If this were to be done, real data could accurately measure national progress in closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

5 Queensland Government Quarterly Report on Key Indicators in Queensland's Discrete Indigenous Communities, October–December 2009, <http://www.atsip.qld.gov.au/government/programs-initiatives/partnerships/quarterly-reports/report-oct-dec-2009.asp> (accessed on 28 April 2010).

6 Dr Tim Reddel, Queensland Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 2.

7 Mr Mike Fordham, Cairns Indigenous Coordination Centre, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 90.

Recommendation 10

3.15 **The committee recommends that all state and territory governments consider the publication of a Quarterly Report in line with that published by the Queensland Government and that this information feed into the Council of Australian Governments baseline data collection process.**

Closing the Gap – Progress Report

3.16 As part of the COAG-led Closing the Gap initiative, the Queensland Government also develops an annual progress report. The Department of Communities advises that the second annual progress report for the period 2008–09 outlined the following outcomes:

The 2007–08 Queensland Closing the Gap Report presented significant gaps between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous people across almost all of the indicators associated with the COAG targets.⁸

3.17 The committee notes that this is consistent with the Prime Minister's annual Closing the Gap statement which is discussed in Chapter Two. The outcomes reflect that despite some very positive achievements, there is relatively slow progress in the government's efforts to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

3.18 The Queensland Department of Communities outlined that a key challenge remains service delivery to extremely diverse communities in a variety of regional and remote areas of Queensland.⁹

Cape York Welfare Reform Trials

3.19 One issue that is unique to Queensland is the implementation of the Cape York Welfare Reform trials.

3.20 The Cape York Welfare Reform trial commenced on 1 July 2008 and is intended to run until 1 January 2012.¹⁰ The trial operates in four Cape York communities: Aurukun, Hope Vale, Mossman Gorge and Coen. The project is intended to address passive welfare dependency and to assist communities to resume responsibility for community wellbeing, including school attendance, child safety

8 Queensland Government, Closing the Gap Report: <http://www.atsip.qld.gov.au/government/programs-initiatives/closing-gap/> (accessed on 28 April 2010).

9 Dr Tim Reddel, Queensland Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 2.

10 *Welfare Reform*, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, <http://www.cyi.org.au/welfarereform.aspx> (Accessed 25 April 2010).

reforms, alcohol and drug abuse, gambling addiction, family violence and tenancy management.¹¹

3.21 Mr Noel Pearson, Director of the Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, informed the committee that the philosophy behind the trial was drawn from international economic development literature that highlighted the importance of personal incentives and property rights:

The international literature on development was the starting place for our thinking. The literature seemed to suggest a number of critical ingredients that are needed and that were present when places like Singapore and Malaysia and places in India and so on moved along the road to development. The ingredients were good governance, incentives to benefit from work, good health and education provisioning, the rule of law, social order, good physical infrastructure and a system of property rights...¹²

3.22 The trial uses conditionality of welfare payments as a means of enforcing social obligations:

Putting obligations on welfare, inserting some basic conditionality: send your kids to school, abide by your housing tenancy agreement, abide by the laws of the community in which you live and keep your children free of neglect and abuse.¹³

3.23 In order to facilitate this process, the Family Responsibilities Commission (the commission), a statutory agency, was established. A feature of the commission was the appointment of Indigenous Elders and respected people in each of the targeted communities as local commissioners:

Probably the most rewarding aspect of what we do is work with the community members on the ground and with our local commissioners, who are local elders or respected people who have been appointed by the Governor in Council of the state of Queensland. Those commissioners are critical to the success of the commission and they are the people who make the work that we do very valuable and very rewarding.¹⁴

3.24 The committee notes evidence from witnesses suggesting that the empowerment of local commissioners under the terms of the trial is crucial in ensuring that the legal framework is aligned with the establishment of local authority and ownership of the social norms, as desired by the scheme.

11 Dr Tim Reddel, Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 3.

12 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 93.

13 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 94.

14 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 1.

The way in which the commissioners conduct themselves and the fact that they are formally recognised by the law are very important parts of the design of this thing.¹⁵

3.25 The section on justice includes comments by the committee noting the importance of community members feeling a sense of ownership and engagement with justice procedures as a fundamental basis for mutual cooperation, respect and community cohesion. The committee considers the local commissioner model used by the Family Responsibilities Commission to be a model worthy of further examination. Local commissioners also play a crucial role in bringing local knowledge into the process, including for example family and individual histories.¹⁶

3.26 The commission works with welfare recipients who are not living up to the behavioural standards requested under the trial. The commission receives notifications from a range of government departments, authorities and Magistrates Courts if:

- (a) a person's child is absent from school three times in a school term, without reasonable excuse;
- (a) a person has a child of school age who is not enrolled in school without lawful excuse;
- (b) a person is the subject of a child safety report;
- (c) a person is convicted of an offence in the Magistrates Court; or
- (d) a person breaches his or her tenancy agreement.¹⁷

3.27 Persons who are the subject of one of the above notifications are issued a notice to attend a conference. This conference may include individuals, parents or one or more families depending on the circumstances.¹⁸ Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Registrar of the Family Responsibilities Commission described the nature of the conferences in the context of a school attendance notification, stating:

The commissioners are quite firm and frank with the attendees at the conferences and they explain to them that for the children to have any sort of future life they need to get the education and, if they do not get the children to school, they are not going to get the education. In Aurukun in particular, most of our conferences are held in Wik, which is of huge benefit to the community members because most of them do not have English as a first language. The commissioners will converse with them in Wik and then translate for Commissioner Glasgow and a decision will be

15 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 98.

16 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 2.

17 Annual Report 2008–09, Family Responsibilities Commission, August 2009, p. 9.

18 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 3.

made. Effectively they ask the parents: ‘Why is it that you are not getting your children to school? Is there a valid reason? Is there not a valid reason?’ ... The options that you have are to work very closely with the attendance case manager and they will help you through all the challenges that you have. If you fail to comply with what you are asking you to do, we will conditionally income manage your welfare payments.’ We use welfare quarantining as a last resort.¹⁹

3.28 The conferencing process includes the tailoring of a case management plan, including referral to other support services such as parenting programs or drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

We might find out that the parents have a drug or alcohol issue or someone else in the house does, so it might mean a referral for that particular person off to the Wellbeing Centre to deal with those issues because it is affecting the ability of the parents to get the child to school. We make referrals to whatever services seem appropriate in the circumstances. We will try and get the parent to enter into an agreement and, if they agree to do those things that the commissioners have said, that is great and we will get them to sign an agreement. If they do not, the commissioners may make an order and then they will institute a decision. From there we monitor the parents’ compliance with the case plan over the 12-month period. We will often bring them back in for a review where we might be receiving information back from the community support services saying that they are not complying or they are not attending. We will either ask them to show cause if it seems to be a serious breach or alternatively, if it just seems like they need just a little bit more assistance or a little bit more reassurance, then we will just bring them back in for a case review.²⁰

3.29 Ms Sovenyhazi noted that there had been approximately 1700 of these conferences over the past 18 months.²¹ As a result of this process, there are currently 98 people who have their income managed. By way of comparison, the commission has a caseload of 517 clients, from a total population of 3000 across the four communities.²² Ms Sovenyhazi informed the committee that approximately six people had voluntarily requested income management, and that some of those who were compulsorily managed were asking to remain on income management after the initial 12 month mandated period.

Some of those 98 people currently on orders are asking to remain on income management once their 12-month order ceases to exist. We do not

19 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 3.

20 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 4.

21 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 8.

22 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 10.

actually think that is a good thing. The commission's attitude to that is that within that 12-month time frame people should be learning through the family income management regime as well as with Centrelink's assistance how to manage their funds better.

Because people are seeing the benefit of income management in the sense that they have got savings, they have bought whitegoods and household furniture, the kids have clothes and there is food in the house as they need it, people are getting comfortable with it. It is good in the sense that it is working to the degree that people are saving money and getting clothes for their kids and food but the commission in general does not think it is valuable for people to constantly stay on income management, because they are not learning.²³

3.30 The committee notes that persons subject to income management are provided with financial management training, including budgeting skills, Centrelink arrangements and internet banking.²⁴

3.31 The committee heard that there had been successes as a result of the scheme, particularly in terms of improving social responsibility. However, the committee heard that the intention to provide greater opportunities to people in the four communities had not yet translated to the outcomes desired. For instance, Mr Noel Pearson informed the committee that:

Two-and-a-bit years into it, I have to say that I am kind of positive about the social responsibility side of the agenda that we set. I am pleased with increased school attendances and so on. But the opportunity side of the equation has very much lagged behind. We have not gone very far with homeownership and we have not gone very far with employment or enterprise development. So if I was asked to give a broad account of where we are at, halfway through the trial, I would say we are going strong on the obligations side but not so strong on the opportunity side.²⁵

3.32 This was a view reflected in comments made by Mr Tim Reddel, Queensland Department of Communities, who stated:

The area we need to focus on now, on which all stakeholders would agree, is the opportunity side of the equation: economic opportunity, employment and issues such as home ownership.²⁶

23 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 7.

24 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 11.

25 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 94.

26 Dr Tim Reddel, Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p.5.

3.33 The committee notes that an independent evaluation of the welfare reform trial has been commissioned from the consulting firm KPMG. The committee understands that the first implementation review will be publicly available by the end of May 2010.²⁷ The committee awaits the release of this report with interest.

Recommendation 11

3.34 The committee recommends that the evaluation of the Cape York Welfare Reform trial be made public to inform other governments about the results of the program and its applicability to other regional and remote Indigenous communities.

Education

Queensland Government Closing the Gap Education Strategy

3.35 The Queensland Government's Closing the Gap Education Strategy outlines its approach to meet the COAG Closing the Gap targets. These targets include halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade and halving the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment by 2020.²⁸

3.36 Entitled *Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland*, the Strategy frames a vision for education in Queensland by 2020 consisting of the themes of strong; green; smart; healthy and fair education outcomes. The Strategy aims to:

- (a) deliver clear, concise messages for regions and schools;
- (b) specify a number of targets based on the COAG and Toward Q2 Outcomes; and
- (c) contain a small number of evidence-based service lines, priority areas and initiatives designed for sustainability.²⁹

3.37 The committee heard from the Department of Education and Training (DET) that there were over 200 schools with Indigenous students in Queensland to which this Strategy would apply.³⁰ DET advised that the 'children are right across the state and if

27 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 8.

28 *Closing the Gap Education Strategy, Every day, in every classroom, every student is learning and achieving*, Queensland Department of Education and Training, p.5.

29 *Closing the Gap Education Strategy, Every day, in every classroom, every student is learning and achieving*, Queensland Department of Education and Training, p.5.

30 Mr Ian Mackie, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 15.

we are to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes, it is the business of every school.³¹

3.38 The committee is impressed with the focus of the Queensland Government in developing a strategy that can be utilised by all 200 education institutions, especially those with a majority of Indigenous students. The committee considers that DET's overall approach provides a clear and understandable document that sets out a theoretical framework to reduce the gap in Indigenous educational disadvantage. However, the committee is of the opinion that the real test of such strategies is in the implementation stage, which it is not in a position to assess at this stage.

3.39 Not all states and territories have developed specific strategies to improve Indigenous education outcomes and the committee encourages other jurisdictions to look at the Queensland strategy as a good example of a state based approach that responds to the national COAG targets.

3.40 The committee heard evidence that the strategy may be of greater benefit if communities also developed their own educational strategies supporting implementation at a local community level:

I think we need to have an education council to lift our education standards and to support issues like attendance policies, behaviour management and all that stuff. Maybe we should have a document that says 'these are the standards that have been identified through data'...I think we as a community need to own the education strategy and build into the education system what is required by the education department. As chair of the education council we have established, I think we need support from the government. We need government to listen to the local issues because reality sits with us as a community.³²

Committee's Focus

3.41 The committee heard a range of evidence in Queensland from educators, parents and the government. The committee is of the view that three issues were particularly important:

- (a) parental engagement in education;
- (b) strong school attendance including options for alternative attendance; and
- (c) the need for a single point of accountability for student's wellbeing.

31 Mr Ian Mackie, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 15.

32 Councillor Jeffrey Aniba, Northern Peninsular Area Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 5.

3.42 The committee also heard a range of other issues including the success of the aggregated community college model and some boarding facilities as well as adequate training and support for teachers.

Parental Engagement in Education

3.43 All teachers that the committee spoke with outlined the fundamental importance of parental engagement with a child's education. They indicated that those students with strong parental support were obviously more likely to succeed at school.

3.44 The Queensland Government's Closing the Gap Education Strategy referred to above outlines parental engagement as an overarching goal and DET indicated that it was an 'absolute overarching strategy'.³³

3.45 The committee notes the focus of the strategy is for parents to become engaged in their children's learning and to develop their own literacy and numeracy skills in order to support the literacy and numeracy development of their preschool and young school age children.³⁴

3.46 The committee further notes the work at the national level to engage parents in child care, early learning and parent and family support programs through the COAG Closing the Gap initiative (Chapter 2 refers).³⁵

Parents as First Teachers

3.47 Mr Jeffrey Aniba, a councillor for the Northern Peninsula Area, informed the committee that 'education starts in the household. That is where you prepare your kids for education.'³⁶ The committee heard that DET has developed an initiative called 'Parents as First Teachers' to support the early years of development. The department advised the committee that the strategy is about:

Parental involvement on a door-to-door basis. But getting parents into the school has been a challenge. A number of the communities have active P&Cs but a number of the P&Cs are a slog. But there are some interesting strategies out there. I would point to the strategy that was in place in Aurukun for the last few years of zero suspensions and exclusions, so not suspending and excluding children, but insisting that children who misbehave—sometimes it is a bit more severe than misbehaviour—come

33 Mr Ian Mackie, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 21.

34 *Closing the Gap Education Strategy, Every day, in every classroom, every student is learning and achieving*, Queensland Department of Education and Training, p. 29.

35 The Hon Kevin Rudd, MP, Prime Minister, Closing the Gap Report 2010, p. 15. <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/general/Documents/ClosingtheGap2010/closingthe-gap2010.pdf> (accessed 22 April 2010).

36 Councillor Jeffrey Aniba, Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 6.

back to school in the company of their carers. That is the ultimate parental engagement: the parent must be in the classroom with the child.³⁷

Parental Engagement Program

3.48 The Napranum Preschool Parents and Learning Group drew the committee's attention to their parent engagement program which was developed to prepare preschool children for successfully transitioning to primary school. The program involves the parents working with their child in their own home environment at their own pace. This is achieved through the provision of a kit delivered once a week during the school term which generally links to school learning with activities.³⁸

3.49 The committee was impressed with the ability of this program to support both the children's education but importantly, the education of the parent. The committee heard that, in addition to kits for parents to support home learning, the program provides home tutors and behavioural support.³⁹

3.50 The committee was also told that the practical outcomes from the program, in terms of the children's capability, was significant, demonstrating the effectiveness of early childhood education as a step to future opportunity:

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.⁴⁰

3.51 The committee heard that the community had followed a cohort of preschoolers and parents who had undertaken this program and were now in year nine. They noted that the program had been shown to yield positive results:

The first lot of [Parents and Learning (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. Attendance is great for those kids, and the parents support them.⁴¹

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

37 Mr Ian Mackie, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 16.

38 Ms Corine Matasia, Napranum Preschool PaL Group Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 72.

39 Ms Corine Matasia, Napranum Preschool PaL Group Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 72.

40 Ms Emma Schuh, Napranum Preschool and Kindergarten, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 73.

41 Ms Emma Schuh, Napranum Preschool and Kindergarten, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 74.

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.⁴²

Early Childhood Education Model

3.52 In a submission to this inquiry, Community Child Care called for further support for an integrated community owned model offering the essential service of early childhood education and care.⁴³ This model offers flexibility for communities and offers children and families access to services and professionals in culturally safe and non-threatening manner.

3.53 The committee heard about an example of a similar model in Aurukun where a parenting centre approach is being trialled, combining a number of related services along with support for families.⁴⁴ As this centre is in its early days, the committee looks forward to hearing further reports on the outcomes of the model.

3.54 The committee also notes the work being developed across Australia through the implementation of the 35 COAG children and family centres. The committee considers the utilisation of pre-school and early education programs that involve parents should be encouraged and further supported by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

Parental Involvement in Primary and Secondary Education

3.55 The committee also heard positive evidence about parental involvement in primary and secondary education.

3.56 Mr Noel Pearson outlined that in Aurukun and Coen, the Cape York Academy strongly focuses on engaging parents in their children's education:

The work that informs the Cape York academy that is running in Aurukun and Coen was based on work that we did to engage parents in their children's education. The hook that was used was the community's anxiety about their kids being able to maintain their languages and their culture. One of the parents explained that culture is the hook to draw the parents through the door and participate in the school program, but then the parents came to see that there were a whole lot of things that they could do, even if they were illiterate themselves, to support their children with their general education. It was a very effective way of engaging parents in taking an active interest in their children. Of course we needed an education department that was open to throwing the doors open to parents

42 Ms Corine Matasia, Napranum Preschool PaL Group Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p.74.

43 Community Child Care, *Submission 46*, p. 1.

44 Mr Mike Fordhan, Indigenous Coordination Centre, *Committee Hansard*, p. 90.

participating in the school, and that did happen under Don Anderson's leadership. The school opened its doors to the parents.⁴⁵

3.57 The committee also heard evidence in Cherbourg where teachers are actively encouraging strong parental involvement in their children's education:

The success we have had obviously is built very strongly on parental-community collaboration. That is based on building up accountability for these boys in terms of direction for their lives.⁴⁶

3.58 The committee is pleased to note that parental engagement is a key principle outlined in the draft Indigenous Education Action Plan developed by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. The committee encourages the Commonwealth Government, together with state and territory governments, to build policy that supports parental involvement in Indigenous children's education.

Attendance

3.59 The committee was pleased to note signs that progress has been made in improving attendance in Queensland.

3.60 My School website data and other statistics show attendance has been historically low. A recent Centre for Independent Studies report indicates that, nationally, Indigenous students demonstrated poor results in the 2009 National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN):

Failure rates of 40 to 50% are common in Indigenous schools and rise to more than 70% in the Northern Territory. If schools are ranked by NAPLAN results, almost all the bottom 150 schools in such a notional list are Indigenous schools. There are few non-Indigenous schools in this bottom grouping and only a few Indigenous schools above this grouping. About 20,000 of Australia's 150,000 Indigenous students are enrolled in these Indigenous schools.⁴⁷

3.61 The committee heard that improving school attendance remains an ongoing effort in many schools:

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

45 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 97.

46 Mr Paul Leach, Cherbourg State School, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 50.

47 Ms Helen Hughes and Mr Mark Hughes, *Indigenous Education 2010*, The Centre for Independent Studies, Policy Monograph 110, p. vii.

up—but then it drops down mid-term sometimes, and that is just family transitions throughout the different communities around here.⁴⁸

3.62 One witness in Bamaga also commented that they have children who are in Year 11 that are reading at a Year 2 level which was largely due to lack of attendance.⁴⁹

3.63 However, in every community that the committee visited, there seemed to be some level of improvement in school attendance. The committee also notes the resolve of school principals and teachers that the committee met with, who indicated that they were not content with the current level of attendance and were striving for enhanced school attendance.

3.64 The committee heard that in some places such as in the Western Cape College and the Northern Peninsular Area College there were significant increases in the amount of students attending school and reaching Year 12 or at least Year 10 levels. Nevertheless the committee was concerned with evidence that there are still large cohorts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children not attending school. As Mr Don Anderson said:

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 ... there has been a dramatic improvement.⁵⁰

3.65 Witnesses informed the committee of a variety of reasons why children are not attending school including:

- (a) the shame of having no food or clothes;
- (b) higher than average levels of sickness;
- (c) having better things to do;
- (d) faking sickness so that they get suspended and do not have to turn up for school; and
- (e) causing disruptive behaviour to get suspended.⁵¹

3.66 The committee heard that parents are often 'scared of the embarrassment of having their child ask a teacher for food at school; they are scared of bringing shame upon their family.'⁵²

48 Ms Corine Matasia, Napranum Preschool PaL Group Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 74.

49 Committee meeting notes, Northern Peninsular Area School, Bamaga, 13 April 2010.

50 Mr Don Anderson, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 26.

51 Committee meeting notes, Northern Peninsular Area School, Bamaga, 13 April 2010.

3.67 The committee also heard evidence about a range of mechanisms designed to improve attendance targeting the reasons listed above. For example in Coen, the Student Education Trust Scheme encourages parents to provide for essential services for students:

Four or five members of a family will deduct money out of their accounts—say, \$5; \$20 a week; \$1,000 a year. Every kid under the age of 18 has got an account, and I think the average figure in those accounts is about \$1,000. So it will pay for the tuckshop, and for school uniforms, excursions and so on. It is voluntary and there is 100 per cent take-up by parents.⁵³

3.68 In Cherbourg, the committee heard evidence that the pre-school program has good attendance rates because they provide a whole range of services including food:

We also provide them with a good nutritional program. They come to our centre and they get four meals a day. We have a full-time cook, and they get roast dinners, salads and everything. That is all at the centre. We provide the children with their own hats and we provide sunscreen.⁵⁴

3.69 The committee also heard that that at many schools, if a particular child is having financial difficulties, the schools assists:

There are all these sorts of issues. I try to work around them. So we supply some food at school. We have got some shoes there as well that we will give children, especially now that the colder months are coming in. We have got a medical centre down here that has a program going whereby, if families are having difficulties, they can give some of these children shoes. So I am trying to overcome some of these problems, slowly. Shoes are a big problem here because they get cut feet, and if they get cut feet then they get boils and all that sort of stuff.⁵⁵

Welfare Reforms

3.70 The committee heard from multiple sources that school attendance rates were increasing across the selected communities under the Cape York Welfare Reform process. Mr Noel Pearson noted positive improvement in school attendance rates, stating:

In the trial communities there is now, as there used to be in the past, a general acceptance by everybody that Monday to Friday your kids are in school. That is kind of just a normal acceptance.

52 Councillor Jeffrey Aniba, Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 8.

53 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 97.

54 Mr Ray Burrows, Gundoo Day Care, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 4.

55 Mr Bevan Costello, Cherbourg State School, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 46.

Coen is a place riddled with the normal social problems of a small Aboriginal community, but the kids get packed up every Monday morning and they go to school. I think the norm in relation to school attendance is solidifying at this stage of the game.⁵⁶

3.71 A key part of this success would appear to be a strong role for attendance case managers who are on the ground working to get children to attend school:

The critical part of the school attendance is the work that the attendance case managers do. They will sit in the school in the morning, find out what children have not attended school, based on the roll, and then immediately go to the houses of those families and either get the children to school or find out why the children have not attended school. An enormous amount of work happens on the ground every single day to try and get these children to school. As I mentioned earlier, I think the increases to date are very, very pleasing. There is still quite a long way to go but I think, given the time that we have had, that the school, the attendance case managers and the commission should be fairly proud of where we have gotten to so far.⁵⁷

3.72 The committee notes the success of the trial in increasing attendance but the committee also notes the significant cost implications arising from this trial. The committee considers that while this approach has proven successful, it is unlikely to be financially viable in every community.

Family Support Officer/Truancy Officer

3.73 Some schools that are not part of the Welfare Reform trials have also engaged family support officers, or truancy officers, to improve attendance. Their responsibility is to visit families whose children were truant from school. In Bamaga, these officers were making progress:

We have an education attendance policy which we have just implemented through the school. We have employed about five family support officers, and that gave us support on attendance. We had 62 per cent attendance in 2008. We have just raised it by another six per cent, but we still sit at the bottom.⁵⁸

3.74 In Cherbourg the committee heard that an Indigenous teacher often goes with the truancy officer if there is some concern with a particular student or family because as he indicated:

56 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 95.

57 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 2.

58 Councillor Jeffrey Aniba, Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 6.

I am a local boy—I was born and bred here. I still live out here. I know all the children. I know their parents. I know their grandparents. So I am well into it. I know it all as far as the family tree goes. That in turn helps me a great deal because I know the backgrounds and so I will know what has gone on the night before. If there are two families fighting down the road, I will know it because I live there. People talk. And when we get to school, I will know that there is going to be an issue with that child because he will have been up late the night before. So I can then let people know what to look for and what sort of behavioural issues will come from that family.⁵⁹

3.75 The committee notes that while government strategy is important, policies that work with individuals at the local level be it through truancy officers or local commissioners will obtain the greatest results.

Transport

3.76 The committee heard that there is often a lack of transport options to support student's attendance at school. The Family Responsibilities Commission indicated that in Aurukun during the wet season, if children come to school and they are wet because they have walked to school in the rain, they are sent home because they cannot sit with wet clothes in a classroom that has air conditioning.⁶⁰

3.77 The committee heard evidence in Napranum about the transport of over 190 students to Weipa (some 7 kilometers away). This was also the case in Cherbourg where the school bus provides transport and has improved the levels of school attendance with financial support from the Commonwealth Government:

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.⁶¹

3.78 DET indicated that the issue with providing buses and transport to support increased school attendance is vexed.⁶² Recalling his own experience, Mr Ian Mackie indicated that:

Having actually driven those buses myself I can alert you to the fact that it is incredibly frustrating. You turn up to be told, 'No, come back in five minutes. I have not had a shower yet.' You come back in five minutes and are told, 'No, I still have to have a shower.' It can be incredibly frustrating for schools, given that there is no better than a kilometre in many of the

59 Mr Bevan Costello, Cherbourg State School, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 45.

60 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 4.

61 Mr Mike Fordham, Indigenous Coordination Centre, *Committee Hansard*, p.90.

62 Mr Ian Mackie, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 23.

communities by way of walking distance. When we talk about reciprocity, getting the children to walk a kilometre is probably not too big an ask. But there are cases where there is a distance to homelands. I recently visited the Jabiru Area School where bussing is quite a feature. But I take your question for the import that it delivers.⁶³

3.79 The committee considers that there needs to be a level of reciprocity and mutual obligation on behalf of the school to ensure that there are options for students to be able to travel to school in a healthy, safe and secure manner. The committee is of the view that more could be done to ensure adequate transport options for students attending school in regional and remote Queensland.

Alternate Attendance

3.80 Mr Don Anderson suggested that schools also need to consider alternate modes of delivery to support optimal learning outcomes for these students:

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.⁶⁴

3.81 The committee notes the logistical and budget implications arising from implementation of such a proposal. Nevertheless, the committee considers that further consideration should be given to a mechanism for students to can easily catch up on missed school attendance.

3.82 The committee heard one example of reintegration was the development of re-entry programs for students who have not been at school for long periods of time. The example that the committee heard was a program that ran from 8:50am to 9:50am in the morning, focusing on literacy to try and speed up the reintegration process through focused learning.⁶⁵

3.83 The committee is concerned that devoting energy to increasing attendance alone will not be effective unless it is accompanied by a plan to reintegrate students

63 Mr Ian Mackie, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 23.

64 Mr Don Anderson, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 28.

65 Committee meeting notes, Northern Peninsular Area School, Bamaga, 13 April 2010.

who have missed a large amount of schooling and require special attention in order to reengage successfully.

Recommendation 12

3.84 The committee recommends that the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs expand the policy on attendance currently in the draft Indigenous Education Action Plan to include the need for measures that facilitate reintegration of students who have missed large amounts of schooling but recommence attending school as the result of attendance measures.

Accountability

3.85 DET drew to the committee's attention the need for a stronger level of accountability with one person for educational outcomes:

We have the particularly strong view that they need to be from preschool to year 12 and include one point of accountability for the life journey of children so that one person can be held to account for the total education service delivery and then employment of that particular group of children. It is case and place based management. Again I refer to that powerful concept of no child being left behind and very much tailored to the case and the place.⁶⁶

3.86 Noting the difficulties with this proposal, the committee sees merit in providing a mechanism for stronger accountability with one person in student's futures; otherwise it is easy for students to slip through the gaps. Indeed, the committee heard evidence that results were achieved in one school because of the strong belief from teachers in what they were doing:

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.⁶⁷

3.87 At the Northern Peninsular Area College, the committee heard that each student in Year 11 and 12 is individually case managed with a teacher supporting their education throughout these two years. Teachers also follow student's progress for two years post school and offer support and advice to encourage further training or

66 Mr Ian Mackie, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 16.

67 Mr Don Anderson, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 30.

employment.⁶⁸ This was also the situation in the Western Cape College. In larger regional centres, the committee heard it was somewhat more difficult to keep track of students once they had left school.⁶⁹

3.88 The committee considers that there should be greater accountability for a student's achievements with one person, particular for senior level students (years 11 and 12). A single person who is able to dedicate time to be a mentor; adviser or tutor would allow for greater support for student learning. Importantly it would also support post educational training and employment. The committee recognises the limitations in terms of budget and time for teachers but considers that this is one area for further consideration.

3.89 The committee further heard evidence that there needs to be a change in the attitude about education. Mr Don Anderson indicated to the committee that there is a strong need for an attitude of learning and education to occur and that it is unacceptable for students to not be accountable and skip school to go to the 'swimming hole' instead of learning:

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

68 Committee meeting notes, Northern Peninsular Area School, Bamaga, 13 April 2010.

69 Mr Robert Fysh, Peace Lutheran College, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 65.

away with that sort of nonsense in a fee-paying school or the higher achieving schools.⁷⁰

3.90 The committee considers that there should be a high priority placed on learning and education including the establishment of firm rules and consequences for those who do not attend school. The committee considers that enhanced accountability with one person, such as a teacher, would encourage this environment. The committee notes the inherent challenges and difficulties in implementing such an approach but notes that a strong investment in children's futures is a fundamental prerequisite for future success.

Early Childhood Education

3.91 One of the key priorities of the Queensland Government's Closing the Gap Education Strategy is a focus on early childhood education and care.⁷¹ Chapter 2 also outlines the work on the COAG-led National Partnership on Indigenous Early Childhood Development.

3.92 The Queensland Indigenous Education Strategy seeks to increase Indigenous participation in pre-school and thereby increase school readiness for Indigenous children as they enter primary schooling.⁷²

3.93 The committee heard evidence about the success of some early childhood programs in Napranum, Bamaga and Cherbourg. The Gundoo Day Care Centre in Cherbourg, for instance, provides a service for children to be involved in early childhood education and care from the very young age of six weeks. The committee heard that the centre provides culturally significant early childhood education whilst also providing for early integration from childcare to primary school:

We cater for individuals. We do individual programs. We do a lot of cultural work. We bring in our elders. Having some males within our centre makes a big difference as well. We have managed to increase to about four males in the outside school hours care program. We have one male permanently in our long day care program. He has just completed his certificate III, so he is eligible to be a group leader. The kids love him. We have a couple of the outside school hours care males come over a couple of mornings a week and they paint didgeridoos with the children, they do painting and they play games, and the children love having that male aspect to the childcare area. I am sure that my committee have backed that up. It has been very good.⁷³

70 Mr Don Anderson, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 31.

71 *Closing the Gap Education Strategy, Every day, in every classroom, every student is learning and achieving*, Queensland Department of Education and Training, p. 9.

72 *Closing the Gap Education Strategy, Every day, in every classroom, every student is learning and achieving*, Queensland Department of Education and Training, p. 9.

73 Mr Ray Burrows, Gundoo Day Care Centre, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 3.

3.94 The committee considers that this service is evidence of a successful approach designed to integrate young children into the discipline associated with attending school every day; learning as well as building early childhood achievement and confidence. The committee considers that more culturally appropriate day care services are needed in regional and remote Indigenous communities. The committee is of the view that pre-school services are an essential precursor for success in primary and secondary schooling. The committee is of the view that pre-school services should be available for each and every child in Australia.

3.95 Given the evidence received in Cherbourg, the committee also notes the value of culturally appropriate programs designed to develop and support early childhood development.

College Model

3.96 The committee also heard evidence from proponents of the college model that places smaller remote schools into larger schools. This has demonstrated successful results with a resulting structure focused on leadership, economies of scale and the concept of a cohesive college environment.⁷⁴

3.97 Development of colleges and cluster arrangements to create Pre-school to Year 12 (P-12) models and frameworks in regional and remote settings is also a recommendation of the Indigenous Education Alliance in its submission to the committee.⁷⁵

3.98 The Department of Education informed the committee that they also support the college model, stating:

We are very much supportive of P-12 college models and would be happy to receive questions about college constructs because we understand education systems across the nation are working with college constructs.⁷⁶

3.99 The committee notes the importance of resource allocation to larger schools and the diversification of learning that can occur with larger regionally based schools and therefore supports the development of the college model if it achieves substantial changes in education outcomes.

Boarding Facilities and Hostels

3.100 The committee heard from the community in Weipa about the plans for a 120 bed hostel. The committee noted that there was a degree of community concern about

74 Committee meeting notes, Northern Peninsular Area School, Bamaga, 13 April 2010; and Don Anderson, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 27.

75 Indigenous Education Alliance, *Submission 100*, p. 5.

76 Mr Ian Mackie, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 15.

the lack of consultation about the hostel.⁷⁷ Nevertheless the committee was pleased to hear about the positive impact that this hostel could have on outlying regions, enabling them to send their children to the Western Cape College. Managed appropriately, the hostel should have a significant impact on the attendance rates of school children in the region.

3.101 The Principal of the Peace Lutheran College in Cairns outlined that there are a range of predictors of school success for students from remote communities succeeding in boarding facilities and those are:

- (i) a pattern of strong attendance;
- (ii) a strong peer group support;
- (iii) an ability to manage transition from community life to school life; and
- (iv) a stable and functional family background.⁷⁸

3.102 This evidence not only demonstrates the pre-requisites for students travelling to attend school, but in the committee's view, underpins the requirements for educational success for students in general.

3.103 In previous evidence, the committee heard about the difficulties for students travelling between different cultures. The committee heard that one of the ways that the Peace Lutheran College was managing the transition between school life and community life was the development of a cultural passport. This 'passport' essentially provides skills students can use in moving between their communities and Western cultural environments.⁷⁹

3.104 The committee supports the development of aides and tools, mentoring, and technological solutions to support students that need to travel to attend school.

Teachers

3.105 DET commented that there is a strong need for the very best teachers be placed in regional and remote communities. For instance, in Cape York, the Torres Strait and the Gulf, DET advised that they encouraged the best graduate teachers to go to these areas. The department informed the committee that they had sought to make remote locations into prestige opportunities, stating:

77 Mr Ian Mackie, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 24.

78 Mr Rob Fysh, Peace Lutheran College, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 64.

79 Mr Rob Fysh, Peace Lutheran College, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 67.

[DET] put up a barrier and said 'you cannot come into these locations unless you are the very best teacher or the very best graduate.' We did say to some people, 'nobody is preferable to you.'⁸⁰

3.106 The committee supports the efforts by DET to encourage the very best teachers to regional and remote Indigenous communities.

Support and Training

3.107 The committee heard evidence that there needs to be more support, training and investment in teachers if there is to be a significant change in the education levels of students.

3.108 Mr Don Anderson was critical of the training that is provided to teachers, indicating that there was not enough support for teachers to learn the art or trade of teaching:

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?⁸¹

3.109 Mr Anderson was also critical of some of the current approaches to teaching. He indicated that training needs to refocus on the foundations of teaching, stating:

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.⁸²

3.110 The committee is concerned about the overall level of support for teachers and their ability to both be culturally appropriate and at the same time achieve appropriate educational outcomes. Indeed as one principal commented:

80 Mr Ian Mackie, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 15.

81 Mr Don Anderson, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 30.

82 Mr Don Anderson, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 30.

In my experience—and the experience has been costly—it is easy in trying to please everyone to end up tying yourself in knots and making yourself and your institution ineffective. Something I have learnt in five years at Peace is to stop doing that.⁸³

3.111 The Indigenous Education Alliance has recommended that a comprehensive induction program be implemented in regional Indigenous school settings for a period of one to two years.⁸⁴ The committee agrees that there should be significant support for an extended period for new teachers to regional and remote communities and for teachers who work extensively with Indigenous students from these communities.

3.112 The committee also heard that there is a lack of focus on sharing of information between school teachers. The committee heard from one school that the network of teachers was informal and very much dependent on being 'in the system' for a period of time before you establish a support network.⁸⁵

3.113 However, the committee heard that there are some networks for Indigenous teachers. The committee is pleased that this is the case but notes that there needs to be enhanced networking between teachers in schools so that professional support, advice and continuous development is supported. The value of formal teachers networks was summed up by one Indigenous teacher in Cherbourg who noted:

As a teacher, if I was not part of the Indigenous teachers network, I would not have contact with any other teachers.⁸⁶

English as a Second Language

3.114 The committee found that there was also a general lack of training for teachers in Queensland to deliver English as a Second Language (ESL) learning programs for those with English as their second or third language.

3.115 Professor Babacan indicated that 'we see problems with access to education pathways; mainstream schooling not accommodating the learning needs of Indigenous students. We see that English language is a problem; students do not speak appropriately.'⁸⁷

83 Mr Robert Fysh, Peace Lutheran College, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2010, p. 66.

84 Indigenous Education Alliance, *Submission 100*, p. 5.

85 Ms Vanessa Boal, Cherbourg State School, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 52.

86 Mr Paul Leach, Cherbourg State School, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 52.

87 Professor Hurriyet Babacan, Cairns Institute, James Cook University, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2010, p. 21.

3.116 Many school teachers indicated that ESL training was essential. The committee heard from multiple teachers that their schools did not have the ESL expertise that they need.⁸⁸

3.117 The committee considers that additional training should be provided to selected teachers in each regional or remote school that has large numbers of students whose first language is not English.

Indigenous Teachers

3.118 DET informed the committee that under the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP), Queensland has trained 127 teachers in their home communities to teach children.⁸⁹

3.119 The committee heard evidence in places such as the Northern Peninsular Area College regarding efforts to get Indigenous teachers trained through James Cook University.⁹⁰ Similarly in Cherbourg, the committee heard that the RATEP program 'worked really well with the school because those people are working as teacher aides in our school. They are getting that expertise and then they go across to study in the afternoon and they can pull the practical and the theory side of it together. It has really helped.'⁹¹

3.120 The committee encourages programs that actively support increasing Indigenous teachers in regional and remote Indigenous community schools. As noted above, Indigenous teachers who are born and bred in local communities can play a strong role model and leadership role in schools and create a positive learning environment for many students in particular schools. The committee also considers that Indigenous teachers are well placed to support cultural education and youth connections with Indigenous elders through the school environment.

Teacher Turnover

3.121 One of the problems that the committee heard about is the high teacher turnover in regional and remote Indigenous schools. In Weipa, one witness commented that:

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

88 For example, Mr Robert Fysh, Peace Lutheran College, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p.66 and Ms Jenni Greenham, Cherbourg State School, 16 April 2010, p. 50.

89 Mr Ian Mackie, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 16.

90 Committee meeting notes, Northern Peninsular Area School, Bamaga, 13 April 2010.

91 Mr Bevan Costello, Cherbourg State School, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 49.

remained. I know that the parents of the children are upset with that as well.⁹²

3.122 In Bamaga, the Northern Peninsular Area College also reported that one third of teachers left each year, causing a major problem with consistency.⁹³

3.123 The committee notes that this situation is not unique to Queensland. In the communities that the committee has visited throughout Australia, the difficulties of attracting high quality teachers particularly to remote schools is difficult. The committee did not have any evidence about the remuneration or salaries of teachers or credit points and the committee therefore notes this as a problem for further consideration.

Employment and Enterprise

3.124 The committee's fourth term of reference concerns employment and enterprise opportunities in regional and remote Indigenous communities. In its first report, the committee outlined that employment and enterprise development had been slow and that the Indigenous unemployment rate was over three times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous people.⁹⁴

3.125 In the three hearings in remote Indigenous communities in Queensland and in evidence provided in Cairns and Brisbane, the committee heard that progress in employment and enterprise development was of serious concern. Some witnesses commented that this was the number one issue of concern in their community. Indeed in Bamaga, the committee heard from the council that there was up to 70% unemployment in some areas.⁹⁵

3.126 The committee also heard that there were a number of challenges to achieve higher levels of employment, particularly in the communities that were still highly dependent on the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP).

3.127 As noted in the section on the Cape York Welfare Reform trials above, Mr Noel Pearson informed the committee that despite strong improvements in social obligations, the opportunity side of the reforms including employment and enterprise development has not made significant progress.⁹⁶

92 Mr Shane Bousen, Weipa Town Authority, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 20.

93 Committee meeting notes, Northern Peninsular Area School, Bamaga, 13 April 2010.

94 Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, *Report No 1*, p. 49.

95 Councillor Peter Lui, Northern Peninsular Area Regional Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 8.

96 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 94.

3.128 Mr Noel Pearson, writing in the *Weekend Australian* following his appearance before the committee, noted that economic development would require the harnessing of self interest, or the 'intangible engines of human motivation'.⁹⁷ Mr Pearson expressed his concern that government neglected the need for mainstream economic development in regional and remote Indigenous communities due to a fixation on passive service delivery.⁹⁸

3.129 Conversely, the committee also heard evidence about the range of options that have been and could be undertaken in remote Indigenous communities to improve employment and enterprise development across Queensland.

Queensland Government Employment and Economic Development

3.130 The Queensland Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) outlined to the committee that the Queensland Government's policy on Indigenous employment and enterprise aims for full economic employment. The department indicated that they consider it is their key responsibility to provide opportunities for Indigenous Australians to:

...participate fully in the economy is the most effective way for people to close the socioeconomic gap. Having a job is the best way in particular so a sustainable one is the best insurance against exclusion. We have taken that as a sort of axiomatic thing to say but I think it is an important starting point.⁹⁹

3.131 The committee heard that between 1 July 2007 and 31 December 2009, the DEEDI had assisted 13 000 Indigenous job seekers (25 per cent of all job seekers) with employment and training programs. The department advised that they spent \$17.7 million on Indigenous specific employment projects with 57 per cent of this expenditure occurring outside South East Queensland (i.e in more regional and remote areas). The department also advised that in 27 cases, they helped promote Indigenous businesses to grow.¹⁰⁰

3.132 Despite these efforts, the department acknowledged that notwithstanding recent improvements to the employment rate for Indigenous Australians in

97 Mr Noel Pearson, 'Senators, start up the intangible engine of human motivation', *The Australian*, April 24, 2010, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/senators-start-up-the-intangible-engine-of-human-motivation/story-e6frg6zo-1225857626192>, (accessed 12 May 2010).

98 Mr Noel Pearson, 'Senators, start up the intangible engine of human motivation', *The Australian*, April 24, 2010, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/senators-start-up-the-intangible-engine-of-human-motivation/story-e6frg6zo-1225857626192>, (accessed 12 May 2010).

99 Mr Ian Fletcher, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 17.

100 Mr Ian Fletcher, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 18.

Queensland, more needs to be done because the unemployment rate is 'higher than it ought to be.'¹⁰¹

3.133 The department indicated that addressing Indigenous employment and enterprise issues is even more important because the general characteristic of the Indigenous population in Queensland is becoming more youthful than the general population. The committee heard that between 2006 and 2016, 37,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders will reach labour market age.¹⁰²

Employment Challenges

3.134 The committee heard that there were a number of pre-requisites prior to entering into the workforce.

Employers Criteria

3.135 The committee heard from Rio Tinto Alcan about some of the pre-requisites that they require for successful employment within their company. The committee considers that the challenges that were articulated by Rio Tinto Alcan exemplify some of the challenges of Indigenous employment and have broad applicability across a range of businesses and sectors. Rio Tinto Alcan indicated that the following were obstacles for Indigenous employment:

- (i) a low level of literacy and numeracy;
- (ii) the lack of driver education and licences;
- (iii) alcohol and other significant addiction problems;
- (iv) health problems from living community life;
- (v) significant family pressures;
- (vi) a lack of life skills such as good nutrition;
- (vii) a bank account; and
- (viii) an understanding of the work environment.¹⁰³

3.136 Mr Christopher Foord, Bamaga Enterprise Limited, informed the committee that one of the biggest challenges to overcome is 'a mindset or a work ethic to want to do a five-day week job.' He further commented that this has a practical impact on businesses saying that 'if we, for instance, roster five people in the restaurant here or in housekeeping, we expect three to turn up.'¹⁰⁴

101 Mr Ian Fletcher, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 17.

102 Mr Ian Fletcher, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 18.

103 Mrs Jo-Anne Scarini, Rio Tinto Alcan, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, pp 37–40.

104 Mr Christopher Foord, Bamaga Enterprises Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 16.

3.137 The committee notes that there are significant challenges between traditional cultural obligations on employment, but considers that these challenges are not insurmountable. The committee did not heard any evidence about how traditional culture and full time employment can work reciprocally but identifies this as an area for further enquiry.

Support Services

3.138 The committee heard from some witnesses that the lack of support services were also a major obstacle for successful employment in regional and remote communities. The lack of public transport, for instance, precluded many Indigenous people from easily leaving their communities to undertake full time employment in close regional centres or other communities. One witness indicated that a number of people in Yarrabah were looking for work opportunities but the lack of transport infrastructure and the need for a personal private vehicle precluded most from working in the nearby regional centre of Cairns.¹⁰⁵

3.139 The committee further heard from one employer in Cherbourg (Gundoo Day Care Centre) that because Cherbourg has no public transport options, they provide transport for their staff.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, as outlined in the mental health section below, some young people do not have the self esteem or confidence to leave their communities and travel to other communities to seek employment.

3.140 The committee also heard that a number of mothers in Napranum would like to work and have the skills to be able to contribute to a full time job but there is a lack of child care options. Ms Sonia Schuh from the Napranum Preschool and Kindergarten said '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.'¹⁰⁷

Employment Options

3.141 The committee heard from a range of people about some of the options that could be advanced in Indigenous communities in Queensland. These options included: enhanced training and development; stronger pathways from school to employment; mechanisms to improve life skills and a range of business enterprises. The committee also heard a range of views on the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP).

105 Dr Roxane Bainbridge, Cairns Institute, James Cook University, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 23.

106 Mr Ray Burrows, Gundoo Day Care Centre, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 4.

107 Ms Sonia Schuh, Napranum Preschool and Kindergarten, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 81.

Training and Development

3.142 The committee heard from Rio Tinto about their Indigenous training and development team that is currently developing innovative approaches to improve the level of Indigenous employment in the mining sector. The committee heard that this includes a significant pre-work component that helps with any life skills or work skill issues that they might have prior to bringing Indigenous Australians entering into the Rio Tinto workplace:¹⁰⁸

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.¹⁰⁹

3.143 The committee heard that there were opportunities for stronger partnerships between government, schools and the private sector to develop training options that are appropriate for business needs:

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 pre-work development,' or get a chainsaw ticket or whatever. No, that is actually not helpful to get people into paid, long-term employment.¹¹⁰

3.144 The committee considers that the focus on pre-work readiness programs is extremely sage advice and encourages a strong Commonwealth/state government partnership with industry representatives. The committee notes that some of the programs listed in the section on social and emotional wellbeing would assist in facilitating work-readiness or the ability to undertake more specific training.

Pathways from School

3.145 As outlined in the discussion on education above, many schools and colleges are case managing their senior school students from education into employment in regional and remote parts of Queensland.

3.146 The committee heard that in many schools in Cape York, there has been a service guarantee that essentially means sticking by senior students until they achieve further education, training or employment:

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

108 Mrs Jo-Anne Scarini, Rio Tinto Alcan, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 37.

109 Mrs Jo-Anne Scarini, Rio Tinto Alcan, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 37.

110 Mrs Jo-Anne Scarini, Rio Tinto Alcan, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 40.

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.¹¹¹

3.147 DET informed the committee that they were looking to make sure that 'no-one is left behind' and that 'every child gets a place at the table'.¹¹² The committee was impressed with the efforts by the Queensland Government, and the individual schools that the committee spoke with, to provide pathway for students into future employment through the service guarantee.

3.148 Mr Don Anderson spoke of the need to align education with employment outcomes in his evidence to the committee:

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.¹¹³

3.149 The committee strongly supports the concept of a service guarantee and the support for students following their education into further pathways. During the third reporting period, the committee heard from a variety of organisations in the Kimberley that it was the pathway between training to actual employment that was most often lacking. Supporting a definitive path from training to employment is an important part of encouraging employment in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

Careers Expo

3.150 The committee also heard that a Careers Expo is held annually in Bamaga to showcase the types of employment that are available for students leaving school.¹¹⁴ The committee heard that schools are actively developing partnerships with business to support those students with an interest in various businesses, police, the military or further education opportunities. For instance, Rio Tinto, the biggest employer in Weipa has a very active program of engagement with the local school 'to ensure that

111 Mr Don Anderson, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 24.

112 Mr Ian Mackie, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 15.

113 Mr Don Anderson, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 25.

114 Committee meeting notes, Northern Peninsular Area School, Bamaga, 13 April 2010; and Don Anderson, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 27.

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.¹¹⁵

Social and Emotional Wellbeing

3.151 The committee heard from the Cairns Institute, which is utilising alternative mechanisms to try and encourage a culture of learning and engagement. The organisation is aiming to accomplish this through improving social and emotional wellbeing, facilitating life skills and individual ambition. Dr Bainbridge detailed the types of programs that they are running in Yarrabah to engage children into education and employment for example through building and constructing bikes.¹¹⁶ Other elements of the program are detailed in the section on mental health and social and emotional wellbeing below.

Small business

Challenges of small business in regional and remote communities

3.152 The committee heard about the frustration felt by some witnesses as a result of governments coming to communities with the promise of micro-enterprise and small businesses creation. Councillor Peter Lui stated that 'there is a fatigue from communities about government officials telling them about economic development opportunities.' He argued that governments should:

...stop using that as a myth in Indigenous communities. Have the government really look at putting those economic development programs into the communities. Stop coming here and telling us, I suppose, what we want to hear. Help us solve some problems. I have been a councillor since I was 26 and I have heard the term 'economic development' just being used over and over again. We have talked about housing and overcrowding. I come from an overcrowded family and I now have a family of my own that is in an overcrowded situation, so it is just going over and over again.¹¹⁷

3.153 The committee also heard the irritation by many witnesses about the lack of support for business enterprise and the lack of a business case for many types of businesses in communities with smaller population bases:

In a community such as this you cannot do that because there are not enough industries and businesses here to employ everybody. You can say, 'Let's create new jobs.' Where are you going to create them? If you open a coffee shop, how many cups of coffee do you have to sell a day with a

115 Mrs Jo-Anne Scarini, Rio Tinto Alcan, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 36.

116 Dr Roxane Bainbridge, Cairns Institute, James Cook University, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 23.

117 Councillor Peter Lui, Northern Peninsula Area Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 8.

population of 3,000 in the community? It is very difficult with a limited population to get the demand to drive a new business.¹¹⁸

3.154 The committee heard about some case studies of small businesses that had shut down due to the difficulties in trying to make a profit. As an example, Billy's Lagoon, which was a cattle ranch in Cape York shut down because it was unprofitable.¹¹⁹

3.155 The Queensland Government has indicated that 'if a business cannot fundamentally fly then we cannot keep them on life support'.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, DEEDI said that 'the labour market in remote areas is almost by definition small and more difficult to get into. But that does not mean we should kind of give up.'¹²¹ The department informed the committee that where a problem is identified, their staff members are working with businesses and individuals to identify training, employment or enterprise options.¹²²

3.156 The committee strongly encourages the Australian and Queensland Governments to get behind the Queenslanders for Work schemes and other respective mechanisms to ensure that there is a strong focus on improving the enterprise situation in regional and remote Indigenous communities in Queensland.

Examples of options for small business in regional and remote communities

3.157 The committee heard that there are a range of possibilities for enterprise and employment in regional and remote Indigenous communities but these ideas needed to be supported by funding. For instance, the Cairns Institute highlighted a range of possible enterprise opportunities:

- (a) growing alternative crops and diversifying the agriculture base;
- (b) connecting tourism with cultural tourism; and
- (c) development of Indigenous creative arts.¹²³

118 Mr Christopher Foord Chief Executive Officer, Bamaga Enterprises Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 18.

119 Mr Roy Chevathen, Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 70.

120 Mr Ian Fletcher, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 19.

121 Mr Ian Fletcher, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 18.

122 Mr Ian Fletcher, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 28.

123 Professor Hurriyet Babacan, Cairns Institute, James Cook University, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 33.

3.158 Dr Bowers from the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health Queensland described her work in trying to sustain and extend art initiatives. Dr Bower said:

We have also been fairly creative in applying to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for an Innovation Fund grant to see if we can sustain and extend the art initiatives, which is not just about people drawing; it is about community engagement. It is looking at other forms of art, like weaving ghost nets and all sorts of other things, where there is an opportunity to build an enterprise and a livelihood.¹²⁴

3.159 DEEDI indicated that they have been engaging with regional and remote Indigenous communities in Queensland and utilising these communities to run pilot projects as a priority:

We think that that means in very practical terms that these groups need to be prioritised for inclusion in the many pilots that Centrelink, and the federal government generally, have got underway. That is certainly something we are doing in our own pilot work and something where we are looking to work closely with federal colleagues to share experience and see if we can develop effective models that can be used more widely. Of course we need to ensure that we have suitably qualified Indigenous staff and service providers. That is a challenge too and something that our department (a) takes seriously and (b) where the department co-leads on wider targets across the Queensland public sector.¹²⁵

Trades

3.160 The committee witnessed first hand the lack of qualified tradesmen in remote Indigenous communities. In Bamaga, for instance, the committee met with the Northern Peninsular Area School where the air-conditioning was broken and the Principal indicated that it would likely be some weeks before a repairer could come and fix the problem. Similarly, in the Bamaga Centrelink office, the committee heard that the air conditioning had been broken for 10 weeks.¹²⁶

3.161 Certainly in bigger regional centres there remain some opportunities for trade based employment as one witness said: "There is a big employment base waiting to be tapped. I moved to Cairns three months ago and it has taken me two months just to get a door put in the house. So services and trades are crying out for people, but it is about the connection and pathways for the community to get employment in a trade role."¹²⁷

124 Dr Jennifer Bower, Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health Queensland, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2010, p. 35.

125 Mr Ian Fletcher, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 19.

126 Committee meeting notes, Bamaga, 13 April 2010.

127 Professor Hurriyet Babacan, Cairns Institute, James Cook University, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 33.

Indigenous art and craft

3.162 Boystown demonstrated practical examples of the work that they are doing on a micro-enterprise level with Indigenous communities in Western Australia such as screen printing. Boystown advised that they will be in the community for the long term to help the Indigenous women to start their own small arts business.¹²⁸

3.163 The committee was also impressed with the work of the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council which has identified agriculture as a particular area where they can create jobs. The Barambah Health Centre indicated that Cherbourg had community produce in the shops that was fresh and cheap and that people were purchasing it.¹²⁹ The committee saw this example as a dual benefit – creating jobs and contributing to a healthy lifestyle.

Cultural Tourism

3.164 The committee heard from one Indigenous Elder who was brimming with ideas for small business enterprise but required a small amount of seed funding to make these ideas a reality:

We are business minds. We have to be; otherwise, we would not survive. We want to be given a chance. With government sending money to centralised places down here or to subregional or regional centres that speak on our behalf and cut the money out from us, we have nothing. That money needs to be streamlined down to give us an opportunity to think for ourselves in terms of getting businesses up and running—for example, tourism. We cannot do tourism in our centralised towns. We can promote tourism on our homelands. We can do ecotourism and stuff like that—set up camp grounds and employ rangers or caretakers and get artists from that area who can do the art that belongs to that area. We need to market it, manufacture it and sell it from our homelands. We cannot sell it from a town, because we do not have ownership.¹³⁰

3.165 The committee considered that this was a practical idea and use of homelands to encourage and support the development of enterprise. The committee was impressed by the infrastructure that Mr Claudie outlined his community has developed as the start of a possible tourism venture, including: solar power; access to telecommunications infrastructure; education support via school of the air and an airstrip.¹³¹

128 Ms Lyn Schonefeld, Boystown, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 81.

129 Mr Matthey Friday, Barambah Health Centre, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 33.

130 Mr David Claudie, Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, pp 86–87.

131 Mr David Claudie, Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, pp 88–90.

Professional Services

3.166 The committee heard from a range of witnesses that one of the areas where there is a less than optimal rate of Indigenous employment is in the professional services industries such as health, education, police and armed forces.

Health Professionals

3.167 The committee heard about the chronic shortages of health professionals in a range of places that it visited. For instance, in the committee's discussions with Bamaga Hospital, they heard that there were 15 to 20 vacancies.¹³² The committee heard that this shortage was largely precipitated by the inability to house health professionals in Bamaga which is discussed below. Nevertheless, this is an example of a professional service which is likely to be growing over the next few decades as Australia's population ages.

Teachers

3.168 The committee heard from both Cherbourg State School and the Northern Peninsular Area about the training of Indigenous teachers from the local community.¹³³ In Cherbourg, for instance, Mr Bevan Costello said:

We have a RATEP program working in our school. At last count I think there were four people who are now out teaching and we have another one just about ready to graduate now. It works really well with the school because those people are working as teacher aides in our school. They are getting that expertise and then they go across to study in the afternoon and they can pull the practical and the theory side of it together. It has really helped.¹³⁴

3.169 The committee was encouraged by the efforts to train and teach local teachers to remain in the school communities as role models and community leaders and to make a positive change to the levels of Indigenous employment in regional and remote communities.

Role of Armed Forces, Cadet Programs and the Police

3.170 The committee also heard positive stories about the role the Army cadets have played in Bamaga. The committee heard that this program is tied into the school and the Police Citizens Youth Club to encourage young people to have a structure for their

132 Ms Samantha Cook, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 27.

133 Mr Bevan Costello, Cherbourg State School, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 49 and Committee meeting notes, Bamaga, 13 April 2010.

134 Mr Bevan Costello, Cherbourg State School, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 49.

lives and 'taking that stepping stone out of the community and coming out of their comfort zones, looking at career paths'.¹³⁵

3.171 The committee heard about the positive aspects of leadership, planning, confidence, problem solving and working in a team that can result from participation in Army cadet programs. Most of all, the committee heard that the Army provides a potential career option for current students that they might otherwise not have thought about.¹³⁶

3.172 The committee further heard evidence about the recruitment of police and police liaison officers in Indigenous regional and remote communities:

We support that as much as we possibly can. When the recruiting drives are on we make sure that our police liaison officers are out working with those people. We have even changed the title of police liaison officers within our operation to community support coordinators. That makes a difference to why they believe they are there. In Cooktown we have two police liaison officers and they see the police liaison officers as tools of the operational police. My police liaison officers as community support coordinators go out and assist people in doing applications and assist them to know how they can get through. Sometimes a lot of the barrier is knowing where to go. We have had some successes with that.¹³⁷

Community Development Employment Program

3.173 The national policy on CDEP is outlined in Chapter 2. This also includes a brief commentary of the positive and negative views of the program across Australia. This section outlines the issues that the committee found with CDEP in Queensland.

3.174 Each of the committee's reports have considered the impact of CDEP on employment opportunities in regional and remote Indigenous communities. In every community that the committee has visited there have been both proponents and opponents for continuation of CDEP in regional and remote Indigenous communities. The committee has previously found that the quality of the CDEP outcomes depends on the competence of those responsible for implementing it and the effectiveness of the mechanisms put in place to monitor its administration.

3.175 The committee heard also heard both positive and negative commentary on the role of CDEP in local communities in Queensland.

135 Ms Sonia Townson, Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 46.

136 Ms Sonia Townson, Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 46.

137 Mr David Bird, Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 61.

Queensland's policy on CDEP

3.176 DEEDI indicated that the official policy of the Queensland Government in relation to CDEP was as follows:

The Queensland Government supports the changes to the Community Development Employment Project's program but when it is implemented in the Torres Strait we think there will be a real challenge finding sustainable alternative employment. We are concerned that people may have underestimated the extent to which private business and council business will become frankly unviable at that point. I just thought we would make the point that we would like to see some further detailed economic and social impact assessment; we should look before we leap.¹³⁸

Criticisms of CDEP

3.177 Witnesses commented on the negative aspects of CDEP and the impact that it has had on communities. For instance, Ms Sonia Townson, PCYC, stated:

I do not really want to go away from this table without you hearing what I have to say about CDEP. We failed that program, and that program has failed us. When the CDEP initiative first came in it was a funded program that went to your council to have our young people to go onto that program to be trained in that field and come out with a ticket at the end of the day and then work and give something back. We failed. Our people who have gone onto CDEP have the money and live day-to-day on that money, and from fortnight to fortnight. It is an absolute joke. I would be happy for it to go tomorrow, because of what been going on.¹³⁹

3.178 Counsellor Peter Lui commented that CDEP has a ongoing impact on the desire of young people to work and enter into full time employment because the cycle of handouts is too hard to break:

Yes, it has helped build these communities and, yes, we do have issues with work ethic. But in some cases CDEP is the problem that causes this lack of work ethic. If you are just out of school, you are signing up for work and the only work that they give you is a couple of days, what kind of a message is that giving to a young bloke? That young bloke or that young lady now begins to get used to the system. They are stranded there for a number of years and it becomes the norm. They can live off two days of work. All of a sudden, someone like Mr Foord gives a young kid a break but, because they have only been working two days for the last four or five years, that cycle is now too hard to break.¹⁴⁰

138 Mr Ian Fletcher, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 19.

139 Ms Sonia Townson, Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 51.

140 Councillor Peter Lui, Northern Peninsular Area Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 22.

3.179 Councillor Lui went on to say that some CDEP workers had been turning up for work for 10 to 15 years every day without any sign of graduating to a mainstream position of employment. He informed the committee that in his opinion, CDEP had become merely a wage subsidy.¹⁴¹

Support for CDEP

3.180 Other witnesses before the committee commented that CDEP was effective and provided a valuable mechanism to develop local infrastructure and provide skills for its participants:

It was working perfectly here. It was certainly helping the community move forward. If you look around the town, all the fencing, paving and landscaping was done through the CDEP. It worked very well. All the CDEP employees with council, builders, carpenters and electricians were doing their work and learning a trade. They were not just sitting and doing nothing. Anybody who was any good always got a full-time job.¹⁴²

3.181 In its meeting with the Family Resources Centre in Bamaga, the committee also heard that CDEP was a positive mechanism for creating almost one hundred percent full time employment in the community and to develop public works and they had concerns about the fact that CDEP may be discontinued.¹⁴³

3.182 Mr Christopher Foord, Bamaga Enterprise Limited, also indicated that CDEP was a success for many people and provided significant support to business to employ locals:

Although CDEP has a bad name, it works in communities. Also, although it is not supposed to be this, CDEP has in fact operated as wage subsidy for Bamaga Enterprises because the government is paying \$16 out of \$20, shall we say, of the hourly rate. That has helped Bamaga Enterprises establish itself and make substantial profits which go back into the community. Bamaga Enterprises Ltd is a community owned company that is non-profit, tax-exempt and all of our money is reinvested back into the community.¹⁴⁴

3.183 The committee was concerned to learn from Queensland Police that there was likely to be a reduction in community police numbers resulting from any changes to CDEP:

Correspondingly, though, due to rearrangements regarding the CDEP funding, there has been a reduction in the number of community police and that is of significant relevance to us. Whilst the community police were

141 Councillor Peter Lui, Northern Peninsular Area Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 22.

142 Mr Christopher Foord, Chief Executive Officer, Bamaga Enterprises Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 16.

143 Committee meeting notes, Family Resources Centre, 13 April 2010.

144 Mr Christopher Foord, Bamaga Enterprises Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, pp 16–17.

employed by the council and were never under the control of the state police, the reduction in their presence is an issue. The current policing model in Queensland is a mix of sworn state officers and police liaison officers. The expansion of the police liaison officer model to the Indigenous communities to replace the community police would be a very expensive proposition, and obviously part of that would involve the provision of housing.¹⁴⁵

3.184 This was confirmed in Cherbourg where the community noted a significant deterioration in the situation with community police:

Twelve months down the track we had to get rid of the community police because, with all due respect, it was not viable.¹⁴⁶

Moving forward from CDEP

3.185 In Cherbourg, the committee heard of one enterprise, the Gundoo Day Care that used to have CDEP workers but have now trained people to take their place in full time salaried employment through an amended allocation from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations:

We used to have CDEP workers within our centre, but DEEWR changed it whereby they add so many dollars to our budget so that we can employ other people in our centre who we normally employed under the CDEP scheme, and we train them. At the moment we have four carers in each of our care areas where regulations stipulate two. We used to work with three carers but when we started constructing our new centre there last year we took on an extra four trainees under this scheme whereby the department has given us more money to be able to employ those people.¹⁴⁷

3.186 The committee acknowledges that many people will face challenges if CDEP ceases. The committee is advised that the Queensland Government's regional staff are working with businesses to try and understand what impact the withdrawal of the CDEP might have.¹⁴⁸ In particular the Queensland Government has developed a program call JobsAssist to:

...to build up a diagnostic capability to go and look at firms and look essentially in accounting terms at the way their net current assets are moving, whether money is bleeding out of the business or beginning to flow in, and looking to see if we can put assistance programs in place to help firms in that position to, firstly, manage themselves better—that can be

145 Commissioner Robert Atkinson, Queensland Police, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 31.

146 Mr Samuel Murray, Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 15.

147 Mr Ray Burrows, Gundoo Day Care Centre, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 3.

148 Mr Ian Fletcher, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 27.

significant—and, secondly, to access working capital if that is appropriate.¹⁴⁹

3.187 As noted in Chapter 2, the committee is of the opinion that where there were adequate pathways from CDEP to employment, CDEP worked well. However, the committee is of the view that CDEP did not provide a transition to jobs in many instances, resulting in prolonged subsidised work. This often led to a disincentive to work. The committee notes that there needs to be a strong commitment by all governments in transitioning CDEP workers into employment or further training.

A Role for Governments

3.188 One suggestion for improving employment options was for government and industry to enter into specific partnerships to produce employment outcomes. Rio Tinto, noted that currently there were difficulties arising from existing short term funding models and short term outcomes.¹⁵⁰ Mr Kamball Schafferius, Rio Tinto, stated:

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.¹⁵¹

3.189 The committee also heard from the Cairns Institute about their work through the local chamber of commerce, which can be a useful voice in the community and can assist in the construction of positive connections, including with state and federal governments.¹⁵²

3.190 The Cairns Institute also raised the idea about the need for a regional development plan for areas that are facing economic difficulties.¹⁵³ The committee considers that this would be valuable as it would allow for regional centres and

149 Mr Ian Fletcher, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 27.

150 Mr Kamball Schafferius, Rio Tinto Alcan, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 45.

151 Mr Kamball Schafferius, Rio Tinto Alcan, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 41.

152 Professor Hurriyet Babacan, Cairns Institute, James Cook University, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p.31.

153 Professor Hurriyet Babacan, Cairns Institute, James Cook University, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 33.

outlying remote areas to create long term plans for economic development and the supporting infrastructure and services that will be required in different communities.

Native Title

3.191 The issue of native title also has a range of implications relating to businesses in regional and remote Indigenous communities in Queensland. The committee notes that on 25 February 2010, the Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill 2010 [No.2] was referred to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs for inquiry and report by 30 June 2010. The Bill seeks to protect the interests of Aboriginal traditional owners in the management, development and use of native title land situated in wild river areas. It does this by requiring the agreement of traditional owners to the development or use of native title land in wild river areas regulated by the Wild Rivers Act 2005 (Qld).¹⁵⁴ Due to this inquiry, the committee has not covered the issue of native title and its linkages to employment and enterprise options.

Committee View

3.192 The committee considers that are significant challenges to improving Indigenous employment and enterprise development in regional and remote communities of Queensland.

3.193 The committee therefore considers that the Queensland Government, in partnership with the Commonwealth Government and job network providers continue their work to:

- (a) build strong partnerships with industry;
- (b) focus pilot projects on regional and remote Indigenous communities;
- (c) develop mechanisms to encourage Indigenous Australians into professional services; and
- (d) strongly support the employment and enterprise aspects of the Cape York Welfare Reform trials.

Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing

3.194 The committee's third report identified a need for social and emotional wellbeing programs beyond clinical health services. Furthermore, the committee also identified the need for enhanced children's services such as child psychologists. The evidence that the committee obtained in Queensland reinforces this view. The committee has chosen to focus on these aspects of health in this section of the report, noting that there are broader health issues that this report does not cover.

154 Further information can be obtained at:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/legcon_ctte/wildrivers/index.htm

3.195 The available evidence on mental health in Indigenous communities suggests that it is a major issue and is related to poor physical health, high rates of criminal offending, substance abuse, family violence and community dysfunction.

3.196 The committee notes that many Indigenous communities prefer to use the term 'social and emotional wellbeing' when discussing what may traditionally be referred to as 'mental health'. The term is considered by some as better describing the Indigenous conception of 'mental health' while emphasising positive wellbeing, as opposed to the sometimes negative connotations attached to the term 'mental health' and 'mental health issues'.¹⁵⁵ For example, Ms Debra Malthouse, Wuchopperen Health Service, described why her organisation preferred the term social and emotional wellbeing, stating:

We provide a comprehensive healthcare service in relation to primary health care as well as social and emotional wellbeing services to families dealing with social and emotional problems which most mainstream organisations call mental health. We tend not to use that term because it has implications for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in relation to being a bad thing as opposed to the fact that sometimes their issues are around dealing with past history, government policies and things to make their lives today a little bit better. So we tend not to use the term 'mental health', although I understand that some of the things you guys are looking at are around mental health. If I tend to use 'emotional wellbeing' and 'social health' that is what I am referring to, and I appreciate your accepting that from my point of view.¹⁵⁶

3.197 Indigenous mental health and social and emotional wellbeing was not a discrete part of the first National Mental Health Plan endorsed in 1992. It was not until 2004, with the publication of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework, that Indigenous conceptions of mental health and how this should be approached were addressed at a national level.¹⁵⁷ As such, it remains an evolving field requiring ongoing attention, discussion and development.

3.198 The term captures not just the health of individuals, but may include concepts such as the general wellbeing of the community, relationships between individuals, cultural identity and connection to the land. In a review of the literature on social and emotional wellbeing, Mr Darren Garvey (2008) notes:

The integrity of relationships between people and spiritual entities and the clarity of connections between people and land contribute greatly to the [Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB)] of Indigenous people. Conversely, ruptures to significant relationships and markers of identity

155 Mr Darren Garvey, A review of the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous Australian peoples – considerations, challenges and opportunities, 2008, http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/sewb_review (accessed 21 April 2008)

156 Ms Debra Malthouse, Wuchopperen Health Service, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 13.

157 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 56.

including access to culturally significant sites and socially significant persons can serve to compromise the quality of an individuals' or a community's SEWB.¹⁵⁸

3.199 Ms Alanah O'Brien, appearing before the committee in Weipa on 12 April 2010 elaborated on the concept of social and emotional wellbeing, noting that the term served to bring together separate health areas under a single umbrella.

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.¹⁵⁹

3.200 Ms O'Brien informed the committee that the concept of social and emotional wellbeing formed a useful starting point for universal health promotion and intergovernmental cooperation.

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.¹⁶⁰

3.201 For the purposes of this chapter, the committee has taken social and emotional wellbeing to refer to a positive state of mental health and wellbeing resulting from positive relationships, activities and lifestyle. Social and emotional wellbeing programs therefore seek to promote happiness and 'positive' mental health and general counselling or recreational activities. The committee makes the distinction with clinical mental health services which treat mental illnesses, which could be considered as treating 'negative' mental health. The committee understands that this may be too narrow a distinction for some, but seeks to outline the terminology used in this chapter

158 Mr Darren Garvey, A review of the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous Australian peoples – considerations, challenges and opportunities, 2008, http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/sewb_review (accessed 21 April 2008)

159 Ms Alanah O'Brien, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 49.

160 Ms Alanah O'Brien, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 50.

in an attempt to facilitate discussion and avoid confusion. This terminology may not be in accordance with that preferred by some Indigenous people, but has been so defined to avoid misunderstanding by a general audience.

3.202 The committee also notes that making a distinction can cause problems in coordinating the two types services which is an issue addressed below. The situation bears some similarities with the relationship between health promotion and treatment.

The Burden of Mental and Behavioural Disorders

3.203 Results from the 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey indicate that Indigenous people aged 18 years or older are twice as likely as their non-Indigenous counterparts to feel high or very high levels of psychological distress.¹⁶¹ In addition, the results indicate that the higher levels of psychological distress are consistent with a greater frequency of stressors reported by the Indigenous population. Forty-two per cent of Indigenous people reported the death of a family member or friend in the previous year, while 25 per cent reported alcohol or drug related problems. The proportion of people reporting these and other specific stressors was higher in the Indigenous population.

Table 3.1 Proportions (%) of Stressors Reported in Previous 12 Months, by Indigenous Status, Year and Stressor Type, Australia, 2004-2005 and 2006 (ABS/AIHW)¹⁶²

Type of stressor	Indigenous status / year	
	Indigenous 2004-2005	Total population 2006
Death of a family member or friend	42	23
Serious illness or disability	28	30
Not able to get a job	17	13
Alcohol or drug related problem	25	8.6
Overcrowding at home	17	n/a
Member of family sent to jail/in jail	19	n/a
Witness to violence	14	3.9
Trouble with police	16	3.9
Discrimination/racism	12	n/a
Any stressor	77	59

3.204 Evidence put to the committee in Queensland also suggested the link between stress and mental health problems. Ms Gloria Wallis, a council member from

161 Australian Bureau of Statistics/Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2008*, Catalogue 4704.0, April 2008.

162 Mr Darren Garvey, A review of the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous Australian peoples – considerations, challenges and opportunities, 2008, http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/sewb_review (accessed 21 April 2008)

Napranum, was asked whether substance abuse was a major cause of the high incidence of mental disorders. In reply, she stated:

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...¹⁶³

3.205 The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey, a large scale, scientifically rigorous survey that included questions about developmental and environmental factors influencing child social and emotional well-being found the following:

- 24 per cent of Indigenous children were rated by their parents as being at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties compared to 15 per cent in the general Australian population;
- 70 per cent of Indigenous children were living in families that had experienced three or more major life stress events (such as a death in the family, serious illness, family breakdown, financial problems or arrest), with 22 per cent experiencing 7 or more of these stressors in the previous year;
- 16 per cent of Indigenous young people aged 12–17 years had seriously considered ending their own life in the previous year; of these, 39 per cent had attempted suicide; and
- children of Indigenous carers who had been forcibly separated from their families were 2.3 times more likely to be at high risk of incurring clinically significant emotional and behavioural difficulties and had twice the rate of both alcohol and other drug use.¹⁶⁴

3.206 In 2005–06 Indigenous males and females were almost twice as likely to be hospitalised for mental and behavioural disorders as other Australians. In particular, rates of hospitalisation for Indigenous people diagnosed with ‘mental disorders due to psychoactive substance abuse’ were 4.5 times higher for Indigenous males and 3.3 times higher for Indigenous females than for their non-Indigenous counterparts.¹⁶⁵

3.207 Mortality from mental and behavioural disorders is also much higher in the Indigenous population. Indigenous males were 5.8 times more likely to die from mental and behavioural disorders and Indigenous females 3.1 times more likely than

163 Ms Gloria Wallis, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 57.

164 Zubrick, Silburn, Lawrence, Mitrou, Dalby, Blair, Griffin, Milroy, De Majo, Cox, Li, *The social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people: summary booklet* Perth: Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and Curtin University of Technology, 2005.

165 Mr Darren Garvey, *A review of the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous Australian peoples – considerations, challenges and opportunities*, 2008, http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/sewb_review (accessed 21 April 2008)

their non-Indigenous counterparts.¹⁶⁶ The mortality rate for 'mental and behavioural disorders due to psychoactive substance use' was 14 times higher for Indigenous males and 12 times higher for Indigenous females.¹⁶⁷

3.208 The Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council notes in its submission to the committee that more than one-third of mental disorders in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be attributed to alcohol, illicit drugs, child sex abuse and intimate partner violence.¹⁶⁸ They also note that social and economic disadvantage in remote areas can be linked to Indigenous experiences of mental ill-health and mental disorder and increased risk factors, citing research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.¹⁶⁹

3.209 Though these headline statistics are invaluable in understanding the prevalence and nature of mental health issues in the Indigenous population, the committee heard that there was still a lack of a strong evidence base upon which to build policy.

Sadly, there is very little actual information about the mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous people in Australia, despite the fact that they represent more than two per cent of our population. We know that one in five Australians have a mental disorder in any 12 months and that 45 per cent of Australians will experience a mental illness. We presume that the rates are the same, if not higher, for Indigenous communities, but quite frankly we do not know. The epidemiological evidence has not been collected to tell us that.

What we do know from some work that has been done to try to tell us some indicators is that Indigenous people are more likely to be more distressed than the normal population when you look at scales such as the Kessler scale. We know that they are also more likely to be anxious and they are more likely to represent having a number of different problems than non-Indigenous populations. Whether that equates to having depression or anxiety, as non-Indigenous people would actually understand it, is actually unknown and there is a belief that some of this comes from a number of other issues that confront non-Indigenous people, rather than for example the presence of mental disorders.¹⁷⁰

166 Mr Darren Garvey, A review of the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous Australian peoples – considerations, challenges and opportunities, 2008, http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/sewb_review (accessed 21 April 2008)

167 Mr Darren Garvey, A review of the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous Australian peoples – considerations, challenges and opportunities, 2008, http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/sewb_review (accessed 21 April 2008)

168 Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council, *Submission*, p. 5.

169 Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council, *Submission*, p. 5.

170 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 57.

3.210 The committee is of the view that the given the prevalence of stress and mental illnesses in regional and remote Indigenous communities, both the treatment of illnesses and disorders and the promotion of mental health and wellbeing is essential in improving the overall health, welfare and functionality of Indigenous communities. The importance of access to a variety of mental health services was raised in the committee's third report, and remains an issue of importance for the community, warranting further enquiry.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse

3.211 Alcohol and substance abuse is a major cause of mental health problems in regional and remote Indigenous communities, either as a contributor to violence and other stressors or as a primary cause in itself. Dr Hunter noted the central role of alcohol, stating:

I do not think that there is any question that alcohol is a major, if not the major, substance causing problems in the far north. I think that there have been very significant improvements in the aftermath of the alcohol management program. There are difficulties and problems with that.¹⁷¹

3.212 However, Dr Hunter also emphasised that marijuana was also a major cause for concern, contributing to rising levels of psychosis:

I would like to underline in bold that cannabis is an enormous problem. Cannabis is a devastating problem. The reason ... that we have significant increases in the disability associated with serious mental illness relates to the impact not just of cannabis on people who have serious mental illness, but the devastating impact on their development prior to the onset of their serious mental illness, that is not just in terms of their own use, but the impact on the wider family. Cannabis cannot be emphasised sufficiently as a major issue.¹⁷²

3.213 This point was echoed by Dr Arlene Laliberte, North Queensland Health Equalities Promotion Unit, who outlined evidence of an increase in marijuana usage following alcohol restrictions and noted that this was perhaps contributing to an observed rise in the level of psychosis:

...there is a lot of anecdotal evidence of communities that become dry having other problems like sly grogging and marijuana use, and there is some anecdotal evidence around hospitalisation data and the rising rates of, for example, psychosis. A lot of speculation is around the effects of marijuana use. That is what we are seeing in the hospitalisation data. So there is that data, but the rest is speculation.¹⁷³

171 Dr Ernest Hunter, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 61.

172 Dr Ernest Hunter, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 61.

173 Dr Arlene Laliberte, North Queensland Health Equalities Promotion Unit, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 45.

3.214 Dr Marion Drennan, a visiting psychologist for the community of Cherbourg noted that existing trauma was compounded by substance abuse, in this case solvent abuse, leading to problems of dual diagnosis.

Many of the people that I see have been very seriously affected by both direct trauma and intergenerational trauma that is passed on. So there is often a lot of work to do just on the trauma basis. There is also the response so many people take to the distress, which is to use illicit substances. In addition, one of the major problems here is the inhalation of paint fumes. Thee incredibly damaging effects of those substances, whether they be legal or illegal, are quite profound. I see a lot of people in this community who suffer from psychotic illness. At this point in time, I cannot say, 'This person would've had schizophrenia if they had not been exposed to these substances,' but they do meet the criteria for that diagnosis.¹⁷⁴

3.215 Queensland Health informed the committee that as a result of the strong connection between mental health and substance abuse, the agency was in the process of merging the mental health and alcohol and drug services together under the same administration.¹⁷⁵

Suicide and the Changing Pattern of Mental Health Issues

3.216 The committee heard from Dr Ernest Hunter that Indigenous mental health was a changing field, with a discernible pattern over the last four or five decades. Dr Hunter informed the committee that:

One of the difficulties that I have as a clinician...is that the area that I am working in is changing by the decade. Indeed, if we go back to the 1960s and 1970s we saw a dramatic increase across Indigenous Australia in problems with alcohol and the behaviours associated with that. In the eighties and later in the nineties we saw an increase in suicide. Both of those did not have precedents. We are now seeing significant increases in people being hospitalised with serious mental illness.¹⁷⁶

3.217 In particular, Dr Hunter noted a changing pattern in regards to suicide in these communities.

I mentioned that suicide really only started to increase dramatically in the 1980s across Australia. I was working in the Kimberley then and subsequently here. We have seen a change in the pattern when suicide began to occur at that time, at least in the Kimberley. It tended to be older men who had some chronic problems from substance use and who were in their thirties and forties, and then in the late-eighties and early-nineties that changed dramatically and we have the picture that is most common now, which is young adult men who have taken their lives whilst intoxicated,

174 Dr Marion Drennan, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 19.

175 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 63.

176 Dr Ernest Hunter, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 59.

often in the aftermath of some kind of confrontation which on the surface may have seemed trivial.¹⁷⁷

3.218 Across Queensland, Indigenous people had a 1.8 times higher risk of suicide than non-Indigenous people between 1994 and 2006 (1.9 for males and 1.4 for females). The highest suicide rates in the Indigenous population were among the 15–24 and 25–34 age groups, while the highest suicide rate in the non-Indigenous population was amongst the 25–34 year age group.¹⁷⁸

3.219 Queensland Health informed the committee that Indigenous suicide rates in Queensland had stabilised during the last 15 years, but remained high.¹⁷⁹ However, the committee heard that a recent development was the rise in child suicides, with Aboriginal child suicides being twice the rate of non-Indigenous children. Dr Hunter cited research suggesting that a common factor in Indigenous child suicides was that they came from communities where suicides had previously occurred, and these children were witness to behaviours associated with suicide.¹⁸⁰

3.220 Statistics provided by the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health Queensland corroborate this evidence:

Of special concern is the high and increasing number of suicides among Indigenous Australian children and adolescents. In 2006 - 2007, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and adolescents accounted for approximately 39% of youth suicide victims, despite comprising only 6% of the Queensland's youth population. The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian children and adolescents aged 10 – 17 years who suicided over the four year period 2004 – 2007 was almost six (6) times higher than other Queensland youth who suicided.¹⁸¹

3.221 During site visits to communities in Queensland, the committee also heard evidence that child and juvenile suicide was a major problem. In the Northern Peninsula Area, the committee was informed that in 2009, three children had committed suicide within the space of two weeks, with many in the community viewing it as a copycat-type situation.¹⁸²

3.222 The committee is deeply disturbed by this trend and notes that it will require increased resources targeted at child psychiatric and counselling services. The

177 Dr Ernest Hunter, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 60.

178 Centre for Rural and Remote Health, *Submission 31* to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee inquiry into suicide in Australia, p. 2.

179 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 57.

180 Dr Ernest Hunter, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 60.

181 Centre for Rural and Remote Health, *Submission 31* to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee inquiry into suicide in Australia, p. 2.

182 Ms Sonia Townson, Queensland Police-Citizen Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 44.

committee notes that a child and youth branch of the Remote Area Mental Health Service is being established in Cairns.¹⁸³ The committee also noted the need for child psychiatrists in the Kimberley, following evidence by the Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People.¹⁸⁴

3.223 The high levels of suicide in regional and remote Indigenous communities is remains a significant national problem. The Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into Suicide into Australia, including in Indigenous communities, and is currently due to report back to the Senate on 24 June 2010.

Mental Health Policy in Queensland

3.224 Queensland Health informed the committee that as part of its mental health service delivery strategy, it prioritised the role of Indigenous Mental Health Workers, with 90 full-time equivalents currently employed in a range of services including mainstream mental health services and justice programs. The committee heard that the agency's target was to employ 150, or one per 1000 Indigenous people in the state.¹⁸⁵

3.225 The expansion of the number of Indigenous Mental Health Workers is part of the Queensland Government's 10-year mental health plan, endorsed in 2008. In addition, the government intends to construct a Indigenous mental health hub facility in Brisbane that will be responsible for driving forward Indigenous mental health service delivery across the state in a coordinated manner.¹⁸⁶

3.226 The committee also notes statements by Queensland Health that as part of the Closing the Gap initiatives in Queensland, the state government is developing training tools for cultural competency, appropriateness and safeness, and that some of this will be compulsory for all non-Indigenous mental health workers in Queensland.¹⁸⁷

3.227 Furthermore, the committee is pleased to see that a program using registrar positions is providing on-the-job training for mental health workers.

I think it is important to provide a sufficiency of background information, so for registrars there is now a set of online modules around Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander mental health which is being created by the College of Psychiatry and is on their psychiatry website. There is a series of training lectures that registrars have to attend. For those registrars who come north, all of the registrars operating in the service have considerable exposure to

183 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 58.

184 Ms Michelle Scott, Commissioner for Children & Young People, *Committee Hansard*, 9 October 2009, p. 25.

185 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, pp 63–64.

186 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 58.

187 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 64.

Indigenous people in their work at Cairns Base Hospital and in the communities nearby, Mossman, Yarrabah and Innisfail.¹⁸⁸

3.228 The training system was strengthened by the addition of year-long senior registrar program. Many individuals who have passed through this program have remained in the Indigenous mental health field, and the position has become very popular.¹⁸⁹

3.229 Finally, Queensland is the only jurisdiction that operates a dedicated Deafness and Mental Health Service in Australia.¹⁹⁰ The committee was not in a position to inquire further about this particular service, but notes that the high levels of hearing loss in Indigenous communities means this type of service is essential.

3.230 The committee considers these initiatives to be positive steps forward. However, the committee notes the need for improved coordination of traditional mental health services with community-based social and emotional wellbeing programs, a point discussed further below. Additionally, related government and non-government activities also require better coordination according to evidence put before the committee.

3.231 Finally, the committee also notes that compared to other states, Queensland could consider more investment in alcohol and drug treatment services.¹⁹¹ This is particularly important given the bulk of evidence presented to the committee suggesting that alcohol abuse is a core issue of concern in many regional and remote Indigenous communities.

Promotion of Social and Emotional Wellbeing

3.232 As noted by the committee above, the promotion of social and emotional wellbeing can be accomplished through a number of activities and avenues. In this section, the committee presents some evidence on types of programs that could be considered.

3.233 Queensland Health noted the importance of culture as a protective factor against mental health problems, and a promoter of social and emotional wellbeing:

We know that inherently Indigenous people have an incredibly strong and vibrant community and culture that is very protective for them. However, we know that in a number of communities, and in particular the ex-DOGIT communities in Queensland, for a number of different reasons those issues are no longer protective and provide resilience for Aboriginal people. The consequence of that has often been high levels of mental health service

188 Dr Ernest Hunter, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 66.

189 Dr Ernest Hunter, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 66.

190 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 71.

191 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 61.

usage, hospitalisation and, sadly, of higher rates of suicide than in the normal community¹⁹²

3.234 The committee notes the importance of culture and community in promoting positive mental health outcomes. In recent trips to Queensland it came across a range of positive examples. For example, the committee heard about a successful Social and Emotional Wellbeing Week in Napranum recently:

Ms Wallis—...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.¹⁹³

3.235 The committee notes that this type of program aims to build community cohesion. This clearly links to the Cape York Welfare Reform trial's stated aim of rebuilding social norms in these communities. The committee feels that community cohesion is a necessary preamble to the ability of a community to defend positive social norms as a whole.

3.236 The committee was similarly interested to hear from the Cairns Institute about the Family Wellbeing Empowerment Program. The committee understands that this program, first developed by a group of Aboriginal people in Adelaide, provides personal development to build trusting relationships, think about personal needs and aspirations and develop the life skills needed to attain personal goals, with a subsequent community focus.¹⁹⁴

192 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 57.

193 Ms Gloria Wallis, Ms Alanah O'Brien, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 57.

194 Empowerment Research Program, James Cook University, http://www.jcu.edu.au/sias/research/researchfocus/JCUTST_058564.html#_Toc133655402 (accessed 27 April 2010).

3.237 The Cairns Institute informed the committee that their Family Wellbeing and Empowerment Program facilitated the involvement of individuals in other programs and community life.

It gives people the capacity to be able to grasp other opportunities in life. You do not know what you do not know. People have not got the relationships. Some people in Yarrabah have never left in their life. They have not even come over the hill. They do not know what that is like to make outside connections. They do not make connections with the school, and that is even within their own community. Family Wellbeing facilitates that process and gives them a sense of self-esteem and self-worth. They are the fundamentals of life. You can throw all the money, all the policies, all the programs—they cannot grasp those programs without that first. I think that is the significance of the Family Wellbeing program. ...It becomes an ethics of morality and care for humanity rather than just existing in your own little isolated group. Many Aboriginal people do not have an understanding of their position in the world. They do not know what caused them to be in the environment they are currently in. It is a facilitating tool; it is not a solution to everything, but it is a facilitating tool for other programs that come along.¹⁹⁵

3.238 The Cairns Institute informed the committee that it was difficult to gain any access to government policy making in order to inform that process through sharing the success of programs such as the Family Wellbeing Empowerment Program.

Initiatives often come and we hear it with the announcement; we do not always get to hear it at the time of development of a particular policy or program. Then when we go in with the research it is too late, because they are already on a path. ... So it is sometimes very difficult to get into the policy cycle and get the voices of the community heard in that. Hopefully, we [as the Cairns Institute] are going to be a bit more of a conduit.¹⁹⁶

3.239 The committee reported on a similar project that was proposed through the Western Australian Indigenous Traditional Culture and Healing Project in its third report and is of the opinion that governments should support these projects.

3.240 One area that the committee hopes a social and emotional wellbeing program could assist is in building constructive partnerships between rival families which has been a significant issue observed by the committee in its visits to regional and remote Indigenous communities.

Siloed Services Between Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing

3.241 The committee heard that the coordination of clinical mental health services with the more holistic social and emotional wellbeing programs was problematic.

195 Dr Roxane Bainbridge, Cairns Institute, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, pp 26–27.

196 Prof. Hurriyet Babacan, Cairns Institute, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 29.

Queensland Health noted that the delineation of responsibility between the Commonwealth and state governments potentially led to gaps in service:

We recognise the extraordinary importance of social and emotional wellbeing and how that gets addressed. You have probably been to see some of the centres that are up in the northern peninsula when you were up in Bamaga. We value them very highly. We think that they are an important part of what we would probably consider to be a primary care approach to mental health. One of the difficulties the state has often struggled with is the relationship between the Commonwealth and the state in funding and the expectation that the state provides specialist mental health services and that the Commonwealth provides other services. We are somewhat convinced that there is a gap there which we fill when it comes to social and emotional wellbeing.

To cut a long story short, it tends to be a juggle between those resources that we have that we provide for clinical services often being used to provide social and emotional wellbeing centres or social and emotional wellbeing programs at the expense of clinical programs. Our intention is to try to have both operating. It would be much nicer if there were some clarity around how to move best between all levels of government to do that. It is a complex situation.¹⁹⁷

3.242 Dr Hunter noted that the development of the two streams had political roots, stating:

I think it is a poorly defined territory. It has a historical background and there are political implications to the reasons that these two fields emerged, but we have people who are employed through those programs and in Cape York.¹⁹⁸

3.243 The committee heard a similar view expressed by clinical psychiatrists working in the field. They indicated that in a community such as Cherbourg, with extensive clinical mental disorders, it was difficult to progress beyond reactive treatment to take proactive steps to address social and emotional wellbeing.

At the moment the mental health service is only operating at a direct clinical level. We do not have, and have not had, the capacity to take a community development and a wellness approach to the community, which clearly the community needs. We are really only responding to clinical referrals.¹⁹⁹

3.244 The committee heard that the community controlled health organisation in that community, Barambah Health Centre, did provide some social and emotional wellbeing programs, such as Bringing Them Home Counsellors, health promotion and

197 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 68.

198 Dr Ernest Hunter, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 68.

199 Ms Shirley Wigan, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 18.

youth diversionary programs.²⁰⁰ Mrs Jennie Anderson, Chief Executive Officer, noted the scope for cooperation between the two services, as was already occurring on an ad-hoc basis.²⁰¹

3.245 Dr Ernest Hunter, a psychiatrist based in Far North Queensland, noted that practitioners could facilitate cooperation on an individual basis.

In terms of how I operate as a practitioner, I work in communities where the [Royal Flying Doctor Service] are now running wellbeing centres and what I do is I try to put aside a half a day in each community to spend with the wellbeing centre, staff and try to look at issues where there is overlap between our services and also to facilitate the communications between both. Even when we have facilities that are collocated in the same space, as is the case for instance in Aurukun, that does not mean that we necessarily have a good relationship.

3.246 The committee considers that a formalised policy of cooperation between clinical mental health services and social and emotional wellbeing services, be they government or non-government is needed. Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, informed the committee that the two types of service needed definition and clarification at the community level in order to resolve responsibilities and facilitate cooperation:

In fact, one of the important things that we are doing is making sure that it is clear what that sort of more primary mental health care and social and emotional wellbeing interface is and exactly where clinical services sit with that, because sometimes there is a difficult sitting together of those two processes. For some of the communities clinical services are something that they are reluctant to accept unless everything else has actually been thought through. For others there is a much greater awareness to get clinical involvement. That is something that is difficult, to have one particular approach that suits every community.²⁰²

3.247 The committee has therefore formed the view that mental health and general wellbeing can be improved by the integration and cooperation of services across the mental health spectrum. The committee notes the confusion in this area and considers that national consistency is required.

Recommendation 13

3.248 The committee recommends that the Australian Health Ministers Conference develop a framework specifying interoperability between social and emotional wellbeing services and clinical mental health services.

200 Mr Matthew Friday, Barambah Health Centre, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 28.

201 Mrs Jennie Anderson, Barambah Health Centre, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 37.

202 Dr Aaron Groves, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 68.

Alcohol

3.249 The section above notes the major role that alcohol and other substance abuse plays in poor mental health and wellbeing in regional and remote Indigenous communities. It is a primary cause of anti-social behaviour, and hence a major cause of the high level of offending and incarceration of Indigenous people in Australia. Alcohol and drug abuse is also a major cause of poor physical health, suicide, family violence, poor education outcomes for children and low levels of community safety.

3.250 The committee examined the effectiveness of alcohol restrictions in Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek in its third report, noting significant improvements across a range of indicators.²⁰³ However, the committee recommended that the Commonwealth work with the Western Australian government to support the development of an explicit plan to ensure that alcohol restrictions be supported by adequate rehabilitation and community support services to address alcohol addiction and problem drinking. Additionally, the committee recommended that such a plan includes a consistent approach to alcohol management that included effective community consultation and decision making.²⁰⁴

3.251 The committee was therefore interested to collect evidence on Queensland's Alcohol Management Plans (AMP) during visits to communities in that state. Since 2002, 19 of Queensland's discrete Indigenous communities have been declared as alcohol restricted areas under the *Liquor Act 1992*.²⁰⁵

3.252 The AMPs vary across communities. For example, in the Northern Peninsula Area it is an offence to be in possession of more than two litres of unfortified wine and a single carton of beer/pre-mixed spirits or any amount of stronger liquor. It is an offence to drink in a public place, as it is generally across Queensland. In the NPA, a household can apply to have their home declared a 'dry place' and hence make it illegal to drink on the premise.²⁰⁶ By contrast, in Napranum, which was also visited by the committee, no alcohol is permitted within the Napranum Shire at all. The maximum penalty for a first offence under these laws is \$37 500.²⁰⁷

203 Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, *Report No 3*, p. 107.

204 Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities *Report No 3*, p. 107.

205 Alcohol Restrictions, Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation website, <http://www.olgr.qld.gov.au/indigenous/alcoholManagementPlans/index.shtml>, accessed on 24 April 2010.

206 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services website, <http://www.atsip.qld.gov.au/government/programs-initiatives/alcohol-reforms/community-alcohol-limits/npa-limits/>, accessed 25 April 2010.

207 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services website, <http://www.atsip.qld.gov.au/government/programs-initiatives/alcohol-reforms/community-alcohol-limits/napranum-limits/>, accessed 25 April 2010.

Community Ownership of Alcohol Management Plans

3.253 The committee heard a range of opinions regarding these alcohol law reforms. In particular, several witnesses noted a perception in the affected communities that the restrictions had been imposed rather than implemented in accordance with the community support. The committee is concerned by the prevalence of these perceptions, as it is the committee's opinion that for alcohol management to work, the community must be on-board and preferably be driving the process, as was largely the case in Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia.

3.254 The Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council did not support the Alcohol Management Plan for Cherbourg on the grounds that it was never going to be possible to adequately police the restrictions given the proximity of Murgon, a community that was not subject to restrictions.

Unless the 'why' factor is addressed—why do people drink?—you are never going to stop alcohol. Where was the AMP for the First Fleet? As long as you have alcohol you are going to have alcoholics.²⁰⁸

3.255 Mr Roy Chevathen, Mayor of Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council, felt that the AMP in that community had been imposed, and the promised support services had not materialised:

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.²⁰⁹

3.256 Similar comments were made by Mr Steven Christian in Bamaga, who felt that the restrictions unfairly curtailed the rights of individuals in that community

The alcohol management plan needs to be thrown out or reviewed, because I feel that it is not only an injustice but a bit of a racist thing. It is a bit of a sham on behalf of the government not being able to handle the situation. The rights of individuals within a community have been taken away.²¹⁰

3.257 The committee is of the view that alcohol restrictions are a useful, and occasionally necessary tool in reducing alcohol abuse in communities, however without community support, the perceptions listed above are likely to significantly undermine the operation of the initiative.

208 Mr Samuel Murray, Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 17.

209 Mr Roy Chevathen, Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 71.

210 Mr Steven Christian, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 34.

3.258 Mr Noel Pearson, Director of the Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, felt that this was a failing in the way the laws had been introduced:

One of the areas where I am disappointed and where we need different action is in breaches of the alcohol management plans. A key part of our thinking was that when we think about social norms the people themselves have got to own and defend the standards that they want for their community. In addition to that social ownership of the norm you have to make sure that the incentives support the norms, because if the incentives run contrary to the norms that you want they severely undermine them.

We also had to get alignment from the law. The law helps to buttress norms as well. The laws and the incentives are now in alignment. What we are struggling with in relation to, say, alcohol is a very mixed story in terms of community leadership on alcohol. There is no consensus amongst community leaders about the impact of alcohol, harm levels in the community and so on, and there is no consensus about what should be done in relation to alcohol. There is no strong ownership by community leaders of the alcohol management plans. I think that is a consequence of poor introduction. We did not introduce alcohol management plans in the optimal way to get community ownership around those plans.²¹¹

3.259 Mr Pearson was of the opinion that gathering the necessary consensus for alcohol management in the community in order to ensure ownership of the plan by communities was beyond the ability of a bureaucratic process. Instead, there needed to be leadership and advocacy from the community. This accorded with the committee's own understanding following an examination of the alcohol restrictions in the Kimberley. In both those cases, restrictions were introduced by processes initiated by community groups.

3.260 Mr Pearson went on to describe to the committee how electoral incentives discouraged strong leadership on alcohol control from local councils and elected representatives:

One thing I would urge the Commonwealth parliament to think about is that there are no incentives at community level leadership. There are no incentives for them to make the reduction of harm levels resulting from alcohol part of their leadership. There is nothing. In fact, if you want to get re-elected, you had better go quiet on alcohol restrictions. The electoral incentives are against you. Nothing in terms of budgets and supports you receive from government is related to whether you are doing a good job or a bad job in reducing harm levels. It makes for disconnected leadership, because government support comes whether you have high levels or low levels of harm—whether you are really working hard to reduce the levels of harm. We made a proposal to the Queensland Government and the Commonwealth through our own process. We started a discussion 18 months ago or two years ago. We said that there ought to be very explicit

211 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 95.

connections between government support and community performance on bringing down the harm indicators.²¹²

3.261 The Department of Communities responded to criticisms of the engagement process regarding the AMPs, stating:

In terms of the consultation process, both with the initial roll-out of the AMPs and then the review several years ago of those alcohol restrictions, there was engagement with each community. As I know with the establishment of the Cape York Welfare Reform trial and the FRC, as you mentioned, there will always be people that say that they were not consulted enough and often that might be because their views were not the views that were finally determined about alcohol restrictions. There was certainly engagement in terms of discussions with people about the restrictions but also, importantly, what the support services were. In the review undertaken several years ago that was recognised as a critical factor that we needed to address and, as part of that, in 2008 we committed \$66.4 million for improved services across the discrete communities who have alcohol management plans to improve service delivery in diversionary services.²¹³

Community Ownership

3.262 The ability of certain communities to minimise antisocial behaviour such as alcohol abuse was demonstrated by evidence provided by Mr David Claudie, from the Chuulangan Aboriginal Corporation, who informed the committee that the autonomy associated with his homeland community meant they had more control over behaviour of individuals in that community:

You are away from alcohol, you are away from drugs and you are away from all the other stuff that is in those centralised places. Out there, we control our own people in that field, so we are right on top of it. It is not an issue on the homelands.²¹⁴

3.263 Mr Claudie noted that the community-imposed ban on alcohol was so widely known and respected that individuals travelling from AMP imposed dry communities would not enter his community under the influence of alcohol.²¹⁵

3.264 The committee considers this further evidence of the need for communities to develop the ability to defend social expectations of good behaviour in the community.

212 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 96.

213 Dr Tim Reddel, Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 7.

214 Mr David Claudie, Chuulangan Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 90.

215 Mr David Claudie, Chuulangan Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 88.

Circumvention of Restrictions

3.265 The committee heard anecdotal information that the introduction of alcohol restrictions in the Northern Peninsula Area had led to highly dangerous trips in small boats to the Torres Strait and Papua New Guinea in order to bring in alcohol, while the incidence of binge drinking of higher alcohol content beverages and methylated spirits had increased.²¹⁶

3.266 As previously noted, the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council did not support the Alcohol Management Plans, feeling it was meaningless as alcohol was freely available in the nearby community of Murgon, which was not subject to restrictions.²¹⁷

3.267 The Department of Communities noted that the government could not achieve enforcement acting alone, and that community leadership was also important:

There is obviously an enforcement function that is needed to identify people that are undertaking those illegal activities. In referring to some of my earlier comments, that can go so far. The role that we are increasingly seeing is not only those communities in the cape, but other communities where local people have taken up a leadership role in identifying and addressing at the local community level, through community justice groups as well as more informal groups and leadership groups, the council and others, people who are breaking the law and having those activities addressed.²¹⁸

3.268 The Queensland Commissioner of Police also informed the committee of the inherent tension between the need for tolerant policing and discretion over minor offences versus the need to enforce alcohol restrictions:

Certainly, though, there is a challenge with the necessary enforcement of the alcohol management plan or the alcohol restriction type legislation versus the significant degree of dependency and importance that is associated with alcohol; there is a real tension in respect of that. That links back to that relationship with the community, which is important, of course, obviously.²¹⁹

3.269 The Commissioner noted that the smuggling of alcohol would always be a problem under alcohol restrictions, but noted that overall, the AMPs had been a success. The Commissioner used improvements in Mornington Island as an example, stating:

216 Mr Steven Christian, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 35.

217 Mr Warren Collins, Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 15.

218 Dr Tim Reddel, Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 7.

219 Commissioner Robert Atkinson, Queensland Police, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 37.

Before the AMP, on a Friday night on Mornington Island, there would be lots of children in the street until three, four and five in the morning. Sometimes they were in the street because they just felt unsafe. There would be noise and loud music. Now, on Mornington Island on a Friday night at 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock or midnight, it is quiet; the only thing you will hear is the odd dog barking occasionally. I think life is better now than before in almost all communities where the AMP has been introduced. That is not to say that it is ideal and there is not a long way to go, and it is certainly not to say that the problems of sly grog and home brew—which is a huge problem—are not there. In fact, there may be some consequence in terms of that; that is, those problems have obviously become worse because of the AMP.²²⁰

3.270 The committee heard evidence suggesting that the alcohol restrictions have resulted in a migration of people to areas free of the restrictions. For instance, the Weipa Town Authority informed the committee that it had observed a greater number of people were coming to Weipa to drink, either during shopping trips or particularly during social carnivals. The Authority noted that they had not yet received the support necessary to cope with this problem such as a proposed residential rehabilitation facility.²²¹

3.271 Rio Tinto had also observed a rise in the number of people coming to Weipa as a result of the alcohol restrictions, and that this presented a problem for their Indigenous employees:

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.²²²

3.272 The committee is aware of similar issues about relocation of problem drinkers as a result of the alcohol restrictions in the Kimberley. The committee does not consider this to be a reason to discontinue restrictions, but notes that it is an important

220 Commissioner Robert Atkinson, Queensland Police, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 49.

221 Mr Peter Graham, Weipa Town Authority, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 18.

222 Mrs Jo-Anne Scarini, Rio Tinto, *Committee Hansard* 12 April 2010, p. 44.

issue to manage and for governments to consider in the event of future alcohol restrictions.

Support Services Accompanying Restrictions

3.273 The committee has previously emphasised the need for support services such as rehabilitation and detoxification facilities and services and diversionary programs for community members. The committee was therefore pleased to note that in 2008 the Queensland and Commonwealth governments announced \$102 million in funding over four years for complementary services, including:

- new alcohol and drug treatment services;
- new programs like 'Cell Watch', sobering up facilities and support for community patrols;
- extra police and support from officers from the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing to enforce alcohol restrictions;
- more programs focused on literacy, before and after school activities and PCYC programs;
- parenting programs, household management and budgeting programs and increased support for vulnerable families; and
- more support for local activities, such as men's and women's groups.²²³

3.274 The Department of Communities informed the committee that over 100 services have been implemented in the 19 communities subject to AMPs, including health treatment services, diversionary services and sport and recreation services. This had led to improvements in the communities:

Since 2002 and 2003, there has been an overall improvement in some key indicators across all communities. However, with the small populations and the quarterly fluctuations for wet seasons and community events, it is difficult to discern the long-term trends at this point.²²⁴

3.275 The committee was made aware of a range of services that are provided in Queensland, particularly the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs (ATOD) counselling teams. The committee also notes that as part of the welfare reform trials in Cape York, four wellbeing centres have been constructed in the four target communities in order to provide alcohol and substance abuse rehabilitation programs.

3.276 The committee also notes comments by Dr Ernest Hunter, who informed the committee that rehabilitation services were not a standalone answer, stating:

223 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services website, <http://www.atsip.qld.gov.au/government/programs-initiatives/alcohol-reforms/about-alcohol-reforms/>

224 Mrs Bette Kill, Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 34.

I might say that having done a lot of research into alcohol use in the Kimberley, there is a role for rehab, but the majority of Indigenous people who give up, do so because they make decisions on their own to give up; they do not give up because they have gone through rehab services. In the research that we did in the Kimberley a third of males over 40 who were drinkers had given up and the vast majority of those had given up for particular reasons which related to health services particularly, and to family. A proportion of them went through rehab.²²⁵

3.277 The committee notes that alcohol restrictions and support services to assist individuals to overcome addiction are important in reducing alcohol abuse. However, the reasons for people drinking, including lack of employment and opportunity will need to be addressed in any long term solution to alcohol abuse. The committee notes for instance, comments by Mr Steven Christian in Bamaga:

...with a growing population and the number of children finishing school or hoping to finish school there is nowhere to go. So education is an issue and employment is an issue. At the end of the day they end up drinking or fighting or what have you. They start a family and the merry-go-round these people are on just goes around and around. I do not know what can be done, but I can tell you something needs to be done.²²⁶

3.278 Creating or providing opportunities and a future for individuals in these communities will be a necessity in reducing the harmful alcohol and other substance abuse.

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

3.279 The committee considers the prevalence of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) to be a major issue in regional and remote Indigenous (and other) communities and has previously made recommendations about raising awareness of the condition and developing strategies to look after afflicted individuals.

3.280 During its visit to Queensland, this view was reinforced by further evidence of the prevalence of FASD. In Napranum, Ms Sonia Schuch, Recognised Entity, informed the committee that up to 80 per cent of children were affected:

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 [Personal Development] on it because none of us are trained in foetal alcohol syndrome.²²⁷

225 Dr Ernest Hunter, Queensland Health, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 64.

226 Mr Steven Christian, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 33.

227 Ms Sonia Schuh, Recognised Entity, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 82.

3.281 Ms Schuh noted the need to raise awareness about the condition so that parents and teachers could accommodate the special needs of these children in preparing them for education.

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.²²⁸

3.282 Representatives of the Cherbourg State School also noted that previous surveys of their student population suggested 86 per cent had prenatal exposure to alcohol and were therefore at risk of FASD. The behavioural problems associated with the condition presented a challenge for classroom education.²²⁹

3.283 Witnesses in Bamaga felt that, through education campaigns in that community, awareness of FASD issues was quite high.²³⁰

We run the Australian Nurse-Family Partnership that is funded through the Department of Health and Ageing. It is a relatively new program. While it is a nurse led program, we also have what we call family partnership workers. They are Indigenous workers who partner the nurses in working with the young mothers or first-time mothers that the program works with. That program follows the mother and child for two years. I think it is from when they are four months pregnant to the time when the child is two years old. They work with the parents, the family and the extended family to give the child the best chance at life and to help the family deal with when they are new parents. The FAS stuff for us comes up occasionally. We do see a number of children who have had those issues, but I cannot tell you exactly what that might be for us. I know that our Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program is a key component at this point. It has been in operation for around 18 months.²³¹

3.284 The committee is deeply concerned by reports of the prevalence of FASD in regional and remote Indigenous communities and the ramifications in terms of employment, justice and general social disadvantage and considers it a top priority for future enquiry.

228 Ms Sonia Schuh, Recognised Entity, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, pp 82–83.

229 Ms Vanessa Boal, Cherbourg State School, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 45.

230 Councillor Gina Nona, Northern Peninsular Area Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 39.

231 Ms Debra Malthouse, Wuchopperen Health Service, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 20.

3.285 The section below on justice issues details the strong link between FASD and antisocial and risk-taking behaviour, resulting in increased contact for these individuals with the criminal justice system.

Solvent Abuse

3.286 The committee heard that solvent abuse, particularly petrol sniffing is a current problem in Cherbourg. The committee is concerned that witnesses are of the opinion that as petrol sniffing is not illegal, local police are powerless to intervene:

Petrol sniffing: Council got one of the best legal minds in the state, a barrister by the name of Michael Limerick, who does a lot of work for the state government. We sat down and changed our bylaws. We wanted to make petrol sniffing an illegal activity and we wanted to charge people by having a clear boundary and saying, 'This is what happens if you participate in this action.' The kids know that it is not illegal. That is the first thing they say to the cops. We had a meeting here where a senior sergeant got up and said, 'People could get into trouble if they took the bottles off the kids. They could have them up for stealing,' which is a farce when you are talking about preservation of life and providing for our future generations. No-one has been game enough to charge anyone under that law but as long as it sits there, there is a dog in the yard.²³²

3.287 The committee notes that under the *Queensland Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000*, police have the power to search a person and seize potentially harmful things if an officer reasonably suspects the person to have ingested or inhaled or be about to ingest or inhale a potentially harmful thing. The officer may ask the person why they are in possession of the substance, and if a reasonable answer is not forthcoming, seize the substance.²³³ The committee notes that a 2003 media release explaining the new powers listed petrol as one such substance dangerous to children and teenagers.²³⁴

3.288 The committee is concerned that local police in Cherbourg may not be exercising these powers, but was not able to seek evidence from Queensland Police regarding this matter in time for this report. The committee encourages the Queensland Government to work with the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council to ensure that local authorities are able to play a proactive role in preventing solvent abuse in that community.

3.289 The committee notes the March 2009 Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs inquiry entitled 'Grasping the Opportunity of Opal: Assessing the

232 Mr Samuel Murray, Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 14.

233 *Queensland Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000*, s. 603.

234 The Hon Peter Beattie, MP, Premier of Queensland and Minister for Trade, 'New Powers Will Help 'Chroming' Kids', Media Release, 27 October 2003.

impact of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy' that made a range of recommendations in relation to Opal fuel and petrol sniffing²³⁵

Housing

3.290 The committee heard a range of views about housing in regional and remote Indigenous communities in Queensland. These views were consistent with the committee's previous evidence from Western Australia,²³⁶ South Australia²³⁷ and the Northern Territory.²³⁸

3.291 In Queensland, the committee heard a range of views on housing issues. The committee was told that:

- (b) many houses were far too expensive with low levels of homeownership;
- (c) there is a chronic shortage of appropriate housing and houses were far too overcrowded;
- (d) the quality of many houses is deteriorating;
- (e) the government's implementation for additional housing was slow or was conducted without appropriate consultation; and
- (f) there were limited if any houses for support service workers.

Lack of Homeownership

3.292 The committee noted that there was not a high level of homeownership in Queensland's regional and remote Indigenous communities or indeed across Australia. As Mr Noel Pearson indicated, the challenge for government and the community is to develop 'an agenda for homeownership—moving from social housing to homeownership.'²³⁹ Mr Pearson indicated that a large reason that homeownership is not on the agenda is because governments are all about service delivery:

...governments think in terms of service delivery when we are trying to think in terms of supporting self-help. It is really hard for us to break the government way of thinking, which is: disadvantaged people need services delivered by government and NGOs. How does government instead change

235 Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs: *Grasping the Opportunity of Opal: Assessing the impact of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy*, p.51.

236 Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, *Report No 1*, p. 23.

237 Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, *Report No 2*, p. 134.

238 Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, *Report No 2*, pp 109–110.

239 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 94.

its way of operating to supporting people taking charge? I just do not see that policy conversation taking place, really.²⁴⁰

3.293 The committee agrees that there needs to be a stronger focus on Indigenous homeownership in regional and remote Indigenous communities. The committee also considers that home ownership, education and employment/enterprise issues are inextricably intertwined and inter-dependent. The committee therefore postulates that the lack of homeownership in regional and remote Indigenous communities is an overall indictment of total community economic development.

Cost of Houses and Housing Shortage

3.294 The committee heard from multiple witnesses about the high cost of housing in regional and remote communities both due to the distance required to bring in housing materials to communities and due to the lack of skilled labour. In Weipa in particular, the committee heard about the excessive price of housing which results in high rental costs. Mr Shane Bousen from the Weipa Town Authority commented on rent prices:

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.²⁴¹

3.295 Even communities quite far from the larger mining areas of Queensland have felt the cost of the housing increase because of the mining boom:

All the mining boom has done is put ridiculous prices on houses and renting. I do not know who can afford to pay before \$400 or \$500 a week in rent when they move to a new place.²⁴²

3.296 The committee also heard evidence that the booms of previous eras had left a dearth of housing due to the unavailability of labour:

In saying that, in Indigenous communities, and especially in these remote Indigenous communities, it is very costly to build a house...It was very hard to get labour sometimes, and especially in own housing booms of the 1980s and 1990s it was very hard to get builders up here unless you paid top dollar, and then houses cost too much. And I think the Queensland state

240 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 100.

241 Mr Shane Bousen, Weipa Town Authority, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 20.

242 Mr Warren Collins, Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010 p. 10.

government's housing output was not crash-hot in the 1990s and early 2000s.²⁴³

Overcrowding

3.297 The committee continually heard that there were serious and chronic problems with overcrowding in houses:

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.²⁴⁴

3.298 Councillor Joseph Elu, Mayor of the Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council, outlined the significant impact that overcrowding has on regional and remote Indigenous communities and the part that overcrowding plays in the deterioration of other elements of peoples lives:

If children are in a good stable home, they have a room in the house for themselves, that is good for education, but if there is overcrowding it will affect their education. I think antisocial behaviour is derived from overcrowding, not enough space for people to have time out. So we say that everything is intertwined.²⁴⁵

3.299 Councillor Elu said that overcrowding in regional and remote Indigenous communities has become inter-generational:

I come from an overcrowded family and I now have a family of my own that is in an overcrowded situation, so it is just going over and over again.²⁴⁶

3.300 The Family Responsibilities Commission indicated that the complexity of the family arrangements in many communities results in two or three families often living in the one house, causing overcrowding and other social problems.²⁴⁷

Slow Government Implementation of Housing

3.301 The Queensland Department of Communities indicated that an amount of \$1.16 billion over 10 years to 2018 has been allocated under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing. The department said that these funds will

243 Councillor Joseph Elu, Northern Peninsular Area Regional Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 2.

244 Mr Shane Bousen, Weipa Town Authority, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 15.

245 Councillor Joseph Elu, Northern Peninsular Area Regional Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 2.

246 Councillor Joseph Elu, Northern Peninsular Area Regional Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 8.

247 Ms Tammy Sovenyhazi, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 3.

provide, for remote Indigenous communities, approximately 1141 new dwellings, 1,216 upgrades to existing houses, repairs and maintenance and tenancy management, consistent with public housing standards.²⁴⁸

3.302 In Napranum, the committee heard about the slow pace of the government's implementation of housing programs that were announced in 2009 and due for completion by 30 June 2010, a mere ten weeks from the date of the committee hearing.

3.303 The committee heard from the Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council that the Government had not even started building the houses. The committee was extremely concerned at the slow pace of the construction. They commented that:

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?²⁴⁹

3.304 The committee was also concerned to learn that the council had to proactively ask if they could build some of the houses as a community to create local employment. The committee heard that the Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council was ready to start construction:

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.²⁵⁰

3.305 The Commonwealth Government's response to this situation was provided to the committee:

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

248 Mrs Bette Kill, Queensland Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 33.

249 Mr Roy Chevathen, Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 64.

250 Mrs Margaret Barnes, Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 66.

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.²⁵¹

3.306 The committee noted that the Commonwealth did build houses within ten weeks in Aurukun and looks forward to following up with the Commonwealth Government on 30 June 2010 to see if the houses in Napranum have been completed.²⁵²

3.307 In Bamaga too, the council complained about the slow pace of housing reform:

You asked about housing. We are still three years behind. We have a housing program that is three years in the delivery. When we were Legacy councils we had a \$10 million budget given to us. We started planning as five individual councils. Those houses are yet to be built. I know it is not part of your thing—it is Queensland state government—but it is one bucket of money that we are playing with here. I said to Jenny Macklin a couple of months ago when I saw her in Canberra that we have to fast-track the housing program. The new housing program is going to require 40-year leases. We have just found out that, for native title purposes, they have to have ILUAs before they build on the blocks, and that is all coming from Brisbane. Nobody is talking to us here; it is all coming through departmental officers. I said to them: ‘Why doesn’t the housing minister fly up here and have a talk to council? Maybe we could then counsel native title holders and government could get together and bypass this longwinded process and have a local solution created here in these five communities.’ As I said, our communities are growing and our kids are growing up. We have got 12 to 15 kids coming out of high school every year. It is small area but those 15 will find a girlfriend in a couple of years and they will want a house and want to move out from mum and dad. Statistics show that our average family is five or six but housing is 11 to 12 per house. There are some houses with fewer, but overall there are 11 to 12 people per house.²⁵³

3.308 The committee also heard about the need to provide local employment, as well as community participation and consultation when building housing in remote communities. Boystown commented that:

...if the Commonwealth government believes there is value in social enterprises and in skilling up local people and in local people owning and contributing to their community, then contracts and tenders need to reflect those outcomes.²⁵⁴

251 Mr Mike Fordham, Cairns Indigenous Coordination Centre, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 86.

252 Mr Mike Fordham, Cairns Indigenous Coordination Centre, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 86.

253 Councillor Joseph Elu, Northern Peninsular Area Regional Council, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 4.

254 Mr John Dalgleish, Boystown, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 85.

3.309 Boystown indicated that they currently conduct tenders to refurbish housing, but they provide support services to ensure that the development of houses takes into account a whole of community wellbeing and economic development function:

...employment, numeracy and literacy and health and wellbeing and the whole flow on. I think what does need to be taken into consideration is how organisations can demonstrate within the confines of the tender what are the value-adds that come with that.²⁵⁵

3.310 The committee notes the slow progress of government housing construction and the frustrations that this causes in some communities. The committee therefore considers that enhanced consultation should be taken on a continual basis with communities to ensure that they are both:

- (a) consulted about proposed developments and have adequate input into the process; and
- (b) that government considers the broader skills that will be developed through the tendering process.

Town Planning

3.311 The committee also notes evidence from Cherbourg that indicated the need for infrastructure considerations to be part of housing planning:

If we start building new houses and we increase the size of the community, I am not too sure that our sewerage system, which was built in 1958, would handle any more people. There has been no work done to it since 1958, just minor repairs to keep it operational. It does not meet Queensland Government requirements under the EPA because it is too close to the residential area and also the overflow runs straight into Barambah Creek, which then supplements both the Murgon and Wondai townships' water supplies, so they have been drinking recycled water since 1958. The state government has known about it now for probably six or seven years, but they keep putting us on the backburner.²⁵⁶

Housing for Essential Service Staff

3.312 In the committee's last report, it found that housing was the major obstacle to the provision of services in those communities. The committee heard that 'staff housing is the limiting factor to do with adding to services. Services could easily be funded, but staff housing is the limited factor.'²⁵⁷ In the committee's recent evidence in Queensland, the committee heard from literally dozens of organisations that housing is

255 Ms Tracy Adams, Boystown, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 77.

256 Mr Warren Collins, Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 13.

257 Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, *Report No 3*, p. 114.

a key issue in regional and remote Indigenous communities. The committee heard that it prohibited employment of additional staff to provide essential services at hospitals, schools and police stations.

3.313 In Bamaga, for example, the hospital outlined that they need an additional 20 staff but there are no houses to support recruitment of any additional personnel:

At the moment, for us to recruit health workers we need at least another 20. We do not have the capacity here. There is no one trained, because whoever we have trained we have employed, or they are old or they have moved on—whatever it may be. So if we try and get a good workforce up here of effective workers who know their stuff and the first thing we say is, ‘Sorry, we can’t give you accommodation,’ then of course they are not going to come. Therefore, we are surviving on just above half a workforce at the moment. We are limited, but we are still moving on. We just did four or five weeks of health checks²⁵⁸

3.314 For the Queensland Police Citizens Youth Club it was also an issue:

Housing is a major issue for us, and I think it is for every government and non-government department in these locations. We cover four major aspects of sport, recreation, culture and welfare. Sometimes we bring in people in those areas and we find it very hard to house them even for a short period of time. When we developed Doomadgee, a new location, one of our major priorities was that the sergeant had a house. We employ our police liaison officers from the local community, so they have normal residences. Housing for us is a major issue.²⁵⁹

Security of Staff

3.315 The committee further heard that maintenance and security of housing was also an issue for staff in regional and remote areas. The committee notes evidence from the Northern Peninsula Area about possible areas to improve staff security:

An example is the maintenance of security spotlights. I am not making this personal, but I will use the example of where I live. People do walk around quite a lot at night. I keep a Rottweiler because I do not trust my security lights. My front lights are broken. As soon as they are fixed I can guarantee that the other two sets will be broken. And I have had someone break into my house. I do not live on the hospital grounds. There is no guarantee that they can be fixed within 24 hours, which is what the policy states.²⁶⁰

3.316 The committee is concerned by this evidence and will follow up on this issue in its next report.

258 Ms Samantha Cook, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 27.

259 Mr David Bird, Queensland Police Citizens Youth Club, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 61.

260 Ms Samantha Cook, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 30.

3.317 The committee is concerned about the overall lack of housing for essential staff in regional and remote Indigenous communities, particularly for health and police staff. The committee considers that further funding is likely to be required to ameliorate this situation otherwise the committee fears that the situation will ultimately get worse.

Justice Issues

3.318 The committee's third report included discussion of Indigenous justice issues in Western Australia and New South Wales. This section follows on from that discussion incorporating new evidence put to the committee during its visits to Indigenous communities in Queensland.

3.319 The third report noted the high social and economic costs of the growing Indigenous imprisonment rate. The committee therefore recommended that the Western Australian government consider increasing the availability of non-custodial sentencing options and the provision of therapeutic and rehabilitation programs to treat the causes of offending and recidivism in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

3.320 As a follow-up action to these recommendations, the committee wrote to justice agencies in each jurisdiction requesting information on innovations in criminal justice that seek to address the high rate of Indigenous imprisonment. The responses to this request are available from the committee's website.

Indigenous Imprisonment Rates

3.321 Nationally, the imprisonment rate of Indigenous adults is 2310 per 100 000, or approximately 1 in 43.²⁶¹ The age-standardised²⁶² rate of imprisonment of Indigenous adults is 14 times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous adults.²⁶³

3.322 Indigenous Australians account over a quarter (up from 20 per cent in 1999) of Australia's total prison population despite representing approximately 2.5 per cent

261 ABS, *Prisoners in Australia 2009*, Catalogue 4517.0, December 2009.

262 Please note that the ABS prepares two versions of the imprisonment rate. The crude rate refers to the number imprisoned per 100 000. The age-standardised imprisonment rate factors in the age profile of the relevant population. Because younger people tend to offend more, a population with a younger age-profile, such as the Indigenous population, will naturally be overrepresented in imprisonment statistics. The age-standardised statistic corrects for this, allowing for more meaningful comparisons between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

263 A caveat on ABS prison statistics: The ABS notes that these statistics rely on self-identification by prisoners as Indigenous. Any change in the tendency to self-identify could distort the statistics.

of the Australian population.²⁶⁴ The Indigenous imprisonment rate has risen significantly over the last 10 years.

3.323 Indigenous males are the most overrepresented group in prisons in Australia at a rate of 4230 per 100 000.²⁶⁵ For certain age groups, it is even higher. The imprisonment rate for 25–29 year old Indigenous men is 6974.6 per 100 000.²⁶⁶ This equates to approximately 1 in 14 Indigenous men in this age group being imprisoned across Australia.

3.324 A discussion paper prepared by the committee secretariat highlights available data and research on Indigenous interaction with the criminal justice system and is available from the committee's website. The paper highlights the importance of violence, alcohol, mental health issues and social disadvantage in contributing to the high rates of offending and imprisonment in the Indigenous population.

Offending from A Young Age

3.325 Alleged offender data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics from police databases indicate a high level of offending by Indigenous people. In Queensland, 10 858 per 100 000 Indigenous people were proceeded against by police through a formal charge, diversion or caution in the 2008–09 calendar year.²⁶⁷ As with the non-Indigenous population, young people were the most highly represented. 16 615 per 100 000 Indigenous young people in the 15–19 year old age group were proceeded against by police in that same year, which is approximately one in six.²⁶⁸

3.326 The Queensland Department of Communities informed the committee that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people make up 34 per cent of juvenile offenders in the Queensland youth justice system. During 2008–09, Indigenous young people represented 53.5 per cent of all young people remanded in custody and 72 per cent of all young people admitted with detention orders. The number of Indigenous young people coming into contact with the police in Queensland, however, declined by 17.4 per cent between 2006–07 and 2008–09.²⁶⁹

264 ABS, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008*, Catalogue No. 4714.0, October 2009.

265 ABS, *Prisoners in Australia 2009*, Catalogue 4517.0, December 2009.

266 ABS, *Prisoners in Australia 2009*, Catalogue 4517.0, December 2009.

267 ABS, *Recorded Crime – Offenders, 2008–09*, Catalogue 4519.0, March 2010.

268 ABS, *Recorded Crime – Offenders, 2008–09*, Catalogue 4519.0, March 2010.

269 Mrs Bette Kill, Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 34.

The Need for Diversionary Activities for Young People

3.327 Witnesses in Cherbourg drew attention to the large amount of unstructured free time that children in that community experienced, directly linking this with substance abuse and antisocial behaviour.²⁷⁰

What we are looking at here is the pulling power on 14- and 15-year-olds and up to 18-year-olds and their vast amount of unstructured time—so the opportunity to interact with people who are engaged in at-risk behaviours, one of them being substance abuse.²⁷¹

3.328 The committee heard that peer pressure was a major risk factor for substance abuse in particular, undermining the controlling influence of parents.

A lot of the kids who we found were doing it [petrol sniffing] before that were only doing it because the ringleader would say, ‘Come on, let’s go,’ and if they did not listen they would get a hit. We found there was some violence behind it as well. The parents and other family members of some of those kids decided to take them out of the community and move away for a bit. We kept in contact and the families said, ‘They are doing really well; they are finally putting their head down, doing the work at school and enjoying school and playing sports.’ One family who had four sons under the age of 12 who were doing it moved to Dalby. They found that once they moved away and the parents had more responsibility for looking after their kids they seemed to improve in the home.²⁷²

3.329 The committee has previously outlined the need for youth services to keep children occupied and away from the opportunity for risky behaviour, particularly as the result of boredom. The committee is pleased to note the existence of a variety of youth services in Cherbourg, including the Police-Citizens Youth Club and South Burnett CTC Youth Services. However, the committee understands that engaging parents in these services is likely to be of benefit, noting comments by Barambah Health Service:

...it is hard to empower community members because, when there are a lot of these programs and these agencies who are willing to help, I find that they are not really empowering our people to do things themselves. In our community people are pretty much taking advantage of the services and not really being responsible.²⁷³

3.330 The committee also heard that diversion, be it recreational activities, employment or any other activity, is not just needed by children. Ms Gloria Wallis, a councillor in Napranum, noted:

270 Ms Shirley Wigan, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 24.

271 Mr Paul Leach, Cherbourg State School, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 46.

272 Mr Matthew Friday, Barambah Health Service, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 32.

273 Mr Matthew Friday, Barambah Health Service, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 32.

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.²⁷⁴

3.331 Evidence provided by the Queensland Police-Citizens Youth Welfare Association (PCYC) in Cairns also suggests that recreational activities that reduce boredom for both children and adults can achieve significant reductions in offending.²⁷⁵ This evidence is discussed below.

Early Childhood Intervention

3.332 The committee also notes evidence from Cherbourg and Napranum stressing the importance of early intervention as a means of reducing offending behaviour.

3.333 The committee heard evidence from Gundoo Day Care Centre in Cherbourg suggesting that the cohort of children who had been through the centre and prepared for school were more likely to achieve strong educational outcomes and less susceptible to substance abuse and criminal behaviour.

It stands out like anything, especially in the juvenile justice system. You find that there are very few of the children who have started off at Gundoo Day Care at six weeks old who have gone through it. They usually go [through] their schooling, they go through their high schooling and they stay out of the juvenile justice system. It is only a very small minority of our children that end up in it. That is mainly because of that school readiness and all that it is built into children: the social skills and everything. We also provide them with a good nutritional program. They come to our centre and they get four meals a day. We have a full-time cook, and they get roast dinners, salads and everything. That is all at the centre. We provide the children with their own hats and we provide sunscreen. All the child has to do at Gundoo is come along with a change of clothing, with Kimbies if they are still in them and with formula for while they are there if they are babies. You can see just how beneficial it is for our children to have quality early education and care, and every child in Cherbourg should be able to have that. But they are not, and they are the ones who end up not wanting to work and not having built up that self-esteem. Our children are proud of themselves, and we try to instil in them pride in their Aboriginality as well. A lot of the parents of the children...have sent them on to private schools. They then go on to university and things like that. That all starts back with early childhood education and care.²⁷⁶

274 Ms Gloria Wallis, Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2010, p. 57.

275 Mr David Bird, Queensland Police-Citizens Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 58.

276 Mr Ray Burrows, Gundoo Day Care Centre, *Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2010, p. 4.

3.334 Similarly, the committee notes that the Napranum Parents and Learning Group, which facilitates early childhood learning based on parental engagement, demonstrates another good model for early childhood intervention. The program would appear to be leading to strong educational outcomes, which is a protective factor in terms of offending. However the facilitation of a stronger bond between parent and child would also act to improve family life and social control. The need for programs to encourage parent-child interaction has also been discussed in a previous section on education.

3.335 The committee notes that the Department of Communities will invest \$8.5 million into early intervention and family support programs in 2010–11.²⁷⁷

3.336 The committee has noted in previous reports the importance of youth services and diversionary activities, particularly in the context of protecting against substance abuse.²⁷⁸ The committee feels that these services and activities are also essential in reducing criminal behaviour by young people.

Positive Social Norms

3.337 The subject of social norms was raised by Mr Noel Pearson, Director of the Cape York Institute who noted the power social expectations in communities had on individual behaviour, above and beyond any service provided by governments.

What ultimately produces change, more powerful than any kind of service support you get, is the moral expectation of those who are most important to you. I will comply with the moral expectations of the people who are valuable and important to me. That is a stronger determinant of how I behave than having access to support services and so on.

Let me tell you about card gambling and the social norm in relation to card gambling, which is a horrific problem in our communities in Northern Queensland. I will tell you about my home community. It has all of the social problems of typical communities: marijuana, alcohol and a range of social problems. The one thing they do not do at Hope Vale is card gambling. You cannot find a card gambling school. There are very aggressive horse betters when the races go on in Cooktown, and there are pokie machine pullers. There are gambling addicts in Hope Vale. There are card gamblers in Hope Vale who go down to Wujal Wujal, Yarrabah or Laura to do cards, but they do not do cards in Hope Vale. It is an unwritten cultural and social rule that nobody is allowed to set up card gambling schools in this community.

I give that example as an illustration of the power of a social norm if it is in place and is defended. The reason why it is still in place is that whenever it was challenged—it was challenged on a number of occasions by young

277 Mrs Bette Kill, Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 33.

278 Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, *Report No 3*, tabled 26 November 2009, pp 108–109.

cousins coming back from Yarrabah and trying to set up a gambling school down the street—the challenge was shut down. The norm was defended.²⁷⁹

3.338 The committee notes the importance of social norms and expectations of behaviour as a means of reducing criminal behaviour in regional and remote Indigenous communities. As Mr Pearson noted, the establishment and defense of positive social expectations requires community leadership. The committee is of the opinion that government policy needs to support the process of the reestablishment of positive social norms in communities.

Once people identify with the expectations that people have of them, you have something that does not need to be policed by laws, policemen and so on; it is policed by social expectations.²⁸⁰

3.339 The committee notes that where enforcement of behaviour by social norms and enforcement of the law by police is aligned, communities are likely to experience much lower levels of antisocial behaviour.

3.340 The committee has previously noted in this report the importance of appointing local commissioners to support the work of the Cape York Welfare Reform trial. The vesting of government authority in locally respected figures appears not only to have facilitated case management using local information, but more importantly, has helped to rebuild the authority of elders and respected people, in turn improving the ability of the community to control antisocial behaviour. The committee considers that this represents the alignment of traditional Indigenous and mainstream authority.

Relationship Between Police and Community

3.341 Two approaches employed by Queensland police in order to bridge a perceived divide between Indigenous communities and the police have been the establishment of Police and Citizen Youth Clubs and increases in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in the police force. These initiatives are discussed below.

Police and Citizen Youth Clubs

3.342 The committee was impressed by the activities of the Queensland Police-Citizens Youth Welfare Association (PCYC)²⁸¹ in regional and remote Indigenous communities in Queensland. The Queensland PCYC first moved from a largely metropolitan base in 1996, establishing a presence in Yarrabah in response to high

279 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 99.

280 Mr Noel Pearson, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 99.

281 The Queensland Police-Citizens Youth Welfare Association is more commonly known as the Police-Citizen Youth Club and the acronym PCYC, hence that acronym has been used in this report.

levels of youth suicide and juvenile offending.²⁸² The activities of that centre won national and state awards and led to the establishment of further centres in Palm Island and Mornington Island. Each of these Indigenous PCYC centres is assigned a sergeant and two Police Liaison Officers (PLO) and employs local staff.²⁸³

3.343 In 2004, the organisation developed the Community Activity Programs through Education (CAPE) program to provide a presence in smaller communities including Wujal Wujal, Hope Vale, Napranum and others.²⁸⁴ PCYC noted that in the first 12 months of the program operating in Wujal Wujal, juvenile crime dropped by 67 per cent, although this may not have been due to the PCYC alone.

Because Wujal was seen as a highly volatile area, that is why the Queensland police service has put a police station there for 300-odd people, one of the focuses was if we reduced the boredom for not just the children but the adults and we had a lot of adults programs there—we had partnerships with the Bloomfield school and other areas—that crime hopefully would reduce. The front page of the Cairns Post through the release of statistics from the assistant Commissioner of the day, not my statistics, shows that we reduced juvenile crime whilst we were there. We cannot say that we did it all; all we can say is that, for the period 12 months before that versus the 12 months that we were in there and looking at the six months that led up to it, juvenile crime reduced by 67 per cent.²⁸⁵

3.344 Another example given to the committee was the operation of a recreation program over the Christmas period in Mornington Island. By keeping the large number of students returning from the mainland or out of school during the holiday period occupied, Mornington Island's rate of indictable offences by juveniles dropped to zero.²⁸⁶

3.345 These examples serve to highlight comments made above by witnesses in Cherbourg, who explained that long period of unstructured time, boredom and peer pressure combine, resulting in a greater risk of antisocial and criminal behaviour.

3.346 The organisation had also run programs that sought to bolster cultural identity and respect within communities. Ms Sonia Townson, the CAPE PCYC manager in Bamaga, informed the committee about a youth clean-up program that connected

282 Mr David Bird, Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, pp 51–52.

283 Mr David Bird, Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 52.

284 Mr David Bird, Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 52.

285 Mr David Bird, Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 58.

286 Mr David Bird, Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2010, p. 59.

young people and elders in her community through voluntary work for the elders, such as cleaning yards:

That was a good interaction between the youths and the elders and it had never been done before. There are always educational programs and projects in the school where elders do take part, and that is where you do see that transition happen between the two groups, the youths and elders, but it has never been done in a community like that before. They were really uplifted and our program went very successfully. Now I am finding myself structuring in my calendar one week of every month going to servicing that aspect of our elders' lives.²⁸⁷

3.347 Additionally, out of the many programs run by that PCYC, several incorporated cultural events such as weddings, initiations and a tombstone unveiling.²⁸⁸

3.348 Mr David Bird noted that the PCYC encountered difficulty in funding facilities that were required to comply with certain government regulations. For instance, the breakfast program in Napranum had been closed due to health regulations that specify, amongst other things, the need for a third sink.

3.349 The committee understands the need for regulations, but is concerned that in certain circumstances, the appropriate balance between regulation and the need for community programs is not being met. The committee is of the opinion that there is a need for discretion in cases such as these that takes into account local needs and conditions on the one hand and the need for regulation on the other. In addition, this situation highlights a common finding of the committee, which is that funding arrangements by governments need to take into account the need for adequate resources to ensure regulatory standards can be met.

Indigenous Police Employment Initiatives

3.350 The Queensland Police Commissioner informed the committee that the recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander police officers was a priority for the service:

I want Indigenous people, whether they be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, to join the Police Department. I do not mind whether they join as sworn officers, civilian staff members or police liaison officers. What is important is to have them join the Police Department.²⁸⁹

287 Ms Sonia Townson, CAPE Police-Citizens Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 42.

288 Ms Sonia Townson, CAPE Police-Citizens Youth Welfare Association, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2010, p. 42.

289 Mr Robert Atkinson, Queensland Police Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 45.

3.351 The Commissioner noted that it was sometimes difficult for Indigenous recruits to work in Indigenous communities that they were not from, particularly as a Police Liaison Officer (PLO).

...there are real challenges in someone from outside a community going into that community as a police liaison officer. There are challenges within community because most of the communities, as you are well aware, are not natural, in the sense that they were formed by missionaries years ago with different clans and tribes being brought together. So there is that conflict internally with most anyway. But then, to take someone from another family group and community entirely and say, 'Well, you go to Aurukun and be a police liaison officer,' is a big ask.²⁹⁰

3.352 The Commissioner's preference therefore was to employ PLOs from the community itself where possible.²⁹¹

3.353 The committee heard that there are currently 152 PLOs, most of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

They are highly valued. In fact, quite interestingly, in some recent work and research we have done, our police liaison officers were found to be amongst our most highly engaged employees. Some of them are just outstanding and wonderful people who have been with us for a very long time—almost from the start of the program.²⁹²

3.354 The Commissioner was concerned that another element of Indigenous policing would suffer as a result of the removal of CDEP from communities. Many regional and remote Indigenous communities have employed community police through the CDEP program, which has ceased or is due to cease, depending on the community.

Some communities had up to 10 community police. Now they have none and there will be no police liaison officer there, so there is a real disconnect in terms of those numbers. With respect, the community policing model had its problems: they were employed by the local councils—and that is not even, as you know, normally a council responsibility. I mean, it is not roads, rates and rubbish. Most councils are not expected to employ law enforcement type officers. But it was better than nothing, and it is a real concern to me. ... it is a particular concern in the Torres Strait because, if the CDEP funding fails there and the community police are withdrawn, we only have a police presence on two of the 17 islands.²⁹³

290 Mr Robert Atkinson, Queensland Police Service, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 45.

291 Mr Robert Atkinson, Queensland Police Service, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 45.

292 Mr Robert Atkinson, Queensland Police Service, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 45.

3.355 The committee noted in the section on employment above that the withdrawal of CDEP may result in some serious community consequences if the transition is not appropriately managed.

Hearing Impairment

3.356 The committee is aware, through evidence provided to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, of the potential for hearing difficulties to exacerbate problems associated with sentencing and court order compliance, with the potential to increase imprisonment of Indigenous people.

3.357 For instance, a submission to that committee's inquiry into hearing loss in Australia provided by the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) noted that 90 per cent of Aboriginal prisoners in the Darwin Correctional Centre had some level of hearing impairment.²⁹⁴

3.358 NAAJA's submission traced poor educational outcomes as a result of hearing disorders to increased criminal behaviour later in life. Additionally, the ability to participate in court proceedings and to understand and abide by court orders or parole terms is potentially compromised by the widespread existence of hearing disorders in the Indigenous population.²⁹⁵

3.359 A submission by Dr Damien Howard, Phoenix Consulting, to the Community Affairs inquiry notes that some of the anti-social behaviour of Indigenous people is related to widespread hearing loss. Additionally, the communication barrier resulting from hearing disorders can severely compromise the relationship Indigenous people have with police or other authorities, particularly where that hearing disorder is unrecognised and the lack of communication is attributed to language, intellectual or other difficulties.²⁹⁶

3.360 The Queensland Commissioner for Corrective Services informed the committee that all people entering the corrective services system in that state are assessed for criminogenic needs. The committee considers this to be a best practice approach. However, the committee was concerned to hear that adults are not routinely screened for hearing loss.²⁹⁷ Given the statistics presented above, the committee recommends that hearing assessment be added to the routine screening process, at the very least for convicted felons, but preferably prior to court proceedings. In the case of

294 North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, *Submission 170* to Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee inquiry into hearing health in Australia, p. 4.

295 North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, *Submission 170* to Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee inquiry into hearing health in Australia, pp 2–5.

296 Dr Damien Howard, Phoenix Consulting, *Submission 112* to Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee inquiry into hearing health in Australia, pp 26–28.

297 Mr Kelvin Anderson, Commissioner for Corrective Services, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 48.

screening by Queensland Corrections, the committee notes that this could be incorporated into the disability strategy currently under development.²⁹⁸

Recommendation 14

3.361 The committee recommends that Queensland Corrections consider including routine hearing assessments in the induction and assessment process for persons newly entering the corrective services system.

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

3.362 The committee has previously noted the prevalence of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in regional and remote Indigenous communities.²⁹⁹ The committee notes that the behaviour exhibited by individuals suffering from FASD would tend to increase the exposure of these individuals to the criminal justice system. A submission from the National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Related Disorders (NOFASARD) notes international research indicating an overrepresentation of individuals with FASD in the criminal justice system and prisons.

A Canadian study of 287 youths remanded for a forensic psychiatric/psychological assessment found 67 of the young offenders (23.3%) had an alcohol-related diagnosis. Children and youth with FASD are at increased risk for maladaptive behaviour because of the constellation of brain based disabilities such as poor impulse control, poor reasoning and judgement, abstraction, adaptation, socialisation and their inability to alter behaviour.³⁰⁰

3.363 A paper by Associate Professor Heather Douglas provided to the committee cites research suggesting that FASD sufferers are less able to recognise and understand cause and effect, empathise with others or restrain impulses.³⁰¹

The cognitive, social and behavioural problems associated with FASD often bring sufferers to the attention of the criminal justice system. It has been estimated that approximately sixty percent of adolescents with FASD have been in trouble with the law. Impulsive behaviour may lead to stealing things for immediate consumption or use, unplanned offending and offending behaviour precipitated by fright or noise. As a result of their suggestibility, FASD sufferers may engage in secondary participation with more sophisticated offenders. Lack of memory or understanding of cause

298 Mr Kelvin Anderson, Commissioner for Corrective Services, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 49.

299 Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, *Report No 3*.

300 NOFASARD, *Submission 114*, pp 4–5.

301 Douglas, Heather, *Sentencing and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)*, paper provided to committee as appendix to *Submission 112*, p. 2.

and effect may lead to breach of court orders; further enmeshing FASD sufferers in the justice system.³⁰²

3.364 In addition to a tendency to exhibit anti-social behaviour, Dr Douglas notes that individuals who suffer from FASD may be disadvantaged in police questioning due to inherent suggestibility, while the condition may affect the individual's fitness to plea.³⁰³ The committee notes that FASD sufferers are thus more likely to both offend and more likely to be disadvantaged in their interactions with the criminal justice system.

Policing

3.365 Statistics collected by the ABS NATSISS survey suggest much higher rates of contact between police and Indigenous people and particularly young Indigenous people. This is a fact corroborated by police proceedings data. Cunneen (2008) suggests that zero-tolerance policing or initiatives such as 'move-on' powers in New South Wales compound Indigenous anger and mistrust of the criminal justice system. A study of police search powers in NSW found that in Bourke and Brewarrina, both towns with large Aboriginal populations, between 90 to 95 per cent of searches were unsuccessful. Cunneen believes that the unnecessary anger and mistrust of police, arising from what is perceived as harassment, has a criminogenic effect by reducing the influence of social norms, such as respect for authority and the justice system.³⁰⁴

3.366 The Queensland police informed the committee that they had increased the number of police in regional and remote Indigenous communities by 29 officers since the Palm Island tragedy.³⁰⁵ The Queensland Police Service was aware of the need to avoid over policing as a result, stating:

I think also there is now a greater awareness by police on the communities of the need to be very, very generous, I guess, in not enforcing relatively minor legislation and in trying to avoid people being placed into custody—that is with public order, public nuisance and traffic type offences. I think that tolerance does need to exist. Certainly, though, there is a challenge with the necessary enforcement of the alcohol management plan or the alcohol restriction type legislation versus the significant degree of dependency and importance that is associated with alcohol; there is a real tension in respect of that. That links back to that relationship with the community, which is important, of course, obviously.

302 Douglas, Heather, *Sentencing and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)*, paper provided to committee as appendix to *Submission 112*, p. 4.

303 Douglas, Heather, *Sentencing and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)*, paper provided to committee as appendix to *Submission 112*, p. 2.

304 Chris Cunneen, 'Indigenous Anger and the Criminogenic Effects of the Criminal Justice System', in Day, A., Nakata, M., & Howells, K., *Anger and Indigenous Men*, Federation Press, 2008.

305 Mr Robert Atkinson, Queensland Police Service, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 35.

I think there are real challenges, though, in terms of community engagement. Currently—and I am not being critical of this; it is necessary—the police population ratio on communities is very high. In some communities there might be 800 people and 10 police; that is one to 80. I think the Australian average is around one to 430. So there is already a disproportion there. However, we are conscious, I hope and believe, of not having overenforcement because of that disproportion, and I think we have moved beyond that claim.³⁰⁶

3.367 The committee notes similar comments by the Western Australian Police Service, which encourages officer level discretion as a means of avoiding over policing. The committee has previously recommended that the Commonwealth support the police in that state to ensure that the message of discretion is clearly communicated to officers in the field. The committee notes that all jurisdictions could benefit from a clear policy in this regard.

Cautioning, Conferencing and Diversion

3.368 Data collected by states and territories indicate that, compared with non-Indigenous juvenile offenders, a smaller proportion of Indigenous juvenile offenders were diverted from court by formal cautioning or referrals in each State and Territory for which data was available.³⁰⁷

3.369 In Queensland, Indigenous young people were 2.9 times less likely than non-Indigenous young people to be cautioned rather than going to court, two times less likely to undergo police conferencing compared to going to court and 1.5 times less likely to be cautioned rather than undergoing police conferencing.³⁰⁸ This result took into account prior records and seriousness of offence, controlling for factors other than Indigenous identity. The authors noted a range of possible explanations for this disparity including racial bias, differences in the proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth pleading guilty, and hence being eligible for diversion, and more informal contact with police outside of the statistics recorded in the study.³⁰⁹

3.370 The Queensland Department of Communities were of the opinion that diversion of juveniles was occurring effectively, where young people came into contact with the youth justice system. The department provided some further statistics on the matter to the committee:

306 Mr Robert Atkinson, Queensland Police Service, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, pp 35–36.

307 SCRGSP, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2009*, July 2009, p. 10.33.

308 Troy Allard, Anna Stewart, April Chrzanowski, James Ogilvie, Dan Birks and Simon Little, 'Police diversion of young offenders and Indigenous over-representation', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* No. 390, AIC, March 2010.

309 Troy Allard, Anna Stewart, April Chrzanowski, James Ogilvie, Dan Birks and Simon Little, 'Police diversion of young offenders and Indigenous over-representation', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* No. 390, AIC, March 2010, pp 4–5.

...research does show that Indigenous children who come into contact with the criminal justice system do so at a much earlier age than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Also, recent research commissioned by our department indicates that 29.9 per cent of Indigenous Queensland children are cautioned initially at the age of 10 to 12 years of age. Cautioning and conferencing are typically available to first-time and non-serious offenders; and we know that young people, when they do come into contact with our youth justice system, are being diverted effectively. Youth justice conferencing gives a young person and young people who have offended an opportunity to repair the harm that they have caused and it holds the young person accountable for their actions. Research does demonstrate that our Queensland conferencing efforts result in young people who participate in conferencing having at least a 15 per cent to 20 per cent less likelihood of re-offending.³¹⁰

3.371 A statistically significant discrepancy in the likelihood that Indigenous young people will be diverted from court relative to non-Indigenous young people has been found in Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales.³¹¹

3.372 The Queensland Department of Communities also noted that Indigenous juveniles in that state were at greater risk of being remanded into custody than non-Indigenous juveniles. However, the department considered that this was not evidence of systemic bias, but was due to the lack of supports and bail supervision in regional and remote Indigenous communities. To counter this, the department informed the committee that the Queensland Government was investing in accommodation facilities and programs to assist young Indigenous offenders to meet their bail conditions.³¹²

Corrective Services in Queensland

3.373 As of April 2010, there were 5700 prisoners in Queensland, of which 1689 were Indigenous, or almost 30 per cent. Of the almost 16 000 individuals in community-based corrections, 3420 were Indigenous, or just over 20 per cent.³¹³

Community-Based Corrective Service Staff

3.374 The committee was pleased that under the Queensland Government justice strategy, the government has committed to keeping people in the community and under community supervision wherever possible. Part of this strategy has been the location of probation and parole officers in several remote communities, particularly

310 Mrs Bette Kill, Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 34.

311 Lucy Snowball, 'Diversion of Indigenous Juvenile Offenders', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 355, AIC, June 2008.

312 Mrs Bette Kill, Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 34.

313 Mr Kelvin Anderson, Corrective Services Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 30.

in Cape York, to facilitate non-custodial sentencing options.³¹⁴ The committee heard that corrective service staff are offered a \$7000 bonus and free housing as an incentive to work in remote locations.³¹⁵

3.375 The committee notes from its previous report that the availability and viability of community-based corrections in remote communities is of prime consideration in making sentencing decisions. In the absence of alternatives, imprisonment can be one of few sanctions available to a court.

Court-Ordered Parole Program

3.376 The committee heard that one of the key policy innovations in Queensland has been the introduction of court-ordered paroles. The Commissioner for Corrective Services described the process, stating:

...it is an assessment by the court that the person can be held in the community but that the matter is so serious that it deserves more than a community based order, like a probation order. So they are saying, 'This is a serious matter and it deserves a term of imprisonment. We'll say that that is satisfied as of today. You can go straight to parole.' What makes this different is that that parole order is then administered by the Parole Board, which means that any breach or sanction can be dealt with very, very quickly and is not then returned to court and adjourned and adjourned and adjourned. So there is a very immediate kind of relationship.³¹⁶

3.377 The parole term is treated similarly to a term of imprisonment, in that participants are assessed and placed into various programs on the basis of criminogenic needs. Though the Commissioner expected approximately 1000 individuals to enter the court-ordered parole program, 3000 individuals had passed through or were currently participating in the program. The Commissioner informed the committee that this had played a significant part in arresting growth in the Queensland prison population. The committee was not able to assess the exact number of Indigenous individuals serving court-ordered parole terms.

Therapeutic Programs

3.378 The Queensland Commissioner for Corrective Services informed the committee that in addition to a range of programs offered to prisoners in that state, there were three that had been developed specifically for Indigenous offenders. These were an Indigenous sex offender program, an Ending Offending program related to drug and alcohol use and an Ending Family Violence program. The Commissioner

314 Mr Kelvin Anderson, Corrective Services Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 30.

315 Mr Kelvin Anderson, Corrective Services Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 53.

316 Mr Kelvin Anderson, Corrective Services Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 44.

noted that due to the success of these programs, the Families Responsibilities Commission had approached Queensland Corrections with the possibility of partnering and providing those programs to clients in the welfare reform trials.³¹⁷

3.379 The Commissioner noted that the three Indigenous programs were of high intensity, with the Indigenous sex offender program, for example, taking six to nine months.³¹⁸ Undertaking rehabilitation programs in prison improves a prisoner's chance of parole, providing an incentive to participate. Participation is voluntary, on the basis that uninterested participants would be disruptive in group work. The three specific programs were supplemented by various community-based initiatives, such as a program addressing dangerous driving in Weipa or binge drinking awareness courses.

3.380 The Commissioner was asked what transition services were provided to facilitate reintegration into the community upon release from prison. Two transitional programs assist with ongoing support for health and mental health needs, accommodation and potential employment.³¹⁹ However, only 126 Indigenous prisoners took advantage of these programs in 2008–09.³²⁰

3.381 In addition to programs for adult offenders, the Department of Communities, Youth Justice, informed the committee that they run a range of programs for juvenile detainees. These included an intensive 10-week Aggression Replacement Therapy program that teaches social skills, anger management and moral reasoning and the Changing Habits and Reaching Targets program, also designed to reduce offending.³²¹

3.382 The Department of Communities also noted the importance of effectively transitioning detainees back to the community, noting the Youth Opportunity Program which provided culturally appropriate support to young people and their families. This included parenting skills, supporting young people to make positive lifestyle choices and assisting them to link with positive peer networks.

3.383 The committee considers the provision of assistance following release from the community or custodial corrections to be essential in addressing the high level of recidivism by Indigenous offenders noted above. The committee is particularly supportive of the concept of 'throughcare' which seeks to provide a single stream of support both inside and outside of corrections. This necessitates the close cooperation of service providers inside and outside of the justice system.

317 Mr Kelvin Anderson, Corrective Services Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, pp 30–31.

318 Mr Kelvin Anderson, Corrective Services Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 43.

319 Mr Kelvin Anderson, Corrective Services Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 43.

320 Mr Kelvin Anderson, Corrective Services Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 43.

321 Mrs Bette Kill, Department of Communities, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 34.

3.384 The committee notes comments by the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council, who noted that the intermittent nature of mental health care in remote communities made the provision of throughcare difficult or impossible.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are experiencing co-occurring mental disorders, as with substance abuse or alcohol misuse problems, or who are in the process of rehabilitation post contact with the criminal justice system, these lapses or voids in treatment can contribute to perpetuating the cycle of ill-health, which in turn holds ramifications for family and community and the health and wellbeing of others around them. The inability of services around the individual to deal adequately with the patient's mental disorders, co-morbidities and the risk factors that might be connected back to family and community means that sustainable health improvements become difficult and risk of re-exposure to negative influences and behaviours often remains high and unresolved.³²²

3.385 The committee notes that the re-exposure of returned offenders to remote communities and the same environment in which they originally offended poses a major obstacle to the rehabilitation aims of the corrective services system. Action to reduce offending and re-offending will need to occur both in the community and in the corrective services environment to be effective.

Senator the Hon. Nigel Scullion

Chair

322 Mr Dion Tatow, Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council, *Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2010, p. 99.