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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN/WATERLOO

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At Redfern on 19 May 2004

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The Committee met at 10.00 a.m.

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PRESENT

The Hon. J. C. Burnswoods (Chair)

The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans
The Hon. K. F. Griffin
The Hon. R. M. Parker
The Hon. G. S. Pearce
The Hon. I. W. West

corrected

(Evidence taken in camera)

(Conclusion of evidence in camera)

(Short adjournment)

(Evidence taken in private session)

MICHAEL MUNDINE, Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Housing Company, 104-106 Lawson Street, Redfern,

LANI TUITAVAKE, Property Manager, Aboriginal Housing Company, 104-106 Lawson Street, Redfern,

RICHARD GREEN, Youth Liaison Officer, Elouera Gym, Aboriginal Housing Company, 104-106 Lawson Street, Redfern,

PETER VALILIS, Project Manager, Aboriginal Housing Company, 104-106 Lawson Street, Redfern, and

COLIN JAMES, Director, Ian Buchan Fell Housing Research Centre, University of Sydney, sworn and examined:

DAVID LIEFER, Lecturer in Facilities Management, University of Sydney and Honorary Adviser, Aboriginal Housing Company, 104-106 Lawson Street, Redfern, and

ANGELA PITTS, Urban/Social Planning Consultant, Aboriginal Housing Company, 104-106 Lawson Street, Redfern, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: At the start of our proceedings today we acknowledged the country that we are on. Mick, or anyone else, would you like to make any sort of opening statement before we get into the questions that we sent you?

Mr MUNDINE: Yes, I would like to say something. I think a lot of positive things can come out of this inquiry that will be of benefit to our company for the future and I really feel that what we are getting today will be a true decision on what we are doing for the future and I just hope that everything goes all right.

Mr GREEN: As it is a Government inquiry, welcome to country:

Wy-an-an-na, pemul. Boo-rai-ya yabun
Wingiri wongul.
Mipidyadimi dual. Yenamania baoul.
Beall mul-lin-ool.

(Mother Earth, we are singing through music. We all have totem and clan. The white men speak a strange language. We are walking into the future. Good morning.)

Good morning. That is "Welcome to Country". I thought I would throw that lingo at you just for you to be aware.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. When we visited the office of the Aboriginal Housing Company we saw the models and talked a bit about the plans so we have a sense of some of the things you are talking about. Our first questions concern the role of the company and how it is funded. Other than the Block, what other properties do you own? This will give us a picture of the company and your role. We have received your submission, of course.

Mr MUNDINE: The Aboriginal Housing Company was set up for Aboriginal people with a low income who could not afford housing in the open market. It was set up to help our people so that they could manage in life, as a stepping stone to bigger and better things out in the open community. That is what it was really set up for, for the people that are down there now.

CHAIR: And where does your money come from?

Ms TUITAVAKE: The Aboriginal Housing Company receives funding from the New South Wales Aboriginal Housing Office. We received $77,000 towards the wages of three or 2.5 employees. That has been the same since 1998 when AHO was set up. That was moved across from ATSIC. The other income we have is generated from rents.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So your funding has not gone up in the last six years, is that the bottom line?

Ms TUITAVAKE: No. The only time it went up was $7,000 when the GST came in.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Have you been applying for increased funding?

Ms TUITAVAKE: Yes, we have been.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Why have they knocked it back? On what grounds have they told you that they are not increasing your recurrent funding?

Ms TUITAVAKE: One of the grounds that has been raised with us is that under some projects they are not able to generate money and we have high rental arrears that we should be targeting, collecting the arrears. The bilateral agreement with ATSIC was only for $70,000 and that is all they were committing themselves to.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So the whole lot runs on $77,000—

Ms TUITAVAKE: There is rental income as well.

CHAIR: Do you get any money from the City Council or South Sydney Council as it was or from the Federal Government?

Ms TUITAVAKE: This is the first time we have been able to access funding from DAA, and that was a one off. That was to assist us with Peter Valilis's position, our project manager. Peter originally came on as an ATSIC project, funded through ATSIC for two years. Then we were able to extend it for one more year and the funding ran out. So since then we have been just funding it from the generated income. We have lobbied ATSIC to continue that funding, which was declined. DAA have come across and given us all the $44,000, which was to run from January to 30 June this financial year to help with Peter's wages.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: What will happen after June?

Mr MUNDINE: He is out the door.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What is your annual rent roll?

Ms TUITAVAKE: About $210,000.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: To give us an idea, what are your arrears?

Ms TUITAVAKE: Our arrears are $130,000.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What is your policy for collecting arrears?

Mr VALILIS: Generally, because we are a social housing provider our first option is not to evict. We work with the tenants as much as possible and, in all honesty, from our perspective, many of

our tenants are on social security benefit and if we evict them and try to get the money from them as a bad debt it is impossible. We have a better chance of recovering the debt if we leave them there and work with them to help recover funds. But I have to say that we have gotten to the point with many tenants where we realise that it is just a dead loss and no recovery will be possible. Although, on the other side of the coin, we have had very great success with some tenants, who have paid back lump sums in $5,000 or $6,000 lots. We have had some good results in recovering rent and some bad results.

But part of the problem in the past also has been the Tenancy Tribunal. We have gone to that Tenancy Tribunal and for some reason they have labelled us as the Department of Housing and said, "These people have nowhere else to go so you are stuck with them." They have knocked us back on evictions many times. It took us about 18 months of working with the tribunal members to educate them as to what our severe financial position was every time they knocked back an eviction. I have to say we also have worked with our tenants. Last year we had one tenant who was very difficult to get rid of. He actually threatened board members if we did evict him. When it came time for me to evict him he threatened me with physical violence.

I am not easily intimidated. So I gave him a chance and I said to him that this was the last chance. When we went back to the tribunal, which I told him we would, he said to the tribunal member, "Do not argue. We are leaving." We have been working with tenants and with the tribunal and we are getting better results. For the last couple of years at least we have got a 100 per cent success rate at the tribunal. That is a marked improvement from almost a zero success rate at the tribunal.

CHAIR: Mick, did you want to add something?

Mr MUNDINE: Yes. I just want to refresh people's memories: We are looking after people that nobody else wants. That is why it is very difficult for us to get money out of a lot of our people—because they are caught up in the welfare mentality. They really use and abuse the system, so it is a very hard row for the Aboriginal community itself.

Mr VALILIS: I would like to add to that that our tenants, or the majority of them, have lived in very poor housing conditions. Even the best tenants, if you put them into a poor housing condition, they will react badly. We have been working with Aboriginal housing for a couple of years now trying to organise to have the properties renovated. These are the properties off the Block that we are talking about. Recently they have come up, they have come to the party and they have started renovating. These same tenants that we had trouble with at a very low rent, we have actually put their rents up—sometimes double and triple what they were—and these same tenants have actually come back and said, "I have a reason to pay rent now. My house is in good condition and I have no reason to muck it up or actually not pay rent." We have had very good success. All the tenants who have had their houses renovated, we have had no problems with.

Mr MUNDINE: It is unbelievable.

Mr VALILIS: It is really a cycle that we have now realised how to break, and we have broken it.

CHAIR: How many do you own off the Block?

Ms TUITAVAKE: Forty.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: How many properties do you have altogether? In terms of the problems that you have with arrears, what sort of percentage could that be of those properties?

Mr VALILIS: I would say, all up, I think we have 62 properties and pretty much everybody—I would not say 100 per cent but almost 99 per cent of them—have problems with arrears at some point. We are putting in programs where tenants actually pay their rent plus extra, to either pay off their rent or actually generate a surplus of funds for times, say, during Christmas or other times like that, where they cannot pay rent. This surplus actually will sort out their rent during those

times, so we are putting programs in place for them. Other than about four tenants who are earmarked for eviction now, pretty much everybody is either paying back their rent or is on a surplus.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: That was probably my next question—how many tenants might be in that group who you are not going to try to recover those arrears from?

Mr VALILIS: I think there are about four. We are working with them. We got an eviction order two days ago on one of the tenants—last Friday. We try our best with our tenants because we are more than just the big bad housing manager. We are social housing and we try to help our tenants. These are Aboriginal people who need as much help as we can give them and we try to give them that help. But at some point we have to say that enough is enough. When we reach that point, eviction is the only answer. Even after we evict them, we help them with the Department of Housing. We make contact with them and we give them support letters to move on to the Department of Housing, so they are not on the street.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I have a follow-up question on the issue of rent arrears. Has the issue of garnisheeing been explored previously?

Ms TUITAVAKE: We have.

Mr VALILIS: We actually hired a debt-collecting firm.

The Hon. IAN WEST: No, I am sorry, not debt collecting. I am referring to people who are on payments from the State and Federal governments, but mainly the Federal Government. Has there been any negotiation with the Government about the possibility of garnisheeing their wages?

Mr VALILIS: Our discussions were with Centrelink's pay department. What we have asked them was whether it was possible that we could get all those social security tenants onto Centrepay. Once they are on Centrepay, we have no problems with them. It comes out of their entitlements, their allowance. They never see it, and they have no problem. The problem that we do have is that tenants get rent assistance and then they actually go off Centrepay, which we have no right to say yes or no to, and then we have problems. The Department of Housing has a wonderful arrangement with Centrepay where the tenants must actually get permission from the Department of Housing to come off Centrepay. Unfortunately we have been told that that arrangement cannot be extended to us because we are a private organisation, not a government department. We would love to do it, and I think that if we could do it we would eliminate rent arrears and eviction overnight.

Mr MUNDINE: That is right.

The Hon. IAN WEST: And if you were able to do that, it would assist with the feeling of ownership.

Mr MUNDINE: Yes.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I was interested to hear your comments about people who were feeling that they had some sense of identity with the bricks and mortar that they were living in when the quality increased.

Mr VALILIS: Yes.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I assume that more work is being done in that area?

Mr VALILIS: Yes. I have got to say, as a non-Aboriginal person, before I got here I believed every stereotype I had ever heard in my life about Aboriginal people: They do not like paying rent, they damage their properties, they should be living in the bush or in caves. I believed all of that, and I consider myself a very open-minded and very non-racist person, but that was all I got pumped with. I have to say—and this is an honest admission on my part—that when I first got here, Micky said, "We are going to go and look at properties that we own in the country". These were properties that were bought before I got here.

Mr MUNDINE: Part of the relocation thing.

Mr VALILIS: I said to Micky, "When was the last time that anyone ever looked at them?" He said, "Probably about two years ago." That is when my worst fears came up—they have ruined the properties, what is going to happen to them, no-one has actually seen them. I had seen the properties that they relocated from, and those properties were disgusting that they had relocated from. We went to these houses and I was ashamed when I walked in there because they were beautiful. They were in an immaculate condition. Why did people who lived in squalor suddenly live in immaculate conditions when we had not seen the property for two years? Because they got to pick the property and where they lived, the conditions they lived in, and the properties had to be of a very high standard for us to buy them. These people were very happy and the rents were organised very well. We had very little problems with them.

Really, it was all about their living conditions that we were providing. If we provided poor living conditions, we had a poor response from tenants. If we provided good living conditions, we had a good response from tenants. This is why for the last four years we have been pushing governments because we cannot do it. We have not got the resources to do these things. We have literally begged government to help upgrade our properties, whether it be redevelopment of the Block or the properties outside. Once that happens, we will see that the Aboriginal Housing Company tenants will be model tenants; not all of them, and the ones who are not we will get rid of, but most of them will be model tenants.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Commonly described in the white man's bureaucracy as part of the poverty trap.

Mr VALILIS: Yes, that is right. But we created the problem of the poverty trap—the people who supplied poor housing. The housing company has to take some responsibility for it. We have to.

Mr MUNDINE: For sure.

Mr VALILIS: But the fact is that we are only a small housing company with very little resources. The only answer is to partner with government and big organisations. We have done that. We work very closely with the City West Housing Company in Ultimo. They run a very good model. We are trying to emulate as much of their model as possible and as much as is relevant to Aboriginal housing. We are trying to work with government as much as we can. We have pretty much put out the olive branch. We all have to work together and I think, if we do, great things will come out of it.

Mr MUNDINE: For sure.

CHAIR: We have a lot of questions about redevelopment.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I want to ask some questions you gave answers to at the other meeting, but we have to put them on the record so I have to ask them again.

CHAIR: Yes. Some of them are quite short, factual ones.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: With some of the Block, it seems like you are cleaning it up by demolishing it; basically you have got a big field that is getting bigger that you are going to build on. Is that really the situation?

Mr VALILIS: Yes.

CHAIR: How many are left? What are you going to do with them?

Mr VALILIS: There are 21 properties left. Realistically, if these properties were anywhere else in Sydney—if they were in Hurstville or North Sydney or wherever—you would leave them empty and demolish them when you were ready to build. That is the cheapest and most effective way. But because they are on the Block, they become shooting galleries. They are expensive and very dangerous to maintain. There are liability issues, there are kids playing in and out of them, and we

have no choice but to demolish them. We did it systematically. Prior to the Redfern/Waterloo partnership project being set up, we were doing it on our own. Now that that has been set up, they actually work with us to demolish as many of those derelict houses as we can.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But plenty of people have restored derelict tenant houses and semis. Why are you demolishing? Are you not using a real estate solution to solve a social problem?

Mr VALILIS: Not really. I think that Col could probably answer some of these questions.

CHAIR: It is very much up to you people who answers.

Mr VALILIS: Yes. I just want to say that I think that these houses were passed their use-by date a long time ago. In the early eighties, there were attempts to renovate them. But terrace housing is inappropriate housing for Aboriginal families. Aboriginal families are large. They need a lot of room, they need a lot of space and they need a lot of public domain. These little narrow two-bedroom terraces just do not cut it.

Ms PITTS: Mostly planning for the Block over the past 30 years has been fragmented, dispersed, reactive in the short term and basically bandaid solutions, and they have not successfully addressed the needs of the urban Aboriginal population. The result of this is a continuation of blind action inappropriate, statements of the problem and non-commitment from the government. Basically, as a result ineffectual implementing organisations, we the THC Planning team was formed. The deterioration of the Block over the past 30 years is quite obvious and support is needed.

Dr LEIFER: I wish to talk about the economic prospects. About one-third of the cost of a building goes into the actual units of the building—the floors, the walls, the roofs, the shell. Another third goes in the services, that is, electricity, water, et cetera, and another third goes on the rest, including the finishes. So what you are really talking about is that you have got really a very tacky shell without the services, and the actual cost of redoing it is probably as much, if not more, than what can be done by knocking it down and rebuilding it.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The question is: If you build this design, which I gather you have brought a model of, will you have fewer people for the same quantity of tenant houses or not? I mean, are you going to solve it by reducing their density in order to get that space?

Mr JAMES: Ultimately there will be around about the same population that was here originally—about 400—but they will be living in a much larger property that will be more suited to extended families, and they will have generous amounts of open space. Actually the roof will be—

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You are making use of the roofs to have lawn on the roof, more or less?

Mr JAMES: Yes. Well, it is part of their cultural demand—the in/out factor that people talk about in Aboriginal circles.

Mr GREEN: And it is what the rest of society needs also. I think too many people are focusing on the reports from media about drugs and all the corruption here. It has not only been cut in half; it is down to a third. These dealers that we have got among the community are now starving. They are starving themselves out. You cannot go out there and get what you could get a month back and we are not the only community in the country. We are by no means the major distributor of heroin and I do not know where they get the $50 million bracket from, except from these needle buses that hand out the fits, and they count them by route. They are giving hundreds of fits out to one addict, but that does not constitute 2,500 every 10 minutes and it does not constitute what everyone is trying to discover here. There are no drugs here of quality. That is why these criminals now realise that they cannot keep selling their drugs here. They are starting to send their illicit workers down here to entice all the men.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Can I finish about the housing and come to the drugs in a second?

Mr GREEN: I am sorry. I am getting emotional.

Mr MUNDINE: You are jumping ahead a bit.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You were talking about the architectural solution, the density and the number of people.

Mr JAMES: Can I add to that?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Yes. That is what I want you to do.

Mr JAMES: We have been working with that stock for 30 years. There was a time when the property was first acquired by the Whitlam Government that they were renovated by an ATSI work force, and they did an excellent job. The properties were well looked after. The people adapted to what Micky says was a very inappropriate stock in terms of size. They are oriented east and west, which is not very favourable to a Sydney climate. They have also proved to be insecure. Kids can get through sandstock brick, lime and mortar with screwdrivers, so no-one is safe. No-one is safe in Paddington either, by the way. The roofs do not have fire protection between them. There is no barrier. If there is a fire in any one of them, it can travel horizontally. We tried to manage the inappropriate size of the housing—there were twos and threes and nothing bigger than that—when we went into our second decade of renovations. We were combining two houses into one to accommodate the needs.

David is right about the poor and degradation from insecure housing and bad housing in the first place. It was Victorian housing designed for a totally different climate and a totally different circumstance. We used to have a common yard when it was first set up and then gradually the backyards came back in to vogue and then the backyards proved to be very bad places for drug dealing and part of the demolition program was to do what we call "eyes on the street" to reduce any sort of hidey-holes where people can deal drugs or bag snatch. My summation of all that is that it was very inappropriate stock and we are looking forward to some appropriate stock which will meet the needs of large families. They will have that indoor/outdoor activity and they will enjoy what is a fantastic site. This site is north-east, south-east with fantastic views. It will meet all the expectations of the Premier for sustainability, environment basics and all the codes that have been talked about and we have never recognised.

The reason there were Aboriginal people here was partly because of the railways. The Gadigal clan was to exist around here but a lot of the jobs were at Eveleigh goods yards. It is held that the Aboriginal people through New South Wales helped with the construction of the State railway system. They found roots. They found the hardwood for sleeper cutting and they became sleeper cutters. Then they became fettlers and then they gravitated to Eveleigh goods yards and they got jobs there. They were called "boys" and even got less wages than apprentices. They camped close to where the work was and that is principally the backbone of why low-income accommodation was necessary and why people held on to them. They originally squatted and then the church and the unions backed them, and in came the Whitlam Government and it tried a very bold experiment.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: After the 1980s renovations which you said were well done, the improvement was not sustained. Was the reason that your idea about nice properties did not succeed because of the influx of drugs? Why did it not sustain?

Mr JAMES: Grog was the first, methylated spirits and alcohol and that fuelled. The phases were more or less the good area, the hype and the enthusiasm for starting the first community Aboriginal housing in the country. The land had special status: it was the first urban land rights in Australia. It just followed Waddy Creek. Even though it is now held to be a poisoned water hole, it has got that status of being, first, part of the National Estate and, second, Aboriginal land, and that is very important.

CHAIR: Do you want to say something Mr Green?

Mr GREEN: Listening, I am just emotional that is all.

Mr MUNDINE: After the early 1980s the problem why the houses deteriorated and things were going back was because we had a lot of Aboriginal people come from missions and country areas who could not adapt to city living. That is where we got the major problem of rent paying and when a lot of the problems we talk about now kicked off. We thought doing a bandaid job and refurbishing in the early 1980s would give our people a bit of lift. But I think we have got to start realising too—let us go back to the early 1970s—that our people were sort of living on hate and then living on hope. The hate they had been carrying for so long and that is why we have got this vicious cycle of where we are today.

I really feel with this redevelopment starting they can visualise something for the future and that is when the hope will really come into reality. Our people went through a vicious cycle from the 1970s, to the 1980s and the 1990s but now in 2000 our people are still very wary of what is going to happen and we as a board, the committee here at the moment, is working towards a bit of future. So it has just been a vicious cycle of different cycles of alcohol, a lot of vandalisms occurring after the early 1980s where they really started smashing up houses, and then we got into the drug area. I do not have to tell you much more about the drug situation, but that is what really happened.

Ms TUITAVAKE: I suppose it looks like the football field is getting bigger, yes, because we have a plan for the future to redevelop. Like David was saying, knowing it is not viable for us to spend good money in houses where we have moved the family on, the plan is to demolish that house. Prior to the redevelopment talks, if we evicted somebody that same day we had to put somebody in there because the chances were somebody would get in overnight and squat there, or smash up the place, and then they will take squatter's rights and it became time consuming to try to get the people out.

Over time we have become not only property managers but professionals at welfare on how to plan to demolish. When a house is vacant we have to get in there, gut out the house and cut the services. As a company we had to be more responsible as a housing provider. We had to comply with the Act if something happened to the squatters in there. Prior to that we were playing black fella-white fella mentality of saying "They're just black fellas, we will put them in there. We'll get in there and fix it up later" and that never used to happen. Now even an outside property, if the house will be vacant for six months we will not put somebody in there to put them at risk. That is one of the steps we are looking at.

CHAIR: How many tenants are there in your houses at the moment?

Mr VALILIS: In total? All occupants?

CHAIR: Yes, the figure of 400 was mentioned.

Mr VALILIS: On the Block?

CHAIR: On the Block.

Mr VALILIS: That is 400 people, not tenancies. About 100 now.

CHAIR: Does that include properties other than the Block?

Mr VALILIS: No, not outside the Block. On the Block it is about 100 and probably 400 outside.

CHAIR: Are you housing more people now than you were originally but scattered in different places?

Mr VALILIS: Yes. Just to clarify something. Arthur, the issue is not just prettying up the house but the houses on the outside that we have bought were bought with a certain agenda in mind

and that was that they would be an appropriate size and in an appropriate location whereas with the Block we never really had that level of discretion to do it.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It was inherited.

Mr VALILIS: We inherited the Block. We just had to make do with what we had whereas outside we can be discriminate and say "We don't like that house. That one will do." You have to look at it differently.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What sort of waiting list do you have? How do you manage it?

Ms TUITAVAKE: We have 200 people on our waiting list. Annually we send out a renewal just to update our waiting list to ask whether people still want to be on our list. One of the issues that we have raised with the Department of Housing and with the AHO, is that as far as we are concerned a lot of these people are on different lists—whether it is the AHO or the department. We want them to work out a system where the people who are on our list are not also somewhere else clogging up the system. Once upon a time, the company was set up for transients with six-months stay or a year but now we have long-term tenants who have been there for 15-20 years in some of our properties. It is a long wait to be on our list.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What is your experience with drug houses and shooting galleries?

Mr VALILIS: I have got to say—I do not know if I should say this off the record because these issues are very dangerous to us. We are on the front line. We here every day. We are easy targets. We play a very fine line. If we go head on there is no reason why a drug dealer cannot walk into our office—it's open—and shoot us all dead. It is as simple as that. But over the past six years we have successfully gone from 15 drug houses down to about three or four now. There was one major shooting gallery next to 78, at 76 Eveleigh Street. In all honesty, we tried everything to ask this lady to move so we could demolish. We asked council to demolish just the one House, but these terraces were built in twins. So if you demolish one it structurally compromises the other. We did everything. We begged, we offered hundreds of houses for relocation and for her own reasons she did not want to move. And that shooting gallery, no matter how many times we blocked it up, was reopened. That has always been our approach.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Did the council know it was a shooting gallery?

Mr VALILIS: Everyone knew.

Mr GREEN: Basically the shooting gallery now is a back lane. There isn't one here that is open to everyone.

Mr VALILIS: We blocked them all up.

Mr GREEN: It is a back lane. The people have been using for who knows how long?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: You talk about drug houses. Can you define what that means to you?

Mr VALILIS: A drug house is basically a premise that is tenanted and actually used for illicit activity such as selling drugs but not limited to that.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That is the definition in the Act.

Mr VALILIS: That is the way I define it. I have not read the Act, I do not know.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: But tenanted by a family?

Mr GREEN: Or they are empty places—

Mr VALILIS: Actually, if they are empty and we have blocked them up and someone has broken in then they become an illegal shooting gallery. If they sell drugs out of it? That is our loose definition of them. A drug house is a tenanted house. A shooting gallery is a non-tenanted house or someone is squatting in it.

Mr MUNDINE: I suppose there are rumours and allegations that we rent houses to drug people. I have been here so long and I can say that we rent houses to people, and we did not know that mothers and grandmothers were going to sell drugs in the future. People cannot really condemn us for saying that we rent houses out to drug dealers. It is very sad that it has come to the crunch where mothers and grandmothers sell drugs in this community to our people and children. For people to start pointing fingers at us, they should clean up their own backyard too.

CHAIR: What are the major issues facing young people in this area?

Mr GREEN: It is a lack of respect from parents towards their own children, and a lack of respect across the nation for children for us parents. How many times do you get home and your daughter or son dictates what you will watch on TV and what you will eat? It sounds really ridiculous but it is because of the all the music they listen to. They have got no respect for any of us. And that is not just a black issue, it is a black and white issue. It is a community issue. It is right across this nation. This is not the drug capital of Australia, believe me, I am an addict. I am an hour away from destruction. I have to pray every day that I do not go near it, and I do not go near that. And I thank God that somebody gave me a chance because I am not drinking, and I have given up cigarettes as well in this last week.

The Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans: Well done!

Mr GREEN: Yes, it is not easy. I would like a puff right now. But the thing is parents have lost control over their children because you can not talk to a young child about doing the right thing without their parents jumping on you. In the days before colonisation it was uncles and aunties who had the ropes over respect, and that is not being observed. Nobody is observing the actual descendants of this land. Everyone else is coming from different countries and speaking up. They are teaching their own languages in schools and they are denying our own, okay. Our elders and some of my uncles and aunties were not allowed to speak their language but that has not stopped me. I may be fair, but at the point of a gun, and being threatened, I have never denied my culture and that is why I am emotional because I am grieving for my people. We lived in the bush and we used caves as galleries. We never lived in them. We also held councils.

It has been since the influx and the assimilation when they put us all together. Our languages are like Latin. We have to revive them. I thank you for allowing me to speak it at this parliamentary inquiry because it is being ignored. Everyone comes here and says he is the blackest and someone will jump up and say, "I am and Eora elder". They are not. "Eora" means people. You are all Eora people. They are denying our culture. They make out like every blackfella plays a didgeridoo. No, we clap sticks. Yidakis are from the Northern Territory. That was the Federal Government's way: divide and conquer people. You know it yourselves.

That is why I am getting emotional. It is something I have been saying to myself since I was a 14-year-old boy. I have been waiting for this inquiry to come around. It just happens now that I am and adult. But it is the same story that I am telling you: Let my people go. Help us but do not despise us. We are 2.4 per cent of the population. We are the most gaoled race on earth. The problem is not just happening here; it is happening through the government. So please, you are with the Government. Talk to them. We are surrounded. They just disbanded ATSIC but they failed to mention that there were three quarters of a million white bureaucrats running it, looking after 400,000 of us. Why can we not do it ourselves?

In the last two months since the community centre opened all the ethnocentric people—excuse me, I will not call you toolah mullah, dual, white man—people have been coming in here with the same agenda, the one agenda that Mick and everyone else has been talking about. I have been screaming about it since the eighties: the youth. They all want to do something for the kids, all the civil libertarians. Some of them are Asians, some of them are Greeks—I better not say that. They are from all over the place, of all nationalities. But they are coming here telling us what is best for our

children. We should be able to tell our children what is best. A group of kids they took away just recently. Young [name], he was a little terror at times but most children are. He ended up wearing all the blame for every kid. Some kids would do something wrong and he always got the blame. Well regardless, you could still get through to the boy. It took me three months to talk to you. Then he was telling me his cycle of fourths and fifths in language. Some of you adult could not do that. This is a talent that a boy is showing.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: A cycle of fourths and fifths?

Mr GREEN: The music equation. Anybody who knows music would know what I am talking about. This is a child who is not even a young teenager, just a young boy trying to grow. He used to call me blow arse and dead shit—all sorts of names. But I kept at him and kept at him and kept talking to him and he has started speaking back. Getting through to a kid like this, who is looking out for our best interests? Nobody. It is all for their own best interests. All the commercials have beautiful Aboriginal people but what about 20 years ago? We were still being classed as flora and fauna. The Government has let his run to the destitution it is now. If we can be granted the opportunity to build this model—I like this model—

CHAIR: We are going to get on to that. We are going to get over the page.

Mr GREEN: If we can be granted the opportunity to rebuild we would be able to show the world exactly what we are capable of.

Mr MUNDINE: I want to talk about the community itself and the people who are living here. We all know that we are caught in a vicious cycle that is drug related. But it is about time that our people stood on their own two feet and said that enough is enough. That is why DOCS is coming out and taking children, because the girls are on drugs and alcohol. So it is time for our people to stand up and say that enough is enough. Our children are suffering because of what adults are doing. The adults are suffering because they are caught in a vicious cycle of evil that is around here. It is all right to blame this person or that person or blame the company or the government. But if our people do not stand up and have a go themselves too we are lost. They talk about the stolen generation; if we do not try to rebuild now we are going to have a lost generation. It will be very sad and appalling on our behalf as Aboriginal people.

As long as I am in the saddle with the housing company I will push to the limit. I do not care whether it is the Government or private enterprise, we have to get this rebuilt and done. It has got to be done. We will not only be building for our people; we will be building for the general community. That is what it is: working and living together. I do not believe in racism. I am not a colour situation man. I believe that we are all human. We should all work together as human beings for a change. But I must say again that our people have to stop drinking up around the top there, because they paint everybody with the same brush. People have to stop selling drugs in our houses—mothers, grandmothers; I do not give a stuff who they are. They have to stop it. If they do not stop it this is a waste of time for us. It is a waste of time sitting around here talking. Our people have to start standing up for themselves.

CHAIR: How do you suggest they should start doing it?

Mr MUNDINE: Start taking responsibility for themselves and respecting themselves. The women at the Mudgin-Gal centre stand up and say that enough is enough. Where are our men? They have to stand up too. Instead of sitting up the top, they have to stand up and say that enough is enough. They have to look after their women and children. There are rapes going on, paedophilia, everything going on in this community. Everybody is sitting back. Only a few people are standing up and saying that we have to do something. It is time for us all to stand up, not just Aboriginal people, everybody living in this general community, because everybody is painted with the same brush. Now I want to talk about the needle bus, or have I gone too far.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It is important to recognise the work you have done in getting rid of the drug houses and shooting galleries but the problem is still there. Are you aware of drug houses and shooting galleries in properties around here that are not owned by the Aboriginal Housing Company?

Mr VALILIS: There are. They move to Caroline or Hugo Street. It is really out of our control at that point. I really want to emphasise how dangerous it is. One of the biggest problems that we have is that part of our building at the back of our office. The people who were using that were so angry they attacked every builder that was down there, and the painters. You name it. These guys do not know it but somebody actually pulled a knife on me down the Block because of that. I am okay: no holes. But that is how dangerous it is. These are people who at the same time will come up to you and go, "Hey, brother, how are you going? You are my best mate." When they are angry about you doing your job and closing the drug houses or the shooting galleries they will pull a knife out on you.

Mr MUNDINE: We all know that drugs are not the boundary of our concerns; there is no boundary and there is no colour bar. We feel sorry for people on drugs whether they are white, black or brindle. They have no respect for themselves so how can they have respect for other people in the community. That is the problem we all have, not just in the Aboriginal community.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: To some extent my question has been asked and answered, but not really. I think everybody recognises what you are saying, Mick, about everybody standing up for themselves and saying that enough is enough. If that has not happened by the time this project is built and there are kids running around street at all hours and throwing rocks and stuff, why will they not just jump out of those windows and do the same thing? How are we going to solve that problem?

Mr VALILIS: For a couple of reasons. The people that we know are selling drugs on the Block have been told quite categorically that they will not be offered a house. There are plenty of people in very good families who have now for the first time indicated that they want to live back on the Block. When we were asking the question on application forms for our waiting list "Do you want to live on the Block?" we would get responses such as: "you have to be joking", "no way", and "no chance". Now we almost have a flood of applications from people who want to live on the Block, because Aboriginal people themselves are starting to see that there is a new future.

On top of that, we are putting together very strict by-laws. We have good legal advice on drug clauses that we can add into our leases. Richard is helping to develop protocols for the area. We will have caretakers in the development. He can probably give you more information about our lead architect Dillon Kombumerri. He has been sent to London to look at the best medium-density housing projects there and how caretakers help monitor and help police the community. We are also proposing community policing, where the actual tenants police the area themselves and work with the police on any issues that are out of their control. So there are a lot of programs that we are putting in place to make sure that this never happens again.

Mr MUNDINE: With the police coming down more heavily on the drug situation in the community and people starting to work together we have tenants in Louis Street who want to relocate. It is good for us and good for the community that those sorts of people have signed up. But in the new complex there is no way that the other type of people will be offered accommodation. It has to be internal so that we can make sure that this does not happen. We can only do so much from the company's point of view. We might construct a good foundation and good affordable housing but the people have to say that enough is enough and we do not want this situation again.

The Hon. IAN WEST: How do you trigger that?

Mr VALILIS: It already has.

Mr GREEN: If you look at me and think I am the only sober person in the community, I am not. A brother turned up this morning as fit and as healthy as you could imagine. Half a dozen women have stopped. It is like a snowballing effect.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In relation to the danger of moving people on, you are building this iconic site here with everything going up and all good people selected. Will that not just push the problem a couple of blocks away?

Mr VALILIS: That is up to someone else to decide. It is very hard for us to work on our project let alone every other project that comes up. Sure, if someone wants to hire us later on to do the other projects—

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So you will have a good area and hope that that standard is met?

Mr MUNDINE: It is not going to be a perfect community. We will have the good, bad and the ugly in any community, wherever you live. We are not going to say that they are going to stop selling drugs or stop drinking. We are not saying anything stupid like that. But at least we are making a start to try to solve the problem. It is going to be a hard road. We are only touching base at present. Even when we have built this there will still be problems. But at least we are making a start. That is what I am saying.

Mr VALILIS: The alternative is to do nothing.

Ms PITTS: I would like to note that in 1999 the Aboriginal Housing Company, myself, prepared for the Aboriginal Community a social plan. It was basically a grass-roots response to the severe stress and disadvantage experienced on the Block and the continuing inaction and ineffectual responses from services and government bodies and institutions. We had community consultations over a period of two years and workshops. We developed certain goals and criteria and objectives. There are 12 principles identified which reflected the ideas of most of the groups in the area as we moved through a range of meetings, formally and informally. Basically those principles are reconciliation and social harmony; appropriate and affordable housing; culturally appropriate service and facilities; community safety; supporting families, women and children; Aboriginal health; Aboriginal identity, culture and spirituality; training skills development; employment; ownership and management; Aboriginal enterprise; ecological and environmental sustainability; and contact with nature. These objects and criteria have been applied to key decisions in devising the development options, recommendations, models and strategies for the redevelopment process.

In chapter 7 of the Social Plan, basically there are strategies, actions and initiatives that were proposed for each of the 12 criteria. For example, one of the objectives, community safety focuses on crime prevention through environmental design which will be implemented in the design process. It is called CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design), and that focuses on ensuring areas are safe from entrapment by creating safe movement corridors, appropriate lighting and landscaping in an attempt to reduce crime, as well as discouraging the lanes and alleyways where people have been shooting up and doing drugs. By adopting the CPTED principles, the redevelopment project will provide the opportunity for secure and safe housing and allow management to address the problem in a co-ordinated manner. We do not have time to elaborate on these recommendations, but a copy of the plan is on the web site. Col James will probably elaborate more on how those criteria and objectives were incorporated into the design process to ensure that the development meets the needs of the community.

CHAIR: We heard a bit about this when the Committee visited the company's offices last week.

Ms PITTS: Yes. It is a very important point that the strategies we have put forward for the plan are systematically evaluated and monitored and for the outcomes of the project to be systematically monitored. Occupants' evaluation strategies should be developed and implemented. I think that has been a problem of past developments. There was not any follow-up on the plans that were put forward for development. Some evaluation is basically essential for feedback from the relevant stakeholders, tenants and occupiers. It would also include community health and social impacts as well as cost-benefit analyses. That way this consistent and continued assessment should ensure the success of the project, as well as being able to measure the failures.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Have you done financial modelling to show that when you have finished this building, you will have enough revenue coming in to maintain the building and pay for it?

Ms PITTS: Yes.

Mr VALILIS: The Macquarie Bank has done that.

CHAIR: Hang on just one second.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I am just picking up on what she was saying.

CHAIR: Yes, except Col and David want to say a little bit about the project, and then we have a couple of questions we need to ask Mick and the others about the funding of the company, government commitment, if any, and how they are consulting the community or will consult the community.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: And we need to hear their views on the needle bus.

CHAIR: Angie told us she had an opening statement.

Ms PITTS: What is really important at the moment is that I feel it is imperative that the development gets under way as soon as possible because the effects of the social and physical problems in Redfern in its present form are preserving a pattern of residential genocide. Basically the Aboriginal community continues to endure inadequate housing which leads them to severe problems, while also being subjected to a number of drug-related illnesses, disease and death directly resulting from the high level of drugs-related activity in the area. Basically what needs to be done is that there is a great need for support from the Government, both financially and in terms of a commitment from the Government, for action to make this work.

Mr JAMES: I would just like to say that we have followed Angie's 12-point social determinants to the letter. They are the criteria that have been driving the plan. We were so impressed with it that we enrolled Angie in a PhD program to keep going with their evaluation of the Block as it proceeds. That will be supervised by people such as Professor Ed Blakely, who is the new head of planning at the University of Sydney and current chairman of metropolitan strategy. I add that the university is fully backing this project. It is not only me but my students who are volunteering and working up designs. The housing company has been very receptive. In many ways the involvement of the university has helped to lift the game in perception of what is possible.

I am particularly proud of the fact that the university has resources that it is prepared to put in, in this way. There is no lack of expertise. David Liefer in particular has some really good, usable skills: Peter Phibbs, Anna Rubbo and even Frank Stilwell have looked at the property and the stamp duty gained from gentrification. Inevitably when this happens and when the DA gets approved, property will increase in value. I should just say in response to why it looks like what it is, we are housing 62 families which is an underdevelopment of the site. Why it is 62 is in memory of the Gadigal clan; there were 62 members left, and that is as logical as any other reason, as the city council tells us.

The South Sydney City Council has been very supportive. Michael Whitaker, the general manager, and Monica Baroni, who is the social services manager, have been exceptionally impressed. I think it is the first scheme that has ever been put forward that has had a socially determined base which is measuring the already basic requirements and environmental standards which will be achievable, even within our budget. We will produce 62 homes for Aboriginal families, for whom the need is threes and fours.

CHAIR: For an average family? There is a mixture, I know, but what sort of number of occupants do you expect?

Mr JAMES: It will be 62 by an average of 3.5. That would be the ultimate outcome. The three and four bedrooms are intended to keep families intact. The apartments and townhouses will all have full 100 per cent disability access to keep the Elders in the home. That is a distinct change from non-indigenous families where the elderly often get outcast into nursing homes. But here, they are a very central element in keeping the health of the family intact and in looking after young kids, so disability access is really important. Within the 62 families will be a mix of middle income, low, middle and low, so we are following the prescription that a social mix is desirable so that the rich will

help the poor. The model has had 10 years experience in Ultimo/Pyrmont with City West. We have worked very closely with them. The rents will be geared to 30 per cent of the household income, so we are addressing affordability.

Some comments were passed by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources [DIPNR] recently which asked: What about the elderly people who want to live alone? What about the single couples? The answer to those questions is that there is another site on east Eveleigh Street where we and the housing company would like to contribute land, along with the council, to produce a whole new batch of affordable housing. We do not think that everybody will want to live in Eveleigh Street. They will probably want to change the name anyway, but we are addressing a broad spectrum of needs. But on the Block itself, it will be indigenous people and it will be large families and it will be patrolled and protected by this special caretaker category that we have got where the courtyards have surveillance by a resident who can manage the open space. The council is quite prepared to look after open spaces. We are proposing a square here, which is a big open place that will get rid of that sharp corner and open it up to the community. It will be a place for performance, meeting and markets and other sorts of enterprise.

Part of the plans include an office building for the housing company and a hostel for visitors and students. There are 300 Aboriginal students at the University of Sydney and the numbers are growing. People are now enrolling in things like nursing, health studies, law, education, and that must be nurtured. Also there are the people who visit Redfern—there are 32 agencies that supply Aboriginal services. There are jobs here. There is training here. There are two universities. There are TAFE colleges. There are the Eora and Tramby colleges. It has to be a good place for Aboriginal people to live and train and work. I think that is helping to guide that particular agenda. That came out of Angie's work and I think the general formula for funding this operation is that the housing company is supplying the land. It is worth well over $8 million.

We are after equal funding from the Federal Government, which has not offered us anything yet. The State Government is providing in-kind services. People like Landcom are providing money to employ Dillon Kombumerri, and we were very pleased to hand the job over to an Aboriginal architect, an architect from the Miramar design unit. It is important that this is seen to be driven by an Aboriginal architect who understands cultural issues. He is a student of mine, too, actually, but he is very, very good.

CHAIR: David wants to add something, and then we must ask the questions which are so directly related to the terms of reference.

Dr LEIFER: The success of the project, or indeed whatever is done, depends on the quality of the management information system that is in place, and that requires resourcing. The managers here know full well what state-of-the-art techniques they should be using, but they do not have the tools themselves to actually do the job they need to do. Also there is a threshold size of organisation below which things cannot be done cost effectively. Introducing the new housing will bring the organisation up above that threshold size and make it sustainable.

CHAIR: We may be able to ask you to stay after 1 p.m. We really must get onto some of these questions because we are bound by the terms of reference that the Parliament has given us. Some of them can be answered quite quickly and perhaps we can use the time that we have left to go into some of exciting things. I hate stopping you, but I am also conscious that we could be here for hours on end. Let us see if we can quickly run through some of the issues such as the consultation issue and the ones on the bottom of the first page of questions about the financial status and the audit assessment. I think most of them you could probably do within five minutes. Let us see if you can run through them quickly for us. I know we have spoken to you about them before, but we have to get them on the record.

Mr MUNDINE: Sure.

CHAIR: The first one is the point made in the Government's submission about the assessment of the company's financial position. Can you comment on your financial position?

Mr MUNDINE: Just one thing before we can start, I want to say today that we are not afraid of saying that we made mistakes in the past. We are trying to justify what we are trying to do, and what I want to say today is that we have made mistakes. We get blamed for a lot of things that happen around here. We will take the blame for some of the things that are done around here, too, so we are not saying that we do not take the blame.

Mr VALILIS: In regard to the assessment, we have worked with the fellow who was doing the assessment. We have not received a draft of it yet so I am not really sure what is going to be in the assessment, except to say that it will probably be the same as every assessment that has ever been done. What the assessment will probably say is that the housing company has been demolishing its assets over many years to undertake this redevelopment. It now does not generate enough income to be self-sustaining.

CHAIR: And you could have told them that last year and the year before.

Mr VALILIS: I have told them every year.

Mr MUNDINE: Yes, every year.

CHAIR: I thought you would say that. The next question relates to criticism. Mick has just suggested that there has been criticism of the way of the way you have been managed.

Mr MUNDINE: Yes.

CHAIR: You have said that you have obviously made mistakes.

Mr MUNDINE: Yes.

CHAIR: You have made that point about demolishing drug houses and not having an income. Are there any other comments, given that criticisms are being made of the company?

Mr MUNDINE: We have been criticised all right.

CHAIR: But we want to give you the chance of answering.

Mr VALILIS: It is hard to address a criticism without knowing exactly what you have been criticised for but I think we have all heard them before. I should say that for any legitimate criticism the housing company has an open-door policy. We have mechanisms to handle the objections of people. If anybody—black, white or brindle—has an objection to the way we are managing, or about anything, they are more than welcome to talk to us. We will discuss it with them and if it is a valid objection and if it is doable, we will do it. I have got to say that many of the best initiatives that we have put in place have come from the community. We would be crazy to turn them back.

However, there are people who criticise the housing company and some of them are drug dealers. They object for the obvious reason: they do not want the housing company. The fact is that drug dealers are more afraid of us than they are of police because we have the power to evict them. There are white residents who want to see Aboriginal people gone from the Block and they know that the housing company is the final obstruction to them succeeding in getting Aboriginal people out of Redfern altogether. There are the Aboriginal activists from the 1970s who would like to take over the company. And I have got to say government would not be welcome under those circumstances: it would be a true no-go zone here and it would be very political. It would be very hard for any sort of co-operation to go on here.

The fact is Mick is a moderate when you look at the politics here and he basically opened his arms and said, "Let's all work together". You would not get that from some of the radicals out there. They hate white people, they hate police and this place would be a nightmare. So if the criticism is coming from those people then they are not legitimate. If the criticisms are coming from legitimate concerns the only answer is that we have an open-door policy and we will discuss it with anyone who has a legitimate concern about the way we manage things.

Mr JAMES: I have worked with this bloke for 28 years and I consistently say he has got one of the worse jobs in Sydney. It is very hard to handle the tenants and the Aboriginal abuse and all the bad things that happen here. One of the things that has not been brought up is that Aboriginal services and other mainstream services in this area all flick their problems to the housing company. We did a digest for the Premier's Department of all the things the company has to do—funerals, finding people, youth allowance and income which is normally picked up by other agencies. The problems are flicked to the housing company because it is there, they do not want to come to the Block or because it is too hard. Its core business is running housing and it cannot do anything.

CHAIR: How will the company fund what it wants done?

Mr VALILIS: We will be exploring all modes of funding, that is, government and private. We hope that there will be a mix of partnerships but we are discussing with private industry—the big end of town—to see if they will donate equipment, materials, money and time. In fact, much of this project has been funded by pro bono work that people such as David Liefer and Col James have done. Col has not been paid for 28 years!

Mr JAMES: Dawson Waldron, solicitors. All you have to do is ask people and they are very willing to support it because they know it is good.

CHAIR: Has the Government made any commitment to provide funding? If not, at what stage are negotiations?

Mr VALILIS: The Government has made no commitment.

CHAIR: Has any level of government?

Mr VALILIS: No level of government. In all honesty, we are not surprised. For a long time the Block has been considered too hard and could not be fixed. The fact that we have written a social plan has given people new hope that the Block can be fixed. There are 30 years of demonisation of the Block that we have had to overcome. We have had to depoliticise the process and build partnerships and do all those things all on our own and now all tiers of government have come to the party and are starting to negotiate. I think it was last year we signed a MOU with the local council, with the State Government and with the University of Sydney, and that was historic.

Mr MUNDINE: That is the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project.

Mr VALILIS: That is the way things should be. We should all work together. Communities have incredible insight into their own problems and incredible initiatives and solutions. Government has resources and expertise and together we are unstoppable.

CHAIR: How much money do you need?

Mr VALILIS: The project will cost approximately $27 million.

CHAIR: That is a lot of money.

Mr VALILIS: If it is put into context, when you look at major development contributions from around the area, developers do not want to come into Redfern at the moment but when the Block is redeveloped they will come in and they have an obligation to contribute to affordable housing. Then you look at stamp duty and all the other benefits with lower needs for social services around here. I do not know, but the Block is looking pretty cheap, or pretty affordable, I should say.

Mr JAMES: Those three models, and the latest analysis from Mirramar investigated a comparison between what it cost to do the Block and what commercial ruling rates were and the Block comes up as half the cost of normal housing in the market for a number of reasons. One is we are housing more people per unit than mainstream. Mainstream housing is one and two bedrooms. We are not providing any parking because we do not want to provide parking so close to the station, there is no demand and the council wants us to go that way. We are conforming to social housing standards and it looks good—economically feasible.

CHAIR: Do you need any more community consultation?

Mr JAMES: Those models need to be developed up to a preferred model and then there will be a lot more consultation. Anyway it is part of the development approval process.

CHAIR: That process has not yet started? Is it a chicken and an egg here? Do you need more certainty about funding possibilities before you can realistically do anything?

Mr JAMES: We need funding soon to get Mirramar to develop up the plans to reach a development application stage. Then we need some idea of the funding for doing what has to happen. The next step is the sites have to be consolidated. The site has to be remediated and detoxified. It also has to be cleansed from the Aboriginal point of view. There have to be more demolitions. There has to be different stages. The services are all being renewed. There is a fair bit of up-front work that would happen before any construction. We have geared the construction over two stages so it would happen over a number of years.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: What sort of site remediation is required?

Mr JAMES: Exactly what happened on this site. They take off the topsoil that is loaded with asbestos and lead—asbestos from the break linings of trains and lead from motor cars. The analysis is exactly the same as here. They scrape off the top and replace it with clean fill. But I am also talking about that it has to be cleansed from an Aboriginal point of view because this is a poisoned waterhole and it has to be addressed by people like Richard.

Mr GREEN: It is a walking line all the way from Parramatta right through. It is where the people used to meet and gather for thousands and thousands of years. The Gameragal and the names with "algal" on the end of every clan means women and children. So the names set precedents in antiquity. They are older than any canon of law you can come up with. You really have to pay attention to it for the sake of the world, not just simply Australia.

Dr LEIFER: The amount of $27 million obviously sounds like a lot of money but that is $420,000 a unit which in Sydney terms is not ridiculous.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Is there a possible staging process or are you talking about $27 million up-front?

Mr VALILIS: No, it will be done in two stages over a 2½-3 year period.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Can it be staged in four lots?

Mr MUNDINE: No, there will stage one and stage two.

Mr JAMES: There is a big danger in not doing it in big hits. We have learnt before that it is too easy to pull out.

Mr VALILIS: Builders go broke and a lot of different things happen. Can I just say that the housing company and the Pemulwuy Park project team in particular is very mindful of its responsibility to be socially sustainable, financially sustainable and ecologically sustainable. We are also very mindful of the importance of the management as a tool for success. From a financial point of view, Macquarie Bank did an independent financial forecast on us. After the redevelopment is finished—this is based on very exact figures from City West Housing that has had 10 years experience and know the ranges—we will be producing a surplus of about $300,000 a year. This covers all the asset management of all our properties, all the wages and expenses and on top of all that we will still have $300,000 which is pretty good.

Mr JAMES: They offered us $2 million at the end of the analysis, so they thought it was pretty good.

CHAIR: I record that you have made it very clear in your submission your opinions about the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project. What is your opinion about the needle van?

Mr MUNDINE: It is a disaster. It is a honey pot for the community. It is destroying not only our people and our children but the general community. People who live in Hugo Street and Caroline Street are in an uproar and want to get rid of it. It is drawing in all different nationalities. As I said before, there is no colour bar or boundary where drugs are concerned. It is creating a major problem and that is why I think at the present moment that the DOCS is taking children away, because it is drug related. My main concern is that it is giving out too many needles. I thought it was one-on-one like they do in Pitt Street but it seems as though they are giving out 20-50 or whatever in a plastic bag. By the statistics from the police they are giving out 700 needles a day. Who are they serving? Who are they providing them to? That means to say that everybody in Caroline Street, Hugo Street and in this area here is on drugs. So it is just pathetic, what more can you say about it? It has got to go.

CHAIR: Does it have to go a block away or a mile away?

Mr MUNDINE: It is seen by children. It is visual to children and it is parked here every day. Children play in the playground there. Would they put this bus in Vaucluse or where there are just white residents? Will they have a bus in every area where they sell drugs? Why not have it every area? We know that Waterloo and a lot of areas that sell drugs why not have the bus there? Why are they using this community?

CHAIR: Some people would say the needle van serves good purposes, for example, it brings health benefits?

Mr GREEN: They would be people protecting their jobs, their positions. Their main argument is, "If we get rid of the addicts what are we going to do?"

Mr MUNDINE: I understand they have got to have fresh needles. We know they have got to have clean needles, we understand that, but why give out so many to an individual person? On the other hand, the needles are just laying all over the place. We have children here running around. It is a vicious cycle. Can they be moved? We have tolerated it for the past six years. It started in Caroline Lane, why can it not be moved? Please tell me? What authority have they got over everybody else? That is what I am trying to say. I am not going to say no more now.

Mr VALILIS: We have heard the arguments about health benefits and we have consulted the Aboriginal Medical Service human Redfern. They are the lead agency for Aboriginal health in this area. Their question to REPIDU and Central Sydney Area Health was: If it is so good why is it not in every Aboriginal community? The fact is that it is a spectre that they hold over this community. They say, "If we go there will be an outbreak of AIDS." That is rubbish. It is complete rubbish based on nothing. They are just using fear to keep it here. If there were such an outbreak the health department should monitor it and respond to it then. We have said is all along to them. We have also offered alternatives. If there are addicts who live on the Block—and we have done our own audit and there are about six—

Mr MUNDINE: I would not be six, of the tenants we have now.

Mr VALILIS: Fewer than six. Why not deliver needles to their houses and pick up the empties at the end of each day? The answer to that is that they service all the other people who come out of the community.

Mr GREEN: Eighty per cent.

Mr VALILIS: That is our own figure. We have basically asked them to go. They are not needed here. They already have a fixed needle exchange in Pitt Street that people can access very easily. The response in one of the staff meetings was, "Aboriginal people do not leave the Block." I am sorry, but that is institutional racism.

CHAIR: You have made your views pretty clear and of course we will be talking to the health people. We heard views about it from the Premier's people and the partnership project people

yesterday. Let us move on to this human services review that is going on. We have skipped over a whole lot of questions about how effective you people think this great mix of government and non-government agencies and services is in meeting the needs of Aboriginal people. But to home in on the specific question about the human services review that is going on, have you been consulted? How have you been consulted? What is your input? Tell us what you think.

Mr VALILIS: Yes, we have been consulted. We have put in a submission to them. It basically is very similar to the submission we have put in here. The housing company is heaped with everything, every service that the community needs. Every community has a variety of needs, but for some reason everyone thinks that because it is the Block it is a housing company problem. Our core business is housing management. Unfortunately, we are very short staffed so every time we have to respond to something else that takes time away from our core business, housing management. That means that we do the welfare stuff poorly and we do the housing management poorly. That is the problem. We have been desperately trying to create partnerships with other service providers so that we can get back to our core business and that these people provide the services they should for the Block. That is what we hope will come out of the human services review.

CHAIR: Col, do you want to add something on that?

Mr JAMES: I would like your inquiry to be aware that as of yesterday a major consultancy has been offered to Paul Memmott of the University of Queensland. We are in partnership with them to investigate indigenous homelessness in the five hot spots around Sydney, of which Redfern is a key element. As to Arthur's point about what happens to people when they cannot get housing or they are homeless, a lot of people hang around here and a lot of people worry about it. The objective of this piece of research—it is it a big one— is to plot pathways to help people into housing and out of housing but the major component is to assess the level of service and the frequency of service, or the absence of service, with those indigenous people who are at Kings Cross, Woolloomooloo and Redfern and to evaluate those services. It is a commission from the Aboriginal Housing Office. It will take six or seven months. But there would be a response to your question about what happens when people get out of here, where they go.

CHAIR: Mick, did you want to add something?

Mr MUNDINE: Yes, on the homeless side of things. The majority of the people up the top now drinking and hanging around are not homeless. They just come here to use and abuse the community every day.

CHAIR: Where do they live?

Mr MUNDINE: They go to a Department of Housing house, AHO houses. They all have houses. It is swish housing. I can name every one of them and where they live. People think when they see them in a bunch that they are homeless people. But the Aboriginal housing people do not come to ask whether they are homeless. They are assuming that that group of drunks there must be homeless. We have to work together on this sort of issue.

Mr JAMES: This will all be covered and recommendations will be made.

CHAIR: We have questions under the heading of leasing strategies. I am running through these instead of the other members of the Committee because I am conscious of our need to keep bulldozing through a bit. What do you think of the way police deal with crime on and around the Block? What do you think about the level of policing? How do you think—we are making an assumption here—relations between the police and the Aboriginal community can be improved? They are not easy questions to deal with in a few minutes but let us make a start.

Mr MUNDINE: It is the old saying: You are damned if you do and damned if you do not. If the police come in heavy you have the politicians at the top to say back off. They have a very tight job around here.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Did you say that the policy up the top was to back off?

Mr MUNDINE: Just say that the police come in heavy and do this and that, then you have politicians up the top to tell them to back off and get out of there. It is a very political thing. That is the problem that the police have got here, seriously.

Mr VALILIS: People say that police are racist and that is why they are targeting Aboriginal people. That is not it.

CHAIR: So the police have a difficult job?

Mr MUNDINE: The same as the Aboriginal ACLOs that are with the police. If they see them working with the police, the pigs, they are dogs. It is a very difficult job. The reason they do not want the police here is that they want this as a no-go area for their vicious cycle of drug-related issues. The commanders up here can only do so much. Where Dennis Smith is succeeding a lot is in working with the community. Not only Dennis, many of the officers are working in with us. Sometimes the police do come in a bit heavy. And let us face reality, you have always got people out there who just hate and resent the police for the rest of their life. They do not care what the police do; they still have that attitude toward the police—like the police will have that attitude Aboriginal people. It is a very hard job but I must say that the police have done a very good job on coming down heavy on drug-related issues because the community wanted it. That is why it is succeeding: the community wants this thing to stop.

CHAIR: What about the other crime, the kids, the bag snatching, et cetera?

Mr MUNDINE: The bag snatching and the kid crime situation are drug-related. The parents want drugs and alcohol. How can they look after their children? They do not show respect for their children so the children do not respect anybody else. It is a vicious cycle. But since the police have come down heavily on the drug issue in the last three months and we have locked up a lot of the shooting galleries—we had to do it because of another reason: there was rape going on, a lot of vicious, bad things going on in the empty houses. We have done them through the Redfern-Waterloo partnership.

We got funding from the AHO to do a lot of the bricking up work. But before the riots started the relationship started to go really well because the police were working with the children. We had youth officers taking kids away on camps. The parents should be doing that. The police are doing their job. I am not backing for the police; I am not backing for our people. It is a catch-22 whichever way. A lot of people jumped on the bandwagon because it was a good time to get back at the police for coming down too heavily on this community. Many people were doing it because of TJ but many people saw it as an opportunity for everyone to get back at the police. They have a tough job. All of us in this community have a very tough job.

It is the same with us. If they see us working with the police they say, "Oh, look at the dogs up in the office." The names we are called in the office are unbelievable, but you have to take it. If you walk around now you will see officers standing on the street. You would never see officers standing in Caroline Street, Eveleigh Street or anywhere near the Block. They are standing there. So there has to be something coming out of what is happening. And would you believe people are going and talking to them? You will always have a smart person, a person who resents the police for the rest of their life, but I really believe that the situation has changed a lot.

Mr VALILIS: There is a very clear correlation between the relationship of police and the community and the level of drug dealers: the more drug dealers the poorer the relationship is. But as the drug dealers systematically leave the good people in the community are coming out, talking to police, building better relations. In regard to closing drug houses, we are no legal experts but the information that we have is that police had a hard time closing drug houses around here because the legislation restricted them. They would walk into a house, find a whole lot of drugs and the tenant would say, " It is not mine. Do you know how many people walk in and out of here?" They can take the drugs, take the money and that is about it. Thank the Lord the new drug premises legislation is here. The situation has now changed. Now police can go in and if it is a drug house and anyone is in there that is it. It is working differently now.

Mr GREEN: The police are having a hard time now keeping out the non-indigenous addicts more than they are having trouble with our own people here. Every hour new white people appear on the Block and walk straight past them, give them a mouthful of views and keep walking. They are powerless to even pull up these people at times. A lot of addicts are going for the bus and needles and whatever else they can find.

CHAIR: What about the level of policing in and around the Block? Some people say that it is too intrusive, the police are always around. Other people say it is a no-go area. Is the truth somewhere in between?

Mr VALILIS: Of late, the police have really hit hard—even before the riots. This is really because of the new empowerment they have with the new legislation and the fact that Dennis Smith is a different commander. He has a different approach to things. I know that a lot of people do not want too much policing in this area and some of them are not involved in drugs. But at the end of the day as long as there are drug dealers here we have to expect the police. It is as simple as that. Once the drug dealers go I will be surprised if the police do not back off as well.

Mr MUNDINE: We are talking about the drug issue but, as I said before, there are always going to be our people who are negative towards the police situation. You still have the early seventies radicals that will just hate police for the rest of their lives. It is a mixture sort of thing. Drugs is one of the main issues but you have a lot of poverty pimps out there. They live off the misery of people in any community.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Are those seventies radicals the ones that you think stirred up the riot?

Mr MUNDINE: For sure.

Mr VALILIS: Yes.

Mr MUNDINE: There is no two ways about it. There is a very small minority of them still around.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Do they live on the Block?

Mr MUNDINE: No, they all just come in and use and abuse the Block. You go and see how many are there now. If you come back about 7 o'clock no-one is around. They just use and abuse this community.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Were they generating that feeling around the police in the days before the riot, stirring people up?

Mr VALILIS: I think they are always stirring people up.

Mr MUNDINE: It had been going on for ages.

Mr VALILIS: What happened to that poor young fellow was an opportunity for them.

Mr MUNDINE: It is not only Aboriginal people. We have a lot of different nationalities out there ever-ready to have a go at this community too. We call them the white saviours. They cannot even save themselves; how can they save this community? We cannot just be condemning our people all the time. We have an Asian lady going around now stirring up everybody. What would she know? Do they have anything in place for the future? People condemn us and this community, but at least we have got something in place. Have they got something in place? If they have, please tell them to present it to us. We challenge them.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What do they want you to do—get lost? What are the white saviours' objectives?

Mr MUNDINE: Let us face reality. We had three different political groups around here. We had the Redfern Home Owners, and they are the ones who just want the Aboriginals out of here altogether.

Ms TUITAVAKE: Out of sight.

Mr MUNDINE: Out of sight, out of mind. We have the Redfern Residential Reconciliation which was a mixed group of black, white and goodness knows who else. They were very negative towards this new redevelopment. They do not want the changes. We also have the Redfern Coalition, which is a very powerful political group. I can tell you something about Aboriginal groups: if we did not get onto that group and if we had not defeated that group, we would not be sitting here today.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What do they want?

Mr MUNDINE: They just wanted—I can tell you that if that group had taken over, it would have been a black power base.

CHAIR: They are the people you were talking about before?

Mr VALILIS: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do they want Aborigines to go to Walgett or somewhere?

Ms TUITAVAKE: They want us not to renovate the existing houses and leave the place the way it is.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: On the basis of what evidence?

Mr VALILIS: No evidence. They have fallen by the wayside because whatever they were proposing would not stand up. Can I just say that Aboriginal people are some of the smartest people in this country. They know how to manipulate the system. They are painfully aware that most of the money that goes into Aboriginal Affairs is guilt money. As long as they have got something to point at and say, "Look at how the Block is", they can always suck money out of the government.

Mr MUNDINE: That is true. That is definitely true.

Mr VALILIS: When we fix the Block, these radicals will not have somewhere to point at in the middle of the city. They could go to the bush, but everyone will say, "Well, that is the bush", but they will not have the city to point at and say, "Look at how Aboriginal people live right in the middle of the city." They are afraid of that because they know that Aboriginal funds for their programs will dry up. They are very smart. They are very, very smart.

Mr JAMES: Can I make a request? I have to go back to a forum this afternoon. When the advertisement first came out about this inquiry, I was quite upset and I immediately consulted Micky, Peter and Lani and I rang up Julie and said, "Look, you are providing a perfect vehicle to delay the progress of the Block", because we were expecting some Cabinet submissions and all sorts of stuff. I retract that now. I think instead you could be a wonderful political tool to actually get things off the ground.

CHAIR: We are very aware of that fear—that another inquiry can be another delay.

Mr JAMES: I would like to argue a case for an interim response, at least very, very soon—in May, if that is possible—in order to allow some budgetary matters to flow through before the May budget.

CHAIR: Let me just briefly comment on that as far as I can. The Committee needs to talk about these things, obviously. We have to make our interim report by 31 July and you are asking us to do it earlier than that. We have so far scheduled six days of hearings which will take us through to 8 June. One of the difficulties is that there is not much time during the week that Parliament is sitting

and when there are other committees. The earliest we can address the issue of what is in our interim report, and whether it will be a short sharp one on a specific issue or what, is effectively I guess when we finish that first round of hearings.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: But we still have not heard from DOCS or anybody.

CHAIR: But some of those can actually be scheduled prior to 8 June, if we can fit them in on the morning of a sitting day, as I said yesterday.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Yes, that is true.

CHAIR: I guess we have a slightly tedious parliamentary timetable. But having said all that, we will very much take on board what you have said because we are all aware from the debates that people are concerned that, very much against our will, we could become another excuse for delay.

Dr LEIFER: I wish to point out that 30 June is the end of the financial year, and that effectively means that we are inactive. It will be a loss of 12 months.

CHAIR: Can I just say in relation to that that we have been asked this by other witnesses. It is quite normal for us as a Committee, going back to other inquiries we have done, to be in a position to say to the Government or a relevant agency, "Look, this issue is around now. Can we get some certainty?" Sometimes in effect we also become a bit of a lobbying group and in some ways our very existence, by keeping public attention on things, sometimes means that the Government finds ways of doing things.

At this stage we are very much aware, and have been from the day the inquiry was set up, that what you were saying is a real danger—not only from your point of view but from the viewpoint of other people who are giving us evidence as well. Perhaps that is a good note on which to finish. David and others have prepared some notes about what you would like to see come out of the inquiry. Some of the other things are that we are very conscious that Angie had a statement. I think by negotiation with Rachel that will become a supplementary submission. But we have lots of different ways of getting back to you after today and getting more material out of you in writing. We can always talk you again later on, and so on.

Mr MUNDINE: Yes.

CHAIR: At this stage I guess you really should tell us now what you want to see come out of the inquiry. Later on, perhaps when we break, we might talk about the other people that the Committee might talk to. We have already noted that as far as we know there is only one name so far that needs to come out of the transcript.

Mr VALILIS: Yes.

CHAIR: You can let us know afterwards if there is anything else that has been said and if there is a problem in making it public.

Mr MUNDINE: I want to go back to the Redfern/Waterloo partnership project. I think the reason why we have reached this level at the present moment with our planning is that we worked in with Michael Ramsey at the Government level and his party. I think that is the reason why we got to this level—because we worked straight and directly with Government bodies. I think the problems we had in the past were that we had the middle person. I am not going to condemn anybody for that. We had the middle person and we would get so far and that was it. I praise the Redfern/Waterloo partnership because I believe they came to us in the beginning, that is Michael, and asked what is the problem in the community. Before, the Government just used to say, "You do this. You do that." Michael came to us and said, "Mick and Peter and Lani, what is the problem? Let us work from the beginning to the end." He met us halfway and that is why we are working this out with him and that is why we have succeeded so far with what we are doing now.

Seriously I must say many thanks to Col Gellatly. He put a bit of faith and a bit of confidence in us when we had the meetings down at the Premier's Department. We believe that he is a man with a

good heart and that applies to a lot of my colleagues here, too—Col and all them. They are working with their hearts and I really feel we have too many educated people around who use their head but do not use their internal feelings. Col was a big help to us. I cannot praise them up more than I am saying now.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Have you been chatting to him about this inquiry and coming along today?

Mr MUNDINE: The only time I spoke to Col—how long ago was it that we spoke to Col?

Mr VALILIS: We have not spoken to him for a while.

Mr MUNDINE: It was at a meeting down at the Premier's Department. Do you remember that, Col, the last meeting we had there?

Ms TUITAVAKE: It was August last year, August the first.

Mr MUNDINE: That was the last time I spoke to Col?

Ms TUITAVAKE: Yes.

Mr JAMES: I can remember his words, though. There were heads of government all around the table reviewing our case and he said, "It is time that we really started to implement a whole-of-government approach and I want all of you to contribute to this project." So, we are waiting.

CHAIR: What do you want to see come out of inquiry?

Mr VALILIS: I just want to hand out an article that appeared in the *Age* last week under the headline "Life of Aborigines second worst on earth".

Mr MUNDINE: One thing I want to say is that I would like to see the truth come out of this inquiry—the truth, you know, and nothing but the truth. We will all put our hand on the Bible. I do not want to see or I would not like to see whatever comes out of this just sitting on the shelf for the next generation.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We do not like to see our reports sitting on the shelf, either.

Mr MUNDINE: No. I would like to see a lot of positive things come out of this. There will be negatives—do not get me wrong; we all know this—but I think positive things ought to come out of this. In other words, I want everybody to be working together, just like we are doing now. That is what I want.

CHAIR: Is there anyone else who wants to add to that answer?

Mr JAMES: I would like to see your early report encouraging government to help to get us off the ground—let the project get going.

CHAIR: We sort of gathered that.

Mr JAMES: Well, $2 million would help.

Dr LEIFER: I would like to see this report recognise the level of professionalism and devotion in the Aboriginal Housing Corporation and the extraordinary difficulties under which they have been operating. I would like to see you use all leverage possible to get adequate resources to help them to do the job they want to do properly.

Mr VALILIS: The handout that I have given you is new research that shows that Australia enjoys the fourth highest living standard in the world while Australian Aborigines suffer the second worst living standards in the world. A little Aboriginal housing company with very little staff and very

little resources is not going to solve everything, but we have got a plan for the future to kick-start a new future for Aboriginal people in this country. This will bring hope to everyone, and we hope that the Government—State governments and the Federal Government—will work together with communities and really bring Aboriginal people to the living standard that everyone else enjoys in this country, and this is the kick-start.

Ms TUITAVAKE: As for Aboriginal people, Aboriginal people always say, "If you get it right, if it happens in Redfern, it happens everywhere else." We are good role models and if this inquiry comes up with the positive things, I think it will be a good message out there for Aboriginal communities and for doing it again somewhere else. It will show that we can have this forum and something good comes out of it. It is not just another document.

Mr GREEN: It has been our Mecca before people came here and we deserve sovereignty and houses, and this company has bought it. I came in and asked Mick last year, "Are you really the big bad wolf, brother?" I have known Mick for 25 years but, okay, we were not as close as we are today. It is not by inducement that I said this: I said it out of concern for the community. I said, "Are you really the big bad wolf, brother?" and he said, "You hang around here and watch." I have noticed since I have been working here that he has helped everyone and he has never even had the gall to bag them for it. He has helped everyone. He has helped people to arrive at funerals long time. He has helped people who are homeless. He has done his best and I really take offence to him being attacked like this because when they are attacking the company, they are attacking Aboriginal people nationwide. We are the Mecca. This is the Mecca. This is the essence of all our culture. We need some help with this. I know from telepathy alone—I can feel your heartbeats—you know that it is a righteous thing you have just listened to, so thank you very much.

Ms PITTS: I want to say to this Committee that the terms of reference the Government has been using to assess the significance of the Block should be placing Aboriginal people, Aboriginal values and Aboriginal ways of knowing and Aboriginal meanings at the forefront of this community. That is actually where we are coming from and basically that is part of the planning framework. Hopefully it will have a chance of becoming effective transformative, and empowering.

CHAIR: We will get more from you in a supplementary submission.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I apologise if we have received it already, but I think that Angie was saying earlier that we have a statement, but I understood she was saying that in 1999 she did a report.

Ms PITTS: Yes, a community social plan.

The Hon. IAN WEST: We have that?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr VALILIS: It has been annexed.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I would like to comment in answer to Col James's point about us delaying the thing. The Government has not historically been reluctant to pre-empt the findings of committees by solving the problems so that we have less to complain about in our final report. Far be it from me to suggest that that is a possibility here. Indeed, if we get the publicity we attempt to get for the cause, that might well be a line for you to pursue.

The Hon. IAN WEST: The right publicity, that is.

Mr MUNDINE: Thank you.

CHAIR: I thank you all for coming. You are happy for the transcript to be made public with the deletion of the name?

Mr MUNDINE: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you happy for your names to be attached to comments you have made? You might cop some flak.

Mr MUNDINE: We cop it every day now, so what is the big deal?

Mr VALILIS: We have been copping it for the past 30 years.

CHAIR: You will receive the transcript because there may be corrections and so on to be made. We will need a resolution from the Committee that the transcript of this hearing—that is, of this particular segment—be made public.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I so move.

Motion agreed to.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Luncheon adjournment)

(Evidence taken in camera)

(Conclusion of evidence in camera)

(Public hearing resumed)

CHAIR: I begin by welcoming everyone here, and acknowledge particularly that we are gathered here in the traditional country of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. We honour and recognise that. As probably everyone here now realises, the acoustics cause quite an echo. In the confidential hearings that many of you know we conducted today, it sometimes was quite difficult for the witnesses to hear us and for us to hear them, so we must ask everyone to be as quiet as possible. It will be hard for Aunty Joyce. She can sometimes have a very loud voice, but earlier she had a very quiet voice. I do not think I need to repeat the rules I mentioned yesterday relating to the media respecting the witnesses. I ask that those rules and the witnesses be respected, particularly as we are under some difficulties in terms of noise levels and so on.

JOYCE RUTH INGRAM, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Tell us a bit about yourself, who you are, how long you have lived in the Redfern-Waterloo area, and how you see the area and how it has changed in that time?

Mrs INGRAM: I was born down in Batemans Bay. I have lived in Redfern from about nine months old, all around Redfern and a little bit into the country area.

CHAIR: I will have to ask you to speak up a bit, if you can.

Mrs INGRAM: I was born in 1922 at Batemans Bay and came to Redfern when I was about nine months old. My sister was born in Redfern here. I am 15 months older than her. I have lived all around Redfern, Waterloo, Chippendale and Surry Hills. We made an escape, as I thought, through a leap, but we still came back to Redfern because I belong to Redfern. I was married in Redfern. My eldest son was born in Redfern. My grandmother was 106 and she passed away in Lawson Street, Redfern. As I said, I was married in Redfern, too.

CHAIR: So you know it almost better than anyone?

Mrs INGRAM: I know it a little bit—not that much, I suppose.

CHAIR: You know a lot more than we do. What are the good things about Redfern? What are the important things for Aboriginal people?

Mrs INGRAM: I have always looked upon Redfern as my home base. You see, when Mr Redfern came, there used to be a gathering place at the top of Eveleigh Street. That is where the Aborigines used to gather, and they still gather there because it is like Mother Earth to them. We have held it since Captain Cook came in and then everything changed, and of course progress came in; but still the Kooris, as we call them, gather there because it is Mother Earth that calls them in.

CHAIR: Is the Redfern area important for Aboriginal people throughout New South Wales, or just local people?

Mrs INGRAM: Well, I think it is because whatever happens on the Block with Aboriginal people will happen to the rest of the Aborigines around Australia. So this little bit of land here, the Block as we call it, was given back to the Aborigines in 1973 I think, or 1974, by Gough Whitlam. Now if we lose this little bit of land, the rest of the people around Australia will gradually be losing their piece of land and they will be right back where they started from; we will have nothing. We are not full-blooded Aborigines and we are not white. We are the in-betweens. We might be indigenous, but nobody wants us. So this little bit of land here is the only piece of Australia that we can say "This is our place" about. It was given back to the indigenous Aborigines—not to one person in particular but to the Aborigines themselves—so we always look to it as our land, and I do not see why we cannot keep it.

CHAIR: Do you fear that you are in danger of losing it?

Mrs INGRAM: I do.

CHAIR: Who do you think will take it?

Mrs INGRAM: To my way of talking, the birds are whistling and the dogs are barking that they want to get rid of the Aborigines—the indigenous Aborigines—of the Block so they can put high-rise housing or whatever—apartments—for $300 and $500 a week, and they want us to get off. They do not want us here. Gradually I really think myself that they want to push the Aborigines back out of Sydney, as Dad and Dave did with his sheep and his cattle.

CHAIR: Who is "they"? Who do you think wants to do this?

Mrs INGRAM: The Government.

CHAIR: Just the Government?

Mrs INGRAM: Well, I just could say the Government and those agents that look for money all the time—big agencies—and we cannot fight them. We people are indigenous Aborigines and we have got nothing. This is the first of piece of land we have got, so why can we not have it? They have got the rest of Australia. It makes us sad. If we can get our own houses, backyards and clothes lines, our kids can look at it then and the kids can say, "We live there. That is our place." There is a little tiny bit of pride and dignity in that little Block—not much, but there is a little bit of pride there when they are able to say, "That is our home". But as it is now, we have got nothing. We will never have anything while ever we are being pushed around. I think it is about time we faced facts and sort of be reconciled to each other because we are not going to be separated. There are the white people, if you will excuse the expression, and there are the Kooris. We will always be in Australia. We will always be in Redfern, so we should try to be reconciled to each other and try to respect each other.

CHAIR: Aunty Joyce, when you say how important it is for young people, young Aborigines and young Koori kids, to have dignity and to know that this is their piece of land, do the young people have special problems in the area at the moment?

Mrs INGRAM: Well, they have got nothing. They have got no place to go in and say, "This is our community" or "This is our place where we can go and separate from the Elders", like a community centre where kids go, just for the sake of going, so that they can be away from the Elders and they can do what they like. But of course, you have to behave yourself. You cannot just pick up the reins and run wherever you want to.

CHAIR: A lot of people were talking about young people with drug problems and young people with crime problems. Have you seen those develop over your lifetime?

Mrs INGRAM: Have you ever been to Kings Cross, Cabramatta, Woolloomooloo? Anywhere in Australia or all over the world, you will find drugs. When you are desperate, to my way of talking, now as an Aborigine, they have got nothing. All we have is this little tiny bit of land, as big as a pimple on the back of an elephant, and yet you want to take it away from us. So, when you get depressed, what they do, or some of them, is they go inside of a bottle like a genie. They get drunk, they pass out and, for a while, they are out in orbit. But when they come back and they start to get sober again, reality is there; the problem is still there, but it is a little tiny bit bigger. It is the same with the drugs; it is only an escape.

Now if we had our own homes—we are not looking for lairy places—we just want three and four bedrooms, backyards and clothes lines so that we can say, "Do not come over that fence. That is my backyard." And then you give two choices, but you can only have one. Do you want drugs, or do you want a home? If you want a home, we will get you a home. You will have a home on the Block. If you want drugs, we will give you three to four weeks to find somewhere else to live. You see, Aborigines have never had a choice. They were told. That is what Dad and Dave done to the Jacky Jackys: "We will build you a house, Jacky." He said, "Yeah, boss." But they did not say to him, "Would you like us to build you a house? How would you like it?" That is the difference. We just say, "Yeah, boss", because we cannot do anything else. Am I talking stupid?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: You have been one of the leaders in this community, and people look to you to know where to go forward. Does what is happening to some of the young people here make you really sad? What should we do to sort out the problems with young people here, shooting up with drugs in the back lanes, the needle van and drug houses?

Mrs INGRAM: To get to the root of everything you have got to dig into the ground, have you not? If you want to dig a tree out of the ground you just do not cut it off at the top because the roots are still there in the bottom, are they not? So you have got to go to the roots of it. Where are they getting the drugs from? Who is supplying them? Who was the first lot that brought the drugs in? And you just cut it off there.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: A lot of people have said that it is people from outside the Block who are dealing the drugs in this area. Is that true?

Mrs INGRAM: It could be. I have no dealings with drugs but you see a lot of things, I will be quite truthful and honest. You cannot say too much either because you do not know whose toes you are treading on.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: What do you think of the needle van that is usually parked outside?

Mrs INGRAM: Those that are on drugs, it is better for them to have a clean needle to stick into their arm with drugs but if you take that van and needles away, as the saying goes, they are hanging out. So that if they walk around the streets and see a needle laying on the ground and get it, wash it under the tap, they do not know what is in it. They do not know who had that needle. It does not worry them, as long as they can put the drugs into their arm or wherever. That is my opinion, so I think it would be better for the van to be there then we know that they are going to have clean needles than for them to pick up dirty needles.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Where should it be located?

Mrs INGRAM: Seeing that I do not live on the Block now, I suppose in Louis Street where it usually is or there could be a special place. You see up in Kings Cross as far as I hear and know they have got a shooting gallery, have they not? They call it that and they go in there and they get a needle and give themselves a bit of medicine and are also being watched by the doctors. If anything goes wrong they have got a doctor there. Why cannot the Aborigines have something like that too? Drugs are to stay. It does not matter what you do anywhere drugs are in Australia and they are going to stay. The only way to do it is to sort have a prevention there.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Are there enough leaders in this community to work together to sort out some of the problems?

Mrs INGRAM: I think so if they are given the chance. The Aborigines have never been given a chance. They have been told what to do.

The Hon. IAN WEST: What do you want to happen to the Block?

Mrs INGRAM: I would like to see us get the houses back that we should have here for our people. I would like to see that for the future, not for me—I am on my twilight walk and I am heading for the end of the rainbow. I would like to see houses here for the future of our young people. They can say, "This is our little bit of land". Australia is a big place but this is our bit of land. That is all I am looking for.

The Hon. IAN WEST: What type of housing would you like to see?

Mrs INGRAM: Just ordinary houses, three and four bedrooms—depends on the amount of the family—with a fenced in backyard and a clothes line. You can always say, "Don't come over my backyard. Don't come over that fence. This is my backyard."

The Hon. IAN WEST: Are you familiar with the draft plan of the Aboriginal Housing Corporation?

Mrs INGRAM: It all depends on what it is. I do not know what they want.

CHAIR: Do you have a strong view about the housing company and its job over the past 30 years?

Mrs INGRAM: Could you ask me another question please?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What is the relationship between the police and the Aboriginal people?

Mrs INGRAM: They are the law of the land but I think if they were fair dinkum with the people and the kids—we have got to show respect to the law and, in return, the police have also got to show a little of respect to us a not drive past in a car and back it down and then swear at a woman and call her filthy names. Now if that woman were to turn around and swear back at the police she would be arrested for abusive language, or whatever. Now that has happened but I cannot mention names.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What is the relationship between the Aboriginals and the police generally? Is it good, bad, getting bad or getting worse?

Mrs INGRAM: As far as I can see it is all right but since this accident or this death of little TJ it has sort of rattled a few people.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are things worse since the death of TJ?

Mrs INGRAM: Yes, now I am talking honest, I think it has got worse. You see, you must know the majority of white people know, anybody knows, that an Aborigine is a homing pigeon. I do not care if he stays away for a couple of day, a couple of weeks, he will always come back home to Mum. All the police had to do was just wait for this young boy to come back. It might be a week but he will come back and he will come around. I do not know what really happened so I cannot pass my opinion on it. I was not there, I never seen it. I only heard different things said.

The Hon. IAN WEST: What do you think about the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project?

Mrs INGRAM: How do you mean?

The Hon. IAN WEST: Are you familiar with it? Have you been consulted about the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership project?

CHAIR: Did you speak to Michael Ramsay and his lot who have the office down here?

Mrs INGRAM: Yes, I heard them talking.

CHAIR: Are they doing a good job or could they do a much better job?

Mrs INGRAM: I would not have a clue about that. All I am concerned about is that this little bit of land here belongs to us, if you do not mind me saying so. They are the Indigenous and this is for us and our future, the kids, our family and anything else outside of that does not worry me, providing that they do not come on to the Block and make trouble for us. We have copped a lot of trouble and anything that has happened—and they run on to the Block, run through the Block and the police do not go no further than the Block—it must be the people on the Block. So we have got to sit and take it all, and we cannot do anything about it then somebody is going to get arrested off the Block.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: How do you feel now that you know that people were trading drugs over the back fence of your house when you were still in the Block?

Mrs INGRAM: How do I feel? Like I said, if we were given the opportunity of a choice. Given two choices: What do you want? Drugs or a house? We want to live here in a decent house without drugs is all I am saying. Give us a choice because we have never ever had a choice. We were told what to do, when to sit down and when to get up. If we had that choice, it would give our kids a chance, pick up a little bit of respect and dignity and go to school, have a place where they can go to like the settlement, a community for themselves where they are not being hassled by people selling drugs. You tell them you either get off the Block or the next step is you will be arrested. You see we have never been given anything, it has always been told to us. We have been told what to do.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Are you comfortable where you have been moved to?

Mrs INGRAM: I am comfortable. I hope I am not talking out of turn.

CHAIR: Tell us what you think.

Mrs INGRAM: It all depends.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: What services do Aboriginal people need from the Government in relation to health services, education and housing? Which ones are the most important?

Mrs INGRAM: They are all important—houses. A decent home for kids to live in, once again I say, so they have a little bit of pride and dignity in these kids. You have got to go to school. You have got to have an education, now, it does not matter which way the cat jumps. You have still got to have an education because that is going to partly rule not only in Australia but all over the world too. If they have a decent home, and a decent bed to come home to. If we say you have got to go to school and you must learn, I think it would make a big difference.

You see Aborigines, especially Indigenous people too, have never been given a chance to make up their mind. Ask them, "What would you like us to do for you? What is it that you really want?" They would tell you, not be told "You do this, Jackie Jackie. We are going to build you a House, Jackie Jackie." So you do not say nothing but "Yeah, boss" and he goes and make a little mia-mia on the river bank and does a bit of fishing on his own because it was his own decision to live there. You see our decision is that this little bit of land has been given back to the Indigenous Aborigines by Gough Whitlam. Why can we not have decent homes there for our kids? We do not want high-rise with lairy apartments and pay $300 and $500 a week, we cannot afford it. A lot of Indigenous Aborigines live on the dole or the pension like me.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Apart from housing the next most important thing is education?

Mrs INGRAM: Yes, they have got to have an education.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Are you concerned that Aboriginal young people are not receiving the best education they could at the moment?

Mrs INGRAM: Yes, it does concern me because I have great-grandchildren and I keep saying to them, "You have got to learn. You must have an education, because if you have not got an education you cannot fill in the form to get the dole."

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Can you see any way of getting children the best education in the future, keeping young people at school so that they can finish high school and go on to university if they want to or do a trade? Have you any ideas about the best way to do that?

Mrs INGRAM: Do you mind if I ask you a question?

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: No.

Mrs INGRAM: How long can you sit at your desk?

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Not very long, because I have arthritis.

Mrs INGRAM: Aboriginal children can only sit for a certain time. They get restless. If they are not interested in what is being said to them they get restless—not only Aboriginal kids; white kids too, any other child. I would say, "Righto, pens down. Let's go for a run." They will learn. They have to learn. Aboriginal kids come to a standstill when they are about 14, 15 or 16. It is sort of like a nature. They do not know where to go. They are like in a maze before they start picking up the sticks again and walking straight.

The Hon. IAN WEST: And what can we do to help them in that period when they are 14, 15 or 16?

Mrs INGRAM: Find something that they really like. What did you like to do at the age of 15 or 16?

CHAIR: Go on, Ian, tell everyone.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I do not think I should.

Mrs INGRAM: There you are.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Is there anything in the way of mentoring or things like that that we could do to help during that period?

Mrs INGRAM: I think I would say: ask them, "What would you like to do?" and let them pass their opinion about what they would fancy, what they would really like to do. We know that they are at a standstill. We cannot read their minds.

CHAIR: It is an important issue with the Committee. People have already talked to us, and we will talk to a lot more people, about that most important age as you have said when it is really hard for young people.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What assistance would you want from DOCS, or what alternatives would you see to DOCS, in helping kids and families at risk?

Mrs INGRAM: I would not have a clue about that one because I do not know DOCS. I do not know but to my way of talking it is only the Aboriginal Protection Board in a new dress. In the old days the Aboriginal Protection Board came and took the kids whether you liked it or not, and that is DOCS. We have to be very careful. Our kids have got to go to school and have an education. They have to have a decent home, not be roaming the streets. But if they have nothing to occupy their mind they are restless. I am very wary that DOCS will walk in and take the kids. This is me talking. There might be changes in there too.

CHAIR: Aunty Joyce, we usually finish our session with our witnesses by asking them what they would like to see come out of our inquiry. Do you have any special or particular things that you would most like us to try to achieve or to help the Aboriginal community achieve?

Mrs INGRAM: I have said it: what I want to see is decent houses, backyards and clotheslines for all people, and especially for our children, because they are our future.

CHAIR: So anything that we as members of Parliament and our Committee can do towards that you would think would be something useful?

Mrs INGRAM: I would not have a clue. You would have to ask somebody else that question.

CHAIR: We thank you very much for coming. We know that it is not easy to talk in front of a lot of people and there were more microphones and cameras that almost anyone has ever had before. Thank you very much for telling us so strongly how you feel and believe. We will see you again.

Mrs INGRAM: I hope I get my desires to see houses. That is my desire, to see the houses there for the people.

(The witness withdrew)

LYALL THOMAS MUNRO, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: As we noticed when Aunty Joyce was talking, we need to be very quiet if the witnesses are to be heard and the questions are to be heard.

Mr MUNRO: I swear this on the religious beliefs of my people, the Comleroy of New South Wales. I also recognise the Gadigal of Eora whose land we are involved with at the moment.

CHAIR: We do not need your address, and I think you are appearing before the Committee as a private citizen.

Mr MUNRO: Yes.

CHAIR: It would help if we started, as we did with Aunty Joyce, with you telling us a bit about yourself, how long you have lived in the area, your thoughts about the area including its good points, and its importance to the Aboriginal people, as well as the problems of the area. Just fill us in a bit to start with, and then we will ask more specific questions.

Mr MUNRO: I am basically married and have seven children, and 12 grandchildren by the end of this year. My life has been basically associated with the resistance of our people in the seventies and basically associated with the struggle for the human rights of Aboriginal people. I served on the majority of the Aboriginal organisations. I was the Chair of the Aboriginal Legal Service in 1983-84. I spoke as a representative of the National Legal Services in Geneva in Switzerland at the Palais des Nations in 1983 in 1984. I studied at the International Human Rights University at Strasburg in France in 1984 and was rewarded with a certificate in human rights. I have been involved with the Block since its existence. I was one of those who registered or made the application to the Whitlam Government in 1973. Along with Aunty Joyce and others I was also a member of the first Aboriginal board of directors of the Aboriginal Housing Company. Most of my days at the moment are spent at the Block, basically because I am at times homeless and at times I suppose anxious for company. Most of my days are spent at the Block.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Do you live in Redfern?

Mr MUNRO: No. I have lived in and around Redfern. I have lived in Redfern. I have been in Sydney for I think about 35 years. I have lived around the inner-city area—Alexandria, Waterloo, Redfern, Chippendale.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: What do you mean by "at times homeless"? What does that mean?

Mr MUNRO: It means that, exactly.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: With seven kids?

CHAIR: Tell us if you do not wish to go into any personal details.

Mr MUNRO: No, I do not want you to go into it.

CHAIR: That is your right. We have heard a lot about how important this area that we are on is to the Aboriginal people. We have also heard a lot about the problems that exist and perhaps have existed for quite some time. Do you want to give us your perspective on the positive things and the problem areas?

Mr MUNRO: I suppose first and foremost if you look around you I think there is hypocrisy going on in this part of the country and this part of the State that has never been seen before. This Taj Mahal was built across the road from people living in abject poverty.

CHAIR: What? The Taj Mahal we are sitting in?

Mr MUNRO: The Taj Mahal we are sitting in. None of our community members were involved with the bipartisan, if I could call it that, program that is going on. In actual fact, this place is available now simply because of the death of young TJ Hickey. That was responsible for the speeding up of this Taj Mahal overnight. It was interesting to note that there were not many Aboriginal workers during the whole program, so this place basically came alive two weeks after the incident. At this stage I need a point of clarification: Am I to believe that this Committee is one of the three inquiries that are going on? Is this the Government inquiry into the death of this young man, or is it the police inquiry, or is it the coronial inquiry? Is that what we are on about here?

CHAIR: This is the parliamentary inquiry. You are quite right that there are a number of inquiries. There was a debate in the Legislative Council. We are a committee of the Legislative Council

Mr MUNRO: Yes, I appreciate that.

CHAIR: The Legislative Council decided, in addition to the internal police inquiry and the coronial inquiry, there should also be a parliamentary inquiry, and we are it. Certainly it did arise out of the events of the night of the riot.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Because I moved a motion to have an inquiry into the events. The Government changed it and broadened the terms of the inquiry.

Mr MUNRO: As far as we are concerned in the community at large, the inquiry should have gone further to a royal commission into this State and the handling of a young people by members of the State police, in particular in this area—I can only speak about this area—about the overpolicing of an Aboriginal community to a stage that I have never ever witnessed in any other Aboriginal community throughout this country; the continued surveillance that the community finds themselves under.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Is it true that you were in the Block yesterday, abusing two police?

Mr MUNRO: No.

CHAIR: Mr Pearce, I think we should not ask—

Mr MUNRO: I take offence to that suggestion—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Is it true or not?

CHAIR: Mr Pearce, can I ask you not to ask personal questions.

Mr MUNRO: —and the next. There are two strikes. There is one with the lady next to you.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Is it true or not?

Mr MUNRO: The other is this goat here, who has obviously got no respect for Aboriginal people.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: No. Is it true that you were here?

Mr MUNRO: No.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It is not true.

[*Interruption*]

CHAIR: Can everyone please—

Mr MUNRO: This is what we are talking about—the ignorance and the racism—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It is not racism. You are talking about excess policing.

CHAIR: Mr Pearce, can I ask you to please to be quiet.

Mr MUNRO: —that is in this community, with Redfern police and their overpolicing of our people here in Redfern.

CHAIR: Can I just say a couple of words?

Mr MUNRO: It is known worldwide. In actual fact, the lady that was sitting here, Aunty Joyce, at the time was being interviewed by London's BBC when six burly policeman pulled up there without warning, whilst Aunty Joyce was being interviewed, and run into her house and upstairs and through her room, and then downstairs, before even realising that she was being interviewed by an international medium.

CHAIR: When did that happen?

Mr MUNRO: That happened the week after the death of this young man. As far as this person over here is concerned, I do not see what these assumptions and speculations are about the amount of drugs. Can you imagine $50 million worth of drugs? That is almost $1 million a week, for Byami's sake. If you people are here to discredit us, then this inquiry takes on a whole new meaning. You know, you just got my back up.

CHAIR: Can I just say that I ask Mr Pearce not to provoke witnesses.

Mr MUNRO: And these are Fourth World conditions that our people are being subjected to here by an absentee black landlord, not an absentee white landlord.

CHAIR: We are here to listen to what you have got to say.

Mr MUNRO: Our people are controlled here by an absentee black landlord. I was a member of the first organisation here. I know the plans and the dreams of Aboriginal people here. I do not go sticking my head in the ground thinking that it does not go on. Redfern police, by association, are racist to the extreme. They do not like people like myself interjecting to try to find out what is going on in the community. You have a community that is policed at least 40 to 50 patrols a day per day, and these patrols were enhanced by the death of this young man. I fail to see how there is the ignorance that has been displayed in the media about the death of this young man. Witnesses have come forward and I spoke to one witness in particular who is prepared to come forward and who said that the police van did chase the young man. It pulled up at the back of the unit simultaneously at the time the young man had his accident. It was a police chase. This community here was never invited to the mediations that were put on by the State Government. I was elected on behalf of the community, by the Elders of the community, to speak on behalf of the Hickey family. They gave me sole rights to speak on behalf of the community.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Some people have told us that the riot was in fact using—

Mr MUNRO: The riot was not in fact related to drugs, like most rednecks are believing at the moment and most talkback jocks. No, it was a group of young people that were traumatised by the death of their young brother and they then spent the day being tormented by redneck police from Redfern police station.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: So do you deny that people were—

Mr MUNRO: Look, we can take this inquiry over there at the moment or over there tomorrow and you will see exactly what I am talking about. This is where they have all the new surveillance cameras. If they are after a young Aboriginal person here—and you need to be aware of this—they will spend at least three days surveilling this young person , be it he or she, until they know exactly where this young person will be at the time that they raid. And when they raid, it is 20 burly

policemen in as many cars chasing a teenager or an under-age child, for them to be released 10 minutes later.

CHAIR: What do you think of the drug problem in the area?

Mr MUNRO: The drug problem in this area is no different to the drug problem everywhere else. It is an imposition, like most white influences are. They are impositions on our people here. This is the richest piece of real estate in this whole city because of where it is. It is a place of abject poverty and questions obviously should be directed to the Aboriginal Housing Company. The program of refurbishing these homes did not go ahead entirely because the housing company saw fit to put people out of these homes to replace them so that they can have a fait accompli and go ahead with their programs that are anti the community.

CHAIR: What do you mean "anti the community"?

Mr MUNRO: I was involved in the community organisation here over the past five or six years, here in Redfern. We were allowed 50 members onto that organisation. They then included a hundred other members from their side of the fence.

CHAIR: This is the company?

Mr MUNRO: We had disputes here. They continually disallowed members of the Aboriginal community. Like I said, they are absentee landlords, and they are allowing the overpolicing and overzealous policeman who come to the Block at any given time of the day, en masse, screaming around in their cars, putting the lives of young kids and the lives of our Elders at stake every time they raid the Block. This goes on repeatedly. Last year myself and a member of the Block got the then Commissioner of Police to visit unheralded at the Redfern police. We told them about the process of arresting the young people, how it was similar to situations in Central America and South America and disappearing children. They done it in front of him, but there was no recourse after that.

CHAIR: What you mean? What did they do in front of him?

Mr MUNRO: They done exactly what I explained, in front of him. They came in two cars with four in each car at a hundred miles an hour, so to speak, screeched up there, grabbed the young person, bossed them into the car, and then they were out of there as quick as they come in. This is repetitious in the Block—every day, most days of our lives.

CHAIR: Why does it happen?

Mr MUNRO: I would think that the Redfern commanders—there has been a group of them over 10 years; I think there has been about six of them over 10 years—they all had their own individual formulas on policing the Redfern area, particularly the inner-city area. The intimidation of a young people is not directed to this area in particular. All kids—

CHAIR: Is there are a lot of crime in this area relative to other areas?

Mr MUNRO: There is no crime here if you think about other areas. For example, I mean Kings Cross, may be Chinatown and different other places throughout, there has been no serious crime here in this place that I can see.

CHAIR: Yesterday the police said that Redfern has high level of relatively minor crime but it was not the case in relation to serious crime. Nevertheless there are a lot of robberies with handbag snatching and assaults.

Mr MUNRO: What do you do?

CHAIR: We are interested in your views.

Mr MUNRO: What do you do if you try to intervene? You cannot do anything, you cannot intervene because the same thing will happen, as happened to me yesterday.

CHAIR: What happened yesterday?

Mr MUNRO: Sorry, not yesterday, a couple of days ago trying to intervene. I remember the meetings here that we had repeatedly with Redfern police to have it shoved in our faces every night after these meetings. I have witnessed it. I have seen the attitude of particular police in relation to particularly young Aboriginal people here. They select them at random and they then process them through their own system.

CHAIR: Why does what you say happen?

Mr MUNRO: As you say, for basically menial street offences but they are not restricted to the Block.

CHAIR: Is it related to people coming in from other areas?

Mr MUNRO: I concur, yes. The amount of crime that does exist in and around the Block is related to the fluctuation of the Aboriginal community. This community is seen as a sizzling association with where they come from. It is a place where Aboriginal people meet to discuss issues. It is where Aboriginal people meet to join up with members of the stolen generation, so to speak, from Cootamundra and Kempsey. It serves a lot of reasons for being there, you know. But why is it necessary to have this surveillance? I mean on the morning this young man was found injured the police never consulted any of the elders or any community members around here as to the so-called bag snatching earlier on that morning that enhanced the police presence in Redfern. Of course, it gave them the right to torment a group of young people that were traumatised and this led to the now infamous riot. I fail to see what drugs have got to do with the death of a young man because of a police chase.

CHAIR: A lot of people have referred to the problems that the needle van causes.

Mr MUNRO: The needle van is there because people use. They have not got access to the normal resources that are available to the wider community. What are they supposed to do? Use spent needles and end up with, you know?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: In this inquiry we have heard from a lot of people who have the best intentions of working really hard with this community. They have expressed their disappointment that other people are stirring up, to use their words, young people in this area and taking advantage of the situation to create animosity towards the police. What positive things could happen?

Mr MUNRO: I think that is just ludicrous.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Has that happened?

Mr MUNRO: I think if you pull up any Aboriginal child, they will tell you they hate police, the majority of them. That is the sad reality.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Do you think the riot that night was caused by people taking advantage of a sad situation and stirring it up?

Mr MUNRO: No, it was caused by police who were over-zealous in their policing of the Aboriginal community at the Block.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Did the police put up the posters?

Mr MUNRO: Well, I am not saying that, no. Do not put words in my mouth.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Who put up the posters?

Mr MUNRO: I am not responsible for whoever put up posters. What posters are you talking about?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What do you say about the footage of you abusing Aboriginal women during the riot and inciting the youngsters?

Mr MUNRO: I fail to answer that. I do not want to answer that question.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: No, you do not want to answer it because you were there inciting the riot, were you not? You were there abusing Aboriginal elder women?

CHAIR: Mr Pearce, we know what you are trying to do but we are trying to be polite.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: He was. We are looking for solutions. Mr Munro are you part of the problem? Is that not your function? You are part of the problem.

Mr MUNRO: I am not part of the problem. I and my colleagues are the only resource our young people have. Do you know what it is like to save the lives of people who overdose every day? Do you know what it is like to save a life?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I do not think you do.

Mr MUNRO: I know a young man who is 35 years of age this year who has saved up to 500 lives in the past 12 years. His name is Ningena—Sam Hooky. Do you know what it is like to save the life of someone?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: We all know how sad those situations are. What I am concerned about is you inciting the riot.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Thank you for the opportunity of listening to you, Mr Munro, and for coming to give evidence. I have heard about your years of experience and I am honoured to be able to ask you a few questions and get your advice on the Redfern-Waterloo position. The biggest problems are the issues of consultation, doing it right and speaking to the appropriate people in the area. Historically there have been real difficulties from the point of view of the bureaucracy and the white man in doing it right and properly. What advice can you provide as to how we can do it properly?

Mr MUNRO: I think if people are sick they need to be fixed. I do not think they need to be gaoled, that is my personal view. I appreciate very much the concerns of the committee but, hey, the Block is no different to most other places, other than the immense policing that goes on. Whatever programs come about have to be by the initiative of Aboriginal people and controlled by Aboriginal people. They cannot be part of the mainstream formula because that formula we have seen is not right. For example, the only access to methadone by the young people who abuse substances is through the RPA and the Aboriginal Medical Service. The fit machine, as they call it, has been there for sometime. Why be overly concerned at the moment? At least the young people who are using have access to clean fits, in the absence of their own programs, particularly detoxification programs and expertise from doctors involved in that field. Do not base all programs on the cure but on the needs of Aboriginal people.

This place represents somewhat of a melting pot in Aboriginal society. It is not like, for instance, Tamworth or Moree that have settled Aboriginal communities as we have a fluctuation at the Block with people coming in and going out. So sometimes it is hard to set up programs to cater for all the needs that are represented here from all around Australia. That becomes a real problem. Again, I have served on committees until they were coming out of my ears with meetings with Redfern police and different bosses all to no avail. The same situation continues. If you want to go tomorrow and have a look for yourselves I suppose if they want to continue with their programs, it will continue. If not, they will obviously know you are coming. I have got no qualms about my role that particular night. I was an observer over some 500 white people.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: You have got no qualms about your role that night? You were not an observer. We have seen the tapes.

CHAIR: Mr Pearce, can we be polite to our witnesses?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: This witness was here inciting the riot. We have seen the television footage.

Mr MUNRO: I was an observer that night.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: You call that an observer, you were part of the problem that night.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Can I please apologise for my fellow member and say that there are a number of us white fellows out there who are desperately in need of assistance from people such as yourself. I apologise and I am suitably embarrassed by my fellow member.

Mr MUNRO: I respect that. When are we going to be told that the housing program is going to start? You say the Aboriginal community has a problem with drugs. No, we do not. Individual Aboriginal people have a problem with drugs and if they were not available they would be forced to go away in some sticking dive, where no-one is watching or looking after them and where they would probably shoot up and overdose. At least here no-one hinders the police and the ambulance in their duties when they come down to the Block which is about seven times a week. There is no expertise for us to save people's lives. We do it simply because we are Aboriginal people and we are the first on the scene before the ambulances get there. There is a service going on with the Aboriginal community itself un the absence of major infrastructures which there seems to be over a long drawn-out period of time—never the twain have met, for sometime that I am aware of.

Yet the appropriate Ministers in the aftermath of the death of this young man saw fit to have community consultation which completely excluded any of us who were there that night and saw what happened. They proceeded as they do repeatedly, like the Drug Summit last year at Parliament House. If we have a serious drug problem why were not any of our members invited from the Block? I mean, $50 million a year is almost $1 million a week coming out of the Block, and this is unbelievable. I fail to see what the abuse of drugs has got to do with the death of this young man. Justice will never prevail whilst we have people in society who are prepared to stand by and watch it happen. Someone once said something about that. But that is basically what goes on. All myself and other people like Aunty Joyce can do, in the absence of major infrastructure, is to be a source of information. Who to go to if you have got a problem with drugs, you know? Where to go to seek refuge. Where programs are available, even though they may be out of the area. At least we can direct them and become a source of information, and that is mostly seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What should the Government do for the Aboriginal people? How should it deliver that help?

Mr MUNRO: First of all the Government should be ashamed of itself. These are fourth world conditions that exist some two kilometres from Parliament House. I said it during the Games, the Games came and went and there was not redevelopment of these programs. Aboriginal people have to be involved in the redevelopment of this housing program. Most Aboriginal people who are living in the inner city area originally came from the Block and sought housing elsewhere as the houses were closed down by the Aboriginal Housing Company. We, as concerned Aboriginal people, need to know where the Aboriginal money is going and it should be used for the right purpose. I am in no position to give you any advice on when any programs will start.

We have our young people there. Look, if you have been to the Block for as long as I have and if you have seen the state of the Block in the last week, for example, the Block is basically clean. There are hardly any fits in the lane any more. There are hardly any fits laying around. The people look after the Block and pick up these so-called thousands of fits that we have heard about in the media. The Block is basically clean. Come and have a look for yourselves. There is no rubbish laying around. Aboriginal people too changed after the incident of the young man's death.

CHAIR: Has there been a cover-up/clean-up to make things look better?

Mr MUNRO: No, because this is a CDP program. This is Aboriginal people themselves, there is no council-assisted programs. You talk about this bipartisan group. I applaud them and I originally did but when you have got a member like George Piggins who says openly on Sky television that "you go down there during the day, they are all asleep to come out at night as predators". That is a member of this bipartisan committee. This place, Taj Mahal, was imposed on the residents of this place. If you can look through the building records, have a look through the police station records up here of how many patrols per day are operating at the Block? Do not believe me. They will have records up there. Have a look at their petrol bill. I appreciate what Greg Pearce is going on about but that is another kettle of fish. That is not what I am here for.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We have been told that the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project is the Government's solution to a broad approach to helping Aboriginal people. What do you think of that project?

Mr MUNRO: I just gave an example of one of the leading lights of that organisation. If that is the attitude coming from George Piggins—there is no more leading light around South Sydney than George Piggins—and if that is the type of rot that that he comes up with, what does he expect out of young kids? Does he expect them to have faith and confidence in someone like George Piggins. No, it does not work like that.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Have you had any dealings with them? Have you been consulted by that partnership?

Mr MUNRO: None of us have been consulted by this group. Like I was saying, when the Premier had discussions just after the incident with the young man all the Premier's selected Aboriginal people again were involved, the same as they were in the Drug Summit. None of us were invited to be a member of any of those forums on what is going on. So we have an absentee landlord situation prevailing here. It is very much a community under siege.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So you mean that there are some Aboriginals who are always the ones consulted and a considerable number not consulted? Is that what you are saying?

Mr MUNRO: No, I am saying that none of us that frequent the Block or reside at the block or any of us that were given the right to speak on behalf of the community were involved. We never got any invitations because that is how we are seen. We are out of sight, out of mind. Most people just drive past the Block. You blink and boom you are past Redfern station.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: How did you expect to be involved when you were seen on television abusing Aboriginal women and when you were seen on television inciting the riot? How can you expect to be involved?

Mr MUNRO: For Mr Pearce's benefit, the two women in question were going on unaccustomed to what was acceptable on that night, let me say that. One, the traditional lady, was drunk and spent an hour before that intimidating all Aboriginal people that were on the Block. Evidence will back me up on that. Where was she supposed to be, in the middle of it all? For Christ's sake!

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: You were in the middle of it all. You claim that you were an observer.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I am concerned about the stories I hear about young children in this community. I am concerned about stories of them running around in the middle of the night and a lack of parenting skills. What do you think could be done to try to give people those skills? And what do you think the role of DOCS is in this area?

Mr MUNRO: I am not an expert. I sit in the Block until at least 8 or 9 at night and I do not see any resemblance to what you are asking.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: So you do not ever see children late at night smashing windows?

Mr MUNRO: The majority of young kids that are seen in the Block late at night are young kids from out of the area, not resident Block kids.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: So, I guess, as an elder you would take some responsibility for those children?

Mr MUNRO: No, I am not an elder.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Okay, a leader.

Mr MUNRO: An elderly group of people have pointed me with the right to speak on their behalf. I do not have enough evidence to answer your question. If you go to Redfern, to Waterloo or anywhere else and you will see kids around at that time of night.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: People have told me that you, out of the goodness of your heart, took up a collection for TJ Hickey. I wondered how much you raised out of that.

Mr MUNRO: That is a private situation.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: The people wanted to know how much you raised and what that went towards. Did TJ's family get that money?

Mr MUNRO: That is a personal situation.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Well, did TJ's family get the money?

Mr MUNRO: Yes.

CHAIR: We are running out of time and Mr Smith was due to start giving evidence a few minutes ago. Do you want to say anything more to round out? We traditionally asked people what they would like to see come out of our inquiry. Given the views you have expressed, a certain amount of cynicism about the multiple inquiries and so on, would you like to say anything to us about what you think we should do?

Mr MUNRO: I have a grave fear of what I believe will come from these inquiries. We have been through it before on numerous occasions. I have given evidence before on numerous occasions but nothing constructive comes out of it.

CHAIR: So what would you like to see, granted your cynicism?

Mr MUNRO: In relation to the death of young TJ, I would like to see justice be done and I would like to see justice being seen to be done, which is what we are told about the common law. I am very concerned about the way police handled this young man. In actual fact, evidence came about that said that this young man was taken off the fence by police, 25 minutes after, and there was no ambulance rung by that time. In fact, the police rang for backup.

CHAIR: I very much respect your strong feelings about this but that matter is not within our inquiry.

Mr MUNRO: We have very strong feelings, Madam Chair, about what went on and what went on after and what is still going on. These guys are after retribution. As far as we are concerned they have pre-empted any constructive notion coming from these hearings simply because they have arrested, and they continue to arrest, in a very disorderly manner, people who are charged with offences relating to that particular night.

CHAIR: Let me say again: our inquiry is not focused on those particular events. We have been given the job, which I think is a difficult job, of looking at the broader sorts of issues, the matters about housing, DOCS and so on.

Mr MUNRO: The underlying issues.

CHAIR: Yes, and the ongoing issues and the future of the Block and so on and so on.

Mr MUNRO: I just want to see justice for the family, and I want to see police stopping their excessive policing of the Block area. That is basically it. The Aboriginal people will decide what to do with their lives and what to do with their community. If I am living directly in the community, of course I will have something to say. But these people have lived there all their lives. People there are very high up in the echelons of Aboriginal leadership. There are very intelligent people there and I am pretty sure that if they are allowed to have a say in the restructure of the homes there for Aboriginal people they will put in their two bob's worth. Other than that, I have no offers of anything. I thank you for hearing me.

(The witness withdrew)

KEVIN IVAN SMITH, **JAMU-MURRINJARI-MURRAMARANG-WALBANGA**, affirmed and examined:

LANGIS SHANE PHILLIPS, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: I welcome Kevin Smith as one of our advertised witnesses. Kevin has asked that Shane Phillips attend with him. I ask people to take their seats and be reasonably quiet.

Mr SMITH: I would like to add to the affirmation:

I am black, I stand alone
At death's door, he will wait to call me home
So no matter what my life may be,
One day I will have to meet with Him
And at that meeting, I will let it be for my good
And I will walk in truth, as people should
Because he is the great Byami.

CHAIR: You are both appearing before us as individual citizens, not on behalf of an organisation?

Mr SMITH: Yes.

CHAIR: We will begin by asking very similar questions that we asked Aunty Joyce and Lyall Munro. Tell us a bit about yourselves and your connection with Redfern-Waterloo, and then maybe after you have done that, a bit about the positive things, why it is important, the negative things and the problems that this Committee has been asked to address. Then the Committee members can ask questions out of that. You can speak in whatever order you like.

Mr SMITH: I am 51 years of age. I was born here in Sydney in Crown Street but my parents come from down the South Coast—the same town where Aunty Joyce comes from, Batemans Bay. I am from the Walbanga nation from the Murramarang and the Deua River people, the fish people of the South Coast. I was born here in the Crown Street hospital in 1953. My parents met here in Sydney. My father came from the Broulee tribe, which is down near Moruya, and my mother came from the Murramarang people and they were situated around near Pebbly Beach near Durras. My father ran a steam sawmill out from Pebbly Beach. They supplied most of the timber to help build the houses here in Sydney, way back during the turn of the century. Mount Durras is my story place. It is the spirit or resting place where my ancestral spirits have been and still are and where we still return. I lived here for the first four years of my life. My father tells me that I was conceived in the back of an old La Salle vehicle down in Alexandria Park and I was then born in Crown Street.

I left here when I was four years old. My parents went back down to the South Coast. My parents were itinerant workers. My grandfather, my father and my uncle ended up working in sawmills and spot mills. We were bean pickers, pea pickers—you name it. We have been around. I have been to 13 different primary schools in my life and five different high schools. I finished my education out at Kirinari hostel out at the Gymea High School. I went on to fifth year and attained a Higher School Certificate by going back and attending the University of Technology, Sydney. Then I went bush and lived in a tribal community right up in the Gulf of Carpentaria where I went through my first stage of teaching as a traditional person. I have been initiated through the first stage only. I have other levels to acquire. I have lived in tribal communities. I have travelled. I have been around the world twice. I am a resident actor with Belvoir Company B. I am an Aboriginal storyteller. Most of the animated stories that you hear on the ABC and SBS are narrated by me.

I have been through Europe. I have done festivals all around the world. I have done the Munich festival, the Theatre Spectacle in Zurich, I have done the Dublin festival and I have been to London and I have performed in London as well. So I have had a vast experience in two worlds. I have lived the traditional-cultural way. I am attached to traditional communities right throughout the

whole of Australia, including the central desert. I am familiar with six traditional languages. When I came back to Sydney I started an apprenticeship in moulding, foundry work, and I did my apprenticeship at Hadfield Steelworks. Towards the end of my apprenticeship I got involved with the Aboriginal land rights movement because of the continual arrests that were taking place outside the then Empress Hotel in Regent Street, Redfern, where the police wagons used to line up. There would be eight or nine of them. You would walk out of the pub and you would not even commit an offence and they would just grab you and throw you in the back of the van. Then they would not only charge you with the Summary Offences Act, which was in place then, they would also rob you of your weekly wages if you happened to be working. They charged you with being drunken and disorderly and took your wages. That was a common thing that took place, and everyone knew it. Everyone was aware of it.

It was that police presence, way back in the early seventies, that forced us to set up a tent embassy on the lawns of Parliament House. Out of that tent embassy we were recognised. We tried to push ourselves—and we still do—as a separate nation to white Australia. There are many nations within the traditional community right throughout Australia. We see ourselves as different nations. It was from there that we established the first Aboriginal Legal Service. From there I went to work as a field officer for the Aboriginal Legal Service. Most of my work was done in the Children's Courts down in Albion Street and around other areas, so I came into direct contact with children who had been charged with juvenile delinquency, had been fostered out to so many different families, had gone through hell and back and were still trying to find themselves. I was involved with link-up situations. I have been involved with welfare assistance programs, but I have done a lot of court work. I have worked with a lot of barristers and I have worked with a lot of people who are now judges in the area.

After three or four years, I had a bit of a break down over certain cases that I had been handling for the legal service. I went and put myself into the National Aboriginal Black Theatre in 1974-75. It was from there that I launched my career as a performing artist and storyteller and I have been actively involved in this community. I lived here on the Block in a house in Caroline Street for a period of five years. My children were born here. I work here on the Block. I am a CDP participant so I have to clean up. I am one of the cleaners here of a morning who picks up the rubbish. I have asked to give evidence as an independent person because of my involvement in the past that I speak of.

CHAIR: We will ask Shane had to tell us about himself and then we will talk to both of you about Redfern, the issues, and so on. I think that would be a sensible way to go so that we know a bit about you as well, Shane.

Mr PHILLIPS: I will not take the time up. I am not real good at talking about myself. All I can say is that I am a family man. I care about this place. I am born and bred here. My family is from here and from the North Coast. I believe in family values. It is most important that I believe in our people, and I am very proud to be Aboriginal. I am very proud to be able to sit with people who have been through the struggle. I was raised in the community and in the family before the struggle and my education was there. I have a very limited academic background but I learnt through life what we could do, and I had to learn very basic things by just sitting in on conversations and meetings. One of the things I do believe—and this is my own opinion—is that meetings really get me nowhere. I have sat at many tables and I have been involved in things where we have poured our hearts out as Aboriginal people, and I have seen nothing come of it. I believe that the answer and the truth will come via our people. I truly believe that the answers and the way we will move forward will be through our own people and through our own efforts. I will pass you back to Uncle Kevin.

CHAIR: Are you employed at the moment?

Mr PHILLIPS: I am employed as an indigenous skipper of a training company which trains indigenous and non-indigenous skippers. We are an Aboriginal organisation without any funding. We struggle, but we have survived through our commitment to our people and that is what it is all about. Uncle Kevin was pretty much one of the founding members.

Mr SMITH: We set up an association called the Tribal Warriors Association where we put five people through but we bring in a lot of people off the streets and that. We have put them through maritime training programs so that they get their deckie certificates, their coxswain certificates, and their maritime engineer's certificates as well as their captain's certificates.

CHAIR: How old are they?

Mr SMITH: We have two women who are currently going through the program.

Mr PHILLIPS: Ages vary.

Mr SMITH: Yes, ages vary. We do not discriminate against the age that they can take on the boats. If they want to do it from 17 or from even 15 or 16 upwards, we will take them if they want to be mariners.

Mr PHILLIPS: While we are on it, one of the points about training and employment is that it is a real key thing for our people. One of the things that we do in the association is we have had the opportunity to have the 0-10 training packages there. We have qualified teachers with us, and that has helped us to mould training and education our own way, with our own styles of training. It has given them the same competency and they have been assessed by the Waterways Authority and autonomous assessors who have given them all the approvals that they need. We have found that our own style of training has helped to retain students and helped them because we look at the big picture. We have had opportunities to deal with a lot more issues, apart from just training.

CHAIR: I asked you originally about the positives and the negatives. Your own stories have given us a lot of the positives about the Redfern-Waterloo area. Can you run through some of the darker side for us, the problems, as well as the reason why this inquiry was set up and why we are here?

Mr SMITH: I guess it is the same old vicious circle—housing, education and employment. I was thinking about it last night and two words came to mind, encouragement and discouragement. The discouragement fits in when you see houses being torn down and you know that there is a need to accommodate people who are out there on the streets, and that just is not being provided. So you wonder in the destruction that you see taking place and houses literally being torn down in front of you what will be put up to replace them. Where is the encouragement for what we see for the future? In the process of having that project established and built, will it offer training programs and trade apprenticeship programs to those people who are here? I know in working on the street here and participating when we are cleaning up the housing company and we are planning and bricking up, the kids will come along and say, "Can I give you a hand, Uncle Kev? Can I help, too?"

They take an interest in what they want and what you are doing, and they will sit with you and stay with you for about two or three hours and they want to work. The encouragement is like Tom Sawyer whitewashing the fence. They come along and they see you doing it and they see that you are happy in what you are doing and they say, "Can I have a go, too?" That is the sort of encouragement that needs to be done. If you propagate a seed you plant a seed. You give them the opportunity to do something and if it is a practical application in what they want to do, in the use of their hands, with what they see with their eyes and how they apply their body techniques to that task. Those changes are not given. There is duplicity in government organisations. You have funding that goes to mainstream organisations and they are highlighted because they service the needs of the Labor Party. Bob Carr gets a lot of kudos for funding Aboriginal organisations that are not really carrying out the service that is required of them.

CHAIR: What are they doing instead?

Mr SMITH: Just take, for instance, you have got a methadone program that is being run by the Aboriginal Medical Service—I am not saying we do not need it because we do—but that is one drug being substituted for another drug. Why are there not legal heroin shooting galleries where people who are addicted to heroin—it is a sickness—are monitored and kept in control and their habit is looked after in a proper way? Another thing why the needle exchange van is essential is because there is a hidden HIV crisis in the inner city. We have people who are drug users who also suffer from HIV. In particular, one young kid is in a bad way and he walks around and literally up-ends the needle bins and takes out all what is left over in the needles and puts them into one needle and shoots it up his arm, and it is really a sad thing to see. This kid is already dead, it is just a matter of time before he disappears and he would only be 23 or 24 years of age. That saddens you.

CHAIR: Do you support the needle van?

Mr SMITH: I do support the needle van but it should be complemented with a legal heroin gallery whether it is by the Aboriginal Medical Service or the community area health service. That will allow heroin users to be registered and monitored and the statistics could be better confirmed by those who are using heroin on whether the rates are increasing or decreasing. We do not see that happening and we do not know the positives. We are not told the positives. All we see is people dying around us all the time and more young people getting addicted. Educational programs should be put in places like this. These white elephants that we talk about get put up without any community resource structure. This is in place. I was talking to some of the resource workers here. What Aboriginal content has been put in? It is stuck right here in the middle of an Aboriginal community.

CHAIR: Did South Sydney council consult with the community when it embarked on this project?

Mr SMITH: I do not know about the consultative process. If it did take place it went over my head because I saw nothing.

CHAIR: We will talk about the city council later on. Do you want to talk about any other problems?

Mr PHILLIPS: Apart from the fact that we probably die at an earlier age than other people. The dietary diseases are probably the highest in the world or this country. The incarceration level is, I do not know how many times, different to the non-Aboriginal community member. Many other statistics that our people suffer—I sort of feel a bit uncomfortable that I have to justify a lot of our means and our existence with the fact that we are just trying to survive. We have been given legacies by the past and we have to deal with them now. At least our community is making an effort to deal with it. I do not disagree with Uncle Kev but I want to say in relation to heroin use, our mob are suffering with substances now. I am one person. I believe we have to try our hardest to help our people survive without it. If there has got to be heroin use around the place, we have got to monitor it. At this stage we have got to do something about it to protect ourselves or our kids around the community.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I am so impressed with what you have been doing with the training program. It has become apparent in this inquiry that there are a number of services—people do not seem to know how many—with lots of good people doing good things but they are duplicated. You talked about family value and kids, what can be done in this community to try to help the kids that are wandering around the streets at night and parents who have difficulty with parenting?

Mr PHILLIPS: Again I feel like I have to justify what has been given to us. You will find that most parents that are suffering now have been affected by that protection board. I can find the statistics that will show that for anyone that has been dispossessed of family, language and Aboriginality, it has taken this long for them to find their feet. Without being taught family values it is very hard to then teach your kids that when the pressure is on. Without making any excuses, we are making a conscious effort within our community to deal with it to help our people put the right supports in there. We need support. I can remember brother Lyle talk about having our moneys mainstream, and that is one thing that is really important. Welfare made our people and put us into this position. If they have to throw their money back this way, they have to help us get back out of it.

Mr SMITH: The separation and the break-up of family units has been going on since the turn of the century. Men who enlisted to fight in the First World War and the Second World War went over to try to get equal status and be recognised as citizens. You must recognise yourself that it was not until 1967 in this country that we were recognised as citizens of our own land. That in itself, and the perpetrated policies over the ongoing years that had led to family disunification, is still there. Just here recently there was a family separated and the kids were taken away from them. I think that the DOCS should work on restoring family units, and not deal with the kid that has got the problem when the whole family could be suffering because of that problem.

They should focus on the whole family unit and maintain that family unit, support the family unit even when one, two or three kids might be having problems. You have got a truancy problem as well. The DOCS touches things with rubber gloves in a lot of ways and it will not use its strength to do what it is supposed to be doing. It is windy organisation: it blows in and blows out. You do not know where it is going to be or what it is going to do.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Some women in this community are taking a strong stand. Do they have support to do some good work in relation to building families?

Mr PHILLIPS: Not enough. One of the things I want to say is as Aboriginal men we want to be standing with them. We make a statement that we are standing with them. We have planted the seed just not long ago but the thing is the foundation. It is gaining roots and we are going to nurture it.

Mr SMITH: You have to realise that it is only 212 years of colonisation in this country and, as Aunty Joyce said earlier, we are yellow people. We are caught between two worlds: a black and a white world. But our culture and the colour of our skin tends to lead us more to our Aboriginality than to our whiteness, or whatever that may be. In the process of doing that we have not lost our identity: we still maintain it. When the Whiteman came here there were no gaols. We had a law in place that if you stuffed up you got speared, and that was it. There was no crime. Things were exchanged. We had a bartering system and a whole different set of values. It is now that we are clashing with a value-system that is competitive whereas we were co-operative. We learnt to share. We learnt to care and that is what the whole family unit was about.

Now that has been broken down—and it has not just happened overnight, it has happened ever since the assimilation policy right back since the churches have been here and the benevolent protectors, the church, took over the role. When the father of a brother of mine here went away and fought in the Second World War his kids were taken away. When he came back from the war he had to go and look for his kids and they were in institutions all over the country. How can an Aboriginal family come together and be a unit with all the past policies, and the policies that are still being practised against us?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I notice your history of quite impressive work as an artists and a story teller. At the moment there is a huge demand for Aboriginal stories and the ability to tell them. Has anyone used your ability to bring together Aboriginal children in a project to build Aboriginal pride?

Mr SMITH: We are working on that. Hopefully we are going start some drama courses upstairs. We are trying to put a few things together.

CHAIR: Who is we?

Mr SMITH: Vincent, another resource worker here. I am involved with so many things. I am also a mentor for a prisoner release program for Probation and Parole. It is just a 10-week program that has just started where we are encouraging those blokes that are on the program to seek positive outcomes in their life. There are lots of things here but we have got to work on a generation. We were talking about this ourselves, the generation after us, we see ourselves being grandparents looking after grandchildren whose parents are drug addicted. That is a sad fate that we are going to have to wear but I think society itself in general should cop a lot of that blame. The way that government funding is directed to agencies has no monitoring. Accountability is not up to date and really the accountability only focuses on audits: the financial control of it. It does not account on what are the programs, what are the projects and what positive outcomes from those projects are happening.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: How should the Government deliver programs to help Aboriginal people? What programs should they have?

Mr SMITH: They should look overall. It is like Shane said, even with the Tribal Warriors Association and with the CDP we would like to take on more participants but the funding is set at certain limits. Rio Tinto Shipping sponsored the Tribal Warrior Association for $50,000. We cannot employ people with that amount of money but we can operate. It is an operational cost. If we were to be able to source wages for participants who wanted to go through those training programs, because

we have a huge demand now on the Captain Cook Cruises and bridge walks for Aboriginal tour guides who can tell stories.

All we need to do is to set up training programs, through the likes of the CDP and put people through classes that can give them the history and the background of this area, and then they can go out and be tour guides. I think the rate of pay is something like $32.50 per hour but it is only four hours work a day and they might only do that in three or four weeks. Really it is a culturally based position that you are working from and it just needs to be opened up a lot more. There are a lot of community organisations around Redfern that could be given funding in a more serious manner than those mainstream organisations that are not doing as much as you would expect them to.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: What are your views on the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project?

Mr SMITH: It is an egg, to me. It has got to hatch yet, has it not? It is here. What are we going to put in it? How are we going help it grow?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It has been here for a couple of years, has it not? It is not exactly an egg: it is a chicken.

Mr SMITH: No, this has only just been built.

Mr PHILLIPS: What was the role of the committee when it was first initiated? What was it meant to do?

CHAIR: This is the Sydney city council one, the partnership project?

Mr SMITH: Is that the one with George Piggins in it?

CHAIR: Yes, with Michael Ramsey.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It is meant to co-ordinate services.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: It got $7 million over three years and it is two years through.

Mr SMITH: I wonder? It goes on to the point made by Lyle about itinerants here. We have got a floating population of people who come here from other country areas and not only from other country areas but from other States. They always gather at the Block. This is the first place they come to if they want to find relatives because everyone is a cousin, a brother or whatever, but this is where they come. This is the first place of focus. So if you had a resource centre that could co-ordinate the efforts of all the organisations and have information on hand as to where they could find accommodation, the health services and the Centrelink office. Families come down when kids are flown down to be put into hospital. Sometimes hospitals arrange for overnight accommodation but in all those areas need to be put under a microscope to find out where the duplicity lies in all our service delivery organisations. Why should it not be a lot more focussed on the real issues?

Mr PHILLIPS: Apart from that, we do not know what their charter is. I do not know whether the Waterloo-Redfern project is being attacked but I would like to know that if there is some resource that our people can access or that can help our situation, let us not go from one extreme to the other and get rid of it; let us make it active. Let us make it work for our people.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: So basically what you are saying is that you really do not know a lot about the project itself, you have not heard a great deal in the community about it?

Mr PHILLIPS: We have heard about it, but we sort of do not know unless you are in one of the organisations that work with it. We are not going to knock it but we would like to know that it is going to work for us and we would like to see it active.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: What are your views in relation to the Aboriginal Housing Company and the management of the Block at present?

Mr PHILLIPS: I hope the Aboriginal Housing Company accomplishes what it has started to do. I think it is about putting Aboriginal families back into the community. It is based upon family. They are talking to council about it. They are Aboriginal people and I think: good on them. Let us get things moving back to what it was. What we have become is not what the community was always. It is a result of a lot of things—oppression, people who have found substances and westernisation. But I know we have a vision. We have a dream, and it will be accomplished if we all support it.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: So as far as you are concerned the future of the Block would-be—

Mr PHILLIPS: Aboriginal housing back here for Aboriginal families.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: A very good standard of housing and to get it with a family orientation—

Mr PHILLIPS: Yes, and it would be great to see a lot of the people who are going to be tenants possibly working to rebuilt those homes so that there is a sense of ownership on them. That is really important to people. You show a lot of pride in your community if you are involved in the bricks and mortar.

Mr SMITH: Yes. The overall planning of the project itself, and if families are brought back together here and if the building does go ahead. That is what I mean: we are facing a lot of ifs. If this happens; if that happens; when it is going to happen. There is so much uncertainty floating around. You would like to see something positive start to take place but that is not so at the moment. I really do not know much about the operational structure of the housing company so I really cannot comment on it. But if it is set up to service the needs of this community, and that is to build houses and provide accommodation, then it should get on with the job and it should be funded to do so.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I understand from what you are saying—correct me if I have got it wrong—that the funding appears to be a little like a sun shower: it comes and goes and you cannot see where the water has been. You are talking about a resource centre. I am thinking about the possibilities of trying to co-ordinate the multitude of services that are around the little spits in the ocean.

Mr SMITH: There is a nepotistic set-up behind many of the organisations. They are controlled by a clique of certain people who sometimes will not allow others in unless they fall in with the pattern of the policies of the people that are running it. Nepotism is a big part of running a lot of the structures around Sydney. People have built their ivory towers and are in positions of power and control and they do not want to hand it over to anybody else.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Can you give us any ideas of possible ways of minimising nepotism occurring?

Mr PHILLIPS: A lot of Aboriginal people establish businesses so that they can use their family, because family is the basis of our people. We have been given organisations that are there to help social issues instead of helping our people break the economic cycle, break into it and allow us to build our own businesses. Throw people into the deep end, mentor them and help them through it. I do not know many people who work in Aboriginal businesses around Redfern. I do not know many Aboriginal people who own their homes around here. I do not know many Aboriginal people who run businesses that are well established around here. But I know that there are a lot of people who run large businesses who started by being thrown into the deep end. And they had someone help them through. That is what we want. We want to be able to establish ourselves so that we can help ourselves.

Mr SMITH: We have to put up with the false portrayal in newspapers and other media that generalise our situation and do not look at us as individuals at different levels and what we are achieving as individuals. They just put us under the one mushroom. They treat us like mushrooms: they keep us in the dark and feed us bullshit.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What is your view of the way policing occurs in the Block?

Mr SMITH: I saw the lead up to what happened to young TJ. About three or four weeks before that there was a young kid in the same situation who came down through the middle of us who were up their drinking. He got sideswiped by a police car directly there on that park and he was propelled over the front of his handlebars. But he landed on dirt; he did not land on an iron pipe. This intimidation by the police has been going on for a long time. I witnessed two police officers following a young 15-year-old kid down Redfern Street about four or five weeks before the incident that happened to TJ.

They were walking along behind him saying, "Piss off home you little black prick. Get off the streets." They are intimidating kids with that sort of language. The kid was turning around. He was only 15, no adults with him. I thought they were not allowed to question or intimidate kids unless they were in the company of a guardian or a parent. If they are going to walk along the streets and intimidate our kids, our kids are going to get their backs up. That is what happened on the night of the riot. I saw them gathering on the Saturday. I was not here on Sunday when the riot took place. I came over Sunday morning and I had left earlier. But I saw all those young kids who had gathered here—more than 120 of them. Amongst them there might have been only about 10 adults. When the riots did take place it was mainly children aged between the age of 13 and 18 or 19.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What has happened since then? Is it worse or—

Mr SMITH: No, the police could adopt a more decent approach to our community and towards our people as individuals. Right now we have this policing in your face situation. They are standing here 12 hours a day on the top of the Block watching us like they are prefects in a schoolyard. We are not children that are still going to school; we are adults. We are citizens of this community and we want to be treated as human beings, not like we are some germs under a microscope.

Mr PHILLIPS: Sometimes they do not define who is in trouble and who is not. They will eyeball and intimidate the wrong people, the people who are out there. I have got kids and I would like to know that my son can walk along the streets without feeling like he is going to be in trouble for just doing something. He stays out of trouble—I thank God for that—but I know that there are a lot of parents out there with that worry. You do not want them to mix with the wrong crowd but you want to make sure that they are not going to be pushed to the other side by police making them feel like they are part of the other team. Some really important psychology needs to be taking place.

Mr SMITH: We need to be given the opportunities to rebuild character, to revitalise our culture, to find those hidden strengths that we once had that come from our spirit ancestors.

CHAIR: That comes back to what you said earlier and probably comes back to our last question that we usually ask people. We are a parliamentary inquiry. We are not experts but we have been asked to do an inquiry. What would you like to see as a result? What would you like to see come out of our inquiry that we recommend to Government?

Mr SMITH: I would like to see more accountability on the funding processes to community-based organisations.

CHAIR: And that means indigenous—

Mr SMITH: Indigenous as well as non-indigenous. The focus of those organisations should be streamed to cater for all the needs rather than one doing this, one doing that and getting funded for this and getting funded for that. Then you will find organisations clashing with one another. There was a building, Murrawina, that was run by a committee. It has been leased to a party outside of this community. That place could have been established to provide a halfway house, overnight accommodation, emergency accommodation. It could have been utilised by this community instead of being leased out to some other mob that is going to come in. It is a Maori organisation. It is a shared culture arrangement. But I think that the board of Murrawina should have at least looked at alternatives for that structure before they moved out.

CHAIR: We will write a report and we will make recommendations. What else would you like to see, Kevin or Shane?

Mr PHILLIPS: I would like to see the truth come out of it and I would like to see that we did not come up and everyone spill their guts and tell everyone about their life and know that it is all in vain and you guys can go back to your comfortable jobs and your life and your own problems. I would like to see that some action comes out of this. I have become apathetic in coming to tell people about our problems and solutions that we may have in our own communities, and we do not see any of them. A lot of times we have great ideas in our communities and they are ones with good solid foundations but by the time it gets up to the departments and it comes back it is their program and it is completely different to the one we wanted so it does not have any long-term benefits.

Mr SMITH: DOCS should look at the need for helping to restore the family unit rather than destroying it. Our kids are still being taken away from parents. There needs to be a redressing of that situation. They should look at the overall family problem and not just individual.

Mr PHILLIPS: Before we go, someone has given me something to ask about. There is some money earmarked at some stage. We do not know what has happened with ATSIC. There was a project called the Aboriginal Development Communities Program, ADCP, which was administered by DAA. There was something like 200 million bucks, which has gone there. He says that a lot of those funds have gone for remote communities. A lot of times you will find it happens like that. They earmark a lot of things for the remote communities saying that it is because they are the real black fellas and the urban areas suffer more, because we suffer most of the disposition within our communities and the effects of that.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Shane, you support our asking the hard questions, I assume?

Mr PHILLIPS: We do, but we would like to see something good come of it.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 5.30 p.m.)