

**REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT**

**INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ABORIGINAL  
COMMUNITIES AND**

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**At Tamworth on 27 April 2016**

**CORRECTED PROOF**

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**The Committee met at 3.15 p.m.**

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**PRESENT**

The Hon. G. S. Pearce (Chair)

The Hon. R. H. Colless

The Hon. P. Green

The Hon. N. Maclaren-Jones

The Hon. M. Veitch (Deputy Chair)

**CHAIR:** Today the Committee will be taking evidence in respect of two inquiries: the Inquiry into Regional Planning Processes in New South Wales and the Inquiry into Economic Development in Aboriginal Communities. I acknowledge the Gamilaroi people, who are the traditional owners and custodians of this land. On behalf of everyone, I pay respect to elders past and present, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal persons present. Today's hearing is the third hearing for both inquiries. The Committee has already held hearings for both inquiries in Sydney and Dubbo, and will also visit the South Coast to take evidence from stakeholders. Further regional hearings for the Inquiry into Regional Planning Processes in New South Wales will be announced in the coming months.

In relation to that inquiry, the Committee is seeking ideas that will stimulate regional development and reduce the time and complexity involved in the approval process. The Committee is also interested in maintaining community expectations regarding the environment and the economic aspirations of local businesses. In respect of the Inquiry into Economic Development in Aboriginal Communities, the Committee is keen to investigate how economic development can provide jobs, resources, opportunities and education for Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. At today's hearing we will take evidence from various witnesses, including the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council, Namoi Councils Joint Organisation, ProTen Limited, Baiada, and the Tamworth Business Chamber.

Before we commence, I will make some brief comments about the inquiry and the procedures for today's hearing. In accordance with broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media may film or record Committee members or witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I also remind media representatives that they must take responsibility for what is published about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside of their evidence at the hearing.

Therefore, I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others after completing their evidence because such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take action for defamation. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat. Witnesses may take questions on notice, in which case we hope to get answers within 21 days. Witnesses are also advised that any messages should be delivered to Committee members through the committee staff. Mobile phones should be turned off or switched to silent. I welcome our first witness, Ms Fiona Snape from the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council.

**FIONA SNAPE**, Chief Executive Officer, Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms SNAPE:** I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this hearing is being held and pay my respects to elders past and present. I acknowledge all Aboriginal young people who will be our future leaders.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** On our travels Committee members have heard from a number of organisations about the importance of mentoring in ensuring that we unlock economic opportunities in indigenous communities. How should that mentoring be delivered? Do you have any views about what we should consider, such as culture, age, gender and so on?

**Ms SNAPE:** All of the above. The Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council holds the contract for the opportunity hub in Tamworth. Mentoring is one of the things our staff do with the young people. By the same token, our Aboriginal staff have also been mentored by other people. For example, our chair has held a position at the local ACLO (Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer) with NSW Police Oxley Local Command for 28 years. He is a good mentor and role model to our staff. The Aboriginal staff at TAFE, at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and others around town have been very good role models. School-aged kids—most particularly the boys—rely heavily on our male staff as role models.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** You mentioned the opportunity hub. Can you explain what that is and how it works?

**Ms SNAPE:** It is one of the programs under the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment [OCHRE] program run by the New South Wales Office of Aboriginal Affairs. It involves working with Aboriginal students from year 5 to one year post school. We are getting them to dream in those early years and we inspire them to be whatever they want to be. We are assisting with career planning and ensuring that their school subjects align with the career path they want to take. We also assist them into employment or into further education. The coordination staff and I have done some fairly heavy work with businesses in town to ensure success.

Lots of kids want a part-time job, but no-one in their family has had a job before. The schools have indicated that that as an area of need. We have partnerships with McDonalds and Hungry Jacks to provide these kids with part-time jobs. That works very well because they know that we are in the background to mentor them if there is an issue or if they do not turn up to work or are struggling at work. Quite a few kids now have part-time jobs, and that is good. We also assist with school-based traineeships. We have a partnership with the Australian Army for opportunity hubs. That has been a huge success.

One of our year 12 boys who was an independent student did not get the marks he wanted in his Higher School Certificate. We assisted him in participating in the Army YOU session here, and he has just completed the indigenous prerequisite course. He phoned the opportunity hub and said that without it he would not have got in. He got 85 per cent in his test. He will be in the September intake for the Army. Another student has been in care and has suffered domestic violence. He is in the August intake for the Royal Australia Navy. That is the type of thing we are doing. We also run school holiday programs and provide activities such as basketball. There are always mentors, not only within our staff; we also have community elders and businesspeople.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** How is the opportunity hub funded?

**Ms SNAPE:** Through the State Government. The contract is with Department of Education and Training and State Training NSW.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Does that involve the land council or a separate not-for-profit group?

**Ms SNAPE:** No, it involves the land council. There are four opportunity hubs in the State, and they are all different. We hold one, TAFE Western in Dubbo holds one, the Aboriginal Employment Strategy holds one in the Hunter, and MTC Campbelltown, which is an employment agency, holds the one at Campbelltown. We find that ours works very well. I am not saying that the others do not; I am sure they are also successful. However, our community feels that it has a real ownership. When the contract came up, we went to the sessions

they had before the tender went out. Joblink Plus and other big players that would normally apply for those contracts were there. When they realised that we were there we got together and formed a consortium. We are the lead agency and we are supported as an advisory council with Joblink Plus, the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group [AECG], the Tamworth Regional Council through the youth centre, Centacare, which includes Headspace, and the Careers Network. There is a good consortium of partners that we can refer to if we come across issues, whether they be mental health or other issues. The Aboriginal Employment Strategy is also one of our partners. We are not all things to all people, but we have partnerships in our own right and we have those links. The Aboriginal Employment Strategy also runs school-based traineeships and we have students whom we have been mentoring.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** How do you identify the mentors you require through the opportunity hub? Do people come through the door and offer their services, or do you know of people in the community whom you approach?

**Ms SNAPE:** We know people in the community and our staff. If we see a need we will approach them.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** How do you match the mentor to the individual? That is an important part of mentoring.

**Ms SNAPE:** It certainly is. We have a partnership with the Nestle Corporation and they run holiday programs. It is not only Aboriginal people in the community who want to open themselves to other people to help them to explore other career paths which they probably would not come across here in Tamworth or which they do would not think are available to them. When our kids did the YOU session with the Army, they came away very excited. They did not realise that the Army offered 121 careers; they thought it was all about combat. There were also things that they did not think they would be capable of doing. Once they did the YOU session they were amazed at the scope open to them. I think we will probably see more impact now. We start at year 5, and they have good connections with our staff and also the Aboriginal education officers in schools and what have you.

**CHAIR:** The opportunity hub is a great story demonstrating the land council leading. The Committee has heard about the many difficulties that other land councils have had with governance and resources. Can you tell the Committee about your experience with governance, the resources you have and whether it is sustainable?

**Ms SNAPE:** When I commenced there was only myself and one part-time administration assistant with the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council in late November 2009. Prior to that, it had been in and out of administration for some time. There were not many records when I started, and I must admit that I was surprised by what I saw. However, we had a strong board at that time. I came from the Rural Lands Protection Board and it had a similar structure. I had worked with boards before. It had been very difficult to build relationships with businesses and with the council, but we built up thrust. I had previous connections and knew staff at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Aboriginal staff. They started to auspice money through us and they could see that we had the capability and that the board had a good, sound structure.

NSWALC has a governance tool that they test LALC on. We always hold that 100 per cent mark on that. I think it is a real credit to a strong Chair and a good board, and there is a good cross-section of the community. The opportunity hub, the community feel like they do have a bit of ownership over that because not only do we give a report to the board on a monthly basis what is happening at the opportunity hub but we also go out to our member's meetings, our community meetings and our staff give information. We are there for questions. We always, you know, at most community meetings if people do not ask questions then a grandmother or somebody will stay back and ask questions and we sort of get a referral that way.

People will come into LALC, to the land council office because I guess it is more comfortable for them to come into the LALC rather than to a school or to somewhere to answer questions. They do still go to schools and that sort of stuff, but it is an area of comfort, I guess, and a bit of ownership. I think that is probably a key thing with Aboriginal communities, is consultation with the community so they feel like they have some ownership and some buy into it.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** For how long is the opportunity hub funding?

**Ms SNAPE:** Our contract now is up to 31 March 2017.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** What will happen after that?

**Ms SNAPE:** Could you tell us? LALC has been one of the opportunity hubs that is under review, like out of four they are reviewing two of them and we have been told that was because of the maturity around the implementation of it. And that is being done under a 10-year review under the OCHRE program. The University of New South Wales is doing that social policy under the Social Policy Research Centre UNSW review.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** You would be hoping for a rollover?

**Ms SNAPE:** We are hoping that it will go for another 10 years because, you know, to roll over because I think the impact with these programs is going to be for the young people. It is a bit hard, whilst we have helped and we had impact on some teenagers, it is fairly hard to change the teenager's view, if you have one you know how difficult it is to change a view. So that is what we are hoping. I think Aboriginal communities see programs that come and go and that sort of stuff, and things that work, and then the funding gets pulled. These came about through that ministerial task force and consultation with Aboriginal communities, so it is something that Aboriginal communities want. I think it should have the time to run its course to see a whole generation from those year 5s run through to the one year post-school to see what impact it does have.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** In relation to that, the Committee has travelled around and has heard from a number of different people, Aboriginal land councils and other organisations, most of whom have a heart to become self-funded.

**Ms SNAPE:** Yes.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** What is the Local Aboriginal Land Council and other organisations doing to become self-sustaining, which introduces my next line of questioning about opportunities, gaps or red tape? Will you start from the top as you have been through that little journey?

**Ms SNAPE:** We would like to be self-funded. When I started there was myself and an administration assistant and now it is seven staff, and another part-time officer. That is funding. We do a little bit of bookwork for some other players. We have, with our housing, 15 houses. We have passed accreditation through the Aboriginal Housing Office—

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** Will you come back to housing?

**Ms SNAPE:** Sorry, I have gone in another direction.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** No, I was going to ask about that but the feedback took my attention from what you were saying as I listened to the sound. Will you return to housing?

**Ms SNAPE:** Housing—Tamworth LALC is accredited, which under the Aboriginal Housing Office, you had to sort of show good governance structures and what have you to keep your own housing. So we have managed to do that and the AHO put some of our junior Aboriginal staff through some capacity building, and we would like to be able to take on more housing stock that the AHO sort of want to put into Aboriginal communities rather than non-Aboriginal or some of their stock that they have with the Department of Housing. So that is our ideal.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** How many houses do you have?

**Ms SNAPE:** We have only 15 now so it is not sustainable, but there is a lot of housing stock in Tamworth.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** What is the capacity if you look at the best case scenario? What number could you get to?

**Ms SNAPE:** With our capacity building?

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** Yes, the capacity with what stock is available.

**Ms SNAPE:** I am not sure exactly what stock is available in Tamworth—how much the AHO has in Tamworth—but I know there is considerable stock. I know the Department of Housing manages some of their stock, plus they got some stock managed by Homes North and others. So I do not know, but I do believe that the LALC would have the capacity, and that is what we are aiming for. We have a five-year plan to be able to take over that sort of stock now. We will be in consultation with the AHO on that.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** Is that housing and wraparound services?

**Ms SNAPE:** That is just housing. But we do wraparound services.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** Can you advise the Committee what sorts of things you do?

**Ms SNAPE:** With wraparound services?

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** Yes, with housing.

**Ms SNAPE:** We have tenants meetings and sometimes they are not all that well attended at times. But we do housing inspections and I attend those, or now the junior staff are sort of starting to attend those. If we see an issue we can, sort of, whether it be headspace or Tamworth Family Support and those sorts of things, make the tenants aware of those services, so that is one. The Tamworth LALC is also under NSWALC economic development policy. We were one of the land councils in this region that got economic development dollars, and because we lease a 1,600-acre property, "Trelawney", from the ILC. At present there is a farm management plan being done. To date that has always been about social programs and what have you that the board—we have only had it for a little while in partnership with somebody else, with Jobs Australia, but we are getting that lease now transferred to Tamworth LALC's name.

Whilst we will still run social programs there and there will be training there we have realised that the property has to be self-sufficient and maintain the wage of—there is a farm manager out there, an Aboriginal person, and there is a family that lives out there, but it is not sustainable. It has not been able to pay a farm manager's wage and that sort of stuff. So we have NSWALC has actually paid for a farm management plan to be developed. We are just looking at how we can get funding. The LALC has put in to buy some sheep. We have got a good partnership with a businessman in town. We have stock on agistment to sort of just pay the overheads. So it is just paying its overheads so that is where we are in the process of that as well. With that there will still be a lot of social activities around at that place, and training for Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people by some employment agencies. We have been approached by a lot of other people that want to run programs out there.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** Are you aware of any land claims that could be holding up other opportunities?

**Ms SNAPE:** Here in Tamworth?

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** Yes.

**Ms SNAPE:** Probably not here in Tamworth, but the Crown lands review I know that Tamworth Regional Council is one of the pilot sites for that. Whilst I am not across it and know a great deal about it, we have had a few sessions with NSWALC people who have been assisting us and we are going to have further meetings with them because we would like to be involved in that. We could probably have some advantage with being able to do some—give some of the Crown land that is sort of close to town to sort of do some economic development, or to even, you know, we have been approached by the Aboriginal Medical Service to see if we have any suitable land to build their medical service on, and that sort of stuff, but we do not have any close to town. We know there is Crown land that is close to town that would be suitable so I do not know whether that is an option in there, but we would like the Aboriginal land claims sped up, of course, like every other land council in NSW.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** The Committee wants to find economic development opportunities. Do you want to put on the record any other opportunities in Tamworth that the Committee is not looking at?

**CHAIR:** Just think about that. I know the Hon. Rick Colless wants to ask some questions.

**Ms SNAPE:** Yes, I might have to take that on notice. There would be something, but I cannot say off the top of my head.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I refer to your earlier comments about mentoring young people. Does the Clontarf Foundation operate in Tamworth schools?

**Ms SNAPE:** It does.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** For how long has that been going in Tamworth?

**Ms SNAPE:** I am not sure how long that has been going here, but we do a little bit of work with the Clontarf Foundation as well in, obviously, high school. So our staff do a little bit there. One of the things that we have also been looking at, and we hear from community all the time, there is always so much for boys but nothing for girls. We hear that a lot. When we were in Sydney with Nestlé it put us in touch with Role Models and Leaders Australia, people who run the Girls Academy. There are 12 of them in Australia, only one in New South Wales, which is at Coonamble, which is a Connected Community School.

We hear it from community all the time: They want something for girls. So Role Models and Leaders Australia has been over here because it is a very similar program for girls as what Clontarf is. They actually started the Clontarf school in Perth. We have had all the schools at the table. They are interested in getting something for girls. We know that the Feds—Nigel Scullion—have given Role Models and Leaders Australia an undertaking that it is in budget to expand that program. So there is a real need for those types of things, and the staff that they have would be like a big sister and a mother-type role and we can see that it would work really well.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Have you seen any tangible benefits of the Clontarf program as yet? Have you seen different attitudes amongst some of the young people and the sorts of things that the Clontarf people have tried to teach them, which are self-respect and self-discipline, to give them a focus in life to improve their lot in life? Have you seen any of those types of tangible things appearing in the younger generation so far?

**Ms SNAPE:** Yes, with Clontarf. Me personally, no I have not actually. I have not got a story to tell on that, but I know that program runs very well. We do a lot in that school, and our staff work with the Clontarf Foundation. We have been up there and the boys are fantastic and they have a whole amount of respect, I think. And even our Chair in his role with the LALC does a fair bit with those and has been on trips with them and it works. It does work just like the opportunity hub whilst it focuses on Aboriginal students. We also at times with the opportunity hub work with non-Aboriginal students. Obviously we do not count them as far as our reporting to the department and what have you, but we find that that balance works well as well. So there is not that divide, because sometimes there can be that divide, and Aboriginal people want to do that sort of stuff, or sort of feel inclusive of that type of thing so we find that model works pretty well.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** This morning at Guyra the Committee went to the Watlridge Indigenous Protected Area that is run by the Banbai people. They have a program there that brings in young people, both indigenous and non-indigenous, to look at their Aboriginal artworks and that type of thing. Apparently that is providing a great forum, if you like, for different people to come together with a good understanding of each other. If that is started at a young age it will obviously flow through in their late life.

**Ms SNAPE:** It does. One of the things with the Opportunity Hub that was identified by the community and we put in our tender submission and one of the things that we do a lot of at school is cultural activities with the students. It is a really great engagement tool. Like when the Nestle staff come up here our staff give them cultural awareness of what to expect of the local community. It is very localised to what the children are going to say, some of the language that they use and those types of things. That works really well. But the engagement at school is just fantastic. We just ran a weaving workshop for some of the schools that we got some funding for. They also will get a certificate II for grass identification with that. It was just amazing to watch the girls weaving. It was such a good engagement tool.

One of the good stories with the Opportunity Hub is in partnership with Hillview School they worked with their emotionally disturbed class. These kids do not get up and participate or get a certificate or anything. Our staff along with Aboriginal staff over at Hillview School taught them Aboriginal dance over that term. They actually got up at their assembly with the Aboriginal men and performed the dance and got certificates and all

that sort of stuff. It is the first time they have ever done that. That was through engagement with the cultural activities. Our staff take them on cultural tours out to Boundary Rock. They have taken them up to Armidale where one of our staff members is actually from to show them the difference between the different nations and the different cultures and what have you. It is a fantastic engagement tool and it is something that kids are hungry to find out.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** It has been mentioned that the Committee has visited a number of communities and heard from different land councils. There have been varying degrees of engagement with land councils and Aboriginal communities. I am interested if you have any comments on why there are such varied levels of engagement. You may not have a lot of dealings outside of Tamworth, but I am interested in whether you have any views on that. Secondly, do you have any suggestions for this Committee to look at further ways of supporting land councils to achieve greater engagement with the Aboriginal community?

**Ms SNAPE:** That was one of the questions that came up at the Aboriginal interagencies this morning: how do agencies engage Aboriginal communities? Our Chair chaired that meeting this morning. Sometimes we can find that difficult as well, our people not turning up to meetings or doing that sort of stuff. But it is about making people feel welcome and trusted and knowing that their voices are going to be heard rather than saying, "Here's a great idea and this is what we're going to give you." It is about consultation, it is about a little bit of ownership. But I do not know about outside of Tamworth.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. That has been very helpful. We are really grateful for you giving us your time today.

**Ms SNAPE:** Thank you.

**(The witness withdrew)**