CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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At Sydney on Tuesday 29 April 2008

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The Committee met at 8.00 a.m.

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PRESENT

The Hon. I. W. West (Chair)

The Hon. G. J. Donnelly
The Hon. M. A. Ficarra
Dr J. Kaye
The Hon. T. J. Khan
The Hon. M. S. Veitch

CHAIR: On behalf of the Committee I acknowledge that we are conducting our business today on the traditional country of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and we pay our respects to elders, past and present, and thank them for their custodianship of the land. As I have noted on previous occasions, the inquiry will examine policies and programs aimed at addressing the lifetime expectancy gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, Federal Government intervention in the Northern Territory, opportunities for strengthening cultural resilience within indigenous communities, and the outcomes of the COAG trial in Murdi Paaki, among other issues.

Today the Committee will be hearing from wide range of witnesses from government and non-government organisations and also from the private sector. We will be following up today's hearing with another public hearing in Parliament House tomorrow morning and then a public hearing at Redfern Community Centre in the afternoon. Last month the Committee travelled to regional New South Wales to consult with communities about ways to address indigenous disadvantage. Tomorrow's hearing at Redfern will be the last hearing held before the Committee tables its interim report on 30 June.

In accordance with Legislative Council guidelines for the broadcasting of proceedings, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed and recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, members of the media must take responsibility for what they publish or what interpretation they place on anything that is said before the Committee.

ROBYN KRUK, Director General, Department of Premier and Cabinet, and

VICKI D'ADAM, Assistant Director General, Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I thank Robyn Kruk and Vicki D'Adam for being with us this morning. Would you like to make some opening comments?

Ms KRUK: Thank you for the opportunity, but I do not. I am conscious of your time and commitments during the course of the day. If there are questions that I am unable to answer within the allotted time I am happy to take them on notice.

CHAIR: Does the New South Wales Government break down broader State Plan goals such as keeping people safe to identify their application to indigenous people? Will the data be disaggregated to determine levels of improvements within indigenous communities? Will the outcomes for indigenous people be determined separately in relation to the broader goals?

Ms KRUK: For the benefit of Committee members, the State Plan has a range of high-level indicators. The Strengthening Aboriginal Community is one of the 14 high-level goals under the plan. Under this goal, which is entitled "Priority F1" the focus is on government effort making measurable improvements in the following areas: safe families, quite clearly, looking at ensuring that Aboriginal families are supported to live free from violence and harm; education, to increase the readiness of Aboriginal children to learn prior to school entry; environmental health, to ensure that all Aboriginal communities have equitable access to environmental health systems; and, finally, economic development, to increase Aboriginal employment.

The priority delivery plan for F1 also incorporates a strategy Building Community Resilience, which is aimed at securing long-term sustainable change in outcomes for Aboriginal people. The strategy underpins the delivery of Priority F1 and all other State Plan priorities of relevance to Aboriginal people. To pick up the second part of your question, State Plan performance data is disaggregated into a number of levels and it reports publicly for Aboriginal people under the following priority areas: under Priority F5, which focuses on reduced hospital admissions, and Priority S4, which focuses on increasing levels of attainment for all students.

It would not be a surprise that in most other areas of State Plan operations a number of indicators are of significant relevance to Aboriginal communities. I will touch on those—there are probably 13 that are of the highest priority—which include: reduced rates of crime, particularly violent crime; reduced reoffending; improved outcomes in mental health; reduced levels of antisocial behaviour; the principle of prevention and early intervention in government service delivery in New South Wales; increased participation and integration in community activities; increased proportion of children learning skills for life at school entry; improved health for reduced obesity, smoking, illicit drug use and risk drinking; reduced rates of child abuse and neglect; and increasing levels of attainment for all students.

The final three are better environmental outcomes for native vegetation, biodiversity, lands, rivers and coastal river waterways; more students completing year 12

or recognised vocational training; and, finally, more people using parks, sporting and recreational facilities and participating in the arts and cultural activities. The application of these priority areas to Aboriginal people has been driven by relevant lead and partner agencies and monitored by the Two Ways Together Coordinating Committee [TWTCC]. I think your Committee would be familiar with the operation of that group. This is the Government's principal coordinating body for Aboriginal affairs.

Comprehensive measurement of the outcomes for Aboriginal people occurs through the Two Ways Together reporting indicators. The Government has made a commitment to release that report every two years. Committee members have probably seen that report. I think the most recent version of the report was released only in April. My notes state that it was released on 22 April. That gives Committee members an indication of the disaggregation under all those measures for Aboriginal communities in each of those areas.

CHAIR: Did you say that the chief coordinating group was the TWTCC?

Ms KRUK: No, I am sorry. The Two Ways Together Coordinating Committee is the principal group on that sort of basis. I am sorry if I am telling you something that you have heard before. The State Plan obviously is the overarching planning document. Going back to my former role in health I recall that the State Plan, in the activities it seeks to pursue and its performance indicators, drew quite extensively on the measures that were included in the State health plan. In relation to indigenous matters the Two Ways Together plan is the plan that contains detailed indicators and measures that the Government intends to pursue.

CHAIR: I was appreciative of that. What I was missing was the CEC, the overarching committee that I thought you chaired.

Ms KRUK: No. The CEC, if you have seen that your in notes somewhere, is the Chief Executive Committee In essence, the Chief Executive Committee is a body that I chair that brings together major employment agencies within the Government: health, the transport agencies, the natural resource agencies, the environment agencies, and the Department of Community Services. The head of Aboriginal Affairs is a member of that committee. While her agency obviously is a small employer in relative terms, the issue was given the significance of indigenous-related matters to the Government as a whole. She is a member of that committee. That committee is one of a means by which we track progress within government on some of those performance measures. Those agencies would have been part of the government effort in pulling together the Two Ways Together document. Clearly, Committee members were aware of the fact that there was considerable input from Aboriginal communities and stakeholders on a broader base, but government agencies were certainly a lead partner in that regard.

CHAIR: My understanding is that the CEC monitored the chief executive officers, their accountability, and their accountability requirements under the new plan.

Ms KRUK: Yes.

CHAIR: It is also the key monitor and adviser to government on the State Plan Priority F1 and the implementation of it through Two Ways Together.

Ms KRUK: Yes. I am sorry if I have caused confusion. The Two Ways Coordinating Committee is the principal coordinating body for Aboriginal Affairs related issues. Obviously a number of issues reside in the Two Ways Together document. The Chief Executive Committee has the remit to look at the progress of all State Plan priorities. They obviously include issues related to transport, infrastructure, broader economic priorities and the whole gamut of issues that are picked up as the State Plan. The Two Ways Together Coordinating Committee is a sub-plan, as is the State health plan and the metropolitan plan in the planning area. You have a range of planning documents that cascade down. In essence, the State Plan is the overarching planning document.

CHAIR: I understand that the CEC, as the leadership group for the Government, was to drive the State Plan F1 and Two Ways Together and to report to the Premier especially on the chief executive officers accountability and incentive payment scheme.

Ms KRUK: Yes. Your understanding is correct. The CEC has the responsibility to monitor progress on all State Plan priorities. F1 is obviously a significant one. As I said, the Director General of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, who is a member of that group, is charged with the responsibility of advising where there are significant concerns in relation to any of the measures—and clearly there are if you look at where New South Wales is tracking—and also for ensuring that agencies report their data. Chief executive officers have an obligation to report progress on the performance measures within their contracts. So that is their relationship with their Minister and, in this instance, their reporting relationship to the Premier.

CHAIR: You chair that committee?

Ms KRUK: I chair that committee.

CHAIR: As chair of that committee you would be seen as the key driver of the whole plan?

Ms KRUK: Yes. I would be responsible for driving the plan and monitoring progress.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: I refer to the State Plan, to Priority F1 and to the environmental health of Aboriginal communities. Yesterday everyone was concerned when they read in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that 75 indigenous communities in rural and regional New South Wales did not have adequate sanitation or a water supply. There is a 218 per cent increase in hospitalisation rates for gastroenteritis. There are increased respiratory infections and eye and skin infections, which are all related to a lack of basic sanitation and a water supply. What is happening to try to get this going? The Minister for Water said in the *Sydney Morning Herald* "Sorry, but I have allocated all my money for the next four years under the Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage Program. I cannot address this issue." Health officials have said, "It is not our problem to provide infrastructure." People are now saying, "What is the use in saying sorry if we cannot provide water and sanitation?" What is going to happen?

Ms KRUK: If I can do my best to answer that. I saw the article as well without necessarily knowing the documents it referred to. A couple of issues within the past couple of years, New South Wales Health took a concerted effort to start water quality testing right across the State, and that included also water testing in some of the outlying Aboriginal communities. That gave a sense in relation to the urgency and the problems in some of those communities. While that may have been the case in some of the country towns controlled by local government, those testing regimes were not previously in place in the Aboriginal communities. So, that gave us a good sense of where the difficulties were.

Without knowing the veracity of the numbers, 218 per cent, there is also no benefit in quibbling because the Two Ways Together report—which you would have no doubt scrutinised—gives a clear breakdown of the fact that these statistics in relation to an increase in gastrointestinal presentations for children are high. Whether it is a twofold or a threefold increase, it should not give anyone any comfort. The interesting issue is if you make a comparison between the statistical rate for Aboriginal children and non-Aboriginal children, both are high and there is quite a small disparity in that area—but again it is a cold form of comfort.

The stuff I saw referred to in the paper was somewhat unfortunate, without knowing its genesis. What I can say to you is we have had a clear direction from both the Premier and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs that this is the major priority: I want you to look at what funding sources are available within government. Are there areas that are a lower priority than this and can be utilised, and if not we will deal with it. Obviously I cannot pre-empt any budget announcements in this regard, but I think what was referred to in the paper was probably part of that process. I have been on the public record a number of times and said that in many instances we are accused of spending a lot of time reporting on the problem. We now have a database that clearly shows that those issues from the health perspective are of the highest concern—gastrointestinal, eye disorders, cardiovascular issues. We could pick the diagnostic response areas that were the most significant and where there is the biggest disparity, and that is where the health effort is now being focused.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Without adequate sewerage and water we are stuffed from the beginning—skin infections, eye infections, all of those basic elements. Where local councils have the duty to provide these services and perhaps are dragging the chain or perhaps do not have the resources, how can you get that ball rolling? You are right. You have to measure what the problem is before you start, otherwise you are not doing it scientifically. You have done that; you have done the evaluation. Where you find it is local government agencies, how are you going to empower them, enforce them or put a time frame on to ensure that this stuff gets done?

Ms KRUK: It is a real issue. I stress, in some instances communities are not under the ambit of local government. They are communities on Aboriginal and, so you have different tenure arrangements. You probably have also a situation where a productive relationship needs to be entered into with the Aboriginal land council. I have seen that done in a number of communities. So, that should be the starting point in a whole range of discussions. From my understanding—and I am a bit beyond my remit here—and my knowledge of the area it comes from working together with the land councils, with local government and with the State Government. The first really

important step was to get a sense of the community and where were the biggest problems in relation to water quality levels. That has occurred.

The second thing, and there is a very solid database on this, and no doubt you would have been briefed by the New South Wales Health on a program called Houses for Health—I am sorry, my memory is failing me in this regard. What I can remember most clearly, because I started my career working on child protection issues, is that often quite small investments on taps and improvements in relation to water quality within the house yielded the most significant health gains. So, in some instances it is not necessary to have a total overhaul of a sewerage facility—mind you, that might be a desirable end game—but there are a range of things you can do that produce demonstrable increases in health and wellbeing and also reduce the risk of harm to children. Probably the strategies of all of the agencies that have appeared before you, whether they be Health or Education, are very solidly focused on the prenatal and the nought to five cohort, and also some of the chronic disorders within the elderly community.

So, there is not a simple answer. I wish I could tell you there was. It comes basically from an agreed arrangement between land councils, local government and ourselves. It has to be based on data. There have been sufficient interventions both within Australia and overseas that have demonstrated that an emergency response where you send resources in overnight in a militaristic manner does not lead to a sustainable improvement. The areas where I have seen the most demonstrable and sustainable change is where training initiatives have also been offered to members in the community. It is cold comfort if you live in Brewarrina and you have had your facilities fixed but the closest electrician is 300 kilometres away and they are not inclined to come out on a Friday. You have to train up the young kids in those communities to be able to sustain it. We have some good programs in that regard but looking at the statistics again that is cold comfort. The issue is to go in with a very focused approach in those communities.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Thank you. It is good to hear about training and education, because if you empower and train young people in your own communities how to maintain these facilities and also deliver the message to them in their own community about how important it is to wash hands and do the basic things we take for granted—it has to be ongoing, not just an acute reaction. It has to be over a long sustained period of time.

Ms KRUK: I see you are speaking with Murdi Paaki, the COAG trial, next. What is significant, and I hark back to my time at Health, a number of the models where a quite different form of government service was being offered with a strong emphasis on indigenous providers, indigenous people who were trained from their communities subsequently being providers of services within that community, was starting to show results. It is only in its early days because it requires pathway courses to be developed to get the young kids in Bourke to learn within their own environment, train within their own environment and subsequently to work in that environment. They are the initiatives where I have seen the most significant success.

The fact that the State Plan and the Two Ways Together plan are 10-year plans is probably a realistic time horizon. I have a number of friends who have worked with the Inuit population in Canada, and they have struck similar problems. Nothing beats

going back to working with the community and having a strong evidentiary base of what works and to be prepared to have some failures in some of the initiatives you offer. Regretfully some interventions may work in one community; they cannot be translated without change to another community.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Let us return to the State Plan. I think you indicated there are number of objectives that you set out, and you referred to families, education and the like. They are headline measures that are used to test performance against those objectives, are they not?

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: For instance, I think you referred to one earlier in terms of, say, families. The headline measure to be used as a determiner of whether you are succeeding is victimisation rates for domestic violence, is that right?

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Is that one of the published figures?

Ms KRUK: Yes, from memory, and I might get Vicki to look at the document. I think the Two Ways Together document breaks down a number of measures that are relevant to domestic violence. The statistics are broken down into Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. It also looks at overcrowding. There is obviously a correlation—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Well—

Ms KRUK: No, I am saying they are related measures. I am sure you understand your statistics are as good as people's preparedness to report themselves also to be indigenous. I struck that in Health, trying to push indigenous dental programs. We knew penetration—no pun intended—was a lot higher than our statistics would show, but yes, our data is broken down on that basis. Vicki, do you have a page?

Ms D'ADAM: It is on the second page, the facts sheet under the report that was released on 22 April. It says under law and order, "Indigenous women and men are more likely to be victims of violent crime. Indigenous women 44 times more likely to be hospitalised for assault and indigenous men 10 times more likely than non-indigenous women."

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am talking about the State Plan.

Ms KRUK: The point I was making earlier is that they link in together. The State Plan picked a certain number of dashboard indicators.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: With respect, Ms Kruk, I am asking questions with regard to the State Plan, so let us—

Ms KRUK: I am putting it in context.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Let us talk about some other performance indicators—performance indicators with regard to environmental health. They are F1C, are they not?

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Those performance indicators relate to hospital admission rates per 100,000 of population, and those are in specific areas of hospital admission rates, are they not?

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: One of those, for instance, is skin infection?

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Another is acute respiratory infection?

Ms KRUK: And gastroenteritis. There are about five measures that are broken down on that basis.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: They are headline measures for each of those specific areas?

Ms KRUK: Avoidable admissions, from memory, as well.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Let us deal with the three—acute respiratory infections, gastroenteritis and skin infections.

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Those are reported quarterly, are they not?

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: As part of the State Plan requirements that they are reported?

Ms KRUK: I do not have the State Plan with me, but from memory, yes. There is also a commitment to report annually as well.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: So, when you said earlier that you were not alive to the figures, I take it they are quarterly figures that float across your desk in terms of F1C for each of those headline measures, are they not?

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: And one of those that was reported recently related to gastroenteritis and showed a 218 per cent increase, did it not?

Ms KRUK: What I was saying was I could not say whether the 218 per cent was correct. I am also familiar with the statistics that are in the Two Ways Together report that was released in April, which would be the most recent set of statistics in the public arena. I also made the point that to quibble between whether it was a twofold or threefold per cent increase was not productive. What is your point here? Is your point that I do not remember the exact statistic? Yes, I am saying I do not remember the exact statistic, but either way I take no comfort from the fact that whether it is 200 or 218, it is a statistic that no-one can be proud of. If you are criticising my memory, I stand corrected.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am not criticising your memory, Ms Kruk.

Ms KRUK: Fine, thank you. I was also referring to the fact that the Two Ways Together report was the most recent report released. I am also conscious of the fact that the Health Department would on a monthly basis look at that data as well.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Ms Kruk, let our relationship be friendly, for a start—

Ms KRUK: I am not understanding your point here. You are criticising the fact I do not remember whether it was 218.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: No, that was not my point.

Ms KRUK: Okay, I stand corrected.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: If you listen to my questions and respond to the questions we will move quicker.

Ms KRUK: I am pleased to do so.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I take it therefore the position is on a quarterly basis one of the things that comes across your desk are admission rates for skin infections, gastroenteritis and chest infections?

Ms KRUK: In addition to a whole range of other measures—avoidable admissions. What we did—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Ms Kruk—

Ms KRUK: Please listen to me in terms of context. Yes, it is the case that a range of other measures in relation to diagnostic response groups are judged to be of the highest significance to the indigenous community. Those statistics also come across my desk.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Is it not the position that with regard to the State Plan, under environmental health, the admission rates that are referred to are acute respiratory infections, gastroenteritis and skin infections?

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: So, we are talking about F1C, those are the admission rates, so please let us just agree that I am dealing with one discrete—

Ms KRUK: Accepted.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Those are admission rates that you receive and they come across your desk?

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: They are headline measures under the State Plan?

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: They are reported publicly?

Ms KRUK: They are reported publicly. But I thought I had indicated that. I am sorry we were at cross-purposes

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I do not think you had.

Ms KRUK: They are reported publicly. Also, I think from memory, about 33 of the particular performance indicators are externally scrutinised before being reported on. Particularly the health data has a high level of scrutiny.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: If we go to the State Plan update, say, from March, do I take it we will find that for each of those measures the information is present?

Ms KRUK: From March I would have to check what was on the update. A detailed report on each of the State Plan indicators is given on an annual basis. The March one would have been an update. What I have not done and have not had the chance to do was to check that data against the Two Ways Together data. I am happy to do so.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Would you please do so?

Ms KRUK: Yes, happy to do so.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Let us move on.

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Do I take it that it was in fact as a result of the substantial increase in admissions for gastroenteritis that you were tasked with the job of bringing agencies together to look at water and sewerage schemes?

Ms KRUK: No. We were given its priority in the State Plan. There is a group of CEOs, particularly in the human service and the justice area, that is actually working on the whole range of performance measures in the State Plan relating to indigenous

health. I am a member of that group. Obviously, the statistics of Aboriginal health as a whole are of concern. What was identified by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and this was supported by health data, was the significance of, what is it, the water quality-related measures, and they were asked to actually come up with what they believe to be the interventions that would yield the highest results. Those matters were actually presented to Cabinet. I was certainly involved in the discussions and assisted DAA in pulling together those measures.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Have you met with all CEOs whose agencies have been asked to contribute funding seeking their agreement to a proposed funding plan?

Ms KRUK: This is the normal part of, what is it, building up of budget for agencies and I would argue it is also a responsible financial initiative for agencies to actually have a look at, "You now have data, you've been told that this is an incredibly significant issue and will yield good results, are there programs actually that have a lower priority?" I mean, you would argue that that is a responsible fiscal measure. That was the process that was actually followed. We as agencies were told to examine all areas, including our own, and look at funding sources. I cannot take it much further without pre-empting a budget, what is it, announcement.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I will ask the question again.

Ms KRUK: I am not sure what your question is.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Have you met with all CEOs whose agencies have been asked to contribute funding seeking their agreement to a proposed funding plan?

Ms KRUK: Sorry, tell me the first bit, I missed it.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Have you met with all CEOs—

Ms KRUK: Have I met with them? I meet with those agencies on a daily basis, virtually. Yes. So I am aware of the discussions. I am also aware of the discussions that New South Wales Health has already or committed a considerable amount of its resources in relation to Aboriginal health issues. Without knowing the exact piece of correspondence that the article in yesterday's paper referred to, presumably Health also indicated that. Health has internally directed resources to meet a whole range of health priority needs in the indigenous community. I think the article made reference to the fact that they were somewhat uncomfortable actually supporting maintenance of infrastructure, which is not a surprising comment. But I think if the rest of the letter came to light of day they would indicate the areas where Health actually was providing considerable support.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I think it was a bit different from that. Is it not that the Director General of the Department of Health has written expressing the view that it is neither possible nor appropriate to re-prioritise health funds to support water and sewerage infrastructure?

Ms KRUK: But have you—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: That is what the director general—

Ms KRUK: But what I am actually saying is I would be surprised that the rest of the letter did not actually indicate where support was being given to this particular initiative because I know for a fact the amount of work that Health has done in relation to F1 and is intending to do. The fact that they indicate that they do not consider it to be their core business to actually construct and maintain, it is not a surprising comment. But their core business actually does extend into a lot of other related areas. See—I am sorry, I am not being difficult—without knowing the letter that was referred to, I am not surprised a letter such as that exists. The issue is I come back to my point both the Premier and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs made it quite clear to agencies that these were priorities and we needed to look at the use of our existing resources in the first instance and, presumably, that is what those letters indicate.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Regarding the general issue of environmental health, I am right in saying this is the twentieth anniversary of the HREOC report into Toomelah, is it not? That is a 1988 report?

Ms KRUK: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: What that HREOC report identified was that environmental health issues such as water and sewerage were a fundamental importance to uplifting Aboriginal communities out of their position of poverty and oppression, is that not right?

Ms KRUK: I think what it also demonstrates in that period of time is that there were probably a range of initiatives which were not sustainable initiatives. I am aware of the work that has undergone in Toomelah-Boggabilla over the last couple of years. The emphasis has been on getting sustainable initiatives in place. If you look at over that period of time, and it does track 20 years—it does track actually and catch up governments of many persuasions—there have been a range of initiatives that have not had sustainable or not achieved sustainable improvements. I am conscious of the fact also that commissioner Wood is intending to visit Toomelah-Boggabilla as well. With respect, I think that if there had been a simple answer for Toomelah-Boggabilla, there is not one person that you will strike that would not have grasped at that readily. The issue is a range of initiatives has gone into place, but we still have underreporting in Toomelah. We still have a range of health problems in Toomelah-Boggabilla, despite the interventions. There is no lack of effort or goodwill in terms of trying to achieve that.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: But the simple reality is that is it not 20 years later—

Ms KRUK: It is not a simple reality.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: —having identified water and sewerage as being of fundamental importance we are still scrabbling around in the government trying to find funding for water and sewerage schemes? Is that not right?

Ms KRUK: Simple reality, also a significant amount of funds have gone into programs of that type. Vicky, what is the amount of funding in the program?

Ms D'ADAM: As the director general referred to previously, there was a Housing for Health Program. There has also been the Aboriginal Community Development Program, which has seen significant funding. That is over $200 million I think for the ACDP program. So, as the Government submission says, there is a $240 million capital program. It has listed the communities that it has been implemented in. There is also the Housing for Health Program. So, environmental health has been considered by the Government and where it has been successfully implemented there has been substantial health improved outcomes for people in those areas. As I said, there has been a range of communities that have been serviced. There are some that are still unfortunately without. But in terms of your comment, over the last 10 years the Government has put effort in this area and in resources.

Ms KRUK: See, and significantly in the area of gastroenteritis, as I said, what is concerning is that you actually have probably the least disparity in that statistic in relation to the indigenous community and non-indigenous. It is actually some of your chronic health initiatives that are probably the more difficult in the longer term to tackle.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Could I just cut in, and I am aware that I am taking up time for questions by the Hon. Michael Veitch—

Ms KRUK: I am sorry, I am probably answering too long.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: If there is no disparity, then it is bad for everybody who lives in those communities. The water and sanitation has to be improved for indigenous and non-indigenous. It is not good enough to say there is not much of a disparity.

Ms KRUK: No, it is not, but if you look at it, you need to look at it in terms of what that number is on a population basis, and you need to look at the range of those measures together. What was significant, say, for instance, in Fiona Stanley's work in Western Australia, which has been trialled in other locations, was the very simple act of putting in a $20,000 swimming pool actually had a whole range of health outcomes, improvement in skin conditions, improvement in school attendance, but that was part of quite a coherent program based in a township. Can I also look at it on the macro level. I mean, you now have governments at all levels that have actually committed to reducing that disparity. No-one takes comfort in the fact that there is a smaller differential in gastroenteritis, but there is a range of other health issues that needs to be focused on at the same time.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Thus ends the lesson on interrogation of witnesses by the Hon. Trevor Khan this morning!

Ms KRUK: He did not call me the defendant, as I have been in some instances here.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: I think he went close. Page seven of the Two Ways Together report says that CEOs will report to their Ministers and to the Premier's Department on the success against the performance indicators in their contracts. Does this equate to a self-evaluation process?

Ms KRUK: No, quite simply. Clearly you have an obligation to report progress in relation to your particular KPIs under the State Plan and you report those within your performance contract. That is in addition to the public reporting that the Government has already made a commitment to under the State Plan. So that is very transparent. And there is also the commitment in terms of the two yearly report in relation to Two Ways Together. So you have a very high level of transparency. Most agencies actually have got data on their own websites. As I referred to earlier, and I am doing it off the top of my head here, approximately 33 of the measures are actually independently verified. I know in the health area that the bulk of the data was actually collected by the Institute of Health and Welfare. If you look at it in the police commissioner's remit, the bulk of the data is actually collected by Don Weatherburn's institute—so, independently scrutinised. You also have a situation where the State Plan gives a commitment that the data would be independently verified.

So, in this instance I think the Auditor-General is actually undertaking the verification of the data. So, you have a high level of transparency in that regard and very little wriggle room in terms of what is working and what is not working. The focus, and this picks up Mr Khan's comments to some extent and it underpins the Two Ways Together document as well, is that the commitment was made, let us pick on the health indicators that have the greatest chance of actually delivering both health outcomes and a broader range of outcomes within the community. That is why something such as avoidable admissions were also included in there. So, it is not self-evaluation; it is arguably evaluation with a very high level of scrutiny attached to it.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: How are the CEOs then held accountable to their targets, to their KPIs?

Ms KRUK: Well, arguably governments are held accountable to their targets as well. The issue is that by the identification of the lead CEO, say, for instance, if I look at within the health area, health is the lead CEO in a number of those indicators, but in no way, if I look at affordable admissions, is a health CEO on their own able to actually look at the full range of activities that are going to bring about an improved performance in that area because it has to do arguably with the quality of your primary health care machinery, has to do with the level of support that can be offered within an at-home environment. If you look at it in relation to indigenous communities, it may mean offering far greater dialysis services that can be provided in an at-home setting versus those that need to be provided in a hospital setting. But the clear aim is recognising that one agency needs to be the one that is actually responsible for coordinating those initiatives, and in good Westminster style the Minister that actually sits across that area has that responsibility as well.

The structure that the Premier has put in place is those Ministers and the CEOs report to a Cabinet subcommittee. The Cabinet subcommittee also significantly as two independent members on it who, frankly, do not cut as much slack in that regard either. One of them is Professor Brian Mccorn, who no doubt would be known to you—he has probably appeared before your inquiry in one context or another—and also Mr John Stuckey. So, both men are of considerable standing in their fields. So, in my 20-odd years of working in government it is probably the most transparent and accountable, what is it, performance regime. Now, what does that mean? Quite clearly, and probably from some of the discussion in the media in the last couple of days, if a

government has identified those measures as being the ones they judge their own performance by and judge the performance of their CEOs by, by definition resource allocation is given priorities in those areas.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: What happens if the target is not met? What is the process for the CEO in particular?

Ms KRUK: If we look at the worst situation—and we know how easy it is to terminate contracts; I am probably witness to that——the reality is that there is a 10-year time frame. This is not about being a punitive exercise. This is actually about ensuring that there is a coordination of effort to get some real outcomes. I come very simply from the fact that none of us working these jobs unless you have actually got a real belief and a real desire to get some change occurring. In most of the instances milestones have actually been developed, so you get a clear indication if a target is not going to be met. Clearly the indigenous areas would be identified as being some of the most difficult targets to meet. That is why it is no coincidence the amount of discussion and amount of time that is spent on those within government. That was also my rationale for including the Director General of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs on the top committee of CEOs, so that there is no meeting that indigenous issues are not actually discussed and people do not track in terms of what they can do to contribute to it.

If I look at what difference that has made—say, for instance, under the regime of Andrew Scipione and previously Ken Moroney, they were active in setting in place the joint investigative response team to actually having dedicated both male and female officers to deal with domestic violence situations. You have seen quite significant changes to the profile and the operation of the Police Force in response to that. That is very clearly linked to the fact that those agencies are actually held accountable for the huge disparity in terms of domestic violence in Aboriginal communities. I am sure you have had Department of Community Services [DOCS] staff appear before you as well. You have seen quite different service models but I do not think you would have seen anyone sit in my spot here and actually express any comfort at the difficulty of the task. I have not seen any government express comfort at the ease of the task.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: One of the continuing themes that we have struck both during the hearing and at our site visits has been an issue around pilot projects and what appear the continual process of running a 12 month, two-year or three-year pilot program and just as it is getting going it stops, as opposed to a long-term, continuous funding process. Do you have any comments on that and how it may well impact upon the key performance indicators of the CEOs within their contracts?

Ms KRUK: It has clearly impacted. A pilot program by definition is a good thing. I have worked with Aboriginal communities both in western New South Wales and also down on the South Coast. If you put in place a "solution" or a program that works in the rivertones and you attempt to translate that without modification down on the South Coast, you are wasting your money. The committee has no acceptance of it, they will not engage with it. They think it is basically white fella business and they will be very quick in telling you what to do with it.

A pilot program gives us some ability to look at where you get the most significant returns on investment and the most significant engagement in relation to programs. I have seen enough of those programs roll out into statewide initiatives if the data is strong enough. I had Aboriginal communities that lived in absolute fear that we would roll out a Murri Ma model in other parts of the State despite the fact that the

Murri Ma model from my viewpoint and the evaluations that we undertook were actually beginning to yield real successes. It was a quite different model.

There were some real frustrations—and I will be honest about it—where we had coordinated care trials where we had joint funding models between the Commonwealth and the State where one or other of the parties would walk away from it. I always felt there was an element of politics at play in that regard and I make this as a totally non-political statement: The fact that the Federal Government has exactly the same if not stronger targets by which it will judge its successes as we have at State level in relation to programs I think will actually deal with some of those concerns about pilots being stop and start when there has been a similar emphasis on needing an evidentiary base from the Commonwealth Minister and the Commonwealth officials at the meetings I have attended so far, so I do not think that will change, but that is arguably the service models that is being applied anyway. You need some indication of what is going to work.

For instance, if I look at otitis media, which is a program that I previously had responsibility for rolling out, that initially commenced as quite a small pilot. We got incredible success results. The commitment was subsequently elaborated in the "Two Ways Together" document to seek to get coverage of over 80 per cent, so the success results were there. Our biggest challenge, and you will not be surprised with this, is actually to get individuals who are able to offer that service. That, in turn, meant we had to work with TAFE to put in place quite a different training model for those staff members. Yes, the 10 years time frame is better. It actually gives some funding certainty. No program is likely to yield results in a short period and in most of the government agencies you are seeing a lot longer time horizons going in or you are seeing an evaluation point built in, for instance, in the first or second year, with time allowed for adjustment. That is sensible.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: One of the things we are struggling with is that when all the departments have been before us, they have not been able to articulate one pilot program that did not work; every program they have run has worked.

Ms KRUK: That is very humble of them.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: If they are so good, why are they not continuing? How come they stop?

Ms KRUK: It is the transferability; it is the scale. Literally by the nature of the populations you need something that can actually get some returns. Some of the pilot programs may work for a particular group but will not work on a larger population. With "Two Ways Together" and the State Plan, they have picked the indicators that will have the most significant returns and they are otitis media and early intervention in relation to learning models. You have to make some decisions as to where you actually invest. I, regrettably, have seen pilot programs that have not worked but I actually think that is a good thing if people have been prepared to trial different service models.

I am also aware of the fact that there is a range of views in the Aboriginal community about what constitutes success because there were different views in the different peak groups about the applicability of the Murri Ma model to other parts of the State. There is a range of different views about the AMS model and the provision of

health services by Aboriginal providers. There will always be that and at the end of the day you have to look at what the program can yield and arguably a one-year time frame or a two-year time frame is too short quite clearly. I am pleased to hear that you have heard a good number of initiatives.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: My question relates to question three on notice about coordination, which in part you have answered earlier this morning. With respect to specific achievements to date, are you able to nominate any specific successes?

Ms KRUK: Yes, but can I provide you those in more detail? The Government submission identified a number of the areas where we were starting to see results. That was in some of the literacy areas and the schools in partnership programs. Some of the health areas are starting to show results. I remember quite clearly in my own remit a joint program with DOCS infant maternal health for the first time for what was a reasonably small investment of $4 million, from memory—but please do not hold me to that because I am in the middle of the budget cycle so I have too many numbers—started to show an improvement in infant birth rate.

If I can give you a list of those, it will save you having to sort through the document. Again it is cold comfort but as an example, we used Aboriginal midwives. We are starting to see for the first time a reduction in smoking in young Aboriginal mothers—it was tied in with a range of other initiatives—in what had been a decline in statistics across Australia. The study is recognised as being one of the best in terms of yielding sustainable results. That was the issue. I can give you a list of those programs, if that is useful.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Yes, that would be. How does the Department of Premier and Cabinet measure outcomes and revise their State Plan goals? Can you explain how those goals are revised and refined?

Ms KRUK: There is a commitment to publicly revise the goals on a three-yearly basis and that is a consultative process. As you are aware, when the State Plan was initially developed there were a range of inputs from the peak groups, from memory, from consultations across the State but also meeting with peaks on what actually constituted the initial targets. In some instances the field was so underdone that there were not actually targets developed in the area that I have specific responsibility for in relation to the encouragement of prevention of early intervention programs.

It was quite clear that agencies were not necessarily collecting their data or programs on that sort of basis so there are a series of steps in relation to our delivery plan, which, in the first instance, look at what effort is being expended in relation to these programs and then to make an assessment in relation to what returns we are getting for that. Any government I have dealt with in the last 10 years is committed to actually intervening far earlier in a life cycle but the unknown question is those programs that yield the most significant results and the rate at which you can actually invest. That is the debate that is going on in health.

There is the three-yearly commitment to a public review. If you look at tracking on progress, that is done when we meet on a monthly basis. A CEO obviously has far more detailed agency data. For instance, if Commissioner Scipione sees a particular

spike coming up within some of his areas of responsibility, that is something that is sensibly raised at that meeting. Clearly we need to look at what is happening in this particular community. Is there are an emerging drug problem or something else happening in that community? What has been very productive is the relationship between police and health to look at the correlates with risk drinking. What is the violence and admissions to emergency departments? It is the ability to look at those initiatives at one point in time. It is that coordination that has been pivotal in relation to the development of a whole range of the community-based crime prevention initiatives where you have government agencies that can bring all of that data together and then at work at a community level and see what will make a difference. You will have seen the Auditor-General's report in the last couple of weeks putting some of that data into the public arena.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I have put this question to other witnesses about the dysfunctionality of the family unit, which is obviously not unique to the indigenous community but all society. Within the indigenous community we have received evidence from elders that the notion of the family unit, obviously defined differently to our Western culture, that the male role is that of a responsible, caring individual but often we see examples of young adolescent men in their 20s and 30s who have no understanding of that role in their culture of manhood and fatherhood. Are there programs around the State that seek to rediscover and expose young indigenous men to their traditional roles and responsibilities as males within the family?

Ms KRUK: The most impressive one I have seen recently is a facility out at Griffith. I am happy to provide the details. I think it is picked up in the Government submission. It is literally set on a big property and it is targeted at young boys between the age of 12 and 15 at first contact with the justice system. It is not that they are facing incarceration but at first contact with the system. It is a voluntary program from three to six months. They graduate at the end of the program. It combines both the traditional educational component and the educational stream but the emphasis is on building resilience and strengthening individual responsibility. It is probably one of the most impressive programs I have seen. I know the Attorney General and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs visited a couple of days after I did. It is a joint initiative between ourselves, the Federal Government and—I have to think of which community it is.

CHAIR: The Tirkandi Inaburra at Griffith?

Ms KRUK: That is it, Barkindji. If you have the time it is definitely worth seeing.

CHAIR: We are going there.

Ms KRUK: Excellent.

CHAIR: I am sorry—we are thinking of going there.

Ms KRUK: I know that you are busy, but if you have the time to do it, it is quite inspirational. The program is only in the early stage of development. I think they have the University of New South Wales along to start doing a longitudinal study. It gives you hope, can I say quite simply, but it is based on all those elements about strengthening. I remember Jimmy Little once saying to me words that I have never

forgotten—"What our people lack good male role models." I have been somewhat cynical about investing in a whole range of men's programs, but he probably was the first pivotal adviser for me in that regard. He said the loss of good male role models of those communities has taken a considerable toll. I think a number of the programs that look at strengthening that network, not just perpetrator based but actually strengthening the role models, are worthy of your consideration.

CHAIR: For programs such as Two Ways Together in the regions, I understand that regional engagement groups are still meeting and they are coordinated by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Ms KRUK: Yes.

CHAIR: The regional coordination management groups [RCMGs] are coordinated by yourselves, and a link to the project groups as opposed to what used to be the cluster groups. I assume they link into your TWTCC. Do you meet specifically to talk about that coordination in terms of the CEC, or is the CEC a general CEO meeting?

Ms KRUK: There are a couple of points. The regional engagement groups are certainly operational, to answer your question about whether they are still working. My notes basically tell me that they are in place in the North Coast and Hunter, Murdi Paaki, Illawarra, the south east, New England, the north west, the Central Coast, greater Western Sydney, and in the mid-western Riverina.

CHAIR: Has Murdi Paaki become the tenth region?

Ms KRUK: Murdi Paaki is listed as certainly being one of them. Ms D'Adam confirms that. Members would know that the regional coordination management group's coordinators are staff of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. They are literally responsible for the ordination of government services across a particular region of the State, so obviously they have as part of their remit achieving government business in a whole range of areas, of which indigenous health is one. I met with my regional coordinator managers yesterday when we were all in Sydney. Interestingly enough this is one of the issues that came up for discussion.

The CEOs group meets on a monthly basis. They rely on advice coming from the regional managers who are obviously part of the regional coordinating structure and address issues that are emerging in the area. We have a very solid database now about problems on a regional basis held by each agency. Most regions would have in place quite different approaches to dealing with, for instance, indigenous issues. The approaches to your urban population out at Mount Druitt and Bidwell would be quite different to what the regional coordination groups are dealing with, for instance, down at the South Coast and to what they are dealing with in, say, the river towns. There would be common elements, but on the whole they would be quite different approaches.

CHAIR: How are the Aboriginal representatives of the project group being appointed, selected or elected?

Ms KRUK: Through DAA, is it not?

Ms D'ADAM: In terms of representatives of the project group, the project group on my understanding replaced the cluster, as you said, so it is for the different areas. In terms of it looking at Aboriginal engagement through the regional engagement group, that varies. The communities themselves can nominate who will go on those groups but I think it again depends on issues that are being dealt with by those regional engagement groups at the time: it may be more appropriate if a person who is involved in the medical centre may go along.

Ms KRUK: If you look at it, quite simply the purpose of the regional engagement groups was to ensure that we had a structure in place so that there was proper contact and engagement with the indigenous communities. That was probably variable in various parts of the State. How that is actually manifested and what the make-up of the group will be depends very much on the issues that are top of the head and top of data in relation to the regions.

Ms D'ADAM: But if there is a community working party in place, the person from the community working party will be on the REG.

CHAIR: There is an extremely large amount of goodwill out there in the indigenous community for making this work. I speak for this Committee when I say that there is great enthusiasm for making the visions and the objectives of the State Plan and the Two Ways Together work. I can see in the local communities, such as the land councils or the CWPs, that what is coming back among that goodwill is the problem with connection and understanding the structure.

Ms KRUK: Yes.

Ms D'ADAM: Yes.

CHAIR: Can I say that I have real difficulty understanding the structure from the CEC down to the regional groups? I have studied it for a while and I am still having difficulty getting my head around exactly how they link in and connect. When we talk to the Dunghutti people and we talk to people from Mount Druitt and from Nowra, there is a clear indication of their real enthusiasm, but they are having difficulty understanding how they fit into the structure. I appreciate it is a long question, but it is more a comment.

Ms KRUK: No, it is a fair question too. If I can come back to you and explain the decision-making structures from a State perspective, I am happy to do so. What has muddied the water in some respects also is that for some time there was probably not a predictive or particularly helpful productive relationship between the State and the Commonwealth in this area. A range of initiatives that were put in place in the last couple of years in some communities have put in place another consultative structure. Understandably the communities were not all that impressed with the fact that they may have been working with one particular consultative structure and all of a sudden the game seemed to change and something else was put in place to take its place. I know what my response would be. I would know what the response of the communities was. In a number of areas, and this is just through the commitment of individuals, those initiatives were brought together.

We are now seeing situations where you have co-location of both Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Affairs lead staffing members and a commitment to work through one consultation structure. The thing is they were named different names. I could not work out the bureaucracy in this regard, either. What is significant I think also—and you are obviously going to ask questions in relation to the Murdi Paaki COAG trial—is that they were some of the problems that arose initially. It seemed to be another layer of bureaucracy over the top—you know, more talk, et cetera, et cetera. It was a commitment to try to use existing mechanisms.

All of them have as a common element the fact that there is no benefit in coming to a town with a plan. A plan like that does not work. The reality is that the plan has to be developed at community level. Whether you call it a community action plan or something else does not matter. That is the basis of most of the interventions, whether it is Toomelah, Brewarrina, Bourke or Walgett. That is where most of the initiatives are going. I have never been concerned about what the groups call themselves as long as their major purpose is to pull together that support mechanism or principles or that plan for the community, which is owned by the community.

CHAIR: I merely make the comment because you are the driver and passengers do not understand that the car is moving.

Ms KRUK: Your comment is very valid. It is the same feedback I get from communities.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Would it be possible to get a schematic representation of the layers of talk that you have referred to so that we can see how it flows? It is quite complex.

Ms KRUK: Yes, done. I will do my best.

CHAIR: There are a number of questions that we did not get to.

Ms KRUK: Are you happy for me to take them on notice?

CHAIR: We would like you to take them on notice. We will dig them out from the transcript or from wherever and send them off. We allow 21 days for a response, if that is possible.

Ms KRUK: That is fine.

CHAIR: We appreciate your being here.

Ms KRUK: I appreciate I have been difficult to get hold of and I appreciate that you have come in at 8 o'clock to do this. I apologise to the non-morning people!

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: You will notice that Hon. Trevor Khan is not a morning person. You can tell that!

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I was out walking at a quarter to six, thanks very much.

CHAIR: We are extremely mindful of the daunting task that your department has.

Ms KRUK: I am totally happy to come back again if you want further discussion. Your report is too significant in the directions that are being tracked, so I am happy to give whatever time is necessary.

(The witnesses withdrew)

JAMES McCORMACK, Manager, Dubbo Indigenous Coordination Centre, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, P. O. Box 1083, Dubbo, 2830,

SUSAN FINNIGAN, New South Wales State Manager, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Box 7788, Canberra Mail Centre, 2610,

TREVOR ALAN FLETCHER, Deputy Director General—Schools, Department of Education and Training, Level 2, 35 Bridge Street, Sydney, 2000, and

ANTHONY JOHN GREET, Group Manager—Indigenous Education Group, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 14 Mort Street, Canberra City, 2601, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Would any of you like to make some opening comments?

Mr FLETCHER: I joined the New South Wales department in late 2004 and I have worked in significant projects in South Australia and Victoria around education, but particularly indigenous education. Over all my time in education I have seen a lot of squandered opportunities, and a lot of money and investment, but things done without cohesion and without longevity that have just come to nothing. In fact, they have often worsened the situation because you have tremendously disappointed people and just created more cynicism and more problems.

For me the most significant thing that came out of the Murdi Paaki is the fact that it was done differently, by design—even differently from the other COAG trials across Australia. It seemed to me that some of the things that came out of that were the absolute importance of senior people in the organisation. The other lead agency at that stage was the Australian Government's Department of Education, Science and Training and also the Department of Education and Training in New South Wales. During the three years that I was involved with the program we spent a lot of time in parts of the Murdi Paaki region and got to know those people very well. So it was not just the steering committees; just as importantly, it was to get out on the ground and meet members of the community working parties and the broader community and to engage with them.

If I take a measure from the very first workshop I attended to the last one, there was enormous growth and confidence. It was not just what came out of the Urbis report saying, "Some things have been going okay; it looks a little bit different". It was that some trust and momentum had been built up and, more importantly, some capacity had been built that was not there before, from young people through the youth leaders program all the way through to elders in the community. We were seeing some tangible results. But it was the continuity, the high-level leadership that was involved, and that sense of a different engagement with communities—different to what I have seen in other parts of Australia.

Certainly I became very buoyed by that—and optimistic. That is not to say that in my view it was done perfectly. From time to time we were told, "Look, some agencies are not part of it. Where is this agency, where is that agency, be it Federal or State." At

times I did not think we looked closely enough at the third layer of government. At times I do not think there was sufficient engagement with local government. I am not here to say at all that we got it right and it just worked swimmingly, but it was very different and there were some tangible benefits. As I say, if you take that snapshot from late 2004 to the end of 2007, at the last workshop it was a totally different place.

Mr GREER: In December 2007 a five-year COAG trial in the Murdi Paaki region of far-western New South Wales came to a close. That trial saw two leading government agencies, the Australian Government's then Department of Education, Science and Training [DEST] and the New South Wales Government's Department of Education and Training [DET] work in partnership with 16 indigenous communities to explore innovative ways of doing business and delivering services based on community-identified priorities.

We knew when we started the Murdi Paaki trial that we would require a new and different approach. As lead agencies, DEST and DET took our cue for the trial from the indigenous communities of Murdi Paaki, whose consistent message to us was: Stop talking, start listening, and work with us to deliver. To do this, we needed to break down levels of distrust and cynicism between indigenous communities and layers of government. That was our first challenge: building trust. Our second challenge was to enhance capacity in the community so that communities could more effectively play the role that they wanted to play. Our third challenge was to find ways of working together as government agencies, Australian, State and local, to improve outcomes.

Although the life of the trial spans a turbulent time in indigenous affairs, with the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC], its results have been quite encouraging. There is emerging evidence of tangible improvement, particularly in education, and two independent reports provide further affirmation of the success of the trial. But perhaps most importantly, the indigenous peoples of Murdi Paaki have acknowledged the positive impact that the trial has made to their communities.

Ms FINNIGAN: Firstly I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today and pay my respects to elders past and present. As the State Manager of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in New South Wales, I have responsibility for not only delivery of the department's business across New South Wales and the ACT but also the responsibility for leading the Australian Government's response in terms of indigenous affairs across the State and Territory. The policy framework that we work within these days is the COAG working group on indigenous reform and their commitment to closing the gap on indigenous disadvantage.

That reform brings together the Australian Government and all State and Territory governments, and the working group's objective is to close the gap on indigenous disadvantage, focusing on closing the life expectancy gap within a generation, halving the gap in mortality rates for indigenous children under five within a decade, and halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements within a decade, in partnership between all levels of government and with indigenous communities. COAG has also agreed to a further three high-level targets to help close the gap. These are: halving the gap in employment outcomes between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians within a decade; all four-year-olds in remote communities

having access to early childhood education within five years; and at least halving the gap for indigenous students in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020. That is the framework that the whole-of-government participants are working towards.

In terms of the department and what its business looks like across the State, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs here in New South Wales and the ACT has just under 140 staff. Just under 17 per cent of those staff are indigenous employees. The State office is based here in Sydney and we have a strong regional presence. We have seven indigenous coordination centres spread across the State and I also have four regional offices, and I have staff located in all those places. You would be familiar that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs has staff co-located in four of our indigenous coordination centres across New South Wales.

The primary business of the State office is contract management with more than 5,000 service providers across the State and territory. That is for the delivery of both mainstream and targeted programs and services. Our whole-of-government responsibilities with indigenous affairs, that is very much working across all levels of government and engaging other Australian government departments to participate in the arrangements.

Mr McCORMACK: I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and pay respect to their elders, past and present. Ms Finnigan has covered quite a bit of the information which talks about the work that I as one of seven indigenous coordination managers do. Dubbo Indigenous Coordination Centre was set up in late 2005 as an additional indigenous coordination centre into the network. We worked closely with other trial partners in the latter stages of the COAG trial from 2005 onwards. From the Australian Government side, we now have the lead agency responsibility for the whole-of-government business across the Murdi Paaki region from January this year.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: I want to talk a bit about the shared responsibility agreements [SRAs] and perhaps gather your comments on what you think have been the successes of them. I would also like your comments about what you think were the ones that did not work.

Mr McCORMACK: I am certainly happy to talk a bit about some of the SRAs that I think have shown some real successes. One of the ones I think has been very successful—I can speak as an observer and a rather late-comer to the process—was the initiative to put air conditioning units on a regional basis. It was one of the original COAG trial shared responsibility agreements. It was a fairly big one. I think the effectiveness of it—I rely on Mr Greer and Mr Fletcher to correct me if they think I have got the wrong perspectives on this—was that in agreeing to undertake what was a very major project across the region—it was a $1 million project—my observation was that it came from a clearly identified community need.

One of these observations that I certainly heard made regularly was that the significant issues with heat were a real barrier to kids getting a decent night's sleep, being able to go to school and achieve to their best potential. Putting that bit of air cooling on a schedule basis across a big range of the community and housing in the region was a terrific initiative in that it responded to community need. The community identified why it was important to them, and there was a fairly well scoped and well structured process for ensuring that that retrofitting of air conditioning rolled out. It certainly was not

without its challenges and difficulties. But again the observation I would make is that that made, from what I could see, the impetus to do it all the better. So rather than look for a quick wins way of saying, "Okay, this is how we will achieve one of the first SRAs", I think the COAG trial went at something that was fairly problematic and did so with a great deal of success. That SRA was a good example of how you can tackle something fairly challenging but significant and respond to community need. There were a number of others.

I mention just one other from my perspective. It sits outside the Murdi Paaki region but it draws on families that often move from western New South Wales to Dubbo. As you know, Dubbo sits technically outside the Murdi Paaki region but there is a shared responsibility agreement which will soon be finalised there called The Will and a Way. It is a three-pronged initiative for Dubbo and regions to encourage kids to stay at school. Essentially, it gets year 10 students to pledge to do one of three things in the coming year: to stay at school, to be in some form of training or to be in employment. It is a very strong partnership between the schools—excellent cooperation from Dubbo Senior College—the business community—Fletchers Exports have been part of that—and the Australian Government. There is a strong business community, kids pledging to do one of those three things, Australian and State government partnership. Again, I think the link at Murdi Paaki is that Dubbo often ends up being a natural hub for communities coming in from the west. Those are examples of a couple of shared responsibility agreements which have in the longer term been demonstrating some good results.

CHAIR: Can I get some clarification on that? Murdi Paaki is roughly 16 communities going from Wentworth up through the central west—

Mr GREER: Lightning Ridge, Goodooga, Broken Hill and Menindee. It is about the size of Germany.

CHAIR: And you say that the air conditioning project rolled out into the whole of Murdi Paaki.

Mr McCORMACK: It has not gone right across the region; it is progressively doing so. The initial funding, it depends on the local circumstances. Tentatively, it costs about $6,500 or $7,000 to retrofit air conditioning into one house. You could look and say that will probably, depending on circumstances, give you enough for about 190 to 200 houses. The estimates suggest that there could be need of somewhere around 450 to 600 houses across the region. Again, I think the importance of the SRA is that it was a terrific start on something which was always in the past seen as in the too-hard basket.

CHAIR: True but you are not suggesting that it has gone through the whole region.

Mr GREER: No. It was the first phase. My understanding at the end of the trial back in December is that it had been rolled out in Brewarrina, Collarenebri, Goodooga, Ivanhoe and Lightning Ridge.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: There is a long way to go.

Mr GREER: This was a first stage to see whether this was effective. If it was effective, then look at the next rollouts. As Mr McCormack said, I think the initial scoping of this with the $1 million odd was to roll out 200 units in an identified number of communities.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: When will the second phase commence?

Mr GREER: It had not commenced at the completion of the trial. I think there was to be an evaluation of how the rollout of the first phase went.

CHAIR: Was that from 2004 or 2002?

Mr McCORMACK: I stand to be corrected on it but I think it commenced in late 2003, as I recall.

Mr GREER: No. The SRA was signed on 6 April 2005.

CHAIR: Six April 2005 and we have gone to Goodooga, Lightning Ridge and Collarenebri out of the 16 regions. What do the people do to get on the list? Is there a progressive list?

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: What was the assessment process for delivering to those communities as opposed to the other communities? What was the identified need?

Mr GREER: My recollection is that the Murdi Paaki regional assembly, together with the lead agency's steering committee, identified I think it was 7—I can confirm that—in the first tranche of communities where these initial 200 units would be rolled out, with the expectation then that once that was evaluated you would look at phases two and beyond, as Mr McCormack said.

CHAIR: I am having difficulty comprehending that that is a shared responsibility agreement. That seems to me to be a rollout of some infrastructure.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Yes, it is infrastructural.

Mr FLETCHER: If I can join a couple of dots. First, I acknowledge that this is the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and pay my respects to elders past and present. The importance of the program, from the meetings I attended with the regional assembly, it was about differentiated need. There were some parts of the region that had air conditioning, some of it was in a poor state of repair, some had none, some have never had it. I think there were two limitations: one was the availability of funds and the second was the capacity to install the air conditioners across the region. The importance of that is that we keep coming back to this. People talk a lot about education. We want to improve retention in places like the Murdi Paaki region, but if you are not thinking about what happens after that to keep the kids at school, but if there is no activity and employment, and this kept coming up from the working parties—education and employment. If you go to the status of males in the communities, there was a lot of connection drawn to that. Of course, the other thing is that if you want children to attend school and be there on time every day they need to get a good night's sleep.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: And hence the air conditioning.

Mr FLETCHER: And hence the air conditioning. The community was pretty well grounded in understanding how these things came together. We needed it to have kids to have a good night's sleep. It was not just about air conditioning but that would help. We want them to attend school and do better and beyond that we want further training and employment. So not just in air conditioning but the maintenance of the housing stock out there. There were a number of traineeships which as a steering committee we kept looking at. I think that is that notion of having a cohesive look at it. Do not just look at education. Do not just look at air conditioning. How does the whole thing come together?

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: I am not quite grasping this but can you perhaps explain the difference between a shared responsibility and what I would see as an obligation? I guess I am struggling to see how air conditioning is a shared responsibility, which would appear to me to be an obligation on behalf of government to do that. What is the shared responsibility?

Mr McCORMACK: If I could comment on that, my understanding of the shared responsibility associated with the air conditioning—and I do not know the identified policy on the fit ting of air conditioning into community or public housing—but with the agreement to retrofit air conditioning into the properties in those communities, the obligation was around, firstly, there must be a lease in place, and in a number of community-owned properties not all tenants had leases for a number of reasons. It was not always the case that there were leases in place. Secondly, on top of the leases that had been formally signed, they needed to agree to a $5 a week increase in their weekly rental contribution to contribute to the added investment in the property. So that was the shared responsibility element of that air cooling SRA.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: That is a pretty weak connection.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: If I could just move on, we have heard of that one and that is an example you gave to the Committee of a SRA that worked. Can you give us an example of one that did not work?

Mr GREER: At the end of the trial there were 29 shared responsibility agreements in the Murdi Paaki area, and I think around that time or some time in 2007 that was about 50 per cent of all SRAs in New South Wales. Of those, eight were essentially focused on a regional basis and 21 were local. The local ones were responding to priorities that had been identified by the local communities—not imposed but identified in their community action plans—and then prioritised as how they may be able to be addressed. The regional ones covered aspects such as providing in the sense of building administrative and secretariat support of each of the 16 working parties. That was one that worked pretty well.

I do not have the figures here but I think about nine of the young indigenous people who were employed in that secretariat type function went on and completed an H4 and I think one of those then continued on to do tertiary studies. I think there is a causal connection there. Similarly another significant regional approach in the area was the community facilitators project where subject to each of the 16 communities

completing their community action plan, a community facilitator would be shared with that community to provide professional and technical support to work with the community.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Mr Greer, that is all good but the question is pretty simple. Every time we go somewhere and I ask the question of bureaucrats about what has not worked, they cannot tell me a project or a shared responsibility agreement [SRA] that has not worked. So if everything is working so hunky dory why is there such a gap? There must have been one that did not work as well as you expected? There must be an evaluation process that you can measure the success or otherwise of these SRAs if they are so good?

Mr GREER: Many of the 29 SRAs that were in place are continuing. I am happy to take on notice an assessment of where they are up to at the moment and get that back to you.

Ms FINNIGAN: Perhaps James could give you an example of a SRA that we have not considered to be successful.

CHAIR: Good.

Mr McCORMACK: The example I draw on—can I say it is one we will still bring to a successful conclusion—is the initiative to put a community swimming pool in at Weilmoringle. You are probably familiar that Weilmoringle is a very small and very isolated community. Out of that community's action plan they expressed a desire for a swimming pool; firstly for recreation, for better health activities for Elders who would benefit from water aerobics and that sort of thing. Trial partners and we were involved in putting together a proposal that would deliver on having the pool put in and funds were allocated. Some of the scoping works around preparing the community to assist and, in fact, manage the life-saving and the issues in the community, were put in place. I think it is fair to say that the SRA was signed in June last year and what we have found is that the sustainability issues, such as making sure once the pool goes in the filtration processes, the public health issues and the liability and all those sorts of things have been covered, have not been fixed yet. It has actually proved to be far more complex than we had first thought.

We have done quite a bit of work with the local Aboriginal land council at Welmoringle, with the zone office of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council [NSWALC]. In fact, we have been in discussions with Geoff Scott the chief executive officer of NSWALC. I think one of the great learnings to come from this is in delivering on the committee's aspiration for a pool, if we want to make it sustainable it will be really difficult. As we speak now I am confident in the longer term that the Welmoringle pool will go in but it is not in yet. It has been a real learning process around making sure that once the pool is in that in 12 to 18 months time it is still working well. I hope that gives a better sense of some of the operating frustrations.

Ms FINNIGAN: Perhaps I could just add to that talking about which SRAs are not successful. It is a difficult conversation so I understand why you had some difficulties in looking at that but the objective of a shared responsibility agreement is that the community members that sign up to that agreement and the other parties to that agreement—so the different levels of government—work together to actually

achieve the outcomes identified in the SRA. Things might not happen immediately and you might not get the outcome as first identified in the terms of the SRA, so the time might have to extend. I am sure from the evidence you have collected during the inquiry you have started to pick up that time is a bit of an issue that we cannot go in and just impose solutions on communities. It is really important that we work side by side in a real partnership with community members and that might not then result in a time frame that we might want to impose.

Mr FLETCHER: Could I make a suggestion to in terms of what could be improved? I do not think you get the turnaround. We know from history across Australia that we do not get a turnaround in some of the things we are looking at, in terms of school performance, crime domestic violence and so on. That does not happen quickly. I think the failure across Australia quite frankly is that no one has ever built the platform. We have had these funding initiatives and the one-size-fits-all approaches and of course it does not work. What happens after that wasted opportunity, funding and resourcing? We then jump out that life raft and try it on another one.

What I think here, as I alluded to before, is that there has been the building of a platform and a building of a capacity locally and a genuine sense if the pool is what is the most important thing for Weilmoringle we need to understand that and have the conversation. Then I would like to see more comprehensive SRAs built-up with quite sharp but broad targets around things like school retention, employment opportunities, health and all the things that really matter to these communities. I think if we could build on what would happen in the trial and work to that and again try and do it with a sense of continuity—do not change all the arrangements—and have the higher-level people from government working together with the business communities.

The third chair of the steering committee was, of course, Sam Jeffries who was the chair of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. Now if Sam was not there with a representative from each of the communities we would not have got as far as we did. I am trying to say that that is the platform we are talking about. It is the involvement, the ownership of what matters to them. What happens also is that things fall through the cracks. This conversation was at the steering committee often. What is an entitlement? What should happen in terms of air conditioning, education or whatever? From their point of view it matters not necessarily at the end of the day as long as it happens. If it has historically fallen through the cracks they say, "Well here is an opportunity. All the government people and bureaucracies are involved. We want to now address the pool, the air-conditioning, the housing or whatever it is."

CHAIR: Do you do any evaluations from the indigenous partners, the community working parties? For example, with the air conditioning, has there been any report back from the indigenous community as to their thoughts?

Mr FLETCHER: One of the most impressive things is the six-monthly workshops. At the last workshop of last year each of the community working parties reported back to the broader group and they talked about the progress from their areas, in terms of what had been achieved, what had changed and how it looked for the future. The fact that they were able to do that—they were no longer looking to us or just for Sam to speak or community facilitators. The head of the working parties each did it. They all had good things to report. Some of the things I think they were right to ask. One of the things they pushed me for at an early workshop was, "Mr Fletcher it is nice

that you come out here and talk to us and you are on the steering committee but we want to see the data." Some of the data that we sent to the Committee on improvements in literacy, numeracy, retention and so on was the same data that they were screaming for. What that then lead to was that we tried to come back with more reports on crime, on health statistics, on employment. I think that is what they are entitled to. Once they can actually see it and understand it that creates its own momentum and confidence and they are more inclined to keep working with you.

Mr GREER: Just to add to that. The Committee might like access to the write-ups or summations of, say, the last several of the Government workshops because you will get a sense through that of the maturity of the government structures and the issues they are addressing. We are happy to make those available should you want them.

CHAIR: It would be very helpful because I have to admit—I do not know about other members of the Committee—that I am not getting a sense of equal partnership and maturity of the CWPs. The equal partnership taking place I have difficulty sensing.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: To begin with we will talk about the Murdi Paaki region, even if wrongly pronounced. Let us take a specific town in that region and talk about Brewarrina. If I were to drive into Brewarrina I would—and I invite all of you to briefly make comments—see a very depressed community, would I not? With unemployment rates that are what? In terms of Brewarrina what percentage would be unemployed?

Mr FLETCHER: I do not know the answer

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You do not know the answer?

Mr FLETCHER: No.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Well, let us go further. High rates of crime?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: High rates of domestic violence, is that right? In truth high rates of sexual assault in that community, including high rates of sexual assaults of children, is that right? You do not know? All right, let us take in a material sense in Brewarrina. Let us drive out to the edge of town. There is a facility on the edge of town that has been funded at some stage with a large amount of Government money.

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: We know the one that we are talking about, do we not? It is the one that is absolutely wrecked? Is that right? Was that funded during the Murdi Paaki time?

Mr FLETCHER: My understanding is it was prior to that.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Prior to that?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It was a facility that was a hostel of some sort, was it not?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It must have been built certainly within the last 10 years, is that right?

Mr McCORMACK: I am unsure. I think it is probably about 12 or 15 years old.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Every window in it is broken, is that right? You know the facility I am talking about?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Every wall has been kicked in, is that right? It is just a shambles, is it not? Yet hundreds of thousands or perhaps millions of dollars were spent on building that facility. Where is there a shared responsibility agreement that deals with, say in the Brewarrina circumstance, the maintenance of what may be a billion-dollar facility, the protection of a million-dollar facility?

Mr FLETCHER: I visited Brewarrina in 2005 because I wanted to find out what it was like out there. Can I describe that visit to you? We went there and to call it a robust meeting under plays it. It was very angry. There was division in the community and all of things you have started to talk about; they talked about. My sense of the facility you described—I would like to go back to where did that evolve from? Who made that decision? Why was that deemed to be a good idea? The things that they have been talking about in the last couple of years have been things about creating some employment, the fish nets, the museum and there are a few things they had under way they were wanting to do. The other good thing is that the school, the one that I looked at, has had an eight per cent increase in attendance and much better results.

I went from describing the anger and I was driven around the town and I saw it warts and all. Then we had a discussion instead of talking about the mistakes of past and the problems as to what should we do in Brewarrina to improve things. Certainly it is a community with a very good facilitator who has set up a business centre from memory and done a whole lot of things now that is giving some optimism. If you are in Brewarrina and you are looking at things that have not worked and you are just welling on that it is not taking you or the younger generation anywhere. What I am saying to you is that certainly from the start of 2005 to the end of 2007 this community has moved a long way and felt much more optimistic. What they did not want to do—and they said this very loudly—is to revisit that mistake. They do not want another million dollars spent on something that takes them nowhere as a community and leaves them more disappointed at the end.

Mr GREER: I think that is captured. I read through some of the earlier transcripts before appearing. I noticed the evidence the chair of the Brewarrina CWP gave, Mrs Barker, at pages 35 and 36, I think. She captured the positive aspects of what

is working—perhaps the glass half full. Many of those related to some of the SRAs that were replaced, particularly, as Mr Fletcher has mentioned, the initiative of the Brewarrina Business Council, which I think she noted, that in the passage of time has saved three organisations from going to the wall. She thought that was a great outcome.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You know the town of Brewarrina. To describe it as a glass half full is overstating the positive outcome in terms of that town. It is far from half.

CHAIR: It is not how I remember her evidence.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Mr Fletcher, I want to deal with an issue you have not spoken about and it may be outside your area of responsibility. You are Deputy Director General of the department, is that right?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: So you have some involvement with the schools across the State.

Mr FLETCHER: I am Deputy Director General of Schools.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am not being trite. Let me talk about an example of one specific school within the State where you might think there is some developing problem. I am talking about Peel High in Tamworth. That school was built in the late 1970s?

Mr FLETCHER: I believe so, yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It was built right on the edge of Coledale, which essentially is a large Aboriginal community in Tamworth, is that right?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I know I am catching you by surprise.

Mr FLETCHER: No, I have been to the school, I know the school.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: The school that would have a potential enrolment of between 500 and 600 students, would that be right?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Indeed, in the 1980s it reached an enrolment of 500 or 600 students, is that right?

Mr FLETCHER: I believe that is right.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Those were both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, is that right?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It was a mixed community and, as best we know, a reasonably harmonious school community of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students?

Mr FLETCHER: Clearly I was not there at that time, but I have visited the school.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: That is your understanding, is it?

Mr FLETCHER: It is.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Now the population of that school would be about half that 500 or 600 number, would it not?

Mr FLETCHER: I have not got the exact number.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Could you find out?

Mr FLETCHER: I believe it has gone down. It is one of our Schools in Partnership. As you know, it is not part of Murdi Paaki. It is one of our Schools in Partnership, and it has just had a change of principal. It is a school not unlike some others in the State and elsewhere in Australia that cannot be separated from the community in which it exists. Sometimes people expect that the schools are by themselves responsible for all that happens in a community and the problems that can emerge. What happens, of course, invariably is that they impact on the schools.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Mr Fletcher, do not get defensive at this stage. What I am seeking to do is essentially identify what has happened with that school. I am not seeking to attribute blame to the teachers or the principal, far from it. But what we have seen essentially is a drift of students, particularly white students, away from that school to Oxley High and perhaps Tamworth High, is that not right?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes, I believe there has been.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: In a sense, what has developed in a non-remote community is what has been loosely described in the *Herald* as "white flight", is that right?

Mr FLETCHER: That is what has been described in the *Herald*.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: How does the Department of Education overcome two things: one, the segregation of the population essentially along racial grounds and, two, the underutilisation of a very significant and expensive facility like Peel High?

CHAIR: I am happy to let the question and answer go, but we really are wandering from our terms of reference.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: We are not at all.

Mr FLETCHER: I am happy to give a response.

CHAIR: I am merely saying that I am prepared to make the ruling that we are. I am happy for Mr Fletcher to answer the question, but think about where we are going.

Mr FLETCHER: There was an unfortunate reporting in the *Herald* and some of the data they referred to was not borne out by the facts. But what we do have and what we have had over many years is a situation where school enrolments will move, go up and down, and community perception will often be a driver of that. There has just been a review of education in Tamworth. The approach that we are taking as an education department is very much promoting this new concept of learning communities, that is, schools, particularly our public schools, working in cooperation. I can take you to many schools in New South Wales, because I am privileged to visit them, where there is absolute harmony even where it does not exist in the broader community.

It is not just Aboriginal students, it is some of our fantastic multicultural schools. That to me as an older Australian—and I am not the only one here—gives me great optimism that the younger generations can understand tolerance, respect and diversity and in some ways can lead the changed thinking in the broader community. Peel High is one of our Schools in Partnership, it has got a new principal, it is one of our priority schools. We are confident that as part of the broader Tamworth community we can have a good future at that school. What we do not want is people leaving the school for the wrong reasons. I was very impressed with many of the teachers, the community members and the students I met on my visit to Peel High.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am not being critical of the students or the teachers; you must understand that. I just want you to be able to give me some confidence that the department has a program that ensures the facility is appropriately used by a broad range of students.

Mr FLETCHER: The department has 2,240 schools and we monitor what happens in each one of them. What I am saying to you is that we are moving to a different approach that is more about groups of schools working together in the best interests of students. I could also mention Brewarrina and some of the perception out there. There has been a lot of discussion about Brewarrina lately as one of those schools where no teachers want to go with the new staffing arrangements. In fact, when the last job was advertised 31 teachers applied to work there.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: We have heard that from the Minister. Could we go back to Peel High? Are there any other schools like Peel High, perhaps Marrickville, where there is a shift in the population of students?

Mr FLETCHER: There are a number of schools. The problem is, Mr Khan, it ebbs and flows. I can take you to other schools in Sydney that a number of years ago were in sharp decline that have reversed significantly. The danger is to think that it is a self-fulfilling prophecy that once the school starts to lose enrolments it is doomed. I do not believe that is the case.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I want to go back to the COAG trial. Is it not true that in each of those schools you have referred to where enrolments have risen again after a decline that there has been substantial investment in terms of facilities?

Mr FLETCHER: No.

Dr JOHN KAYE: For the ones I am thinking of, Building the Future schools, is that not true? Can you tell us what investments were made in the schools in the Murdi Paaki trial?

Mr FLETCHER: It is quite a broad question. One of the things that I have learnt over my years is that the danger is to think that if you do not pour money into a place it cannot improve and if the buildings have not had a makeover in the last three years people will not go there. That is not true. What it comes down to is what is going on and what is perceived to be going on inside the school, what is the quality of teaching and learning. That is what it always comes down to. When you can produce the data about how students are improving and the quality of teaching that is being implemented, you can convince people that they are good places to go. Think of the schools out west; go to Murdi Paaki, Menindee. Central School is a perfect case in point. There have been no significant recent facilities developed that spring to mind. But when I visited the school, what had happened just through a change in leadership and, I think, a more focused approach to what was going on inside the school and getting the community re-engaged with the school, you now have got unbelievable improvements in retention and Aboriginal students are completing their Higher School Certificate in families where that has never happened. That is generational change.

One of the problems you have in communities like this is that it has always been thus that the students, particularly the boys, will get to years 9 or 10, start not to attend school and then they will leave. Then they are caught up in the same life experiences as their parents. I am saying to you, Dr Kaye, that there certainly has been significant funding in terms of Schools in Partnership, priority action schools and other Federal and State funding. For instance, in New South Wales 45 per cent of all Aboriginal students are in a school that is in receipt of some equity funding. That means there are 55 per cent that are not. The danger is to say, well, we cannot have high expectations for those students because they are not getting the extra money. I reject that totally and I have got evidence to support that.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I have never made that suggestion at all.

Mr FLETCHER: But some do.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: In terms of the Menindee experience, that is a targeted school?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: The principal, in a sense, was handpicked, was he not? He came out of retirement.

Mr FLETCHER: He came out of retirement to go back there, yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Initiatives were introduced, such as the employment of an Aboriginal teacher, a young bloke, who I think is being paid as a teacher even though he has not finished his degree?

Mr FLETCHER: What we did with the Schools in Partnership, and we are encouraging more broadly, often people get captured by past history and practice. What we have said is, "Let's think a little differently. Let's give schools like Menindee more flexibility." That is what we in fact did. Then it is the local solutions. It is not just that the principal came out of retirement. There are people in all these communities who have something to offer, both in paid and volunteer employment. One of the things he did really well was to engage year 11 students at the school as mentors for kindergarten to make sure these kids, all the Aboriginal kids had a personal mentor two days a week in literacy. That is powerful. Think of the benefit not just for the kindergarten students but the self-esteem of the older students. In fact, some of them now are considering teaching as a career.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: To pick up the point that Dr Kaye made, even though there was not substantial expenditure on infrastructure, there was substantial additional expenditure in terms of funding these initiatives, was there not?

Mr FLETCHER: There has been more, particularly across Murdi Paaki because of the nature, the isolation and the Aboriginal cohorts that are there. Both the schools have been in receipt of some form of equity funding or other.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: I want to touch on the Dharriwaa elders and the Dareton Aboriginal community. The Dharriwaa elders and the Dareton Aboriginal community made comment about the composition of the community working parties. They said there was a lot of discontent and frustration with a number of aspects of the trial, including the internal appointment of community facilitators and the CWP delegates as opposed to democratic, transparent elections and the perceived failure of some of the community facilitators and the working parties to fulfil their duties. Can any of you comment on whether you saw that, whether you agree with it, whether it is true that you propose changes in the governance structure for the future? Are they legitimate concerns? If so, do we learn anything in terms of how to do it better?

Ms FINNIGAN: I am happy to comment on the community facilitators and the engagement with indigenous communities more broadly. The community facilitators were selected through a merit selection process. Those positions were advertised and people applied. There was a formal selection process.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Who made the decision on the merit-based selection?

Ms FINNIGAN: I am not sure who the selection committee was.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Did it involve local elders?

Mr McCORMACK: It involved a local community reference committee. I am certainly aware that in a number of instances there was contention about who might be most appropriate. In some instances I understand there was concern that it should be a local person and in other instances it should not be a local person because local people

were all known and there were objections. It is a fair comment to say that there was some robust discussion about it. But there was certainly a process followed and the engagement of a community reference committee.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Do you think it was done in the best possible fashion in terms of all the community working parties that you dealt with? Is there anything we learnt from the process that we can do in a different way in the future to get a better outcome or are you completely happy with it?

Mr GREER: My understanding is that that project and its processes are subject to evaluation. It will be interesting to see the outcomes.

Mr McCORMACK: The final report will be due fairly soon.

Mr GREER: The evaluators spoke to me and to a range of other people. I will be interested to see that report. I think it has been anchored in New South Wales out of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Ms FINNIGAN: It is a partnership between the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: We have a lot of talent in these various local communities. However, concern has been expressed that they find it very difficult get a line of communication with community working parties and they feel disempowered. Is there any way to increase opportunities for community members to be involved in those processes? The greater the community participation in these processes the better the outcome. People should have a vehicle to express themselves, whether or not they are correct. At least they have the opportunity to express themselves and that is recorded. Would you like to comment?

Ms FINNIGAN: I will comment from the Australian Government perspective. The charter of the indigenous coordination centres is to engage and consult with all members of the community across all communities. There is no restriction on structures that are put in place to encourage engagement. Questions were asked about shared responsibility agreements and that discussion was in terms of engagement. Shared responsibility agreements are not the only tool, they are just one of the tools that government uses to engage with either whole communities or different members of communities, whether they be families or even individuals. Mention was also made of the elders group. There has been engagement with that elders group through the Indigenous Coordination Centre and it has received Australian Government funding for different measures. The issue is more the perception of their engagement actually and with whom.

CHAIR: And the level of the engagement. We are effectively talking about ownership, control and the vision of Two Ways Together, and the State Plan is about joint ownership and accountability, not only consulting.

Mr FLETCHER: The best we can do in this situation is to ensure that we have good and transparent procedures and open communication and training. It is folly to believe that in any community everyone will be happy all of the time. I learnt not to try

to manage by exception, but to manage the exceptions. Where there is an issue, we do not simply say, "Bad luck." One of the great strengths of this trial was to have two people out there all the time. The committee met them—Mark De Weerd and Louise Bye. They were often the glue for the working party meetings and when issues flared up with the shared responsibility agreements. They often attended and they took part in some robust exchanges.

One of the working parties at Bourke suspended affiliation with us for a period. There are personalities and history involved. They walked away and then came back. We must understand that that is the way of the world. As long as we have good procedures and training and we are always trying to improve it, we are on the right track. It is folly to pretend that everyone will be happy. Members know about the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. I was going to some of the communities and the group representatives were not necessarily fully aligned and happy with the community working party. We are trying to manage those tensions as well.

CHAIR: It is true with equal partnership, ownership and consensus we will not get everyone agreeing. However, will the evaluation be done by the community working party or by some interloper?

Mr GREER: I understand that the Department of Premier and Cabinet has commissioned an external consultant to do the evaluation. However, it is being done in consultation with communities and other stakeholders.

CHAIR: The word "consultation" is as loaded as the word "interloper". I have difficulty in accepting that that conjures up the equal partnership, ownership and consensus envisaged in the State Plan and Two Ways Together being monitored by the director general of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Mr GREER: In the context of the trial, the facilitators were a response to a specific request. From memory, the chair of Dareton made that request. It was a specific request for technical and professional support to assist each of the community working parties to take their community action plans to the next level. Having developed the community action plan, which captured the priorities as espoused within the community in a bottom up way, they felt a need for professional and technical support to help to implement them in a measured way. It was the facilitators' role in that context. I understand that that will be the subject of the evaluation.

Mr McCORMACK: Correct.

Mr GREER: I do not know whether there are lessons in the evaluations and findings about the future or ongoing nature of such a service or provision now that the trial is finished. Unfortunately, I have not seen the draft or outcome. However, I do know that that evaluation was well progressed.

Mr McCORMACK: The evaluation of the Murdi Paaki program is being undertaken by a member of the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs panel of experts—Kate Sullivan and Associates. She has been through a pre-accreditation process of identified skill sets in four key areas specifically for working with indigenous communities on these sorts of things. Her appointment was ratified by all members of the steering committee, which included the Department

of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Sam Jefferies, representing the regional assembly. I hope that her skills set and credibility to carry that out will be fairly good.

CHAIR: I do not denigrate the great work of the Council of Australian Governments trial and the Murdi Paaki concept. Please do not get me wrong, but I have real difficulty with that concept of evaluation.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Mr Fletcher, you made some comment in response to a question about improving shared responsibility agreements as a concept. Can you elaborate on that? Given your first-hand experience with the trial, can you provide a hard-headed response about how you think the concept of shared responsibility agreements can be improved?

Mr FLETCHER: The analogy for me is the State Plan. We have a State Plan with targets out to 2016, but then we annualise it. There does not seem to have been a sense of what should happen in this community in the longer term and in a holistic sense with regard to education, employment, health and wellbeing. What should it look like in 2016 in that community? I would have loved to have had that discussion and then come back to what we do annually. I have some stunning data to share with the Committee. I have worked in and around Aboriginal education for 35 years and have often been very frustrated. We have plans in the State to close the gap. Of course, it is interesting that the Federal Government also has a plan to halve the gap. The plan is to close the gap by 2016. We also looked at the targets every year out to 2016.

We wanted to do two things for Aboriginal students: First, we wanted to reduce the number of kids at risk in terms of achieving minimum standards of literacy and numeracy, which is still a large number; and, secondly, to have many more Aboriginal students in the high-performance bands achieving really well. We established annualised targets, but we did not significantly achieve in the first year—we did not reduce the minimum by much and it was differential across the 10 regions. However, we achieved the 2012 targets last year, particularly in literacy in primary schools. I have not seen a result like that in my 35 years of involvement in this area. That encourages great optimism. It happened in the Murdi Paaki region.

If we talk about closing the gap, if the whole State is improving in some areas incrementally, to what extent is that happening? We have some data that Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki schools experienced a sharper reduction in the gap. There were some exceptions—in year 7 numeracy and literacy we did not do as well. But that is enormously encouraging. I am sorry I am wandering but I wanted to say that about the State Plan. Comprehensive, holistic planning over a longer period and coming back to annualised progression would be an improvement.

Mr GREER: I support Mr Fletcher's observations. When we started down the road of shared responsibility agreements in the Murdi Paaki region initially they were single issues. We were looking at ways to improve that going forward. For instance, rather than having a new shared responsibility agreement for every initiative or project, we might have as an interim step a single shared responsibility agreement and as new projects come up they go on to the end as an addendum or schedule. The most appropriate result would be full, comprehensive shared responsibility agreements on a community basis that pick up what is being done in health, education and so forth.

Mr McCORMACK: This goes back to a comment made earlier about the context in which we see shared responsibility agreements. The bringing together of government and community gives the opportunity to do things which may not become a shared responsibility agreement but which are valuable things in themselves. In evidence at the Dubbo hearings, Mark De Weerd talked about the Aboriginal young leaders program. There is no shared responsibility agreement around that, but we were happy to work in partnership with the former Department of Education, Science and Training and with the State Government to build this leadership development program for young people across the Murdi Paaki region. Again, the value was that there was a community wish to have that done and there did not seem to be any value in specifically making it a shared responsibility agreement. It was an initiative that was working and it was a good idea, so we got on board and helped to fund it. It is continuing very successfully.

Mr FLETCHER: It is pointless to try to improve education unless we are looking at employment and training. It is pointless to attempt the former unless we are looking at domestic violence, health and housing. I come back to that cohesive approach.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You have referred to data about performance to date. Is that right?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: And your projections are to 2016.

Mr FLETCHER: We set targets for schools across the State and then differentiated targets for each region. We do not expect western New South Wales to perform at the same rate as northern Sydney. We look at the trend data and then set a realistic target and annualise it for each area. A target is then picked up by every school. Every school in this State must have improvement targets based on their performance and what we need them to do to meet State targets. When we re-aggregate them, we get what we are looking for, which is the State Plan achievement.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Are you able to provide us with the past data and also your projections through to 2016?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes. I have not brought it with me but I can do that.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I have a document that has one of the headline measures as being the percentage of Aboriginal children attending government schools where learning and development needs are identified in the first 10 years of school. It is the *Quarterly Performance Report State Plan Priority: Improved Health and Education for Aboriginal People*. The comment next that it is, "The measure will be introduced in the first term of 2008 in 400 kindergartens in schools across New South Wales to demonstrate the skills and knowledge that kindergarten children bring to school."

Mr FLETCHER: I believe you are referring to the Best Start Initiative, which is what has happened. We have 400 schools involved in that initiative. It is not a test but a new assessment is conducted of children in the first term of kindergarten.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Are you able to provide us with data about that?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I show you the document. I might in a sense tender it later. Can you see below that headline measure that there are supporting measures, number of Aboriginal children entering kindergarten in all New South Wales schools? You will see to the right that there is a table that is identified with the source of the education department—that is on page five of the document. You see there is only one bar in the chart for 2006. Do I take it that there is data for 2007 and 2008?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes, there should be. One of the problems with the data we often use, often there is a time delay because you are waiting on the Australian Bureau of Statistics data to be published and released in February. That has only just happened. I do not know when you printed this but there is more recent data available. A couple of things have been happening of late. More students are entering schools and our retention rates for Aboriginal students into the higher school certificate have increased dramatically. We also have more students now identifying as Aboriginal. Principals report to me that that is a significant change.

CHAIR: That is not a public document.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Well, it is produced in response to freedom of information, so I think it is public now.

CHAIR: I am merely talking about how we put it in *Hansard* and how we deal with it.

Mr FLETCHER: I have no problem. I believe we would now have the data on the number of students entering kindergarten in 2007. I do not think there is a problem with getting that back to you.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: If you turn to page 6, there is also the number of Aboriginal children attending government preschools, which again seems to be non-specific, and the number of Aboriginal children participating in the schools as community centre initiative. Also, the data does not seem to be there. I am happy to tender the document.

Mr FLETCHER: Can I hold on to that?

CHAIR: Yes, hold on to that.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Earlier the point was made that the Murdi Paaki trial has developed a degree of sophistication and maturity, and I daresay there is positive momentum. Now that the trial has ceased, do you see a risk, of losing that robust progression? Do you think there is a real risk if something is not put in place to continue on, that something will be lost, including the goodwill that may have been developed in the community?

Mr GREER: During the trial and the latter parts of the trial a regional partnership agreement was drafted and discharged, and my colleagues might tell us what the status of that is at the moment. They can be one of the vehicles to sustain aspects of the momentum.

Ms FINNIGAN: It is important to identify some of the measures that have been agreed by COAG about closing the gap. It identifies specific outcomes the parties to the regional partnership agreement commit to working together to address. Those conversations have commenced. They stopped for a while, while the new Government took its place.

CHAIR: I am sorry, could you speak up a little?

Ms FINNIGAN: I am sorry. James's voice can carry, so perhaps if he answers.

Mr McCORMACK: Just quickly to recount what Sue was saying and to pick up on Tony's point about the regional partnership agreement discussions that were taking place in the latter half of 2007. It went into abeyance as the Federal election was called and the new Government was elected and has worked through some of its policy directions. Certainly we are preparing to sit down and discuss in more detail with a regional assembly the shape and nature of the new regional partnership agreement, as Sue indicated, structured around the COAG-agreed Closing the Gap initiatives. That is a conversation we would be looking to have and to do some consultation across the region with Murdi Paaki communities about how, if you like, the refocused regional partnership agreement would look. We are looking to do that fairly soon.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: My point goes to the status of the document that has been provided to the witness. I am unsure and will be looking for some clarification from the secretariat about the provision to a witness of a document that is titled, "Cabinet in Confidence". I appreciate the basis of its release but I am not sure whether past practice has been to provide such a document to a witness on a committee like this, which means it is taken out the room. With the greatest of respect, I am sure it would retain the confidence if that request were asked. But I am not sure whether that is a practice committees have followed in the past.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Let us be honest, one of the realities is that it would be unusual under freedom of information—and I will concede this point—for a Cabinet in confidence document to be produced in answer to a freedom of information request, but it was. So, I say that any privilege that attaches to a Cabinet in confidence document at that point disappears.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am not sure that is necessarily the case. I think we are in some interesting territory I am unfamiliar with and I think we need to take some time to reflect on this. I am not sure whether the document should leave the room, with the greatest of respect to the witness.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Clearly we have an indication from Mr Fletcher that he can provide the information. To that extent, the document is in a sense an aide memoir only, because I have taken him to each of the data sets that are referred to. Whether the document leaves the room or not, the witness has given an undertaking to provide certain information that is contained, coincidentally, in that document.

CHAIR: At this stage I think we should get the document back and we will take the appropriate advice as to whether or not the document should be released through this Committee or whether it should be released to the witness through Mr Khan or through some other appropriate way so the witness can answer the questions he has agreed to answer. Whether it goes through *Hansard* or whether it is presented to the witness through the Committee or through Mr Khan is a matter for decision.

Mr FLETCHER: If I can respond to Mr Veitch's question. One of the things that struck me about Murdi Paaki was that it was more about enabling than disabling health. That is a significant difference. In the future, when I go back to Brewarrina, and I will, you want to see that that increasing optimism and the capacity is there, translated into things that are happening, that are measurable—education, crime, health statistics. That is why I come back to that notion. There is always a danger in anything, if you do not continue to pay attention to it we can become complacent and things can go backwards, but I am confident with FaHCSIA and the DAA as the new lead agencies that it will continue to go well. But the third-party, that is the regional assembly or whatever it becomes in the future, is how the Government can engage with that representative group. I think that is critical.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Can I take you back to the community working party issue? Later this morning we will no doubt hear about the Harvard trials. What came out of the Harvard trials was not just the importance of good community governance in health outcomes, but also the sense of confidence amongst the community that there was a democratic process, an engaged democratic process, of governance. We heard from the Dareton Aboriginal community, in its written submission, and from others, that there was great disquiet with the representative nature of the community working parties and, in particular, the fact that governments only primarily interact directly now with community working parties; that there are members of the community who are disenfranchised. Can I ask firstly for your comment on that and, secondly, what steps have been taken to ensure that all members of the community feel like they are engaged in the process of Murdi Paaki?

Ms FINNIGAN: I guess from the FaHCSIA perspective, we do not believe it is accurate to say that we only deal through the community working party structures or that they are the only point of contact for government in working with the indigenous people in that region. ICCs around Australia worked with a wide range of community partners. There are models of community working parties in many communities across Australia but all ICCs, and that includes Bourke and Dubbo, worked with indigenous organisations that are strongly connected in local communities. For example, the land councils, the community working party providers, the Aboriginal medical services, legal services, along with the informal groups such as elder's groups, men's groups, women's groups and youth groups, as well as at times with individual families or even with individuals themselves, depending on what it is that we are working in partnership with them about. So, the community working parties, as I mentioned earlier, is one of the mechanisms that we use to engage with people in the community and to do planning around issues and strategies.

Mr GREER: If I could just add to that. My understanding from the notes I have on this is that the Dareton community working party draws on representations from five distinct communities in the Sunrasia region—Dareton, Wentworth, Nametjera

Drive, Gol Gol, and Buronga. It is my understanding that the Dareton community working party has elections in each of those five communities to make up the 10 community working party delegates, two from each community. Again, it was my further understanding that those delegates represent the interests of other community members and also provide forums to air other concerns, and that the community working party in Dareton also has public forums where community members can attend, as can other individuals and what have you. As I say, that is my briefing on that issue.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Mr Fletcher, could you point the Committee towards information that indicates where a school within the Murdi Paaki trial seen to be falling behind the targets set—I appreciate the explanation given of the targets—but where that happened and what steps were taken? What the DET and other acronym organisations did to improve performance? Was that by investment or whatever? I do not think you have time to answer that now so I ask you to take that question on notice and I ask that you give it on a school-by-school basis as it relates to Murdi Paaki?

Mr FLETCHER: Yes.

CHAIR: Could you advise as to the current or future status of Murdi Paaki? Is it resigned by the Federal Government?

Mr McCORMACK: As indicated, we are looking to do a renegotiated regional partnership agreement in the next few months we have a way forward with that under a COAG closing the gap strategy and, as I indicated, we are going to be talking with the regional assembly and are looking to do some fairly broadly-based consultations around Murdi Paaki on how that new agreement will look.

CHAIR: In other words, you do not know at this stage?

Mr McCORMACK: In the next few months.

CHAIR: Thank you for attending. We appreciate the work you have done in regard to the COAG trial, which is important. You have 21 days to reply to questions on notice.

(The witnesses withdrew)

SALLY ANN FITZPATRICK, Vice President, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation, 1 William Street, Marrickville,

GARY JOHN HIGHLAND, National Director, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation, 1 William Street, Marrickville, and

IAN RING, Professorial Fellow, Centre for Health Service Development, University of Wollongong, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Do you wish to make some opening comments about the role of Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation [ANTAR]?

Mr HIGHLAND: We would firstly like to acknowledge that this hearing is taking place on the lands of the Gadigal people. Whilst it is customary at these sorts of events to acknowledge the traditional owners and then move on, we think that there is something of the history of the Gadigal people that has direct bearing on the deliberations of this Committee. The Gadigal people, as we know, were here long before we were. There are still some descendants of the original Gadigal people living in Sydney. Many of you might have met Alan Madden from the Metropolitan Aboriginal Land Council, who traces his ancestry back to pre-1788. Regrettably, Alan is one of the few people alive today who can trace his ancestry back to the time before the coming of Europeans to this place and that is because most of the Gadigal people were killed within a short time of Europeans coming to what became Sydney. As a matter of fact, they were reduced from 50 people in 1788 to only three people in 1790 and after 50 years the more than 3,000 Aboriginal people in this area around Sydney were reduced to only 300.

Contrary to popular belief, the main cause of this reduction was not massacres; it was introduced diseases such as smallpox or smallpox-like diseases, influenza, tuberculosis and venereal diseases. That pattern was repeated all around New South Wales and Australia. As a matter of fact, when Europeans first got to the Nepean River, 60 kilometres from here, most of the local Aboriginal people there were already dead or dying because of introduced disease. So we see that the issues being deliberated on by this Committee are both timely and timeless. They are timely because they come at a time, we think, of unprecedented public support and government commitment to finally closing the life expectancy gap between indigenous and non-indigenous people and importantly that commitment at the Federal level is a bipartisan one, but they are also timeless because they actually predate the Australian nation. The issue of the impact of disease and poor health on indigenous people in this country is among the oldest, unresolved issue that we have to deal with.

ANTAR very much welcomes this inquiry. We hope that we can play a major role in generating a sense of greater ownership and commitment on behalf of the New South Wales State Government to closing the gap. To give some background, I am the principal author of the ANTAR submission, which is why I am here. Sally Fitzpatrick is both the New South Wales vice president of ANTAR and also the national secretary. Sally coordinated a project called Success Stories in Indigenous Health and we thought that Sally's experience would be of use to the Committee. We do not claim to be experts in these areas. ANTAR is an advocacy organisation and we draw on the expertise of people who are experts, both indigenous and non-indigenous. That is why we invited

Professor Ian Ring, one of Australia's leading experts on indigenous health, to join us. We felt that Ian's expertise would also be of benefit to the Committee.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I congratulate you on your submission. It is an excellent submission. I take you to the section where you talk about a Harvard study. First, could you outline in one sentence what the Harvard study was, second, its key findings, third, its relevance for Australia and, fourth, its relevance to this Committee?

Mr HIGHLAND: The Harvard study is an ongoing project. The full name is the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development. It looked at factors contributing to the success of primarily economic development but also social development amongst native American nations. It basically determined that there were four factors responsible for success. The first is issues relating to sovereignty. We should be clear about what is meant by sovereignty. The Harvard project does not see sovereignty as being a separate state or a separate nation. It simply talks about, in their own words, when native nations make their own decisions about what development approaches to take. They consistently outperform external decision makers. So it is basically having local people having control over the decisions impacting on their own communities but also, importantly, being accountable for the decisions that they make.

It talks about the importance of institutions. It says that it is no good just to have self-determination on its own. That has to be backed by capable institutions of governance to provide some robustness to the process. It talked about culture being important; that there needs to be legitimate culturally grounded institutions that are relevant to the particular culture of the communities in order for there to be success and, finally, it looked at the importance of leadership and said that all of these factors are not, on their own, able to contribute to success; that leadership is crucial.

The authors of the Harvard project studies have come out to Australia on many occasions, have looked at the circumstances of Australian indigenous people and feel that there are definite parallels. They talk about the fact that in places like the United States, Canada and Australia there has been a commitment to overcome indigenous disadvantage. That has not been accompanied by a similar commitment to what they describe as self-determination. They say that in fact these two things are linked. We wanted to point out that study to you because we feel that self-determination is one of the key factors essential to overcoming indigenous disadvantage. We are concerned that nowhere in the State of New South Wales is self-determination as envisaged by the Harvard research actually being practised and we feel that that is essential if the work of this Committee is to bear fruit and we are actually able to close the gap in this State. We go into more detail in the submission that you no doubt would have seen.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Professor Ring, can you outline your expertise and what single things this Committee should focus on?

Professor RING: I am an epidemiologist and public health physician by trade. An epidemiologist is a person who studies disease patterns and the things that influence them. Although I thought I would never get engaged in Aboriginal health, for a public health person in Australia it is hard not to become involved and I have spent quite a long time on Aboriginal health issues.

This is a unique time. I think it has been a long time coming but there has been a change in national mood. I think we are now on the threshold of being able to bring about reasonably sizeable and rapid change. There has never been any reason why Australia, which is arguably the second, third, fourth or fifth country in the entire world, depending on which year and which measure but we are right up there as a country, ought to have within it a section of the population whose health is as bad as any in the world for whom data are available. Nor is there any reason why indigenous health in Australia ought to be manifestly worse than is the case in New Zealand, the United States and Canada. There is nothing unique about the disease pattern or the history and circumstances that lead to those disease patterns, which is unique.

I think the opportunity now is firstly to have a definite commitment to bring about a change which is possible, to develop as the statement of intent outlines clear comprehensive plans of action jointly agreed with Aboriginal people as to the things that would need to be done to achieve the COAG goals accepted by every government in the country. People are often realistic and pessimistic about the capacity to bring about change. No-one says it is easy: it is difficult. We have known for a long time what has to be done. If the commitment to do it now is there and if processes which bring together Aboriginal people and government organisations in definite courses of action to achieve them—because apart from anything else we have had decades in which we have unfunded policies—I am speaking nationally, not particularly about New South Wales, you set out a policy that the world should look like this, there is no dollars attached to it, there is no implementation plan and there is no evaluation.

This is a degree of amateurism and bureaucratic ineptitude and lack of commitment that does not take you very far. If you want to go somewhere you need to say what is to be done? Who is going to do it? What is the cost? Where is the money coming from, as you do in any field of endeavour? Given commitment, a jointly agreed plan of action and a clear agenda forward of what the things that need to be done to achieve those two COAG goals, then I think the future for Aboriginal people and improvement in their health is quite possible.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Mr Highland, you mentioned the Harvard report and, in particular, self-determination. I know it is all outlined in the report but if you think this is so crucial to our going forward and achieving a rapid rate of improvement, what would you like to see happen in terms of the recommendations from this Committee?

Mr HIGHLAND: A number of things. What I would love to see is that the New South Wales Government, the New South Wales Opposition and the minor parties sign up to the statement of intent that has been signed up to by both the Federal Government and the Federal Opposition. It has also been signed up to by every indigenous peak health body, the vast majority of non-indigenous peak health bodies and a range of civil society organisations like ourselves. We think that does provide a template for the way forward. We would then like to see, as is happening at the Federal level, a comprehensive plan of action developed at the State level to fulfil the commitments of that statement of intent. We would also like to see a commitment to report back on progress in the way that has now been made at the Federal level with the Prime Minister saying that he will report back annually on progress towards achieving those close-the-gap goals. They are some things that we think are very tangible that we would hope this Committee would take forward and recommend to the Government.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Ms Fitzpatrick, apparently you can tell us about some good health stories that are out there and perhaps some of the priority areas. Basically, just tell us a little bit about what you do and where you think we should go from your point of view.

Ms FITZPATRICK: My background is in public health as well. I am a junior in the field. I have just graduated—or will graduate in three or four weeks time. The passion I bring to indigenous health is through family connections because I see a lot of this stuff in my own connected indigenous family, although I am a non-indigenous person. The successes that I helped to pull together with this book all have a similar characteristic. They point to the self-determination that we are hedging around here because they identify problems that local people want dealt with first and foremost. For instance, you have in this booklet a story from Redfern about the Blackout Violence program. That is where women in Redfern decided that enough is enough and pulled together some support from local people. They went forward and created what is now even a national initiative to educate and promote non-violence in their communities. In other communities in the far north of Queensland you will see a family wellbeing program.

That was a program that was developed in South Australia by Stolen Generations people. They have taken a program that is not innately from far north Queensland but they have used their own learning and knowledge and their own eldership in the community to develop a program based on principles that the South Australians brought together around grief and trauma and adapted that to suit their own purpose. There you see two sides of the same coin. You see a local initiative but you also see something that might not be from somewhere and remodelled to suit a local condition. Nothing because it is successful will be successful everywhere and we identify quite clearly in the booklet that local initiatives are themselves sovereign. So they can have uniqueness and those learnings can then be taken elsewhere.

We also see that people on the path to these developments in their level community need good partnership, good support and the space to lead that program themselves. Many of the Aboriginal health services in the country that are succeeding are doing so because they have strong partnerships with the local area health service, the local district hospital, a local university and it is a two-way learning process. That is now an embedded process in much indigenous health research. Many of the principles about delivering health services could be learned from the principles of indigenous health research, which are outlined clearly in the NHMRC ethics documents. They are all about respect. It does not take much to listen and government service providers only need to open their ears and they will hear solutions coming from people on the ground.

Mr HIGHLAND: If I could add to that. Sally coordinated the production of this booklet that we released last year and we are pleased to table that for the Committee. We knew very successful programs right around Australia that were saving, extending and improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but we were also aware that many of these programs operated in quite an isolated way. There was not the scale. There were successes that were not replicated or adapted around the country. We felt it would be important to highlight some of those programs. One of the programs in this booklet is from Townsville: a mums and babies program.

This program has very successfully reduced infant mortality, perinatal deaths in that community, and also reduced the incidence of low birth rate babies.

We know that there are programs similar to it operating in many other parts of the country but not across the country. The Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal medical service in Canberra runs a successful program. There is a successful program in Shepparton and many other places. Following the publication of this booklet the Federal Government has announced it is going to roll out the mums and babies program across the country and provide funding so that potentially every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mum and baby will be able to access the same life-saving programs that up to now have just been occurring in a patchwork way. In terms of the public debate we also felt that it was important to shift the rhetoric from one of despair to one of achievement and that we needed to emphasise that success is achievable as Ian pointed out if only we fair dinkum and we get behind this and we put the necessary resources in.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Are public health physicians being involved sufficiently enough in policy development? I say this with a vested interest because I am married to a public health physician who always says there should be more respect given to your opinions—and, of course, epidemiologists—in the policy development and the rollout. What are your thoughts? It is very important and you have to know what you are doing.

Professor RING: I would like to see public health physicians take a more active role in promoting these issues. Having knowledge and expertise that can assist is always a good thing and using that in policy work is all right. The thing is that Australia does not lack for policies. The issue is implementation, not more policies. Just building on the success story thing that Gary mentioned: There are two COAG goals. One is to halve the childhood mortality rate. Now most childhood deaths occur very early in life and are determined as much as anything by the birth weight. As Gary says, we now have a number of stories—not from overseas but from this country—of what works in improving birth weights. What drives the life expectancies better is chronic disease in early middle age and middle age.

We also have studies in Australia that show that you can halve the chronic disease death rate in just over three years by application of knowledge that we already have. Public health physicians do have a role in getting that sort of knowledge around and implemented but it is not easy dealing with these things. It is doable and given commitment I think we can do it. I do want to return later, if I may, to the issue of what is the role of the State Government as against the Commonwealth Government because there is often confusion and uncertainty between those levels of government that has not helped to move these things forward.

Mr HIGHLAND: In terms of our steering committee, we have certainly involved public health physicians in our Close-the-Gap Steering Committee, largely through the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association. Associate Professor Noel Hammen, who some of you may know has had remarkable success with the Inala Aboriginal Health Service, has been intricately involved in this. From our end we have sought to tap into the expertise of a public health physician.

Ms FITZPATRICK: The other comment that I would like to add is that you would already know that New South Wales has a very highly regarded maternal and infant health program. The program has been extended with the caveat being that it must be able to be reached by every Aboriginal mother. Another caveat is that those Aboriginal mothers must be supported in the environmental, emotional and social wellbeing factors that are affecting their lives. More and more often you will see—and you will learn if you read some of the stories in this book—that it is those factors that are affecting their decisions as to when they are having their children, why they are having their children and where they are having their children. Those factors are a system-wide issue for State administration involving housing, support for families, counselling, education and support for perpetrators of violence and the other proactive things that the State has yet to fully investigate, in terms of how it supports the initiatives that are already in train and rolls them out so that they are accessible to everyone.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Previous witnesses today, and also in previous hearings, have spoken about the shared responsibility agreements. Would you like to make some comment about the agreements conceptually and elaborate on what you think are the successes or otherwise of those types of agreements?

Mr HIGHLAND: I listened with interest to the representatives from Murdi Paaki earlier today. I have to say that whilst I have the greatest respect for their commitment and sincerity, we have a different view in relation to shared responsibility agreements [SRAs]. We acknowledge that for many Aboriginal community they have provided a vehicle to secure funding for initiatives that might otherwise not have been secured. One example that Sally mentioned earlier, the Blackout Violence program was able to secure a very modest amount of funding to expand its work as a result of the shared responsibility agreement framework. However, we also think that overall that program lacks rigour and it lacks an evidence base to support it. It is interesting that the chair of the Murdi Paaki Regional Council, Sam Jeffries, had a very different take on shared responsibility agreements to the people here this morning. I am not sure whether he still holds this view but certainly about a year ago he said that he felt that his community was having to spend all their time negotiating separate SRAs rather than concentrating on actions that would actually assist their community. He said that SRAs had become the centrepiece rather than actually doing something about the issues.

There is a patchwork of quality to these SRAs. There are around 1,300 indigenous communities across the country. If the SRAs were to be rolled out in the way that its originators envisaged, we would be looking at tens of thousands of different intersecting SRAs. We believe that would create an enormous administrative and planning headache. We are concerned that there is a lack of evidence behind many of these SRAs. We are concerned that there has not been sufficient evaluations of the SRAs. We also think that many of the services provided by SRAs are services that any citizen of Australia should reasonably be expected to receive. I did not grow up in western New South Wales; I grew up in far north Queensland where it gets pretty hot. It seems to me that air-conditioning for kids in schools in this day and age should be something that the States should consider was an essential service for the citizens of the nation rather than something that needs to be traded off against certain behavioural changes by an SRA. We acknowledge that many Aboriginal people have been very pragmatic about seeking to negotiate SRAs. But we are also aware of those people's scepticism of the process overall and we have been very critical of that process.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: I think you were present when I was questioning about the SRAs. I have an issue about the shared responsibility as opposed to the obligation. I think that is a problem that needs teasing out further. One of the other things I questioned this morning was that we continually hear about pilot projects, short-term funding of projects and then it stops. Do you have a view about the impact that is having on Aboriginal communities, the continuous rolling out of short-term funded programs as opposed to longer-term programs?

Mr HIGHLAND: There is one example that we give in our submission. It is also in our success stories in the indigenous health booklet—Rekindling the Spirit project in northern New South Wales. It is very successful. But the last I heard there is no guarantee that process would be funded after the end of this financial year. We think there needs to be long-term investment. These are long-term challenges. Of course, there needs to be accountability. Of course people need to report on their progress. I sense from talking to many indigenous people at the community level that there is a huge effort being spent on constantly reapplying for funds that could be better used improving the community.

The other issue is that there is always a tendency in indigenous affairs to try to find a magic bullet, to come up with a solution that no-one has thought of. But these are long-term challenges and they need long-term investment and long-term commitment. It slightly moves away from your question. That is why we see bipartisan and cross-party commitment as being so crucial so that we get away from the situation of endless rounds of experimental pilot projects that can be jettisoned by a new administration and indigenous people have to accommodate a whole new way of doing things. Yes, we would love this Committee to put forward a suggestion that long-term investment and long-term commitment that extends well beyond the life of any one Parliament is what is needed.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: You have talked about the Harvard project. Have you been to the United States to visit the Museum of the American Indian?

Mr HIGHLAND: Yes, I have. I have to say that the Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation do not have much of a travel budget. I did go there a few years back on a private capacity. There are plenty of things we can learn from the United States.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Is there any similar facility in Australia that you are aware of?

Mr HIGHLAND: Not that I am aware of. I know that Robert Welsh, the chair of the Metro Land Council, had a vision of having a similar facility in Redfern as part of the Redfern redevelopment. I think that made a lot of sense, but I am not aware that there has been any progress. We have this idea that as part of transforming Redfern there would be a site that people from all over Sydney and Australia would come to look at Aboriginal history and Aboriginal achievements. Everyone thought it was a good idea, but I am not aware that anyone has put their hand in their pocket to fund it. I am not aware that there is one, but I think it would be fantastic for something like that to happen.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: One of the things about the Museum of the American Indian in the United States is that funding for the architecture and construction was all undertaken by Native Americans. I think that was the success behind the project. That leads me to a question: What are the simple basic criteria to run a successful program in indigenous communities?

Ms FITZPATRICK: I would like to draw everyone's attention to this year's social justice report to answer that question because it reinforces the principles that are outlined in the introduction of our success stories booklet. The Social Justice Commissioner has identified several programs, of which Rekindling the Spirit is one. It describes the reasons why the programs are working, in summary points in this book. I really recommend that people look at this book, or I should say report.

CHAIR: Is that Tom Calma?

Ms FITZPATRICK: Yes, Tom Calma's social justice report. I do not imagine you would get through this inquiry without interviewing our Human Rights Commissioner anyway. There are simple constructive principles that are premised on human rights principles. One of the things that the Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation seeks always to achieve in its work is to break down this siloing of human rights as somehow out there and non-practical. When you see people acting out what they want and need in their community and putting things into action, this is human rights. This is exactly what we are talking about. Our introduction outlines very simply that if a program is bottom up and not just initiated from above by people in ivory towers, if the methodologies are indigenous and appropriate to indigenous custom and family situations, if elders are in the mix and have a strong lead in the programs, improved outcomes will come slowly but they will come. It is not always at our timetable and schedule, and that is often the case with these pilot programs, and then they are dumped before anything is realised.

Mr HIGHLAND: I am certainly not an expert on running Aboriginal community organisations. Ian may want to comment, but there is some really good research that has been done. There was a project chaired by Professor Larissa Berendt on looking at success factors in indigenous programs. I would be happy to chase up the reference and provide that to the Committee. There is also a very successful indigenous governance project that is run out of Reconciliation Australia. They have indigenous governance awards annually. They also do research on best practice in indigenous governance. Janet Hunt, who as well as being very involved in the Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation is a research fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research [CAEPR] at the Australian National University, has done a lot of work on these issues. Certainly I would be happy to provide the Committee with people who could answer that question with more expertise than I could. Ian may want to comment in relation to the health area.

Professor RING: I do not want to take up too much time. The first principle is that community control is fundamental. The whole issue of health services is to run health services that people will attend. Many Aboriginal people will choose to attend mainstream health services, but when they do there is reason to believe that often access is not as high as it should be, given the level of illness. Even within the mainstream system you can look right across the board and Aboriginal people do not receive the same level of care is non-Aboriginal people. We have been running a two-tiered system

in this country: one system if you are white and another system if you are Aboriginal. That has to stop. Many people will be far more likely to attend a service which is owned and operated by Aboriginal people, particularly when there is community control because there is a discipline that if the service is not run in the way the community likes, the community will take action. But that is not sufficient in itself. You have to have adequate resourcing, competent management, clearly thought-out plans, proper information system, all the usual sorts of things. But none of this is new or exotic or unknown. We just need to apply the level of confidence that we use as a country to Aboriginal health, and do it in a way that recognises the genuine partnership approach.

In terms of pilots, if pilots are an excuse for action rather than a contributor to it, you should not touch them. A mickey mouse SRA has got no real value to anyone. But an SRA where at least the people living in communities recognise the things that need to be dealt with and recognise who is responsible for dealing with them, plus what are the responsibilities of the community, does. So a different form of SRA is required. This is a matter for Aboriginal people and organisations to consider. A map on the wall showing what needs to be dealt with and where might have some real substance to it, but there are many features.

CHAIR: As you say, it is not rocket science; it has been around a long time.

Professor RING: Absolutely.

CHAIR: Whilst I agree there is probably no magic bullet, there must be some catalyst or flint that we are missing that I would be so bold as to suggest is probably smacking us in the face. Do you have any suggestions?

Mr HIGHLAND: One of those up until recently was the lack of a firm deadline and the lack of clear targets for keeping action. Prior to the recent COAG agreement, governments said all the right things but there was no sense of urgency in when these things were to be realised. So we hope that the injection of clear deadlines for action and a commitment to reporting back, being transparent about those, will be one of the factors. Of course, now the real issue will be the implementation. We need to ensure that what has been a very promising start is followed through in the years ahead.

Professor RING: If I may, my take on this is, firstly, there needs to be a structure and a process for Aboriginal people to work jointly with government across a range of fields of endeavours. Sometimes they exist and sometimes not. If they exist here, that is fine, but if not, achieving the COAG goals will require that sort of structure and process. In terms of the roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth and State, these need to be clearly defined. So long as people can say that is not us, that is them, then there is immense potential to bounce things from one level of government to another. Just working through the main issues, if you are thinking of health service issues, the first thing is a workforce. Estimated on a national basis you are probably short about 100 doctors to provide Aboriginal health services in New South Wales.

CHAIR: That is doctors?

Professor RING: Doctors, medics. So there needs to be an idea of how many doctors, nurses and allied health workers are necessary to provide the level of service which will take us out of that two-tier thing, which would give you a level of service that

anyone else who was that sick would get and does get. Then have definite plans that would involve State and Commonwealth to do it. Some universities here do well; others, some very large long-established universities, could do a lot better. The VET sector has a role. Anyway, there is a role for the State Government in figuring out what is the contribution that we can make to the training of a workforce to work in Aboriginal health. That is the first thing.

The second issue is primary prevention—smoking, grog, nutrition and physical activity. They are the cardinal determinants of health. The State Government has a shared responsibility for action in this area. Even though Aboriginal people are roughly three times as sick, we have spent and continue to spend far less on Aboriginal people than we do on the rest of the population. Knowledge of this has been around for decades. We need to have proper programs for these cardinal determinants of health.

In terms of mainstream services, we know that access by Aboriginal people to hospitals and the care that they get within them is not as it should be. There is a real challenge for state governments to come to grips with that as an issue. In terms of primary health care, this is the critical issue. This is principally a Federal Government responsibility, but there is a supporting role for state governments, and that has been the practice in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. We need to ensure that there are proper services for mothers and babies, chronic disease, mental health and social and emotional wellbeing as an absolute minimum available to Aboriginal people throughout New South Wales.

Finally, there needs to be proper systems for seeing what is working and what is not, and then reporting and trying to get away from the public service speak that pretends that something is happening. It is like spin in the Minister's office. We want public servants who can report on what is happening, what is not happening and where it is not happening and finding out what needs to be done to ensure that it happens in the future. Given that sort of thing, as I said, I think the future looks pretty bright.

Ms FITZPATRICK: I refer to the question to the previous panel about education. Until people in communities are offered the opportunity to learn about what else is available to them in their world things will not shift dramatically. There is a huge shortage of ordinary, day-to-day information outside our capital cities, and that probably applies to both non-indigenous and indigenous people. The information flow is narrow and ghettoised. There are checks and balances on who gets what, when and how. Until we significantly address the failure of the system to identify what works and encourage that, there will be a significant problem. It is the choices that people make in their lives that determine much of what we are talking about. Those choices come only from the ability to take in information, to absorb it, to generate knowledge and to move on.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: There seems to be recognition of a positive outcome in terms of objectives being set with regard to life expectancy, infant mortality and the like. Do we all agree?

Professor RING: Absolutely.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Despite what Ms Fitzpatrick said earlier about it perhaps not happening within a time frame—if I am paraphrasing, I apologise—I think

we all agree that certain significant outcomes have to be achieved within a specified period. Is that right?

Professor RING: Yes.

Mr HIGHLAND: Absolutely.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Do I take it that the reason this book was published is that it demonstrates that some initiatives have been successful in achieving Council of Australian Government objectives or key performance indicators? Is that right?

Mr HIGHLAND: The book was published before the COAG objectives. It was an attempt to encourage people like yourselves to make these commitments. We wanted to demonstrate that success was possible if there was an investment. It was part of the Closing the Gap campaign in which we have been very involved to convince the community and governments that they could make these commitments with some confidence that they would be achieved.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I take it from what we have said that the setting of these objectives—whether by a State or Federal Government—is part of the program of the Government's accepting the need to achieve certain outcomes for the Aboriginal community. Is that right?

Ms FITZPATRICK: Narrowing the frame of reference simply to what the Government needs to do is dangerous. It is a whole population issue; everyone is involved in this. It does not get you guys off the hook; the Government must show leadership in this area. If the whole of Australia does not get its act together, it will be the whole of Australia's legacy.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am hearing a different response from two of the three of you.

Ms FITZPATRICK: No.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Am I not?

Mr HIGHLAND: There are two elements to this. One of the things that was missing in previous approaches to these issues was a firm deadline and a sense of urgency. We wanted to do that. Ms Fitzpatrick is absolutely correct when she says that this is not just a matter for governments, it is a national challenge. As a matter of fact, last week Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation launched a new campaign called "Racism makes me sick". It looked at one of the causes of ill health. We are not suggesting that it is the major or only cause. However, we know that research indicates that racism is a stressor that causes ill health among Aboriginal people. The aim of this new phase of our campaign is to focus on a cause that every Australian can potentially do something about; that is, to help close the gap by tackling racism. It is absolutely a national challenge and we are aware of that. It is simply that there are different components to our work. The deadline is essential in holding governments and the nation more generally to account.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I will make an observation and invite comment. There seems an inherent conflict, in a sense, between the concept of local ownership and targets to be achieved by whatever date in what appear to be government-imposed targets. How do you get the two to work together?

Mr HIGHLAND: It is because those targets were not government imposed. They were negotiated with the Federal Government by a coalition led by Aboriginal health professionals. We had the steering committee headed by Tom Calma, the Social Justice Commissioner, and led by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association, with groups like ours as supporters. These targets were not imposed by the Government; they were agreed to by the Government based on negotiations between the indigenous health leadership and the Government. That is a fundamental difference.

Professor RING: I do not think that there is any person or community—Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal—who does not want to see the gap in childhood mortality halved—

Mr HIGHLAND: That is absolutely correct.

Professor RING: —or the gap in life expectation reduced. However, while it is true that it is not just a government responsibility, there needs to be a process from this point on to determine what must be done to achieve those goals, what must happen at a national level and what is the role of the national Government and the State Government. That is why we suggested a series of headings for processes so that Aboriginal people, government organisations and the community generally can come together to figure out what they can do. Out of all of this we do not want a process that is so broad that it is for everyone and no-one needs to do anything. We need to be far more clear and concrete about who will do what and when. That is perhaps the most important thing, rather than some vague hope that when we wake up tomorrow the world will be a better place. If we want to make the world a better place we have to be very clear about who will to do what, in what way, when, how much it will cost and where the money will come from. We do that with any other field of endeavour.

CHAIR: I am committed that when I wake up tomorrow morning the world will be a better place. We would like to continue speaking with you and perhaps we will meet with you again in the second half of the year. Thank you very much for appearing before the Committee.

Mr HIGHLAND: Thank you for inviting us.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

(Evidence continued in camera)

(At the conclusion of the evidence in camera the public hearing resumed)

ANNE-MARIE VINE, Principal, Alexandria Park Community School, Park Road, Alexandria, and

PAUL PARKS, School Education Director, Sydney Region, Department of Education and Training, Mary Ann Street, Ultimo, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Thank you for your attendance this afternoon. Ms Vine, are you appearing in your capacity as principal of Alexandria Park Community School?

Ms VINE: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Mr Parkes, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr PARKS: As School Education Director, Sydney region, with responsibility for Alexandria Park Community School.

CHAIR: Would you like to make some opening comments about your role and the school?

Ms VINE: It is a K to 12 school, which has been in existence since 2003. I have been principal at the school since 2006. I am the principal of the K to 12 school, so both campuses. It is a dual campus school. One campus is located at Park Road, Alexandria, and the other campus is located at Mitchell Road, Alexandria. The junior campus is K to 7 and the senior campus is 8 to 12. We currently have around 350 students, of whom about 50 per cent are indigenous. About 98 per cent of our population all over is non-Anglo. So there is a large non-English speaking background population as well.

CHAIR: Did you say 98 per cent?

Ms VINE: About 98 per cent of the school is of a non-Anglo background.

Mr PARKS: I have responsibility for 28 schools in the Sydney region. Is called the inner-city network—schools such as Alexandria Park, Glebe, down to Tempe, around to Marrickville, Petersham and Lewisham. I also have responsibility for all the schools in the Sydney region described as schools for students with emotional disturbance or behaviour disorder. It is 28 schools that I work with and I also have regional portfolios as well.

CHAIR: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the school? It is a community school?

Ms VINE: Yes.

CHAIR: How is the community involved in the education process?

Mr PARKS: Do you want a brief background? It was established in 2003 as part of the inner-city revitalisation strategy. After wide consultation within the community, it was established by the amalgamation of Redfern Public School, Alexandria Public School, Waterloo Public School and Cleveland Street High School. From that came Alexandria Park Public School and also the Intensive English High School, which is in Cleveland Street. Those two entities came from those schools. I was part of that

amalgamation project and it was an extensive consultation. Not everybody agreed, but it was out there and it was explained and the school was put together with strong advice from the local community. That is where the two campuses came from. Initially it was a kindergarten to year 8 campus, a junior campus, and then a year 9 to 12 campus because the local community strongly believed that in having those two groups it would add the best value for the students. As a result of the ongoing evaluation of the school, Anne-Marie this year changed the complexion a bit. As Anne-Marie said, the junior campus is kindergarten to year 7 and the senior campus is year 8 to year 12. That is the background to the school and how it came about.

Ms VINE: Associated with the school is a community centre. We have a Schools As Community Centre facilitator who works out of there. There are number of offices in the community centre and a few community organisation groups work out of there. That has changed over time. For example, at the moment we have the Smith Family, the mobile playgroup, the mobile play bus and the Aboriginal Education Council. We are currently negotiating with Relationships Australia to have an office there to do some of their management but also to run some courses out of there as well.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Could you elaborate for me and perhaps other members of the Committee the nature of a community school? How is the community involved in this school per se as opposed to a traditional model school?

Ms VINE: I think all schools are moving towards trying to have greater involvement with the community. In our school, in particular, we have close association with a number of agencies and organisations and involve them in some of our management processes. For example, we have two community forums a year to which we invite all of the local agencies and organisations to come. At our last meeting a group of about 30 people attended. The purpose of such forums is to talk about what each of those agencies is doing and how they can work better with the school. We also have some management groups that might include Barnardos, other local schools and other organisations from time to time, depending on the nature of what we are trying to do, coming along and working with us in developing a particular program that we are offering.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In terms of management, it sounds reasonably complex. As the principal, are you responsible for the organisation of all of that?

Ms VINE: Yes, but I have a really good team working with me.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Given the school's interface with many organisations and bodies, is there a different relationship with the students as a result of the school being set up that way? Are the students actively involved themselves in the interface with these organisations or is it more the parents of the children who interface with these various organisations?

Ms VINE: It varies. Sometimes it will be the school staff who have the greatest involvement. At other times we will be working closely with a community organisation. For example, the local area Aboriginal Men's Group will come in and work with the students on particular projects. To give you a couple of examples, we did a very major project last year as part of a science in the curriculum concept, called Bemel-Gardoo. It

resulted in the production of a traditional Eora canoe. That project only went ahead because the school, the students, were working closely with the local men's group and local elders. We also have a young men's group. Again the elder men's group will come in and work with those people.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Could you elaborate on that group? What does it do, what do the elders do? Do they mentor?

Ms VINE: They mentor. They are the repository of much knowledge. One of the things we are doing is recognising the knowledge that exists in the community and working with those people to share that knowledge, to affirm that knowledge and to make sure that it is included in our curriculum. So they are there in a mentoring role as a good role model, but they are also there because they have the knowledge that we do not.

Mr PARKS: Also the other concept of the community school, it is a kindergarten to year 12 school, so it covers all the years of schooling on the one side, albeit it being two campuses. It is all on the one side, so it is one point of contact. With the community centre, Ann Marie has talked about Connect Redfern. The school as a community centre reaches down to virtually the first year of birth. There are programs like Playgroup in the Park where the staff go out with non-government agencies and run playgroups in the park or run playgroups at Alexandria Park. A kindergarten teacher this year is running a playgroup every week and it is hugely attended, from what I have seen. It attracts a huge attendance. It is a whole gamut of things. Connect Redfern also runs food programs.

Ms VINE: They still have a food co-op.

Mr PARKS: They go to markets and bring back fruit and vegetables. They also have second-hand clothing. People can come in and talk about issues and are referred to other services. It is a whole-of-community concept. In the initial planning, and with the assistance of the Department of Transport, we rerouted the buses. Some of the bus drivers use it as a terminus. There is also a non-departmental preschool on site. We have memorandums of understanding with the University of Technology Sydney, Tranby and so on. It is a whole-of-life scenario.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Can you talk us through the memorandums of understanding with Tranby and the University of Technology Sydney?

Ms VINE: To be honest, I do not know what the memorandum of understanding is with Tranby. We certainly have memorandums of understanding with Sydney University and the University of Technology Sydney. The understanding with UTS has been very strong in that it has acted as a research partner with our school. For example, together with the school it has looked a project supporting teachers in the beginning years. They came in and worked with our executive staff and beginning teachers to develop a program to better manage beginning teachers.

They are also integral to our community forums. In fact, they were responsible for developing a survey that kick-started that whole process by going out and seeing what the community wanted from the school and what it felt about the school. It was from that process that community forums emerged. They were represented on quite a

number of different projects. It is fairly open; it is a case of our picking up the phone and saying, "We are interested in this. Who have you got who might also be interested?" It is a very open and encouraging relationship. We also have a close association with the Koori centre at Sydney University. From time to time we participate in research they are doing. The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience mentors came out of Sydney University. That is a very successful program.

Mr PARKS: The other feature is the very strong association with the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. That is a very strong association. Similar to the men's group, they provide knowledge and sound advice about the needs of the students in that area. It is about building relationships in a whole-of-community sense.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: I am keen to get your views or suggestions about how as a community we can increase participation in and completion of vocational and tertiary training by Aboriginal people.

Ms VINE: That is very dear to us because we believe that students move from a very supportive environment in the school often to a very open environment in TAFE and universities. Because of their structure they do not have the close relationship they had at school. We are part of the pilot program for the stage five vocational education and training courses being offered. Our year 9 and year 10 students are getting access to that. The benefit is they are starting to see what a TAFE course looks like and what sort of vocation they could be involved in. They are doing it when they are starting to disengage from school, but with full teacher support. One of the key concerns is how we ensure the mentor is there for a young Aboriginal person when he or she leaves school.

We are also involved in a careers lighthouse project. We are producing a DVD that will have Aboriginal employers and employees talking about what they want from an employee or what they went through to get a job so that our young people can watch a DVD that is more relevant than those that typically portray a very nice kitchen setting with a laptop. We recently did a survey of our student population and found that—discounting the selective students—more than 50 per cent do not have any Internet or computer access. We are still dealing with a very disadvantaged group.

Dr JOHN KAYE: What was that figure?

Ms VINE: More than 50 per cent—just as more than 50 per cent of our kindergartens have no preschool. It is a very different learning experience. We need to start career education early and we need good mentors. Many of our programs are aimed at that. However, we need to recognise that if we then let them go it starts to fall apart.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Speaking of mentors, do you have any Aboriginal teachers?

Ms VINE: We have two Aboriginal teachers on staff: One in the primary school and one in the high school. They are an excellent resource for the school. The more we can encourage Aboriginal people to get into education the better it will be.

Mr PARKS: We also have Aboriginal education assistants. Do we have any in-class tutors?

Ms VINE: We do have in-class tutors. They bring a depth of knowledge to the school that we do not have. They also provide a positive affirmation that students can succeed and they have rewarding experiences. For example, one of our in-class tutors is a Brewarrina man with a very strong background in dance. He has created an Aboriginal dance group for the boys. That has really created a huge change in self-esteem and increased parental involvement in the school. They are coming in because they want to see the boys dance. The boys are also dancing at major events. They can bring this depth of knowledge to the school. We also get our Aboriginal staff to work with our selective non-Aboriginal students because we believe it is just as important to break down the stereotypes to show that these people have knowledge.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: How many Aboriginal students with disabilities do you cater for at the school?

Ms VINE: We have no students with physical disabilities. We have a few students—fewer than 10—who would be classified as intellectually disadvantaged.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Do you have a special unit?

Ms VINE: No, it is inclusive.

Mr PARKS: The school runs a learning centre.

Ms VINE: Yes, we run a learning centre.

Mr PARKS: They have just re-allocated their staffing from kindergarten to year 4.

Ms VINE: We generally take reading levels for students when they first enter primary school. We have students who have zero reading skills when they come to school. To demonstrate how different that is from the general position, that represented 75 per cent of the students in the Sydney region who had that level of reading, and we represent nine students out of the whole Sydney region kindergartens. They come in with a major disadvantage compared to other students.

Mr PARKS: That is why the emphasis is through Connect Redfern, the playgroups in the park and upskilling the parents in literacy.

Ms VINE: We are starting a child-care program on Friday. We are training Aboriginal women to be playgroup facilitators so that they can then take on and run playgroups themselves. With some of the extra funds we receive the school will initiate an Aboriginal playgroup and hire one of the women who completes the course to run the group and try to start the preschool education process.

Mr PARKS: That is moving back to the sense of community. It is not the traditional approach of coming to school. It is the school working with the kids but also moving into the community. Another strong link has been with the Redfern-Waterloo Authority. We were talking about vocation education. The enterprise and employment

strategy has provided a great deal of support for the kids. They are doing work experience with transition. One of their people comes in and works with the students in the school. It is about working with everyone in the community who is willing to work with us.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: I am impressed. You must have a psyche and a team with a psyche. How did you build your success? I can see the pride that Paul has in tick-tacking with everything you do. You do so many things that he has to remind you of them. How can we instil this in other places? What you are doing is marvellous.

Ms VINE: I think you will find people with passion in most schools. We are lucky on one hand and unlucky on another. We are lucky because we receive additional funds through programs such as the Priority Schools Program and the Schools in Partnership Program. We are unlucky because we need those funds because our students are not reaching national benchmarks. Those programs have allowed us to hire some of the staff to whom I have referred. They also allow me through the merit selection process to select some of the staff at my school. We have used funding to employ two community liaison officers at the school. The role of those community liaison officers is to go out to both our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and create stronger links with them. They have created a community newsletter that goes into cafes and the Aboriginal Medical Service waiting rooms, so that the community knows what is going on in the schools. They have involved the Koori radio with our students and will be doing a course with them as a result of that, and really strengthening the links.

Those sorts of things would not have been possible without the additional funding we have received. The passion is there, I think, in most staff. It is just that we have been given that little extra to help support some of the many extra programs. We also, as I said, have very good links with a number of organisations. Again, I mention the AIME Mentoring program in which the university students come in and work with our senior students. That is such a positive program. The students talk about it positively went the mentors are not there. They turn up on the day that the mentors are supposed to be there—we always have the best attendance on those days—and they help create that culture of learning for the students.

Mr PARKS: I think one thing Anne Marie has neglected to say is the strong and dynamic leadership from Anne Marie. She is a very humble person.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: You must have high energy levels too. To go into all those sections of the community and to keep it up and to realise what works and what does not work, is not easy. Can I ask about non-indigenous communities, because it has been a real challenge to keep the non-indigenous community engaged when you are doing the special things for the indigenous community and treat them all as a whole? Have you been successful in the participation of the non-indigenous families?

Ms VINE: To as much an extent as we have been with the Aboriginal families. We have developed close links with the South Sydney community organisations and they have helped and come in when we have been running programs. We always talked at our school about educating all students. When organisations approach us we are very much along the line of if your program is just there to support the Aboriginal students, we are not sure it is a program for our school, because if we have students in need it

does not matter where they come from. I think the community is very aware of that, that we are about educating all students, but we also employ through the priority schools program language tutors from the Vietnamese and Indonesian communities.

We used to have Chinese but unfortunately she could not continue coming. That is to assist with language but also to assist with culture, and they run events with all students, involving and affirming their culture. We celebrate Harmony Day, we celebrate an international day every two years and it is all about everybody enjoying each other's culture. Just recently on Harmony Day we had the most amazing mix of students doing a Maori war dance. It was amazing to watch. Even our Aboriginal boys dance group, there is a Muslim boy in there, there is a Lebanese boy in there and there are Aboriginal students. So, we are inclusive.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Paul, how do we take all the good stuff we see happening and put it into the education system at a higher level?

Mr PARKS: Well, we showcase Alex Park—we call it Alex Park. We showcase it to a lot of people. We were talking to Trevor Fletcher this morning, and people like that and make sure that they know in depth what is going on. Trevor is good, he is very happy to come and he comes out and sees these things. When we work with our network of principals we are also showcasing what is going on, and if people are interested in having a look at how the community school works we are always very open. We have had people from Victoria and some people from Queensland to have a look. We are very willing to share. One of our big things is we are making sure that people know exactly what is going on. We are always saying to them this is good, we just need to continue this and we can enhance it. One of the really good things is that there is a lot of self-evaluation going on. The school does not rest on its laurels. We are not saying it is a perfect place; it is not, and we have our challenges, but there is a lot of self-reflection from the staff and a lot of cohesion to try to make a better end telling the stories.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: You need to go on *Australian Story*, I think. Indigenous culture, indigenous language, I imagine there is respect for everybody's culture, indigenous, non-indigenous, and Vietnamese children and so forth?

Ms VINE: Yes.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: That would be part of the curriculum. What about indigenous language?

Ms VINE: Yes, for a number of years now we have been commissioned to run Wiradjuri as a language that students are taught. As part of the protocols, every parent has the opportunity to say no, that they would rather their child learnt their traditional tribal language but, on the whole, most of our students do that. That is offered K to 6 and then as an elective in years 8 to 12. So, currently we are probably one of the few schools who are running it as the LOTE subject—language other than English—mandatory 100-hour course that students have to do. They do Wiradjuri. As I said, the Vietnamese students, the Indonesian students or any students who would like to learn that language have the opportunity to do so with the language tutors. The school runs Aboriginal studies from kindergarten through to year 12. So, the culture is very much embedded in the curriculum, and part of what we do at regular staff meetings is look at

what we are doing and how we are doing it. We review the Aboriginal education policy. We work with our Aboriginal education assistants and get advice from them. So, we are constantly looking at better ways of embedding the culture into the community.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Preschools—can we see those rates being lifted and, at the other end, participation from year 10 or getting them to year 10 and beyond?

Ms VINE: I think with preschools, and this is purely coming out of my mind and is not based on any evidence, there are no preschool spaces that I can see that Aboriginal students could go to. Being in the inner city, they are snapped up by commuters so there really are no places and there are not that many preschools associated with public schools in the inner city. There are possibly not that many places that students could go to.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: If they were there, would they be taken up, do you believe?

Ms VINE: I think that part of what we are trying to do with the connect Redfern work and a lot of the other agencies is a strong encouragement of that happening. That is the direction and the goal we want but, at the same time, there are possibly not that many places available.

Mr PARKS: That is why we have moved to playgroups in the park, the mobile play bus in association with other government and non-government agencies, building up the parents' confidence and skills in literacy. We have been doing a lot of work with Families New South Wales and we are currently doing a lot of work in upskilling workers who work with people like preschool workers, librarians and community workers, giving them information on what is important with teaching literacy and things like that. We also have a project at the moment with Families New South Wales, working specifically with Aboriginal parents to build those sorts of skills so that hopefully the confidence will grow and then they will take advantage of those sorts of things. But, the mobile play bus and those sorts of things are reaching out the play school and I think the parents tend to like that. But also, reaching the younger mums, the 16 and 17 single mums. They are the hard ones to reach, and going out into the park, going to them, is a good way to start and we are starting to get there.

CHAIR: I am sorry, did I miss the answer to the other end?

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Participation, the other end, participation to, say, year 10 and perhaps to year 12. Are we seeing an increase overall, but particularly in indigenous children?

Ms VINE: I think we are finding that the pre-apprenticeship schemes, the traineeships, the school-based traineeships, are making a positive impact on keeping kids at school, because they are getting a chance to go about their education in a different way but they are also starting to see where this can lead. We are dealing with a lot of families who do not have that history of work in the family and a lot of our parents have very little educational experience themselves. To some extent these children are the pioneers of further education. Some students in our school have said to us, "I am the first child in my family to have gone to year 10." That is a lot to get past but those sorts of experiences and mentoring—I keep coming back to that but it is very important—are

starting to make a difference. At our school now the current year 10 is the very first of the Alexandria Park Community School students. The year 11 and 12 students are the old Cleveland Street High. We have already noticed a difference between the new cohort and the old.

CHAIR: So that is 50 per cent indigenous?

Ms VINE: Yes.

CHAIR: In the years 1 to 7—excuse me, that is primary school?

Mr PARKS: Year 7 is the first year of high school.

CHAIR: So, K to 6, the retention rate there and the retention rate in the 7 to 12 years, what are the percentage differences in terms of the 50 per cent overall?

Ms VINE: If I take the meaning of your question to be talking about indigenous students, their retention at school in the younger years is extremely good. Off the top of my head, I would say 80 per cent or 90 per cent in those younger years.

CHAIR: Pretty much the same as the norm?

Ms VINE: Yes.

CHAIR: And then?

Ms VINE: The falloff starts from about year 8 onwards, and it was one of our decisions for changing the campus structure. It starts to fall off by year 9, probably down to half, and by year 10 it could be down to a quarter of what the ordinary school population is.

CHAIR: Where does the dance instructor take up the boys, at what age?

Ms VINE: He works with students from year 4 to year 7.

CHAIR: So there is nothing for year 8 to year 12?

Ms VINE: Yes, we have different programs for them. We have identified that if we want to have children stay at school and believe in school we have to get them back in year 2 or year 3 or kindergarten. We have to start there, so we have those positive programs happening back there. For our older students we have different programs with perhaps a more vocational bent. For example, at the moment our year 8 and year 9 students are working on a horticultural, gardening project and they are working with TAFE Outreach on that project in an association we have with DP World. They are sending along some very strong men to work with students and act as mentors, and to weed and garden and landscape. So, our older students are doing more vocational programs. Our year 9 and 10 students are more involved with the A-mentoring, because that happens once a week, but our year 8 students are also involved in the young men's group and the young women's group. So we have different sorts of programs for different year groups.

CHAIR: Yet you are still getting a 75 per cent drop-off?

Ms VINE: Yes, but with some of these programs it is only their first year of operation and for some it is only their second year of operation. We are starting to see a difference in what we call the Alexandria Park Students coming through, so the retention rate is starting to increase for these students.

CHAIR: You have one primary school teacher and one secondary school teacher that is indigenous out how many teachers?

Ms VINE: I think approximately 38.

CHAIR: All up?

Ms VINE: Yes.

CHAIR: Have attempts been made to get more, especially in that older age group?

Ms VINE: The current system for employing teachers in school does not allow us to make a distinction based on race. We are just lucky that some indigenous teachers like the work there so that they have actually put an application in there. It is just a hit and miss affair. We cannot put our hands up for it. We do have targeted school administrative support staff, which are targeted, so we have employed an Aboriginal person in our front office as the front face of the school but that is all we have been able to do.

CHAIR: So teaching does not come under the public sector target of 2 per cent?

Mr PARKS: It does across the State and the new staffing arrangements that started yesterday will assist us greatly with allowing us to move in that way. From yesterday, if a vacancy occurs, I do not know whether we can say that Aboriginal heritage is a desirable criteria but we can certainly work the advertisements to give the flavour that, yes, that is the sort of people we would be looking for.

Ms VINE: Our school accepts students on their practicum from Sydney University so a lot of the Aboriginal staff in training will come to our school and do their practicum there. With the facility to be able to employ our own staff, it is highly likely that we will get a greater number of Aboriginal people wanting to work with us.

Mr PARKS: But we also have the Aboriginal education assistants and the in-school tutors. We have an Aboriginal school liaison officer so while there might be two teachers, there are a lot more Aboriginal staff who are working in the school but not in the teaching role.

Dr JOHN KAYE: In your answers to previous questions you talked about retention rates but you did not talk about truancy. How do your truancy rates compared to other schools and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students?

Ms VINE: Our attendance rate is much worse than other schools. It is worse in kindergarten. It picks in lower primary and then it starts to taper off again as the students head towards year 12. The bulk of our non-indigenous students are our selective stream and their attendance tends to be pretty much close to 100 per cent, so attendance is still a major issue for us. I suspect it will always be a little lower than the State because the number of our students are away because they go back to attend funerals and unfortunately funerals are a way of life for Aboriginal families, so we will have students to go back to Walgett, for example, and they will be gone for three or four weeks.

One of the things we have done there is work with the families to get them into a temporary enrolment back in that town and that has been a little successful. We have a lot of attendance programs in place and award systems and we work very closely with the home school liaison officer and the Aboriginal school liaison officer to work with families who have poor attendance. I would say, though, that attendance is getting better except in some families. There are some families with chronic attendance and they really skew our figures but we are seeing a lot more students coming more often and it is up to us to make the curriculum relevant and engaging and have the people who they feel supported by, so I lot of our direction is what we offer at school.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Interestingly, you did not mention the police in the people you talked to.

Ms VINE: Sorry, yes, the police. One of the police liaison officers is attached to our school and he comes on a regular basis. We also work closely with the youth liaison officers who run some programs through PCYC but also come in and do programs on drug education or programs associated around anti-bullying, et cetera, so they do have a close association. They are invited to a lot of our school events and they are part of the school community forum. As well, the principals of all the local schools meet twice a year with the local area command.

Mr PARKS: There is a strong relationship with the police and particularly with the home school liaison officers. We do a thing called a street sweep with the youth liaison officer and the police. We often do not pick up any kids at all and if we do they are visitors to the area so the police send them back to Blacktown or Doonside. It is very rare when police and the home school liaison officer are out looking for kids around the area that they find students who have not been at school, but there is a very strong relationship there. It has also been enhanced through the Redfern-Waterloo association and the case coordination unit, which has been working in Redfern-Waterloo targeting families in need. That interagency approach has been very strong in targeting. We do target but it is more assisting and supporting particular families so you have police, health, housing, juvenile justice and education with Redfern-Waterloo working very strongly together. There has been some significant success with a number of families.

We forgot to talk about the bus. The school runs its own bus to go and pick students up. The public transport bus cannot get down on the Block; it physically does not fit. So the school has a 23-seater I believe—well, I have been on it—and it goes round and picks the students up. It is basically a door-to-door service. It does not stop at bus stops. It stops outside the front door. So we have those services in the morning.

Ms VINE: And an Aboriginal bus driver.

Mr PARKS: And the Ministry of Transport has been really good in providing two school specials and the community likes the younger children to go on one school special and the older children to go on the other school special and the Ministry of Transport has been good with that, so we have been able to do that. There are a lot of things out there. There is also the SMS system.

Ms VINE: We instituted a phone home system so that every day our office staff, once the rolls have been collected, rings every home to say, "Your child is not at school". We have just moved to more up-to-date technology with SMS as well, so we are constantly in contact with families to the extent that some times they are a bit abrupt with us, but my office staff are very friendly, with a smile in their voice.

Mr PARKS: It is about providing support, not just saying, "They are not here". It is providing assistance because some of the kids are a bit reluctant to come and it is about supporting the family in getting the students to school.

CHAIR: There may be a low level of Internet but not mobile phones.

Ms VINE: No. Everyone has a mobile phone.

CHAIR: Did we ask about your relationship with Telstra?

Ms VINE: There is no current relationship with Telstra.

Dr JOHN KAYE: In what sense a relationship with Telstra?

CHAIR: The Telstra Foundation or a corporate entity or what advantages there are or whether you have got one?

Ms VINE: We have a current relationship with a corporate entity, which is DP World, which is the big port company out at Port Botany. They have met with us and as part of their corporate goals they wanted to engage in helping with the community. They have become involved with the school through having some of their staff come out as mentors for our students and being involved in our horticultural projects, working with our Aboriginal education resource teacher and with some of the younger students.

The next thing planned is having students go out and visit the port and have a look at the world of work and start to get comfortable with what it looks like and who is there. So much hangs on good relationships and knowledge. We cannot underestimate how important it is that our students have some sense of a relationship with somewhere they are going. A lot of our students do not get involved in work after school because it means moving out of Redfern. They really are very scared to move away from that very safe environment and so our relationship with DP World is about saying that you can move out, you can go to somewhere like Port Botany.

There are some Aboriginal police there and they will release them again to act as mentors for our students. That relationship has only commenced this year but we are looking at it being long term. As we have said to them and as they understand, the

important thing for our children is that you are not a helicopter, fly in, fly out. Our children take time to trust you but if you keep turning up and keep trying, and you are not patronising, then they will give you complete trust and what comes out of that is just wonderful. And a corporate identity that understands that can do a great deal of good.

CHAIR: Are you saying that it would be good to do a lot more of that sort of work as part of that vocational training build-up?

Ms VINE: Yes. I am saying that for corporate organisations to be involved with schools is a great way of supporting students in their transition out of school but it is just a realisation that it is a long-term relationship if it is going to work.

Mr PARKS: There were some previous relationships in the early days of the school with some companies and they were not in for a long time. It was sort of come in, do your bit and move out—law firms and things like that. These people need to know that they are here for a significant amount of time. Consistency of the people coming is important too. Also, it takes a while for some of these kids to get to know you. They might put on a front to see if you are going to stay the distance and some people shy off some of the initial behaviours, but it is all about sensing what they are like and if they are not shocked or anything, "Yes, you are fine, okay you will do" but if they go, no.

Ms VINE: The other thing that is important is that it is a two-way process and we believe that there is a very harsh stereotype about Aboriginal people that has been portrayed in the media and corporate organisations gain a lot too from meeting and working with our students and Aboriginal staff because they see them in a quite different light, and that has got to be good.

CHAIR: Do you see advantages in there being specific funding for that type of thing?

Dr JOHN KAYE: I think what the Chair means: Is there current specific funding for you to do that?

Ms VINE: No.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Do you think there should be such funding and what would be the benefits of it?

Ms VINE: I am not sure what that funding would be used for because this rests on the organisation being able to release their people so it is a huge financial commitment for the organisation. For ourselves, a little funding would be helpful. For example, one of the things I have done this year is that I have taken my careers teacher and put her into higher duties so that she is now operating as a careers head teacher. Essentially she has no classes to teach and she is acting as a coordinator, so that in that role she is creating and strengthening those links with the organisations. She is also going out and seeking other links and being very much involved in working with organisations and basically saying, "You want to work with us. What is the traineeship you want to give us? It is not just about giving us a book or a pencil. If you really are helping, what is your long-term plan for traineeships? Let's start back here when the

kids are young, start to get a relationship with them, and then start creating that position." The funding that could help us is obviously for the release time for a person like that.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I refer to the selective stream that you run. I would like your opinion on how that affects the culture of the school. You have two quite disparate groups of people—

Ms VINE: Not entirely. There are quite able and creative students in our local stream.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Sure, and that is always true. But there are some who are more focussed. You also probably have parents and grand parents who are focussed on academic achievement—

Ms VINE: The parents are very different. We have conversations with the selective parents that we would never have with our local parents. For example, we would never have a discussion with our local parents about whether two hours homework is enough or not enough. But it has been very, very positive. What the selective stream has done for our school is that it has brought a number of students in—as you said, perhaps with a different focus on education, but also with a number of different skills and from a number of different cultures. In the early days they were quite separate, but as the school has developed its own identity those groups have been merging and there are now many opportunities that we create for the two groups to do many things together.

That has raised the expectations of everybody. So our local students are seeing a different way of operating in the classroom, or they are seeing on display evidence of some assignment work or a project that those students have done and they want to do the same. We have the students come together for interests groups, we have them come together for elective studies, so that they are learning from each other and learning respect for each other. We also have been able to have things like a school band and a school choir—things that we could not have done because we just did not have the critical mass of students. By having a number of selected students who came in with band instrument skills, we were then able to say, "Would you like to learn an instrument as well?" Then we provide the tuition for the local student, and they become part of the school band.

Dr JOHN KAYE: They are all the positives, and I totally accept that those things are happening, including the Pathways and so on. That is fantastic. What about the negatives? Is there a sense of envy, are we forming two separate cultures within the school, are there social interactions—

Ms VINE: As I said, in the early days that had the potential for being a major issue.

Dr JOHN KAYE: But you are saying that does not happen now?

Ms VINE: It is happening less and less. With each year, it is happening less. With the Year 5 and Year 6 students, you go out into the playground and the students are playing handball together, or they are on their electronic games or their cards

together. So, although there are some students who just hang with their class groups, there is less "my area, your area" happening in the playground. There has been a conscious and deliberate school policy to make that happen. It was something that if you had not thought about it, yes it would have. With the older students, they tend to mingle less, but we now have a school soccer team. That has brought together the local and selected students, and as I said, they are in the same classes for electives. But it is a conscious policy and much of what happens in our school is about teaching students to respect all cultures.

Dr JOHN KAYE: You obviously have a lot of program funding, apart from PSFP and SIP funding. You are probably fairly well entrenched in PSFP. I imagine you are fairly secure in PSFP given the socioeconomic background of the students?

Ms VINE: Yes, I think so.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I imagine your PSFP funding is not influenced by your selective stream, is that correct? PSFP is determined by the socioeconomic background of the students.

Ms VINE: Yes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: And obviously, some of your selective stream would shift the average of your socioeconomic background. Does that place you at risk of losing PSFP funding?

Ms VINE: If our local population fell, yes. If our class sizes became smaller, it would mean that that would happen.

Dr JOHN KAYE: What about SIP funding?

Ms VINE: SIP is funded in a different way. No, that should not affect that one at all.

Dr JOHN KAYE: With regard to your playgroups and so on, you do not fund those out of your global budget?

Ms VINE: I fund those out of SIP. As I said, I am advantaged in some of the programs, and many of the programs I implement are possible because of that additional funding.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Apart from PSFP and SIP funding, standard, global budget funding and staff allocations, what other funding do you hold at the moment?

Ms VINE: I suppose the short answer would be, whatever I can get. One of the roles I also have is seeking funds from all sources. For example, I have written a submission for the careers lighthouse project, which is through the Australian Principals Council, and I have been able to secure $10,000 for that. Last year I wrote to the NRMA and was able to secure $5,000 there. Every year I would go out and look at what is there and how it can be used in our school.

Dr JOHN KAYE: How much of your time is devoted to looking for funds, or basically application writing?

Ms VINE: There would be intensive times when that would be the whole week's work, and there would be other times when you are not doing it at all. Probably looking after all those programs takes up more than 50 per cent of your time.

Mr PARKS: And Schools as a Community Centre has separate funding from the department, so for its programs it gets some money. You can see that Anne Marie is very entrepreneurial in the way she gets out and supports her students.

Dr JOHN KAYE: You are obviously a very talented principal, and I echo the Hon. Marie Ficarra's remarks in regard to the work you and your staff do. This is not a comment about you; it is a comment on the funding of education, particularly public education. I have never seen that as cost-effective time for principals. It would be far better if you did not have to do that, because you could concentrate more—

Ms VINE: In an ideal world, that would be true.

CHAIR: We appreciate your appearance today. There are a number of questions on notice that we have not been able to deal with. We would appreciate it if you could answer those questions within 21 days.

(The witnesses withdrew)

JULIE PARSONS, Acting Manager Community Relations, Redfern-Waterloo Authority, and

BERYL VAN-OPLOO, Manager/Teacher, Redfern-Waterloo Authority Hospitality Training School, sworn and examined:

ROBERT PETER DOMM, Chief Executive Officer, Redfern-Waterloo Authority, and

DENNY HALL, Principal Project Manager, Training, Enterprise and Employment, Redfern-Waterloo Authority, sworn and affirmed:

CHAIR: Thank you for being with us on Gadigal land. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. Perhaps you have had a chat amongst yourselves as to how you wish to proceed with your opening comments about the Redfern-Waterloo Authority and its role et cetera.

Mr DOMM: With your leave I would like to do two things. Firstly I would like to hand up a newsletter which has been distributed throughout the Redfern Waterloo area this week, which is an update on activities and it does contain specific reference to indigenous job opportunities and so on. I would refer that newsletter to the attention of the Committee as an update on some of the material that is contained within the submission that we put in by 30 November. Secondly, I would ask the leave to allow Auntie Beryl Van-Oploo to make the opening statement and give some of her own personal experiences about the situation of Aboriginal people in Redfern-Waterloo and the importance of training and employment in improving addressing the issue of social disadvantage.

Ms VAN-OPLOO: Thank you for having me here this afternoon. It is a great privilege to be here and to be heard for the first time. I personally myself have been out there for 50-odd years in the workforce with limited education. I have come from a background where I self-educated. I have always wanted to take my education back to the community—that was the goal in life. From a very early age I worked whatever job I could. I have always worked in communities whether it be in the Sydney region or whether it be in country areas. We have never really had an opportunity that we can have a voice to voice our own opinions. This is the first time I have ever sat before a committee and voiced my opinion. The thing is I have seen over the 50 years that I have been out there in the workforce that nothing has really happened with building these bridges. Believe you me I have been around Australia to remote areas. I have travelled Australia to every major city and every major town. To me personally it is appalling.

I have done a lot of work in Redfern. I have worked for TAFE for 20-odd years as a teacher/trainer in hospitality. It was hard for me there. At the time—and I am being truthful—there was a lot of racism because I had an education and I was not allowed to have an education. There was a lot of good people there that helped me through the way and I stuck in there but the goal was to take it back to the community. I achieved that. I argued to take the education back to the community. The community will not come here. If you do not educate the parents then you have got no way of educating the children. I fortunately had oldies that always told me to go and get an education and I instilled that in my own children—now they are all academic people out

there in the workforce—and my grandchildren will have a choice. I think everybody has the right to have a choice in life.

This is what I am giving these people now that are disadvantaged through the Redfern-Waterloo Authority. I was retired and they made me offer. I did not take the offer straight away because I thought this was going to be another one of those things that they build you up and then they let you down. But I thought about it and I thought I will give it a go for 12 months and with all the support from Robert and the team it has worked. We have only been there 12 months. I have got people out in the workforce that would have no idea of how to go out and get a job. To me that is so great. This morning one of the girls got a job and she had a smile from ear to ear.

The other thing is that we have started off another course and I have got eight people from The Block—I have to tell you this. To me that is a major achievement. They are not only young people; they are parents. If you educate the parents then you educate the young people. I think that is what we need. I do a lot of hard yards as well but my being there as a support person has given them confidence. They have come down there by themselves. The word is out there, that what we are doing with the Redfern-Waterloo Authority is working. Just to see those young people go out and get the job or they will ring me up from juvenile justice and say, "Aunt, can you take one of the boys or one of the girls. We really don't want to put them out there." So I have taken them on and now I can gladly say that one of the girls who did something really horrendous is back at TAFE doing a course that she wants to do. She is getting her life back on track by coming to us—it was like a stepping-stone. If I can keep one of those kids off the street and give them some sort of life or education then so be it. Without people like Robert and Denny and Julie and, like I say, my other team back there—there is only Matthew and I, he is the chef—to see how we have grown in 12 months is just amazing and to see that the word is out there now in the community. I have already been out to Mt Druitt and we are doing a day on 6 or 8 May so they can get the people to come in from out there.

I am training younger people to take over from where I am leaving off when I do eventually step back, which is in the cards within a few years. But for now it is absolutely working in Redfern and I can see the changes. Not only that, the community is so proud of what we are doing. The Elders come down and believe it or not they sit outside and have a cappuccino—they have never had a cappuccino in their life. They come down and have parties and meals. We run a catering service as well, so we have in-house functions where the students get hands-on training. We had 60 people there last Wednesday night and the people that came did not stop complementing us on the service. I was so proud because that is what it is all about.

We do work in conjunction with the Alexandria Park Community School. I work with all the schools within the area so that if there is a dropout I will take that person on board and then eventually I would rather them go back to school and finish school—it is just not in the cards for some of them but a lot of them to go back to school when they are at an early age. We are in the heart of the community—we are on Wilson Street. It is not only the Redfern community that supports everything; it is the communities within the Sydney region and country areas. I can see this program that we run would work in remote areas, it would work in a small country town on a smaller scale but it is a matter of getting out there. I always talk to my niece—a teacher at

Walgett High School where I come from—and she said the kids are starting to change a little bit.

They all know about me. If I can just get it out there it would make one hell of a difference for everybody. I would like to take it to the Kimberley's and I would love to take it to Kakadu and Western Australia because they are people that really need something. At the end of the day what we are doing down there is training people to get real jobs. When they get real jobs it makes one hell of a difference in their lives. That is what it is all about with us and me and working as a team and getting them to work as a team themselves. Believe you me for those people to come from The Block under their own self-esteem is just amazing. I hope it does continue.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your opening comments.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Mr Domm, I wanted to ask you some questions about some specific aspects of the development and the impact that will have on the Aboriginal community. I do that in the context that this is obviously one model that is being tried and therefore it is relevant to us. The issue with your particular strategies, as I understand it, is that in any of the developments that you propose there will be no new schools? Is that correct? You are not providing any schools? For example, you are selling off Redfern Public and Rachel Foster but there is no new education institutions being provided at the primary or secondary level?

Mr DOMM: The decision to close the Redfern school was taken some time before the Redfern-Waterloo Authority was established. I understand that was concomitant with a significant upgrading of the Alexandria Park school to cater for—I think the Redfern school was down to about 50 students. There was a decision made, based on the demographics of the area, that that school was surplus to requirements and Alexandria Park school from all I have seen seems to be quite a strong success story. In terms of increases in population, stage one of the Redfern-Waterloo Authority Built Environment Plan is premised mainly on commercial development and jobs. We only envisage 2,000 dwellings under stage one of that plan, which probably translates to 3,000 or so new residents in the area. So it is not seen that will have a significant impact in terms of demands for new schools.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Are you presuming that the 3,000 new residents will be infertile?

Mr DOMM: No.

Dr JOHN KAYE: They will have children.

Mr DOMM: And the existing schools are able to cater for whatever children may be there.

Dr JOHN KAYE: If you are going to increase the population by 3,000, will that not put additional stress on existing services, in particular, education services? There is no new provision for educational capacity?

Mr DOMM: That is a matter for the Department of Education. They believe that the existing school facilities are capable of meeting expected growth. I agree with that position.

Dr JOHN KAYE: You agree with the position of the Department of Education?

Mr DOMM: Yes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: One of the issues the Redfern-Waterloo Authority has spoken about is jobs creation by this development. Is it your position that the jobs created will benefit the Aboriginal community in Redfern and Waterloo?

Mr DOMM: It already has.

Dr JOHN KAYE: The additional development is commercial and light industrial, is it?

Mr DOMM: We have set up the Yaama Dhiyaan Indigenous Training College, which has a hospitality training function and downstairs runs Koori job courses in construction. Obviously in the early stages of the urban renewal project construction jobs are the jobs that are coming online. Therefore, we are training people to become job ready. Already under the indigenous employment model, which we developed, we have created 240 Aboriginal jobs. At the back page of that update I have given you, you will see a recent explanation of how that model is starting to be applied in areas outside of Redfern and Waterloo, but even inside Redfern and Waterloo with private sector developments and other government agencies, the council, the Commonwealth Government for example and other State government agencies. So the applicability of that model is starting to spread and that is an indication that it is working and is being successful.

So we have already achieved a significant amount in terms of job creation in the construction industry. In fact, every person we put through a Koori job-ready course in construction, we guarantee them a job at the end of it in urban renewal in Redfern and Waterloo. In terms of hospitality training, obviously we are not running hotels but we have formed partnerships with major hotel groups and other employers of hospitality graduates and we are able to feed people into those jobs. My team, headed up by Denny Hall—and she can comment further—is also expanding into other areas and industries where we see there are labour shortages and the capacity for people to be trained and go into employment. The transport industry is one such industry. It needs to be borne in mind that the Aboriginal community of Redfern-Waterloo in terms of the census statistics is about 4 per cent of the community. In other words, on the 2001 census I believe it is less than 800 people. So when you are creating 240 jobs in construction, hospitality and other areas, you are starting to have quite a major impact, even if numerically it does not seem a huge amount to you today.

In the leaflet I have given you we say over the next 5 to 10 years we can create 8,000 construction jobs in the Eveleigh precinct alone, and about 800 of those construction jobs will be for Aboriginal people. Of course, the critical thing is you can create the training and the construction jobs because they are the jobs that are coming online in that area in the early phases of an urban renewal project. The next stage has to

be getting people into permanent jobs that are created after those new employment centres have been established. That is the big challenge for us in moving forward.

Dr JOHN KAYE: That was my next question. Given that most of the Aboriginal community from which you would be recruiting for these jobs already has ready access to the central business district [CBD] which has a number of these types of jobs, what are you going to do that is different to create jobs for Aboriginal people in this urban renewal project?

Mr DOMM: What we do is where there are construction projects on government-owned land or where the Government has an influence, we use that influence to ensure that targets are locked into the construction project before it starts.

Dr JOHN KAYE: That is fine for construction, but I am talking about post-construction.

Mr DOMM: Part of our contract, for example, for the Channel 7 development at the Australian Technology Park is that we have locked in 60 construction jobs for Aboriginal people. But we also have a commitment from Channel 7 that they will sit down with us in two years' time when it is finished and the employees are coming online to talk about how we can get Aboriginal people working in the television industry. We are creating those linkages as we go through. There is not much point talking about how many jobs will be at Channel 7 when they will not be there until 2010. You have to build the production studios first before the jobs are actually there.

Dr JOHN KAYE: If we are to accept that the redevelopment is good news for the Aboriginal community, it needs to be bringing jobs and economic development to the Aboriginal community. You have not explained to me why this particular set of developments will do what the CBD has failed to do in providing ready access to jobs.

Mr DOMM: Ms Hall is chomping at the bit, but before I throw to her I will say that I think I have already answered that question. We are creating the essential linkages with culturally appropriate training and mentoring to address the failures of the past, and it is proving successful. The figures speak for themselves. You do not have to believe me; just look at the jobs that are being created. It is because we have got proper training in place, we have got Aboriginal elders like Aunty Beryl who are widely respected within the community and are able to get people to attend training courses and keep them there. When they go out to the workforce we employ Aboriginal mentors to work with them in the workforce to ensure that if they are having a problem or they are missing from work we go after them and try to find out what the problem is. In other words, we have created a model that is fairly simple and fairly straightforward but culturally appropriate, and it is working.

Ms HALL: Going back to your point about why it is different than the mass of jobs that are available in the CBD for Aboriginal people, the jobs in the CBD are not for Aboriginal people and there are no programs in place for many of that employment in the CBD that produces a product that Aboriginal people can relate to. We spend quite a lot of time working in the community talking to Aboriginal people and being guided by two major elders about what makes a successful program. I think Aunty Beryl has articulated that fairly clearly about it being community based. It has to be culturally appropriate and it has to be professionally run at a really high standard. More

importantly, you do not train unless you have a job because the Aboriginal population is over-trained. There are so many training programs that do not lead to employment.

What Aboriginal people need to go through—and I think Aunty Beryl has expressed it—is a change of self-confidence, a change of skill levels. It is being in an environment where they can feel confident and secure and safe to make mistakes. Because in the wider community when they make a mistake they are not accepted. So it is being able to be a student, being able to learn in a culturally appropriate environment and being ready to go to work. That is why in the training we do we are very particular. It has to be full-time and it cannot be for any less than eight weeks. Because it is not just training people in vocational skills; we are actually training people to work. As you know, in many of these families nobody has worked for three generations. There is not a culture of work. There are no examples of anybody they know who has been to work. The family does not get up in the morning because it stays up all night. It does not have food on the table for breakfast.

All these things, you think might be insurmountable. I suppose the thing I want to say is that it has been quite amazing at how quickly the community has responded. I do not know if you understand when Aunty Beryl says that she has got eight people from The Block. These people have not got out of their pyjamas in two years; they are ex-junkies. They really believe that there is a future for them. What we found in the Aboriginal community is that if you can assist one person in that family, then it has a ripple effect. If we get 16-year-old Dylan into a job on a construction site, his mother is interested in what is going to happen to her and Dylan's brothers and sisters start going to school. It is a funny thing, we do not understand it; we have never lived that life. We do not really understand it. From an outsider's perspective it is if they can believe that change is possible, that people really care enough to put something together for them, then they take advantage of it.

We have got graduates from hospitality in the major hotel in Sydney at Shangri-La. We are placing them with companies all over the place. We like to place them in companies so they get a very big career choice. They might enter on a particular level but in a major company there is no reason for them once they have started that they could not go up to senior management. If you are talking about and want to focus on the commercial jobs that are available, we are putting together at the moment a package around that because we need to be ready for when the doors open. We want to have those arrangements in place so that the administrative people are trained, they are ready to go and we can try to get them into some work before the doors open. So their confidence is built and they can take advantage of those opportunities.

There is a major opportunity right in their community. We have said also that if you have a look at where the skills shortages are in Australia at the moment, the logistics, transport and warehousing industries have been highlighted. We are developing partnerships in those industries so that we can link up, provide the appropriate training and match it with the demands of the industry so that there is that seamlessness to employment. When we achieve that, that is when we have success. If we do not do that right we do not have success. If you are asking why other people have not been able to achieve it, it is because they have not done it right. The big issue that we have been able to show is that we have a model and we have developed it and refined it. That model can be duplicated. It is based on those really simple principles that you must do. You must have the mentors, you must have the follow-up, you must

have Aboriginal leaders, you must have Aboriginal faces in the classroom. When you do that the success rate is unbelievable. We are running at somewhere between 75 per cent to 80 per cent success rate in getting people into employment. I do not think there is another model around that is currently doing that.

CHAIR: Do you have any links with Alexandria Park Public School in terms of mentoring?

Ms HALL: Definitely.

Mr DOMM: We have very strong links with the school. In fact, we run programs within the school. I might ask Ms Parsons to say a few words about some of the human services aspects as they relate to the school.

Ms PARSONS: Since the Human Services Plan phase one was developed in 2005, obviously the Department of Education is very strongly involved. The Human Services Plan phase one directly looks at linking with children and young families. So a lot of the actions contained in it are directly linked to Alexandria Park Community School—things like a mentoring program for young Aboriginal men by old Aboriginal gentlemen. There is the NASCAR Sporting Chance program that we are involved with where we are using sport as a link to keep young Aboriginal children in school. Once again we are very heavily involved in that. There is the Nation Project, which Mr Parks spoke about just before, which we convene and provide secretarial support for. We support the school with young people at risk. There is dialogue and discussion every day. It is a growing process. There is also the Connect Redfern program, which looks at the very young children with playgroups and those sorts of activities that the Redfern-Waterloo Authority is actively involved with. There are a range of those sorts of things.

CHAIR: Auntie Beryl, did you say you have been out there to the school?

Ms VAN-OPLOO: Yes. I have had long links with it before it was Alexandria Park school and it was Cleveland Street High School. That is how long the link is. It has changed over the years, of course. We take students for work experience because they have got nowhere else to go or they go into the city and come back. I have had one come back to me from Darling Harbour because they did not like it in there, they did not feel comfortable. So we take the students for work experience at our premises. Then they go into a career because they can talk it through with me. I am there as their mentor. I am everything there. I am the psychologist, psychiatrist—name it, I'm it. Then I speak to them like their nan or their aunt. I can also talk to their parents. It all seems to work out for the best. As I said, I have had very strong ties with the school since the Cleveland Street days. They then moved it to Alexandria Park. Even when I was teaching at TAFE I went off campus and taught the students there. I fought with TAFE to take the education to them. Somehow I managed it, but do not ask me how. It was a big success. If we all work together these things can happen.

People are forgetting that there are not many Aboriginal families left in the area. There are 13 families left on The Block. There are young mothers who go to Campbelltown and then come back to Redfern because they are not happy out there. Redfern has always been our home and it always will be. We are providing the missing link; that is, education. We are getting out into the community. This morning a lad came in and asked when the construction course would start. I told him that it had

already started. He said that they are offering jobs on the new Channel 7 site and on the construction of the sports facilities at the school. I told him that it was out in the community already. It is word of mouth in our community. They would not pick up a newspaper and read it because 80 per cent of people my age are illiterate. People forget that. It is word of mouth, and then people will know.

Our children are illiterate. I have to scribe for them. That is why I have set up the program at the school where I am teaching now to suit the community. All modules are in a folder because I developed them. I was a TAFE teacher. They are core modules, so when they go out they have a certificate II and then they have other certificates that we get them to do off campus. Without my support and the support of the teachers they would not be able to do those things.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You have been provided with some questions on notice. I will refer to a couple of them and seek your response. The second question asks you to explain the Redfern-Waterloo Authority's proposed share equity model of home ownership. Can you provide some detail about that proposal?

Mr DOMM: I got into trouble a year our so ago at the budget estimates hearings when I answered that question by saying that that forms part of stage two of the built environment plan and that we had not started working on that. I tried to be helpful and answer some questions and dug myself a hole. Stage two of the built environment plan has commenced and we are working actively with the Department of Housing on revitalisation of the public housing estates and trying to see what potential that creates for new and better public housing and also an element of affordable housing, including the potential for some sort of shared equity home ownership scheme.

The leaflet I handed out today indicates that on Saturday the Minister for Redfern Waterloo, the Hon. Frank Sartor, announced a major affordable housing initiative at North Eveleigh. The concept plan for the redevelopment, which is going on exhibition this week, will contain between 150 and 200 affordable rental dwellings. That comprises about 12 per cent to 16 per cent of total dwellings on that site. The total is estimated to be about 1,260. That is a very high percentage of dwellings. However, I emphasise the word "rental". In other words, we made a strategic decision in respect of that site that affordable rental dwellings would be a more enduring solution than a one-off, lower-cost sale process. There are two ways to provide affordable housing: one is to sell at an affordable rate and the other is to set affordable rental rates. We have made the decision that the more enduring solution in North Eveleigh is for the Government to set aside the land from the sale process and then to use developer levies to construct the dwellings over the development horizon of the project and retain them in ownership and use them for low-cost rental accommodation.

When it comes to stage two of the built environment plan and looking at the public housing estates we are still not at the point at which we have started to work out the detail of a shared equity home ownership scheme. Therefore, I am not able to go into any detail in respect of that today. However, the underlying philosophy of that proposal is whether we can find a way whereby low-income, disadvantaged people living in public housing can in some way gain a stake in that housing so that they can generate wealth through capital growth. Having said that, there is no proposal to sell public housing or anything like that. We need to look at what is happening interstate and overseas to see whether there is some capacity to create wealth through a shared equity scheme. We have not come to any conclusions about that and ultimately it will go to Cabinet and a decision will be made. That is all I can say about shared equity at this stage.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: A witness earlier today said that the indigenous community in Redfern feels comfortable in Redfern; it is an environment they know and many have lived there for a long time, or at least part of their life. They have some anxiety about leaving the precinct to come into the CBD, for example, to take up employment opportunities, or even more broadly outside the CBD and other parts of Sydney. Given that many job opportunities are available around the greater Sydney metropolitan area, are there ways and means over time of encouraging Aboriginals to leave and to work outside the Redfern area and then come back in the evening? On the other hand, was the earlier witness wrong in that observation? It was certainly stated that there is some anxiety about leaving Redfern to work.

Mr DOMM: I have met Aboriginal people who will go anywhere to work in the Sydney metropolitan area, in the country or even interstate. I have also met the people described who feel more comfortable within a certain zone. That is one of the reasons we have emphasised mentoring in the employment projects we have developed. Aboriginal people can feel alienated working in Redfern at a particular work site if there are no other Aboriginal people there just as they can feel alienated in an unfamiliar place outside Redfern. It comes back to the culturally appropriate mechanisms in place. It must be recognised that this is an issue for some people, but not all. Where it is an issue there should be mechanisms to address it. Mentoring is a key to reassuring people that they are okay where they are. It is always better if we can send Aboriginal people to a work site where there are other Aboriginals. The Redfern-Waterloo Authority employs a number of Aboriginal staff and we have staff at the Australian Technology Park, which we own. We encourage those people to communicate with each other and if they are having an issue to talk to each other so that they do not feel isolated in any way in the workplace.

Ms HALL: Entry-level training must be in the community, otherwise it will not happen. After that it must be mainstreamed. With construction we run an eight-week job ready course and give them a broad taste of construction so that they understand what trade or profession they might want to pursue. Our aim is to get them an apprenticeship or traineeship. All that training is done by TAFE at an appropriate college. We want to mainstream Aboriginal people once they have confidence. We are trying to explain with regard to hospitality that we have no real leverage over jobs. However, we have very successfully negotiated for our graduates to be placed in work outside Redfern. They are everywhere across Sydney in the top hotels, at cafes and restaurants and with catering companies. If they have the confidence to work anywhere, they are on their way. That is our aim.

We do have mentors who follow those people until they are feeling relaxed and their confidence is high. However, we never let them go. We find it beneficial to have someone keeping an eye on them and being there to talk with them if they have trouble at work. When we first place them on a job, our mentors are there once a week. That starts slipping out as the person is more comfortable. We keep in contact with them and visit them on the job. There is definitely an advantage in having Aboriginal people working throughout the community wherever the jobs are. They do not oppose that once their confidence is high enough.

Ms VAN-OPLOO: We trained a girl down here who went home to Lismore. She is working there and keeps in contact with us. She was there for only two weeks and

found employment. Her husband, who was a junky—I am saying that freely because that is how I speak to them and they know all the details—is now working as well. I am very proud of that family getting it together. It does happen for us. However, as I said, we have never really had the opportunity, it has never been there. How I got this far, I do not know. The spirits must be looking after me. It is happening and it is positive, and I want it to continue. Eventually I would like to see our own indigenous enterprise in the heart of the community. We can continue training young people and doing the work that I have done over the years. My journey now is to turn it into an indigenous enterprise. I can see that happening in a short time. We have been there for only 12 months and it is excelling.

Some of our students are managers at one work site. They have also set up their own catering company. It is all happening. It is a steppingstone. I direct them to TAFE if they want to do an apprenticeship. I will always been be there to support them. If they have that support, it can happen for all of us. I can see changes in education with Aboriginal people. They want education and a job. Some of the boys and girls have gone for work experience at the Reserve Bank at a couple of the compass sites. They say they cannot go up that far because they have never been in a lift before and they are going up 40 floors. They were asked whether they wanted employment. Some of the young lads are only 16 or 17 years old and they are taking up apprenticeships. It is a bonus for me and the communities. I think I speak for the many of the Aboriginal people in Redfern and Waterloo, which is where I spend most of my time. I hope we can spend more time there to see this up and running and create an indigenous enterprise to allow us to be self-sufficient. That is my journey.

CHAIR: Without being intrusive, bureaucratic or big brother-ish, do you have systems to monitor and to assess the successes, to build on them and to make the story stronger and the outcomes better? Do you have systems to track these kids?

Ms VAN-OPLOO: Yes. I never do anything unless I know I am going to get an outcome. I have learnt over the years.

CHAIR: In 12 months will someone somewhere be able to go to either a file or a DVD and look at some exit stories about each of the apprenticeships?

Ms VAN-OPLOO: Oh yes, that is happening now. We are putting all that together. I would not want to lose that. What I do need to tell you is that a lot of these people, they come to us. This morning in class I asked did any of them eat kangaroo, because we specialises in indigenous cuisine. Not one Aboriginal person put up their hand. Did you taste crocodile? Not one person. So, I teach culture as well. I make them aware of their own culture and I also bring everyone else's culture into the classroom as well because they have to learn to respect one another. That is my philosophy.

Mr DOMM: I think Aunty Beryl made a comment earlier about going back when we started off, not that long ago, that there was a bit of distrust and cynicism towards these sorts of programs. There were good reasons for that. Too much in the past governments had concentrated in a well-intentioned way on training scheme after training scheme as if that was an end in itself. We have adopted the position from the very beginning that training is just the start of the process, the start of the journey if you like. It enables people to commence the journey, which is a journey into meaningful employment.

In answer to your question, I refer you to page 19 of our submission. You will see statistics there that indicate that as at November last year we are tracking where those students in the hospitality training are going, for example. There are only 5 per cent of those students where we could say there was no contact. You are always going to lose track of some people. That is simply unavoidable because some people do not have the means to be contacted. Even if they are around they do not have mobile phones or whatever, emails. The point is that with only 5 per cent there has been a lack of contact and the majority of those people have gone into employment or are doing further training or whatever. It is critical for us, and we say to them when they graduate, that we are here for them on that journey, and it is not just the training course, that is just the start of that process.

CHAIR: Their footprint is going to be there and their story is going to be told, good bad or indifferent?

Mr DOMM: Exactly.

Ms VINE: That is right.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

BRUCE DOUGLAS McQUALTER, Head of Indigenous Employment and Training, ANZ, level 1, 8 White Street Tamworth, sworn and examined:

CATHY JOYCE DUNCAN, Indigenous Cultural Capability Manager, ANZ, level 1, 8 White Street Tamworth, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Would you like to make some opening comments?

Mr McQUALTER: Thank you and thank you for the invitation to speak today. I will give some background information on why one of the four large banks in Australia is pretty well down the track of hopefully positively influencing some outcomes with indigenous employment. It all stems from having a business need, coupled with the labour shortage in regional Australia. Indeed, this whole program we have started in regional New South Wales. As regional manager of north-west New South Wales for the ANZ, I looked down the succession planning gun barrel to see not a lot of hope. What I mean by that is to get staff to go to some of these remote towns is increasingly difficult with the cost of living. People do not want to move away from the coast to inland and people inland do not want to move back to the coast for some reason, I do not know why.

There is too much stabilisation so when vacancies came along we could not get people to fill them other than trying to pinch staff from opposition banks. We find in some towns people are going around the banks and when they come the second time round it is getting a bit stale. This is coupled with the lack of youth in our organisation—there is a huge void of talent under the age of 30—and coupled with the fact that everywhere I look, I did not see any indigenous employment in banks. They were the ingredients for putting our heads together.

The ANZ was the original foundation member of the Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment Program [CLIEP], which is a Federal Government program. The large organisations in Australia are now members. From that involvement we had a look at our organisation to ask what were we doing as an organisation all over Australia and as I said to the chairman during the break, everyone was doing a little bit of everything and we had to herd all that information into some sort of structure. That was about the time when Reconciliation Australia was advocating leadership through corporate Australia to put together reconciliation action plans. As fate would have it, it was the right time for our organisation to document all these good ideas that were already being put in place around Australia. We released our reconciliation action plan in April last year, which was the first corporate to do so. The good thing is that it did not document any pipe dreams; it documented what had already been started with some bold aspirational statements put in and a lot of backward planning we put into place a number of positives steps to achieve the goals.

Through the Chair, I submit as evidence a reconciliation action plan that overviews the four main areas of our strategy plan, employment, financial, literacy, cultural recognition and capacity building. I have also submitted a few other items to help us achieve our goals. The goals we put in place were aspirational but they were put in place to demonstrate that unless you have a goal, you do not know where to shoot. Some targets were put in place but we had no idea how to get them. And from that

point in time a number of strategies were put in place to achieve those targets, which are reported on internally and externally.

It is fair to say that we are achieving everything we set out to achieve. We are ahead of target on three of the four initiatives and the fourth initiative we will be coming up to speed on very quickly. On the employment and training side of things, we started with one trainee in 2002 and we have 154 that have started in the program. For statistical purposes at the start of the program in 2002 we had 154; 12 have finished the program that have roles with ANZ through a school-based training program; four have finished the program and have gainful employment in other organisations; 27 have not finished the program; and 111 are currently in the program, 20 in year 12 and 19 in year 11. The program from its foundation out of Wee Waa and Moree is now all over Australia excluding Victoria and Tasmania.

We have five in the team from yesterday because Cathy joined 36 hours ago. Our team is funded 50 per cent through DEEWR and 50 per cent ANZ—everyone of the 111 current trainees and the whatever is left of the other 154; none is in receipt of government funding from any level. We take pride in that. We pay full fare; we pay the premium and we expect quality. When we are talking about indigenous employment, which has created all sorts of needs for mind shifts, internally and externally. But we are pushing through and aiming at our retention rates way above the 33 per cent, as outlined in the reconciliation action plan. Internally, there is no reason why we cannot have 100 per cent retention rate if we get the quality correct on the way in. Thank you.

CHAIR: So why are you doing it?

Mr McQUALTER: Succession planning and business. Along the way, why we put this in place, purely internally, we have realised along this journey the impact this has had externally and also the broad impact it has had internally on culture and also the advantages of engaging youth in a banking environment and, to coin a phrase, a lot of people say, "That is what we used to do. Why did we stop?" I do not know. As far as the indigenous side of things, why have we not ever employed indigenous kids? I do not know. It is not a matter of retrospectively trying to figure out why we were not doing things. We are now at a point of time where we are positively influencing the future and that is the track we want to go down.

CHAIR: There is no additional impost in terms of delivering?

Mr McQUALTER: No, we did not do it to get a corporate responsibility tick off. That was never an intent. It has been quite a good by-product because in 2002 when Cathy, I and Dick Estens, the chairperson of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, put our heads together in Moree to figure out what we could do for one kid—

Ms DUNCAN: They say that out of little things big things grow.

Mr McQUALTER: All these positive by-products were not intended nor are they planned. We are just get on with putting indigenous kids in positions where they can make choices and I think Aunty Beryl talked about choices. We are talking about providing choices for a whole new generation of indigenous Australians who have never had that choice in banking.

CHAIR: It is an important story.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Can you tell us a bit about your successes and perhaps not successes, in improving financial literacy amongst Aboriginal people and why that is important?

Mr McQUALTER: Yes. Financial literacy is a very broad subject. Do you start with any age demographic? Where do you start? I took the analogy of the football background where you cannot teach an old footballer how to be a first grade footballer. You have to start with good young talent that you think will be a good footballer and give them some direction, parameters, guidance and mentoring and see what happens. With that exposure to the workforce comes financial literacy. We are finding that the kids coming to us in employment are taking that financial literacy back to their immediate family or extended family and more increasingly we are getting requests from the kids' schools or former schools to talk about budgeting and planning. Also part of our reconciliation action plan is financial literacy initiatives that involve packaging up education programs so we can do Train-the-Trainer programs around Australia. Cathy has had exposure to that program as a participant and she might like to elaborate on that.

Ms DUNCAN: First, I want to acknowledge country, the Gadigal people, elders of the past and present, and the Kamilaroi people where my descendants come from. The ANZ was running programs such as money minded and money matters. They had programs called My Moolah. As to why it is important for financial literacy in indigenous communities, I come from Moree and prior to coming to this role we were sick to death of coming from public housing and having parents who were not able to budget money. I am talking a bit personal here about the whole community.

If we want things in life, we should get it through education and employment, not through breaking into someone's house and taking what they have, because I had no idea how to get it myself. I do not have wealth and opulence within my family. You also have transgenerational welfare recipients, very similar to the Redfern area and the Moree area, where I grew up. We were sick of seeing indigenous people at the Commonwealth Bank, the ANZ Bank or any bank, to be honest, at the key card machine, thinking it was the employer. A brick wall cannot be an employer.

Most indigenous people when they go to the key card machine to get their welfare out, they would stick their kids up—I do not do it with mine anymore. When our financial literacy was welfare, lack of money management, key card machines were our employers. We were sitting our children up to go to the key card machine and pull the money out, so our children were seeing that key card machine as an employer; that block in the wall is where you get the money from, not through a workplace, not through a commitment and not through going to work. That was the whole mentality of welfare and the treadmill was there.

To have financial literacy in your family and an understanding to budget, whether we have all the evils of drug, alcohol and lots of other things, if we actually keep money aside for food and we can learn through our children being based in the banks. These kids are in the front line now at the ANZ banks. They are not out the back like traditionally Aboriginal people were put to the back of the lines. These are

front-line customer service people. They are in your face. When you come in, you are actually being served by indigenous people.

For an indigenous person on the other side of the counter the pride is there that the child or youth is learning about money management. The ANZ is running programs directly working with communities in the territory and they have done some trials in Moree and looking at other rural areas and talking to community members or children about hire purchase when the hype comes around Christmas that "You can have this for 18 months interest free". It is talking about saving money and putting $10 away a week and doing simple things that can have an effect on families. By having a child working in a banking institution, learning about financial literacy and managing money and having sites on the ANZ website where you can go in, budget and manage money and utilise things internally, that is having a spin-off effect in the community.

Our kids are not coming from wealth and opulent houses. Our drawcard for children is coming from kids who are committed. Their continuity and consistency is at school. You have heard a lot about education where there is not continuity and consistency. We are looking at the kids who are making an effort to go to school. Whatever their family background, that lies with Aboriginal people. Giving them the opportunity to change their life but also change the life within their community. It is also a retention program because we are hearing that 41 per cent—I am not quite sure of my numbers—of indigenous people are finishing year 12 whereas 80 per cent of non-indigenous people are finishing year 12. We are talking about gap closings in governments and all that, this program actually not only gets the child an opportunity for a lifelong career but it gives an opportunity to complete a competency-based certificate to traineeship. It also gives them the opportunity to finish year 12 with a purpose.

A lot of Aboriginal kids who are going to school are not sure of the purpose. Do you finish year 12 to end up in your community to go fishing and get on welfare? Through this program you are seeing indigenous kids uptake. They are in corporate uniform, they are in suits and ties and they are not at the courthouse but they are actually going to the bank to work. That is a big image in any town, whether it is a city or country New South Wales, but very much in country Australia that is a big image. The program has especially had spin-offs with Aboriginal young boys, which I think is very important. We have not directly aimed at gender bases but through the process we are picking up indigenous men in communities that are then being role models for hundreds of other Aboriginal men that are not working but they are actually related, that cultural family tie is there. So it has lots of spin-offs, it has retention, it has financial literacy, and it has the opportunity for the child to have a career pathway after school finishes which I think is important.

CHAIR: It is either gender?

Ms DUNCAN: Yes, it is male or female.

CHAIR: What is the geography? I am sorry I missed it?

Mr McQUALTER: All over Australia bar Victoria and Tasmania. We will be introducing the program to Vic-Tas late 2009. But right across Queensland, northern New South Wales, South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia.

CHAIR: Are you able to link up with Alexandria Park?

Ms DUNCAN: We just did when they left. Aboriginal networks work easy but we already have—we have already given them the phone number, pamphlets and asked them to find me a kid at that school and we will find a branch that wants them.

CHAIR: Well done.

Mr McQUALTER: The hardest nut to crack in New South Wales has been in Sydney. Without doubt Sydney has been the hardest nut to crack because people do not see in Sydney the labour shortage problems as employers. I think the general perception of indigenous employment in banks has not been as hard. Where it started in regional New South Wales there was, you know, you live in that town, you go to school in that town, you work in that town, there is no disappearing on a Friday and not seeing anybody, so how you hold your head in that town cuts right through everything. So there was a great need to look at whole of community in regional New South Wales.

Bringing it to Sydney two years ago without any guidance and direction before our team was formed et cetera was disastrous. We found the most important need in Sydney—Newcastle and Wollongong included in that patch—was the need for cultural awareness with our staff to understand such cultural values as sorry time et cetera. That continues today but I must say the only thing that is gaining momentum in Sydney is through the success of those pioneer kids in Sydney two years ago. The kids that we put on without much effort or guidance and now featured—the girl on the expression of interest form, which is our application form, is Monica Mackenzie of the Padstow branch. That is real life.

Another chap we have got on another brochure is at the foreign currency centre in the Martin Place branch at Pitt Street, Sydney. Benson was from Tamworth. He came to Sydney for an education that he earned money for through his traineeship and he is now in employment with us in Martin Place. We are showing these kids that if they want it, they can get it. We will give them the guidance and the parameters and the discipline of a workplace and if they want that they can go get it. That is what we have seen with these kids. We had no idea that these kids could do this.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you very much. It has been a very comprehensive explanation you have given of the program. In terms of putting together the program and refining it obviously as you have done, did the bank draw on experiences of companies outside the financial industry?

Mr McQUALTER: No-one had completed any of these programs before.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: It is very much starting almost with a blank sheet of paper?

Mr McQUALTER: The original blue print—it is a terrible analogy—was the back of a drink coaster at the Royal Hotel at Moree over a few drinks with Dick Estens in 2002. That is how it started. So it has been built from the ground.

CHAIR: What were you drinking?

Mr McQUALTER: I do not know.

Ms DUNCAN: Red wine.

Mr McQUALTER: It was literally, "I don't know how to start this. Let's go and ask some people." We asked our staff. We asked our colleagues at the—I can't point to you at the Aboriginal Employment Strategy [AES] because you are not there—we asked our colleagues at the AES, we consulted some schools and it was actually an accidental meeting with a school careers counsellor at Wee Waa High School that said, "We have heard of some school-based training program. We don't know much about it. Why don't we try it out? How can we work together on this?" That is how the school-based traineeship started in 2002.

Ms DUNCAN: Yes, it sort of fell and then the previous ANZ chief executive officer came to the Aboriginal Employment Strategy and sent a team to ask what we wanted. In my previous role we could see that they probably would not look at the older school Aboriginal person because they had had some experiences that could be good or bad. So we were sitting there thinking how are we going to pitch to corporate. I had an education background and I said, "Have you heard about school-based traineeships? You can actually help kids come in and finish school and also train them in the way you want them within the bank and its structures."

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Can I be a daredevil's advocate for the moment. Witnesses have put it to us on other occasions that a number of corporations and companies have people, not departments, but persons within their human resources or industrial relations departments that act in some capacity as liaison officers with the indigenous community. They are a point of contact and someone there that the communities can go to try and talk about issues, in terms of employment initiatives in particular areas. The impression I have got though is that generally speaking—I say this respectfully to the company's who obviously employ these people—it seems reasonably superficial and not particularly effective. It seems that outcomes are actually only produced by the companies who put the front-end resources in and the people who drive it. Other than that, it is really just an email address or a telephone number. Is that a harsh or reasonable judgement?

Mr McQUALTER: From our experience from a blank sheet of paper through to today, we see it not only in the banking industry but across corporate Australia that success is where you put your money where your mouth is. What I mean by that is there is a lot of lip service on things that could happen, so you put a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) together and that will get the pressure off. But we also see examples where I guess a combination of clear and decisive leadership at the top, with identifying the passion at the coalface, and with that support and the guidelines of documents such as a reconciliation action plan, you sit back and watch the fireworks. If you do not have that level of support at the top and the passionate people at the coalface it will not work.

We see far too many examples where we have the great intentions from above but it is all lip service from the top right down to the coalface, "We are only doing this because we have been told we have to. I don't know why we are doing it." That is a recipe for disaster. So we have purposely made it easy for branches to say no to trainees, which is almost reverse psychology because the weight of numbers grinds those people

into almost embarrassment to say, "Why haven't you taken a trainee on? We have had this program for five years. Everyone else has had one. Why haven't you had one?" So they all talk to each other. There is a lot of positive peer pressure on the branches to put a trainee on but also we are finding the benefits of the trainees are far outweighing the war stories that everyone had been taught as kids on not to trust a black person with money.

Ms DUNCAN: They thought we were all bank robbers in Moree so I think that is where we started it.

Mr McQUALTER: All these war stories that people have been brought up with and then they find they have a young indigenous trainee in the workplace, all of a sudden the colour is taken out of it and they are just a kid. "They are a 15 or 16-year-old kid in a bank, a strange environment. Let's look after this kid because we want to make it work." When you get that passion at the coalface is just pushes through and you sit back and enjoy it.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Following on from your comment about making it work. What sort of benchmarks do you use to measure that it is working? What sort of figures?

Mr McQUALTER: When we were first asked about this program we had nothing to benchmark against because no one had attempted it. I do recall we were almost backroom scoffed at by a lot of other industries as saying to our chief executive officer, "Why did you go and say that for? You have gone publicly and said you will put 300 trainees on in 3 years. We want 20 indigenous managers in so many years time. We want 3 per cent of our workforce to be from indigenous backgrounds by 2014. You have set yourself up for failure." Unless you put those figures out there nothing is going to occur. That is what has generated action.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: So how are you performing against those statements?

Mr McQUALTER: Everything is ticked off bar cultural awareness.

Ms DUNCAN: That is why I am here.

Mr McQUALTER: We recruited Cathy 36 hours ago from the Commonwealth Government and prior to that Cathy was the chief executive officer of the AES who worked with us when we first started the program. The reconciliation action plan overviews our intent for capacity building but it is fair to say no-one owned it and unless an initiative is owned with sole responsibility it does not work. Every one of those other initiatives is owned—sole responsibility. The area of cultural awareness no one really knew how to attack. Our team is not based in head office. I head it up and I live in Tamworth. Cathy is in Tamworth, we have got another member in Brisbane, a member in Sydney and a member in Melbourne—I had to think of that town south. What that has been able to do is not get caught up in the politics of the head office and we just go and do it and worry about forgiveness later.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Whereabouts are you identifying and sourcing the trainees?

Mr McQUALTER: Year 10 high school. Right now kids in year 10 in high school are coming back to school for their second term. That is where the children are asked—and they are children—what they want to do next year and whether they want to go on. If they do want to go on, what do they want to do? We are working with our workplace providers—we have four workplace providers dotted around Australia but AES is our workplace provider in New South Wales. They are working with the schools to identify kids that are interested in office work because kids do not say they want to be a banker or anything. They will say, "I like air conditioning." That is our experience in North Queensland—they love the bank because it is air conditioned. So we have to promote air conditioning. But it is working with the kids.

We do the interviews through the AES and the other workplace providers in July. The suitable children that have completed the expressions of interest are interviewed by the local ANZ branch in August. They commence the work experience program in the September school holidays and those kids that are liking what they are seeing and the ANZ is liking what they are seeing, they will start on 15 December this year at the end of school. They will not work over Christmas or New Year because that it is a bit cruel but over January they will do formal training, work pretty much full time in January—all paid employment. They go back to school late January or early February and they come in one day a week when school is on. Then in school holidays subsequent over year 11 and year 12 they can work as much as they want.

At the same time they are juggling hormones, L-plates, P-plates, Higher School Certificate, financial pressures—and not downward financial pressures but upward financial pressures because a lot of these kids have got money that they have not seen before, and surrounded with family members that want a little piece of it as well. So we do a lot of pastoral protection with the children internally, via our career development managers. We have a team of five that was a team of one 12 months ago, but three of those team members are career development managers in their own right. They talk with the kids, talk with the managers, make sure they all come through okay. We have got a goal to retain 100 per cent.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: If you were to suggest some improvements to the process what would they be?

Mr McQUALTER: Quality at the intake, not quantity. The numbers in the reconciliation action plan are number focussed, quantity focussed. The danger in going for the numbers is you will lower your standards. I have instructed everyone that deals with us externally and internally let us not tick off the numbers and say "Yes, we have got 100 tick off. Our job is done." Let us look at the other way and say "How many kids do we need to get it 3 per cent of our workforce in 2011?" Let us work backwards and see how do we get the best quality to get that number? That means such things as these introductions of professional documentation to say to the outside world "We are serious about what we are doing. We are putting a lot of money towards this. Why are we doing it? Because we want leaders from indigenous Australia by 2011—20 indigenous branch managers by 2011." We are not going to get that by going to the Government and recruiting someone from the Government or the government sector. We have got to home grow.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Do you do any work with those that either do not complete the traineeship, and drop out of the program, or who at their recruitment stage are deemed not suitable for whatever reason?

Mr McQUALTER: It is two pronged; we have lost 27 out of the 41—before this big intake we have had in the past two years—who did not finish the program. Everyone of those trainees that finished early we conducted exit interviews if the kid wanted to talk about it, or their school, but definitely the local branch on what worked and what did not. So we learnt from that. In fact, the very first kid we put on at Moree failed. We could have walked away and said "no, this is too hard" but you have got to get back on the horse. But we learnt the most valuable lesson from that is to ensure that the family unit is in sync, the school is in sync, the workplace is in sync, all surrounding the student and almost acting as a buffer zone to guide that child through that horrible two years of pressure. When we got that right, and the retention, for example, of the 16 kids that finished last year, 100 per cent of those 16 have got jobs, 12 with us and four with competitors, but they will come back. We got the 100 per cent because we started to look for better quality, and made sure that the corner pieces are in place around the kid, and provide career mentoring and coaching along the journey. As I say, we are sitting back and enjoying the experience.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Are other banks doing what you are doing?

Mr McQUALTER: Yes, the Commonwealth and at a later stage Westpac came on board, I guess, in small numbers. National was smaller numbers again. A lot of the smaller State-based banks—Bendigo Bank—had a dip in it. It is fair to say it is "watch this space". This is not anything on pedestals but it is just that our organisation deemed this as the right thing to do for our business and the community that we serve. Anecdotally we are seeing indigenous Australians are not coming into banks because they are cold and unfriendly, they do not see their own people and, therefore, they are being excluded just by scared off. I figured that is not right or sustainable so how do we make it more inviting?

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: How much of a challenge has that been for internal mindsets to get the right sort of working culture across the board? How long has it taken you to get the mindset right?

Mr McQUALTER: Five or six years. We have got placements for future trainees in another 106 branches—after we vetted every one of them—who have voluntarily said that they want an indigenous trainee later this year. "We believe in the program. It is fantastic for all concerned. We want it." Five years ago we had to revert to a lot of scare tactics of all sorts of things to try to get people to have a go but it only took one branch to talk about the successes, and it just went ballistic. Once it hit Tamworth it took off.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: It is often in the culture of your managers in banks, in regions and country towns, setting the leadership of getting the right internal culture or can it be driven from a lower base within that?

Mr McQUALTER: I think the success of the program has been in the organisation we have put a lot of emphasis on personal values. You bring your whole self to work. It is called a break out program where people really question why they are

working, more larger than the mortgage et cetera, but really a lot of people were questioning whether they were in the right job in this industry? So people are really starting to be human rather than institutionalised. Once you have got that open mindedness you can identify the passion for different things, whether it is indigenous employment or financial, literacy or whatever the mind is open and they want to help. We are taking emails daily from different branches around Australia saying "We want a trainee. When are you coming to our area?" We have gone from taking people into the program to holding back the tide because we do not want to overwhelm the program and set it to fail. We have got to make sure that every step is successful.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: What sort of external mindsets are in those communities? In the early days would there have been questions from the non-indigenous community "Why are you setting targets for indigenous? What about my boy Johnny?"

Ms DUNCAN: That actually happened in the first trainees we put into Moree. I met with the bank ladies and they basically had the opinion "Why aren't we doing this for all youths? We are just targeting indigenous" so we had the whole history thing about indigenous people. But in the process, because we are talking about quality and not quantity—because the number crunching, incapacity or critical masses, if you start to do that stuff with Aboriginal people, you are failing. You need to look at the quality effect. One child's life can affect 100 people in their community. So in the process we have had non-indigenous. I actually let them in: it was my fault. We had non-indigenous trainees coming to the program. So even though this program is directly targeting indigenous trainees, if in a community we do not have indigenous trainees that is up to scratch, and there is a non-indigenous trainee that is there, and we go to an interview process and a non-indigenous wanted to be interviewed, I do not think we would be saying "no" because that is reverse racism.

We have had enough of that as Aboriginal people ourselves. So we have had non-indigenous trainees in the program, working with Aboriginal people. I saw an email yesterday from a school-based trainee, or a trainee in the ANZ Bank and he actually wrote "And by the way, I am not Aboriginal but I would like to still be a part of the chat room, sort of chat, internal thing for the young people to talk on." So it is not an exclusion policy, it is inclusion. There will always be, I think, in Australian society a question about "Why are you doing this for Aboriginal people?" I think that is just something that comes with our lives. Aother girl came from Moree and she is in the Northern Territory now and she is a non-indigenous person.

The good thing with the program is you are talking about insular parts of Aboriginal communities where we do not want to leave our community. It took me 35 years to get out of Moree so I could get my kids to see a different world, but while we are encouraging these trainees to finish their traineeship—Benson, as an example, is in Sydney now working in Martin Place and doing a university course. You can walk past and see an Aboriginal face in foreign exchange, which made me very proud today, but it is giving them the confidence to go out of the community and find professional skills. If they want to, they can go back. If not you have got grandmas and aunties and that saying "My son" or "My nephew works in the bank and he is in Sydney now." I have got to say we are not village people. I am not being rude in that way but we tend to be people that will either stay in one place and not move or we will transit all over the

place, which is some of the stuff you heard about of kids going back and forwards in the Alexandria Park area.

The good thing about this program is its sustainability because in some indigenous communities they like to stay on their own land but some of us like going out everywhere. But there are sustainabilities with indigenous communities so we have accessed a talent that has been untapped in communities that will stay. They will stay for the long-term and they will develop also that financial literacy amongst their family members.

CHAIR: Perhaps I should re-assess my view of banks. If by 30 June you are able to give us some feedback as to your connection, Cathy, with Alexandria Park School and how you have got on there, I might even think even better of banks. I must admit when I first heard of it I was having difficulty comprehending seeing the faces of people in banks in towns where all I heard was that banks were closing down. I am glad to be proved wrong. Thanks for your attendance.

(The witnesses withdrew)

BRIAN THOMAS McLEAN, Group Manager, Meter Reader, Country Energy, Post Office Box 717, Queanbeyan,

AMANDA LEE McCARTHY, Indigenous Program Coordinator, Country Energy, Post Office Box 717, Queanbeyan, and

TERRI ANNE BENSON, Group General Manager, Corporate Services, Country Energy, Post Office Box 717, Queanbeyan, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity do you appear before the Committee today?

Ms EDMONDS: I am presently group manager, meter reader with Country Energy. The reason that I am here today is that initially I was the indigenous apprentice coordinator with Country Energy a number of years ago, and was fairly heavily involved with the development of the strategy and the indigenous program that Country Energy actually conducted.

Mrs BENSON: In my role as group general manager I look after human resources, training, safety, customer service and IS. So in my HR capacity and training capacity I have been involved in employment programs.

CHAIR: You may have worked out among yourselves whether you would like to make some opening comments about Country Energy.

Mrs BENSON: I will make a brief opening statement. Thanks for the opportunity to follow up on our submission and the flexibility that we were given to appear later in the day. That is appreciated. As you would have seen from the submission, Country Energy's experience in the area of indigenous employment is probably of most interest to your inquiry. We have really been through two phases. In the first phase we thought we were really credible—this is going back to 2000. We were winning awards for indigenous employment and we thought we were doing pretty well. We then had some feedback that we were not seen by the indigenous community as an indigenous employer. That surprised us. We had a few awards on the walls; that was not what we expected to hear. It made us think about it again.

We entered the second phase, which as you would have seen in our submission was when we went to a formal strategy approach. We have appointed a dedicated role. The internal employee network formed for indigenous employees really gave a lot of momentum to the program. The two people who were most instrumental in that happening are seated here with me. I was at that first meeting when we got the feedback that as an organisation we were not seen as an indigenous employer. I thought, "I don't know much about that; who does?" Brian was working in our training services area and he applied for the role that we advertised. He took the front running and the formulation of the strategy and implementation plan. Then Amanda came into the picture because

Brian was successful in getting into our senior development program, which is an internal leadership development program. He moved into that program and created a vacancy in the coordinator role, which Amanda stepped into. Since then she has been driving the implementation plan. The people who will give you the best answers to your

questions are Brian and Amanda. For me it is a corporate issue that is backed and it makes good sense for us to be doing it. It is something we thought we were good at. Now we think we are getting better at it and probably understand better where we need to keep improving. Hopefully that is useful to the inquiry.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: From a corporate point of view, from the hierarchy of Country Energy, do they see what they have achieved and aim to achieve as being a good thing for the future of the organisation?

Mrs BENSON: Definitely. The elements of what we are doing are what we do all the time. We recruit locally. One of the philosophies around retention is that we have always tried to recruit locally. We have always recruited indigenous people as a representation of the communities we service. Now that we understand the gaps it is really obvious to us. It was not that anyone was deliberately falling short. We thought we had a natural strength there and we are now just building on that natural strength by putting some discipline around it and by putting people who know best how to get close to the indigenous communities in roles that mean people start to take notice of the positions we are advertising. It is seen as part of our recruitment. It is not seen necessarily as something different. We often say as an executive team that it will be successful when we do not distinguish it. We still coordinate the indigenous apprentices separately at the moment. It would be nice to think that one day it will be one apprenticeship program that we will talk about in one breath. It will not matter what backgrounds people come from.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: A question to Brian and Amanda: What happened in phase 2 that made a difference in terms of successful outcomes? What did you do differently to get this newfound success on the right path?

Mr McLEAN: Initially the indigenous program that Country Energy had in early 2000 was not structured, to the point where I was an indigenous employee of Country Energy and I did not have a lot of knowledge about other indigenous employees. I was a workplace trainer and assessor and we had indigenous apprentices. The indigenous apprentices were not in identified positions. More often than not they were actually add-ons to the mainstream apprentice program. If they saw a lad who showed some form, he was put on as an addition, not as part of the apprenticeship program. We had a number of apprentices who were a little bit lost in their roles at some stages of their career. I was seen as the one to go to if there were some issues. The difficulty with that was when it finally got to me, a lot of the issues were fairly well out of control. Trying to bandaid those was very difficult. We lost a couple of apprentices in the early stages. I think that what we have done in the later stages of the indigenous apprenticeship program is to put some structure to the program. We have identified positions.

This is my view. I believe that identified positions in Country Energy are very important. Without that, I believe our indigenous intake would be very low. We have also put in place a network of indigenous employees that we communicate regularly with and they communicate back to us. As part of that network we have put together an indigenous employee steering committee. Amanda and I and a number of regionally based indigenous employees sit on that committee. That is our conduit to senior management and vice versa. My take on what we have done differently is that we have put some structure around it and we have put a number of things in place that support

these young ladies and gentlemen when they are going through their apprenticeship. That is the difference I have seen.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Where do you start recruiting, and how?

Miss McCARTHY: We have bulk recruitment programs every year. When we talk about bulk recruitment with Country Energy that is generally for apprentices. Country Energy, like other utility businesses, is operating in an area of skills shortages worldwide. Every year we put on between 50 and 60 apprentices. We have set ourselves a target that at least nine of those must be indigenous. We promote that through a number of avenues. One is the network Brian mentioned earlier. The people who sit on that committee are known as RICOs—regional indigenous contact officers—so any indigenous person in that region can contact these people and feed information back. We feed information about career opportunities to them as well. They can then promote that to CDPs—obviously they are being phased out—and land councils, job network members and all those sorts of people in their own regions. They can feed it through to family. There is a saying about the black grapevine, as Brian calls it, that word of mouth is a really powerful thing, especially with indigenous people. We also use indigenous media like the *Koori Mail* and the *National Indigenous Times*.

We go to a lot of careers expos and try to promote ourselves as an employer of choice for indigenous people. Some of those expos have been the Croc Festival and the Red Ochre Festival at Dubbo. We attend a lot of expos that Centrelink and places like that provide as well. We have just started targeting schools and kids in years 10 to 12. We are really promoting to them the benefits of staying at school and the opportunities available to them in doing that. Obviously Country Energy requires people, especially with apprentices, to have a level of skill. Generally we try to target people that have completed year 10. One of the things we have identified through the indigenous employment program is that although a lot of the apprentices we employ have completed year 10 they do not really have that skill level. We have to do a lot of extra training with them, especially with regard to literacy and numeracy.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: What is your success rate to date with retention and permanency of employment? Is it getting better?

Miss McCARTHY: The retention rate at the moment is 95 per cent. We have had 123 indigenous employees and we have lost six. It has been really quite good. When we talk about the problems with retention, I guess some of the problems have been social issues that have adversely affected their private lives and are obviously affecting them at work. A lot of the work Brian and I are doing is to address that. The RICOs in the regions are also trying to get to the bottom of a problem before it becomes really big.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Have you had to change mindsets within your employee base to cope with the expansion and success of your program?

Mr McLEAN: Let's not kid ourselves. Our footprint is regional New South Wales. Most of our managers are white middle class men. Some areas are worse than others, there are no two ways about that. We are not kidding ourselves with that. In saying that, previously it was difficult to have some control over that problem, but we have been through a significant cultural awareness program. Our RICOs in the regions

are slowly but surely getting some positive outcomes, so they are being seen as the ones to go to, although that is not where we really want to be. That assists the program. As I said, with the identified positions –

Mrs BENSON: Underlying Country Energy's culture is this strong expectation of behaviour, that all employees should be developed and that they have to achieve the maximum. It is a bit of a cop-out for anyone in our organisation to say someone should be exited. Culturally our organisation is led from the top. If an employee has failed, generally the manager will be seen to have failed too. So there is this strong essence of "You have to lead, you have to be responsible for people's development". Having to support employees regardless of their needs is seen as something we do. Yes, it is different in this environment and it is more challenging, but it is the principle of give someone a go. They will be supported; it is not three strikes and you are out. We will work through issues. That is something that is common to the company.

Mr McLEAN: Obviously there is some ignorance out there in regard to some of these young lads having problems outside work that the managers do not understand, or they have no visibility of that. Having that regional base certainly assists in dealing with that. Going back to what Amanda was talking about in regard to recruiting, we went through a significant indigenous recruitment program where we decided to put 50 indigenous apprentices on in 18 months. Initially we put that recruitment drive out to the job networks for 50 indigenous positions across New South Wales. We got 11 applicants, which I thought seemed a bit strange. I seemed to see a lot more black faces in these rural towns than that. From that we learnt a lesson and obviously, as Amanda has indicated, we went out into the communities and pushed what we were trying to accomplish. Amanda, am I correct in saying that in our last recruitment drive we had 23 positions –

Miss McCARTHY: There were 23 positions and 260 applications. That was going it alone and choosing deliberately not to go through the job network members. We tried to do a lot of it ourselves and promoted it through the network and our RICOs.

Mr McLEAN: I might say it was a very high level.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Could I ask a few simple questions first off? How many employees do you have in the organisation?

Miss McCARTHY: Currently around 4,200.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: And how many of those are Aboriginal?

Miss McCARTHY: One hundred and seventeen at present.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: How long has the organisation been in place in its current form? It has been through various permutations.

Miss McCARTHY: Since 2001.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: How many of those 117 are pre the current organisation?

Miss McCARTHY: There would probably be between 60 and 70.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Am I safe in saying that you have increased your overall population—if that is the right term—of Aboriginal employees by 60 or 70 since 2001?

Mrs BENSON: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: How many apprentices are employed in the organisation?

Miss McCARTHY: Currently 66.

Mr McLEAN: Indigenous?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: No, apprentices.

Mrs BENSON: There are 450 approximately.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I think I can safely say there are 66 who are Aboriginal?

Mrs BENSON: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: In a general sense, what trades are the apprentices in?

Miss McCARTHY: We have 63 that are currently undertaking certificate 3 in distribution power line.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Is that what we would commonly call a linesman?

Miss McCARTHY: Yes, and we have three that are undertaking electrical technician.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am not being rude, but I asked about the apprentices as opposed to the Aboriginal apprentices. What trades are the general apprentice population doing?

Miss McCARTHY: Generally linesman and electrical technician [ET].

Mr McLEAN: ET and cable joiner.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: We are in an environment where we are in a situation of change, in a general sense. One of the complaints made in the Victorian sense is that post-privatisation there has been a substantial drop in the number of apprentices that are employed in the Victorian power distribution industry. Have you heard that complaint made?

Mrs BENSON: In our area?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: No, in Victoria.

Mrs BENSON: That general assertion?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Yes.

Mr McLEAN: No, I have not.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You have not heard it made?

Mrs BENSON: No.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Could I voice a concern that, if your organisation were to be sold, the policies that you currently have are not necessarily going to be continued—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Point of order: What the honourable member is doing is inviting the witnesses to speculate.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Absolutely, and they are not government employees, so they are entitled to speculate.

Mr McLEAN: Could I respond?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Yes.

Mr McLEAN: I truly think that the program that we have is that good and makes good business sense that I think that would not be the case.

Mrs BENSON: It is a skills shortage environment. It is percentage of employees and percentage of employment base. We have always said, which is why our strength was there: This is the employment base we draw from. Amanda has some statistics about the growing employment base and where job seekers who are 15 to 45 are going to be. There is a large proportion that is going to come from indigenous communities in the coming years. I think with these sorts of programs if you do not get on the front foot and be seen as an indigenous employer of choice you will not get that recruitment certainty going forward, especially in the environment we look after, in the environment we draw from.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: In terms of those 66 apprentices that are employed, are you able to identify where they are employed?

Miss McCARTHY: Locations?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Yes.

Miss McCARTHY: Yes, we know the locations. We have an apprentice trainee database, which keeps the records for all non-indigenous and indigenous apprentice trainees, anyone who is under a formal training contract. It identifies their location and

business unit and also what trade they are undertaking, what date they started, what year they are in and when they finish. We also have the indigenous network list that is kept up to date by the network itself and it gives everybody a location, and it is also available to other indigenous employees so that they can find out where other people are.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Terri, are you able to provide to us a list—not by name—in terms of where those individuals are employed?

Mrs BENSON: Yes, definitely, I am happy to provide it by location, by town.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Is one of you able to express where the majority of those people are employed? Is it Tamworth, Dubbo—where are they?

Miss McCARTHY: Country Energy is split up into nine regions. Regionally speaking, the Far North Coast, the mid North Coast and the north-western, which incorporates Dubbo, Walgett and Bourke, are the largest areas of employment that we have with indigenous employees. The smaller numbers currently would be around the Riverina region.

Mrs BENSON: But there would not be a region without—

Miss McCARTHY: There is not a single region that does not have an indigenous employee.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am not being critical, I would just be interested to know where the distribution is in terms of apprentices.

Miss McCARTHY: There is a definite spread but, like I say, the majority of employees that we currently have are in the Far North and mid North Coast and also the north-western region of the State.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: In terms of the mix of apprentices and in fact employees in general, is there a target in terms of where you expect to be, say, in five years time?

Mrs BENSON: In terms of percentage of our employees?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Yes.

Mrs BENSON: We are at about 2.8. We want to get beyond 3.5. We think that is fairly achievable. We have not really set ourselves benchmarks, we are trying to learn as we go. We have identified positions as part of a strategy, one per region, so that if we have an intake of approximately 50 apprentices we will draw at least one per region as an indigenous apprentice. That is our goal. We seem to be doing a little bit better than that.

Mr McLEAN: And separate to the indigenous apprentice program, we also placed 12 vegetation trainees on the mid North Coast and the Far North Coast and these lads came out with certificate 2 vegetation qualifications and also a number of those have progressed into the apprenticeship program. Our managers actually see this as a good little stepping stone into the apprenticeship program for two reasons: They

can actually have a look at the guys and, if these lads, as Amanda has indicated, are a little bit low in some of their scholastic ability, well, there are opportunities to fix that before moving into the apprenticeship program. So that is very positive and that is seen as a way of progressing our indigenous employment within Country Energy.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: In terms of the apprentices that have completed their courses, are you able to identify for us your retention rates, say, 12 months, two years and three years out?

Mrs BENSON: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: They are obviously not numbers that you would have on the tip of your tongue, are they?

Mrs BENSON: No.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Are you able to provide those later?

Mrs BENSON: Yes, we can provide you the exact numbers later. Generally, as an apprenticeship program, we are tracking over 96 per cent retention out three years, and we do not see a dissimilar trend to that with indigenous apprentices. You would not say there is a 10 per cent gap or 2 per cent; it is fairly much the same numbers, not materially different.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I was not asking you to compare one with another, I was just interested in terms of the overall.

Mrs BENSON: We can provide the exact numbers.

CHAIR: In terms of the overall figures of employees as opposed to tradespeople, what is the percentage of indigenous people employed as secretarial staff and so on?

Miss McCARTHY: We have 101 that actually operate within service delivery, which is obviously our field services type teams. There are only 16 that operate outside of that, but bearing in mind the majority of people that work within Country Energy do work in that service delivery unit.

Mrs BENSON: So they represent more than half of our employees anyway.

CHAIR: So it would be 101 out of?

Mrs BENSON: You mean the rest of the employees?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mrs BENSON: In service delivery, which is where the 100 are based, there would be about 2,300, 2,400 in that division.

Mr McLEAN: Maybe even a little higher.

Mrs BENSON: It might be 2,700.

Mr McLEAN: Yes, I think it is 2,700.

Mrs BENSON: It is over half our workforce definitely in that field.

CHAIR: That is on top of the 4,000?

Mrs BENSON: No, that is part of it.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am wondering if you might be able to give the Committee more detail about how you evaluate your program? You have given us some detail about the program, but in terms of hard-headed evaluation, can you take us through how your program is essentially evaluated on a per annum basis and ongoing basis, whichever way you do it?

Mrs BENSON: We have put together the strategy document and we have put in there how we want to measure our success or how we want to track progress. That document is about six or seven months old. The really encouraging thing about the indigenous employee network is that they have taken responsibility for that document and it is something that each time they meet they start tracking through each of those measures. Some of them are more advanced than others and the ones that are starting to cause a problem, you know, we said we would have one identified role per region, we need to make that happen—that is the minimum—and they talk through that, that is what is going to happen and they plan for that as part of the apprenticeship intake. The RICO would sit on the interview panel if it was an identified position, so they start to plan their involvement in the recruitment process. The last apprenticeship intake was really successful by having the local RICO involved in each of the interview processes.

In terms of how do we measure it now, I go to those steering committee meetings and we go through what are the issues. We have not sat there and gone, right, for every single one. We said at the end of the year we would formally review that and at the end of two years we would do a full review of the whole strategy direction and which elements of it are really working. We have not got to that formal piece yet, but in terms of ongoing, where are we along the implementation plan, that is something that the committee drives. I attend the steering committee meetings and any issues that we cannot work out or we are not getting access to information or there is a communication issue, we solve those in the meetings. Does that answer your question? The hard benchmarking—I could give you statistics. We do report quarterly what our percentages are in terms of percentage of indigenous employment, but I do not see that as being the success factor of this program, not at this stage.

Miss McCARTHY: We also do quarterly reports on each apprentice and trainee under formal training contracts and we look at what stage they are at, how they are going with their study, if there are any performance or behavioural issues associated with that, and we report on all of those things back to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], who are also obviously involved with the funding arrangements.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You have spoken about your program essentially being in its second generation or second phase. Do you see it being taken to

another level at some point in time? I am wondering is this part of an evolutionary process that has a specific sort of timeframe to it or is it a case of just seeing how it develops over time?

Mrs BENSON: From my perspective, definitely we know what we did not know when we entered phase 2. I think we have learnt a lot more about things that we did not understand needed to be done differently or were possible to be done differently. Now that the network is together, yes, I think you are right, we will learn from this, we will get to the second year review and something will change again. Amanda has a much clearer view of what she is seeing it becoming.

Miss McCARTHY: We definitely have some ambitions for the program as far as where we want our indigenous staff to get to. Obviously Brian and myself are the two most senior indigenous employees within the company. We would like to see indigenous employees move into the more academic field. We, like everybody else, are hunting engineers like you would not believe. We would like to see that we get some people within the organisation that we can grow into those positions through cadetships and obviously we have a really good area going now with our service delivery units with apprentices and trainees. Generally speaking, a lot of females, especially indigenous females, see Country Energy as a poles and wires sort of place, so looking into—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Sorry?

Miss McCARTHY: Poles and wires.

Mrs BENSON: Engineering style.

Miss McCARTHY: Yes, a men-orientated sort of field. I am conscious that I would really like to start exploring areas that women are more comfortable with as far as our employment program is concerned, so administration and areas like that.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Are any of the apprentices that are employed women and, if so, how many?

Miss McCARTHY: We currently have one indigenous female and she is based in our north-western region.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: I thought it was rather interesting hearing Greg Donnelly talk to an energy supplier about two and possibly three-phase. I thought three-phase was an interesting concept. Female take-up in predominantly male domain apprenticeships is an issue for a whole range of sectors. What sort of strategies do you think you will employ to break down the male domain amongst the linesmen in particular?

Miss McCARTHY: One of the things that I have been conscious about doing with Emily, who is our female indigenous apprentice, is really trying to promote the fact that she is doing such a great job. I saw her when we started inductions and, up a pole, she looks far more comfortable than a lot of the guys that we put on. One of the things that I have tried to do with Emily is to encourage her. I have also taken Emily to Croc Festival and tried to promote her. I do not know if you are aware, but Croc Festival is an excellent festival for schools especially, they have education ambassadors come in

and they really focus on each business, what each business does and the areas of employment that are available.

Emily was really promoted at the event that was held in Dubbo. We tried to promote the fact that Emily was a female indigenous apprentice because it is very rare that females are interested. At present we also have females who are non-indigenous apprentices. As you said, it is one of those areas that we have to keep promoting for girls. One of the things I did recently was to visit a school. I was interested to find that a lot of school-based trainees who are taking up electro-technology are females. They are going really well. When I spoke to a lot of these students they were not quite sure whether or not that was an area they wanted to go into. That was mainly because it was a male-dominated area. They were really interested to hear what we had to say so far as that was concerned. Promotion is probably a big thing.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Do you have many people with disabilities amongst your apprentice workforce?

Mr McLEAN: Not that I am aware of, no.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: How do you engage individuals in the program? How do you inform them initially that this might be an opportunity they had not thought of? Do you do that at schools? Where do you do that other than at the crop festival?

Mr McLEAN: Going back to the vegetation recruitment drive we got involved with from the mid North Coast up to the far North Coast, we went to the land councils, to the CDEPs and to indigenous employment centres [IECs] all up and down the coast. At a lot of places that we went to the indicator we got was, "Country Energy is not all that it is made out to be. I do not think I could get a job in the Country Energy scenario." Another indigenous gentleman and I went to the land councils, gave them a run down on what it was all about and told them that jobs were available. As we came down the coast the word spread and we got more and more applications as they had more of an understanding of it.

I guess it is important to give them an understanding about it. I believe that is where we are with Country Energy at present. A lot of the people I talk to see it as a viable employment option. Every time I go up the coast I am asked, "When is the next round of vegetation, brother?" They are very aware of it. It was so successful that we placed 12 guys into these positions. Unfortunately, we lost one gentleman because he was not suited to the role of vegetation controller. It is hot and heavy work. As I said, a number of these guys have stepped into the apprenticeship program.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Do you think organisations like yours have a leadership role to play in breaking down the barriers around indigenous employment?

Mrs BENSON: We believe we do, which is why we are proactive about what we do, but it also makes good business sense for us to do it. An element of leadership goes with that. I do not think you can be successful in approaching it if you do not take on a leadership role and start to understand what it is that you are doing and how to be successful at it.

CHAIR: The words "business sense" conjure up dollars in my mind. Are you doing it for a dollar?

Mrs BENSON: No. The words "business sense" represent an employment base from which we recruit. We do not do it as a charity. I think that is another misconception. A leadership responsibility goes with it, definitely, yes. It is not an act of charity. It fits in with what we need to do but leadership responsibilities come with it.

Mr McLEAN: We struggle to keep employees at a number of locations in New South Wales. We do not seem to have that sort of problem when we recruit indigenous apprentices from the towns that they live in. They are not all that enthusiastic about living in Port Macquarie. It is good business sense to do that.

Mrs BENSON: As I said earlier, we recruit locally and we use a common strategy. We also tend to recruit a lot of mature age apprentices. We do not deliberately do so. They tend to be people in the communities that we represent who have gone off and obtained other skills and they come to us as mature age apprentices. They are very successful and we have high retention rates. Recruiting locally reflects the indigenous community we represent.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Where are each of you based?

Mrs BENSON: I am based in Port Macquarie.

Mr McLEAN: I am also based in Port Macquarie.

Miss McCARTHY: I am based at Orange.

Mr McLEAN: In saying that, I did live in Tamworth. I have just relocated.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Are other energy providers doing what you are doing?

Mr McLEAN: They are. The feedback that I am getting from indigenous coordinators at some of these other distributors reveals that they are not sure how go about it. They come to me regularly—I am not sure about Amanda—and they ask, "How did you do this? What did you do there? How do I get this up and running?" It is not rocket science.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: They are heading in the right direction but there is still a long way to go.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing before the Committee. We appreciate your time. We will be doing our interim report at the end of June and our final report at the end of the year, so we will probably seek your assistance again. Thank you very much. It has been very informative and helpful.

(**The witnesses withdrew**.)

The Committee adjourned at 5.01 p.m.