



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2011, Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2012

WEDNESDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2012

MANINGRIDA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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**SENATE
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, 22 February 2012

Senators in attendance: Senators Boyce, Crossin, Moore, Scullion and Siewert

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2011, Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2012

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Committee met at 11:12

CHAIR (Senator Moore): Good morning, everyone. We are going to start, but everyone should feel able to move in and out as you want to because this is actually your meeting, not ours. I am going to get Jacqueline Phillips from the Aboriginal Interpreter Service to explain how the option of interpreters is working. We have a number of people here with us to help you. Jacqueline, would you mind explaining?

Ms Phillips (translator): Good morning, everybody.

Ms Phillips then spoke in language—

Ms Phillips (translator): I will not be interpreting for the people on this table.

Ms Phillips then spoke in language—

Ms Phillips (translator): We will have other interpreters out on the floor for different languages.

Ms Phillips then spoke in language—

Ms Phillips (translator): Use those interpreters out on the floor.

Ms Phillips then spoke in language—

Ms Phillips (translator): We have a code of ethics to follow. One main one is that we are not here taking anybody's side; we have to be impartial. We are just in the middle, just switching language. That is it, thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you. We always begin by acknowledging the traditional owners and acknowledging that we are working and walking on Aboriginal land. We are the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee. I am from Queensland. We have Senator Rachel Siewert from Western Australia. Senator Trish Crossin and Senator Nigel Scullion are your two local senators from the Northern Territory, and Senator Boyce is from Queensland, with me. We also have people from Canberra who work in our secretariat. They can make sure that all of you know the rules of how a Senate committee operates. We have Ian Holland, Sandra and Callie somewhere here. We also have people who are recording everything that is said so that you know that what you are saying will be recorded and held in parliament. A copy of everything that is said will be sent back to the community next week, so you will be able to find out what was actually recorded and taken away from your community as part of this committee hearing. I have a couple of things I have to say to formally open the committee. They are public, so anybody can come in and be part of today. If anybody wants to give their evidence alone, if they want to give it in private, they need to talk to the committee and we will be able to work out how we can do that. That is what we do in all committees. That is nothing special—it is what we do. If people want to talk to us in private we can do that.

It is also important to know that nothing bad can happen to anybody who speaks to us for what they say here. There can be no bullying or bad treatment for anything that you say in a Senate inquiry. It is protected by the Senate. That is also nothing special. That is how all Senate inquiries operate. We need people to know that. You must feel that you are safe and that you are free to say exactly what you want to say to us.

We need the people who are coming to talk to us to use the microphones. We have got microphones on the table. We have also got a couple that people can hand around. We will help you use those so that everything can be said. If you do not use the microphones we will not have a record of what you have said. It is important that, if you want what you are saying to be heard and taken away, you use the microphones. When you come to talk to us we need to know your name. We are going to work through witnesses at the table from a series of organisations who have said they want to talk to us; then we going to have a community forum this afternoon.

I welcome the first witnesses from the Malabam Health Board. Thank you for coming to talk to us and being the first. I know it is not easy to be first. You have got information about parliamentary process and you can always ask us questions. For the *Hansard* record, could you tell us who you are, and why you have come to see us?

Mr Oliver: I am the acting CEO of Malabam Health Board. I have been in and out of the role, I suppose, not only as CEO but also with aged care, over the back there. I must admit that it is not so much that we came here to pose questions to you; we were actually thinking that you guys had some questions for us. To my left is Mr Reggie Wuridjal. He is the treasurer of our board and a previous chairperson. We would have had our chairperson here today but, unfortunately, he has received some bad news. His name is Mr Charlie Gunabarra. He is currently the longest serving Aboriginal health worker in Maningrida, and I believe he is probably up there among the

longest serving in the Top End as well—over 30 or 40 years service. Unfortunately, he had some stuff that he wanted to put to you, but I guess he will do that at a later date.

CHAIR: Mr Wuridjal, are you wanting to say something at the moment?

Mr Wuridjal: I am the secretary and treasurer of the Malabam Health Board. I have been a member of Malabam, and a chairperson, for many decades. I am working with Malabam on health issues and other Malabam services—aged care and youth and all of that stuff. So they are all in there.

CHAIR: I can assure you, Mr Oliver and Mr Wuridjal, our visit here is to hear what you have to say. We will ask questions. We asked to come to the community and the community has been good enough to give us an invitation to come here. It is your meeting. Would either of you like to give us some opening comments before we go to the senators to ask questions?

Mr Oliver: I will give a bit of background on how Malabam was established. It became incorporated in the late nineties, 1998 or 1999. Malabam auspices the aged-care unit that you see down the back and, as Reggie said, most recently the youth and communities program. The primary healthcare program through the Enhanced Health Service Delivery Initiative, or EHSDI, is also auspiced through us. The EHSDI allows us to purchase allied health services and at this stage most of it is done through the Remote Area Health Corps, or RAHC. We have visiting specialists such as podiatrists, dentists and diabetes educators. As you can see, we have dog issues as well, which relate to health issues. You are, I suppose, more than aware of the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program that is currently going on.

From what I can understand of the way Stronger Futures would affect us or affect Malabam's running, our local workforce is very limited at this stage. Our aged-care unit has predominantly local Aboriginal people. It is managed by a non-Aboriginal lady and currently our cook is a non-Indigenous person as well, but predominantly local people are employed as carers. Our youth and community program has been re-established only recently. Our funding is starting to trickle down to us as we speak.

The history of Malabam has been a bit up and down over the years. We have had a few CEOs or people who have been in my position. I am actually seconded from another medical service in Darwin, Danila Dilba Medical Service. I came out on this round to help out the board because of previous issues, I guess.

On the relationship we have with the Territory health clinic, we do not provide primary health care as in doctors and nursing staff as yet; it is still under the control of Territory health. I would like to think that the relationship between Malabam and the health centre has been strengthened over the last couple of years. There has been a history of them and us, basically, and I assume that has been due to a combination of previous CEOs—we all have our different management styles, I guess—and also the Commonwealth-state relationship. We find that we have some duplication in services. We try to manage that as best we can, but, unfortunately, you will not be able to avoid that.

One of those programs is our aged-care program. We provide a residential and respite service, and we also have a home and community care program which is auspiced by another local organisation. Sometimes it does get confusing for people because, basically, they just want care to be provided for their elderly and sometimes people do not realise the different qualifications that you have to have between the two. So it does get confusing in some cases. We try to minimise that duplication, though, by forming relationships with each other and liaising with each other as much as we can, but the reporting requirements will still be totally different and separate from each other. At present, our staff membership at the health board includes me and an office manager/financial manager/supervisor/everything else. We have some local staff as well doing the cleaning and reception type work.

We have just recently employed a mental health coordinator who, even in the very short time she has been on the ground, has shown very promising signs. It enables Malabam, as a Commonwealth funded program, and the Territory Health clinic to work a little bit closer together. It strengthens our relationships with each other. Confusion happens in communities, and I am sure you have heard it before, with the dual roles or duplication that we have.

Unfortunately our services to outstations are limited. There are a number of factors to that: there is not only the funding factor, but also the level of staffing—I feel we do not have the right ratio for accommodation as we do for our medical and clinical staff. We try to fly-in fly-out as much as we can, but again, that adds a burden to our budget and can create some headaches on the ground when you are trying to shuffle people around accommodation.

The Maningrida Progress Association runs a motel here and it is constantly booked—it is chockas. We have temporary accommodation and it is exactly that: temporary. We are talking about dongas. Unfortunately you will not get too many health professionals that will come out and stay in the donga for a week. And I guess why

should they, when they can earn their keep in city centres. Infrastructure, again probably a common thing you have heard about, is an issue for us. We would love to employ more specialists. We would love to employ more doctors, nurses and that type of health staff but where are we going to put them? You can fly in and fly out, that is not a problem, but where are you going to put them? You still need accommodation on the ground.

We would love to expand our office. If you ever get the chance I invite you over to our office—do not all come over at once though because you will not be able to fit in. It is a temporary building. Beside it is the renal dialysis unit that we also auspice, but it is a self-dialysing process: the dialysis patient basically takes care of himself and he has a direct hook-up to Darwin. As I said, our youth program is re-establishing. It is not without its issues or problems though. We do not have accommodation for our youth coordinator and we are actually placing her in another funded program's accommodation. I am sure that I am going to be asked for a 'please explain' on why we have not recruited to that position. But we need to have our youth centre going. We need our youth to be cared for and opportunities to be provided for them so we bit the bullet: we have put our youth coordinator into OATSIH funded accommodation. But I will definitely be getting a 'please explain' as to why we are not recruiting to that position.

CHAIR: That is not happening; an answer to that?

Mr Oliver: We will have some type of answer, yes. Historically—how can I say—quite a few CEO managements have come up here, each with their different styles of management. This movement of staff means—it takes a fair bit of time for people to get used to somebody and know what their functions are—that sometimes there will appear to be confusion as to what we actually do. No, we do not provide the actual bandages and the bandaids, but there is more to health than doing the clinical side of stuff. We are very limited. We do not even have a meeting space, unless you call the carport a meeting space. For our board meetings we try to find other spaces that are around, whether it be our youth centre or even down at our aged care centre. The outstation people unfortunately get the short end of the stick of our health service. There are probably a few reasons for that but I would say the main one would be the funding levels. We would love to provide a service out to the outstations.

Senator BOYCE: How many outstations?

Mr Oliver: There are 34 outstations, I believe. If I may speak in general terms, people on the outstations are probably a little more healthy than they are in the main community. The main reason for that is that they do not have access to the cokes, the sugary foods, the unhealthy foods I guess that are around. We have hard evidence now that people on outstations are healthier, happier, less burden on the system. Yet we are going towards growth town, which is in effect leading people into the main community. Again we are going to have the other burdens that come with it like housing. We already have an overcrowding problem which I am sure you are well aware of. They cannot build the houses fast enough for people wanting to move into them.

We do not provide a regular health service every fortnight or something like that. That does not happen as much anymore. When there are emergencies for people out on outstations their health needs are answered to pretty quickly, but, no, we do not have an outstation mobile clinic. We would love to. We have done a feasibility study on that but again it comes back to funding levels, and also to have the infrastructure to be able to support it. If you do get the opportunity to go to our clinic, it is working every day. There is not much space there if everyone decided to go to the clinic at once, nor do we have the staff to support it. We try to as best we can but, dare I say it, on some occasions you could be crisis managing. Again it comes down to a combination of staffing levels, funding levels and infrastructure.

CHAIR: Mr Wuridjal, do you want to say anything at this stage?

Mr Wuridjal: I want to say a couple of things. Cyril has already explained things in regards to Malabam health services. Malabam is made up of community members and homeland members as well. It is a mixture of tribal groups in this community. Malabam is not on its own. We go through other processes looking after the homelands as well. Maningrida is going to be growth town. People in the homelands want to stay where they are. We want to carry those services out there to them, doctors and nurses and so on. They want to be home. They don't want to come in here where it would be overcrowded. Home is where they belong. So we want to carry those services out there to them but it may be an aeroplane or a transport. For example, the road could be upgraded for homeland people so that we could run those services out there, maybe get an airstrip fixed properly, so that we can be able to provide that service for our people living in the homelands. We care for people who come here who are very sick. We can provide houses for them through the clinic and get them into these new houses if they are having a problem with medical conditions. So those are the things that we will be looking at, but I would rather see my people back at homelands, back to where they come from. I'd like to see those services

going to them. That is the message that I have been getting from people, that they need those services going to them.

CHAIR: We will go to Senator Siewert for questions, but first of all I did neglect at the opening to let everybody know that we are being filmed—not that anyone would fail to notice that because there are cameras everywhere. I am supposed to let people know that we have cameras here from NITV and also from 'concerned Australians'. If anyone does not want to be on film, except for us because we do not have that choice, please let me know and I am sure that the camera people will be very careful not to have you on film. I do apologise for not announcing that earlier. The other thing I needed to say was that we are talking to the people who are up the front giving evidence and anybody else who wants to give evidence can come to the community forums. It is impossible to actually hear if people are calling out or anything like that. I know you will not, but I need to put that on record.

Senator SIEWERT: Can I go to the issue of resources. You have talked a lot about the lack of resources for accommodation, staff and infrastructure. You also said that you had done some calculations about how much it would cost to run an outstation bus. Have you done a calculation on what sort of resources would be needed to address the health needs of the community plus the outstations or homelands?

Mr Oliver: Not recently, no. There is dated and anecdotal evidence. We can do the calculations on the clinical stuff, that is not a problem, but when you start getting into the running costs of a purpose-built mobile vehicle you are getting into the high six figures. We have had a feasibility study done, which roughly came back with \$350,000 for a mobile vehicle. That is for purchasing it, fitting it and running it. That is not even for staffing it. If you throw in a couple of nurses, maybe a health worker and a doctor, you are not going to get much change out of half a million dollars.

Senator SIEWERT: That is just for the bus and operating the bus.

Mr Oliver: That is just for a purpose-built mobile vehicle. There are communities that we know of that do have mobile health services, but from what we gather they are not really appropriate vehicles. For example, I believe there is a truck over at Peppimenarti that, even though it is fitted out nicely, cannot go on dirt roads when the wet weather comes, so it becomes ineffective. I believe Senator Scullion has been on the roads during the wet, so he knows exactly what road conditions are like here. We have several creek crossings that come up and down during the wet season. So you do have to have a pretty sturdy vehicle.

Senator SIEWERT: You talked about the EHSDI resources. What percentage of your resources have been committed through the additional health funding from the intervention funding?

Mr Oliver: That is the enhanced self-service delivery initiative. I must admit that when I first began I had not realised that not only does Territory health get a portion of the enhanced self-service delivery but also we do. In a sense, that is that duplication again. I do not want to say anything that is going to jeopardise that, though. The group of people that the clinic is servicing is the same group of people we are servicing. The people that are out on the outstations are very much attached to the people that are here on the community, but you still have different reporting requirements and different reporting levels, I guess.

Senator SIEWERT: One of the things that has come up a lot over the last couple of days is the number of different programs that organisations are running and have to report against. How many do you have to report against?

Mr Oliver: I could not tell you the exact number. It changes all the time. We provide our annual reports, obviously, our financial reports, our audit reports, and we also contribute to some of the reports that Territory Health have to complete as well and vice versa. We do not have access to the PICOS patient recall system, so if I need to get data or any information like that I go through Territory Health. And vice versa—they do not have access to our system. Even though we auspice the allied health staff, for example the visiting physiotherapist or the visiting podiatrist, they would have to get access through Territory Health or through the PICOS system, and they enter their data in through there. We do not have any control over or any access to any of that.

Senator SIEWERT: Have you been assessing or keeping track of the health of the community, and have you noticed improvements or a response in terms of the health in the community?

Mr Oliver: As I said, we do not have access to the PICOS system, and that is where a lot of the information would come from—the number of people presenting for whatever issue. It is provided to us through the area services manager position and they present to our board meetings. Basically, we get the information from there to be able to strategically plan. We do not monitor; you have got to understand that there are basically two of us in this office. Aside from reporting, which seems never-ending, we are also program managing, we are also supervising, we are also fixing taps. It is very, very multi-faceted, this position. There is only so much you can do

in a day. Even if we did put our blue capes on, if I invited you to our office you would see what type of environment we have to work in. We would love to put a couple of students on, because there is more to health than band-aids, but we have no space to put them. With youth, if you do not have a place to put them they do not feel like they are a part of the process and we will then lose them. We have been trying over the years to get younger people interested in the health arena, but it has been fairly difficult.

Senator SIEWERT: You have said that the youth and communities program is just starting again. It sounded like you had it before, it faded and then you are starting it again. What was the reason for that?

Mr Oliver: It was built before my time, before I came back into this role. We also auspiced a community radio station in it as well, which I might add we do not receive any funding for. I believe the shire gets the funding for that. It went to sleep, for want of a better word, because we did not have the staffing or the infrastructure then. Our funding matrix is like anywhere else, I believe, with youth and communities. We get funded for a coordinator position, a centre manager and two local youth workers. Here we have 3,500 people in total, you would have anywhere between 700 and 800 kids, 13 different languages and two youth worker positions. You do not have to be a mathematician to work that one out. There is only so much we can do.

Senator SIEWERT: You had a male and a female?

Mr Oliver: Yes. Our structure is unique. As Reggie was saying, we try to take in the issues of the outstations as well. We have two chairmen—a chairman for the community and a chairman for the outstations. I firmly believe that we should review that structure. It came in around 2005 or 2006, and we have yet to go through a review process, even though we have recommended that that needs to happen quite urgently: does our structure really support the changes we are expecting to have? I do not believe it does. So, yes, an urgent review needs to be done. And we are totally Commonwealth funded—we do not have any other funding stream.

Senator SIEWERT: As I understand what you said, you do not feel like you are adequately servicing the outstations and homelands. What services do you provide at the moment, or do people have to come into town for support?

Mr Oliver: Most of the time they find their own way in, or I believe BAC will send vehicles out. If they are on a regular schedule to come and see the doctors the clinic will arrange for that as well. There was a period where getting people in and out from outstations was a bit difficult—we did not have a plane servicing them at that time. I think that has been rectified now. At Malabam, at the office over here, we do not have a vehicle that we can send out. Again, our budget is very limited if we have to purchase a charter aircraft, for example.

Senator CROSSIN: I begin by paying my respects to the traditional owners here, and as one of the Territory senators I want to personally thank the community for allowing us to come in here today. I am sure my colleagues and I think it is really important that these hearings get out of Canberra and Melbourne and Sydney—and Darwin—and come out to places like this. This is legislation that will have an impact on your community, we hope in positive ways, and so it is important to hear what you think about the legislation. Mr Oliver and Mr Wuridjal, in relation to the actual legislation that we need to be talking about today, there are two areas that impact on health services—and one is the provision for communities to now have their own alcohol management plans. I know Maningrida has had an alcohol management plan in place for quite a while, and I am wondering if you could give us an idea of whether you think that plan is working, if it is effective, and whether you see positive impacts on the health of people if the plan is doing what it is aiming to do.

Mr Wuridjal: The alcohol plan is made up from community representatives here and different stakeholders. We are now getting it through to where there is a lot of concentration with liquor licences in Darwin. We are going through all this process.

CHAIR: I do not want to interrupt, but there are rules about how filming can happen with parliamentary committees. I thought maybe you could have got some film, but you cannot go in for close shots on people, under our ruling. Where you are is fine, but no closer. Please continue, Mr Wuridjal.

Mr Wuridjal: We have a committee, the DAVSCOM committee, from the Pascoe Justice Committee that comes to the community and talks about all about these alcohol issues and stuff like that. Other than that, we have been talking and a lot of that relates to alcohol. The community is getting on to that, trying to fix the structure and how it fits the community and that sort of thing. There are things happening. We have not have any problems with alcohol at this stage but it is being monitored by the community and the licensing committee. So there are no problems there.

Mr Oliver: We do not have an alcohol and other drugs counselling-type service, which I think we would probably value. I just add that a majority of permit holders here are non-Aboriginal people. As Reggie said, the community has had an alcohol management plan for quite some time, previous to the intervention, and I suspect

that if it was not as manageable as it was then the plan probably would not have existed when the intervention came in. The plan must have had some merit for it to still exist.

From the last couple of meetings we have had at the DAVSCOM committee, and because of the banned drinkers register, electronic records are making our system a little bit more effective and efficient. We are still using the old paper system as far as permits are concerned so, if we can have an electronic system that will make it even more tidy.

I have lived and worked in quite a few communities over my time and I must admit that in the last few years here, whilst there are Aboriginal drinkers, yes, I believe that sometimes the permit system can actually be a bit restrictive—that is, families and drinkers themselves realise that they change when they drink. The permit system, as it stands, means that you have to drink at your place of residence, or your nominated place, and mum or the wife or the kids do not want to see dad, or the drinker, change in front of their eyes. So the drinkers go away from the household or away from the place of residence. But they then breach that permit by doing so, so if they go down to the beach, the police can pull them up—and they usually do.

I am not too sure of the statistics about the women's safe house, or when it is used. I believe that in some cases come barge week, some people just go towards the safe houses. When I say 'barge week' we have that particular barge every fortnight. Over the years it has improved. It used to come out in hot containers. It now comes out in chilled containers and there is a little space where the chiller comes out and it is divvied out on a Saturday. I believe they have just changed those hours to collect your alcohol from eight o'clock to 8:30.

I would like to make the point that the majority of permit holders here are non-Aboriginal people. That is quite evident when you go down on barge collection day—you can almost count on one hand how many Aboriginal people are collecting their alcohol.

Senator CROSSIN: There is a big emphasis in this legislation about working with the Northern Territory government and getting children to school: every child, every day. Does the health clinic currently either through its mental health team or working with parents play any role in assisting parents to get their children to school each day?

Mr Oliver: We have a very strong relationship with the school, I would like to believe. In fact, last year in conjunction with the school we produced four DVDs in three languages. We are quite proud of that achievement. The principal that is there at the moment, Stuart Dwyer, I believe is doing a fantastic job with his staff, so much so that this year we are doing a joint venture, again on health promotions. The youth centre chimes in as well with the school. Our clinic provides regular health-check processes. We currently have a skin sore program happening, right now as we speak. Come March we will have a second round of our trachoma program. Even though that is a house-to-house process, it makes the process even cleaner when we have the school involved. Like most communities, the school is like the engine room. We work very closely with each other.

Senator CROSSIN: What are some of the reasons people tell you for their children not going to school?

Mr Oliver: I have noticed quite a lot of people walking their kids to school. Then they get to school, but they may go out the back gate. A lot of parents assume that their kids are at school once they have said goodbye to them at the front door. But kids are kids and the beach is just there. The principal is fairly dynamic in his ways and he has created an atmosphere where kids want to go to school. The numbers fluctuate: some of that is seasonal and some of that is if families decide to come into the main community for a few weeks, possibly a couple of months, and their children go to school there.

Some of the issues that are obvious are sometimes kids are too tired because they have been up all night. It is not unusual to go out at midnight and see kids still walking around. We have tried to have a policy, even in our workplace, that during school hours no kids should be at work; they should be at school. We try to enforce those as much as we can. To tell you the honest truth, there have not been that many people approaching us to say their children are not going to school because of this or that. I can only assume that some of the kids feel uncomfortable. As we all know, bullying does go on. The kids might turn up to school, as I said, but then they may go out the back gate. That does happen.

Senator SCULLION: I would like to add my acknowledgement to traditional owners. I particularly thank the community for coming here on a weekday. I know you all have things to do and I really appreciate your coming along to help us understand better the impact of the Stronger Futures legislation. Thank you for your evidence, Mr Oliver. It has given us a really comprehensive understanding of some of the gaps in the service provision. I would like to go through a couple of things. You might not have the answers to some of these questions, but I will then ask you to take them on notice.

Infrastructure accommodation seems to stretch over a number of issues. It would be useful if you could quantify that for us. I will not ask you to do this off the top of your head, but I would like to know how many units of accommodation you think would be required within the province of your organisation. If you cannot give us the information now, I ask you to take it on notice and give us some ideas of how your organisation could deal with those matters.

Mr Oliver: Sure.

Senator SCULLION: Do you talk to the Northern Territory Department of Health about these matters—about issues of accommodation and the critical needs of being able to oversize? Can you throw some light on the nature of your discussions within the parameters you indicated earlier?

Mr Oliver: Sure. The relationship that I have with the area services manager is very open and transparent—so much so that we will often swap diaries letting each other know when meetings and supported meetings are happening and all that sort of stuff. If we could build 10 houses here we would still be a couple short. I say a couple short, because if we had the proper funding level per person we could expand even further. Like I say, we have a dialysis unit here. We would love to have a health promotions officer but, again, it comes back to housing. We have seven houses at the moment. When I say houses, they are actually flats—duplexes. The only house that we have at the moment is the doctor's residence; it is the only four-bedroom house that we have. All our other accommodation, including the accommodation I stay in, are two-bedroom flats. It limits the specialists you can have. A paediatrician who has a family is not going to come and live here.

The area services manager and I have a little bit of a joke: we refuse to argue with each other about housing. We are just not going to do it. We have to schedule and plan our allied health services to come out, and it has to be tight. But if we get a call from, say, the Mobile Outreach Service—the MOS team—which is more of a priority? A nurse coming out or housing a MOS team that has to deal with child abuse issues. We may be waiting for a dentist—and have been waiting for six months for a dentist to come out—but if we get a call that an issue has come up and requires accommodation, what do we do?

Senator SCULLION: Are you aware of any plans by the Northern Territory government to provide any accommodation here?

Mr Oliver: I believe there is currently an application for further housing up at Top Town, along the airport road.

Senator SCULLION: That would be for the accommodation?

Mr Oliver: As far as I am aware it is NT government housing, and it could be anything. It could be education or it could be clinic—I don't know.

Senator SCULLION: You talked about the relationship, and that you have to ensure that you do not duplicate services. I am out on outstations from time to time and I see, generally, a male and a female Northern Territory Department of Health doctor and nurse going and running clinics. The community knows they are coming and we have a morning for clinic presentations. What role does your organisation play in that? You are providing a slightly different service, which is not just the clinical side of it. Do you accompany them when they do that? Is there that level of cooperation?

Mr Oliver: No, unfortunately, there isn't. We have recently employed a mental health coordinator; we are expecting that when a visit is planned they will let us know when it is going to happen and will make space available. Mental health issues, as I am sure you are all aware, are a fairly high priority here in the community. We have, unfortunately, had our fair share of suicides—successful and unsuccessful. If we need counsellors to come out we can obviously bring them out, but again it comes down to time—how much time they can spend on the ground. It is not so much money or funding; we can provide the funding for that. But again it comes back to that infrastructure stuff. We would like to keep them here for a couple of weeks, say, but where would we put them? Where would we be able to shuffle them around? But as far as sending out clinical specialists or anything like that is concerned, that is actually handled by the clinic. In theory we were to auspice the two doctor positions. Again, because of previous issues that has not been the case and we are working towards having the doctor positions come back under our umbrella.

Senator SCULLION: Thanks, Mr Oliver. My last question is this. You have effectively told us that you were fully Commonwealth funded. Is that directly through the Commonwealth, or is that auspiced through other-

Mr Oliver: No, our primary health care budget is provided by OATSIH, the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health. Our Youth in Communities program is done through FaHCSIA. I believe that the ICC—the Indigenous Coordinating Council—built the actual youth service and the department of ageing built our aged-care one and provides recurrent funding. So there you go: there are three different reporting requirements just there.

Ms Phillips then spoke in language—

Senator BOYCE: Mr Oliver, you said before that there was now hard evidence that living in the outstations, the homelands, was healthier than living in towns like Maningrida. Can you talk some more about that, please?

Mr Oliver: It is actually not recent evidence. It is evidence that has been around for quite some time, but I guess the most recent evidence that did come out was about our dental process. The kids out on the outstations have actually got healthier teeth, because they do not have access to cokes and lollies. Do not get me wrong, they do get them when they come into town but there are no shops out on the outstations so they do not have access to fast foods so naturally they rely on bush foods and bush tucker and they are a lot more active when they are hunting and gathering, as opposed to kids here. But you can look around at any time and see kids running around. As for sport in the community, the AFL position that has recently been here for the last six months is definitely engaging the youth. There are footy games on every day and also there are basketball games for the girls. We would dearly love to expand that though and through our youth program provide other sporting activities. It has been actually pretty well known for quite some time that the kids and people out on outstations are a lot less stressed.

Senator BOYCE: I was going to ask you if this applied to mental health as well.

Mr Oliver: Yes, mental health. We did have an incident where there was an outstation person who did commit suicide successfully in the last couple of years. But I believe in comparison over the years—and that is an unfortunate event—there has only been that one. People who are out on the homelands and closer and practising traditional culture are a lot more healthier emotionally and physically. I might add one thing, and this is my view from what I have seen over the years because I have had quite a number of years dealing with the community. Do you all know what a lorrkon is? It is a hollow log. We use logs for coffins. Since the intervention and since this new policy has come in that is all we are seeing. We are seeing hollow people walking around. This place is definitely different from the place it was before the intervention. That is not to say that we do not have our issues; we do, as do a lot of other communities. Personally, and again this is only my personal view, they seem to be exacerbated and have been since the intervention. I am not confident that Stronger Futures is going to rectify any of that, but that is what we have got to deal with. I am not confident either that the Stronger Futures information has got around to everybody and that people are fully aware of what it entails and also what future impact it is going to have on them and their lives. In my conversations with people, even today, people are still not too sure of what it actually means. As far as the mental health issues are concerned, then I can see the need for social workers, for example. With the changes that are going to happen and that will be expected to happen, we are going to need a hell of a lot of social workers and a hell of a lot of mental health counsellors—with the impact that income management has, for example. Income management does not really teach people to budget; it just takes half their money away. So you have anxiety issues over that—having enough money to feed your kids, to pay your rent or to have a power card. Even though power cards are \$20, for us people who are working it is nothing but for people who are on income management it is actually something.

CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Oliver. Can you buy your power card with your BasicsCard?

Mr Oliver: I believe so, yes.

CHAIR: And you can buy food with your BasicsCard?

Mr Oliver: Yes, that is what it is for, but Centrelink always had that capacity; they called it Centrepay.

CHAIR: Sure, but I am just trying to clarify from your previous statement that people have not been refused power cards for electricity because of the BasicsCard.

Mr Oliver: No, there has been no refusal of that, but when people go into Darwin there are only a certain number of shops that actually accept BasicsCards.

CHAIR: I understand that. Thank you very much. We really appreciate your evidence. Thank you very much, Mr Wuridjal.

DANAJA, Mr Peter, Deputy Chairman, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

MORRISH, Mr Luke, Chief Executive Officer, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

NAMANURKI, Mr Shane, Board Member, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

RYAN, Mr Matthew, Chairman, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

[12:12]

CHAIR: Our next witnesses are from the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation. Before we get those witnesses up, I need to introduce people to Venessa Curnow from the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, who is standing over there on my left. Congress is actually travelling with our committee and attending all our hearings. Venessa is keen to speak with anyone who wants to talk with her.

Welcome. You heard me say before that information on parliamentary privilege is available. All of you can talk with us and we will ask questions. You have seen how the previous witnesses went. You can learn from the previous ones; it is always good like that. Do any of you have an opening statement you want to make before we go to questions? Mr Ryan, you have the job.

Mr Ryan: Unfortunately! Thanks very much, senators. I would like to say first that at the first beginning, when Minister Macklin came here, we were not consulted properly. There was lack of information in the community. I would like to say that we did not have an opportunity to talk to the minister. We have only spoken to our local member, Warren Snowdon. I feel that we missed out on the opportunity to talk to the minister directly. After that they said they wanted to come back and talk to us personally, each organisation, to clarify a lot of stuff and look after their Stronger Futures. They did not come back, which was disappointing. No-one has even asked for our consent to the laws that will be in the legislation. We don't want this. We don't want the intervention or the legislation. As far as I am concerned, we want to govern our own community, which we have for the last 30 years.

Mr Morrish: Just to clarify in relation to the consultation process, I want to bring a couple of points to the committee's attention. The discussion paper on Stronger Futures was actually handed to members of the community minutes—literally minutes—before the minister arrived for that consultation. I am not sure how community members, with low levels of numeracy and literacy in some cases, where English is a third or fourth language, are supposed to digest a 28-page document in a matter of minutes in order to have an informed consultation, and for the results of that consultation to be taken back and considered and used informing the Stronger Futures legislation. Certainly the Stronger Futures legislation report does not reflect in any knowing way what was actually said here. There were a number of clear statements made that certainly have not found their way into that report. That might just be because they have not fallen into a neat category, but it certainly has not translated into that report. It is no surprise, given that people were ill-prepared, ill-informed and unable to participate knowingly in that consultation process.

Mr Danaja: We have not had any feedback from that consultation we had in the first place.

CHAIR: Are there any other general comments before we start questions?

Mr Danaja: I just want to talk a little bit about the homelands. Going back to the sixties and early seventies, but especially in the early seventies, the old people wanted to go back resettle in their own communities. We have probably 35 homelands at the moment that are currently sitting out west, east and South—on the coast and inland as well. Most of those are our BAC members. We try to help and support them with food, roads and what have you. But it is a bit difficult when you do not have any funding for this.

I just want to point out that we definitely disagree with this legislation, because we were not included in the Stronger Futures. That is the disappointing part. What is going to happen if you bring all those people into the community? It is going to create a lot of social impact. You are probably going to hear more about that from people talking later on. Those are the comments that we are getting.

The intervention has ignored the homelands from the beginning when the first intervention was introduced. I am not sure what is going to come in 20 years—this that we are talking about now. We do not know where the future lies with the homelands at the moment. Like I said before, it is not included in the future. We want to live there. The reason the old people wanted to go back there in the first place was that they wanted to live at peace and in harmony with their homelands—where they could raise their children to be safe and not influenced by the community life itself.

This is our land and it is part of our culture—the language we speak, the dances are part of the homelands as well—not only in the homelands but in a community like this as well. It is common right throughout other

communities as well. Sometimes for me, personally I do not want to live here in the process that you are talking about; I prefer to live out in the bush. Sometimes I do go out bush to get the stress away. When I do that I am at home. It is peaceful and I can feel safe at home and think better. A lot of the bureaucrats and the governments think it is a holiday but it is not a holiday, it is a place that we are proud of, where we can raise our children in peace. The disappointing thing about this whole saga is that this is restricting those communities and some of them do not know what is going on. They are scratching their head saying, 'What is going on?' They are not being consulted properly, as we said earlier today.

We have schools out in the homelands. It is a disappointing thing when you have got three school hubs: one of the west, one in the east, where the kids can go and have their school. At my homeland in Boorelya we have got one they. There is one at Gamardi. What is going to happen to those facilities when everyone is coming to town? That is what I am asking you guys. The government put a lot of dollars into those places to provide service to the kids. We are talking about the kids here. It is very true and the book says that children are sacred, for us sitting at this table and the people watching us right now.

Earlier the Malabam people spoke that people residing in the homelands are more healthy than the people living in the communities. This is very true. It was done by a gentleman by the name of Dr Paul Burgess. He did research on that and I recommend you should read that report he did. I think the saddest thing about this whole saga is that you are kidding us all, you are kidding what we have worked for for a long time. You are forcing us from our homelands to come into the so-called hub town you guys are talking about, which is sad. This world is based on democracy, which is a good thing in the community. People are dying out there in the world for democracy, let alone in this Australia of ours. The CEO, the chairman and I and some of the board members are definitely willing to work with the government; there is no doubt about that. But it seems to me they are turning a blind eye and we tried in vain to get them to listen to what we want to do, especially with the homelands. Without homelands, what can you do? People will come into this hub town and there are all sorts of huge problems.

Mr Ryan: I want to add to what Peter said. Why are you forcing people to come to the community with the services? You create another problem there with social problems. Does the government have money to build more houses? At the moment there is not. You create more social issues here. There are conflicts whereas people are pretty happy in their own homeland. What we want to see is people being happy in their homelands. You are creating a lot of issues here, like overcrowding. You can see for yourself right as we speak here it is a big problem. Since the intervention you have created heaps of trouble. Why take away the funding that we are supposed to provide to homelands? We need the funding to do the basic services to the homelands. As Peter said, we want to work with the government, as we said from day one. It has fallen on deaf ears again.

CHAIR: Thank you. Senator Siewert first and then Senator Crossin has got some particular questions.

Senator SIEWERT: You said you made some clear statements to the previous consultation process that did not get reported. Are you able to provide those clear statements to us?

Mr Morrish: I understand that that consultation was filmed in its entirety, so there would be transcripts available for that consultation, yes.

Senator SIEWERT: What was the nature of the statements? Do you want to make them again so that we know what you were trying to say?

Mr Morrish: A lot of the comments, particularly early on, were in relation to the nature of how the consultation was being run. A decision was made to split the groups into a men's and women's group immediately, basically at the start of the consultation. Whether that was a right way to go or not, it certainly created a perspective in the men, who were here to talk to the minister not as a woman but as the minister for Indigenous affairs. That created quite a deal of animosity, quite a deal of emotion, and a lot of comments were directed, obviously, to Mr Snowden in relation to that particular facet of it. Putting that aside, there were a lot of comments made about this community, about the safety aspects of this community, about the education needs of the children and about adult education and training needs, and homelands, of course, were a big subject.

It seems that, for government to consider Maningrida as a community, it does not always understand that Maningrida does not exist as a small town. Maningrida is a community that is made up of this small central community with 35 homelands that surround it and that carry a population of people up to a third of the overall population at various times of the year. A number of those larger homelands are populated by 30 or 40 people and are populated all year round.

There seems to be no real consideration of how the strategies that are being put in place actually work for the homelands or, in fact, how those homeland residents can actually access the services and the strategies that are being put in place. People do not have access—all families do not have access to vehicles. The roads are in a

terrible state of disrepair. There is not sufficient funding provided to maintain the network of roads out there. That is a simple fact. Add to that the environmental issues that we face—the huge wet season last year. It was not until almost the start of the next wet season that we were actually able to get out on the roads, because of the condition of them, and put machinery on them to fix those roads. We have river crossings in the way. We have creek crossings in the way. It is a struggle just for people to get into the community.

That is what I am saying. We need to consider Maningrida as a community as a whole. It is the 10,000 square kilometres that make up this community.

CHAIR: I just have one follow-up question, Mr Morrish. We will take these issues back, I assure you. Was the decision to split as a result of a request?

Mr Morrish: Certainly not by the community that we are aware of and certainly—

CHAIR: That you are aware of.

Mr Morrish: Certainly the male representatives of the community that I have spoken to about that subject have in no way indicated that.

CHAIR: Okay, we will follow up.

Mr Morrish: I am sure you can ask them yourself.

Mr Danaja: Since that consultation we have peaceably asked if they could put the homelands back on the agenda but, since, we have not heard from them, as well.

Senator SIEWERT: Mr Ryan, you mentioned about not providing the dollars for support of the homelands. Has there been a reduction in funding for your support to the homelands?

Mr Morrish: I can tell you that the homeland funding has remained static for a number of years, so there has not been a reduction in funding.

Senator SIEWERT: But it has not gone up?

Mr Morrish: But it certainly has not gone up. The other point that needs to be made—and this is evident from our financial statements as an outstation service provider—is that that budget is insufficient. We spend a significant amount of our own internally generated moneys on the upkeep and maintenance of the homelands. We do that because that is why we exist as an organisation.

Malabam made the point in relation to assisting people with transport into the community for medical issues or even for law issues, coming to court and whatnot. Bawinanga does provide those services. It is not a regular service; it is an ad hoc service, and that includes helicopters and planes when they are needed. We do that at our expense. There is no funding available for that. There was a huge wet season last year. A lot of homelands were cut off. A lot were flooded. It was an emergency situation, albeit not recognised, and we spent tens of thousands of dollars out of our pocket to ensure that people had food and that those people who needed to be evacuated for medical reasons were done. We have not been reimbursed for that money. No-one even recognised that as a real issue.

Senator SIEWERT: I know that we are a little tight for time, but I would specifically like to ask, on the Strong Futures legislation, about the new rules that will apply for stores, because I know that you run one of the stores here. I know that you have done a lot of work on it. We have not had a lot of evidence yet about what communities think about the rules that are proposed for the stores. I am wondering if you have had a chance to look at it and whether you have any comments.

Mr Morrish: We have considered that as a board which represents its membership. My expectation is that the board members have spoken to the membership around this subject. Our strong view is that the need for store licensing does not exist in Maningrida. There have been two stores here for a large number of years. Both organisations have run those stores to the best of their ability. They both provide great levels of fresh food and other choices for consumers. In a lot of ways, we regulate ourselves because of that competition factor. We have to be making sure that we are providing those products that the community wants. We have to be looking at ourselves and saying, 'Have we got the right levels of fruit and vegetable produce and fresh foods available?'

I can give you a really good example. I know that both of our stores do not make money on fruit and vegetables because we cannot afford to pass on the freight costs. To do that to the consumer makes it unaffordable. We would price out people's ability to buy fresh food, so we hold those costs down on those particular items so that the affordability and the food security are there. I can say, about the amount of money spent on legislating and monitoring from a store licence point of view, that, if we invested that in a freight subsidy to this community or other communities, it would go a long way to ensuring the food security, as opposed to store licensing.

Senator SIEWERT: I will just ask a supplementary question to that very quickly. Maybe you could take on notice—because I know we are short on time—how the new rules would change the way you operate the store. Could I ask that on notice, because I know we are short of time.

Mr Morrish: We could take it on notice, but the bottom line is that we are saying we do not agree with that piece of legislation because we do not need to be licensed. We have run our store for a long time. We have run it properly and there have been no questions raised about how we have run it. What we are saying is: government, work with us on the issues that affect us. Freight is a killer.

Mr Danaja: Are we out of time?

Mr Morrish: I do not know. How long have we got? I know the first session went for an extended period of time.

CHAIR: I am not pulling it up. It is going to be difficult to get everything in, but I am not pulling people up if they are talking to us. Mr Morrish, are all stores as good as yours?

Mr Morrish: Sorry?

CHAIR: Are all stores across the Territory as good as Maningrida?

Mr Morrish: It would be wrong for me to comment directly on other individual stores, and I am certainly here representing Bawinanga and our interests and the Maningrida community's interests. I am sure there are varying degrees of effectiveness in the way stores are run across the community—across Australia, for that matter. It is not a problem unique to the Territory.

Senator BOYCE: Does your store make a profit overall or not?

Mr Morrish: Yes, it does. We do make a profit out of the supermarket. It is one of the few enterprises that we actually do make a profit out of—yes, absolutely. It subsidises heavily all the other enterprises that we run to create local employment. We are a social enterprise. We are not about making money. It is not a moneymaking machine. All the dollars we make go back into homeland services or the creation of enterprises for the purposes of training and employment. Across the board, we operate on a pretty skinny margin as an organisation.

I know the CDEP is outside the Stronger Futures. We certainly welcome the freeze on the transition from CDEP wages to Centrelink. That change, if that does proceed in the future, will damage greatly Bawinanga's ability to run those social enterprises and will damage greatly this community. We will be forced to make decisions to shut big chunks of those social enterprises down. When you consider that we employ 70 per cent of this region's workforce—we employ over 500 people in Bawinanga—for this community as a whole, we, together with the other large organisations that are within it, are the soul and heart of this community. If we fall over, so does the community.

Senator CROSSIN: I want to put on record some of the facts and talk about the homeland situation. My understanding is—and Senator Scullion may be able to verify this—about \$22 million a year used to be provided by the Commonwealth government to maintain homelands. When Senator Scullion was in government that responsibility and money were handed to the Northern Territory government and the current government has maintained that arrangement. The Commonwealth still gives the Northern Territory government \$22 million a year, which they put into the pool of funds for homelands, essentially. What you are talking about is the Northern Territory government's growth town strategy. They are going to concentrate on the 19 or so growth towns in the Northern Territory. We have added another five towns to make it 24. Let me get it right here. Am I hearing you say that both governments need to make a stronger commitment to homelands by either giving money to the Northern Territory government or perhaps changing the policy about running them directly? What I am hearing you say is you cannot have a Stronger Futures document unless there is some recognition in there about the future of homelands. Is that what you are telling us?

Mr Morrish: Absolutely. You cannot split homelands away from a growth town such as Maningrida for reasons we spoke about. The community of Maningrida is the 10,000 square kilometres and the population that lives across that area.

Senator CROSSIN: Somewhere in there we would need to see not only an increase in funding from the Commonwealth government to the Northern Territory government but also recognition of the role of homelands and how they integrate with the growth towns.

Mr Danaja: I remind you that Maningrida people are a part of that homeland anyway. People move in and out. We are nomadic people. We do not stay in one place; we move around. Whether it is for a ceremony or whatever, we just move around. But the most important thing is a homeland for us is the central core of where we go back to live. That is because all of us blackfellas sitting at this table do not own our land but each has our own

country and that has everything to do with the homelands: the story we tell, the dance we do and the language we speak. I want to emphasise that every one of us sitting here speaks a different language. We do not speak the same language. We can speak one English to communicate with you guys but we all speak different languages.

Senator CROSSIN: If additional money was put into resourcing homelands for houses, maintenance of roads, infrastructure or water, would it be viable or feasible to put a school in each of the homelands? Is it possible or at some point do you say, 'If there is funding for housing, bore water, sanitation and roads then we have to accept that it is not possible to have a school for only 40 people and that if we have kids in this homeland then they have to go to Maningrida for school'?

Mr Danaja: As I said earlier today, we have three hubs. If we put the right resources where we need them most—the computers and so forth—then even a truck can take kids in and out from those three outstations to that school. In my area, it is only a short distance but on the western side there is a long distance to travel. If you are a policy maker, you need to think about that as well. You need to provide the services to people living out that way as well. Each different area has its own different needs whether it is education, housing and so forth. We definitely need more funding to make this work because we are talking about improving people's lives here. We are a part of that life out in the homelands as well.

Mr Morrish: We are not naive enough to suggest that we need a school in every homeland, but we do have to explore other solutions. There are technology based solutions that we can look at: School of the Air, use of computers, Skype—the technology is available and there is power provided to these outstations. It is not just about building schools in each homeland. People on the homelands would be grateful I think to be able to have a transport system or a road network that would support them in getting their children to school. It is a number of factors. It is certainly not a suggestion that we need a school on every homeland. There need to be homeland schools positioned in strategic locations so that kids have access and/or a mix of technology based solutions as well.

Senator SCULLION: I would like to continue with some of Senator Crossin's questions. She is right: it was \$22 million per year over four years that was for the provision of assistance specifically to homelands rather than the growth towns. As BAC for your region, how much money have you received directly from the Northern Territory government as homeland assistance?

Mr Morrish: We receive just over \$1 million a year in funding for management and maintenance of the housing and for essential and municipal services. That is for 104 houses that we maintain out on the 35 homelands. A quick look at the figures shows you that we are substantially underfunded when that is compared to the budgeted level for house maintenance within the community.

Senator SCULLION: Have they given you any indication of the future of that particular funding?

Mr Morrish: The only indication that we have had to date is signals coming out of the Northern Territory government that the Commonwealth funding may end at the end of 2012 and that we need to start to look at better ways to manage and deliver services to the outstations. To me that sends signals of, 'Let's work smarter, not harder; do more with less; and, hello, there's not going to be more money next year.'

Mr Danaja: We are struggling to make ends meet and provide that service to those homelands. That is the bottom line.

Senator SCULLION: Can you give us some brief examples of the sorts of needs of the homelands that are beyond infrastructure and housing maintenance so we have a better understanding of the needs outside of the funding that is provided.

Mr Morrish: A lot of the needs outside of that funding are around capital investment. Houses have got a lifespan, particularly in this environment. What happens when the houses are beyond maintenance or beyond repair—\$500,000, at a minimum, to put a new house out there? New bores, renewable power supplies and the cost for batteries for solar and that type of thing is an ongoing maintenance need and one that is very hard to keep up with. There is a system out there called Bushlight—absolutely brilliant—but the cost is prohibitive. With the money available we can do one or two homelands. Those are arrangements agreed to outside of the existing funding. At the moment, all we can do with the money that is provided is the bare minimum. The bare minimum only gets you so far. It is when there is a need for a big capital investment, like with the roads. We get enough money maybe to run a grader across the road when it is washed out or when there are big holes in it. When it looks more like a riverbed than a road, that means we have to put new base down—we have to rebuild the road. The money is not there to do that, so we just grade it and move on.

CHAIR: Is there anything else, Mr Danaja?

Mr Danaja: The time frame we were talking about here: one day is not good enough. For this type of thing we should have three or four days.

CHAIR: For a Senate committee.

Mr Danaja: Yes, for this meeting. Because I think it is critical. This is a very important factor we are talking about here—people's lives. And how it is going to dictate the policy that you guys make—how to dictate us living in the community. So I should recommend that in future, if this type of thing happens again, please have it for three or four days. And show what we are talking about—give us a month's notice

CHAIR: Absolutely, I take your point.

Mr Danaja: Time flies fast, everybody knows. Time waits for no man, that is an old saying.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Is there anything else anyone wants to add at this stage?

Mr Ryan: There was one thing: contracts. We have been hammering our heads against a brick wall to try and get a contract within the community. The Territory Alliance came up here. We have been asking, asking, asking. We have tried to the top level. We did not even get any answers on fencing or that other project that we could have benefited from. We could have employed more Indigenous people and we are the most successful organisation within the community. We could have easily handled that—very easily. But it just went to deaf ears.

CHAIR: Did somebody else get the contracts, Mr Ryan?

Mr Ryan: Yes, there have been external contractors.

Senator BOYCE: Local organisations?

Mr Ryan: We are not sure where they come from. These are the issues where we should be getting firsthand. Look at the community first. If they can do the job, award them the contract that the community can do.

Senator SCULLION: Congratulations have to go to BAC for the work that you did on the SIHIP stuff in the gardens. I know it is a very small part of it, but it obviously it was very effective, so you can obviously put a crew together that can do an outstanding job. Sadly that has not been done in other communities, but it just shows you that you certainly do have the capacity to do all of those add-ons apart from the building.

Mr Ryan: To be honest, we could take over SIHIP's!

Senator SCULLION: Perhaps we will have an opportunity, through the chair, to ask you some questions on notice in terms of those capacities. We do not have time at the moment, but we will be able to provide some questions on notice in that regard.

Mr Morrish: I think it is actually worthwhile to add a couple of examples there to really acknowledge this point. BAC does have the capacity. We have got a large housing and construction area, with a large number of local employees in it. There is basically no project that we cannot undertake. If we need expertise, like anyone else, we can sub it out and get it in. We have got a \$3 million arts centre sitting up there which we built. We have project-managed that and built it ourselves. We can deliver on these things, and we have talked to government, basically cap in hand, saying, 'Work with us; we want to be in this with you; we want to make Maningrida a better place,' and we are ignored. Five hundred thousand dollars' worth of contracts for refurbishing schoolhouses on outstations that we service, and we do not even get a look in. We do not even get told that the contractors are going out there. Those contractors do not even come into Maningrida and spend a dollar in the store. If that is economic development, then I have read the wrong books.

What we are saying is that we want to work in partnership. We understand that we cannot go this alone and we want to work together with government, particularly on issues such as that. Cyril mentioned the NT government housing. We have spoken to NT government Housing and said: 'Let's work together on this. We'll act as your developer. We'll act as your construction.' We are not hearing back. We want to add to the capacity of this community by undertaking big projects like that, creating the ability for people to get the skills and the ability to act as builders, plumbers, electricians—local people, not external contractors. That is the only way that this community will grow and prosper. We want to be a part of that and we want to work in partnership with government on that.

Mr Danaja: I just want to emphasise again that we are definitely willing to work with the government, dollar for dollar.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, gentlemen; we deeply appreciate your information. Any of the comments you have made will go straight to government, I can assure you of that.

HARVEY, Ms Maria, Babbarra Women's Centre

KALAKALA, Ms Mildred, Babbarra Women's Centre

MARAWARR, Ms Janet, Babbarra Women's Centre

SUMMERS, Ms Claire, Babbarra Women's Centre

WILLIAMS, Ms Helen, Babbarra Women's Centre

[12:52]

CHAIR: Thank you very much to the representatives of the Babbarra Women's Centre. I know a lot of you have come and my understanding is that you have all selected these lucky women who are at the table to speak for you. Who has got some opening comments?

Ms Harvey: We have selected some of the most respected women in the community to address the Senate hearing today. We will be giving a bit of history about the Babbarra Women's Centre and we will also be giving a women's perspective on the legislation that is being introduced. Same thing all around—the ladies feel that they are less informed about most things, particularly the intervention. When Minister Macklin did attend, she did speak to the women, but there was a lot of rhetoric and repetition of statements that are in the legislation as opposed to openly receiving feedback around a lot of the issues—I guess mostly crisis intervention, the ability for women to work, balance culture and look after their families, the way other Australian women do. I am sure they will tell you themselves in a minute.

CHAIR: Who else wants to speak to us?

Ms Williams: I have been part of the history of the women's centre for many years, since 1985, which is when we first started. Women had women's resources being operated throughout Australia. I am here to talk about a little bit of history about how our women's centre began. It was part of a refuge centre. I looked after the women and children. Those were the days when people went out and ordered some beer. But women in those days controlled it. With the limit on alcohol, women controlled it. When we asked the liquor commissioner to come out and sort it out with us, we made a deal with them. It worked so well. I worked closely with the police and all that business. But then, since 1996, when it got taken away, the women's resources closed down.

Bawinanga, BAC, have been looking after the centre since then. Then it became a screen-print operation centre. The women really work hard. We wanted to keep the centre. We have every different language with the women that are doing screen-printing now. It is run by Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation. Some of the ladies in the group behind me are on a salary rate and some of them are on CDEP, but we want to keep on doing like Maria said—look after our children and send them to school. We want to have a salary and all that. But people have to understand how women work. Women can work stronger. That is how the women's centre is being operated really well. Like we said earlier, the women have to be strong about it, and they are pretty strong. That is my part of the history story. They still continue to operate no matter what. We are still working hard together.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Williams. Who is next?

Ms Kalakala: I am a supervisor for child safety services in Maningrida. I have been working for four years now and looking after the children, going around to community, caring for children and parents, and kids are going to school. We want our kids to go to school.

How does it work in Centrelink and all this stuff—the intervention, the money side, the food side, homeland people getting their kids to school? Sometimes it is a big worry to us, especially for the night patrol and child safety service. We are out there looking after the children, taking care of the parents—the whole community.

There is also our transport problem. There is also, like the man said, the homeland centre, the school. Some of the outstations do not have a link teacher out there, or out here in the community. They do not go out because of the transport problem. These are the things that we should be looking at too and also at families, friends and our children.

Children are our future. They are the main ones. Kids are the future. It is our future. Kids will be doing this when they become men and women. They will be looking after the community and our homeland—homeland is our heart; it is out there. We need more support from you people, more funding to go out there and collect children, even though there is a sick person or person staying out there. We must go out there—in Malabam, you name it—and help. We must be out there caring for these people. Also, the night patrol is an issue. The night patrol will go out at night, caring for children and adults who have been affected by violence, sexual abuse, everything. We are out there and we see these things happen in this community. We need help. We need more funding for the night patrol and child safety service. We need more funding so that we can get more transport to

care for these children. Children are walking around the streets; children are out there, and people are not caring for them. We want to act for these children. That is all I have to say.

Ms Harvey: The bit about the schooling and the funding is trying to make a connection between the sanctioning that is proposed in the legislation around the inability to have the child attend a school and how that will in fact impact on a person's family payment. In relation to some of the things that were discussed in the women's group: just being in this situation—appearing before the committee—makes it harder for the ladies to articulate the concerns they had raised before we actually got to sit here.

I think that there is concern around the recognition and the importance of culture, language and some of the things that take place on homelands that sometimes limit transport to school. Word of mouth is the fastest way for news to get around, so a lot of people are now concerned that if they cannot get their children to school once the legislation in they are going to be sanctioned for up to 12 weeks. Whilst the SEAM money is put away until the child goes to school, they have that fear because they do not understand exactly what is articulated in the policy and how it will impact on different families. That is the fear, the not knowing: 'Am I going to be cut off for three months? Or is it going to be as soon as my child goes back to school? Will I forfeit the money?'. All those sorts of questions on which there is no real clarity in the policy. Also, there is a lack of recognition of two-way learning and the value of successfully living in two worlds, so that it does become a democratic choice to live in two world: one or the other.

CHAIR: Does Ms Marawarr have anything to add?

Ms Marawarr: I also work at the Maningrida Child Safety Service. I would like to talk about the plan for alcohol before the intervention. There was nothing before, but this came before intervention.

CHAIR: What came before intervention?

Ms Harvey: There was already an established alcohol plan prior to the intervention. That was instigated mostly by women in the community.

CHAIR: Ms Marawarr, I am sorry, I must be getting old; I cannot hear very well.

Ms Williams: What Janet was saying is like what I said before, that it was controlled by us. It was the alcohol management plan. We looked after it. Then the intervention came, and we had to have a licence. But we had our own rules and our own board of management. It was a team and we had to follow those rules. I think it was working. I do not know why the government took it away. It has not been recognised when this intervention came. The Maningrida name has not come up with alcohol problem. Only the social clubs or pubs, those small places, and Maningrida has never been mentioned. That is when the intervention came.

CHAIR: Ms Marawarr, is there anything you want to add?

Ms Marawarr: Yes. We are a bit worried about it, for a long time. When the intervention came, the government made us really weak, telling us we are doing this and that. We do not know about that. It is really hard for the Aboriginal people to have the government telling us, doing this intervention.

CHAIR: Do any of the women want to say anything more before we go to questions? Okay, we will go to questions now.

Senator SIEWERT: You said during the consultation that your messages were not openly received. What were the key things you were trying to get across?

Ms Harvey: In fairness to everybody, including the politicians who came out, there was a lack of preparation. There was a lack of time for the community to digest, think about and discuss with their families what the policy really meant and how it would apply to them. Equally, when the minister and all her staff came in, it was just crazy. It was just so unorganised and everything branched off and everything was quick. People had not really even had time to consider the correlation between the policy and addressing it with the minister. They did not have time to do that. What they did do was take the opportunity to canvass some of the issues that happened in what we call real time—the real things that happen in the community—because there is a lag time between policy being made and it actually being lived out on the ground. Across a range of portfolios, that can be up to 18 months to two years before it is actually being lived out on the ground. A lot of issues were canvassed that day.

Ms Williams: At that time the men were separated from women or women separated from men. We were sitting over at the pub down at a big gazebo, tent, or whatever they call it, and actually no stories were being put together in the real world. This woman never came back to Maningrida after. She said, 'I'll be back to consult a second time.' We were hoping that they would be back, but nothing. The men had their stories; the women had their stories. I was sitting next to Jenny Macklin and I said: 'Hey, how come women who have children from men—you know, men and women work together. We are supposed to be under that shared building, sharing our

stories together of the problems or issues that we raise together.' But, before the finishing time, some of the issues and problems were only briefly discussed by a few people. So it was not a really proper consultation with us and the people on this ground.

CHAIR: When you said that to Jenny Macklin, what did she say?

Ms Williams: I said everyone had been marrying another people. Someone I was sitting next to I knew, and somebody else, and I said: 'Excuse me, ladies. I think we are the mothers and the men are over there. We should go back. We make children together with men. We should not be separated. We are families.' That is when we all moved and came back, and some of the people here are witnesses, because I was there. You were there.

CHAIR: Can I just follow that up. When you actually said that to Jenny—

Ms Williams: I did actually say that.

CHAIR: Then, after that, people moved back together?

Ms Williams: Yes.

CHAIR: But there was not much time. Is that the issue?

Ms Williams: Yes.

CHAIR: When you said to the minister what you just said to us, 'That we should be together' and stuff—

Ms Williams: Actually, it was a [inaudible] with the people. I said it aloud: 'Come on, ladies, get up. Let's go to where man and woman are together with the children.'

CHAIR: You did a walk out?

Ms Williams: Yes. 'Let's go under that thing and join the collective.'

Senator SIEWERT: We heard this morning that the men did not ask for the two groups, men and women, to be separate. Did you ask for that

Ms Williams: No, we did not ask for that. But she was with us all the time.

Senator SIEWERT: But you did not ask for the two groups to be separate?

Ms Williams: No.

Senator SIEWERT: If the government is going to spend more money, what are the key issues that you think they should be addressing? Do you agree with the issues that the Stronger Futures legislation is addressing, or do you think they should be doing other things—or that plus other things?

Ms Summers: I am the manager of the Babbarra Women's Centre for Bawinanga. There are a plethora of issues that have not been addressed by government in the second stage of the intervention. Bawinanga actually has a strong women's group in this community. We invite all members and all women from all around the community to gather together every couple of months to discuss issues that are facing women in Maningrida. I do not see any of those issues being raised in the second stage of this intervention.

Senator SIEWERT: Can you tell us what those issues are?

Ms Summers: Mums are concerned about raising children. You have got a huge number of very young mothers in the community who are not coping and who palm their children off to their grandmothers. We have a series of grandmothers sitting in this group who not only work full time but also look after children full time. That is a major issue. Youth suicide is a huge issue that needs to be looked at in communities. Why are young people trying to commit suicide? We have got teams from child support services and our night patrol working really hard to try and combat some of these issues but there is just simply not enough funding going into it. The night patrol have been struggling for years to gain enough support from government to be able to do their jobs effectively. Women's health is another issue that is raised constantly. There are issues in this community and across Arnhem Land that are more prevalent than anywhere else in the country. Why is this? This is an issue. We, through Bawinanga's strong women's group, have assisted the Menzies School of Health Research in ovarian cancer, vulva cancer and breast cancer research to see why it is so prevalent in Western Arnhem Land. These are some of the issues that can be faced and dealt with far better.

From the perspective of the Babbarra Women's Centre, we used to be, as Helen mentioned, a women's refuge. We are now a series of small business enterprises. We are striving for self-sustainability because, as we see changes to CDEP happen, our ability to provide training development and employment to staff members is rapidly dwindling. While we are utilising the Job Services Australia program, through the Maningrida Employment Services, which is an effective program, we still need more money to be able to support salaries in our women's centre, because these amazing women who you see behind us are facing losing their jobs. You are

looking at women who create incredible textiles; you are looking at women here who are responsible for the health and hygiene in this community because they run an exceptional cleaning crew. We have also, as Matthew Ryan mentioned, picked up the cleaning contract for Territory Alliance and, as Luke mentioned, had the absolute ability to run a successful cleaning contract which entailed cleaning from top to bottom every single house that you see in that new subdivision.

As Luke mentioned, we have the capacity to do these things. Unless government starts to look at the issues at hand, and where money should be spent—for example, on salaries for staff or the infrastructure to provide more substantial business—these women are not going to have jobs in the near future. I am very thankful that we have had an extension to the CDEP, because it gives me more time to find out how we are going to provide salaries for the incredible women sitting behind me.

Senator SIEWERT: When the consultation was held here, were those the types of issues you said you raised and you did not think were heard?

Ms Summers: The women's centre was not invited to the consultation. As for the original consultation, we were not invited by the minister. We did not have the notification that we had to attend that meeting. We had representatives, such as Helen, there and I believe a few of the women made it over there but there was not ample time or information given to us in time for us to attend.

Senator CROSSIN: This is for whomever can answer this. Would you tell me about your night patrol funding? Does it come directly from the federal Attorney-General's Department?

Ms Harvey: I will answer that one. We are currently in a three-month trial period. We have got three months in which we are working directly with Attorney-General's as opposed to that through the shire model, like most other night patrols are at the moment. I think we are into the second month of that. Attorney-General's will assess the performance and some of the KPIs and other statutory requirements around that at the end of the three months and then that will progress.

Senator CROSSIN: Do you remember how much it is? How much do you get each year for your night patrol?

Ms Harvey: I think we are getting about \$700,000.

Senator CROSSIN: So that is for 12 months. How many are you able to employ for that?

Ms Harvey: I think there are about 18 to 20 staff.

Senator CROSSIN: But they do not work every night though.

Ms Harvey: It is a rostered system. It is a rostered system but the more experienced people do the core of the work.

Senator CROSSIN: Can you also perhaps tell me about other support work that the women's centre might do in helping families to get children to school every day?

Ms Summers: Because the women's centre has now moved into being more of a business enterprise, we do not have a program that is focused on that. However, we do have policies and support mechanisms for parents to be able to get their children to school. We will pay for women to have their children sit in school, so that they can get the child there. However, there are other programs in the community that are effective and operated by the school itself to get children physically to school.

Senator CROSSIN: Can you tell me a bit about those?

Ms Summers: I believe that there are positions on the school bus that goes around every day, door to door, to pick children up from their homes to safely get them to school. But further consultation with the school itself would probably be your best avenue.

Senator SCULLION: Thanks very much for explaining some of the multitudinous things that you do. I am interested in the Maningrida Child Safety Service. Can you tell me how that is currently funded? Do you know where the money for that service comes from? If not, you might want to take that on notice.

Ms Harvey: It is funded by the NT Department of Families and Children.

Senator SCULLION: How long does the funding extend for? Do you have confidence in your funding? Is it recurrently funded?

Ms Harvey: It is funded annually. We are currently in negotiations with the Northern Territory government around that particular program.

Senator SCULLION: As far as the night patrol goes, we have just had some evidence a little earlier about Malabam from someone who observed that there were sometimes kids still running around at night. What does

the service provide? When they see kids running around do they simply take them home? What are the sorts of issues that the night patrol actually deals with?

Ms Harvey: I believe that the night patrol deals with way above and beyond what their core service would normally be. I believe there are five to seven police officers in Maningrida. At 4.21, to be precise, the telephones get switched across to the Berrimah headquarters in Darwin, so anything that happens after 4.21 you need to talk to Darwin about. Usually, like any place, the crisis intervention stuff cranks up after dark, so the night patrol are providing a critical service. Like I said, they do way above and beyond what they are really meant to, just in breaking up arguments and returning young children home, back to their parents. When their night is over, they have to go back the next day and make sure all the statistics are accounted for. They also even sometimes identify aged people or people with mental health issues that have strayed away from their families and ensure the safe return of those to people where they will be safe again. What else do they do? They just do so, so much. Like I said, a lot of the times, when things are happening, it is weekends, Friday nights, Thursday nights, barge weeks—they are just so, so busy.

Senator SCULLION: Do you record that diversity of contacts? As a process, do you record all those?

Ms Harvey: Yes, we are beginning to record all of that quite concisely.

Senator SCULLION: I am not sure whether you would be able to provide it to us, but it would be great if you were able to provide an average fortnight. But I do not want names of people. If you were able to put it in such a way that there was a type of contact and the times that you operated, it would be useful, but I do not think it would be appropriate to have any names or whatever. If you could take those out of it to your satisfaction, I think it would be fantastic if you could take that on notice.

Ms Harvey: The current templating that we have does not record names except for case notes, so we should be able to get those quite easily.

Senator SCULLION: You would understand why I would want to—

Ms Williams: Numbers and what it was about.

Senator SCULLION: Thank you very much.

Ms Kalakala: On the night patrol and child safety service: in the night patrol child safety service, we are there every night, 24/7, going round the community, looking round for children and looking after mothers and children from domestic violence, taking them over to the women's safe house, especially during barge week. Also, on child safety, we are taking children to school when children are walking around the street, especially during Mondays and Fridays, and checking on little children with disabilities or something like that. We take them to the clinic. That is all the stuff we do.

Senator SCULLION: Why does the violence increase during barge week?

Ms Williams: Not every barge, not every alcohol—and that is the fact. There are some [inaudible] on the oval where there is no alcohol week, no barge week. It happens any time. That is the main point. Not every barge week. There is some domestic violence that some of us do not know. It is some kind of confidential thing that belongs to a husband and wife, and it is kept that way, but when it is open—like the [inaudible] fighting, it happens somewhere else in a public place, and on any other days, not only during the barge day.

Ms Harvey: It is not always alcohol.

Ms Williams: No, it is not always an alcohol problem with fighting.

Senator SCULLION: That is why I asked the question. In any event, if you can provide a list of those things, that will give us an understanding of what you do.

Senator BOYCE: Ms Williams, you were saying that you were worried about parents having their income restricted because of taking children out of school for cultural reasons and maybe family reasons and things. What should the government do so that that is okay but it is not okay if you do not send your kids to school at all? What should they do?

Ms Williams: I think that the government could talk about two seasons, the dry season and the wet season. You have to send your kids because of education so they can have a proper job, training, grow up and become a leader or something, in a job. But also the government has to understand that we have two seasons, the dry season and the wet season. In the dry season we have ceremonies where we send our children with their families out in the bush for six months, wet and dry, and the government should understand that that is part of our culture to attend. It is a kind of education too, to educate our kids. I know it is very important to send our kids every day.

And then, why is the government also cutting off the income? How would they survive with food, clothes, electricity, power, fridges—a \$20 or \$30 power cut or whatever? At the end, how much money will they have? How much budget will they have, if families know how to budget themselves?

Senator BOYCE: We can get some answers to those questions that Ms Harvey asked about what happens—whether you lose the money completely or whatever. We can ask the minister, Centrelink or someone to tell us—

Senator SCULLION: They might be listening today.

Senator BOYCE: the answers to those questions. But I guess in mainstream Australia you are supposed to send your kids to school every week. I am just trying to ask: should it say you have to go to school for six months? I do not know. How should it look so that it is okay for the people who want to do school and cultural stuff but so that it is not okay for the people who do not send their kids to school at all?

Ms Williams: I think some families are different. There are a lot of different ones. I do not know your type of family, what they do; you do not know about my type, what my family do. So, whether I send my kids every day and that family do not send their kids every day, we have to encourage each other, get communities together and talk about it through our reference group or whatever, with the leadership mob—talking to them, not just push but talk amongst each other about children and tell them all the reasons, like why is this new law coming that government people are pushing? Sometimes, yes.

Can I go back to what I was talking about—what I said at the tent? It has given me an idea. [Inaudible] was right there, very close with me, so she would know. If you ask her, she will tell you.

Senator BOYCE: I have one last question and I do not know who wants to answer this. I was just looking at the book that the Bawinanga corporation produces. There are no women on the committee. Why is that?

Ms Harvey: I am happy to answer that. That book you have there is our last year's annual report. There has since been an AGM and we do have a woman on our board, a very strong woman who is going to become part of that board. I think the members in general were quite pleased that there is now a woman on the BAC board.

Senator BOYCE: That is good to hear. Thank you.

CHAIR: I only have one question, and it is to do with what has happened since the meeting you had with Jenny Macklin. You were raising questions about particularly the education stuff. There is a lot more in the legislation but you have concentrated on the education stuff. Has anyone from the government come back to talk with you, as a group, in community, as a women's group, about those things—about how it is likely to operate? Has FaHCSIA, Centrelink or anyone come back to talk with you?

Ms Williams: No—that we know of.

Ms Harvey: No, but, in the case, I think it will be the way every other case for anything is administered by the government. It will be case by case and it will be around that individual's circumstances.

CHAIR: I was just concerned that there were still so many questions, and that is real—you have not been able to talk with anyone from government to get those answers. I am putting this on the record deliberately.

Ms Summers: No. No-one has been out.

CHAIR: Okay. Thank you very much. If any of the women behind us want to add something, they can come forward. No? They must have all thought you represented them very well.

Ms Williams: I am with the Maningrida Progress Association, but because of the women and my history—I am also a woman, and I started the women's centre in 1985—I am with Bawinanga. I wanted to talk about history and a few hints that this woman could pass on. But I am really with MPA.

CHAIR: The Maningrida Progress Association will be appearing next, so you might just have to stay there. But we are going to have a break first.

Ms Williams: I do work at school too, with the principal—

CHAIR: So you have all this knowledge you need to share with us. Thank you very much to the women's association. Because we want to talk to so many people, we are not going to have an official lunch break. We will take a short break and then come back and hear from the Maningrida Progress Association.

Proceedings suspended from 13:31 to 13:50

HERREEN, Mr Dene, Committee Member, Maningrida Progress Association

TAN, Mr Jimmy Woon, General Manager, Maningrida Progress Association

TOTTEN, Mr Robert, Manager, Maningrida Progress Association

WILLIAMS, Ms Helen, Chairperson, Maningrida Progress Association

CHAIR: Has anyone an opening statement before we go to questions? Mr Woon Tan, do you have an opening statement?

Mr Tan: Good afternoon. I am the General Manager of the Maningrida Progress Association. I would like to give you a brief introduction and history of the Maningrida Progress Association. MPA is a community owned organisation and is a promoter of Aboriginal enterprises. Our business operations include a supermarket, a bakery shop, a takeaway, a service station, a 10-bedroom hostel, a building division and a banking agency for the Territory Insurance Office. The association was incorporated on 10 February 1969 and has been running successfully for more than 40 years without government funding. The association has a board of 12 committee members who are from different language groups. The board of committee members meets regularly to improve and implement new policies for the running of the association.

The small profits that are generated from the business are put back into the community, such as improving the infrastructure of the store, repairing the community town hall, building the school football oval, contributing to sport and cultural activities and in 2007 donating \$125,000 to the building of a new Maningrida swimming pool.

As a community supermarket, we give our top priority in providing healthy and quality food for the community. The association has no problem in obtaining community stores licensing for income management under the NT Emergency Response. A wide range of fresh fruits and vegetables are sold at very reasonable prices in our supermarkets. That is cross-subsidised by a higher profit margin from non-essential goods and soft drinks. Our profit margin is only approximately 10 per cent on fresh fruits and vegetables after taking into account the freight costs. The association works very closely with the remote public health nutritionist from the Department of Health and Community Services in promoting and selling healthy food for the community.

Generally, fresh fruits and healthy foods in remote communities cost significantly more than in urban town centres because of the freight component. The freight costs for bringing freezer goods from Brisbane to Darwin are 80c per kilo and then 91c from Darwin to Maningrida by barge. For example, if we were to buy a kilo of apples from a Brisbane supplier at \$3.50 per kilo, by the time it reaches Maningrida—if we include the freight costs—that kilo of apples costs \$5.21. With our mark-up of only 10 per cent, we have to sell that kilo of apples for \$5.73 compared to the original cost of \$3.50. In view of the high freight costs of bringing healthy fruit into the community, we are seeking subsidy for freight from the government. This would definitely help to bring down the price of healthy foods to sell in the supermarket. With better affordability, this will encourage locals to spend more on healthy food.

The other issue I want to bring up is the tackling of alcohol abuse in Maningrida. The issue of tackling alcohol abuse had been established for many years prior to the NT emergency response. Maningrida is a semi-dry community, as everyone knows. It allows alcohol to be transported by barge only once a fortnight into the community and through an alcohol permit system authorised and established by the NT Licensing Commission to a local service provider to control alcohol supply and distribution. Indigenous permit holders are allowed to order only two cartons of beer. Representatives from local agencies form a local group, known as the Drug, Alcohol and Volatile Substance Committee, in short known as DAVSCOM, to manage the permit application and recommendation and assessment by following the guidelines of the Maningrida Alcohol Management Plan.

For the record, the Maningrida alcohol plan is not finalised yet. It is still in the discussion process and there are a couple of issues that are pending. We are using that as a guideline for the time being. Under the system, all alcohol orders must go through the local service provider. The alcohol is then distributed on a fortnightly Saturday morning, between 8:30 am and 9:30 am with very strict conditions. In August 2011, the Maningrida Progress Association took over from West Arnhem Shire Council as the local service provider when they were unable to handle the ordering and distribution of alcohol. The operation has since been running smoothly and successfully under MPA, with the assistance of the night patrol and Maningrida police.

During a recent board of committee meeting, our board members indicated that the proposed changes under the Stronger Futures bill, under the penalty for liquor offences, for under 1,350 ml to include six months imprisonment is very harsh. There are very few instances of grog running in Maningrida compared to other types of illicit drug running. Illicit drug running of cannabis or kava in remote communities is a very lucrative business. There were 14 cases of illicit drug offences and none for grog running in the Maningrida court hearings on 8

February 2012. All we are concerned with is that, if the bill is passed, our jail will be overcrowded by people with grog offences and punishment for illicit drug runners will be much lighter due to insufficient prison space. I have got statistics here that indicate the number of offences during the last court hearing: for drug offences, including cannabis and kava, there were 14 cases; for drink driving there were four cases; for other motor vehicle offences there were 12 cases; for domestic violence there were six cases; there were 21 break-ins; and there were 22 cases of public disorderly behaviour. That is my presentation, and I would like to thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to present out our view.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Does anyone else at the table want to make an opening comment?

Ms Williams: I am the Chairperson of the Maningrida Progress Association. As Jim said, we have 12 board members, two from each language group, who represent our people around Maningrida—even outstations too because we do support outstations. We do not really get any funding elsewhere. We are a self-enterprise shop—the community owns the shop. We in the Maningrida Progress Association, we give donations to the families for food or whatever, but we do not do it for ceremonies, only for funerals. That helps the family support. We support them. MPA has been running for almost 42 years. We started small. They call it a trading post: from bark hut shop to a huge one because all of our funding bodies are our own people here living in this community or when we have visitors who come to spend their money in there. That is why I think we are not just surviving but doing a good job. Sometimes we have vets. Last time we had a vet come to train after school—some high school kids. We have got a good combination of people who are working there—our staff mob. MPA has been there for decades.

Mr Totten: My name is Rob Totten, I am the manager of the Maningrida Progress Association store. I have been nearly 14 years. We do a good job pretty much. We get feedback from our committee on providing healthy foods and stuff like that. As far as store licensing goes, sometimes I think it is overregulated. In saying that, it does have some good points to make sure that they are doing the right thing. That's about it.

Mr Herreen: My name is Dene Herreen. I have previously been the secretary of MPA and Bawinanga over the last six or seven years—I am wearing a Bawinanga corporation shirt. I have also coordinated the Maningrida night patrol. I do not want to touch too much on the consultations because they have been harped upon right through this, and I thought this was about discussing the policy at hand. We seem to be very much touching on the consultations that took place and that did not take place. Everybody knows the problems that existed back then when Minister Macklin came out and the follow ups that were not done.

Night patrol has seen a progression. The alcohol management plan was in place a long time prior to the NTER. It was in place and it was a conscientious decision that the community made through the women's centre to be able to police what was going on out here as far as alcohol purchasing went. It was a system that worked. It was not touched when NTER came out up until such time as everybody started talking about alcohol management plans. I am concerned with two facets of it: someone bringing 75 millilitres of alcohol into town can do time in jail; a six pack of beer can do you 18 months in jail. This is not right when you have got such an excess amount of marijuana use in this community, and not only in this community but other indigenous communities across the way. Petrol sniffing and all these substances that are coming into town and that are really destroying our kids out here: you get a slap on the wrist if you go to court. I have given Senator Scullion some statistics on the night patrols over the last month. Currently, we are going through a process of, as Maria Harvey said, dealing with the Attorney General's department. Out of a three-month period, over the first month the majority of incidents that occurred were break ins, not so much domestic violence issues—the majority were break ins and incidents dealing with kids out after certain hours. So alcohol is at quite a minimum. I am just a little bit worried that the emphasis is placed continually upon alcohol as the destroyer and the cause of all the destruction in this community when, as has already been spoken about, the majority of people in this community that order grog are actually not Indigenous.

CHAIR: Thank you. We will go to Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT: I would like to ask you the same question that I asked of BAC about the store and the provisions that are contained in the Stronger Futures legislation. The changes are quite extensive. Are they going to impact on you in running your store?

Mr Totten: I think at the end of the day with the amount of restrictions and given what is involved in maintaining them, there is obviously going to be an on-cost. It is going to flow straight through. It is like I said. We are managed by our committee and they point us in the right direction. We also work with Health as well to promote healthy eating. I think money could be further spent on more education towards healthy eating and stuff like that. There is another thing and this is if anyone wants to ask anything further: I am also the chairman of the drug, alcohol and volatile substance committee, DAVSCOM.

Senator CROSSIN: I want to pick up on what you have been saying. So you believe that under the alcohol provisions of the new legislation the penalties are too harsh for the amount of alcohol you might be caught with?

Mr Herreen: Yes. The bottom line is they are excessive.

Senator CROSSIN: Compared with, say, getting caught with drugs or petrol sniffing?

Mr Herreen: Obviously, you are dealing with two different sorts of legislation here. But going on the practicalities and the knowledge about grog running, which is perceived to be happening continuously in Maningrida for it to be noted as happening—and not only in Maningrida but across all these Indigenous communities—I think it is totally excessive.

Ms Williams: Say you have one community member here and one community member there. Say you have six communities. So you have six people at one time going for sentencing in Berrimah and then how much more space would you need in Berrimah? There would be overcrowding then, and for the next six or 18 months. How come this harsh sentence is being done? It is like you are putting us in jail. There could be some other different ways of dealing with the punishment. Maybe it is up to us as a community to punish our own people. Maybe you could think of that, of sending them out somewhere for that.

CHAIR: Thank you. I just want to let you know that I have asked the senators to have only one question each. It is not that they do not have more. It is just because of time.

Senator SCULLION: I understand every year your store has a full audit from FaHCSIA. And you have had that audit for how many years?

Mr Tan: Our store has been audited every year by KPMG, one of the biggest auditing firms in Australia.

Senator SCULLION: And that audit from FaHCSIA is in order to be a licensed store?

Mr Tan: Yes. We have no problem with that.

Senator SCULLION: Have you ever failed an audit from FaHCSIA?

Mr Tan: No, we do not have to.

Senator SCULLION: So, given those things, you would be aware that the new legislation actually provides the power to compel information relating to assessments, a power which I have to say is normally relegated to a royal commission rather than somebody making sure that your cabbages are okay. What has been your general response? Obviously, you have read the legislation. What has been your response to some of the very highly punitive compliance issues in the legislation?

Mr Tan: I have not come across that legislation yet. I have not seen it yet. I have not read it yet. So I am not aware of it.

Senator SCULLION: I have your number. I will make sure I send you the legislation.

Senator BOYCE: We will need Mr Totten or Mr Herreen on this one. You talked about the use of marijuana in the community and the fact that the provisions in the legislation are only related to alcohol. Do you see that the stricter requirements on alcohol could, in fact, increase marijuana usage? Are there any other comments that you would like to make on the issue of marijuana usage?

Mr Totten: I would say it would have some sort of impact. It has been proven in the past that driving the alcohol underground or restricting it to a degree where it was not available here caused us to lose a lot of key people to Darwin. Some of those people never came back. I think it would make a big difference to the community. We meet with the police on quite a regular basis and we do ask them about such things as the number of incidents recorded. We also speak to Health about incidents recorded on those weekends. It is quite minimal.

Senator BOYCE: It is quite?

Mr Totten: Minimal. Sometimes we have even had police say that we did not have any alcohol related incidents.

Senator BOYCE: That would be the weekend after barge week, would it? Sorry, Chair, I am just clarifying.

Mr Totten: Yes. It is handed out on—I think it was touched on before that the majority of the drinkers here are non-Indigenous. On a hand-out day you might get 30 Indigenous people down there and 70 or 80 non-Indigenous down there.

CHAIR: We have a follow-up from Senator Scullion.

Senator SCULLION: This is more just for information on the new alcohol plan provisions. Again, I will try to provide some information directly to you. For example, in Mt Nancy camp in Alice Spring, they are making their own alcohol management plan, which includes a reserved place to drink. Prior to that there was prohibition.

The new alcohol management plan allows people, from a community, for example, to decide on exactly what local alcohol management plan they would like. The minister has the opportunity to sign that off. Sadly, not much appears to be known about the legislation that allows this.

Mr Totten: In saying that, a few years ago we acquired the services of Dr Ian Crundall to do a study. We also got our own alcohol management plan together. Licensing got involved and basically here we are, a couple of years down the track, and we still haven't got the plan signed off, because it seems that there are too many people justifying their jobs. Basically, the new plan that they have come up with has adopted just about 99 per cent of the stuff that Ian Crundall put in his report. We are still waiting. To be totally honest, the money is being wasted on these guys coming out constantly—we cannot get people to meetings because they are sick of hearing the same old thing over and over again. Money would be better spent signing off on that and moving on to the abuse of some substance other than alcohol.

CHAIR: Thank you. Two things: for the record, did any of your group attend any of the briefing sessions from the government on this legislation?

Mr Totten: Sorry?

CHAIR: Did anyone from the progress association attend the meetings with the minister or any other meetings on this legislation?

Mr Totten: No. Never knew about it.

Ms Williams: Yes, with Jenny Macklin.

CHAIR: Ms Williams has said that there were—but no-one else from the progress association?

Mr Totten: No.

CHAIR: Okay.

Mr Herreen: Which ones are you actually talking about?

CHAIR: The Stronger Futures legislation—a meeting with the minister

Mr Herreen: When Minister Macklin came out here?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Herreen: Yes, I attended it.

CHAIR: I just want to see how many members of the—whether from your knowledge whether the progress association was in attendance at that first meeting.

Mr Tan: I was present during the speech by Jenny Macklin.

CHAIR: I also want to put on record our thanks for your evidence and our appreciation to the progress association for helping us out with the food today. The order got very large in the middle of the morning and you provided support in a very welcome way. I particularly want to thank Gail from Hasty Tasty. Thank you to the members of the progress association.

Ms Williams: Is the school the next one?

CHAIR: Yes. Are you staying, Ms Williams?

Ms Williams: Yes.

CHAIR: That is very useful. You just stay there.

Mr Tan: I would like to table a document.

CHAIR: It would be lovely if you could table that; it would be great.

BANGGUNA, Ms Mavis, Maningrida School

DOWADI, Mr Andrew, Maningrida School

DWYER, Mr Stuart, Principal, Maningrida School

RANKIN, Ms Robyn, Maningrida School

WAUCHOPE, Ms Heleana, Maningrida School

WILLIAMS, Ms Helen, Maningrida School

[14:15]

CHAIR: Thank you very much. We have now got people from the school. Mr Dwyer, have you brought your whole school with you?

Mr Dwyer: No, just one of the classes.

CHAIR: I just wanted to get that on record. Welcome, students. It is really great to see you here. Mr Dwyer, you have seen how this works. It is being recorded. Information on parliamentary privilege is available for you. What we need you and anyone who speaks is to give us your name when you speak so that we can record it on *Hansard*. I know you have got an opening statement, and the senators have just been provided with your handout as well. If you would like to start that would be great.

Mr Dwyer: Thank you for the opportunity to talk today. What I have just handed you is our information from last year. You will see that throughout last year, on the first four pages, that our attendance has doubled. That is due to a number of reasons and a number of strong partnerships with the other agencies across Maningrida. It is due to a lot of work by our attendance officers at the school, building those partnerships with the parents and the families and helping each of the parents and families work out ways to get their children to school on a regular basis. That hard work is reflected in these results.

There has been a lot of hard work last year, and there is going to be a lot of hard work this year. The work will not stop. As you can see, we can celebrate the increase, but there is still a long way to go. We will continue to work to improve that as we go. But, from where we have come from, it is definitely an improvement. The next four pages are our results for our year 3s, 5s, 7s and 9s in our national NAPLAN tests—everyone knows what the NAPLAN tests are. You can see again that there have been increases across the board. This is attributed to more students at school regularly, great assistant teachers, great teachers at the school and the families being part of that educational conversation in the home with their children to support what is happening in the classrooms.

We are a pre-school to year 12 school, and we also have a families as first teachers, which works with the zero to three-year-olds in the school. So really we are from the cot to the job, hopefully. Our aim at the school is to get students into employment in Maningrida. I would love to see in the future an Indigenous principal at the school as well as our Indigenous teachers as well as our students walking into jobs at MPA, BAC, the shire, Malabam, the police, and all other job opportunities that exist in Maningrida. I would love to see our students be able to transition into those. Thank you.

CHAIR: Does anybody else want to make a statement? I am do not want to make you shy, but I am looking straight at the lady in the green top there.

Ms Wauchope: I am a trainee teacher here, at Maningrida School. This is my final year.

CHAIR: Is there anything you want to tell us about your school or about how you think any of the legislation would operate? Where you are hoping to work when you graduate?

Ms Wauchope: Here, to share my knowledge here, encourage and be a role model to the young generation here, further my education and make sure the children's education is furthered and goes in different areas. Sharing the knowledge, living in both worlds. I would like to achieve that.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Does anybody else want to make an opening statement?

Ms Bangunna: I am a teaching assistant. I have been trained through Batchelor College for three years. I am in the class teaching years 5 and 6, as well as being the chairperson of Maningrida School.

CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Dwyer, what class have you got with you?

Mr Dwyer: We brought one of our middle year classes that have been very interested in the Stronger Futures and what those discussions are going to be.

CHAIR: Do any of them want to speak to us? Is anyone brave enough?

Mr Dwyer: Would anyone like to talk?

CHAIR: Mr Dwyer, why don't we give them some homework. It would be really good if they could write to us. The committee would really like to hear from you but, if you are too shy to talk to us now, you can write to us.

Mr Dwyer: That would be great.

CHAIR: The senators will now ask some questions.

Senator SIEWERT: You have had significant increases in attendance from 2010 to 2011. What are the main things the school did differently between 2010 and 2011?

Mr Dwyer: I think there have been a number of things. Starting in the school, we have got some really good teachers and teacher assistants. I think the programs we are running in the school are attracting the students and keeping them engaged, so when they wake up in the morning they are thinking school is a good place to go. Linked with that we have got some great attendance officers who are out in the community every day. They start their work around eight o'clock in the morning and continually go around the community during the day talking with parents and with the children who are not at school and getting the families to work out why the child is not at school and finding out what the story is. If the child needs to go to the clinic or there is some other reason, they can have that conversation and work on re-engaging that child back into school if not that day then potentially the following day.

There are also definitely greater links with BAC, MPA, the shire and other agencies here. With those links, our students have been able to experience lots of different facets of the community. That helps them see the relevance of going to school. When they finish school, hopefully they are going to be working in these different industries. So the students can understand the connection with doing their maths at period 4. They understand that they are learning that maths because they are going to have to use it when they step into those jobs.

Senator SIEWERT: How many attendance officers have you got and who are they employed by? Are they the NT government ones?

Mr Dwyer: Yes. We have a senior teacher who is our attendance officer. She works with Colin, Rankin, Robin and Elizabeth. These guys have been doing this for a number of years. They are just great. They get out to different sections of the community and work with the families and the parents there. Helen and I went around to a number of communities and a number of houses last year to talk about why the students are going to school. So we can celebrate that and also talk about some of the things that are inhibiting those children from going to school. We can sit down and say, 'How about we do this differently?' or 'Did you know we do this at the school?' so parents have more of an awareness of what we are doing.

Senator CROSSIN: Mr Dwyer, thanks heaps for coming down with all of your great staff and students. I am going to ask you one question. If this legislation goes through, the reality is that it is the school that actually collects the attendance statistics. I think there are some real concerns not only in this community but right around the Territory that people might instantly have their Centrelink payments cut. If I do not send my child to school for 10 days, what happens? What is the process there to try and fix that problem? I assume you do not ring Centrelink and tell them to cut my payments off. I want to get a sense of the work and support that both governments give you to try and fix that problem first.

Mr Dwyer: It is very similar to our current NT policy around Every Child, Every Day. It is really coming back even before the fines or any of that are rolled out. It comes back to the communication with parents. So, if Trish Crossin has not come to school for 10 days, we would need to then go around to the family and say, 'What is happening with Trish? What is the story here?' and then, 'How can we help Trish to come to school?' We then work it out with the parents or the family and say, 'Okay, what is the background here?' Our attendance officers will then come to the school and say, 'We need these types of support for this type of child,' and that is different support for different children that are not attending. We can then work with that child and really engage them into the school. But we keep that conversation happening all the time. Even when Trish does come back into the school, we need to have that conversation the week after as well to make sure the parents engage and know what is happening in the class for that student, so the parents can support the students in the classroom, because they know what is happening in each class.

Senator CROSSIN: If I am off for culture reasons, you would take that into consideration?

Mr Dwyer: I guess note it on our roll, yes.

Senator CROSSIN: Yes, but if I am away for cultural ceremonies, you would take that into consideration? That is an attendance tick, isn't it?

Mr Dwyer: It would be a nonattendance.

Senator CROSSIN: But you would take that into consideration as to why I am not at school?

Mr Dwyer: Definitely. That would be all part of the story and we need to get an accurate picture of the story about why the child was not there.

Senator CROSSIN: So if I am being bullied at school, you would try to work out why that is happening and fix that problem?

Mr Dwyer: Definitely. A lot of parents are really good. So if something has happened at school they will be able to tell our attendance officers, maybe in language, or they might come to the school with their child and say, 'This happened yesterday,' so we can work out what the whole story is. You know how Chinese whispers go with kids. Sometimes they will go home because maybe the work is too hard or something else. So we will find out what that whole story is and then work out who the best people are to help that child sit down in the schoolyard or in the school a lot better and a lot more comfortably.

Senator SCULLION: Congratulations, Mr Dwyer, to you, your staff and the school. It is tremendous to see the work you have done in a relatively short period of time. It is great. You also acknowledge you have a way to go. In three weeks only 50 per cent of the kids that are enrolled have been attending. So what do you think governments can do to help deal with the remaining 50 per cent? What can government do to help you continue to grow that?

Mr Dwyer: Good question. On any day we have got 620 students enrolled in the school. Today we had roughly 350 of those students at school. If you had driven around the community I would say there would have been only maybe 20 students in the community not at school. The rest of the students are most likely not in the community. They are either on country or in a neighbouring community or in Darwin. Our efforts need to go to those families so that, when they are out in another community or in Darwin or somewhere else, we need to try to encourage those parents to get their children to school in that area. Sometimes we hear of people when they come to Maningrida from another community and we say, 'Why aren't you at school?' and the child or the family might say, 'We are visiting.' So they do not see Maningrida as their school. We need to try to change that perspective so if a child is, say, from Tennant Creek or from Bulman and they have come over here, we need to try to encourage that family to think: 'Maningrida school is part of the school for my child because I am over here. We might be visiting for one month or however long, but I will make Maningrida school part of my process of getting the child up and going for the day.' I think that could be a great part of the process.

Senator SCULLION: Thank you very much.

Senator BOYCE: Pretty much on the same topic, Mr Dwyer, if a family comes to you and says, 'We are going to the homelands for sorry business,' what does the school do then and how can we achieve the educational aims that are intended? What attendance at standard schooling, I suppose, do we require and how do we achieve that?

Mr Dwyer: That is another good question. Going to ceremonies is extremely important for that child, for their identity, for their connection to culture, to family, to everything. So, when people come up and say that they have got to participate in this, as a school we say: 'Fair enough. We'd love to see you again. Is there anything we can give you to take away to do while you're away?' We are definitely appreciative and respectful that people are participating in a culture that needs to continue.

This year we will be following in the footsteps of having the discussions about what our school year should look like, whether we should be still having the holidays where they are and what we might need to change to meet the needs of the community and allow the community to meet cultural obligations. That conversation will happen during this year.

Senator BOYCE: And you have that flexibility within the current system?

Mr Dwyer: We do, yes. We can make some proposals to our NT DET, our executive, and put down proposals about changing the school year to be in line with community considerations.

Senator BOYCE: In which case the provisions of Stronger Futures would apply to people who were not sending their kids to school rather than people who were taking their children out of school for other reasons?

Mr Dwyer: Correct, yes.

Senator BOYCE: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Dwyer. What do you want to tell us, Mr Dowadi?

Mr Dowadi: I have been an assistant teacher since 1998 or 1999 with these families, with these schoolchildren. I have seen the children that have been attending school every time, and sometimes we have problems. We have problems with the parents that do not send them because of pocket money or maybe towels or something like that. Sometimes they start and sometimes they have problems with the parent; they stay home. So

usually the workers go and pick them up and encourage them to send them to school. Sometimes they do not come, so they have to take the school out around the areas.

I was also going to say something about outstation schools. When the rain comes up, the roads are cut and there are no teachers going to outstations. They come here. They do school here. Once it dries I think they go back to community and do school instead. Sometimes we have a good school from an outstation come here and we send them to town, to the city, to get more education from in town and then come back. But you have no pocket money or Centrelink or credit cards to stay in the city so they can learn more, have more education. We are sending them far away, away from their families. Bring education back to our families, to the community, so we do not have to send the kids to the city. It is a bit scary in the city. So we are trying to teach them here, in the community, because we have two cultures here—Aboriginal and white societies. We have to encourage our families to send them to school to learn more and have an education, sitting in chairs, with tables, writing books, computers and everything like that. We are trying our best but we do not have any stuff like that.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. You want to keep your kids locally. Ms Williams, you have something to add?

Ms Williams: I think I have to move on because we have got some dancers coming through this area, for respect.

CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Williams: I have been waiting for this family centre for a while. You might know when the big family centre should be built. There is no foundation yet, nothing. We are still waiting. I worked with the families and teachers for a little while and then later I worked closely with the kids. I can talk with the parents, because I can speak a few languages. I can go out to their home and explain or describe some things. It really put me in a position where I always wanted to be, even when the early childhood or play groups happened. I have been working since 1985 through playgroups in remote communities, so I am used to those sorts of things. Today it gives me pride to help with these children behind me. All of my children are adults, so I only have my grandkids. I encourage the kids to go to school. All the kids around this community are like a big family to us. We make sure that parents and kids always live together. That is a great thing. Stuart and I have to get together sometimes with other teachers. We have good teachers. As Stuart says, we should be celebrating—and I can understand this—Mondays and Fridays are up and down but the middle days are straightforward and really up. I am happy.

CHAIR: I thank Mr Dwyer and his school community. We really appreciate your contribution. We can have one more contribution. I warn all the people waiting for the community forum that we will run out of time. We will try to talk to as many people as possible, but we will not be able to speak to everybody—not because we do not want to listen to what you say but only one plane is available this afternoon.

Ms Rankin: I work at the Maningrida School. I go around in the morning on the bus and take children to school. Even though the parents find it hard to support them, we tell them to bring their kids to school so they can learn for future. We support them and talk to the parents to encourage them to take them to school.

CHAIR: How long have you been doing that?

Ms Rankin: For a few years.

CHAIR: Do the parents work with you?

Ms Rankin: Yes. We always still support them.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. I thank Mr Dwyer and his school community. I do not want the kids to forget to do their homework.

GAMARANIA, Mr Georg, Traditional Owner Representative, Milingimbi Community

GAYKAMAYU, Mr Matthew Dhulumbunk, Dalkarra, Ramingining and Guyapuyju Tribe

GONDARRA OAM, Dr Djiniyini, Dhurili Clan Nation

MUNUNGGIRRITJ, Mrs Djapirri, Spokesperson, Yirrkala and Gumatj Communities

[14:37]

CHAIR: I welcome the Aboriginal Leaders Group. Please tell us how you want to handle this session, because it is your session.

Dr Gondarra: We represent East Arnhem Land: Milingimbi, Ramingining, Guyapuyju and Yirrkala. We are here not asking for money or anything like that. We are here to bring concern about the legislation that is coming before the parliament. Our main concern is about the draft legislation that is before this public hearing. I will start with an introduction, and then I will raise seven points. Then I will allow others to say something on the points I am going to address.

A ceremony was then held—

CHAIR: I want to thank the community of Maningrida for that wonderful experience and the presentation of the document, which we as a committee commit to taking back to the minister. Dr Gondarra, we will return to your evidence.

Dr Gondarra: First of all, I would like to say thank you for the ceremony. These are my mother's people from the east, and that gives me the strength to say what I am going to say before the Senate. I am going to go through it quickly because of the time factor and so let others say something about what our concerns are. As I said in the introduction, we are not here asking for money and we are not here to try to represent stakeholders and the department; we are here to represent communities—our six communities, as I have already mentioned—and their concerns about this particular legislation that has come before the parliament. My introduction also served to politely acquaint the committee with the fact that we people of Arnhem Land have our own pre-existing nation's system of law and citizenship and our own governments. This knowledge is central to my criticism of the Stronger Futures bill, which itself represents a continual interventions policy. Intervention by another government cannot co-exist with the primary policy of the Yolngu nation with its greater self-determination. I will now outline my position on all the bills divided into seven parts and then give other people a chance to be able to say something.

The Stronger Futures bills extend section 91 of the current NTA law. This means that a judge will not consider our laws and our culture in court. Not only do I consider this as racist since all other citizens of Australia have their culture considered in a court, but I also consider it to be an attack upon my people's dignity and sovereignty. Historically, Australia and the Northern Territory governments have restricted our justice systems, by forcing my people into mainstream courts where they are rarely judged by their peers under oversight of foreign judges. To make matters worse, the Northern Territory's emergency response took away any sense of cooperation with the Indigenous jurisdiction by introducing section 91 of the NTA law. Now the government wishes to extend this law for another 10 years. Our law is about justice and is active against crime. That is the Australian law. So why is this sanction necessary? Does the government believe that our law is a myth or that we are barbarians preying on the weak in our society? That is the question that the government has to hear from the people in the community. The Stronger Futures bills will also continue the powers for police to take people away from our town without telling anyone and to integrate our citizens without representation. Once again, I consider this racist as it does not apply to any other Australian citizens. It is also a major disrespect to the jurisdiction of the Yolngu nation while at the same time limiting my people's individual rights. I believe that the extension of these powers must represent the failure of your police to do their job effectively, to be able to communicate with the people around them and win their confidence. The Stronger Futures bills will continue the BasicsCard regime of welfare dependency. My objection to the compulsory nature of the BasicsCard is summarised in the following quote from the letter written to the minister for Indigenous affairs, Jenny Macklin, in August last year. I said very clearly to her:

Madayin Traditional laws do not allow the control of an individual's personal possessions or property by another person.

For us molu rrupiya, tax money taken through official processes, become the individual's personal possession when they receive it. Therefore in the light of Madayin traditional law compulsory quarantining of Centrelink payments breaks the right of an individual to control their own life.'

The solution the Yolngu people seek is for the Australian government to remove compulsory quarantining of Centrelink payments, and instead respond to the needs of our children with education and assisting their parents

with budgeting. It would also be beneficial to have a voluntary quarantining service. Yolngu people are completely capable of providing for their children without being dehumanised and humiliated by having to use the BasicsCard. The strong futures bill centralises power concerning alcohol and pornography restrictions. Giving more power to the minister for Indigenous affairs and her department once again is against the Yolngu policy of self-determination.

All communities in East Arnhem Land have been alcohol free because of negotiation and agreement with the Northern Territory government and our peoples. We have entered into agreement that this area is going to be dry of alcohol. In the Gulf area, where the white population refuses to participate, recent changes have allowed regulation. In West Arnhem Land, Maningrida has a different arrangement and that is very good. You have already heard from them, and this is the way they manage what comes into their community. In East Arnhem Land we do not have as much say. The only fault in this situation has been non-cooperation from the police in enforcing such arrangements. Although not perfect, in recent years we have been largely happy.

Pornography is not something we want in our communities. We do not want to see those naked pictures seen in other places, and we are supportive of government. Yolngu law also supports this view—we are against that sort of thing. It is another crime, and the people should be disciplined and the law needs to be enforced in that area. It is very important also that the government and the leaders and elders should work together to try to get that away from the people, because it is not part of Yolngu or Aboriginal culture when we see pictures of naked people and various other material on the computer. We support that sort of regulation.

The stronger future bills address fraud security by once again creating more powers for the minister for Indigenous affairs and her department. We object to this on the basis that it is again a backward step from self-determination. Nor does it address underlying problems to people eating well, like cost and other things, and it is the same with education. In Arnhem Land, in places like Milingimbi, Galiwinku and Gapuwiyak, the Arnhem Land Progress Association have run the stores for the last 40 years. They have been controlled by the people. Licensing stores would make it very difficult for the Arnhem Land Progress Association because we have Aboriginal board members and Aboriginal chairs. I have been a chairman for 19 years. We know how to run the stores ourselves and there are 300 local people working there. The Arnhem Land Progress Association is a non-profit non-government store which is run by us. We do not depend on government. What profit we make we use to employ our people. If we are talking about self-determination that is how we go about doing it. We do not need government money. We generate what we get, and we always give the money back to the people for different purposes and different reasons.

The Stronger Futures legislation and Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2011 will fine the parents and children who do not attend school. I think you already heard what the other people were saying about it and you have actually seen children sitting down here, showing you who they are. Saying to Aboriginal parents, 'If you don't send your children you are going to be punished because your money will be taken away for three months,' which is what I understand, is only to do with Aboriginal children. In Australian contemporary society there are children running away from school, they are being involved in drugs and not attending school. There is no policy for them. This is only the policy for Aboriginal children in Aboriginal schools. I want you to be sensitive enough to be able to say why. Why is there a different law for Aboriginal children and a different law for the white children? This is discriminatory; this is the fact. Why is the government doing this, saying 'If you don't send your children to school you are going to be punished'? Who is going to be affected more? Not the parents, but it is going to affect the children.

I know that, you and us, we are concerned about their education. Education is a key to the future for Aboriginal people to enter and understand and take a role in society and be a people so we can walk together and build a society and a nation that is better. Creating legislation like this is changing from the Northern Territory Emergency Response into Stronger Futures, but the formula of the legislation is the same as in the Northern Territory Emergency Response. Therefore, our concern is that that needs to be considered properly.

You do not believe that this legislation that has come before the parliament is racist. You know it breaches the international charter of human rights. I think we need to be sensitive enough and try to help people. If we want to see Aboriginal people better in education, better in jobs and better in any other area, we need to work together to build better legislation, because this particular legislation is not on. The Australian people should be asked to reject this legislation because it is racist. It is not helping our people. That is why we come before you and you are listening to us because we represent not stakeholders, not a department, not the service providers. We come here to represent people who are struggling, people who feel pain, people who are confused—what is going on?

Madam Chair, we want you to take this message from us. It is eating us like a cancer. We are always going to be, from the fifties until today, 2012, a puppet on a string of somebody else. We are not a free people. We are

supposed to be the first people, the first nation, of this country. You should be learning so much from us than we are learning something from you. This is very important for us. We should be able to educate our people to stand and work together to build.

Let me say one more thing before I allow my colleagues to say something. When the Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation was established, do you know what the government has done? You took away our traditional customary law, which is very key and important because it emphasises the rule of law, not the rule of man. In customary law, you have three basic elements: peace, order and good government. There is consistency in the law and people are sent into the law. You just did away with something that was very important. The reason why that was done away with was so that the government could go ahead and do what they liked, so they can play around with our lives and our people. I think you need to consider that very seriously.

This legislation is not a special measure and cannot be a special measure. It was never a special measure. Take that message—it is a message from the people and the people's movement. We are subjects and citizens of this country. Why are we being treated as second-class citizens? Just because we are black? We are citizens of this country. We are subject to Australian law, so we should be given appropriate treatment, not like in the fifties when we were asked to drive into the yard by the mission, by the church—I am a churchman, but the church was involved. They brought our people in and said, 'Stay in the yard, and they will come when we ask you to move out from the yard.' This was called the homeland movement—not our name; just homeland.

Today that legislation is saying, 'Come back to the growth town and stay inside the yard again.' That is the sort of formula you have, and we are going to be inside the yard again. What are we going to do inside? Are more jobs going to be created for Aboriginal people? Is it going to be better? Is bilingual education going to be introduced so that people will take it? Aboriginal languages are our first language. English is not our first language, as you know; it is our second or fourth language. Thank you for listening, and I am going to allow other people to say something.

CHAIR: Before we move on—and I am not going to take up your precious time by putting out a message. I just want to let you know that the information around the SEAM program, to which you quite rightly make comment about your concern about it only applying to Aboriginal people, does not. It is working in a number of other communities which are not Aboriginal. So you may not like the program—and we are happy to hear what you do not like about the program—but it is not only for Aboriginal families.

Dr Gondarra: When I look at the legislation, it just talked about me; it does not talk somebody else.

CHAIR: I think it is really important that people know that, and we will make sure you have information.

Mr Gaykamayu: I would like to make a comment on what Doctor has said. It started with black people, Aboriginal people, and you said it is happening in other communities in white society. But it started off with Aboriginal people, and that is not good. We need to be seen as human beings, as First Australians with rights.

CHAIR: Mr Gaykamayu, do you wish to make any other comment?

Mr Gaykamayu: That is the only comment I can make at the moment, but you already saw my paper. You already know me, who I am—I do not have to spell it out—but if I want to I have got more.

Mrs Mununggirritj: I am the manager of the women's resource centre. I also play a part in many areas in my leadership role. I am also on the board of Reconciliation Australia. The question I want to ask is a question about the fact that we have realised that mistakes are made between government and the community. Let us all walk together to create this stronger future. Let us walk with respect—that we can embrace each other's culture as Australian. Let us all share both sides of the knowledge. What Dr Gondarra has said about Australia being a racist country—does that not hurt individual Australians? Does that not hurt individual Australians? We ought to be playing this political game with both cultures on both sides.

I will ask this question: what is happening to Australia now? What is happening in our community now? What is happening with our security now? What is happening with the rights of Indigenous people? What is happening within you, what is happening within me, what is happening within our government and what is happening within our communities? Let us be serious. When I say be serious, let us be serious for goodness sake. We have suffered and with this pain we sit in front of the senators. We thank you that you have taken the opportunity to sit with us and listen. Australia's Indigenous people are a people of pride. We are not invisible. We do exist. We do live in a culture that is alive today. We are a caring people. We would not neglect who you are as an Australian when you come and share with us, carrying that burden as a true government of this Australia. I thank you, so deeply from my heart, that you have taken the opportunity to come and sit with us face to face, because we would not have had the opportunity to come to sit in the political arena of parliament—because our culture is different from yours and

because your culture is different from ours. My message is for a stronger future, not just for the Territory for but wherever Indigenous people in this country live.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Gamarania: May I say this is one of the most historical and happiest visits we have had since Malcolm Fraser's visit. Malcolm Fraser visited 70 years ago when he was sacked from the parliament by John Kerr. When Malcolm Fraser handed the soil to the Lingiari people, it was one of the greatest historic visits ever known. Today we sit down with the Senate and we admire that you have taken the Senate to Maningrida. It is one of the most historical occasions of our lifetime. Your visit to hear our concerns about the seven measures is very important. They have almost destroyed the lives of individual people, as you have heard from other panel members. It would have been better if the government had sat down diplomatically and resolved particular cases.

I could go over a number of breaches of articles of the United Nations by the Australian government. I will only go to one as I know time is very important. Our law is the sole foundation of our life source. The land is the sacred mother and rules are rules, as Dr Djiniyini said. They are not rules of men; Mother Earth, the land we live in, is holy. It is sacred. It is the intellectual property that we own and who we are. The real native Australians preserved the land for 40,000 years. The law of the land was placed by Mother Earth. We practise religious law.

In the Australian Constitution it says Australians have the right to practise religion and tradition. We practise religious law, once handed down by our ancestors. We practise the principles and abide by the rules. Our land is not for sale. Our land is for the purpose of the food chain, gathering and producing enough for years for the purposes of our needs and wants. The next day we preserve the land for the coming year. Our ancestors have kept this up for 40,000 years. There is no doubt about it: we have survived the white man's world. We still hold the rights to ownership. We have taught our people the basic principles, through trials and error, as managers, prime ministers, judges and so forth. We are the traditional owners; we are the prime minister of our land. We come from all walks of life; the seasons of the east wind, to the north, to the west, to the south. We are the native inhabitants of Australia.

We ask the people of the Top End to take positive consideration of the seven measures that are almost discriminating against our rights to the continuation of self-determination, the rights to our autonomy, the rights to our economics, the right to practise our customary law, the right to make policy and control our system. It will work, but the seven measures are very discriminatory. Thank you, Madam Chair and senators.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Is there anything else that questions may not probe but you want to say to us? I do not want to lose this opportunity of having you, because we can ask questions any time. Is there anything you want to say to us?

Dr Gondarra: Can I just say one thing. One of the things that some of the elders from Arnhem Land, central and west, have been trying to ask Minister Macklin's office—and I think it is a view not only from Arnhem Land but from the other 73 prescribed communities—is to try to establish a diplomatic dialogue. We need to be able to see that we are a nation once. Diplomatic dialogue is very important, because we start to talk and we start to negotiate about the land, about anything. That is a better way. We put everything on the table. Things have to be taken away from the hidden agenda. We put them together and we talk. When the Australian government go to other parts of the world—Indonesia or others—you take the diplomatic ways to do things. One problem is that we have not been seen as being a nation.

Perhaps we can establish some sort of dialogue, because Arnhem Land people do not believe in confrontation. We do not march. We talk and we share. We sit with you. We are happy people. We want to talk to you. We are not a racist people. We want to talk to you. We want to sit with you and say, 'Okay, what is the deal?' We can work together. If you want to see growth in Arnhem Land, this is the way you go. You establish diplomatic ways of talking to us. We are quite happy to talk to you about the land. We all want to see development and economic growth, but we do not like it if we are being classified apart from the society. We are part of the nation of this country. We want to live together. We want to build a better community, a better nation, but please do not let us down and say, 'This is the legislation we are going to deal with, because the Aboriginal people are naughty boys and naughty girls and so we need to look after them and we need to treat them this way.' No, we do not need that. We are not a puppet on a string. You do not play around with us. We want to be a free people. We want to determine our dignity and pride in being a people. That is the message that we are giving.

This legislation that is going to come before the Senate, before the parliament, is going to really kill us. We have been burying four or five people every week from January 2011 until today. There are ceremonies, funeral after funeral, because people cannot live anymore. They have lost their will to live. They have lost their hope. How was this caused? This was caused by the NTI legislation that the government put and said, 'This is the

Northern Territory Emergency Response and it is an special measure,' like Native Affairs, who were saying in the fifties: 'We're going to bring you down and we will look after you. We will feed you with a spoon.' We do not like that. Please, we want to work with you. We are part of the citizens of this country. The Australian people said to the Aboriginal people, 'Come and be a part of it,' through the referendum. We walked in and we took that, and we are proud to be Australians. We are not to be seen as being a different people. But do not legislate legislation that is so racist that it has taken away our rights. I know there is no bill of rights in Australia, but I hope that one day we, including you, white and black, take our role in Australia and live as a people. Thank you, senators.

CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Gondarra.

Mr Gamarania: I have one last question for the senators. This seven-point measure in the bill is in the process of taking place on 1 July 2012?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Gamarania: Jenny Macklin has not spent so much time in the process of negotiation. This has been a very limited chance of hearing the seven-point measures. We now have got no way to go except to fight through the seven-point measures. Would there be any way to have another consultation? There is not another consultation. This is the voice of Arnhem Land. We do not like the seven-point measure that discriminates against our human rights and that alters our self-determination and many of the things that we have done successfully. As you heard, BAC is one of the largest and most successful business operations. This is a classic example. This is what we do. Would the senators take into consideration our positiveness, not the negativeness? Get rid of the seven measures imposed upon us.

CHAIR: We will take that message back.

Senator SCULLION: It is my view—and this has not been much talked about—that the motives of the previous government, governments before them and the current government have been and are pure. Governments do not seek to hurt Aboriginal people. The mechanism they use to go about helping—we say, 'closing the gap'—seems to be the issue. You made an appeal to Australians about the rights of Aboriginal people. You quoted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and quite rightly so. What do we say to Australians who are really concerned about the width of the gap? We heard evidence today that only half the children who are enrolled for school in Maningrida are going to go to school. It was probably about the same before the intervention. We both know that. So half the children in Maningrida are not going to get the same opportunities as other Australians—and we are Australians together and have those rights. What do we say? I understand your concerns about this. To those Australians who are concerned that 50 per cent of the children in this community of primary school age are going to get no education—in the formalised sense; I am not saying they will not get an education in a cultural sense—what do we say? There are no other schools in Australia apart from Indigenous schools, to be frank with you—and that is just a fact—with such low levels. It is not about ethnicity; it is about places which are characterised by poverty—they are the ones which have these sorts of statistics. I know this is not an easy conversation to have, Djinyini, but I know that we have been straight with each other for many years. I think it would be very useful to the committee if you were to talk about the way you think we should go about it instead of the ways we have tried to go about it—with the best will but perhaps failing because we have not done it the right way. How do you think we should go about those practical issues of closing the gap?

Dr Gondarra: I respect your question and I think it is a very important one which needs to be answered. I want to take you back to how the government started off. They said to us in the community, 'We want to put in a site manager.' The site manager's role, we were told, was to educate people, to monitor and to sit with the people clan by clan. I was one of those people working really closely with people—trying to sit with them and fighting for their concerns. That was really important. Back then we were getting a lot of issues of concern raised with us—what the parents were thinking about schooling, health and many other things—because people were based in the community. The Labor government have put in a business manager. The impression we have in the community—I may be wrong, but this is the impression in East Arnhem—was: 'This is a boss. He is running the whole show.' It was a difference of expression. The Northern Territory Emergency Response has taken away the hope, taken away the right, taken away the people's dignity and pride in being parents by quarantining their money. You would never see that in contemporary society. There, everyone is treated equally. There is a budget—you have your budget, I have my budget. In my budget I had entitlements for my kids. My kids are now grown up, but I have grandchildren.

People are frustrated. People are sick and tired of being controlled. When people are sick and tired of control they just give up hope: 'What is the use of sending my kids to school? I'm already suffering, my money has already been quarantined. I have no control. My life is threatened.' If you were in their shoes and feeling this way,

come on—we would all feel that way. When our lives are being threatened and taken away, we just sit and do nothing. I have already emphasised that people are dying, not just dying spiritually and emotionally but dying physically. They cannot live for the day because their lives are controlled by somebody else. They have given up hope: what is the use?

This cannot be done when people's lives are being threatened. Parents are sick and tired. I asked one of the parents, 'Come on, take your children to school.' They said: 'Why? They just took my money for three months because I didn't send my children. I'm going to sit and do nothing.' That is the reality.

CHAIR: I am very sorry but we are going to have to end this session. We can continue the conversation through the process of exchanging documentation. Thank you to the traditional owners.

I need to get some of the traditional owners from the local area to come and put something on the record. The people with the microphones will have to pack up, because they take a long time to pack up, but we will continue talking until about five to four. We will take full notes of everyone who contributes to our discussion in that time. I have been told that there are local traditional owners who want to have a say.

DANAJA, Mr Peter, Deputy Chairman, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

RYAN, Mr Matthew, Chairman, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

WURIDJAL, Mr Reggie, Treasurer, Malabam Health Board

[15:35]

CHAIR: Gentlemen, we are going to go ahead. Even when the person with the microphone has to pack up, we will continue taking notes of your evidence. Do not think that you have missed out. But please start.

Mr Wuridjal: I just want to say to the senators and to the government that I am really concerned. We have seen what has happened for the last five years. Now we have Stronger Futures coming in and that is going to destroy Aboriginal people in this area. But my real concern is about the services provided by the government—Commonwealth or NT. We need to negotiate properly to get funding rolling in the community to benefit our people employment-wise and we need to get our local Indigenous people to liaise, to work in partnership with the other services. We have a powerful Aboriginal organisation in the Maningrida area. Even in the Northern Territory, they are able to provide services for our people. That is my real concern, that we need those services in Maningrida to go ahead, to get things happening for our people. It is really important to communicate with our own people rather than getting services from outside areas coming in, because there is no accommodation and no place to add any accommodation. We are running out of space.

My concern is that we want to get funding. We have Aboriginal organisations already operating here. We need to get those things happening. You take away CDEP. What is the government going to put in there to support employment? People are getting sick of BasicsCards. We want something else. Working together, we need to come up with something that is suitable for Aboriginal people—something that allows them to walk around better, rather than just being shamed by all these things. Putting in five-year leases through the NTER destroyed us. Houses were put in and we signed 40-year leases. It is going to be another 10 years for all these services that are going to be provided here by the government and by NT government. Where do we stand?

Mr Danaja: My main concern is: what do we need to do to prove ourselves to the government? We are well-educated people. Surely we are capable of governing ourselves. How can we prove this to you? There has been consultation ever since the introduction of the intervention. We were not involved in the decision making. Everything was done behind closed doors. We did not have a say in the first place. I am not trying to be rude to anyone, but this policy is very racist and has to stop. When you make a policy, the policy has to suit the people on the ground. The process has to work both ways—sitting at the table talking business. As far as I am concerned, I am like Reggie and a few of us here. This is getting us nowhere. We are going back in that same old circle, circle again. There are no winners here today. For us, it is a very frustrating thing. For the dreamers, the government dreamers, the bureaucratic people, they think the gap is getting smaller from their point of view. For us guys that are sitting around here and in other communities as well, that gap is so wide. It is here to another planet—I think to Mars or somewhere. Everybody thinks that we have a magic wand. I am sorry. It does not work like that. Stop reading books. We are real people. Let us sit down and talk. I am very proper about these kind of things, especially for my people.

Mr Ryan: I represent the Bawinanga Shire plus the NLC as a councillor. On our permit system, what is happening with the access permit system in Maningrida? At the moment there are uncontrolled people coming in, and you could assist the police as well in checking their permits as to if they were from here. They might be bringing in hard drugs into the community. Another thing is that there are still other communities, including smaller communities, missing out on basic services. The so-called hub towns and the small communities like Minjilang and Warruwi are missing out on basic services. Can you tell me why, please, Senator?

CHAIR: Senator Crossin is going to answer that.

Senator CROSSIN: I will have a try and Senator Scullion might want to back me up in some of these areas. We do not have any answers about the shires and the shire services. It is a local government issue and that is funded through the Northern Territory government. The Northern Territory government is responsible for what happens with the shires. In relation to CDEP, there are no plans to abolish CDEP. In fact, we just announced only last week that those that have been grandfathered on CDEP will stay on CDEP and wages top-up indefinitely. So, there are no plans to actually abolish CDEP. Government business managers are not in the new legislation so after 1 July government business managers have no legislative role—they do not exist in legislation after 1 July. In terms of the permits, you still need a permit to come to Maningrida. You do not need a permit though to go from the airport down the main road into the centre of town, but if you want to go anywhere else you still need to apply to the NLC to get in.

CHAIR: I have to put on record that we senators on this panel come from different parties. Senator Crossin has just given a response to your question on behalf of the government. Senator Scullion is from the opposition and Senator Siewert is from the Greens. They may have a different view as to your question and, to be fair, I need to put that on record. We have to pack up the microphones really soon. Senator Scullion and Senator Siewert, could you put a quick comment on the record as to that question so it is fair.

Senator SCULLION: There were quite specific questions and Senator Crossin has provided faithfully what I understand the government's position to be. I do not think I need to say any more than that. I think you are spot on the money in terms of that being exactly what I understand the situation to be. You are shaking your head. Is there some other question?

Mr Ryan: There is a lot of confusion right across the community.

CHAIR: Now we will see what Senator Siewert has to say on that question so I am being totally fair.

Senator SCULLION: Can I just say that I will talk to Senator Crossin and that we will ensure that the message you have given to me, about a lot of confusion about those measures, goes back to Minister Macklin.

CHAIR: Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT: The government has put a halt or frozen the phasing-out of CDEP for the grandfathered mob, but there have already been significant changes to CDEP so, while it is fair to say that the current ones have been transitioned, it has already been frozen. As you know, there are a whole lot of people who have already moved off CDEP or who do not get access to CDEP anymore, and the government is currently looking at what is going to happen with remote employment and has not made an announcement yet. Remember when that discussion paper came out last year? That decision has not been made yet. There is a great big question mark over all that at the moment.

Mr Danaja: Is there a follow-up on this?

CHAIR: Of the committee?

Mr Danaja: Yes.

CHAIR: We will not be coming out again unless we actually have the ability to do so—which we can talk about, and we will talk about that—but this committee ceases on this particular issue in three weeks time.

Mr Danaja: Would some other representative be able to give us information?

CHAIR: But the follow-up will occur. We are all taking back the message that one of the key issues for this community was that there was no follow-up after they visited. All of us in our own ways will be taking that message back. You will get follow-up, but I cannot guarantee it will be from this group. I am now going to have those microphones whipped away. It was really important to get those things on the record because it was not fair for one side to actually give an answer but not the other. Thank you all.

Committee adjourned at 15:45