

EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE

Tenth Report - "An Examination of Indigenous Employment by the State"

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville) [10.20 am]: I present for tabling the tenth report of the Education and Health Standing Committee, entitled "An Examination of Indigenous Employment by the State".

[See paper 3435.]

Dr K.D. HAMES: As the deputy chair of this committee, I present this report on behalf of the chairman, the member for Central Kimberley-Pilbara, who is in Fitzroy Crossing today. In doing so, I will quote selectively some components of his foreword to give credence to his role as chairman in his absence. He states -

In presenting to the Legislative Assembly this, the tenth report of the Education and Health Standing Committee in the thirty-seventh Parliament, I particularly want to thank the Committee staff for their dedication and support, . . .

Of course, all committee members thank them. I presume that they are listening somewhere. I cannot see them in the gallery, but on behalf of all members of the committee, I say particular thanks to the principal research officer, Dr Jeannine Purdy, who once again has done a wonderful job, and her number one sidekick, Ms Nicole Burgess, who has been a great help to all members of the committee and, I am sure, to the principal research officer. I also give thanks to the other members of the committee. As usual, we worked hard and well together and I think this report is a reflection of that work. The chairman's foreword goes on to say -

This Report is the third in the series of reports the Committee intends to publish on its *Inquiry into Successful Initiatives in Remote Aboriginal Communities*. The earlier two reports have provoked widespread interest, particularly within the many remote Aboriginal communities across regional and remote Western Australia.

This report is an examination of Indigenous employment in this state. In my view, its presentation is extremely timely. The timeliness is accidental; nevertheless, given that a forum on Indigenous employment, which has been initiated by the state government, will be held on 30 November, this is a great opportunity for us to present to Parliament and to the community a report on the examination of Indigenous employment in the public sector in Western Australia. The chairman's foreword continues -

The Australian community now holds a strong ambition for their governments to work successfully towards enhancing the life and opportunities of indigenous people across this country. Employment is a key for that outcome.

Employment pathways for indigenous people, including those in remote communities, are vital. Historically, training and employment provided within the public sector have been key steps to securing long-term economic opportunity for large sections of our entire population.

This report is extremely timely not only in terms of the forthcoming summit, but also in view of the problems that are currently being exposed in remote Aboriginal communities, particularly those at Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and surrounding parts of the north west and Kimberley. It shows that there is a huge need for this state to take every possible opportunity to make sure that employment is provided for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people by and large are severely disadvantaged. We have just heard the member for Bassendean speak about particular problems that have arisen in his electorate. As I said to him during his speech, the member might cop some criticism for that, but I strongly support his comments, as I have experienced those problems as a minister. A major problem is trying to find a solution to disruptions in the community by small groups in general, and very often by small Aboriginal groups, living in Homeswest houses. How do we tackle those problems? We can tackle them at the top end by evicting people from their houses, as I did with Joan Martin and her family when they were living in Karrinyup. However, Joan Martin now lives out of a car, going from house to house with her family because Homeswest refuses to provide accommodation, when she was not the bad tenant; it was the children who were causing the disruption. How do we solve those problems? Kicking her out of her house did not solve her problem. Sure, it helped the street, but now she and her family are still disadvantaged and the underlying problems have not been addressed.

One of the key underlying issues that must be addressed is the employment and employability of Aboriginal people. We must look at the sort of representation of Aboriginal people we want in our workforce, and this report goes into those sorts of issues. The Aboriginal workforce comprises just over three per cent of our total population, I think.

Mr P. Papalia: It is 3.5 per cent.

Mr M.P. Whitley: It is 2.5 per cent.

Dr K.D. HAMES: No, it is 3.2 per cent of our total population. Mr Acting Speaker, we are confused by figures, because there were many figures in our report.

We believe that there needs to be that level of Aboriginal representation in the workforce, and that in fact is the government target. I am sure that the member for Bassendean has a better handle on the facts and figures on workforce participation and the percentage of population within the community than most of us. Nevertheless, we believe that the target needs to be as high as possible to encourage disadvantaged Aboriginal people to enter the workforce.

The report covers various issues, and I will go through some of the chapters. I have addressed to some degree chapter 1 and why we have published a report on Indigenous employment by the State. We believe it is extremely important that we have a detailed and thorough understanding of the level of Aboriginal employment in this state, particularly in the public sector, to determine whether we are living up to the requirement that I believe the state government has to ensure equal representation of not only Indigenous people, but also other disadvantaged groups in our community. It is particularly important to ensure that Indigenous employment is at the maximum possible level.

Chapter 2 covers the survey conducted by the committee of Indigenous employment by state agencies. Initially, this was quite a difficult task. The committee wrote to all government agencies, and the initial response was very poor. The committee wrote to them a second time, saying, in effect, that the committee was disappointed that they were not able to provide figures and it intended to outline in its report that they were not able to provide figures unless they would do so. That was obviously a successful tactic, because 90 per cent of agencies then told us what their Indigenous employment rate was. The chapter outlines the results of that survey, and I will reflect on some of those results later. Other members of the committee will go through some of the statistics and figures for that employment target and the end results.

Chapter 3 examines the public sector employment of Indigenous people generally and refers to comparisons between the commonwealth and the state. It is interesting to note that the commonwealth government has not done too well in its employment figures. In fact, the level has been static since 1992, when 2 746 Aboriginal people were employed, which represents 1.9 per cent of the workforce. Since 2006 that number has increased by only four persons, to 2 750 Aboriginal employees in 2007. A large number of persons employed by the commonwealth are under the community development employment program, otherwise known as CDEP, which has now been scrapped. Many members would have severe concerns about what the scrapping of that program will do to Aboriginal employment in this state, and it cannot be denied that those people need to have real, long-term jobs, and preferably full-time jobs, rather than CDEP jobs. Nevertheless, the CDEP provided considerable funding for the employment of Aboriginal people in this state.

Indigenous employment in the state public sector has increased by about 1 000 persons within the workforce. However, given the whole population of the state and the total number of people in the Indigenous labour force, which has increased from 105 200 in 1994 to 186 900 in 2006, the percentage increase has been fairly marginal.

Chapter 4 considers the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 of Western Australia, the Aboriginal employment figures of the department that is responsible for administering that act, and the issue of full-time employment versus headcount. That department represents the number of Aboriginal employed people by way of headcount only, and it must be recognised that a large percentage of Aboriginal people are employed part time. Therefore, the total percentage of Indigenous employment looks to be far greater than it is in reality compared with full-time equivalent employment.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion, which considers what is happening to Indigenous employment within the state. I will read two key sentences into *Hansard* at this point -

Although cross-sector Indigenous employment by the State has matched the Indigenous workforce participation rate (2.5 per cent), the performance of individual State agencies is highly variable. There is also an on-going failure to meet Indigenous employment targets by many Western Australian public sector authorities, despite the recent reforms . . .

I turn to the appendix at the back of the report which considers the employment of Indigenous people in this state on an agency-by-agency basis. I will give some ticks and crosses to agencies that are doing well, or not so well, in Indigenous employment. I will not go through all the agencies because a large number of them have responded. Going through on a page-by-page basis, organisations like TAFE, Central TAFE and Challenger TAFE have fairly low percentages of Indigenous employment, but to some degree to increase Indigenous employment in areas that require higher levels of education and skill will always be difficult, which relates back to the education of Aboriginal people and therefore their abilities to be able to undertake certain tasks and be represented in areas that do require high levels of skill. The fact that the percentage of Aboriginal employment in those areas is low is unfortunate and I think it will take more education, starting at grassroots level, for Aboriginal people to increase their representation within that workforce.

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On the next page of the appendix is the Department for Community Development, which is obviously in a different situation. That department has a great deal of contact and involvement with Aboriginal people within the community, and therefore it has a great desire to ensure that Aboriginal people are employed to help deal with Aboriginal families with problems that need addressing by the department. A large percentage of Aboriginal representation is needed within that department, and in fact it is there. Out of 1 659 employees within that department, 156 are full-time Aboriginal employees, even though that figure probably represents a lot more than 156 Aboriginal people working in that department, and that is a 9.4 per cent employment rate. That is a commendable result and obviously that department needs to work to ensure it maintains that high level of Aboriginal representation.

In contrast, on the very next line is the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, which also has just over 1 600 employees but only 6.7 full-time Aboriginal employees. Out of 1 631 employees, it has 6.7 Aboriginal employees, an Indigenous employment rate of 0.41 per cent. Members should remember that the state government's target is 2.5 per cent, which is far greater than this department's 0.41 per cent.

The Department of Health is again a department that has very great contact and involvement with Aboriginal people, particularly at some hospitals, and particularly in dealing with members of the community and particularly in the remote parts of this state, yet out of 25 672 employees Aboriginal people have a representation of only 1.4 per cent, which means 373 Aboriginal people have employment. That percentage rate is very low.

I gave the Department of Housing and Works a small tick because 7.69 per cent of its workforce are Aboriginal. Out of 1 202 employees it has 92 Aboriginal employees. However, it is only a small tick because I know, having been the housing minister, that the target rate is 10 per cent. It is not always possible to achieve that target; however, I know the department has gone very close and has a specific program to get Aboriginal people employed, but I think it could do a little better.

The Department of Indigenous Affairs, as is to be expected, has a very high percentage of Aboriginal people employed, at 30 per cent - 44 out of 145 employees.

One would hope that the Department of Premier and Cabinet, with the Premier being a former Minister for Indigenous Affairs, would have a much higher representation. Its percentage is one of the worst, at 0.5 per cent, which is well below the target level. Out of 796 employees only four are Aboriginal.

The figure for the Department of Treasury and Finance, I guess, is understandable because, obviously, to be in that department an employee must have a high level of training in the area of finance. Out of 762 employees only one is an Aboriginal person.

A far greater rate than 1.01 per cent would be expected in the Disability Services Commission, where out of 1 581 employees only 16 are Aboriginal.

I gave a big tick to the Equal Opportunities Commission, as is to be expected, which has 10 per cent Aboriginal employment and is well above the target level. The commission only has a small number of people employed in total, at 28, but out of that number three are Aboriginal.

The Fire and Emergency Services Authority has 1 000 employees, but only six are Aboriginal. The Forest Products Commission has 271 employees but zero Aboriginal employees. Likewise the Government Employees Superannuation Board: out of 1 800 employees it has zero Aboriginal employees. Given that there are members in this house like the member for Victoria Park, who is Aboriginal and extremely highly educated, there would be at least one Aboriginal person who would have the qualifications to work in the Government Employees Superannuation Board.

In the limited time left to me I will mention Legal Aid Western Australian, which does a lot of work for Aboriginal people. Out of 232 employees in total it has just over three full-time Aboriginal positions, which is a rate of 1.4 per cent. In the Parliament of Western Australian, out of 153 employees there are no Aboriginal employees, not one. That is a sad reflection on this Parliament.

I have two to go. I will quickly deal with the Water Corporation. It has only 1.22 per cent. I was once the responsible minister, so I should bear some responsibility for that. I know the Water Corporation has programs to encourage Indigenous employment, but the figure is still only 1.2 per cent: 28 Aboriginal employees out of 2 287 employees.

Lastly, the Western Australian Sports Centre Trust - the member for Wagin will talk about this, to some degree - employs 270 people in an area in which we know Aboriginal people excel, yet its workforce comprises only 1.2 Indigenous full-time equivalents.

The committee is extremely pleased to present this report to Parliament. It highlights the fact that we must pay a lot more attention to encouraging Aboriginal people to work in the public sector.

I will conclude by reflecting what happens at Rio Tinto. When I visited Rio Tinto's Argyle Diamonds mine, it had an Aboriginal employment program in place but the company could retain only a small number of Aboriginal people. The company was trying hard but was having trouble keeping Aboriginal people working at the Argyle Diamonds mine. Aboriginal people now make up 30 per cent of employees at the Argyle Diamonds mine. Rio Tinto has told me it has set a target of 50 per cent Aboriginal employment. That is an outstanding result. Government departments, mining companies and everyone who wants to employ Aboriginal people need to talk to Rio Tinto and ask it what on earth it has done and how it has done it. Government departments should be shown Rio Tinto's programs so that we can make sure that at least the public sector reaches a much higher level of Indigenous employment. We must do that if we are ever to address the social disadvantage of Aboriginal people in this state.

MR T.K. WALDRON (Wagin - Deputy Leader of the National Party) [10.40 am]: In speaking to the report of the Standing Committee on Education and Health, titled "An Examination of Indigenous Employment by the State", I emphasise that there is no doubt that the employment of Aboriginal people in Western Australia is extremely important. It is as important as the employment of all members of our community. I will follow on from the comments of the Deputy Chairman of the committee. There is no doubt that the employment of Indigenous people offers them hope and security. It is important for their self-esteem and wellbeing. Indigenous people who gain employment develop leadership roles in not only Indigenous communities, but also the community as a whole, which is extremely important. I believe in role models. Although we sometimes overplay the importance of role models, they are important. Providing opportunities to Indigenous people creates good role models. I have seen that happen in communities in my own electorate. Government departments must give as many opportunities as possible to employ Indigenous people. The first finding of the report hits the nail on the head when it states -

As the State's largest employer, the public sector is in a unique position to contribute to improved social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal people through increased employment levels and subsequent enhanced service delivery.

That is a strong and true statement. It is concerning that almost half of the 119 state agencies that responded to the committee survey did not employ any Indigenous people. As the member for Dawesville said, some departments do better than others. I will talk about sport and recreation. I will not say much about the Western Australian Sports Centre Trust, which is slightly different from the Department of Sport and Recreation. The Department of Sport and Recreation does a good job. The number of its Indigenous employees is above 3.2 per cent, or 30-plus Indigenous employees. There is no doubt that sport presents great opportunities for Aboriginal employment, particularly in the north of the state. Sport provides opportunities for not only Indigenous employment, but also the engagement of young Aboriginal people. Australian Rules football, basketball and netball in particular offer great opportunities. Opportunities have been taken but there are more opportunities.

There is a great example of how Indigenous employment works in my ex-home town of Kojonup. Kodja Place, which is the interpretive centre in Kojonup, employs local Indigenous people who are involved in the development, running and management of that centre. That has provided employment for local Indigenous families and their children. Some of the local people have gained further employment or have commenced study. Reconciliation is perhaps one of the greatest things to take place when Indigenous people work with the rest of the population. When we work together, we get a better understanding of each other, which is important. My visits to Indigenous communities, including with the committee, have reinforced my view that employment is the key.

The response to the committee's survey was fairly poor, which is disappointing and tells a story in itself. The full-time equivalent Indigenous employment rate of 2.17 per cent is not good. Obviously, government and the private sector must take this matter more seriously. The member for Dawesville referred to Rio Tinto's Argyle Diamonds mine, which is a fantastic example. State agencies must set an example and others must follow because there is no doubt that the employment of Aboriginal people will bring great benefits to the community generally and provide great social benefits to Indigenous communities. More importantly, it will greatly benefit Indigenous individuals and their families.

The final recommendation of the report states that the state government should now consult public employers and, I think, also private companies such as Argyle Diamonds that have successfully employed and retained Indigenous staff. It is one thing to employ Indigenous staff, but we must ensure that they are retained for the benefit of the organisation and the individuals. We must identify the successful formulas and understand how they work. The committee's report highlights the need to focus on Indigenous employment. The Premier's upcoming forum on Indigenous employment presents an opportunity to focus on this issue and to highlight it to the rest of the community.

I thank all the committee members. We have a terrific committee and I enjoyed working with all the members. I thank the chairman, who is not here today, and the staff, Dr Jeannine Purdy and Ms Nici Burgess for their great work, once again. Best luck to Nici, who is expecting a baby in January. I hope it goes well.

Mr P. PAPALIA (Peel) [10.46 am]: I intend to speak only briefly to comment on the report of the Standing Committee on Education and Health into Indigenous employment in the state. I will begin from where the member for Wagin left off and acknowledge the conscientious and dedicated efforts of the Principal Research Officer, Dr Jeannine Purdy, and Research Officer Nici Burgess, particularly in light of the demanding effort that was required of them during the inquiry into lead contamination in Esperance, the report of which was only very recently completed.

I must confess that I have had some reservations about the timing of the release of this report. That was not due to the content of the report or because of any concerns I had about the motivations of my fellow members of the committee. I was concerned because of the ongoing coronial inquiry into the large number of deaths in Fitzroy Crossing. That matter is the focus of some media attention, and sometimes that focus is distorted, which may not be helpful. I was concerned that this report could become involved in that focus. Also, I am very aware of the state government's forthcoming Indigenous employment forum, which is slated for 30 November, which will focus on the employment of Indigenous people in the private sector. I was concerned that releasing this report now could undermine the focus of that forum. Nevertheless, in speaking to this report I convey my desire and, I am sure, the desire of all members of the committee that this report be viewed by ministers and departments as an opportunity rather than as a threat.

Statistics can be a little confusing. As has been mentioned, the measurement of current Indigenous employment in the public sector is 2.17 per cent. On the face of it, that fails to meet our target of 3.2 per cent Indigenous employment if Indigenous community demographics are used as a measure. The committee members are aware that it could be argued that a better measure is a comparison of the Indigenous workforce participation rate, which is 2.5 per cent. It might be argued that the figure of 2.17 per cent is not that far from the figure of 2.5 per cent. I have a lot of concerns, and I know other members have too, that if ministers and departments get defensive about this report and potentially manipulate those statistics, they could say that the figure is not far off and then not dedicate too much of an effort to correct it. I ask that they do not use the figure as a way of ignoring an opportunity to rectify some shortcomings. Indeed, I ask that ministers and departments use the report to analyse whether their departments are doing all they can to rectify the figure and to see whether they can learn from more successful departments. As the deputy chair of the committee indicated, some departments are clearly far more successful than others at employing Indigenous people. I also ask that departments see whether they can learn from the success of private enterprise at employing Indigenous people. In light of the program for the forthcoming forum on 30 November, I encourage ministers and departments to at least seek representation on that forum, noting that it will focus on the private sector. They could perhaps seek representation as observers so that they can learn from the private sector and perhaps link with the private sector to enhance their programs.

In the course of this inquiry I have become aware of another factor that could potentially impact on the success rate of employment of Indigenous people in the public sector. In some cases private enterprise, in seeking to increase the participation of Indigenous personnel, has sought to employ good quality, already trained people from the public sector. I understand that has been the case with some people employed by Woodside. The packages that Woodside is able to offer are frequently far more attractive to the good quality people that we may have attracted and otherwise retained in the public sector. We should not overlook that fact. It may be that at times we end up being the incubator for the private sector. Ultimately the objective must be to increase, across the board, the participation rate of the Indigenous workforce. If that results in statistics that indicate we are not quite achieving targets, we should be careful not to denigrate those efforts to increase them, nor to reduce our efforts and focus on lifting standards and the participation rate.

Dr K.D. Hames: We have staff who are poached all the time by other government departments, which is not a problem, because they are the incubators.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes, we can perform an incubator role.

I hope we are successful with this forum and can get a more consolidated focus from the wider private sector on lifting Indigenous employment rates. We may not always achieve our targets but the private sector may feed off us a little. I hope it does not, as we need to fill public service positions; but, if it does, it should not be seen as a failing. I commend the report to the house and support its contents.

MR M.P. WHITLEY (Bassendean - Parliamentary Secretary) [10.53 am]: I begin by thanking Dr Jeannine Purdy and Nici Burgess for the work they do. They are incredible staff who have had an incredibly busy year. The Esperance lead inquiry put unusual demands on their time. For them to have come up after that inquiry and produced another high-quality report after they had virtually worked full time - I am talking about them having a

few hours of sleep a day and dedicating the rest of the time to producing that report - is testament to their ability and commitment.

I also thank the other members of the committee. This is an excellent committee. Committee work is fantastic. Members who have been in this Parliament and not done committee work - a few long-term and high-profile members have missed out on it - miss out on a very valuable process. We actually get to know members from the other side and get to appreciate their skills and abilities.

Ms J.A. Radisich: Yes, far too well!

Mr M.P. WHITELY: Some more than we might want to!

I must pay tribute to the commitment of the two opposition members and, of course, the government members, all of whom are excellent. I acknowledge the member for Dawesville's commitment to this issue. I acknowledge that he and the member for Central Kimberley-Pilbara have an obvious passion for and a real commitment to Indigenous affairs. The member for Wagin is just a good bloke basically who does not play politics and who brings perspective to the issues, and I thank him for that.

There are two ways of reading this report. I am pleased to see that the two opposition members I mentioned have not played politics with it. They could have used the report to attack the failures of various government departments and to highlight their failure to meet targets. From a government perspective we could use it to put forward the defensive argument that a headcount of 2.5 per cent indicates we are meeting the proportion of the workforce that is made up of Indigenous people. The proportion of the Indigenous population is 2.5 per cent and the headcount of the Indigenous workforce in the state government is 2.5 per cent; therefore, we could say that we are meeting the target and the Indigenous population has achieved equity. However, I do not think that is the way we should approach the issue. The issue has been raised that the headcount is not the most appropriate measure. The full-time equivalent figure as best we determined - there were some problems with statistics - was 2.17 per cent and is therefore somewhat below 2.5 per cent. I am not suggesting that an FTE figure or a headcount figure is the be-all and end-all. Both figures need to be viewed, but we certainly need to be aware that the FTE figure is below the proportion of the Indigenous population.

The government could also defensively say that it is significantly outperforming the private sector and that Indigenous people have a far greater opportunity of employment with the state government sector than they have with either the private sector or the commonwealth government. That would be a defensive reaction. We could argue that this is an endemic problem and we are the best-performed of those three sectors. However, that would not acknowledge the opportunities for Aboriginal people for employment in the state government. It also would not acknowledge that the targets that have been set are not being met. The targets that have been set and were revised downward - they can be seen in finding 44 of the report - were 2.6 per cent for 2007, 2.9 per cent for 2008 and rising to 3.2 per cent in 2009. We therefore have not met those targets. Those targets were revised downward. I do not want further revisions downward nor a defensive response to the report.

However, the report does have a use, and the member for Dawesville started to highlight some of that use. Ministers can use the report to sit down with their departments and agencies, look at the targets that are not being met and ask why they are not being met. In some cases there may be legitimate reasons that targets are not being met or cannot be met. Nonetheless, this report identifies levels of Indigenous employment and the question should be asked by those ministers and their agencies. Certainly the state government must make an in globlo effort to meet its targets.

The target that we should aim at for 2009 was set at 3.2 per cent, which is based on an estimate of Aboriginal people as a percentage of the entire population of Western Australia. It is interesting to note that the estimates of that figure, depending on the source, vary between 3.2 per cent and 3.8 per cent. It is worthy of note that it is ambitious to set a target using a proportion of the population. It is a worthwhile target and a target that should be set; nonetheless it is ambitious. As was pointed out in finding 22 of the report, although the workforce participation rate is 2.5 per cent, the proportion of Aboriginal people as a total percentage of the population is between 3.2 per cent and 3.8 per cent. The reason for the disparity in those figures is that within the Indigenous community there tends to be more children and, obviously, that reduces the participation rate. However, that should not be used as an excuse. Systemic problems are associated with the disadvantaged in remote communities; for example, limited education and employment opportunities and poor health. In some communities the committee found there was general disengagement from the workforce. All sorts of problems that flow from the history of disadvantage are partly responsible for the low level of participation of Indigenous people in the workforce. We cannot use that as an excuse for setting employment targets at a lower rate; in fact, it should be used as a justification for the state government to set employment targets at a higher rate. Through the state government we have the opportunity to be the catalyst for better employment opportunities for Indigenous people and, as the member for Peel pointed out, provide them with a pathway to employment in the private sector. If we are the first employer for some Indigenous people and they go on to find employment in the

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private sector, it should be viewed as a triumph for the system, even though it would make it more difficult for the government to meet its employment targets.

A few members referred to the achievements of the Argyle Diamonds mine. When I was temporarily the parliamentary secretary to the member for Eyre when he was the Minister for State Development, I met with Brendon Hammond. I was given the task of investigating opportunities for Aboriginal economic engagement. His was an inspiring story about the desire and the drive to get local Indigenous people to become members of the workforce at the Argyle mine. His success came through his determination as a manager. He would not take no for an answer. When people made excuses and gave him reasons that something could not happen, he said it was not good enough and they should make it happen or he would look for somebody else to fill their job. He had an air of reality about him. In no way did he accept a lack of accountability or second best as an option for long-term employment. He would give people support structures and second chances, but he would not give them numerous chances. He demanded something of them. So often employers make the mistake of failing to demand appropriate performance from their employees and, in doing that, they doom them to a future of inappropriate performance. Brendon Hammond's story was an inspiration to me.

We are seeing the dawning of a new reality in Indigenous affairs in which progress can be made. In the early 1990s I worked briefly in Indigenous affairs and left in a state of absolute confusion because I could not see a pathway forward. However, now there is a new opportunity to address some of the challenges the Indigenous community faces and a preparedness by the government and community to deal with that reality.