

**SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE EDUCATION
AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE ADEQUACY AND APPROPRIATENESS OF
PREVENTION AND TREATMENT SERVICES FOR ALCOHOL AND
ILLICIT DRUG PROBLEMS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT FITZROY CROSSING
THURSDAY, 29 JULY 2010**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Mr P. Abetz (Chairman)
Mr P.B. Watson
Mr I.C. Blayney**

Hearing commenced at 1.11 pm

ROSS, MR JOE

FaHSCIA Contractor, Bunuba, examined:

GIBSON, SENIOR SERGEANT IAN

Officer in Charge, WA Police, examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for coming. I just need to read the formal script that is part of what we do. On behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee, I would like to thank you for your interest and for your appearance before us today. I would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners, past, present and future, of the land on which we are meeting today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into the adequacy and appropriateness of prevention and treatment services for alcohol and illicit drug problems in Western Australia. I would like to introduce myself and the other members of the committee present: I am Peter Abetz. I am the vice-chairman of the committee; on my right is Mr Ian Blayney, member for Geraldton; and a little further to the right is Mr Peter Watson, the member for Albany. On my left is Dr David Worth, the principal research officer for our committee. Keith Jackman from Hansard is recording everything we say.

The Education and Health Standing Committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia and this hearing is a formal procedure of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house. This is a public hearing and Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any documents during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record. While everything will be on the public record, if you want to convey anything to us that you believe not appropriate to be on the public record, please indicate that before you tell us and I will rule that we go into closed session and that that information will not be made public. It may be something sensitive to your local work that you may want us to know about but that for you it would not be helpful in the longer term for it to be known that you have conveyed that information to us.

Before we proceed to the questions that we have for you today, I need to ask you a series of questions. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive the information for witnesses briefing sheet provided with the "Details of Witness" form today?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today's hearing?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Fine. For the record, could you please state your full name and the capacity in which you appear before the committee today?

Mr Gibson: My name is Ian Gibson. I am a senior sergeant with WA Police and I am the officer in charge of the Fitzroy Crossing Police Station.

Mr Ross: My name is Joe Ross. I currently work for FaHCSIA—Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs—in Broome. I come here today as a long-term resident of Fitzroy Crossing to give evidence.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you, very much.

Perhaps Ian would like to kick off by painting a bit of a picture for us. Obviously, there are lots of issues in a place like Fitzroy Crossing, but we particularly want to zero in on the drug and alcohol issues; that is, what the problems are and what the potential solutions, including the treatment and prevention programs in particular, and what we can as a committee in the end recommend to government to do to improve the situation. They are the sorts of information that we are looking for from both of you.

Mr Gibson: Firstly, thank you for allowing me to appear before you today to represent WA Police. I have prepared—I believe you all have a copy—a submission from Fitzroy Crossing. Essentially, what I have to say is contained in that submission. The problems that we are experiencing at Fitzroy Crossing are 95 per cent alcohol related. We have an emerging trend towards cannabis. Three years ago, the cannabis use in town was fairly negligible, but it is now becoming more prevalent. It seems to be supplied by extended family members from Derby or Broome. The quantities being sold are very small and they are being sold at very high prices. That in itself is a concern because people will see it as a fairly profitable proposition to come to Fitzroy Crossing.

Our alcohol issues are generally related to alcohol that is brought into town. As you are aware, the local hotels are subject to section 64 restrictions. As contained in my submission, the hotels self-manage very, very well. We have a very good working relationship with the licensees and the operations manager for Leedal Pty Ltd. We meet with them on a regular basis and we have a system in town in which we visit licensed premises on a very regular basis—probably more than any other licensed premises in the Kimberley.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Is that both of them?

Mr Gibson: Both of them; yes.

The patrons have become used to the fact that police officers will be walking through on a regular basis; it is second nature to them. We have seen a change in the hotels and the way that the patrons are now behaving—from what used to be considered bloodbaths, to what most people more often than not now consider a social venue. We have very, very few problems associated with the licensed premises. The operators, as you have probably seen, have introduced a standard penalty—I guess I would call it that—for any infractions that occur, and those penalties are up on boards for everyone to see. They stick by those penalties fairly rigidly. There are behaviours that are acceptable and there are behaviours that are not acceptable, and there are licensed premises-imposed penalties for any infractions.

If we have any major issues, the pubs have no problems at all going along with what we ask—from closing to reducing the strength of alcohol being served or whatever. We have a very good relationship with them. Social functions, for example, the rodeo, for which extended trading permits are applied for, are all limited to mid-strength alcohol. We introduced that measure two and a half years ago when I first arrived here, and it is becoming the norm now and it is accepted practise that only a mid-strength permit is available when running a licensed function.

As you will probably hear as you go through the Kimberley, all our issues are alcohol related; there is no doubt about it. As I have said, it is now getting to the stage at which those issues come down to three to four days of the week, predicated by the welfare payments that come in. Obviously, there is the issue of those who travel to Derby to collect the grog and bring it back, and then it is just party time. The people who mostly cause our problems are “power drinkers”: they cannot sit on a

carton for any more time than it takes to drink a carton; if they have two cartons, they will sit there and drink until they are finished. Obviously, we have all the alcohol-related harms that eventuate from that behaviour. We are now experiencing a trend towards increased levels of reporting of both domestic and non-domestic assaults, and with that we have an increase in offensive behaviour or threatening behaviour offending. There are a couple of reasons for that. I believe there is a strengthening within the people of Fitzroy Crossing, and they do not tolerate violence anymore. A lot of the offending we see is between an alcohol-affected person and a sober or not-as-drunk person—previously, both people were drunk. Evidentiary wise, we are better placed to take action on behalf of the victims. As I said, the people are now more empowered to report, and not tolerate, the offending behaviour. They have the support bases now through the womens' refuge centre and through June Oscar and her ladies, and through the other support services with Nindilingarri Cultural Health Services and the like—and, obviously, from us; we have a complete no-tolerance policy.

The CHAIRMAN: The increased reporting of domestic violence is, you feel, not because of an escalation of the problem, but more the fact that people feel empowered to report when their partner does the wrong thing. Is that the case?

Mr Gibson: I think that it is both. Initially, once the restrictions came through, and in the ensuing 12 to 18 months, we did not see the empowering of women and the non-tolerance within the family structure of violence. Since the shopping centre burnt down, it has created a culture of being able to travel to the neighbouring towns, particularly Derby, to get alcohol. It all started from having to access the supermarket for basics, and now it has morphed into a collection of cars and people going over to purchase literally boot and carloads of alcohol. It is not uncommon for us to stop a car with 16 to 20 cartons of beer and bottles of spirits and premixes and things like that. As I have said, people just do not stop drinking until it is all gone.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there nothing to legally prevent them from having that amount of alcohol in their vehicle?

Mr Gibson: No; there is not. We have gone through it all. When the restrictions first came in and some people tried what they call sly grogging, we concentrated on those people and they were charged. They would then find another way to get the alcohol into town. If that way were illegal, we would charge them. As we progressively charged people for offending, so they got better at doing what they were doing, whereas now we are witnessing a completely legal transaction—one that does not offend the law.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Are the penalties strong enough?

Mr Gibson: The magistrate is very supportive—well the previous one was; this one has not been exposed to it as yet—and is issuing destruction orders; that is, if we catch someone street drinking alcohol, we destroy the full carton instead of just the one can.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I was talking about the penalties for sly grogging.

Mr Gibson: The magistrate-imposed penalties were fairly hefty; they were reasonable for the offence. So we were getting some support in the court. However, as I said, you only charge a few people and they learn from that and go onto other things; that is, we do not have that sly grogging issue now.

The CHAIRMAN: Should there be some amendment to the Liquor Control Act or whatever, to limit somehow the amount that people can purchase or carry in a vehicle at any given time. It would seem to me that by allowing one or two people to go to Derby to pick up 30 cartons of beer is not right. I mean, we are really talking about commercial quantities of alcohol.

Mr Gibson: Exactly. A lot of what we were doing was predicated on the quantity a person had with economy of scale—I guess that is the best way to put it. That is, if there are two people in a car and

they are both on welfare, how could they reasonably expect to be able to afford 20 cartons of alcohol. So, as you say, we were looking at commercial quantities.

Mr P.B. WATSON: We were told by the police in Derby yesterday that people now get a list from someone with the correct amount of money and buy alcohol that way.

Mr Gibson: Yes. We are also seeing the cards being handed over and receipts stuck to cartons that go along with the person's purchase. So when we put it to the occupants of the car, they will say it is not their alcohol and the receipt relates to another person and that it is their purchase. They have covered it all! But you are right; something needs to be introduced to prevent that happening. At the beginning of the last year, I went to Derby and spoke to the licensees. I asked them to self-introduce the means by which to control the quantity of alcohol sold at any given time. I also asked them to enter into a memorandum of understanding to that intent. Unfortunately, that was met with some objections by one outlet and fell away. At present, I have gone to DAO and asked for its assistance. We are currently drafting an application to have some of those section 64 restrictions imposed into Derby. In my view, there may be some pain inflicted on some people, but that is short-term pain for long-term gain. We are seeing some major harms caused in Fitzroy Crossing as a result.

[1.25 pm]

Mr P.B. WATSON: It is illegal for them to bring full-strength alcohol into the town?

Mr Gibson: Yes.

Mr P.B. WATSON: You cannot buy it?

Mr Gibson: To takeaway, no.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: There is nowhere else that people have been able to buy their stores since the supermarket burnt down?

Mr Gibson: The supermarket re-established. They have got to be congratulated for what they have done—it is in the community hall. It is very limited what they are supplying. Some will say the quality of the freshness of the groceries and whatever is obviously not going to be there. They have to be congratulated for what they have done. They moved fairly quickly to provide the service. Whether it is up to the standard of most people is for the individuals to say.

The CHAIRMAN: Just before we move to Joe—how many staff do you have here at Fitzroy Crossing and is it a 24-hour on-call type of situation and how does it operate?

Mr Gibson: We have myself, the senior sergeant; and I have got a sergeant and 10 constables. We run effectively a 16 to 18-hour day. I am on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week for any emergencies.

The CHAIRMAN: If people ring the police, that goes straight to you, or does it go via Broome and they screen it?

Mr Gibson: No; our systems dictate that when the station is not attended, it goes to Broome. Then Broome contact me direct if there is anything. I either sort the job out there and then or, if I need to call someone out, I do.

The CHAIRMAN: Do people resent that screening process? Is the screening process done quite well in Broome in the sense: are they aware of what the local issues are? In some of the other communities, the fact it goes to Broome, they feel they don't understand the seriousness sometimes of domestic violence situations, the importance of dealing with it immediately rather than sending a copper out the next day.

Mr Gibson: I am sure there is some negativity to it, I guess. Unfortunately it is the way our system works—it has to go through Broome. It works the other way as well where someone will ring up and all they are really doing is looking for a lift from point A to point B. We get the call that they are being raped because people at the other end do not understand what they are saying. We have

that situation in reverse as well. I would say most people do not like the idea that they cannot ring the station direct and talk to me direct or talk to whoever is on call direct. That would be a fair comment, but unfortunately that is the way our systems work. In fairness to myself in my position, if the calls were going to come to me direct on a constant basis, I would be working constant night shifts.

The CHAIRMAN: I think you would have some screening mechanism in place.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Have you lost any staff since they brought in the restrictions?

Mr Gibson: No. There has not been any.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Has the workload dropped?

Mr Gibson: Yes. This is in the initial sense? Our tasking has dropped fairly significantly. Our overtime expenditure has dropped significantly. Our road trauma and road incidents have dropped and have remained so, which is a good thing. We were at the stage where one in six RBT'd person was charged with a drink-driving offence. We are now one in 20, which is a significant improvement. The seatbelt offences are low. Our traffic within Fitzroy Crossing and Fitzroy Valley is very, very good comparatively speaking.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Joe, have you noticed much change since the alcohol enforcement?

Mr Ross: I guess you have heard a lot about the effects of the restrictions and that here, but it would be good to understand the history of this place. I was born here on 23 July 1960. My direct family worked around the police station, post office, hospital and pub. The town you actually see today, and that bridge over there, is a result of the award wages 1967, 1968, 1969. People moved off the properties into the old mission. There were four language groups up here. There was total mayhem and social upheaval in this whole community. Through the 1970s right through to the 1980s was a real tumultuous time for Fitzroy Valley people. One of the key elements of that was the introduction to alcohol. Predominantly one in three people drink in this community. There is a Frances Morphy population study that was done by the ANU. It is currently available on the ANU website. There is about 3 800 people here. The mean average is about 24 years old. 1975 was the first introduction to people actually starting to drink, and predominantly men. It was in the early 1980s when women started predominantly drinking. Then it just escalated and ramped up from the late 1980s through to the 1990s. It was in the 1980s that the government realised that they could not have everybody in this town, so they created communities like Nookanbah, Wangkatjungka, Yeerlie, Bayulu as large communities to disperse the people out of here and get them back on their country, which was a circuit-breaker at the time. From 1975 we have had a group of people who have started drinking and the whole culture of drinking right up until the point where the women, led by Emily and June Oscar, said that enough was enough. That period from about late 2005 through to 2007 was really a wake-up call for this community and for people like myself to understand that we had become immune to the deaths and the effects of alcohol over the last 30 years. What happened in 2007 we should have done that back in 1990. If you can understand that this is how the landscape has been created here. It is one of our great tensions with government around this outstation movement and the support of the outstation movement. People are real healthy on country here. We are quite fortunate here that you still have very strong cultural protocols, you still have very strong ceremonial processes and there is still a sense of identity in this community across the four language groups being Bunuba—where I come from—Gooniyandi, Walmajarri, Wangkatjungka and Nyikina people. There is that sense of identity. That is really the only thing that has kept this place together socially. I think, looking back, to say that the alcohol restrictions have not had an effect on this community and the social harmony of this community would be like saying the invention of the wheel had no effect on transportation in the world. You could see the total shift in the way our community now rationalises issues. Ian talks a lot about people actually having rational discussions around a quarrel. You might have a sober person helping a policeman trying to sort out a dispute, things like that. Out of an aggrieved party like men

came the Men Shed. Firstly, they were aggrieved that the women had so much power over them. They were the first set of meetings. Ian and quite a few others used to come to these meetings. They would be like “Two bloody women are ripping us off; taking our grog away from us.” Suddenly they were starting to talk about the effects that was having on themselves, their children and their families. With a bit of good luck from the government and a little bit of support from Forrest and crew, the Men Shed started. It is starting to address what should have been done for men right throughout the Kimberley. An imbalance has been created between women centres, rightfully so—they were right, that women had power and support and resources and men are left out in the cold, up until now in Fitzroy Crossing. I think it is a good, indirect result coming out of the restrictions that has helped in that way.

The CHAIRMAN: Are the Men Sheds only Indigenous men or do white men go there as well?

Mr Ross: Presumably if you look like a man, and as a man, you can turn up there.

Mr Gibson: It is non-discriminatory. In the whole it is an Indigenous group.

Mr Ross: In Fitzroy you cannot have exclusive groups here as with our Fitzroy Futures Forum. My father was an orphan from Liverpool. He came out in 1938. There are people like him, there are people like Jeff Davies and others so you cannot create an exclusive society here in the Fitzroy Valley. I always thought about the “Save the Women” out at Goolgaradah—they originally talked about a three-year moratorium. They said, “Oh no, let’s be easy. Let’s just go and ask for 12 months.” The first response by Barry Sargeant and Peter was, “We’ll go and sort it out in the accord.” It went to the accord. That just blew up. I don’t know the exact process, but I remember the second meeting when Barry Sargeant and Peter and that attended here, there was a shift towards a section 64 review of the place. I often think about there were a lot of people like myself who were quite sceptical whether we would actually get a restriction in the first place. Then we had to live by these accords. It was not far after the meeting with Barry Sargeant that June and Emily approached a few of us men to try to do something, like support them politically. I suddenly realised the way our people here become so immune to death, having 50 people die each year—literally alcohol, youth suicide and drugs. We took a slice of five years and we had 250 people. You took another slice behind that, you started to find 40 a year. It just ramped up from the 1990s. This community became so immune to death and what effect alcohol was having on us. As I said for anybody to say that there has not been a total shift in social harmony in this community, to see men going to the school these days with their children, higher participation by fathers at the assemblies now. They have these open days at the end of terms, fathers go there with their children. That was unheard of four years ago, let alone 20 years ago.

The CHAIRMAN: Has the Fitzroy Futures Forum had some bearing? Can you tell us a little bit about that, whether that has had some impact on it?

Mr Ross: Not so much the restriction but I think out of that. As I said post-2007 suddenly, it does not matter who you are, you can drink as much as you like on Friday night and you’ll be crook as a dog on Saturday. You’re much more rational on Sunday thinking about how to fix the car or mow the lawn. Literally that is what happened post-2007—people started thinking rationally about what they wanted of this place and this society here. A handful of us started the forum process in about the year 2000. A forum is actually an advanced version of a Probus association. It is unconstituted with a very complicated and complex—once we got to about 2008–09 now we have like 150 people participate in some way, a couple of hundred people, sometimes we have big meetings, little meetings. People are starting to think about what the governance of this place is. In an indirect way it has had a strong influence on the place.

As for drugs and alcohol, I said this to Barry Sargeant at the second meeting where Peter attended: there are some places in Australia that you have to have a socioeconomic profile or demographic profile of this community. Where you have negative labour markets, where you have very limited opportunities for people to take quality education or you have this large cohort of foetal alcohol

spectrum disorder, people moving through the system, you have to intervene. That was our clear statement to him—in WA you have to profile these communities. Whether it is this mindless discussion that drinking happens to be a human right was just mind-numbing talking to people. They see it as a privilege; that if you want to drink, if this society wants to drink, there are social norms that you have to stick by. If there are places like Fitzroy, Halls Creek, Wyndham, Laverton, and you could pick these communities in WA, intervention must happen in these communities as it did here. It was just by good fortune there was an instrument outside of government. We were struggling to convince the government of the day to support us in this process.

[1.40 pm]

Mr Gibson: I will just jump in there and follow on with what Joe was saying. I think it is very important for the committee and the wider community to understand that Fitzroy Crossing, of the communities that asked for some intervention or had intervention put on them, was one of those that asked for restrictions; they were community driven, whereas all the others were not and the restrictions were an instrument of government. We have four of the six communities that have section 175 restrictions, as in grog-free, and all of these exist within the Fitzroy Valley and the restrictions are all community driven. The others, when talking Oombulgurri and Nyanganawilli, the restrictions were government instituted or government driven. I think that is very important.

Mr P.B. WATSON: So, have they not been as successful?

Mr Gibson: I do not know that they have not been as successful, but the point I am trying to make is that we have a community-driven ethos or spirit to want to change, but, unfortunately, what we have seen three years down the track is nothing—no support; no nothing. When people here look at the infrastructure and the support services that have been provided to other communities where the interventions were thrust upon them, they are getting those services.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Joe, I was interested in the fact that this morning someone said was there are no under-15 footy teams here. Now I am a great believer in sport getting kids off the street, stopping them sniffing glue, drinking and doing drugs. Is there any reason for that, do you know, that there is no junior sport?

Mr Ross: Junior sport? Because they all play in the seniors. At that average age, there would be a colts team. John Davies of Derby, who has died now, came out and helped start the Central Kimberley Football League. I think that might have been in the late 90s. It is very good example of where you could target a cohort of the community to break the cycle of drinking. So, once the football season finishes, I think you would find that your incidences and participation in drinking ramp up. Over Christmas, boredom; it gets back down when the football is on again. That is young men in the community—a really important group. Mind you, they still have to get breathalysed to get onto the field; they cannot get out of that.

Mr P.B. WATSON: They breathalyse them today?

Mr Gibson: Yes, we have given the league a breathalyser.

Mr P.B. WATSON: You should do it down our way! When I used to umpire, I am sure some of them were drunk.

Mr Ross: It is a very good form of really tackling people's, not mental health, but more about getting them to engage in other forms of community—society, games, basketball. They have got the pool here now. I was just thinking about it driving past the pool. You do not have to force people to go to the pool because the pool is a good resource for quite a few things, proven in Bidyadanga and Jigalong and other places. The issue around the mites and skin diseases and all of that—you have the whole school system create programs within the school that they have to attend through their classes. Having a resource like that helps. There has been an urban renewal process here, if you go around and look at the state-of-the-art school: \$36 million later, we have got a fantastic school. They have changed the hospital; they built a brand-new hospital. There has been a total culture shift

from previously having to employ nurses out of England, out of agencies, into now families turning up here wanting to stay and work in this hospital. A police station is going to change—a brand-new police station. There are pool, halls and this \$250 million housing program that is coming in here for remote Indigenous housing. None of that would have been possible if 2006 and 2007 had never happened. Unfortunately, June is not here, but you would understand, if you met her, why the community got behind her.

The CHAIRMAN: Just a question in terms of the alcohol issue, from what we hear, the alcohol bans have really transformed the community. Some people who are, shall we say, opposed in some way to them, say that all they have done is shifted the drinkers down to Broome and all that sort of thing. The evidence presented to us does not support that view. It is a very small amount of people doing that. Do you have any idea of how many of the, for want of a better word, hardcore drinkers actually do travel down to Broome and bring grog in? To what extent is that a major issue here? You mentioned the car full of grog coming back, but how many people participate in that type of thing?

Mr Gibson: The hardcore drinkers are not the ones who do the travelling. It is the ones who are not the hardcore drinkers who go there for other business—do their shopping—bring all of it back for the hardcore drinkers.

The CHAIRMAN: It is more opportunistic, is it?

Mr Gibson: Yes.

Mr Ross: You have to understand too that Bidyadanga, Broome, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek are on the rim of the Great Sandy Desert. That whole cultural block there has been moving over the last 30 years, ceremonially, up and down, and Broome is a stop-off point for the desert crew. So you have constantly got Bidyadanga people, Looma people, Fitzroy, my gang—the Bunuba ranges people—always went to Derby to interact. You have got this constant movement of people that have been going up and down this rim for thousands of years.

The other issue is centralisation of health services into Broome. They got rid of the health services in Derby, so you go to Broome to get your specialist checks, you go to get your kidneys cleaned out, you go to get your toes cut off. Those people have families. They have visitors that also go to Broome, and so there is a mixture of them. That is notwithstanding the issue of affordable housing in Broome: the amount you have to pay rent there is totally disgraceful, and that is totally starting to marginalise black and white people on low incomes.

I make another point. I do not know whether there was an intent in it, but the banning of people from the pub for life for drinking raises the issue: where else is a hardcore drinker going to go? He or she will move to Derby or Broome to drink. I think there should be some integrity around—if you are going to ban someone, make sure he or she has tried to kill somebody for starters, or tried to poison someone in that pub, but if it is just for minor offences, you do not ban them for six months or 12 months. You put them through a forced process of Milliya Rumurras or whatever it is, but currently we are seeing that gravitation of people to Derby and Broome who have been banned from this place here.

The other point is that there is sign outside talking about mid-strength rules are applied from 12 noon to 6.00 pm and under it says, “As per the state liquor licensing law for Fitzroy Crossing”. I wonder: that is not what I read in Barry Sargeant’s decision. Mischief-making is what I call it—quite openly. I say to this fine institution here, and the managers of the one down the road, to stop being mischievous with some of these signs in order to stir anti-alcohol restriction sentiment in our community. It is false advertising.

The CHAIRMAN: Is this actually by choice of the community rather than by the liquor licensing law; is that what you are saying?

Mr Ross: It is the choice of the hotel.

Mr Gibson: That is what I mentioned before about the self-management of the licensed premises. With the Lodge for example, they only have mid-strength alcohol between 12 o'clock and six o'clock. At the Crossing Inn, they will have mid-strength alcohol from three o'clock to five o'clock to have a break from that full-strength grog. They do not open until midday, and at the end, because everyone is waiting at five to 12, 10 to 12 to get in, and there is that heavy drinking going on, they break that at three o'clock and grab a mid-strength. Whether they are putting in things down there about state alcohol laws or whatever, I do not know. They really ought not to do that. I have to disagree with Joe. I do not think it is mischief-making. I think is good management of alcohol and responsible service, and they do it for that reason. They know that they will be held to account if they have drunks or serve drunks on licensed premises. They have in the past and they will in the future. We see it as a positive rather than a negative.

The CHAIRMAN: How many people have actually been banned from pubs here? Is it a small number?

Mr Ross: I do not know, I do not drink at the pub. I think more to the point, if you can get past the vested interests and really start to understand the trends in the community, you really start to get a handle what the effect the restrictions have had on this place. I think a major shift in the debate happened when, pre restriction, the public servants like Ian's supreme commander and Phil Clews and his whole team in the Broome police force came on board. Another shift happened with John Bolton coming out of the health system and saying, "No, there is a problem with middle alcohol strength and disorder." Now we have a cohort of young people here who would be aged from three years old, or conservatively, two years old, right through to 35, who, in some form, fit into the foetal spectrum alcohol disorder. There is also the work that the WA health department—Fiona Stanley and the George Institute through the leadership of James Fitzpatrick—have done in identifying tools, carer systems and a wraparound services for that cohort as they come through the system.

The thing to prepare for now is the post-restriction young children who are going to go to school next year. I see the schools starting to reshape the way they are doing behavioural management of the group slowly moving out of the school system, and they are now becoming much more prepared for this new group that is going to enter the school system next year—those four-year-olds. If the government is ever going to take an interventionist-type initiative, if you cannot find a June Oscar or an Emily Carter in the community, you have really got to be prepared with key leadership from your departments like DAO, Grant and all his crew and the police. Everybody has to be prepared so that you do not lump this change in culture into the community, because you will end up with a polarised community as in Halls Creek—it is heavily polarised—and now there has got to be a lot of healing in that community. Here it was much easier because the dispersal of drinkers actually went back out to the communities and the depolarisation of the whole debate made it much easier for people to just say, "Oh, okay. Let's move on." You are going to find that Halls Creek is going to take a couple of years—three to five years I reckon—and some of these other places, discrete towns, you have really got to be prepared for.

The CHAIRMAN: Has the rate of criminal charges decreased in the town through the bans, and has that resulted in fewer people from this community actually being in prison in Broome or elsewhere in the prison system, or how has that impacted on the prison population from this area?

Mr Gibson: If you are talking from a juvenile perspective, we do not have, comparatively speaking, a major juvenile crime issue in town.

The CHAIRMAN: You do or you do not—sorry?

Mr Gibson: We do not, we are very lucky in that regard. Most of the juvenile crime we have is opportunistic, and generally tends to be from boredom, I would suggest. We introduced 18 months ago, and you will hear about it through KALACC, a referral process to their programs, which have been very, very successful. We support those and will continue to do so. In relation to adults, pretty

much most of our offending is assaults—domestic violence and non-domestic assaults. Has it had a significant impact on imprisonment? No, I do not think so, purely because, in my humble opinion, we do not have the ability to refer offenders or perpetrators to other sources for remedial action. We have now got the Men's Shed on board. We have approached them to see whether they would take court referral stuff and to be able to do work development orders, because previously that service was not available in town; so, we had people who were fined, and obviously the fines do not get paid and get reverted to a warrant of commitment and the people wind up spending time inside because they are not able to do work development orders. Now we are seeing that the Men's Shed is able to provide that service to us. We would love to be able to—Joe mentioned it earlier—to have an emergency accommodation place to take men and perpetrators to. We just do not have that—unfortunately. There is a common belief, and rightly so, that we should not have to take victims out of their homes, but, unfortunately, that is what we are doing because we have a safe refuge for women and children, but we do not have emergency accommodation for men, so what do you do? We are now unfortunately having to remove the victim when we should not have to, and that is something that really could change.

[1.55 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: If you had such emergency accommodation for perpetrators, how many beds would you need in a facility in a place like Fitzroy Crossing?

Mr Gibson: Conservatively, 10 would be good; six would be acceptable.

Mr Ross: Men's services in Broome and the Blue House in Derby are very good examples, and the police should be able to just drop someone off, and they can be told, "Okay, your wife's up at the refuge" or "Your wife's at home; settle down", and they have someone to talk to—one of their relatives or a very good counsellor. After a few hours of just talking to someone they go, "Okay, maybe I was wrong." Currently, they leave these people just sitting in an empty room. The whole trauma that some of these people have come through, either through abuse or they have never had mothers or fathers, they have had their grandparents looking after them, and they have never had the concept of "If I'm alone, how do I look after myself?" Things like that. Imagine when they are just coming down off ganja or they have run out of grog and they are arguing. We had a whole family here once. This old bloke, Charlie Nunjun, came in from the bush—they brought him in from the bush with his family. His grandson killed him; his grandson suicided; his daughter-in-law killed his other son; and the third son died of alcohol poisoning at the pub. That was all in one little bush family that came in, in the 1950s and 1960s, just by this total upheaval in this group and the management of them. Being able to put males somewhere after the police have picked them up and not put them in jail is really where we are lacking in services. If I go to Broome, I go to the movies, I go and watch *Bran Neu Dae*, I will go and get some Chicken Treat or I will go and watch the football, or I will go down and watch—I do not know why, but I go there with about 300 people—the sunset go down at Gantheaume Point; here, you cannot have those big services until about another 20 or 30 years down the track. We have really got to be smart about how we make the continuum for, say, young men in football—what is the continuum post-football, in the off-season. We should be having a celebration of this society. The family week, a month ago, was a very good example of that, and the community came up and joined in for a whole week. We said that no government people could have meetings here, but they could come and visit if they wanted to—things like that. Maybe there should be a structured continuum for people, so that they are engaged in either organising those events, or they are participating in events. That should be managed out over 12 months, instead of this squashing everything into just when it happens to be dry.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Are VROs an issue here?

Mr Gibson: Yes. They are used very regularly, and more often than not they are used to good cause. We do have, obviously, as with anywhere else, people who will abuse VROs. But, generally speaking, they are used to great effect, but we have a lot of them in existence, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: You mentioned that, three years ago, marijuana was pretty much a non-issue, but it has really become a much bigger issue.

Mr Gibson: It is.

The CHAIRMAN: You also mentioned the cost of it and alcohol, because often alcohol and marijuana go together for these people. What steps could be taken, do you think, to reduce the marijuana problem; and the BasicsCard, for people who are not looking after their kids and spending a disproportionate amount of their income on marijuana and alcohol, what are your thoughts on giving the welfare agencies the power—not as a blanket thing—to say to problem families, “You need to have a BasicsCard. Some of your social security goes into that and you can only spend it on food.” What are both of your thoughts on that?

Mr Gibson: Having been here for two and a half years, I am sure I have a completely different view to Joe, but I support it. The problem I see with it is that if it is driven by our on-the-ground DTP support service people, they then have to look at their clients and decide whether to put them on a card. They have to see them on a regular basis. This is a very small town, and I think it is something I do not think they ought to be subjected to. If the BasicsCard is going to be introduced, then it should be driven by something else other than those people on the ground, especially in a place like Fitzroy Crossing, because they are going to see them day in, day out and they will get harassed because they have done it to them. I think there should be a better referral process involved in that. We are not only talking only about alcohol and drugs but also gambling is a big issue within the Indigenous community here. You see some of the card games that are just massive, and the money that gets won lost at those games is quite phenomenal.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Is it just cards or is it racehorses as well—is there a TAB here?

Mr Gibson: No, there is no TAB here. They can punt on Fonebet, but very few people would access that, I would suggest—it is cards.

Mr Ross: I am with Ian; I do not think it is a big enough place to have government people here, going around and telling people whether they should be on cards or not. I think the Cape York model, the Family Responsibilities Commission, is probably overkill. Pre-restriction I probably would have said, “Yes; go with the Family Responsibilities Commission.” But post-restriction you have this rationality in the community, and I just know that in my little community at the old crossing there, we have Danny, our chairperson, and we have about three scallywag young women who bloody run off and spend all their money. We would love to be able to say, “No; you’re leaving your children with your mother. We are now going to go and see government and we’re going to say that your mother gets the money, and you’ll get 50 bucks to go and play cards and drink.” I think the need for what Ian is talking about is a balance between a referral from government to use that process. There are some very good chairpersons in these communities who can say, “Yes; we’ll have a meeting about this”, and then usually direction gets given, like it would be in our community. We very much look forward to that model, where we can say, “Right ho, young lady, that’s it. You’re starving your children; we’re going to give it to your mother, who is actually looking after the kids.”

The CHAIRMAN: Are you suggesting that, in that sense, the Aboriginal elders, or the leadership of the community itself, would actually be empowered to require some quarantining of the money, rather than having a DCP or somebody else doing that? The community, itself, would take responsibility for that.

Mr Ross: It would be the leadership of the community, or there would be an agreed term that that money would go to who is actually looking after those children and feeding those children.

The CHAIRMAN: That is good.

Mr Ross: It would be reflective of how Fitzroy has always been; the whole place is built on non-government organisations—you are probably going to hear about [Inaudible] soon. But it would be

a continuation of allowing the community to make its own decisions, and government just becomes facilitators in the process—the police, the whole lot.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: They could use the swimming pool here all year, could they not? Is that the case?

Mr Ross: They turn it off at the wrong time of the year here.

Mr Gibson: They could, effectively, use it all year.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Do they have a time when they close it?

Mr Ross: Yes, because of the cost of having a lifesaver and things like that. The Royal Life Saving Club provides a service for I do not know how long.

Mr Gibson: It is for nine months of the year.

Mr Ross: You actually find that a lot of people want to swim this time of the year, such as tourists and the whole lot.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: You could swim here all year, I suppose.

Mr Ross: Probably in Jigalong and Bidgedanga and those places, yes, you can have a specific time, but in Fitzroy you would have the pool open for 11 months of the year maybe. But they close it off now, but 120 000-odd tourists come through this place and most of them want to do some 25-metre lap swimming. I know when my missus was here, she wanted to go down every morning and have a swim. We used to sneak in over here—it was freezing cold under those shades.

The CHAIRMAN: Joe and Ian, do you want to sum up? Is there anything you want to tell us before we wrap it up? Is there anything we have not covered yet, or do have any ideas that you want to share with us?

Mr Gibson: Look, I would probably just like to reinforce a couple of things that I mentioned in the submission that I wrote to you.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for that, by the way; it was much appreciated.

Mr Gibson: We are sadly lacking in youth activities and sports and organised programs. We are sadly lacking in other sports and activities for adults, and people to coordinate them.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Does sport and recreation have anybody here?

Mr Gibson: We do not have a sport and recreation officer here. The only organised sporting body that we have is Garnduwa Sports in the town, and that is the only person. This is what I was talking about with government services, we just do not have them. It really follows on from what Joe was saying about football; there is no continuum.

Mr P.B. WATSON: What about basketball?

Mr Gibson: No. They are covering the basketball courts now, but even previous to that being there and before the shop occupied the hall, there was no organised basketball going on because there was nobody here to organise it. We are sadly lacking in those recreational activities, I guess, across the board from juveniles to adults.

Mental health is a major issue, especially from a policing perspective. We have a lot of people here with mental health issues, either through drugs and alcohol or other health problems. We ultimately find ourselves becoming involved with those people and their behaviours, when really it is not a policing matter, and it is really is something that should be dealt with through the health organisations.

Following on from what Joe was saying about the FAS and FASSD issue with the children—foetal alcohol syndrome and spectrum disorders—that will become more and more of an issue within the school, and more and more of a policing issue, too, I would suggest, given that these kids have no

cognitive ability to recognise right and wrong. They are obviously going to come into the criminal justice system sooner rather than later, so the schools, I suggest, need more support there from that kindergarten area up through in the classrooms.

Mr P.B. WATSON: You have to start with the young kids, do you not?

Mr Gibson: Yes; you have to start with the young kids; that is right.

Mr Ross: Yes, it is about the management framework for the young. If you took half of the past 30 years—you take 15 years—that is where it really ramped up the effect on young people. If you take Canada and other places as an example, these young children are heading straight to jail. The diversionary type of programs for these young people, where they get in early and have good management and have systems set up systems for them, are good. I think the way that it has panned out since 2007, is that the relationships with the police and whole lot has totally shifted from the way they used to operate, but also our community perceives police and government differently, and a lot of that has been because government has actually got behind the women and that to make this place a better place. I am a great believer that the next step in this process is legislation for the Fitzroy valley, so that there is no argument about the future; if it is indefinite, it is indefinite for the rest of our lives. In 50 years' time our great-grandchildren can argue over whether they want takeaways in this place. It is going to take at least one to one and a half generations before we actually get ourselves to a rational society that can then start considering about any introduction of takeaway alcohol in this community. But I am glad I do not come from any other community other than this place because I love this place. It is a fantastic place to have grown up in and to continue to grow up in.

Mr Gibson: Can I finally say that the other thing that we are sadly lacking in—it is just so obvious—is alcohol and drug counsellors.

The CHAIRMAN: That has been made clear to us.

Mr Gibson: You have to ask why, really, but we just do not have them.

Mr P.B. WATSON: You cannot put in a system like that with no support.

Mr Gibson: Exactly. That is the short thing we are saying, and we have been saying for the over two and a half years I have been here. We have been saying it ad nauseam, and it has just gotten to the stage now where it is becoming ridiculously and abundantly obvious that the attention is not being provided to Fitzroy Crossing. I have to agree with Joe: I have worked in a lot of country towns, and Fitzroy Crossing is very unique in that the people have that willingness to go forward and that wanting to change, generally speaking. You are always going to have your naysayers, but, generally speaking, you have a community and a group of communities that do not have the issue with infighting amongst families, like you do in other places. They want good balance, and I think it is really a little bit sad that they are not getting the support they deserve.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Joe and Ian; much appreciated. I am just going to read this little statement. Thank you for your evidence before the committee today. The transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 28 days from the date of the letter attached to it. If the transcript is not returned within this period it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections, but if you feel that you wanted to tell us something else after you left, feel free to add an extra page or two, write what you want on that, and send that in with the transcript, and we will accept that as a supplementary submission. Thank you very much, gentlemen; much appreciated.

Hearing concluded at 2.11 pm