

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

INQUIRY INTO COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES IN GOVERNMENT

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
Wednesday, 12 March 2008**

SESSION TWO

Members

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman (Chairman)
Ms K. Hodson-Thomas (Deputy Chairman)
Mr S.R. Hill
Mrs J. Hughes
Dr G.G. Jacobs**

Hearing commenced at 11.04 am**TANG, MS JACQUELINE THERESE****Acting Director General, Department of Indigenous Affairs,
examined:****SMYTHE, MR STEPHEN****Assistant Director, Policy and Innovation, Department of Indigenous Affairs,
examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks for coming in, Jacqui and Stephen. Possibly you may know most people, but just in case I will first of all introduce the committee. Katie Hodson-Thomas, the member for Carine, is the Deputy Chair of the committee; Shane Hill is the member for Geraldton, a committee member; Dr Graham Jacobs is a committee member; Brian Gordon, our principal research officer, I am sure you know; and Jovita Hogan is our research officer. Thanks again for coming in. Before we start I will just read you a couple of paragraphs and we have a couple of questions to ask you. I ask that you respond verbally rather than a nod or a shake of the head so that we can record it for *Hansard*.

This committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

Ms Tang: Yes, I have.

Mr Smythe: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form?

Ms Tang: Yes, I do.

Mr Smythe: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read an he information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

Ms Tang: Yes, I did.

Mr Smythe: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions relating to your appearance before the committee this morning?

Ms Tang: Not currently, no; they might evolve later.

Mr Smythe: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Would please state the capacity in which you appear before the committee?

Ms Tang: Acting Director General of the Department of Indigenous Affairs.

Mr Smythe: Assistant Director Policy and Innovation, Department of Indigenous Affairs.

The CHAIRMAN: Before we start, do you have any opening statements that you may like to make?

Ms Tang: Not other than that the department is certainly at a point, and I think it is quite public, that we are coming out of a review and really trying to position ourselves in the context of government and how we do business for and on behalf of government, particularly in relation to the

outcomes for Aboriginal people. So, where we have been, where we are at the moment and where we need to be in the future is a work in progress. So some of the comments that we will discuss today is historical and certainly not where we want to be in the future, and some is about what we have done since I have been in the position and what we are trying to do to position ourselves.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Thanks, Jacqui and Stephen. The State Coroner, Alastair Hope, recently found a lack of accountability and cooperation between departments in response to deaths, most of which involved alcohol and drugs. What do you see? I felt this question particularly interesting in that there are issues facing and securing a level of collaboration in order for your agency to be effective. What we are really focusing on is the collaboration between agencies and for us all to be better in outcomes.

Ms Tang: Yes. Are you happy for me to just sort of give a bit of a lengthy answer around that, because there is no yes or no to that?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, please.

Ms Tang: If you bear with me, I will give you some history, not too dated. I commenced this job in June last year and when I commenced, my staff, including Stephen, spoke to me very early in the tenure to say that the government had signed a bilateral with the state and commonwealth around Indigenous affairs that had been signed 12 months prior to my commencement. There appeared to be no apparent leadership around the implementation of that bilateral. There were some senior officers meeting to try to deliver on some of the six outcomes that were in the bilateral, but it is fair to say it was just floating along and no-one seemed to own it or be responsible for it. Clearly it was the Department of Indigenous Affairs' responsibility; we were the agency that needed to carry it. So on the advice of staff, the recommendation was that we would bring together the group of directors general who were impacted by the bilateral, and this is certainly in light of the fact that the human services directors general group had been suspended, I believe, the year before, about April 2006 or so. So there was actually no forum for directors general involved in social justice or social services to come together to collaborate; that we were all out on our own. So whilst I accept that as director general of the department I was responsible for the bilateral, I certainly was not going to do this on my own, and neither could I do it on my own. So we had our first meeting before the end of June when we brought the directors general together and we talked about what we had to deliver on the bilateral and there was common concern about how there was no leadership. Where did they fit? They had been trying to do some work and some were obviously more advanced than others. So the view was very supportive around the fact that the directors general would work together on the bilateral, and for the six outcome areas of the bilateral, each director general agreed to take leadership of each outcome. So we worked on the basis since that time that we have a director general who is at the head of that outcome, and then we have senior officers who work underneath that to support the bilateral.

If I could just lead on to, because it is still with the flavour of collaboration and how we do this, very soon after that cabinet considered the Gordon inquiry and came to a similar view that, again, this was a piece of work which did not seem to have any leadership around it. There was no-one overlooking it. It was sitting in our department as a secretarial support, having come out of—I think it was—Premier and Cabinet; but there was no-one really driving it to say, "What's happening? You know, this is a major issue for government and for Aboriginal people, and yet who's minding the ship?" So cabinet made the decision that my minister was the responsible minister and, if she wished, to delegate it down to my position to be the person who would lead and the department would lead. So very quickly the DGs group that came together for the bilateral also picked up the Gordon inquiry responsibility as well, and has done since then and DGs, again, were supportive around that process. Very soon after that we had the high number of disclosures around the east Kimberley sexual abuse of children, and the police took the initiative that they felt that whilst there

was a bureaucracy responding to this, as far as they were concerned both the police department and Child Protection were required to be there on the ground 24 hours a day, seven days a week when it happened, not when bureaucracy decided to get there. So the initiative of the acting commissioner at the time, Chris Dawson, was that he would bring together a similar group that I brought together for Indigenous Affairs to really have quite an operational management of the Kimberley abuse operation.

Apparently this came to the attention of the standing committee on law and order, and they felt, after discussion that the police, whilst the initiative should be applauded in bringing people together and whilst they were very much at the beginning of the process, were they really the correct department to oversight the whole process, given that there is an immediate response and then there is a need for recovery, rebuilding and sustainable communities? So, whilst they had a very clear role here, they actually could not follow the path right through to the end. So within a very short period of time the department was given the mandate to take on the lead of the Kimberley response. So within probably eight weeks we went from not having a directors general group to one that managed the bilateral agreement, the Gordon inquiry and the Kimberley response. So to manage that particular process is that we were going to have six-weekly meetings for the broader DGs group, and then meet every fortnight about the Kimberley operations, because we had to get down to where were the gaps, where were the services, how were we responding to this? As part of that process, a document was developed in collaboration with the other directors general. I did not bring one up today but as part of our written submission we will put that to you. It is a document called "Safer Children Safer Communities", and this has been through the standing committee on Indigenous affairs and the standing committee on law and order, because we felt that before we embarked on this process everyone needed to understand the roles and responsibilities that they had in responding to child abuse; and also at what stage, what phase did various departments come in and who picked up responsibility? So departmental staff, with the directors general quite clear support, a document was developed which set out the phases of initial response, recovery and sustainability—not necessarily those words—and under each of those was the required activities and the responsible agency who would work to do this. We have now moved to monthly meetings for the Kimberley response group and we have sort of made it quarterly meetings for the directors general group, but we can meet more frequently depending on issues, and I will talk about that separately in respect of the coronial inquiry.

So what we have been doing is we have focused on four communities. The first two were, obviously, Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing, and then a watching brief on Kalumburu and Oombulgurri. So what we do is we have a spreadsheet of all the activities and strategies that are set against that "Safer Communities" document and agencies are reporting against those as to whether in fact those strategies are happening, whether they are not happening, whether they have halted and why they have. I realise that the terms of reference of the committee is not only looking at what are we doing but does it work and how can we improve it? I will not put my hand on my heart and say that that is a perfect process, because DIA has gone from an agency that has been fairly insular, given the review and very internally focused, to all of a sudden having to be a clearing house and taking a leadership role in managing all this information. So we have had our teething problems but we have very committee staff who are attempting to do that. So we are actually delivering something for the directors general, because there is no point in bringing information if you cannot analyse and put it back. So what happens is the information comes in, sometimes we have to be stronger to say, "We need that information." Some agencies are more adept at putting that in, given their own resource restrictions, than others. That information comes in; our staff analyse it as it comes in, then as part of the meetings we put recommendations back to the directors general who then discuss how that has progressed and then we move. So we are constantly looking at where are we at, where do we need to move and then what do we need to go forward?

[11.15 am]

We have put collaborative proposals to government and they are still subject to approval. Unless I am instructed to, I do not believe it is appropriate for me to discuss the detail of that, other than to say that it is a demonstration of the willingness of the directors general to work together to put combined submissions rather than try to pick off government ministers with “I want this for my department”, and then ministers are left at the cabinet table arguing the point. We understand that we are trying to make it easier at the top so that we can get what we need to do the job.

Another process that we are currently in is that one of our officers has gone out to the communities and said, “This is what we are getting reported to the directors general group about what is happening. Is this real for you? Is this actually happening, or is it just a figment of our imagination or bureaucracy so that we can tick the box?” I have not seen the outcome of that analysis, but that is just the process of: we are doing this, we believe this is being done, and how it is operational on the ground. If it is not operational on the ground and determining a different outcome for people, whatever we do up here is ineffective and useless. That is an important process that we will bring back to the directors general to say, “Either your message is not going out, your resources are not hitting the ground or we do not have the correct strategies, or these things are really working and we should invest in them more.” That is probably just an overview. I will stop there if you have any particular questions.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: We have had representations to this committee that it is important to get the DGs to commit to a simple message—a simple script—without all the “bureauspeak” and be able to ask, “What are your aims and achievements?” and put it in simple language that the whole organisation can understand. Even a third party or a lower level within the structure could understand the mission in plain language. Does that happen or is it likely to happen with the DGs meeting so that everybody knows exactly and can identify what each person in each department is about?

Mr S.R. HILL: What their key objectives are.

Ms Tang: It is fair to say that we have been running for a relatively short period of time. Again, a more recent decision of the coronial recommendations is that our department has quite rightly been given the mandate to run with that. We have a number of things that we are running. However, all matters that we are dealing with in the directors general group are common in the sense of whom the service is being provided to—that is, Aboriginal people—how the state investment is in relation to delivering that service and what we are trying to achieve, which I think is fundamentally safer communities and safer children. The issues that the directors general are grappling with, and my department supports that, is what is the role, what are the key messages, and what are the things that we are going out strongly to do. That is something that we as an executive within my department are very focused on currently. Unless we are very clear about what our objectives are, how do we step up as leaders and provide that advice and direct the influence that we have across the directors general? I believe it was difficult to start with. We have brought together a group of people who are siloed in their budgeting and their services and they are asked to automatically come together and have a common mission and goal, when we all have individual pressures about how we do that. What I can say is that over the period of time, people are beginning to see it as a forum in which matters can come together and we can make combined submissions to government. My view within the department and in the discussions I have with staff and others is that it is all very well and good for us to coordinate and collaborate. I understand that is in your terms of reference. I would rather see it in terms of leadership and influence. What I say to my staff is that when they bring people together, if they do not bring them together for a purpose but they have lots of activity, they will have no productive outcome, which I think is what you said, Dr Jacobs, about being common in our view. The directors general come together and we are principally around issues of child abuse and safer communities and safer children. That has resulted in discussions about our common issues of staff recruitment and retention in regional areas, housing, investing in some communities and determining whether a community is sustainable. We are grappling with all these issues, but the

common view for me—I believe it is for the group as well—is how we make efficient and sound investment of government funding to determine real outcomes for Aboriginal people that ensures that they have an economic base, that they are safe and that they stand proud in their culture. There is a common view about that. We in the directors general group have not sat down and asked, “What is our common mission?” I believe that will come; it is just that we have a lot of issues to deal with today. That is not an excuse; that is just the reality of it.

The CHAIRMAN: Jackie, I understand that you have had a lot of focus put on you, particularly with the coroner’s report and you are starting to tackle those issues that he has outlined. Do you have any opportunity or method for bringing in outside help? Is there outside help that you can bring in; that is, non-government agencies such as Anglicare, Wanslea and those types of agencies that also currently deliver services to Indigenous communities? Do you have any support that way?

Ms Tang: “Support” is probably not —

The CHAIRMAN: It is probably not the right word.

Ms Tang: No. In recent times—I do not think I am talking out of place—we have been in discussions with WACOSS. People say that billions of dollars go into Aboriginal affairs and yet there is nothing and that we have wasted our money or Aboriginal people have not stepped up to the mark. There is a big issue around the question of the government spend. We are working with Treasury and Finance about how we will do that and how we determine the commonwealth and state spend. This is an issue for COAG right now across the nation. There are also non—government services and spend. The directors general group is in discussions with WACOSS about how it can assist us, obviously with funding from us. I do not want to term it as an audit because that is a standard thing, but it could give the department information to be shared with other directors general about the services that are being provided by non-government and non-profit organisations within those specific sites so that we can get a greater understanding of whether it is a lack of funding or whether we are funding the wrong strategies. There are some very productive non-government strategies that we are insufficiently funding. What is the expanse of service? When you ask whether we are getting any external help, we are seeking that and they are very keen to work with us to be able to do that. We are currently in negotiations with them.

Mr S.R. HILL: Jackie, I am aware of your background with some other government agencies. Do you feel perhaps that DIA needs a bit more teeth or some legislation to strengthen some of the roles that you are going to be forced to play? Obviously, you are bringing together the DGs and other government agencies, but I sometimes think in my role in the public sector that poor old DIA sat down here and the bigger agencies took the limelight at the top. Is there a feeling in the agency that you need some teeth to bring that together?

Ms Tang: The Premier did say in August that he wants to give us grunt. We do grunt. We understand that. I think if we do not get grunt, there is no point. We are relevant as far as our influence is concerned. I think we are developing a stronger influence and we are trying to position the department to be influential. Influence does not necessarily come only from me talking with other DGs, as you quite rightly say. One important decision made by government was the appointment of the Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs. That now gives me a mandate and a forum to take the issues of the directors general to, because unless I have a forum and influence on behalf of the directors general I bring together, I will lose them. DGs are all busy people and they all have their pressures. Unless I can influence how decisions of government are made and how investment is made through Treasury and Finance and through government, and have an ability to influence upwards, I have to say to the directors general, “Thank you but I am of no value to you.” The Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs gives me that mandate. On one hand, we are able to report up what the issues are for us as directors general and departments and also alert the government about risks and give advice on how to respond to those risks. We then take it through to cabinet. That is a really strong one for me. If we did not have that, I would be questioning where I

would get this leadership and influence mandate from. The other issue is legislation. We do have legislation and when you read the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act, you see that we have quite significant authority in managing 12 per cent of the land across the state, in seeking consultation from Aboriginal people and in all sorts of things to do with Aboriginal people. We do not utilise it. I have worked for other departments, as you know, and the act gets slapped on the table and they say, "This is our power; government must fund it or you must do this." We do not slap the AAPA act anywhere. We have a tool, but it is the extent to which we have not used it historically. Another issue is the Aboriginal Heritage Act. I believe we have more relevance in the heritage area because mining companies require us to process their section 18 approvals and go through all that. Although that was groundbreaking legislation in 1972, it is the oldest legislation in the nation now and time has moved on. Consultation needs to be different. Mining companies and state development need to be updated. One of the major discussions with my minister is about the support that we need to be able to have the resources to review both those acts. In one sense the AAPA act is quite expansive in what we can do, but it is about looking at the contemporary nature of that and seeing how we use it. We cannot rely on other people to say that we should use our act. I do not say that Ian Johnson, under his Prisons Act, has responsibility, he must endorse that and he must give it the mandate and the authority, not another department, and the same stands for DIA.

[11.30 am]

Ms Tang: If we want our legislation to have authority, then we have to ensure that it is enforced. So, part of that is updating the legislation but also having the ability, particularly around the heritage matters, to be able to come in with a compliance component, because we rarely prosecute. So, it is a matter of how we actually have the resources and really hone in to how we give authority to that act.

The CHAIRMAN: Jacqui, you have mentioned child protection and child safety as your main focus at the moment. That is understandable, but how do you decide that you have got that reasonably well locked away? It will never be locked away 100 per cent, but it is reasonably secure in these communities there. How do you then move from that to tackling the issues of health, education, economic development and accommodation for Indigenous communities?

Ms Tang: I think there needs to be a two-way approach. We will never lock away child abuse across the community, whether it is Indigenous or not. It is there and it needs to be responded to. I think it is the ability to respond to it that is the real issue that will always be there. The discussions in the time I have been in the position—obviously when I was with Corrective Services there were issues as well—were on how do you focus the effort to make the long-term difference without forsaking the current generation? If you say, "We'll focus on the child that is born today so that in 20 years' time they have a job, they have an education and can provide their family with a safe environment", you cannot just focus on that child because that child is in an environment. What are we doing for their parents, what are we doing for their extended families and the environment in which they are born? So, it is about how you keep your eye on what is the generational change that is required and where is the long-term goal, but at the same time work on strategies to do with today. To do either one in isolation you have lost the game.

The issue for me is that this department cannot do it alone. I see it as very much about how you set a state direction for the strategies, very much like COAG is working on that national agenda. What are the strategies; what is the long-term plan that we work to; and who do we rally forth to do that? The other is: where are the dollars; and who has control of the purse strings? My department never has control of the purse strings; it is just too small a department. We do not do what Treasury and Finance does, but it comes back to the point of influence and leadership. I see the future of DIA and the most value that it can offer government and the community is almost being Siamese twins with Treasury and Finance. So that when decisions are being made across the state—and in future possibly nationally—about how the government investment for the long-term good as well as the

immediate, is that clearly the expertise of Treasury is in economic management and finances. Ours should sit front and centre as far as policy and strategy are concerned in relation to Indigenous affairs; and the two of us work together to work across the government agencies, and non-government, to say: where will the investments be made? Then we go in and monitor and evaluate as to whether those outcomes were achieved; and, if not, why not? I am talking about not just the big stick; the big stick will never work, saying, "You didn't do this". But how do we work with agencies with our expertise to assist them in the strategies and how they implement them. Then monitoring and evaluating that advice to share it with others, and then working with Treasury: do we invest more in here; do we turn the tap off here; and how do we do that? So, whilst I say that our department should be about leadership, expertise and influence, I will not deny that I cannot do it without Treasury and Finance, and obviously the support of government about the direction we are taking. So I see it very much triangle of partnership. First of all, us providing that expertise to government for them to make decisions about whether that is where they want to go; and then that financial element. So the three of us, as a strong partnership, and then working with the community, government and non-government to be able to say: where do we place our resources? I will stop there, because I tend to rant on about that.

The CHAIRMAN: Do members have other questions?

Mr Smythe: I was just going to make a comment about how to improve health, housing etc. One of the things we are working on at the moment through this bilateral agreement with the commonwealth—which is an agreement basically to try to streamline services to Aboriginal communities and try to deal with the problems of duplication and gaps in services that have been plaguing this area for some time—we call regularising services. That is, government utilities, for example, take more responsibility for delivery of essential services, and local government gets more involved in the delivery of local government services, because many remote communities have had the responsibility for delivering all those services in the past, mainly through funding from the commonwealth. They are totally overburdened by the responsibility of it. I am talking about communities, many of which have poor governance arrangements and so forth. So the thinking is that if we can get Horizon Power and Water Corporation to be more responsible for delivering those core services that we all take for granted, and local governments get more involved in delivering their services and are funded, that will take away some of the burden from communities for having to manage those quite difficult service delivery issues, and they can focus more on their local social programs that they can be involved in. They can be involved in looking at employment and training issues and not have to worry about whether they turn the tap on and water is going to come into their house and waste is removed safely and so on. So, there is a lot going on now with the state and commonwealth to regularise those services.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you got an instrument or a lever that you can use on Horizon Power and Water Corporation to deliver those services? I mean, essentially they are government trading enterprises and they operate commercially.

Ms Tang: I found that the Department of Housing and Works would probably be the best people to respond to this particular issue. We are clearly heavily involved, as Stephen said, but to date my involvement is seeing that those organisations are working with Housing and Works as to possible solutions. So, it is not my observation in recent times—it may have been in the past; I do not know—that they are being dragged to the table. The reality is: what services are being provided to remote communities and at what cost? That is the other element.

The CHAIRMAN: That is one of the things that a couple of months ago I remember in a report one of our Indigenous communities was going to lose its power because it did not have money to pay for diesel. How do we get Horizon, or whoever it is, to actually start working with those communities to give them alternate forms of power; and obviously solar is the one that you would think about where most of those communities are, so that they do not have the recurrent cost?

Ms Tang: It raises the other big issue that we are dealing with at the moment. In one sense we are reluctant to raise it, because we have not got a lot down the path of addressing it, but it is the sustainability of communities. How do you determine whether a community is sustainable or not, and should invest more dollars? Many people say, "If there are fewer than 50 people you shouldn't invest." But we see communities which have high numbers of people and which are highly dysfunctional, and yet we see very small communities which are highly functioning. So, where do you put your money, because where is the best outcome? So we are working on: what are the factors that determine whether or not a community is functioning and sustainable? That is no easy task; it can be subjective, particularly around infrastructure, central services, municipal services and all those sorts of things. There is a philosophical debate occurring across various quarters as to: do you draw a line in the sand? Do you do an assessment and draw a line in the sand and say that anyone below that should not have a service and anyone above should; or, should the philosophy be, should the aim be, to make as many communities sustainable as possible. Therefore, you do not draw a line and ignore; you say, "What is needed to assist them to be sustainable to move them up over the line, and if they are not sustainable, how do you transition them to a sustainable community?"

As you can see, it is very complex and has many different views about which way you should go and what will that mean in future; you know, the decision to say that all communities should be brought up to standard as far as housing, municipal and essential services are concerned, and that we will fund all of these is an enormous investment for the government. Is that how it should be spent? So they are some of the issues we are grappling with at the moment and DIA is taking the lead on that particularly policy to try to resolve it, at least as a point where people can come together and say, "Okay, for this community, these are the factors which are showing they are just below sustainability. I think we will invest." If Education is investing in a school and Water is turning up to do something, perhaps Housing says, "Well, look, we'll make our investment to this community rather than this one at this time so we can get a critical mass for the sustainability". At times, departments are making decisions which mean that houses might be built over here, schools are built over here and the water is being fixed over there. So the money is still being spent, but you are not getting it into a critical mass to make a difference in one community. So it is a point of common knowledge about what are the current factors addressing issues for that community; and if we came together and made those decisions as a group, how could we address the problems in those communities.

The CHAIRMAN: How do you involve those communities in the decisions about their own community? I mean, how do you determine the leaders, because without leaders in the local community, it is going to go nowhere? How do you incorporate them into the vision?

Ms Tang: That is a very difficult question. For Western Australia, having just been in a meeting for the Indigenous task force where other states shared their current consultative structures, I am afraid we are not in any position to compare. I make no comment about the effectiveness of their consultation in other states. We only have one form of funded method of communicating with Aboriginal people, Indigenous people, and that is through the Aboriginal justice agreements, so through a law and order lens. We have no other mechanism to formally approach Aboriginal people across the state. So currently we have no formal state representation at which I as head of this department, or government generally, could go to as a forum, not for them to seek permission, but even just as an advisory group to talk with them about these very issues that we are talking about today. People sort of need to express that view. That is something that I am talking to my minister about, and I am hopeful of getting high level representation, but that is only one answer. The very good question that you ask is: how do you identify leaders? How do you identify the people who will speak on behalf of their country, their people or their community? This is at times an issue just dealing with heritage matters as to who speaks for country? Yes, you have native title, but that does not mean that people do not have a knowledge of or an association with land whilst they may not be

the native title owners. So that is one issue. The other issue about when you go into a community is: is it necessarily the loudest person? The women are very strong; the grandmothers are picking up a lot of the dysfunction and picking up the concerns in the communities, but we do not have a mechanism necessarily to talk to the women in communities. So we have no structured way to do it. Within our department it is a matter of relying on our regional officers, their knowledge of the people in the regions, their personal relationships with communities and their knowledge of the politics within communities. So there is a lot of work to be done there, because, no, we do not always get it right, we do not always ask the right people; and then we wonder why we get a lot of criticism about why we did that and we say, "We asked this person because we thought that was the person who was speaking for you."

I do not have an answer to that. It is a major issue. All I can say is that we rely on our departmental staff to informally know what is occurring in those regions. In my view, that is not good enough.

[11.45 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for coming in this morning. I am cutting you off really short but we have to go across to the other place. There are a lot of other questions that we would like to ask, so maybe we could have a further discussion with you. If possible, we would like to have you back in again. We will give you some breathing space, realising the pressures you are under at the moment.

Ms Tang: Would that be before 31 March?

The CHAIRMAN: It would be in May or June. This committee does not have to report until November.

Ms Tang: Maybe we should put our written submission to you before 31 March with such documents relating to communities and children. You can consider them and when we come back we can talk about the issues that you might have on our written submissions.

The CHAIRMAN: That would be great. Thank you for your evidence before the committee this morning. A transcript of the hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Would you please make these corrections and return the transcript to us within 10 days. If the transcript is not returned within that period, we will deem it to be correct.

Hearing concluded at 11.46