



LEGAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr DA Pegg MP (Chair)
Ms N Boyd MP
Mr DJ Brown MP
Mr MJ Crandon MP
Mr JM Krause MP
Mrs JA Stuckey MP

Staff present:

Ms E Booth (Acting Committee Secretary)
Mr B Nutley (Indigenous Liaison Officer)

PUBLIC HEARING—EXAMINATION OF THE WORKING WITH CHILDREN LEGISLATION (INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES) AMENDMENT BILL 2017

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2017

Doomadgee

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Committee met at 8.55 am

CHONG, Mr Tony, Councillor, Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council

CHRISTY, Mr Peter, private capacity

ESCOTT, Mr David, Community Liaison Officer, Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council

EVANS, Mr Martin, private capacity

HARRIS, Ms Deborah, Co-ordinator, North West Queensland Indigenous Catholic Social Services

HOLDEN, Ms Juanita, Governance Manager, Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council

NED, Mr Jason, Deputy Mayor, Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council

NED, Mr Vernon, private capacity

WALDEN, Mr Clarence, private capacity

CHAIR: I declare this meeting opening.

Councillor Ned: I thank everybody for coming here to Doomadgee today to give us a bit of a run down of what is in the bill. Welcome to our country: Gangalidda, Garrawa and Yunjulla people country. It is good to see you here. It is good to get a bit of help from you fellas and an understanding of where we are. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you for that welcome. I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. Thank you for meeting with us today to share your views on the blue card system. My name is Duncan Pegg. I am the member for Stretton and chair of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee. With me are Michael Crandon, member for Coomera and deputy chair; Nikki Boyd, member for Pine Rivers; Don Brown, member for Capalaba; John Krause, member for Beaudesert; and Jann Stuckey, member for Currumbin.

We are pleased you are here with us today to assist us in our examination of the Working with Children Legislation (Indigenous Communities) Amendment Bill 2017. This bill was introduced into the Queensland parliament by Mr Robbie Katter MP. It is our role to examine how the bill proposes to work. At the end of our examination we are required to write a report to Queensland parliament with a recommendation about whether the bill should become law or not. The committee has not yet made a decision about whether to recommend the bill should become law. This is why we are here. We want to hear your views and experience of the blue card system.

You would have noticed the microphones. We are recording what is said today so that your voices are on parliament's record. It becomes a permanent record. Annette is recording the meeting and a transcript will be emailed to you so that you have an opportunity to check and correct it. It will also be placed on the committee's website. Please make sure that we have your contact details by talking to Emily or by filling in the form that is available from her.

Given the sensitive issues about child safety that might be raised today, I remind everyone that comments should not identify children by name, including the child who is in the child protection or youth justice system. As I am sure you will appreciate, we want to protect the privacy of those children. Comments should also not refer to any matters before the courts.

In terms of what the bill does, it proposes a different type of blue card system for Indigenous communities taking into account their unique circumstances. We understand that some people cannot work because of the current blue card system even though in a number of cases it is considered the person poses no risk to children and that their employment would have a positive impact on the community. Under Mr Katter's bill, a community justice group would be able to make a binding Doomadgee

recommendation to the chief executive to issue a restricted positive notice to allow an individual to work with a specific community even if the blue card application would not be approved under the current system due to previous criminal offences. The community justice group could not issue this type of recommendation if any prior criminal offences were sexually based offences. It will be possible for the community justice group to issue a recommendation for a restricted positive notice for other serious offences such as certain offences involving stealing with violence, burglary and unlawful entry of a vehicle and also for some offences such as trafficking, supplying or producing dangerous drugs. A restricted positive notice issued by the chief executive would allow the holder to work only in the specific community to which the notice relates.

As you know, we have Brett Nutley here with us today, who I am sure you know. He is parliament's Indigenous liaison officer. The way we normally run this is we will give you a chance to say a few words to start off about your views on how the blue card system is working in the community and then we will open it up to questions from committee members.

Ms Holden: For the record, could I put an apology in for the mayor, who is at a funeral at Mornington Island today, and the CEO who was called over to Cairns a couple of days earlier. I have apologies for both of those.

CHAIR: Consider that recorded. Jason, would you like to kick off?

Councillor Ned: I would like to talk about the community history of our people and how the blue card came about. Our people found it pretty hard, because when this blue card first started coming out to the communities, I do not think the community people had been notified about the act and what the blue card can do to you. It is fairly hard. We have all these laws in place from Child Safety and the police. If you go out on the street and do something wrong, you go to court and you lose your blue card. If people lose their job, they have no income. The kids are battling. The people are battling. It comes to be a hard run to us here in our community. They should have come out to the community people and let them know the history, and say, 'If you do anything wrong, under the act and the law you lose everything'. People cannot survive out here if they have done a little innocent thing, go to court and automatically they lose their blue card. It is fairly hard.

Even with Child Safety meddling, Aboriginal people here are strong on our Aboriginal law and our culture. Once Child Safety and that come into the place, our parents have no rights to their children anymore. From 1989 backwards, our people would say, 'Right, get home before dark' and we went home, because we had respect. Now, ever since this law has been put in place, we cannot even say anything to our kids because they will threaten us. They will say that under Child Safety law they can get away with things and we cannot do anything to them. As soon as parents start getting up them, they will report us to the police. With just one incident, we lose our blue card. If you are working at the school or anywhere, you cannot operate without a blue card. Not only that, people are starving.

This has been a big history to us in the community. You are taking our life away. We are supposed to be unmarked people from the country, but now with all this law in place our people are getting branded every day to do something and fewer people are getting jobs, because they do not have the right any more under the act. People come and face the council all the time. We cop a pineapple from them, because they think we lay this law down, but this law does not come from us; it comes from further on. We did not know anything much about this law. We cannot explain it to them, because we did not make this law. The person who put all this policy in place about the rights and wrongs of what you can do under the blue card and how you go about it, they should be the people representing to the people on the ground. It makes it hard.

People cannot get jobs. We have the police flying around here like a mob of armies. I do not know what they are doing picking on people and booking people. They pick on people walking home on the street. Then they go to court and they have no job tomorrow, because they have lost their blue card when they went to court. It is a big pain. You have to have a blue card just to look after your own people. My own people never had a blue card to look after us. They took us out and showed us the real history of life and there was respect. Law is law, but what Child Safety put in place blew our world. It was like a bomb coming in and it took the right away from our people under this act. Kids have the habit, now. It only takes one person to light a fire and it spreads. It takes only one kid to use his brains and take his parents to court, then he goes and tells all the family and all the young kids and they do the same thing.

It is a real hard thing, the blue card. I have been on the council now for about six years. We were talking about the blue cards three or four years ago. As soon as people lose their blue card, they come whingeing to us, to the council. I say, 'Mate, we never put this law in place. You ruined your life. That is the first thing. You wrecked yourself. You can't get a job anywhere.' It is really hard. I explain it

through the government stuff. You have to try to get a job, but under the act and the law it is hard to get a job. You cannot even get finance or anything. That is how hard it is. I reckon that with all this policy that is in place now, we should look into it and be stronger about our rights. It is fairly big one. I know a lot of people who had been walking on the street and had a brawl. They were caught on the police camera, so they went to court and lost their blue card and they could not have a job at the school anymore.

CHAIR: Thanks, Jason, for giving that overview. I am sure we will flesh out some more of your views when we get to questions.

Ms Holden: From a council perspective, listening to the guys down at the men's shed, there are many jobs in this community. David is our council community liaison officer. David has been down at the men's shed. They want to be able to work in the school, they want to work with disabled children and those organisations, but they have historic SPERS fines. There are little things that are stopping them. I can see the passion and the frustration in the men at the men's shed. They just want a go. Yes, they know what has happened. I am sure all of us have done something that we should not have done in the past. However, they want to stay in their community. They want to work. They want their children to be proud of them, to say, 'That's my dad' or 'That's my uncle' or 'That's my brother' working at the school. That is what I have seen just in the six months I have been here. They cannot move forward and it is that cycle. Would you say that, Jason?

Councillor Ned: Yes.

Ms Holden: They cannot get out of that. Because they have a fine, they cannot get a blue card and so they cannot work. Their kids are seeing their dads or uncles or brothers at home, and they think, 'They're home; we don't need to do anything either'. But that is not what they want; they have no choice at the moment.

Councillor Ned: Looking at the history of the people, if someone did something 40 years ago they cannot get a blue card. When young, everybody has done something silly. When you get to 35, you realise that you should not have done that sort of stuff. They still bring up the same old history from way back, from when you were a young kid or a teenage kid of 17. You cannot get a blue card, because you have a bad history. Maybe you were drink driving. The act just clamps down on us like a shell. If you have a history, it is not worth looking for a blue card, because you know you are not going to get one.

CHAIR: We understand your point. It is one that has been made in other hearings. Before we go to questions, David, would you like to say a few words about your views on the whole blue card issue?

Mr Escott: From my first-hand experience, I was a school attendance officer when it was first introduced to communities. I was the first one there. I was there for a year and a half. Before that, I was working at the shop for three months. I went up to the school and started at the school. I was there from 2014, when it came in, to the middle of 2015. From what I have seen over there, I have seen principals come in and they want people from the community to come in and work there, but everybody is scared to go and work there and help with their kids. I was working there and I was seeing kids getting out of hand and they wanted to do this and that. They said, 'We'll go to the community and ask the community if they want to come up here and work'. When they went up to work, they said, 'Do you have a blue card?' The moment they said 'blue card', everybody just went away.

During the time I was there, I had kids coming up to me and calling me mister and sir. That is kids from my own community. I was working with teachers and teacher aides over there. I heard the kids calling them that and when they started calling me that I felt good inside about myself. I felt happy. My own family were calling me mister and sir. When it came to the blue card, I could not get my blue card because of various things. That made me feel unhappy and sad. I did something stupid, I got on the grog and then ended back in the gaol again. I came back out and went back to the school and they said, 'We really want you to come back in here'. I said, 'I can't come back in, because I cannot get a blue card'. So they put me on two years good behaviour. It is like I was facing the judge again and the judge was telling me, 'You got to have two years good behaviour before you can get a blue card or apply for a blue card'. That is the sort of thing that really turns us off.

We had a member from the community over there teaching, bringing back language in the school. He did one small and minor thing. He had an argument with someone and they said, 'We got to shut down your blue card'. He felt so hurt. I used to help him doing that. I used to help him at home, because I could not go over to the school anymore. When I got this job, being community engagement officer, I have to go around and help. When I used to work at the school, I used to organise things over there for the kids. I got things happening like sports or if there was a fete coming up or something

coming up for the Christmas break. I used to help out with that. After a while, he just felt so hurt. He felt like doing something. He would ring me up and I would say, 'Don't bother, but it's alright. One day something will happen and we'll get a chance to get a blue card to work in our community.' That is the sort of thing. I have seen young fellows at the men's shed and they talk about that. Even today they were asking, 'What's going to happen with the blue card?' They have heard about it. Everybody has heard about it. The whole community has heard about it. Are we going to get a right to work in our community with our kids?

At the end of the day, our kids have to come home to us and who looks after them? We do. They have the school holidays. We have to take our kids out and teach them. We have to take them out bush. We have to teach them and show them how to survive, not only out in the bush but here in the community and outside. We are the ones who will be there to help them along, bring them up the way we want to bring them up, but Child Safety is coming in and breaking everything down for us. You are telling us that we are not capable of looking after our own kids; that we have to have a blue card to look after our own kids.

A nephew came up to me and said, 'Uncle, I got my kids at the safe house. Can you look after them for me?' I said, 'Boy, I can't get them because I am not entitled to get a blue card'. He said, 'But they're your grandchildren'. I said, 'Sorry, I can't help you, boy'. It is that sort of thing. It breaks our heart to see and hear that sort of thing. You have new laws coming in every year. No matter what time of year, you have new laws. New laws about things like how we are going to look after and treat our kids, how we are going to grow our kids up. We should not have those sorts of laws.

CHAIR: Thanks, David, for giving us those initial remarks. We will move on to questions. I have a couple of questions that are interrelated. Firstly, how many jobs in the community actually require a blue card? In the community, how many jobs are people who cannot get blue cards excluded from? Secondly, what kind of offences or criminal histories stop people from getting blue cards? I accept there will be a range of things, but are there a lot of people with traffic offences? Roughly how many? How often does it come up? Do you want to kick off, Jason?

Councillor Ned: What turned us off is, when they get these laws in place, if someone wants to go and get a job they could have a history on a piece of paper, but we do not have a history. People are happy to go out to the school or other government organisations in our community to get a job. They sign them up and say, 'Oh, you're fine.' They send in an application and then the poor fellow gets the word back, 'You can't operate here because you haven't got a blue card.' That should come up-front. If anyone is offered a job, they should have this piece of paper of their history, of their criminal act. It is no good getting someone to do all of this paperwork and getting them happy to go and get a job and then two weeks later, or a week later, you find out that he cannot get a job because he has a criminal history.

Our people, once they get condemned once, get damaged once, they will not go back, because it never came up-front first. You give them a piece of paper of their right of that law, they read it and say, 'Well, it's not worth us going up there and putting in for a job.' The first thing we need to do is get on to these people who made this law and ask them to give a run-down of our history, of our life, and how come we cannot get a blue card to work here—to work anywhere in the community with our people, with our kids and that. It is a fairly hard one. A lot of young people have said to me that they want to get a job for the council, or for the youth hub.

Ms Holden: Yes, the youth hub. I was just going to say that.

Councillor Ned: They go, 'I might get a job tomorrow.' They put in for work at the youth hub at the council. He might have been blueing out there—fighting with another young fellow—and because he went to the magistrates box he is not the same kid he was. He has become a criminal. That criminal act damages him from getting a job. Our people are not bludgers. They want to work, but what is making them bludgers is law and order policy.

Ms Holden: Just following on from that youth hub, the council has been calling for those jobs on and off for at least six months. It is funded under the Prime Minister and Cabinet, so there are very strict guidelines that the council follows. We want local people, but because they are going to be working with the youth, they cannot. It is 12 to 20 something.

Councillor Ned: 25.

Ms Holden: There is a range in that bracket. There is a need to have local people—a male and a female—down there for our youth. It has been identified that the youth need guidance in the community. From what I understand—this is going off the blue card—a lot of workers who are outside do not have licences because of SPER fines. That is what I am hearing—they cannot get blue cards because of fines. I do not know what a lot of the history is. I am still trying to get them over here.

The school is continually calling for attendance officers. They definitely need a blue card for there. There is Save the Children administration staff, youth workers, support. That is why I keep saying, 'There are so many jobs here.' I have been here for only six months, but I have seen the flyers coming through. A lot of it is to work with youth, but people just do not have the card because of their history, whether it is traffic offences, or whatever the offences are. I can vouch from what I have seen that these are issues that they have accepted—'Yes, we did the wrong thing. We're trying to move forward,' but they cannot. From what I have listened to they are not saying, 'Yes, I've committed an offence. So what?' They know they have done it. They have done their time, or they have done their service. They want to move forward now because, like Jason said, they were young, they got into a little bit of trouble, and now they have moved on. They are stepping up, because they have kids themselves now and they want to show these kids, 'Yes, I've stuffed up before, but I've grown up. Let's move forward.' They want their family, they want their kids, to be proud of them.

Councillor Ned: That is what I said earlier, because we are all fully related in the community here and our young people get together, they operate out of there all the time 24/7. It only takes one young fellow to go up there and he gets kicked in the butt, saying that he cannot get a job because he was blueing on the street. He has no right to get a blue card. He goes back down and tells all his friends. His friends are probably on the same road as him, too. They have probably been blueing. They say, 'What can we do? We cannot go to work, because we have to have a blue card to operate in our community and work.'

Our people want to come and do things, but with this blue card, it is fairly hard on everyone. There should be something in place. If a young fellow comes here we are not going to say, 'No, go home, boy, you're a criminal.' Council could come and say, 'Right, boy'—or 'girl'—'We'll help you. We need to ring the police and find your history and we'll try to help you get a blue card.' If we ring the police and the court gives us the history of this young person, it might be a way for us to operate with him to work around this stuff. Because he has done one issue, he has ruined his whole career of getting a job because of that one issue.

CHAIR: Thanks Jason, David, did you have anything that you wanted to say in relation to those questions?

Mr Escott: There are a few things that I want to say. That is all our old people standing there, our elders in the community. People are not letting us live in the same age group, because of too much drinking, or drugs, or something. I had a couple of girls come up to me and ask me how they can get a job down there. I say, 'Why don't you just go and apply for a job?', which they did. Our elders have seen us grow up. Some of our old people have seen us grow up from little kids, from babies. One old lady, she was the chair lady, and she is still down there today and she has seen us grow up. She made sure that we all went to school and got educated. These two girls, when they applied for a job they said, 'Do you have a blue card?' A blue card to look after one of the elders! If you had a grandmother, or a grandfather, you would do anything you could to help them. It were not for them, you would not be here today.

We really need that blue card to work within our community to help especially our elders. Even young blokes come up to us say, 'Can I go to the school? Can I go and ask for a job here?' It might be for Save the Children. 'Do you reckon they'll give me a job?' I say, 'You've actually got to go and apply for it.' 'What about the blue card?' That is the first thing that comes to mind. When everybody goes to apply for a job, the blue card is going to come up. You do not have to read it on a piece of paper.

They go in and ask the police to check their criminal history and all of that. I had problems myself applying for a blue card. I had to go through all of this paperwork. I had to write letters. It must have been have 15 or 16 pages. I wrote to the blue card commissioner in order to get a blue card to work in the school. I still got knocked back for it after doing all that work.

Ms Holden: These are some of our workers from My Pathway. We have Vernon Ned. He was previously a councillor. These are the fellows on the ground. I think that Vernon would be able to speak for what the issues are as to why people cannot get blue cards and what is making it hard.

CHAIR: We will give you a chance to settle in. If you like, we could move on to others. If you want to start speaking now, it is up to you.

Mr Ned: I have been trying to get a blue card for a very long time to help a lot of kids out in the community. They are doing a lot of petrol sniffing and with paint thinners. I have always been chasing these kids around and telling them, 'If you're having any problems at home, come and let me know and I'll help you out.' A lot of these kids now, they have kids of their own. They have just forgotten about sniffing petrol, paint, and everything, because they now have someone to care for. I am trying to get a blue card but I have a bit of a history with domestic violence.

I have just been to a conference in Brisbane—about a month ago now. That is what I have been talking about. Whatever happened in the past should stay in the past. You cannot keep dragging us backwards. We are trying to move forward. They look at our history and, 'Oh, he's been a bad boy all of these years ago. Why should we give him a blue card?' It is sad, because everyone is trying to move forward, yet they are always dragging us backwards. It is a bit sad, because a lot of people are trying to make changes in their life. They cannot when they are being taken backwards.

They talk about closing the gap. When they speak about closing the gap, we are supposed to be working together. How are we supposed to be closing the gap when they are making it go back out again? It is sad. I do not know. It is just terrible. Every job that is available in this community is all blue card related. Nobody has a blue card to work. If they look for work they say, 'No, he's been a bad boy. We can't afford to have him on board.'

CHAIR: Thanks, Vernon.

Councillor Ned: Can I say one more thing? You know the history. Just like us, putting in an application for work, the people who put this law in place probably never thought of what we are going to run into, how much damage this law is going to do to our communities, or whatever. Someone finally has gone to work to earn a living to support his family. My main issue is that, if we put something in place, we want to make sure that it operates and does not destroy anybody's life. People are going to be operating, at work, and helping each other. Because of this being put in place, people in the real world never think straight and say, 'Right, we're still going to have a fight and we're still going to have a blue card.'

I do not see the history of this rule. This law, if it is coming for my people, it should be qualified to say, 'Right, we need to send this issue out to the people who we are going to work with and who we are putting the pressure on about this blue card that they need to be notified and have a proper understanding of what it can do to their career.' They just threw this on the table.

I will put Child Safety into it. All of our problems now in our communities—no matter where—is because Child Safety is blowing us up. We do not have a legal right for our people anymore. It has gone through this child safety act. Child Safety does not care. All of our young people are going haywire because they are working off Child Safety power, not Aboriginal power—like respect in the old days, where we could not do things like this. Now, they are getting the right from Crown law and they can go and do what they want to do.

If a kid breaks in here tonight, the police say that it is their parents' responsibility. No way in the world. You know whose responsibility it is for those kids? It is Child Safety because Child Safety put this act in place, and the children and parents are frightened of that act because they will go to jail. If a father who is working and who is trying to correct his kid goes to court, he will lose his job at court. Where are the rest of the tiny fellas going to sit? They get no income, but because all of these policies that have been put in place they are working the wrong way around us.

CHAIR: Thanks, Jason, for making that point.

Mr CRANDON: Unlike the last couple of hearings we have had, this is more of an open forum where you are talking to us and telling us stories. You are answering many of our questions. Thanks for coming along. I really do appreciate it. The message that I have been getting is that the big issue is that minor crimes—the minor issues on people's records—are holding them back. Again, you have been talking about that. You have not spoken about serious crimes such as drug dealing and alcohol abuse. What about those sorts of crimes? Do you say, 'If they go that far, it is too far and they cannot have a blue card,' but that is not the case for minor crimes such as having a blue in the street or a disagreement or whatever? Where do you draw the line in the sand in relation to the severity of the crime—minor crimes versus more serious crimes—or do you just give everybody a break?

Councillor Ned: We do not really know the crime until they go to court and what act covers their crime. We do not know. It is not our job to say, 'You are selling drugs or you are selling alcohol, you have been charged through the courts and you cannot get a blue card now because you are selling that sort of stuff.' We do not know that.

Mr CRANDON: It sounds to me like you are saying it is the result of relatively minor criminal activities. They are getting into fights. There is minor stuff going on in their life and they have made a mistake. You want them to get back on track but they cannot get a blue card because of these minor things versus serious crimes. For example, if someone in your community were found guilty of selling drugs in your community, would you accept them as someone who could have a blue card? Would that be okay?

Councillor Ned: It is not the people living in our community who do this sort of stuff. It is people who come from outside and bring bad things to our people in our community. Under this blue card act they should have a list there saying, 'You can't get a blue card because you killed someone,' or 'You can't get a blue card because you were drink-driving.' We do not know anything about that, mate. The policy of the blue card is from the top to the bottom. We do not know the breakdown. That is what you want to find out.

Mr CRANDON: The severity of the problem.

Councillor Ned: My boy who is working goes to court next month because he punched someone in the mouth. The poor fella will lose his blue card. Or someone punched him and he punched him back, and because he is holding a blue card, he is standing up for his rights, he still loses the right of his blue card.

Mr CRANDON: Which means he loses his job.

Councillor Ned: He loses his job.

Mr CRANDON: David, did you want to say something?

Mr Escott: Nowadays we have kids from 13 years up going and buying drugs. If I see someone who has a blue card selling drugs to a minor—we have given him an opportunity to hold a blue card to go to work somewhere such as a school or wherever—I will tell him, 'No, you don't hold a blue card anymore. You shouldn't be doing that. We gave you the right to have a blue card in order for you to go to work for your money instead of selling drugs to a minor.' I would not want that. I would tell him, 'You do not hold a blue card anymore. We gave you that chance.' I would get pissed off with it.

Like I was saying, we see a lot of kids in our community who grow up and get into bad things because they have not got that opportunity—they have the opportunity to apply for a job but then it comes back to that whole blue card business. That thing should have been stopped a long time ago. You probably would not have drug dealers in the place. You might have alcoholics in the place. I am not going to say that everybody does not like a beer every now and then. I am sure everybody around the table here will have a beer. At the end of the day if it is a hot day I am sure you are going to have a can of beer. That is not going to stop. If it is a minor thing—if he goes to court because he got caught drink-driving—that is not going to stop him. A couple of weeks later he will probably get caught again for drink-driving. You are not going to take the blue card from him; you are better off just letting him have the blue card. If it is a serious thing, if he is trying to run somebody over, then you can shut him down and say, 'No blue card for you anymore.'

CHAIR: I know that some people have joined us part way through. We might take a couple more questions and then those who have just joined us might want to come up and give us your views. This has turned into more of a forum than a traditional hearing. I will give some of our newer arrivals a chance to settle in and then we will give everyone a chance to have their say.

Ms BOYD: My first lot of questions relate to the community justice group. How many members does your community justice group have?

Ms Harris: We have 13.

Ms BOYD: When the community justice group meets, what kinds of attendance rates do you typically get?

Ms Harris: As in just our members meeting?

Ms BOYD: Yes.

Ms Harris: Normally we gather up to six or seven, and the majority of the time I get to speak to the others because some of them are pretty old so I normally visit them at their homes and discuss what we need to discuss.

Ms BOYD: The bill specifically states that for the community justice group to make a decision on blue cards you need a majority vote. I understand that community justice groups are volunteers with a lot of elders comprising the membership. Do you think that you would be able to get people together in a room, review these matters, make decisions and vote based on majority membership?

Ms Harris: Most certainly. I just started in January and we have had so many deaths in our community and it has been hard. Everyone is grieving and trying to come to terms with their issues, but I can see now that we are slowly picking up. We will no doubt be able to make a really good judgement when it comes to us making decisions on who can and who cannot have the blue card.

Ms BOYD: The framework allows blue cards to be issued to people who may have a number of offences. They include under the Criminal Code section 409, 419 and 427 which relate to stealing with violence, offences of burglary and offences of unlawful entry of a vehicle. Under the Drugs Misuse Act

it is sections 5, 6, 8 and 9D which relate to trafficking of dangerous drugs, supplying dangerous drugs, producing dangerous drugs and trafficking in relevant substances or things. Would you be happy for people who have committed those offences to be issued a blue card?

Ms Harris: No, most definitely not. You would have to bring other members in—maybe even councillors and other people—to speak about that because some of those issues are pretty serious. But then that is just my decision. It is up to councillors and Councillor Ned to make a comment on that.

Councillor Ned: Our young people and older people go to court here every month and this sort of issue comes into court every court day. We have a barrister out there fighting for our people. When the barrister goes to see the judge he should represent our people in terms of the act, the law and the blue card policy. I have not been to court for a long time now with people to support them. If someone who is working and who has six kids has to go to court because he has done a little thing, he will lose his blue card. He should have a solicitor there supporting him and letting the judge know where he stands. He should be showing concern and helping his younger people in the community, keeping them in school and all that sort of stuff, helping with clothes and food. That is where it falls down.

We do not get any feedback from what happens in court when our young people go there. You should tell the solicitor, 'Look, mate, I am going down here because I have been caught with spirits on the street down here and it is not allowed in our community.' The solicitor said, 'Right, old mate, do you have a blue card with you?' If he says, 'Yes, I have a blue card and I need support from you today for me to hold my blue card over a little incident,' that is our biggest issue here. People who go to the courthouse do not get any support. They do not recognise any government act or law. They just have to face the magistrate and, bang, there goes his blue card and the poor fellow down the street is walking silly with the young people because he lost his blue card. It blew him up. The law blew him up because he cannot work anymore. It took his right off him through his blue card.

If we are going to set something up, we need to be professional and make sure that things are in place for our movement. We cannot go to court all the time and have our blue cards taken off us and get a criminal history. That buggers us up for life, mate. Once we go down that road, people think we shouldn't be here anymore. What is the good of us? I would rather hang myself because I am not here to help my people anymore because I come under this criminal act and then I lost my luck. All my good has gone off me. I cannot work. I got my licence taken off me.

We have a big problem here. All these things are going round and round in a circle. It is not going to go straight until we sort something out and make sure that we have a proper policy where if you are in danger you cannot get a blue card to work with kids or work with old people. A lot of our people who are in danger are not here because they go straight to Stewart Creek. Half of our population is in Stewart Creek because of little minor things under the history of our act.

Mr Escott: Nikki was talking about serious offences. We have the justice group. Aunty Deb from the group is here. I am a member of the justice group too. I am always down at the men's shed. There are minor things happening. There was one boy who was fighting on the street. He went to court and did six months. After he came out he tried to get a job, but they could not give him a job because he was fighting on the street. That is a public nuisance offence. He cannot get a job because he cannot get a blue card. Everybody fights—you do not have to be drunk to fight; you can be clean sober. I am sure everyone in this room has had a fight with someone—not a physical fight but probably verbally abused someone or something like that.

When it comes to minor things, they could come into us and we could say, 'We will give you a chance and give you a go. We will see how you go. If you can stay out of trouble for a while then you will keep your blue card and you will be able to work somewhere.' When it comes to really serious offences they are the people we really need to have a look at. We need to look at those people, including me. If I were to walk in and ask for a blue card they would need to have a good look at me too.

If they were serious they would have to look at me for a while and leave me for a while and say, 'We will give you a chance to redeem yourself and if you do good, come back in later on and we will see what we can do about getting you a blue card to be able to work in the community. We will give you that chance.'

There are a lot of young people around here who do not get that chance and do not get the opportunity to work within their own community. It is hard for them. I am hearing it outside. We have families outside of this place saying the same. If I am in Kowanyama for a funeral people will come to me and say, 'I am trying to get a job here but I cannot get a job because I have no blue card. They caught me bringing grog in or they have seen me walking around drunk on the street and being a public nuisance.' They cannot get a blue card to work there.

Ms Harris: In terms of blue cards, I think there was not enough negotiation or information about it. That is how I am feeling. I have only been in the job since January. There are people who have their little public nuisance issues and whatnot. As the justice group it is not as though we are going to go out and say, 'Because you are my friend or my mate, you can have a blue card.' We have to look at this in the appropriate manner for the simple reason that we have to move forward. If we are going to do something silly or make harsh decisions or even negative decisions we are never going to get anywhere.

I really believe it should just come back to the members and councillors too. They need to be a bit more involved so we can all sit down at the table and discuss things. If someone wants to keep reoffending then there is nothing we can do. We cannot help them. When it comes to minor offences, we need to give them a chance. If they want to keep reoffending it is not like we did not give them a go.

CHAIR: Jann and John have questions so we will get them to ask their questions. We will then let the new arrivals have a chance to have their say. Do you want to table some documents?

Councillor Ned: Yes, from the councillors.

CHAIR: I will have a quick look at them. Vernon, this relates to you, does it not?

Mr Ned: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you happy to have this tabled because it means it is a public record? Do you understand that? It relates to you personally.

Mr Ned: Yes.

CHAIR: Leave is granted for the tabling. Do you want to speak to the document?

Mr Ned: Yes. I have been doing a lot at the school. You have to have a police check. Even when I was a councillor I tried to get this all overturned. There is a lot that they sent out to me. I would like to show Robbie and he can talk to you about it.

CHAIR: We will give Robbie a chance. We will give Jann a chance to ask a question and then John and then we will give everybody who has not had a chance to make an opening statement a chance to have a say.

Mrs STUCKEY: It is very special to be out here to meet with you. I thank you for coming along. I acknowledge Robbie Katter. We would not be here if it were not for the bill that he was brought forward. I think we need to understand though that the bill is all about the safety of children being paramount. We have to consider that. The bill is also about giving consideration to a lot of things that you have been talking about.

Mr Ned, you were talking about being able to work with young people who have been denied a blue card and being able to help them to qualify. I think we were hearing a bit of that from Deb as well. In a couple of the other communities when we talked about this two-tiered system that is coming in we talked about the justice groups, that do have a large role in this bill, being able to monitor or supervise—almost like probation. We have heard Mr Escott talk about that too.

How do you see that working or do you think it would work? Accepting that those very serious cases, like Deb agreed, or very serious offences or repeat offenders would not be included, for these regular offences that we are hearing about that are really holding people back, how do you see that sort of system working? Would you think the community would engage?

Councillor Ned: So many police come around to you. That is a big issue. What they give you first is the issue. These guys want to talk to the bottom—you are a dead man. That is our main problem. We have not got a breakdown in between that.

Mrs STUCKEY: In this bill it is allowing for some of those lower level offences to be reconsidered by the justice group and the community. Some communities have said that they feel that would be too discriminatory and it would victimise people—that is, saying to people, 'If we let you have your blue card will you go on a clean path?' Other communities say that they think that would be a very important thing because people can feel proud and have something to work towards and know that that is what it means. The blue card does have criteria around it. It has to have criteria around it. It is about the safety of children.

Mr Ned: Out here the biggest breakdown we notice in the community is that if they gave us a blue card and gave us a chance we could show that we are trying to look after our children, but how can we look after our children when you keep turning us down. We cannot go forward when you are pulling us back. It is like roping at a rodeo.

Mrs STUCKEY: I would like to be able to do that.

Mr Ned: You rope a calf and drag him back. You have to scruff him down. That is the way we are being treated. We cannot move forward when you are looking at what happened 20 years ago. They go that far back and deny us a blue card. We cannot help our children in the community because they see us working with kids without a blue card. It is putting us down big time.

Mrs STUCKEY: We are trying to find a path through and say that the really bad offences and recent offences—

Mr Ned: Like I said, some of these things happened 20 years ago or 15 years ago.

Mrs STUCKEY: It is historical.

Councillor Chong: We need to find out the basis for the rules of law. When does a criminal assault on someone mean they lose their blue card. We need to look at the offences. What serious offences result in people losing the card. A person might have been out of trouble for five years and cannot get a blue card. There needs to be something in place that if you fit the criteria you get a blue card. At the moment, it is all over the place. Police are charging people and people are losing their blue cards over common assaults.

We need to look at these charges. What charges are they? What criteria is there? If something happened with children that would probably affect your blue card. What we need to do is look at these other crimes. You may not work with children. It might be common assault or domestic violence. We need to find out how these charges affect holding a blue card. That is the problem we are having.

Councillor Ned: As I said earlier, we need to find out the history of this act. If we go to court for one thing we lose the rest. We do not know our rights with it comes to the blue card. I know we can lose pretty quickly—that is our right. We do not know how to hold onto it.

Councillor Chong: We need to look at the law part of the blue card. You do not find justice in court, you find law. We need to look at the law side of the blue card. We need to really look into that. If someone has not done anything for 20 years why can they not get a blue card now? That is decades ago. It is not acceptable. People move on and change a lot. We all change a lot. We do bad things but we move on. We need to put on the table what is affecting this so we can move forward. That is the main thing that we need to look at with the blue card.

We had one fellow doing language and now he cannot get a blue card. He needs to go to the department. We are talking about education. We are talking about a lot of things. We need to look at a solution and where he is going to fit in our community. This is a community issue as well. That is the sort of thing that I would like to see fixed. People do not know what is going on. We need to look at the law side of things.

Mr Walden: I have been at the school since 2010. We all belong to this community. I do not want to get a blue card to go to Mount Isa. I do not want to get a blue card to go anywhere else but Doomadgee because the future is over at the school. Every one of those kids that goes to Doomadgee school has a tie to all of us in this room.

We have the police, we have the justice group, we have the council here. We have everybody here. I have the biggest mob of references that I put in for a blue card in 2010. I have been a big madman going back 30-odd years. I went to the school and I lifted the school attendance rate from 60 per cent to 90 per cent—one man. Look at the statistics around what we are capable of doing for our children. We are bringing them to school and talking to families about their problems.

All these things are taken into consideration. You might say it is no good for us to have a blue card on the condition that I offended somebody 20, 30 years ago, but that is back here. I am not looking back there anymore. I am looking here, where I should have looked before I went back there. These are the things we have to understand. As we get on in life we change. A lot of people might not think we change but we do. Sometimes we might change for the better, sometimes we might change for the worse. These things that are hanging over us from 30-odd years ago are going to come back to the forefront and we are back where we started again. We do not want to do that. A lot of them kids there, I can go over to that school and tell them to stand up or sit down now and they will do it because they know that we are the people who can help them—see that fellow there, me and him. All these sorts of things you don't know about us. You only know me because I am talking now, but my history and everything, I was born in Doomadgee, I belong here. I never came here by plane, I never come here by a doctor. I come here by the good Lord who gave me birth.

We have to understand that we are here to help our future. I don't want to help nobody else's future but ours. If all them kids died tomorrow I would have to shoot myself too. People from another country, another town, need to understand what we are wanting to achieve as community members.

The past is the past. Do not keep digging that up. I went to court three times for the blue card and I still can't get it. I put one paper in a couple of months ago and I don't know what has happened. I tried it again. The legislation has to take into consideration that this community is not like the Mornington community or the Aurukun community. We have a lot of strict elders here. They will put you into line if you need to be put into line, don't you worry, but these are the things we have to look at. We have to look at how best we can get those kids educated. You might not want them educated but I do. You might not want them to stop breaking in and all that but I do. We cannot hit them to stop them. We have got other means. The culture, the language, all that needs to be taught and if we can't do it as customary law that belongs to us they are going bull headed. We got them going haywire at the moment. Tonight they might be going haywire, yesterday they might have went haywire, but the people who want to put them on the right track can't get a blue card and I am one of them.

I belong here. My ancestors brought themselves here and I come here too. I was born just down the road. This is my home. I don't know about you, but this is my home and those kids are mine. When they go to high school I am a proud man. When they go to college, university, I am a proud man. No matter who they belong to they are ours. If we cannot get them to that standard and that quality and that equality of life we are no good. We are called no good people because we can't help our people. All those few little things are hindering us from doing what we need to do for our children and our people at the same time. When I used to go and talk to mum and dad and ask mum what is your problem in the home, you haven't got a washing machine, we will go up here, there is a service provider who lives in this community who will help you get a washing machine. All those sorts of things. We have to look at how we can fill that big picture with us. I might have been the worst bloke in the world but that is all in my past. I gave up alcohol. I gave up everything to help them little fellas over there because I know I can help them.

CHAIR: John has a question and then we will give everybody who has not had a chance to have a say a chance to have a say and come in on all the issues and questions and discussions we have had.

Mr KRAUSE: To each of you, from what I have been hearing here it sounds as though blue cards are required for a whole range of jobs and things around the community. You were working at the school, I think, and you want to work at the school as well, but can you give me an example of some other jobs where there is not direct contact with children where blue cards are required? Is it every job that a blue card is required?

Mr Ned: Yes, every job. You have got to have a blue card to work in bloody aged care too and they are not kids.

Mr KRAUSE: It is meant to be a system for child protection. We have heard in other places it seems to be a requirement for heaps of jobs not just working directly with children jobs. I see that is an issue. Clarence, I do not know what your history was, but what are some of the offences that people have been in trouble with that are preventing them getting blue cards? Are they assault offences or alcohol offences?

Mr Ned: It is all to do with alcohol. I have got a whole heap of stuff sitting right in front of me here now.

Mr KRAUSE: Some examples would be helpful.

Mr Walden: Like drunk and standing up for your rights when the policeman pull you up and they don't like that and you get a fine for that and you are a no good man.

Mr Ned: It is all only light stuff, light charges. Like Clarry was saying, people change. They want to make a change but they cannot. They look back at what they put on paper from many moons ago. It is sad because when they say, 'This fella has been a naughty boy', back in 1990, 1989 whatever, they take it that far back and they just say why should we issue him a blue card. If they give us a blue card it is like a driver's licence. When you get the driver's licence you wouldn't want to get caught drunk driving because you lose your licence. You keep getting caught for drunk driving you end up losing your licence for life and then you cannot drive, you cannot cart your children around.

Councillor Ned: To give you the history of this blue card, when they put it in place they never had the right voice person from each community or wherever through parliament. They had someone talking on our behalf that don't live here and don't understand our act or about how we live and survive in our country. That is where we get blowed up all the time, where we should have our own voice person from each community go into parliament and talk up for our rights to help our people. We don't have that. That is our main problem. I see that all throughout council history that we have the wrong person talking up for our people up in this country, sundown country. We have not got anyone out of

this sundown country to represent our history of how we live and the pain we go through—a survivor. If we had someone, a voice from this country that understands and takes notice of the history and all the pain we go through, our people, this wouldn't be here because our voice person would have got up and told the minister, look, we need help, we don't want to listen to someone else talking for us that don't live here with us. We are the people with the mouth. We live in our community. We know our rights, how we survive and respect each other through the act of the Aboriginal law. They took our Aboriginal law away from us and brought Child Safety in and they blew us down. We cannot even correct our kids any more.

We should have a voice person to go to parliament from our country. We don't want people who don't live here who come from wherever representing us. They have never been to Doomadgee. We are the poor person here who have to put up with government policy and we are still fighting. We are here today arguing about the same thing. If we had someone talking for our rights in the first place when all this went through parliament everyone would have a good answer for us. People would have notified us what the rights and the wrong is. No good just flooding us with it when we haven't got someone there who understands our history. That is where the main game come from. We don't know our rights when we go to court. We don't know our blue card history. When you go to court we lose our blue card. Nothing has been put in place because we don't have the right voice person there to sort it. We get someone who don't live here. That is our biggest issue. We need someone on the ground from each community. If anything happen like this in the community or all around the world it shouldn't be dragged into it. Taking someone who don't come from this country, doesn't know anything about this place and how we live, how much support we need, where we are going to do go, we don't have that because someone else is talking for us and it is going round and round through parliament. Then everybody been sent out here and we are trying to sort it. But it is too late. It has already been put in place. If we could have had someone understandable in there in the first place we would have the act right.

CHAIR: Thank you. We will give Tony and then Clarence and Deborah a minute to answer John's question and then we will open it up to those who have not spoken yet.

Councillor Chong: One of the questions I have is when people go to court and they get recorded in the court we need to know under that crime that they have actually done how long before someone can get a blue card. Does it have to be up to five years or what? That is the question I am asking: how long does it sit in the black book? When we get recorded for doing a crime will it affect our blue card? How long do we have to wait? That minimum?

Mr KRAUSE: I don't know the answer off the top of my head, but I think it changes for different types of offences. Some of them are five years, some are 10 years, some might be longer.

Councillor Chong: That is what we need. That is the information we don't have in the community. We need that in black and white to say this is the offence and this is the length so at least we know where we stand. At the moment we don't know where we stand at all. These are the sorts of things we need to look at because at the end of the day they brought us into a community and now the social issues are coming back to the government because they have brought us into these communities. Now how are they going to fix these problems? My question is how are they going to fix these problems? It has been brought into society from government, now government has no idea how to fix these problems. They still don't know how to fix the problem. That is my question.

CHAIR: Thanks, Tony. We will take that more as a comment that you have raised. Clarence?

Mr Walden: I want to say that when the blue card came out if you had come around and sat down with the community members. I know under the legislation now the government have full control of us and our community. What the government never done is never came round and said we want to talk to this person, that person or the whole community as a whole at a public meeting or something. They just came and took what they wanted and now we are in a situation where we do or die. It makes it really hard when you want to help. I am a great help in this community. You can ask all these people here. You can ask anybody who comes here. But I can't. I worked with the mayor for nine years and we trained up to 30 people every three months, young people from the age of 18 to 25. I have worked with them. I haven't got a blue card to work with them, but I am quite capable of helping them. They might come from far and wide over Queensland, but I still helped them all. All these sorts of things.

Do not look at Clarry from the back. That is what I want people to understand. I can go back there. It would only take me two steps and I would be back there, but I am trying to go this way. It is harder going this way, because every time I want to put a foot forward people keep hitting me in the ankle, stopping me from going forward. Those are the issues. Those kids over there need us. They need us bad, because the attendance at the school right now, if you went and looked, it went down.

Who is to blame? They are blaming us down there, poor bugger me from down the back, because I am not helping the kids, but I cannot help them, because I have not got a blue card. If I kicked them up the backside, I would be in jail.

Those are the sorts of issues that we have in our community now and it is not only in Doomadgee; it is all over the countryside. This problem is all over Aboriginal communities. It is getting greater and greater and greater. If you can give us, me and that fellow there, a blue card, you might see changes, but not if you cannot give those people that. You only have to go to the school and look at how many children I brought to school this week and all that. That has to tell you something. We do not look at that sort of thing today; we look at statistics. They do not look at me and say, 'He's a good man or 'He's a bad man'. They look at my statistics. I have been good for 40-odd years now. I had my last drink 30-odd years ago. I had my last cigarette 20-odd years ago. It is all those sorts of things. I try to uphold the law, but sometimes we have to be accountable for who we are.

I do not take a backward step from anybody—a policeman or anybody. Those are the sorts of issues that we have problems with. If you stand up to the police, you are a no-good man. I cannot help it, because I was brought up that way. My ancestor told me, 'If you want an argument, you can have an argument, so long as there is nothing in between'. Those are the things that we have to look at. I could tell you a lot more about this community. At one time, you could not do a thing wrong because you would get a boot up the arse so hard that you would not never forget it. That is what happened to me. That is why I never forget. Today, what do those little kids over there need? They have the education system today. They can get educated to the highest level. We could only go to grade 9 or grade 5. It is no good. We need to help them. That is all I want to ask you.

CHAIR: Thank you. Deborah, do you want to say something?

Ms Harris: Jon, could you repeat that question, please?

Mr KRAUSE: I was commenting that it seems like every job needs a blue card, even ones that do not deal directly with children. I was after some examples of that. Also, can you give examples of offences that trigger the blue card problems, especially minor ones that might not relate to children at all? It seems as though everyone is caught, every offence is a trigger and every job needs a blue card. Does a council truck driver need a blue card? I am after some practical examples of people who have had issues.

Councillor Ned: The way we are going, there might be.

Mr KRAUSE: So it is not at the moment?

Ms Harris: It is not under the local government legislation for outside workers, but it would depend. If it was for a youth worker, definitely. As Jason said, going forward, you just do not know what they are going to change in the Local Government Act.

Mr KRAUSE: That is what I was getting at: is it that the blue card has become just another document that is required for a whole lot of jobs? I am not saying that is the case, but if anyone wants to say that, it would be good to hear the examples. That is where I came from.

Ms Harris: I have a guy working with me. He does not work with youth, but somewhere along the line, according to my bosses, he needed a blue card. I said, 'No, it's not necessary. He doesn't need a blue card for the simple reason that he does not work with people under 18'. However, they still insisted on him having a blue card. We have actually applied for a blue card, but it has never arrived. We applied for that in April and we have never received that blue card.

One of my major issues is that a lot of people are given employment—and this is the sad part—and then after they have applied for the job, someone discovers that they have an offence that happened five or 10 years ago, so they have to leave that employment. That is the heartbreaking part, because you see a lot of families that feel as if they are moving forward, but all of a sudden—and in the little time that I have been here I have seen the heartbreak that some of those elderly men have had, especially ones who have been working at the school. I know for a fact that they have been doing well. I think it needs a whole new review. I am not telling you how to do your job, but I think we all really need to sit down. As Jason said, we definitely need a representative. It is an issue we need to work out and see exactly what happens. As you would appreciate, Doomadgee is a very isolated community.

CHAIR: We will take a short break. We will then open up to some of the people who have not had a chance to have a say, if they want to. They do not have to. I recognise that some people are here just to observe and listen, which is quite valid. If you have not had a say and you would like to, please let me know. We will start with Robbie and give anyone else who has not had a say a chance to have that say.

Proceedings suspended from 10.19 am 10.21 am

CHAIR: We might bring Robbie in at this point. Obviously, Robbie, it is your bill but for today's purposes you are more wearing your hat as the local member here.

Mr KATTER: I did not plan to say anything today, but there are probably a couple of points that are important. Everything that has been said here today is valid and has been a motivation for the bill. It was all triggered by Clarry's incident years ago. He was pretty emotional at the time. Clarry had stepped up to the mark and everyone around town thought he was doing a great job. As he said, the attendance rates had lifted at school. After appeal and appeal and appeal he still lost the job. Then the people in Mount Isa education were saying, 'Can you please change something about the system? We keep finding good people for these jobs in the community and we want the community to manage themselves, not send someone else in, but they keep failing on the blue card.' That is really what triggered it all, whenever that incident was. The more we dug, the more we found. It is the same with Vernon and comes back to what the deputy mayor, Tony and Jason kept saying to me that this is what we need.

A couple of responses I get in talking to the blue card office—I forget what it is called—is that it is a matter of being on the front foot and making sure that before they apply for a job everyone has done their work. I would love people to respond to that today because that is just not practical as a response. Anyone who works in the services here would say that is not a practical solution, but I would be happy to hear from people as to what is. I do not think that is a solution. A critical point that I think has not been touched on here is the timing. Clarry may get it after a year, but if you told me I could have a job but because of these past indiscretions some 10 years ago, I cannot take it, I am going to drop my head and tell you to bugger off and I will go and do something else. It is no use trying to get me back six or 12 months later when it has all cleared up, and that is if I keep pursuing it with all the paperwork.

I gave evidence at one of the hearings. The bloke who was asking me questions said, 'Do you realise Clarry did not do all these things?' He was supposed to have seen a psychologist or something every three months. I thought, 'Blooming hell, I would struggle.' People go bush here, and you might get a psychologist fly in every few months if you are lucky. Even trying to arrange hospital appointments here is hard. If that is applied to everyone here, there is no wonder it is so difficult. The bar is way too high.

One last point that I think is really valid—and it only occurred to me in the last couple of weeks—is that most of these communities do not have more than 2,000 people and everyone here knows everyone. Jason knows if there is someone dodgy in town who should not have a blue card. He will not cop someone getting a blue card if his kids are at school. They are very small communities where these people would know where the risks are more than any one of us or anyone else with a score card of historical crime. This still gives them a criminal record but lets them say—I think it is still a safer system. If Deborah is sitting with the justice group and someone tapped her on the shoulder and said, 'Don't dare give it to this fellow because he's as dodgy as anything'—he might not have a criminal history, but the current system does not allow for that. This could be safer because the local community could say, 'We don't want that fellow with a blue card because we don't trust him,' even though he has no criminal history. I would argue this is an even safer system. At least there would be some local input as to who gets through the gate and who does not. The criminal history is still all there and right up-front, and those not negotiables are still there. I think that the size of the town is an important point because most of these communities are not over 2,000 people. When you have a town that small, everyone knows everyone and everyone knows their history.

CHAIR: In terms of the format going forward, we will give anyone the opportunity who has not had a chance to have their say. Then we will give the opportunity for anyone to make some closing remarks probably of no more than a minute. Afterwards, we do have some lovely morning tea and we are hoping you will join us. You will have a chance to actually informally speak to committee members and raise any issues as well.

Mr Peter: I had a job previously, about four months ago. They tracked me down as they know that I have a criminal record, so I lost my job. My kids go to school over here and they do not want to go to school anymore because I do not work over there anymore because of the blue card.

CHAIR: You have been directly affected yourself?

Mr Peter: Yes.

Mr KRAUSE: Can I ask what the offence was?

Mr Peter: DVO, but it is not related to kids.

Mr KRAUSE: Your job was at the school?

Mr Peter: At the school.

Mr KRAUSE: What were you doing?

Mr Peter: It was on the behaviour management team. Whenever kids would be silly, I would take them back down to their parents and sort the problem out.

CHAIR: Do any of the people up the back want to speak? You do not have to, but you are welcome to. Everyone who has already had a say, we can keep it to a minute. We have some lovely Lamingtons here that we can all share. We will give everyone a minute to have the chance to sum up. We will start with you, Tony, and we will work from right to left, a minute to sum up.

Councillor Chong: One thing I would like to really see is committee members and elders having input into the blue card. If any bank type of thing comes into the community, we sign to say, 'This is so-and-so.' We need some sort of thing where the community plays a role in getting the blue cards. If this person had an incident five years ago, the community members and the elders could say, 'No, this fellow has done well, he's been doing well,' so it would give a bit of promotion that he had done well. It is sort of an input into the blue card so that if someone comes from the community that we know—and we know everyone. I would like to see us having more input into that—some sort of thing with the elders, the community and council—so that person can move on with their life. Just where that breakdown is as well—if you would look at that situation as well.

Mr Escott: Like they were saying, if we do give it back to the community and let the elders decide whether to issue a blue card to someone if they have not done anything serious, if we give it back to the people instead of someone else—for instance, if I was to walk up to a lady, and ask, 'What kind of man do you think I am? Do you think I am a good bloke?'—you have only just met me today. You could write something on a piece of paper and hand it to the police and the police will come over and say, 'You're a bad man,' but if I was to walk up to someone here and they come from my community, they would say, 'No, he's a good bloke. He's all right. He's doing good for himself. He got off the grog. He came off the drugs. He is trying to fix his life up again in order to help his little family. He has got a family there now.' It would be good to give it back like that. You have the justice group, you have elders in the community who know me. My mate here has seen me grow up. I lived next door to him for a while.

Councillor Ned: The policy of the blue card is five years too long. The only job out in the community is under the blue card policy. If someone wants a job he cannot wait for five years to clear his blue card. Parents have kids to look after, people to feed down there. Waiting to clear their blue card for five years—I reckon that is a bit too long. A man would be dead waiting for his blue card. We need to act smart and work on this thing in an urgent way. A lot of people down here cannot get a job because all our workforce here is all blue card related. That is a bigger problem.

Mr CRANDON: Christy, coming back to you for a second. Just for the record, how long ago was the domestic violence order? How long ago was that? Was it three months ago? How long ago was it?

Mr Peter: Two years ago I think.

Mr CRANDON: Do you have a job now? You have not found another job?

Mr Peter: No, I do not have a job because I lost my job at the school.

Mr CRANDON: You lost your job as a result of going through the process? Clarence, when was your last incident? You were talking about 40 years ago, 30 years ago, 20 years ago. How long ago was yours?

Mr Walden: In '87 they went back to.

Mr CRANDON: Your last incident was in 1987? There has been no record since?

Mr Walden: They dug up my record from that far back. We have to understand, like I keep saying, that kid over there, they belong to us—the lot of us in the room. If any of us cannot help them, we are not worth feeding. They are going down the gurgler instead of up the chain because of all these things. What is the legislation going to do? I reckon they should bring it to the council. They are our representatives. They can talk on our behalf. We have justice here. We have Save the Children here. We have them all here. I have letters from all of those people saying what sort of a person I was and how good I am with the kids.

Mr CRANDON: And you still did not get it?

Mr Walden: I still cannot get it. I put a paper in a couple of months ago—about February—here. I have a lot to say about a blue card, because it hurts me to know that I cannot have my future.

Mr CRANDON: You have certainly been the most passionate, followed closely by Jason. Vernon, how long ago has it been for you?

Mr Ned: Ten years ago.

Mr CRANDON: Ten years ago. I just wanted to get that on the record as time lines. Thank you.

CHAIR: To finish off, Deb, would you like to make some concluding remarks? Vernon and Jason, we will let you finish, if you like. Would you be happy with that? Do you have anything further that you would like to add?

Ms Harris: No, I do not. I would really like to see it being reviewed and would really like to see the community councillors get more involved in it. Like was said earlier, we believe that someone spoke on our behalf. I honestly believe that it needs to be spoken from this community, because it is the most affected community. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thanks, Deb.

Councillor Ned: I would like to thank Rob Katter for coming along today and bringing all of this together. Me, Rob and Vernon have been working on this blue card for a very long time. A couple of years ago, we had this major problem with the people in our community who could not get a job. They were always coming to the council and complaining that they could not get a job anywhere because of this blue card. We talked to Robbie and he worked hard to where we are today. We have faces at the table here and the councillors where we are putting a strong thing together. We are hoping to get a bit of a change, if we can—if we are lucky—to get our people back to work again to support their families.

Like Uncle Clarry said, he has seen us all grow up. He was a strong voice in the community from day one. He wanted to get back and do a bit of work. The children at the school all respect him and that. They know who we are. If all of this sort of stuff could be put to the minister, hopefully, they will take note where our trouble is. Thank you.

CHAIR: Martin, I understand that you wanted to say a few words.

Mr Evans: I am from here. I was born and bred local like some of these others here. I come from Doomadgee. I grew up here. I have lived here. With the blue card, I cannot understand the school over here. I worked at the school. I worked over there before this principal came to Doomadgee. I worked there in the past when a bloke called Richard Barrie was here. I worked there. I was a school attendance officer at the Doomadgee State School. I was a bus driver at the school as well.

There are particular teachers in the school and they expect every kid who go to the school with a smile on their face. I have seen it all. They have to have a smile on their face as well and introduce the kids to the class—'Hello. Nice day. Good to see you coming to school' and stuff like that. But they look at them with a really grumpy face. I do not think that Paula McGuire, the principal over there, should be in my community, because she looks down at us like we are bloody scum, like we are some dirt. This is our community. I know that you have been sent here by the government, but you go by how we treat our kids. With the culture stuff, she cannot even let me and Kenny Gilbert in. The culture we had at the school—

Mr SPEAKER: We did mention about not identifying individuals—

Mr Evans: With the blue card, I got a letter from blue card. I was very pissed off. I was off the school. I spoke to one particular person. I said, 'Mate, this is how we do it.' Then he went to the principal and she said, 'Send him off. We don't want people like that.' I am still hurt about that, like all of these other people here. They sent us all off.

I would like to see the council and the community do the blue card decision in this community. We do it here, not the government. It is making it hard—impossible—for everybody. Not everybody in this community is a bad person. We come to terms, we get together, discuss stuff like that, sort it out and we are on the road again. With people coming in from outside and putting us down and putting our kids down, it is not on. We get hurt as well. We are here forever. This is our community. I just feel a bit hurt about how kids get treated here at the school. I have a right to be hurt. I do not care what anybody says. I have a right to be hurt about what I have seen over there. I am very hurt about a lot of things. With this blue card situation, I reckon that the community should handle it. Put it to us. Everybody has common sense here in the community.

CHAIR: To summarise that, I take it you are a strong supporter of this bill? Would that be a fair thing to say?

Mr Evans: Yes.

CHAIR: Thanks very much.

Mr CRANDON: Might I ask a quick question of Martin?

CHAIR: Sure.

Mr CRANDON: Can I just clarify, you were working at the school and you lost your job?

Mr Evans: Yes.

Mr CRANDON: Because of your history, or because of something that was reported?

Mr Evans: Something was reported.

Mr CRANDON: Not because of a criminal history?

Mr Evans: I have a criminal history. I had a bit of a criminal history.

Mr CRANDON: Is that why you lost your blue card?

Mr Evans: No.

Mr CRANDON: That is fine. How long does your history date back to? You might have heard me before when I was asking Clarence and Vernon time lines on their history. Is your history a long time ago?

Mr Evans: I go back to 1996.

Mr CRANDON: I just want to get that on the record so that we can get a feel for who cannot get blue cards, who is losing blue cards and what time lines there are. There was a complaint made against you and that is the cause of you losing your blue card?

Mr Evans: Yes, a complaint made against me. Also, there was a non-Indigenous man driving the school bus and swearing at kids—'Eff you. Sit down and behave yourself' and all of that sort of shit. I did not like that. I am not going to stand for that. I just said to him, 'You don't do that, mate.'

Mr CRANDON: Thanks very much.

CHAIR: Thanks. Vernon has another chance to have a final say. We will give you that opportunity and we will close it off.

Mr Ned: I was just about to say the same thing that Martin was talking about. We have our council here. If we want a blue card just to work within our community, they should be talking to whoever they want to talk to about our blue card and say, 'Yes.' At the end of the day, they are our representatives. They represent us in everything that they do when they go away for a council meeting and everything.

Councillor Ned: From the council's point of view, we have the people to be the voice people. That is what I am saying. They have someone else talking on our behalf for our community and they do not know our rights. This would not happen if we had someone from our community. Each community has the same problem. If we had a voice person in parliament to get up and explain the history of us, we would not be here today, because that person would have come back and given the community a bit of feedback on how we can work around it and, 'We can give you the blue card. We know you.' They do not trust us. If there were a policy put in place—maybe they get someone from each community to be involved—but they are slamming it in front of us. Then we have to live with it.

Councillor Chong: One thing that I can put as well is I went to Mount Isa and talked to the manager of the Westpac Bank about 100 points. One hundred points came to the elders and the leaders in the community. That gives community members 100 points straight up. It is a system where the elders and the leaders come in and get 100 points. It is the same thing I would like to see with the blue card—exactly the same structure of that how we got set up with the Westpac Bank. The problem that we have been having is an ID problem. You need 100 points. When I went into the bank, I had a meeting with the manager and set up a system where the community leaders and the elders are 100 points. If we get some sort of system with that with the blue card, that would work the same and we would not have a problem. That is the sort of thing that I would like to put forward.

Mrs STUCKEY: Martin was not here when everyone else was told that this was being recorded. I have just had a word with him to let him know that. Martin, did you want the names of the people whom you mentioned removed, or are you happy to leave them in? It will be a public document?

CHAIR: I really think that is a matter for the committee ultimately more than anything else.

Mrs STUCKEY: But he was not aware he was being recorded when he said that because he was not here at the beginning.

CHAIR: I need to hear that directly from him.

Mrs STUCKEY: Martin, you need to say it yourself.

Mr Evans: At the end of the day, who cares? That is the way we talk. We are part of this community. Do we have anyone from Child Safety, or what?

CHAIR: Not today.

Mr Evans: What about the police? They are supposed to be here.

CHAIR: We might close off this session. Thank you, Jason, and everyone for participating today. In terms of what happens next, we will keep examining the bill by holding a public briefing with Mr Katter and a public hearing on 25 October. That will be in Brisbane, but it will be streamed live over the internet and there will also be a transcript published on our web page. We will then write a report about our findings and may make recommendations, including with the bill be passed. We may use your names in the report, so please let Brett or Emily know if you would rather your name was not used.

Once we table the report in parliament, which we have to do by 14 December this year, the parliament will decide whether the bill should be made into law. If the bill is passed by the parliament, it will become law. If it does not pass, the blue card system would not change unless there was other legislation introduced to change it. You are welcome to contact Emily at any time for more information—and she is going to put her contact details up on the whiteboard there—to find out where the bill is up to.

Once again, thank you very much for having us in your community and for your involvement today. The meeting is now closed, but you are all welcome to join us for morning tea. We have some of the biggest lamingtons I have ever seen here for you to enjoy. Thanks very much.

Committee adjourned at 10.47 am