



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

MONDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2017

Yarrabah

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Committee met at 2.40 pm

CHAIR: Good afternoon, everyone. I invite Mayor Ross Andrews to say a few words.

ANDREWS, Mr Ross, Mayor, Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council

HENESS, Ms Celeste, Daycare Director, Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council

JONES, Ms Vicki, Executive manager, Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council

KYNUA-YEATMAN, Ms Lerissa, Coordinator, Yarrabah Community Justice Group

MENZIES, Ms Janelle, Chief Executive Officer, Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council

SANDS, Michael, Deputy Mayor, Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council

Mayor Andrews: Thanks, Duncan. On behalf of the Yarrabah Shire Aboriginal Council and the community of Yarrabah, I would like to welcome you to the shire. A councillor is normally a traditional owner as well for Yarrabah and the local community, but unfortunately he is not here today, so I welcome you to the shire. In terms of protocol, I believe that they have to give the welcome to country. On behalf of the shire council, I want to say welcome to the committee to discuss this very important issue. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thanks very much, Ross, for that welcome and for being here today. I start by acknowledging 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, the member for Coomera and deputy chair; Nikki Boyd, the member for Pine Rivers; Don Brown, the member for Capalaba; John Krause, the member for Beaudesert; and Jann Stuckey, the member for Currumbin.

We are very pleased you are here with us today to assist us in our examination of the Working with Children Legislation (Indigenous Communities) Amendment Bill 2017. The 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 the Queensland parliament with a recommendation about whether or not the bill should become law. The committee has not yet made a decision about whether to recommend that the bill should become law. That is why we are here. We want to hear your views and about your experience of the blue card system.

You might have noticed the microphones. We are recording what is said today, so that your words 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 we have your contact details by chatting to Emily or by filling in a 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 a child who is in the child protection or youth justice system. I am sure you will appreciate that we want to protect the privacy of those children. Also, comments should not refer to any matters before the courts.

The bill 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 that 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 recommendation to the chief executive to issue a restricted positive notice to allow an individual to work within a specific community, even if the blue card application would not be approved under the current system due to previous criminal offences. The committee justice group could not issue that type of

recommendation if any prior criminal offences were sexually based offences. It would 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.

We have Brett Nutley with us today. You have all met Brett and I am sure some of you already know him. Brett is the parliament's Indigenous liaison officer. Brett, would you like to say a few words?

Mr Nutley: I want to thank the community for coming along. I try to get community members to come along to these meetings, which are held all around the state, to have their say on any proposed legislation. We have here one of the young ladies from our first Indigenous youth leadership program, which I am involved in every year. Around 400 young people have come through since her time. It is a pleasure to see that she is working in a good job, partly as a result of those programs and also from learning how these things work. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you, Brett. We will try to keep this as informal as possible. Obviously we have some formalities. To start we might ask everyone to make a few opening comments and then I am sure the committee members will have some questions for you. Ross, would you like to start off

Mayor Andrews: I am a bit unprepared. I do not have any documentation with me. I have just spent a couple of days on holidays with my family. It is my first day back today. I think it is very important to lay the platform that the safety of kids is paramount to anything the proposed changes are recommending. Kids are first. I know there are issues around volunteering and job related issues that our people have faced for a number of years since the introduction of the blue card. I am not in a qualified position to assess whether it has been successful or unsuccessful. Where I am coming from is I think kids' safety is really paramount in terms of what those recommendations will set out to be.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ross. We might go next to Vicki.

Ms Jones: I agree with what the mayor said. At the end of the day the kids are the most important things and any changes need to take that into consideration.

CHAIR: Do you have any preliminary view on the bill?

Ms Jones: I have not read all of it. I have been off sick for the last two and a half weeks.

CHAIR: Celeste?

Ms Heness: Obviously being in child care my concern would be with the children and their safety. Even some of those criminal offences you have noted would be accepting to get a blue card are still quite alarming to me. If someone is a drug user or something, what mental capacity would they have to be around children, especially with ice being such a huge factor? People are very unstable on that. It does really concern me.

CHAIR: Janelle?

Ms Menzies: I agree with everything that has been said. We do have a very difficult situation where people in Yarrabah cannot get jobs because of the blue card restrictions, but again it is the child safety that is the most important thing.

CHAIR: Lerissa?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: I completely agree with the amendment. I encourage it. I have read through some of the explanatory memoranda. The classification of offences that are eligible for the justice group to make recommendations in relation to, I think that they are suitable. They are not really dangerous offences. It is drugs and low key violence. I work firsthand with people in the community who have experienced difficulties obtaining work or continuing to provide for their families because of their issues around a blue card and keeping it and dealing with negative notices. I have assisted a few community people in showing cause for their criminal history or criminal offences that they have been involved in. It is very real in terms of disrupting a functioning family and someone who is trying to do positive things and change their lives around. I did read the speech from Mr Katter and that was a very real situation, the example that he used and the reason behind this bill and the discussions around it. I have worked firsthand with people who have experienced problems with blue cards and maintaining a livelihood, I suppose. I completely agree with the amendment. As a justice group coordinator I think it is a really good opportunity for us to be involved. Just having that background information, from going through court and knowing exactly what the facts are in relation to the circumstances and being able to comment on that is a great opportunity for us.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Michael, I know you have just joined us. Would you like to make some opening remarks

Councillor Sands: I came in on the tail end of Celeste. I think in the real world it is true what Celeste said around day care. You cannot get a job there. If you haven't got a blue card you cannot work around where children are. What Lerissa just said about getting access to a blue card, we have a big unemployment rate. I know people did wrong in the past, we all did I suppose, even myself. I got punished for riding a horse in Yarrabah. That was breaking the law back then. A lot of people have turned their life around. How long must that charge stay on your head? Because of petty things you cannot get access to a blue card. How long does it stay? I don't know. For people to get access to a blue card to get into a permanent job, even working around a school, maybe as a yardsman or whatever around a school, they cannot access it yet they have the capability and I suppose the know-how to do the job but they just cannot get access to it. What happens to them? They just stay in the unemployment queue, then they go on to something better. For their life, that is going into drugs, going into alcohol and going back into prison. The vicious cycle just goes round and round.

CHAIR: Thank you, Michael, and thank you everyone for giving us some opening remarks. We will now move on to questions. I have a question about how widespread this issue is. People have talked about how high the unemployment is here. I know you will not have direct numbers, but I was looking to find out how widespread is the issue of people looking for work and is not being eligible for a blue card preventing them from getting gainful employment? How widespread is it? Do one or two people come up to you or is it dozens? How pervasive is it?

Councillor Sands: A truckload, put it that way. I think we are overrepresented in the law. Lerissa might talk on this too. The AMP has turned a lot of good citizens into criminals. You are only allowed one carton of beer. If they bring in an extra carton of beer they are charged over it. He might have lost a bet on the footy and be replacing that carton of beer. He might have bought one carton for himself and a carton for Joe Blow, but the bloke who bought the extra carton of beer is now on a charge for bringing an extra carton of beer into the community. It is petty things like that turning good citizens into criminals because of the AMP. I do not drink. I have a lot of mates who do drink.

CHAIR: Is that stopping people getting blue cards?

Councillor Sands: I don't know. Like I say, we are over-policed. You scratch your nose in the wrong way and they charge you over it.

CHAIR: I think we get your point. We might go from right to left. Lerissa?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: Another thing that I have recognised in relation to obtaining a blue card for employment is that the commission does not recognise the rehabilitation that they have done in relation to their offending which would be something that the justice groups are obviously able to put forward in their recommendation for a restricted blue card and have that recognised. I think that is important because they are obviously trying to work so they have obviously changed what they are doing and they probably need those things recognised. A lot of the blue card negative notices that I have had come through my office are ones in relation to domestic violence. We do have some really good domestic violence programs here that men and women have engaged in and they have received this notice saying no, because of this charge or the outcome of your court matter, we do not think you are eligible to hold a blue card, not recognising anything that they have done in relation to that offending. I think that is really important.

CHAIR: Ross, did you have anything to add on that particular topic?

Mayor Andrews: With jobs?

CHAIR: I asked how widespread it is, people not being able to get blue cards and it preventing them from getting employment.

Mayor Andrews: I can only guess. I am not sure in the council's recruitment process that there would be people missing out on jobs with not having the suitability requirements in terms of child related employment. Maybe across the community in different organisations and different government organisations as well that would be affected, in terms of the health service and the school, a few of the non-government organisations that come into the community, I am only guessing, but widespread there as well anecdotally. It sort of goes back to the mandatory requirements of having a blue card because of kids. It is paramount for the safety of our kids or any kid in general that we have to. I know that we have unemployment. We have a lot of social issues around family violence and breaches around the AMP. There is no real economy here so it is all caught up in this social dysfunction. But there are positive things that are happening as well. People are in jobs. I think we have 300 people in jobs across the community. I know, putting a volunteers hat on, we do struggle with volunteers in terms of junior Yarrabah

sports because the parents cannot get access to a blue card. It fatigues volunteers. We have a limited base. I do not really have the answers around the blue card issue because for me child safety is paramount.

CHAIR: Vicki?

Ms Jones: I can say that in the four years that I have worked here, in all the positions we have advertised the only ones that a blue card and police criminal history check are mandatory is for housing, child care, truancy—the ones that are dealing with children basically or in and out of houses. We have not had any applicants who have been knocked back because they could not obtain a blue card. Every applicant who did apply already had those in place. We actually did have one employee who was employed in housing when I first started here and he did not have a blue card, but when we looked at his circumstances and his history, we actually did a risk assessment with council and he remained in his employment. It was just a matter of adjusting his duties to suit what he could and could not do relating to going in and out of homes. Other than that we have not had a problem across that side of it.

CHAIR: What percentage of jobs require blue cards?

Ms Jones: Truancy I have three positions, the knowledge centre is two positions, the day care we have—

Ms Menzies: Currently nine.

Ms Jones: The housing is six and the swimming pool is one and then two casuals.

Ms Menzies: At the moment we run at 150 staff.

Mayor Andrews: I know that through the bill it may place some pressure on the justice group as well, but I think the justice group capacity is building to support Lerissa and make it more functional as well. We have to be careful that we do not place a lot of pressure or emphasis on the justice group, whether they qualify or unqualify an applicant, because Lerissa is one person in a job however many days a week she does. The justice group members are elders but are all volunteers as well. That has to run parallel to any support or recommendation about capacity building of the justice group taking place.

Ms Heness: From the managing director here and outside I too have had a few staff over the years here who have had smaller criminal issues and who want to bring you their blue card but obviously it has been held up. We have given a call to find out why and it is because they have had smaller alcohol charges or whatever posed against them in that three-year period that they hold their blue card. That has gone off to review committee. Obviously they have then decided that it was not that bad so with those issues around domestic violence and with smaller alcohol related offences they have still come away with their blue card. Obviously it is done on a case-by-case basis, so the more serious levels of alcohol related or domestic violence is stopping the blue card. From my experience the minor ones still have them. That has been in the last 12 months.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: Just a comment in relation to the classification of offences that do compromise a blue card. Most of them are not child related encounters. I think that has been overlooked and it is not just.

Ms Menzies: I reiterate what Vicki said, that we have 150 staff and that in three years no blue cards were rejected. We are not aware of the ones that Celeste has been talking about but obviously they have come through positive anyway. Only about 15 per cent of the staff require a blue card at this point.

Mr CRANDON: This is a pretty important and potentially very serious issue such that if it went positive, if you like, as far as the blue card is concerned with loosening the reins and something potentially goes wrong, it is very serious. There were a number of things I was picking up across the conversation, that is, that the indications are that there really has not been a restriction to employment as far as the blue card access is concerned but there is a feeling that perhaps it is holding people back as far as their employment is concerned. I also picked up on a couple of things.

Michael, you were talking about petty things like the extra carton of beer, that kind of thing. That is on the one hand but then we were talking a little while ago, Celeste mentioned, drug offences as in I am assuming crystal meth, all of those very serious types of issues as well. We are talking about on the one hand very serious stuff all the way through to very minor stuff, as you have been indicating, an extra carton of beer for goodness sake, that type of thing. In your opening statements you talked about how long do they have to keep being punished? If somebody has been through the process, it is not child related, it is an age defence in other words, and it sort of is something that happened a decade

ago. It is back in the day. Once again, I think with this individual checking perhaps it is not an issue for those older ones but once again we might have this situation where people feel as though people are missing out on the job.

Michael, you talked about not being able to get a job as a groundsman at the school. On the one hand we are talking about direct access, direct employment, looking after kids, involvement with kids, direct involvement, as opposed to secondary, if you like, working at a school. Do we have a situation where someone has missed out on a job at a school? Can we cite any specific circumstances, perhaps you could help us there, where someone has missed out on a job because of a relatively minor offence that was looked upon where you felt he or she should have been able to get that job? Do we have any specific, real examples rather than what we think might be going on?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: I am working with a gentleman in the community at the moment in relation to his blue card. His blue card has been wholly cancelled. He lost his job. He can no longer be involved with his child's football club. He was a coach and a volunteer there. The whole family had to leave the club. The kids have been relocated to boarding school so they can play for another district's local junior league club. It has been really hard for him. He feels like he is at a loss. In terms of the initial facts relating to what happened, he contested it in court but felt like it was not wholly the truth and was still convicted for an assault. It did not involve any children, but that conviction still cost him his blue card and he tried to show cause three times. He now is at a loss as to what other direction he can take in relation to his employment.

Mr CRANDON: Are there any others? I know it is a relatively small community. Are there any others other than the one mentioned?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: I had a younger person. He was a teacher's aide at the school.

Mr CRANDON: That is direct contact?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: Domestic violence, it cost him his blue card. But he has been doing programs. He has ended the relationship. He still does not have a blue card.

Mr CRANDON: How long ago time-wise for both of these? Is one very fresh and the other one—

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: In the last three months they submitted their correspondence from the commission and I have assisted them to put forth an argument.

Mr CRANDON: We might have to exclude from publication this material that you have just been outlining because it directly identifies someone; was it a serious assault?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: No. It was just a common assault.

Councillor Sands: Say the education department advertises a job. If Joe Blow was in prison five or ten years ago for an assault, they do not understand the process. Even I do not know how long that stays on their head in terms of access to a blue card for a lot of these advertisements. It is either a blue card or you are in the process of getting a blue card to apply for the job. Once they see that, they just do not want to apply.

Mr CRANDON: They do not apply?

Councillor Sands: There was no advertisement saying that you have to have a blue card or are in the process of getting access to a blue card.

Mr CRANDON: Perhaps an education—

Councillor Sands: That is right. That is what I am getting at. A lot of people should be educated on that so they know when they get access to the blue card. Whether it is two years or eight years, I do not know.

Mr CRANDON: Can you clarify something for me before we get any responses from anyone else? I was under the impression, Lerissa, that if a parent were involved in a sport with their children there is no blue card requirement?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: It is a voluntary blue card, not one for work.

Councillor Sands: They can do it as a carer.

Mr CRANDON: They can be there but cannot be involved.

Ms Jones: The only time they require a blue card is if they are in charge of or working with the other children in that team.

Mr CRANDON: Thank you for that clarification. Does anyone else want to make a comment on that?

Ms Menzies: I know of an incident where somebody was charged and went to prison for a serious sexual assault over 20 years ago. They have not been able to get a blue card ever since.

Mr CRANDON: That comes back to that issue of how long should they be punished.

Ms Heness: I think sexual assault is on a different scale to alcohol related offences.

Mr CRANDON: Even though it was 20 years ago and they have been clean as a whistle ever since?

Ms Heness: That is right.

Mr CRANDON: So he was an 18-year-old, sexual assault. I am not talking about this fellow, I just want to put it into perspective. An 18-year-old, charged with sexual assault, 38 now, still—

Ms Heness: A lot of people do not report it, either, when it comes to sexual assault. There is a lot of shame and stigma around the victim and a lot of people do not come forward and say, 'Yes, this happened to me,' because sometimes as the female they go to court and they say they should have dressed this way and maybe they should not have acted that way or maybe—

Mr CRANDON: Yes, but this bloke went to jail.

Ms Heness: Yes, but it could have occurred again and someone has not reported it.

Mr CRANDON: That was a sexual assault which my colleague has just pointed out is excluded anyway.

Ms Jones: Just to clarify what Janelle said, I know the circumstances that she was talking about and it was a sexual offence against a child; that is why it has not been removed. That is the difference.

CHAIR: Ross, did you have anything to add on that question?

Mayor Andrews: To drive the garbage contractor truck with the road gang, it probably does not affect those occupations. But if you are involved in a school, the vacation care program—I am only guessing—or other local government-related jobs, it may be secondary. I do not know if I am right or wrong, but it would not affect somebody on the road gang.

Ms Heness: Unless they were coming to the daycare team. The plumbers and electricians and anyone mowing our lawn will need to hold a blue card because they have direct access to children. If they do not have the direct access to children, they do not need one.

Mayor Andrews: There could be people within those local government jobs who have jobs without blue cards on the road gang.

Ms BOYD: I have a question around the serious offences as outlined in the proposal. This bill proposes to allow for criminal code offences under sections 409, 419 and 427 which relate to stealing with violence, burglary and unlawful entry of a vehicle, and the Drugs Misuse Act, sections 5, 6, 8 and 9D which relate to trafficking dangerous drugs, supplying dangerous drugs, producing dangerous drugs and trafficking in relevant substances or things. I want your view around whether you would be happy for people with these previous offences to work with children in your community.

Ms Jones: Personally, no. Anything drug related around the kids, definitely not.

Ms Heness: I think if they have been to rehab, the proviso would be maybe a drug test to ensure that they are staying clean and on track and are trying to improve their life. I think everyone who goes down that path deserves a second chance as long as they stick to that sort of thing and are actually clean in themselves, because being a drug user can give you quite unpredictable behaviours. If they are an active drug user, definitely not, but if they can be tested, yes.

Ms Menzies: I would probably agree that someone who is actively using heavy drugs should not be issued with a working with children's card. I think they put kids at risk.

Mayor Andrews: I agree and I disagree. Someone who has been on every drug for a while, they have a holiday on behalf of the Queen. If they are to work around children, there must be a gap of 10 or 20 years that they did not touch the stuff and are on the right track. There is no way in the world that I would trust anyone with that 10 years. I have seen what drugs do to people as I was part of the rehabilitation centre and we did some training. It is in their system for so long and all of a sudden they can crack up. I would not want them around kids anyway. That is my opinion.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: That is a really broad question. Each individual circumstance varies and we have to take a more fragmented approach on each individual. Is it directly supplying to a minor, has it been a drug-related offence that has affected a young person, or is it just personal use? It is really up to the individual circumstance in relation to that question. I do not see any problem with those particular offences. I know that there are more serious offences in that respect. As to sexual offences,

I would definitely say no to making any recommendation because we know that with these offences here listed there is appropriate rehabilitation available both here in the community and in the wider community. It is accessible. With sexual offences, studies have proven that you cannot rehabilitate a sexual offender, especially in relation to children. I think that is the most awful thing. That is my personal opinion. I do not see any problem with the offences classified here in the amendment.

Mayor Andrews: I tend to agree with Lerissa. It should be based on the individual case, because drugs and sexual-related offences equate to zero tolerance. But I have seen in some cases alcohol and drug-dependent clients being reformed after many years. But they still have to go to respite. We need to look maybe at the circumstances and the individual cases, because people are reformed after many years of support, rehabilitation and counselling in terms of alcohol and drugs. This is based on individual cases, I guess, but in terms of zero tolerance around sexual-related offences and the extreme drug behaviour, the ice epidemic in not only in our community but around the country is increasing.

Ms BOYD: How many members are in your community justice group?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: We have approximately 20 members. The majority of those are old and elderly and I do not expect them on a voluntary basis to come in and be available all the time. We do have a handful of active members, approximately five, who do attend regular meetings. It is still difficult to get members engaged because of what Ross mentioned before. We do have limited resources and there is not very much incentive for community people, especially elders who already have priorities and a lot of responsibility in the community and in their families to make that extra sacrifice and volunteer their time. When there is a need for them, they do actively participate.

Ms BOYD: The bill proposes that if a blue card application is knocked back by the mission, by the chief executive, that the community justice group have a period of time where by majority decision they apply a restricted positive notice. What would that mean for you to be able to get everyone together in a room to get a majority decision and to be that body within the community that facilitates such action?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: We would be grateful for that. I can definitely see the benefit in it and the members would also see the benefit in that. It is definitely life-changing for a lot of people in terms of getting work and staying there and being able to provide and have a livelihood. A lot of our members are family-oriented people who want the best outcomes for any of our clients in terms of court submissions. Anyone who goes to court and needs our support, we are legislated to make submissions in relation to their personal circumstances and get the best outcome. It is very similar to that. It would just be, I suppose, to the commission rather than a court. It is a different process.

Mrs STUCKEY: I have two questions. One is for everybody to make some comments on, and I would like to ask a bit more about that community justice group, too. If we all agree that the premise that safety of kids is paramount and keep that front and centre, what do people think about the possibility of a two-tiered system for a blue card? From what I hear, you are saying that it should be case-by-case, that some things are obviously more severe and that the bill does exclude sexual offences. What are the thoughts around a period of probation or, like I say, a restricted blue card or having supervision for a period of time for some people? Could we have some comments around that, and then I will ask my second question?

Ms Heness: I think it depends on what a restricted notice would look like. I do not know. I know that we have to get to the point of a restricted notice but as to how it is monitored and looked after in the community is up to the community, really. At the end of the day, everything becomes public knowledge. The community is really small, so we know what happens after a court day and you know how people are affected in their employment. Is that your question, what would it look like?

Mrs STUCKEY: No. It is just really your thoughts about exploring more along those lines. Supervision can be a very positive thing, as we have heard from Mike, too. Supervision can also be supports, not just policing something. If you are talking about a close community where everybody does know a lot of each other's business, is there a way to add that layer of support to some people who perhaps you really do not want to just tick off. There is still that hankering in there. You are talking about doing it case-by-case. Could you have two tiers?

Ms Heness: I think it would depend on the level of direct contact they have with children. In a child-care centre where you are working 50 per cent of the time as opposed to if you are a school groundsman where they work when children are in class and maybe after hours or before school and they have that level of support. Everything will have to break down to absolute individual, the job, the person and what were their offences? If you had a restricted blue card, who would have them as their mentor to ensure things go smoothly?

Ms Jones: But then you will need someone to supervise them as well. That is the other issue. You are effectively creating a whole other position to supervise someone. That does not make that person feel very nice, because they are being watched. If it is anything involving direct contact with kids—

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: We really cannot avoid it. We can monitor it while they are at work but then they finish work and there are kids all over the community all the time. There is a huge population of young children. I suppose that is really difficult to answer, but in terms of protecting children in an environment specifically for them like a school, workplace, counselling service or something like that, where there is one-on-one contact with adults who are not family or do not know them, there is definitely a need to review their criminal history and any behaviour that has affected a child or potentially could.

Mrs STUCKEY: I guess the reason I raised that was because of those cases that you did share with us earlier. I thought that if there was some step in there to be able to support that for a person who you are saying—

Ms Jones: When you are talking about rugby league and all that, that is governed by the QRL and the NRL. They have pretty strict guidelines to how that procedure operates. That is not something that the community can change, because it is governed by a totally different organisation. They have strict policies and procedures with that. It would not matter what the justice group did. They would not be able to change the QRL and the NRL's policies with relation to blue cards and working with children in that respect. Like I said, with us and one-on-one, effectively you would need someone to be a monitor and that is not very nice for that person. As Lerissa said, it is a small community. Rumours and that fly around and it would be horrible for the person to have them under constant supervision because of their past history just to get them through a blue card process.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: In relation to outside the community, this does not shed a light on that. The explanatory memorandum says that it is specific for the community, so any offences or blue card applications that are directly affected in the community. I think that narrows that down to things that have happened here and how we deal with the consequence of their actions, whether it affects their blue card or whatever else.

Mrs STUCKEY: I refer to what Nikki was talking about with the membership of your justice group and that you said a lot of them are volunteer elders who have other priorities, that it is difficult getting them all together. I combine that with what Mayor Ross said about the responsibility that is placed on that group. You have a small community and you are making some decisions that could be unpopular by rejecting some people. How do you see that working? Would it require support from the broader community, or would the community justice group as a unit just operate itself?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: How we are legislatively established is that we have members who represent each organisation and cultural grouping in the community so we have that representation of community. Sometimes, opinion is divided. Like I said, when we give submissions in court, they could be good or bad. It is not something that is new to the justice group. It has to be honest. There needs to be an honest opinion. We really expect people to get upset with what we have to say sometimes, because it is a community opinion and it usually not everyone agrees.

Mrs STUCKEY: It is very important that people have respect for the justice group. I know that I have over the years. I have met some fabulous people in those groups in different communities. Do you have a specific position within that group, or are you all equal members?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatmen: I am the coordinator and then we have our elders who usually do prison visits and things like that, but we have had a few of them pass on. We have elders and we have members as well. A lot of the members are becoming elders. There are none there as young as me.

Mr BROWN: I thank everyone for coming in today. On the positive side, getting people back into employment is what this government is all about. In terms of the bill, the community justice group can make an interim binding recommendation, which puts the person into employment. What if it goes wrong? How will the community react to the community justice group if the green light is given to someone who again is found to be trafficking dangerous drugs to children? You talked about a close-knit community. If it goes wrong, how will the community react to that green light?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatmen: I think we all deserve a second chance. If they are applying for employment, they are considered suitable for it and the only thing that is preventing them from that employment is a blue card, I think it is reasonable. If we know that they have offended continually over the years, I do not think it would be appropriate. Again, you would have to assess it on an individual basis, look at their criminal history and what they have done to rehabilitate themselves, or change their behaviour.

Mr BROWN: But there is a possibility. If the community justice group makes a binding recommendation in the interim and they work and they are again found to be trafficking dangerous drugs to children who they are working with, what is going to be the effect on the local community?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatmen: I think it is the same as releasing a prisoner from a correctional institution.

Mr BROWN: But that is removed, because you have the judiciary in those roles. You do not have the community making the decision. In this case, you have community members making the decision.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatmen: That is the community justice group's role—to give community feedback, or submissions in a courtroom, in relation to offences that have been committed in the community.

Mr BROWN: That is submission, but not decisions. In this bill, these are binding recommendations.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatmen: Yes. Everyone has the potential to reoffend and slip back into what they have been doing if it is a habit. We have not had a very high drug rate here in terms of crime that has gone through the courts. I do not know what it is like in general in the community in terms of unreported drugs statistics. Again, we will have to weigh up what has been reported and what has not. Everyone is careful about giving a child a drug. Why just the convicted ones?

Mayor Andrews: On Jann's second-tier issue, we probably need to capacity build and support the justice group. I think it is important that should, hypothetically, things go wrong, what is the criticism out in the community in terms of that particular issue? I would like to see similar to what they have in Cape York—the Family Responsibilities Commission. The justice group may have to implement a similar due diligence process through this bill if they are to assess applicants. It is pretty risky as well. How do you assess somebody, recommend that they get a blue card and a couple of months down the track they stuff up?

The government needs to support the justice group in terms of their capacity building and financial support, because Lerissa is the only person who is employed as a coordinator a couple of hours a week. From my end, we need to support the justice group. We do not want to place a lot of pressure on the elders, too. Families are related and interrelated. There will be two laws: white man law and our law. Being the elders they are, how do we prevent some really big pressure being put on elders? It may be a bit unfair as well. They have to make the call.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatmen: There will be a lot of disgruntled grandmothers on the justice group if they see their grandchildren come forward, expect them to get this restricted notice and they do not get it. There will definitely be a bit of tension there. They will definitely disagree. If they are issued with the restricted notice, there should be some support there to specifically help them in relation to their offending, or for whatever reason the negative notice got issued. For example, when we have people breach the AMP and go to court they get a significantly reduced sentence if they engage in a drug and alcohol program here in the community and then go back to court to get sentenced. I think there needs to be some kind of support there for them outside the workplace and in their own time to help support them with their offending.

Mayor Andrews: Would anyone else like to comment on that question that Don put forward? With the elder, that elder has to go back home.

Ms Jones: I think there would be a lot of backlash. We find that regularly, anyway. If someone makes a decision and it is the wrong decision, there is a backlash and it spreads through the community.

Mr BROWN: That is more my point.

Ms Jones: That is exactly. There would be.

Mr BROWN: It is not if it is going to happen—

Ms Jones: It would happen.

Mr BROWN: If it did happen, what is the effect on the community?

Ms Jones: There would be a backlash against all of them. There would be repercussions. The elders are not very well respected as it is with the children. There is a lot of family tension in the community at times. There would be repercussions.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatmen: Is there an appeal process if a notice has been granted?

Mr BROWN: We did not come up with the bill; the Katter party did. That is why I have to ask questions about the bill. Part of the bill is giving a binding recommendation. Once that application goes in, these people could start working again in that area. I have to ask about what is in Robbie Katter's bill and the effect if hypotheticals did happen.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatmen: They would obviously go back to court and be reported. Are you asking whose liability is it?

Mr BROWN: I am just asking what the effect would be on the community.

Ms Jones: What the community would do?

Mr BROWN: If the community justice group has made this binding decision?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatmen: Is there an appeals process if it is not granted, or not?

Ms BOYD: You guys get to grant it.

Mr BROWN: No, there is, but in the meantime there is a binding decision in which the applicant can work. It could be rejected down the track, but in that period of time things possibly could go wrong. If they did, I am trying to figure out the effect on the community as a whole.

Mayor Andrews: Should there be a safety net with the existing—

Mr BROWN: Maybe the point is that this decision is not binding to begin with. Therefore, you wait until the review happens and the applicant does not work straightaway. Is that the better model?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatmen: How does this tie in with the review process?

Mr BROWN: The bill says—

Once the Community Justice Group has been notified of the application they may make a binding recommendation to the chief executive that an interim restricted positive notice is issued. This enables the applicant to undertake the regulated employment while the application is being considered.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatmen: That is when they show cause? When they have been issued with a negative notice? That is where this ties in?

Mr BROWN: But they are working already.

Ms Jones: Basically, they are working while you are making a decision.

Ms Heness: What impact will that have on that particular person if we have given the job? They have had it for three months and then whoever makes the decision goes, 'No, you're too much of a risk.' I think that is a bigger let-down.

Ms Jones: It will have a huge impact on the justice group and I do not think it is fair to put the justice group in that situation.

Mrs STUCKEY: From the conversations that we have just been having about the responsibility on the community justice group, if they are not to carry that responsibility, who should? For this bill to work, who would be best placed?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatmen: Holistically, this is about working with children. Everybody is responsible for all the children in the community. Child abuse is something that needs to be addressed on many levels, not just in the workplace—in our home, on the street; wherever there are children. If anyone is going to be responsible for the ill-treatment of children, it is the whole community.

In terms of the community justice group and the way that it is made up, our foundations are to represent the community. It would be appropriate with the right support. I see that this as an incentive for our members to get more involved, start getting a bit more serious about their positions and what they are there for. We need support and a bit more activity from our members.

Mrs STUCKEY: How many people have come through your office? You have given us a couple of examples. You have a population of 4,500. You have over 60 per cent unemployment, so jobs are very important.

Ms Jones: It also depends if we have sorry business.

Mrs STUCKEY: You have 4,500 people here and 60 per cent unemployment, roughly. How many people have come through your office that you think this would apply to? You have given us a couple of examples.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: I only came back from maternity leave in June. Since that time, three people have come through my office who have had to show cause to the commission in relation to offences that they have been convicted for in court. I have had a few and I did not know how to direct them in relation to their grievances with their blue card. Probably about five; a handful.

Mrs STUCKEY: Congratulations on having a bub.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: Thank you.

Mayor Andrews: I wanted to pick up on capacity building and support for the justice group. If they are going to be considered for these types of recommendations, they need investment and resources to support them. I know governments do not invest at the crisis management end. They do it more upstream, I guess. It would be unfair on the justice group.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: It is definitely not core business that we are funded for, so we would have to look for more funding opportunities to develop strategies to roll this out. We do conflict resolution and stuff like that, but we would have to have a bit more training and DJAG would have to become more aware of what you guys are proposing and how exactly it is going to be rolled out in the communities.

Ms Heness: I think they would have to have an understanding. In childcare, we do not just go by the blue card. We have our national law act and our childcare regulations, which both state that you must be of a fit and proper person to work with children. I am sorry, but a drug user is not a fit and proper person and nor is an alcoholic. You would have to look at those sorts of things, as well, and what legislation goes around each individual employment opportunity. You would have to know all those things and not just say, 'Yes, we're going to grant you a blue card because it seems like a minor offence'. There are a lot of rules and regulations that go with childcare that are just not straight off a blue card.

Mr KRAUSE: My question was touched on earlier, about community sport and other community activities. Other than the one spoken about before, have there been many examples where the inability to access a blue card has inhibited people from getting involved in sports activities, coaching or managing or even doing any other types of activities here?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: There is only the one case that I know of, which is the one that I have recently had. I was hoping that he could come in today, but I could not get in contact with him. There is only that one that I know of.

Mr KRAUSE: Lerissa, you mentioned that since you came back from maternity leave in June you have had three cases where they needed to show cause about their blue card.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: Yes.

Mr KRAUSE: What type of offences were involved with that show cause?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: Common assault. A domestic violence and aggravated breach, so that was an assault, as well. I think the other one was drug related. He had not used drugs in about eight years and still he was not able to gain employment or have a blue card application.

Mr KRAUSE: Were the other two fairly recent offences?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: Yes.

Mr KRAUSE: And the drug related matter was around eight years ago?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: Yes.

Ms Jones: That is because it is a 10-year limit.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: The difference with his situation was that he was applying for a blue card to gain employment; the other two had already had blue cards.

Mr KRAUSE: And they were removed?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: Yes.

Mr KRAUSE: The limit for declaring these offences is 10 years; is that correct?

Ms Jones: It stays on the record for 10 years.

Mr KRAUSE: If anyone knows the answer to this, feel free to answer. There is a piece of legislation that enables people to not declare certain criminal offences after a certain amount of time has elapsed. Does that apply to the blue card application process or does it look back forever?

Ms Jones: It goes back 10 years. They actually do a search for 10 years.

Mr KRAUSE: Child sexual offences or other things—

Ms Jones: They will stay on there longer, but the one we were talking about was 20 years ago. Because it was a child offence, it actually stayed.

Mr KRAUSE: So it does go back further than 10 years in some cases?

Ms Jones: In some cases, depending on the thing. If it is a murder, a sexual assault or anything involving children, it stays on there forever. Anything else is a 10-year period. Traffic offences are five years.

Mr KRAUSE: You can get pinged for a traffic offence, say, speeding?

Ms Jones: Yes, you can, depending on what it is.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: It is not always.

Ms Jones: It just depends on the offence. If it is dangerous driving or driving under the influence, they will pick that up.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: Traffic is very discretionary. It is not something that the commission tends to scrutinise in relation to a blue card application. I have had one situation where a person has been convicted and imprisoned for two years, suspended. They did not actually go to prison, but had a suspended sentence. He still got a blue card. He still did child related work. He still has it. It never got affected. I think they are very discretionary when it comes to traffic offences.

Mr KRAUSE: My next question is in relation to the time frame around the issue of blue cards and responding to concerns. Do any of you have an opinion about the time frames that are taken in issuing or going through the process? Does that affect employment prospects?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: It is a very drawn-out process.

Ms Jones: It depends on the time. It is six weeks plus.

Ms Heness: If there is an issue, generally it is you chasing them up to find out why the card has not been issued after three or four months.

Ms Menzies: It used to be longer, though. It used to be a lot longer, years ago.

Ms Jones: I think it just depends on the time of year, too. I know when we have done some employment applications, pretty much we have had them back in a couple of weeks. There are others that have just taken forever, but then we found out that it is because some offences have been identified. They have to go through the process of whether or not they are going to approve them and we have had to go up for review.

Mr KRAUSE: Do any of you think that the net is cast too broadly, in terms of the range of offences? We spoke about traffic before.

Ms Heness: Yes. I think there are some that probably should not be there.

Mr KRAUSE: Such as?

Ms Heness: Depending on the traffic offence, obviously drink-driving with children in a vehicle—

Mr KRAUSE: But everything is there at the moment?

Ms Heness: Yes.

Ms Menzies: That is why we talk about a tiered system.

Mr CRANDON: Drink driving with children in the street.

Ms Heness: Yes. I do not agree with drink driving. I do not drink alcohol at all. Sometimes there are probably small ones that you could get, say you forgot to put your seatbelt on or whatever. I think they need to really look at that. One of the girls had an empty can of alcohol in her car. She does not drink, but it was in her car so she was taken to court. That affected her. It did not affect her blue card, but it took a lot longer to get it approved.

Mr KRAUSE: You can still get the card, but you have to go through the process.

Ms Jones: A whole big hoo-ha.

Ms Heness: And then you are still wondering. You do not know what they are going to approve and what they are not going to approve. You are the one sitting there wondering: have you lost your job; what is going on?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: I think having a justice group involved is really beneficial. There was a situation where I had an 18-year-old take the rap for her boyfriend, who was trafficking drugs in the community. It was too late in the court process for him to take responsibility for it. She has never used drugs in her life and she does not drink alcohol. She had just turned 18. She is now a convicted drug trafficker, out of the goodness of her heart. That will never change. She cannot get a passport. I do not know how that will affect her ability to obtain work in the future or a positive notice to work with children, but she is completely innocent. Only the justice group, being there through the court process and supporting her, would know that information and be able to provide that in relation to a restricted notice, which is really important.

Mr KRAUSE: Thank you all very much for your contributions. It has been very enlightening.

Mr CRANDON: Thanks everyone. We really appreciate that. We seem to be talking about the ones at the fringe. Lerissa, you just gave another example of one at the fringe. She misses out because she did something to protect someone else, and there are the other examples that you used.

Mayor Ross, in this bill there is no expectation that there would be any additional funding. The explanatory notes make it clear that—

The costs associated with augmenting the current framework to incorporate community area applications are considered minor and can be covered by existing departmental budget allocations.

What Mr Katter is talking about is not what you would be expecting, in terms of augmenting the organisations.

All the way through this meeting I have been writing little notes and then somebody will ask a question around a note that I have written, but I want to run through them. How would you deal with relationships and the pressure put on, one way or the other? Remember, we are talking about both ways here. How would you cocoon yourself? We are talking about small communities where everybody knows everybody and there are related parties. If the group is making a decision that will affect someone, how do you leave out of that group someone who is related to them? Would you want to take responsibility? You mentioned that each organisation and cultural group is on the committee. Will people be excluded because someone will say, 'Let's not invite him and her, because we know they do not like that other group that this guy is associated with?' Alternatively, 'Let's not invite them because of all of the conflicts of interest'. How many make up a quorum for the group? You said there are about 20. These are all the questions that were running through my mind while I was listening to all of the questions and answers.

My question is this: if unemployment is at 60 per cent in a population of 4,500, isn't it easier to employ someone who has not offended? Wouldn't it be easier just to find people to work with our kids, which is what we are talking about here, who has not offended? I throw that out there not saying I am one way or the other on this. I am asking you, as a community, wouldn't that be easier for everybody?

Mayor Andrews: If that person misses out on a job because he or she does not have a blue card, another Indigenous person will get the job. It really would not affect it.

Mr CRANDON: That is the exact point I am making. We have 60 per cent unemployment and not everybody in the community is under this cloud. There are heaps of potential applicants out there. We are hearing about the ones who cannot get the job because of their past history. What about the ones who can get that job? If there is a job up for grabs, somebody else will get the job. I am putting this to you to say what you think, yes or no: wouldn't it be easier for the community and cause less strife and fewer issues in the community if it was just left as it is, that is, everybody who is able to get a blue card gets the jobs and those who cannot get a blue card get other types of jobs?

Mayor Andrews: You go back to the primary question, as well: is it fair to place the pressure on the justice group or do you just leave the status quo, where all that screening and that discipline is done externally.

Mr CRANDON: I am looking for feedback on that question from everyone.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: You would have to look at how many people or what percentage of the community already has a criminal conviction. You need to look at that number and how many of them are trying to get jobs and change their lives around. I go back to that speech from Mr Katter about the middle-aged gentleman who wants to change his life. He is respected. He made mistakes earlier in life. A huge percentage of young people already have criminal convictions because of the AMP. It is constant reoffending. I have had employers look at those and say, 'They're dishonest in their character'. It is still an offence. Alcohol is a drug, as well.

Mr CRANDON: So we are not now talking about the blue card from what you have said there?

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: I am talking about employment—

Mr CRANDON: Any employment.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman:—with a criminal history and how that affects their suitability—

Mr CRANDON: Lerissa, sorry to interrupt you, but we are talking about loosening the reins on the blue card so that potential offenders have direct access to the kids. We are not talking about that next level up where there is an issue; we are talking about the blue card here. Let us not mix the two together and say it is not fair.

CHAIR: I think in terms of your question though, Michael, in fairness, you used the term 'potential offenders' when really we are looking at people with prior convictions.

Mr CRANDON: I am not sure what I might have said, but I was not intending to infer anything else.

CHAIR: Yes, just to clarify that.

Mr CRANDON: We are talking about the capacity to get a blue card for a specific role, not employment broadly.

Ms Jones: That is correct, because it is not every job you need a blue card for. It is only the ones working with the children.

Mr CRANDON: Very few of them need it.

Ms Jones: To me I think it should be left the way that it is. I do not think it is fair to put that back on to the justice group in the communities to make that decision of who should or should not get a blue card because that is not fair to Lerissa being the sole employee, the elders and everyone else. I think it should be done by an external agency in the way that it is done, and that is what we are talking about: we are talking about working with the children. All the garbage workers, the roads crew and all the other workers, especially for council, do not need a blue card. For the hospital it would be the same—there would be some positions where you would need a blue card and some where you would not.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: Our members do not need a blue card.

Ms Jones: That is right, yes, so it would be job specific. To me, if it is anything involving children, then it should be as strict as possible to protect the children because at the end of the day the children in the communities are the most vulnerable and the ones that get affected all of the time. Do not even get me started on the childcare changes that are happening with the funding.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: Yes. A lot of the funding bodies require child abuse training.

Ms Heness: And that is coming back to what it would be if they got it wrong.

Ms Jones: If they got it wrong, these guys would be persecuted.

Ms Heness: As the responsible person in a child care, if they got it wrong and issued someone with a blue card and they did something wrong within the child care, that would have a huge impact on me, my career, my own blue card and my own family if they got it wrong. If someone decided, 'Oh, well, that was three years ago or that was four years ago,' that could have a huge impact on the children in the service and families outside the service. We are having a huge problem now in that our staff have been made mandatory reporters. That is so much harder for these guys here because now they are the ones deciding that you are not treating your child well. It is the same sort of thing in terms of what impact that will have on them as a community and they are scared to report because of the backlash that they may get. Yes, it has just made it very difficult.

Ms Jones: Should the blue card system be reviewed with respect to what offences and that? Definitely, because it is a joke. Serious offences and anything involving children, hard drugs, trafficking or what have you definitely should be there. There are then all of these other minor offences that we are finding. Like we said, there were a couple of minor traffic ones and what have you. As Lerissa said, it is coming down to whoever is sitting in the chair at the Blue Care office who makes a decision depending on what day of the week it is. That needs to be reviewed. Putting it back on to the community justice groups, that is totally unfair. It should not happen.

CHAIR: Are there any further comments on that before we close or any other final remarks anyone would like to make?

Ms Menzies: Just that most of our jobs for council do not require blue cards. The positions we cannot fill are not necessarily ones that require blue cards. We get plenty of applications for most of our positions, and that might be because the people that cannot get blue cards are not applying for those jobs as well. Again, in the areas where we need blue cards we do not struggle with filling those positions.

Ms Kynuna-Yeatman: I think it is a good opportunity because I have never seen community involved before in any of the blue card process and to be able to shed further light on the individual circumstances and that extra opportunity to have a restricted positive notice and have a second chance after making a mistake. I do not see any problem with the classification of offences there. As I said, the Criminal Code is huge and there are a lot more offences that are more serious and rehabilitation is available for these offences, and a lot of them are offences that younger people who are likely to look for employment do engage in. I think it is a good opportunity for people who are trying to change their lives and get back on track to have and for the community to have input and a say into how they are engaged in employment in our community in terms of employment that does relate to children.

CHAIR: Anyone else?

Councillor Sands: It is all going through my mind. We are talking about employment. We are talking about offences people have created. We are talking about sport. I am thinking outside the picture. It is the school holidays now and a lot of our kids like to go camping. We have certain groups here that take those kids camping. Then again, when it comes to an elders thing, like if someone wants to take boys out bush, it is a man's thing. Does that person have to have a blue card to take those kids out there? He is an elder. That is not part of our culture when they are going out. My question is: does that elder need a blue card too or do we come back to that two-tier thing? I do not know. That was why my mind was boggling while you were talking.

Ms Heness: Wouldn't they just be taking them out like an uncle or grandad? It is not like a paid thing. It is usually around paid things like you pay to go to school. They are not taking them on a school camp. If they take them away, they are taking them like on a journey.

Councillor Sands: Yes, but then again you have extended families. You might start off with five, but by the time you go you have 20 following you, not five. They all want to come out bush.

CHAIR: I think it is a valid point but probably one that we cannot technically answer. I think it is a valid point. It comes down to whether it is an organised activity, I would have thought.

Councillor Sands: I just hope they take Indigenous culture into consideration, because a blue card is not our culture. It is not.

CHAIR: Understood. Anyone else?

Mayor Andrews: As I said before in my opening statement, safety is paramount for the kids. If the government did support the justice group in terms of their recommendation, I still go back to the investment in the resource to support them, because Lerissa or the coordinator herself cannot do everything. Maybe there is like that safety net with the external agency doing it. I guess I am talking a bit contradictory, but I think the kids' safety is paramount in all of this. It is an opportunity like Lerissa was saying. Maybe the justice group or the elders can have some due diligence process in terms of how they assess the criteria of the applicants, but I guess they have to be prepared for the repercussions as well and the criticism should something go wrong down the track. I really do not have the answers, but I think kids' safety is the No. 1, for me anyway.

CHAIR: Thanks very much, Ross, and thank you to everyone who participated today. As the committee we really appreciate your assistance. In terms of what happens next, we will be having further roundtable meetings with other communities. We will keep examining the bill and hold a public briefing with Mr Katter on 25 October. Both will be streamed live over the internet and a transcript will be published on our web page. We will then write a report about our findings and may make recommendations, including whether the bill be passed. We might use your names in the report. Please let Brett or Emily know if you would rather your name was not used. Once we table the report in the parliament by 14 December the parliament will decide whether or not the bill should be made into law. If the bill is passed by the parliament, it would become law. If it does not pass, the blue card system would not change unless other legislation was introduced to change it. You are welcome to contact Emily at any time for more information such as to get an update on where the bill is up to. Thank you very much again for having us in your community today and also for your involvement. This meeting is now closed. I invite you to join us, if you wish, for some afternoon tea. Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned at 4.10 pm