

PUBLIC MEETING

MANINGRIDA — Tuesday, 2 May 1989

PRESENT: —

Committee:

Mr S. Hatton (Chairman)

Mr B. Ede (Deputy Chairman)

Mr C. Firmin

Mr W. Lanhupuy

Mr D. Leo

Mr R. Setter

Officers assisting the Committee:

Mr R. Gray (Executive Officer)

Mr G. Nicholson (Legal Adviser)

Appearing before the Committee:

Mr YIBARBUKK

Mr HART

Ms Helen WILLIAMS

Mr Milark WINUNGUDJ

NOTE: This is a verbatim transcript that has been tape-checked. However, due to poor recording, or many people speaking at the same time, some of the recordings were inaudible and unable to be transcribed.

FINAL EDIT: 11 MARCH 1991

Mr HART: On behalf of the council, I would like to welcome Mr Hatton and Mr Firmin and their party who are here to talk to the council and the community about the constitution which the Territory will need if we are going to become a state. With that, I hand over to Mr Hatton.

Mr HATTON: Thank you very much. Firstly, I would like to apologise for the muck up that occurred in the notice here. We had thought that we had advised and that the Office of Local Government had been following it up to ensure that the council was well aware in advance of our arrival. However, it appears that something went wrong with the administration of the system. I offer my sincerest apologies for the inconvenience that we have caused and I must thank Stan Tipiloura for letting people know on Saturday that we were coming. I will ensure that I do that.

My name is Steve Hatton. I think that the last time I was in Maningrida was early 1987 when there was much talk about ensuring that you could have the boat ramp fixed. However, this time I am here in a totally different role. I am here as the chairman of a committee of the Northern Territory parliament. This is not a government committee, but a committee of the parliament. Both the government and the opposition have equal representation on the committee. At the back of the folder that we have distributed, you will find the names and photos of the members of the committee. There are 3 members from the CLP - myself, Rick Setter and Colin Firmin - and 3 from the Labor Party, Brian Ede, Wesley Lanhupuy and Danny Leo.

It is the only committee of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly that has the same numbers of government and opposition. That is because, on this particular matter, the government and the opposition are both working for the same purpose. We are not fighting about it. In politics, it seems that, all the time, the ALP says one thing and the CLP says something different and that we are arguing all the time. In relation to this particular matter, we have said that it is too important a matter for us to become involved in party politics and fighting. Thus, we have sat down and we are really working very hard in a bipartisan manner to do this job.

The committee is called the Select Committee on Constitutional Development. The terms of reference of our committee are shown at the back of the booklet. That is the job that we have to do over a period of years. But, what we are doing at the moment is working towards involving the community in the writing of the Northern Territory's own constitution. Before I talk about that, I would like to make one thing really clear. We are not here to ask you whether you think the Northern Territory should become a state or should not become a state. It is not a question of saying that we know the issue of statehood is very emotional. Some people think it is important to do it now and other people are really nervous about it and want to hold it off. Other people are simply against it at the moment. There are people for it and people against it. We are saying that you cannot even think about the question of statehood until you know what it means. It will take considerable time to work through. However, we do ask people to recognise that, one day, whether it is in 5 years time or 10 years time or in 20 years time, the Northern Territory will become a state, just like every other place in Australia. We will eventually obtain equality with the rest of Australia. It is only a question of when. One day, it will happen.

But, before you can even think about that, you need to know what you want and how you want the Northern Territory to be. You do that by writing a law called a constitution. This is the one law that is written by the people. It is the people's law. This is the law that the people make to control the government and to control the courts. It is not like, say, the dry areas law or other laws that are made by the parliament and where the governments make the law and, when governments change, the law can change backwards and forwards. This law is made by the people and it stays. Only the people can change it and it is the most important law. It is a law that is the boss over the government. It says what the government can do and what it cannot do. In that law, you can write in rights that are really important to you that you do not want the government to muck around with. These are things that are so important that you say that no government, no matter who it is, can touch them. It might be your right to vote or to speak freely about anything. It might be protection of religion, culture, sacred sites or Aboriginal land.

You remember that, last year, you were asked to vote in a referendum. There were 4 questions from the federal government on which you were asked to vote yes or no. That was to amend the Australian Constitution. The people looked at it and said no and therefore the government could not do it. The government wanted to do some things. It had to ask the people and the people were not happy with it. The people said no and therefore it could not happen.

However, we do not have such a thing in the Northern Territory. Every state - Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania - has a constitution. The federal government has a constitution which says what it can do and what it cannot do. We are the only place that does not have a constitution. The only thing we have is the Australian Constitution which says that the federal government can do what it likes with us. A constitution is not something that gives power to the government; it is something that limits the powers of government. Without a constitution, the government can do what it likes. The federal government can do what it likes in the Northern Territory. It has that power. It cannot do that in the states because the constitution stops it.

In the Northern Territory, no one has ever asked the people how they want the Northern Territory to work, how we should make the rules for the election of parliament, what sort of a parliament we should have, how the courts should work, what the Administrator's job should be or what sort of protection there should be for the people's rights. No one has ever asked the people those questions before because we have been a territory. We are now going out and telling the people that we are going to start work as a Territory community to write this law. Through that, as a community, we will work through the issues that are important to us. What do you want this Northern Territory to be like for your children, for your grandchildren and for your great-grandchildren? What are the important things that you want to protect for them? How do you want the constitution to be written? How do we ensure that we can build a way that Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people can live together side by side with respect for each in the future? How do we make rules that will encourage that to happen? How do we talk through and overcome the fights that have been going on for years?

We can do that by talking and making this law which cannot be made just by politicians. Our job is to tell the Northern Territory people that they need to do this job. We have brought these books which tell you a bit about what a constitution is and the sort of things you might want to look at. But that is just a beginning. We have other material. We have been

working for about 3 years on research. We looked all round the world at different constitutions - in America, the West Indies, Canada and Africa - and all around Australia. We have come up with a lot of different ideas. Some things in here we do not like and other things we think are really good. There would be things in there that you would like and other things that you would not like. It is important that you have a look at that as a community and talk about it. If there are some things that you are not sure about, we can arrange for somebody to come and explain them to you. The community should talk and determine how it wants this Northern Territory to be and how to write the people's law that will set the ground rules for the future.

It is a job that we have to do. We are here to ask you to have a look at it. I will explain how we are going to go about it. We come here at the moment to give you some material that we want you to read, think about and talk about. We will come back later this year or early next year when you have had a good chance to work through it and then you can tell us what you think should go in there. We are doing this all over the Northern Territory. On this trip, we are visiting 59 different communities around the Territory. We have been all through central Australia. We have just started to travel around Arnhem Land now. We have been over to VRD. Bit by bit, we will visit as many people as we can.

When we have heard from all over the Territory and you start to hear what other people are thinking too, we will sit down as a committee and try to put down on paper what we think the people are telling us. We will have a first go at it. However, this constitution is too important to let politicians or lawyers or academic people write it. We want the people to write this constitution. Thus, we will put some ideas together on the basis of what the people have told us and then we will form a big committee of people from all over the Territory. It will be called a constitutional convention. It will have representatives from the desert country, from Arnhem Land, from Darwin, from Alice Springs and everywhere else. They will come together and look at what we did. They will argue it out and they might have to meet time after time as they work through it. Eventually, they will come up with a draft constitution which will be put to a vote of the people at a referendum. If the people vote yes, then we will have a constitution. If the people vote no, we will have to go back and start again and keep working through it until we get it right.

It is important that we get it right. When you make that law, it will be your law - not my law, not the government's law but your law. It will be the law of the people. In many ways, it becomes like Aboriginal law. It does not change. It stays there. It is the core which sets the direction in which we are going to go. It gives the foundation for our future direction. The people's rights will be in there so that no one can muck about with them. The government cannot touch them if they are in this law. This law is the boss over the top of the government. This is the way the people say that that is how the place will work. The government has to work inside that. It cannot do something different from what this says it can do. Thus, it has the important things, the rules within which the government must work. It is the people's law and, from that, we build. That is why it is so important that the people ensure that those laws are the right ones. You must bear in mind that you will be making the laws that will determine what the Northern Territory will be like for your grandchildren and their grandchildren.

Mr YIBARBUK: How many more years before this can become effective?

Mr HATTON: It cannot become effective until all the people say that it is what they want.

Mr YIBARBUK: How many more years?

Mr HATTON: That depends on the people. If everything went really smoothly and we did our job really well and the constitutional convention went really well, it could take 3 years. However, I reckon that it could take 5 years or 7 years. Time is not important. Getting it right is important. I do not want to put a time limit on it. That is not possible because it is too important. You have got to get it right and I am here to plead with you as a community to make ensure that you have your say and that you become involved in it from the very beginning so that what you think is part of the whole debate. You should have your say. Who should go on that constitutional convention? We want to hear about that too because we do not want just the government or the politicians to say who will go on that convention. We want the people to determine that. What sort of Aboriginal representation should there be? How do you break it up for the Centre, for the Top End? How do you ensure that you get the people who can truly represent the community and speak for the community? The number of times that they meet will be up to them. It took 13 years to write the Australian Constitution. Maybe we can do it a bit quicker than that, but it is important to do it properly. Therefore, we are not rushing.

Mr YIBARBUK: Is there any chance that Aboriginal people can have their own provisions in this?

Mr HATTON: Yes, there is. You can do that in a constitution. There are sections in this book that deal with Aboriginal rights for example. This book goes into a lot more detail on some of those. Questions have been raised such as whether we should put in the constitution a guarantee of protection for Aboriginal law and land rights. Those things have been asked. Then, you can talk about how that can be done. However, you have to talk to the whole community. You have a Top End mob, a central Australian mob, the Darwin mob as well as the Arnhem Land mob, right? I know that there are things that are really important to Aboriginal people, that they want to ensure are totally protected. Through this, you have to get the understanding of the non-Aboriginal people too. This is the way that you can do that. They are not opposed to it. Many people just do not understand. This will force all the Territory people, black and white, yellow and brown, to sit down together and work out together how they will live together. That is why it will take a bit of time but it is something we have to do, isn't it?

The answer is that you can put them in there. There is one question that is asked, for example, about the possibility of special Aboriginal representation in parliament. Should you have special seats set aside for Aboriginal members like they do in New Zealand? However, there is a catch to that too. In New Zealand, for example, all the Maoris can go on the Maori roll to vote for the Maori representatives or on the general roll to vote for their electorate member. They cannot do both.

Mr YIBARBUK: Catch 22.

Mr HATTON: Yes. That is the problem. There are other ways. Maybe you could look at some sort of representation in relation to having an Upper House and a Lower House. There are all sorts of hang-ups in respect of that. That is why it will not be quick. When you sit down and start talking, there is good and bad on all sides and you have to make a balanced decision on which is the best way to go. However, you have got to be involved and talk about it because this is your chance. When they wrote the Australian Constitution and the state constitutions, they did not go out and ask the people. They have never asked the Aboriginal people, have they? But, we are doing that, right up front. You are part of this Territory; this is your home. It is our home too. You would argue that it is more your home than my home. I am not going to get into that fight. What we are saying is that we have all to sit down and talk this through because we will all be living here in the future and we need to work out a way to do it together.

That is really what we are here for. We ask you to read this and perhaps say: 'I do not understand some of this. I want someone to come and explain more to us'. There is a toll free telephone number in here. Write to us or ring us up and we will organise someone to come out and talk about it. We really want people to start talking about it. It is really important that you become involved early and stay involved. Do not let the other mob do the job. Do not say that it is too hard and that you do not want to know about it and, in 3 years time or 5 years time, when it is time to vote on it, complain that you were not consulted. We are asking you now.

Ms WILLIAMS: If this one is going to happen, what are you going to do about land rights and sacred sites within Aboriginal communities? What will happen in the future?

Mr HATTON: It will not have any effect at all on land rights unless you want to write a special protection into the constitution. Could I explain this to you? I know and you know that Aboriginal people do not trust the Northern Territory government about land rights and sacred sites. There has been a lot of arguments and fights over many years about it, hasn't there? Aboriginal people are a bit nervous about it. If you write it into a constitution, no matter who is in government, they cannot touch it. Only the people can change it. Therefore, that is a way. At the moment, your land rights are held under the federal Land Rights Act. That protects your land rights and your ownership here. But, do you know that, if there was a change of federal government or if the people in Sydney and Melbourne became anti-land rights and that became politically advantageous, the federal government could just wipe out that Land Rights Act and you would lose the lot? There is no protection. There is no protection because what the government can give, the government can take away. What is in the constitution, the people give and only the people can touch. Whatever you put in there would only strengthen your position. All right? So far as sacred sites are concerned, it would be the same thing.

Mr YIBARBUK: Would it be a stronger?

Mr HATTON: You can make it stronger by putting it in there.

Mr FIRMIN: When talking about a constitution, I have found that people understand it a bit better if they look at it in terms of a building. A building has a solid foundation that is very strong. On that, you build the walls and the roof and put

the fittings in. The foundation always stays there but you can change the walls or the roof or the fittings. The constitution is like the foundation. It is solid and it stays there. When you want to change something, you change it by legislation but the foundation always stays the same. You might say that the building is no longer the right size or the right shape and you change the outside parts of it. Legislation is what you use to change those outside parts and fittings. However, the foundation is always there. It is like the land that you sit on and stand on. It is solid and it does not change. That is how the constitution works.

Mr HATTON: That is right. Let us say that you put into the constitution something to the effect that Aboriginal sacred sites must be preserved and protected in accordance with Aboriginal law. If that is in the constitution, then the government has no choice about it. The only way it could ever change that is if it went back to a referendum of the people and the people said that it could be changed. The people have got to vote yes or no. When you write your constitution, you can also write in how the people can change it. It might be that, in relation to some clauses, 60% or 70% of the people would have to say yes before it could be changed. The government might change the administration but it cannot change the fundamental protection of the sites. It cannot turn around and say that it will wipe out all Aboriginal sites.

We have had some men say to us that they want to write into the constitution that Aboriginal law must stand. In fact, they were saying to us that Aboriginal people should not have a choice, that they should be dealt with under Aboriginal law and, after they had finished dealing with them under Aboriginal law, we could deal with them under white man's law. That is the view of some of the old men. Now that is a thing that you can talk about. It is possible to do that. It is just a matter of talking it through and determining that that is exactly what you want to do. If you do that, it has to go that way. You cannot change it afterwards. It is going to be stuck there. You might decide that that is a bit strong and that you want a choice. I do not know, but all those things can be talked about.

The only thing that you cannot do in a Northern Territory constitution is go outside the Australian Constitution. You cannot make a republic. You have to have the Queen's representative. However, within the Australian Constitution, it is up to the people of the Northern Territory to determine how they want this place to work. It is the way that you can protect those things that are important to you, certainly from the Northern Territory government, no matter who is there. We cannot write into our constitution something that will tell the federal government that it cannot do something that it is permitted to do under the Australian Constitution because it is the government over the top of us. But, at least, you can set the rules for the Northern Territory. Does that explain what I am talking about?

Mr WINUNGUJ: I still do not understand.

Mr HATTON: Okay, I will give an example. You know that there are big fights going on in the parliament about the Sacred Sites Act. People believe that the Northern Territory government is changing the law so that the power to protect the sacred sites is being taken away from the Aboriginal traditional owners and being given to the government, to the minister. That is what is being said, isn't it? You could put into the constitution that the government cannot touch sacred sites without the approval of the traditional owners or the custodians of the site or you could write into the constitution that decisions in respect of Aboriginal sacred sites shall be in accordance with Aboriginal law. The government would then not have a say about that. It would just have to do that. It cannot just say: 'Oh, we do not like that. We are going to change it'. It cannot do that if it is in the constitution. Do you understand that?

Mr WINUNGUJ: Sometimes I cannot. My people are looking at this. When I say 'my people', it doesn't matter what tribe we are. My countrymen. Sometimes your government is introducing a lot of ideas designed to meet the needs of the 30% of the people who are Aboriginals. In the past, we have not had any say because we are always known to be in the back. Sometimes I come to think that our people, this community and elsewhere in the Northern Territory, should have more say in parliament if elected and in writing down in black and white in the constitution to ensure that the people are secure, that this constitution will somehow meet the needs of (indecipherable) besides the balanders and Aboriginal people. We need to have a better understanding of how we are going to talk about looking at statehood. We do not want to be told: 'Okay, this is going to happen and it is best if you go along with us and join the party and we sort of look at it'. All right, 50-50. We have a say but some time back in the preliminary work. This is the foundation. Our people are living here. All right, we are consulted now about how the constitution is going to be ...

Mr HATTON: About how we are going about doing the job.

Mr WINUNGUJ: How we go about doing the job. It hurts my feelings sometimes. All right, if we are going to look at statehood, people have the vote. All right, we forget about the federal government. I am trying to say too much now.

Mr HATTON: No. Keep going.

Mr WINUNGUJ: What I am saying is: how can we be sure that your government is going to protect us under the local community government? We are going to be unsure that the referendum is going to be clear in minds and that we are not going to be put aside and dealt with like back before 1970, before the referendum came that we were recognised to have the vote. How are we going to ensure that we are going to be involved in this new constitution that your government is introducing?

Mr HATTON: The parliament. It is important.

Mr WINUNGUJ: Yes, okay. I am coming to that one. Then again, how we are going to be sure about our foundation, click click, our land rights under that act? We are still under the federal act. How we are going to ensure that the parliament, the Northern Territory parliament, will consult us saying: 'Okay, we are following on the same kind of Land Rights Act and we are following on the same kind under the referendum before 1970'? You know what I am trying to say?

Mr HATTON: Federal referendum, yes.

Mr WINUNGUJ: The federal referendum. After the constitution, if everybody agrees in the Northern Territory, then we turn around and we are put aside. Then, we have no foundation. We have nothing.

Mr HATTON: There are 2 ways.

Mr WINUNGUJ: These people, my people here, the Yolgnu people, will lose their lands as their foundation. We live here. We work here. With this new constitution and every policy in this that I have just scanned through that you are introducing to the community, we would like to talk about it, to clear our minds. We would like to see that better resource person come. We would like to be not only with you but with other people, so that we do not get brainwashed in this community or some balander people will turn around and say: 'Oh, you know, the same old system will again be happening'. It is not like that way. We would like to stand in a better position where we can be secure and have our rights to say how we would like to introduce our Aboriginal law that can adapt into your parliamentary law. Where today every constitution has been introduced into an Aboriginal community or in parliament or elsewhere in other states, I am sure they go and consult them, but we would like to find ...

Mr HATTON: They do not. That is the problem.

Mr WINUNGUJ: Yes, that is what I am getting around, you see.

Mr FIRMIN: At least we are.

Mr WINUNGUJ: Okay. I thank you for that, for coming here. But, then again, we would like to be consulted. Let every individual person know, the landowners, every tribe sitting here, every elder, that we have a voice. Otherwise, we are talking: 'What do you think? This is the best thing. Okay, we'll follow on the constitution. It is proposed. Maybe the next stage, stage 1 and 2 or 3. Let's go. We have the statehood'. But, before that, we would like to clear our mind about how you are going to go about debating in parliament or outside with other Aboriginal leaders. We would like to make sure rather than be put aside back to square 1 where we started.

Mr FIRMIN: What you should do is what a lot of the other communities are going to do and that is to write down the things that you feel that you want in the constitution. We touched on most of those important issues such as the retention of your voting rights and the ability to put your representative view forward in the right environment. We touched on the law and land rights. Many people have said such things to us as we have been travelling around. For example, some people have said that they want to retain land rights but they do not necessarily want to retain them as they are today because the land rights that they have today do not allow them to do anything with their land other than to say that it is their land.

Mr WINUNGUJ: Yes, of course.

Mr FIRMIN: They are saying that they cannot work with the legislation that is in place at the moment. People are starting to say those things to us and we are saying: 'That is fine but it is up to you to decide how you would like to work with land rights, and how you want to change them and how you want to have them protected? These are things that we ask you to think about.

Mr WINUNGUJ: We would like to be doubly sure beyond any doubt.

Mr HATTON: Could I suggest how you do that? Firstly, we are going around now saying that we are going to start this job and that we want you to think about it. We are trying to encourage you to become involved, to have your say in it and to make sure that you are part of it and you are not being left out. That is what we want. If you want to ensure that Aboriginal people and your landowners will be involved all the way through, you must think about how the representatives of this constitutional convention should be chosen. Who should be on it? How should we go about selecting them to make sure there is proper Aboriginal representation on that convention? That is part of it. And then, you will say: 'Okay, we get this constitution together. How do we know that, after it is all over and done with, you are not going to turn round and do all these nasty things to us'? You do that by putting it in the constitution in such a way that we cannot change it.

Mr WINUNGUJ: This is where I want to feel secure. If this constitution becomes finalised, we would like to know - Aboriginal people, not only in this community but elsewhere in the Northern Territory - how we are going to go about cooperating with each other and working together.

Mr HATTON: That is right. That is why you must be involved in the writing of it. Put those things in there.

Mr WINUNGUJ: Yes, but then again it is not quite an issue to overcome today.

Mr HATTON: No. We are just here to say that you must start thinking about it.

Mr FIRMIN: But, as Steve said earlier, and I thought it was extremely true, unless we all get this right, unless we all sit down together and understand each other's point of view, we are not going to be able to live together over the next centuries in harmony. It is not going to work. We all have to be satisfied at the end of the work and therefore we intend to keep working until we get it right.

Mr HATTON: The other protection you have is that, in the end, before any of this can come into place, the federal government has to approve it too. Statehood cannot happen until the federal government says okay. You cannot even think about statehood until you have a constitution. If we do not take into account the Aboriginal people's point of view and properly protect their interests, the federal government will not go along with it. It is not going to work unless all the different types of people in the Northern Territory are happy with where we are going - Aboriginals, balandars, the lot.

It will force all Northern Territory people to come to terms with the realities of the Northern Territory. It will make us talk to each other. I do not have enough of them here, but there is a book called 'Land Matters on Statehood'. I do not know whether any of you have ever seen these. You might have seen this through the Land Councils because copies were sent out to them. It sets out different ways of dealing with the Land Rights Act. That is a government matter and not one for this committee. It says there that what they want to put in the Land Rights Act is what the Aboriginal people are going to tell them. They want to talk directly to the Aboriginal people about that. But, maybe in talking about this, things can start to pop into place.

Mr WINUNGUJ: Speaking in Aboriginal language with occasional English words.

It is very important we go through this proposed constitution work. It is the same thing that I have explained.

Mr YIBARBUK: Speaking in Aboriginal language.

Mr WINUNGUJ: Speaking in Aboriginal language. Step by step by step by step. It will take us 5, 6, 7 or 10 years. It is for us to make sure that this proposal will protect us and will protect human rights.

Mr YIBARBUK: Speaking in Aboriginal language.

Mr WINUNGUJ: Let us talk and clear our minds on how we are going to put our words into black and white.

Mr YIBARBUK: With this constitution, will there be any effect on community local government?

Mr HATTON: It should not have much effect on community government. You can write in a constitutional protection for local government. That is another thing that you can talk about. You make the rules.

Mr FIRMIN: The government supports community government as you are probably well aware. It is not likely to change.

Mr HATTON: You cannot say to me: 'Look, can I do this in there'? I have to say to you: 'What do you want in there'? That is the way it works. It has to be from all the people. And it is not only what you want but what people in Alice or Lajamanu or wherever want.

Mr YIBARBUK: These proposals came from the 2 parties, I suppose?

Mr HATTON: Yes. There are equal numbers on the committee. It is the only committee of the parliament on which there are equal numbers of government and opposition members. There are 3 from each. All the other committees have 3 government and 2 ALP members, but we are running together on this one. Wesley Lanhupuy is on this committee. Stanley Tipiloura was supposed to be here today, but he sent his apologies for not being able to make it.

Mr FIRMIN: He is not on the committee, but he is helping.

Mr HATTON: He is not on the committee but he wanted to come out here because he has been involved through the parliament.

Mr YIBARBUK: (Ndjebbana language)

(English Translation):

Yes, slowly look look paper this that rain they said long time yet. Think run along go which way. Find the law, many lawyer, lawyer they have own, and we have, and others have. Over and over, different. lawyers dealing with different matters. Slowly look where road we go. Other good and other bad.

Mr MANGKUDJA: Big mob country.

Mr HART: What Steve and Colin are saying basically is they are introducing this to us and it is up to us now to have a think about it in the community and see if we like it.

Mr HATTON: We will leave other books here for you too. There is this book that sets out some different ideas on the setting up of a constitutional convention. We want to hear what people are saying about that too. What I am saying to everybody is that they cannot simply trust the politicians to do this job. The people must become involved and have their say. Do not let the politicians do it all themselves. It is too important.

Mr WINUNGUJ: I think every politician should go around the communities swapping different ideas.

Mr HATTON: That is right. That is what we are trying to do, but you must be riding us all the time.

Mr YIBARBUK: They sit in the office there. They make their own decisions. We have no say.

Mr HATTON: You have to talk to the local fellow.

Mr YIBARBUK: Every time they come up with different issues and we do not know what the issues are. They are making up the issues in there.

Mr HATTON: That happens in government all the time. It drives you crazy. This job will take a lot of work, but I believe that it is the most important job that we have to do in the Northern Territory in the next 100 years. If we walk away from it and do not do it, our grandchildren will say: 'Why didn't they do this job when they had the chance?' If we do it well, we will leave a Northern Territory about which our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren will look back and say: 'Those people did a really important job and made the Northern Territory a good place for us. They gave us a good heritage'. It is up to us to do that. It is not simply our opportunity, but our responsibility to future generations. You fought for land rights and for other things for your people and this is just as important, if not more important.

Mr YIBARBUK: Sometimes I feel that we have been left out in the dark.

Mr HATTON: That is true. You have been a lot.

Mr FIRMIN: Sometimes we all feel the same.

Mr HATTON: People in the white communities often say the same thing too. It is true, and for lots of different reasons. There have been lots of fights going on. You know that and I know that. People do not trust each other and do not talk. When people come and say, 'What do you think about this?', people are not prepared to say what they really think. We do not get out to the communities often enough to talk to people and listen to them. It has got to change. But, as a citizen, you have to stand up and demand the right to be heard. These sorts of things are not just given, you have to fight for them. Demand the right to be listened to, demand that your local member come and tell you what is going on and demand that the government explain what is going on. And you will find that they will be quite happy to do that.

Mr YIBARBUK: Some don't.

Mr HATTON: Well, sometimes you are so busy going backwards and forwards. You are running all over the place and the one who yells the loudest is the one that you go to. A squeaky wheel gets the oil, doesn't it? That is a lot of the problem. The Territory is a big place.

Mr FIRMIN: It is expensive to get around too.

Mr HATTON: But, it is really that you do not think about it rather than trying to exclude people. You do not get around to including them because you are worrying about other things. That is where the local member's job is really important. It is his job to come along and say: 'This is going on in the government here, there and everywhere else'.

Mr YIBARBUK: They should probably open up a position within the Territory government and explain what is going on.

Mr HATTON: Yes, I believe that that is what the Office of Local Government people are supposed to be doing. They are supposed to be doing that and are available to do that.

Mr FIRMIN: Do you see the Office of Local Government people very often?

Mr YIBARBUK: Not very often.

Mr HART: It is more often lately.

Mr FIRMIN: We have found the same in the south too. They say that they are starting to get more visits now. Perhaps that will build up as more communities take on local government and the staff increases.

Mr HATTON: Since we moved those OLG people into that separate area ...

Mr FIRMIN: That has made a lot of difference.

Mr HATTON: ... away from community development so that they can concentrate on local government roles, they became more focused on the job.

Mr FIRMIN: But, we will certainly take that comment on board when we go back. We will talk to the local government people and suggest that they get out more often. We did the same thing in Alice Springs. We told them that the Willowra people told us that they had not seen anybody for some months. They said that they would make sure that they went out to Willowra.

Mr HATTON: Are there any other things that you want to talk about?

Mr HART: That is food for thought.

Mr FIRMIN: Thanks everybody.

Mr HATTON: Thank you for gathering to meet us at such short notice. Again, I apologise for the muck up. Next time, we will make sure that we talk to each other on the telephone and we know exactly what is happening. My apologies for what happened today. I do not like doing this. If there is anything that you want me or Wesley or Brain Ede or Mr Nicholson, our constitutional lawyer, or someone to come out and talk about anything relating to this, please let us know. We have been talking about putting some of this material on videos or tapes, perhaps in language, if people think that would be

worth while.

When you get some ideas together, we can relay them to Yuendumu and other places and we can tell you what they are thinking. In that way, we can have different ideas going around the place. Therefore, if you come up with some ideas, perhaps we could put them on video or tape and send them out to all the communities.

Thank you very much.