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EDUCATION, ARTS AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr NG Hutton MP—Chair
Ms W Bourne MP
Mr N Dametto MP
Miss AS Doolan MP
Mr JM Krause MP
Ms CP McMillan MP

Staff present:

Ms L Pretty—Committee Secretary
Mr P Yagmoor—First Nations Liaison Officer

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO ELDER ABUSE

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 15 May 2025

Thursday Island

THURSDAY, 15 MAY 2025

The committee met at 9.41 am.

CHAIR: We will get officially underway. I invite Aunty Betty Tekahika (Mabo) to please join us for a prayer.

Aunty Betty Tekahika (Mabo) then prayed—

CHAIR: I now invite Uncle Sila Savage to give a welcome to country.

Uncle Sila Savage then gave a welcome to country—

CHAIR: Thank you very much. I will now read through some formalities after which we are going to have a conversation around some questions we would like to get some feedback on from the community. Please bear with me as I follow a script to make sure I stay out of trouble.

Mrs Tekahika (Mabo): Can I say something first?

CHAIR: Yes, of course.

Mrs Tekahika (Mabo): Apology families, elders of this community and friends. It is my mistake and I think it is father's mistake, too, that we acknowledge our families are sitting on sorry business around the Torres Strait and here on Thursday Island. We have probably called some places as well, if I can address that little bit. It is to respect our elders past and present of today. We must acknowledge everyone because we are the generation of yesterday and we are the people of yesterday, the elderly people. The people of today and the people of tomorrow are our little ones, the future. I just want to say that little bit.

I would like to say something else, like Sila said in his speech, and I would like to address it a little bit. We have places like the cultural heritage on the high land because he is giving you the okay now. They have the war memorial, they have the big waterfalls and they have all these things around here. I would like to give a little bit of that. I think that is the role of the elderly people and addressing it now to our families who come here to address our needs. Thank you very much is all I can say.

CHAIR: Thank you so much for welcoming us so fulsomely. Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into elder abuse in Queensland. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on Thursday Island and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. My name is Nigel Hutton. I am the member for Keppel and the chair of the Education, Arts and Communities Committee for this morning's proceedings. With me here today are: Corrine McMillan MP, the member for Mansfield and deputy chair; Wendy Bourne MP, the member for Ipswich West; Nick Dametto MP, the member for Hinchinbrook; Ariana Doolan MP, the member for Pumicestone; and Jon Krause MP, the member for Scenic Rim.

The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee with its inquiry into elder abuse across Queensland. We are here today on Thursday Island to hear your views and your experiences, to help inform potential changes and to report back to the Queensland parliament on elder abuse and on solutions and interventions that may be able to take place.

This committee is a committee of the Queensland parliament and its hearings are subject to the rules of the parliament. It means that our proceedings are recorded today by our wonderful Hansard reporter Bonnie and will be published on the parliament's website. If you have any concerns or at any time feel you would like to say something but would like for it to be said in camera or in private, please just let us know and we can sort that out.

Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I would ask everyone to please ensure that their mobile phone is switched off or to silent mode. I invite anyone who wishes to speak to share their answers.

Today we are going to share some of the common questions and then invite anyone from our panel who would like to share an opinion. We will have a common question and then invite multiple responses to that. There might be a follow-up question. We might say, 'Ms Pearson, can you explain a little bit further on that one?', and then we might go to another common question as opposed to the format in other places where we might ask everyone to give a big speech first and then ask some one-on-one questions afterwards.

BRUCE, Mrs Beverley, Private capacity

BRUCE, Mrs Rachel, Private capacity

PEARSON, Ms Nancy, Private capacity

SAVAGE, Mr Silas, Private capacity

TEKAHIKA (MABO), Mrs Betty, Private capacity

WARRA, Ms Lena, Private capacity

CHAIR: The first question on behalf of our committee today is: is elder abuse present in your communities and what does it look like? Is there anyone who would like to share their thoughts?

Mrs R Bruce: There is elder abuse in our community. It is not talked about. It is kept within families. Part of our work at Mura Kosker regarding community is part of our DV team and the OPAP program, which is Sarah, and trying to look at encouraging families to come forward, share their stories and look at what support mechanisms we can put in place for the elders but also for the family as a whole. I think it is coming out more and more, but prior it was not really talked about. We are trying to encourage that yarnning within families and within community. It is a whole-of-community approach to stamping out this issue that is in each community.

CHAIR: Would anyone else like to share on that question: is there elder abuse in your community and what does it look like?

Ms Pearson: I will share. I know that it does exist. It depends on where you see it. A lot of our elders have homes and, because we have the extended family, sometimes it is hard for other members of the family to move on. The thing about that is, when you are living in overcrowded situations, there is a lot of impact there. When we look at what we basically have to offer for our elders, there is not another place where they can go, especially when they become older and are wanting a place of their own and wanting their own space but also maintaining what they do. Not all of our elders want to go into a home. Trying to put that on them is not right from a cultural perspective because we are the ones who basically help them and support them in their home as the extended family. At the same time, when it comes to some of the services for our people, we also need to look at those services if they are appropriate for them. Having something here on TI does not cater to the whole need of the Torres Strait. That is abuse. That is neglect.

I know that in some of the communities where I talk to elders they are worried about whether people are using their money the right way like they would like them to or whether they are using that money for other things. This aunty who I stayed with, my partner's aunt, she was very aware of it. Her story is that she lived here on TI and then moved back to her home community. She had children on the island. Her partner left her things, so she basically gave this house to her grandson but dad ended up selling it. In selling that house, mum got nothing, so that is also elder abuse and neglecting their rights to a property they owned. These are some of the things that do happen. At the same time, if aunty was supported properly, she would not have had to leave, but it was her choice to go back home, so we supported that.

Another thing that I am aware of is the respect around where elders live, and when you have family living with you they are going to be confronted with family violence, and that is trauma. Also, when we look at what our young people are doing, we must never think that they are too old to understand. Our elders are very much ahead of everyone because they have seen things before us who are coming behind. They are the ones who are trying to put protective factors in place, but at the same time it is up to the people who they connect with to try to put those protective factors in place to ensure that there is a healthy boundary. For our elders, yes, they need to be protected. They need to be socially inclusive. Looking at what we do in our organisation, we are trying to fill that space in making sure that our elders are supported, listened to and heard.

CHAIR: Thank you for that answer. Mrs Beverley Bruce, would you like to speak on that question?

Mrs B Bruce: I am a resident of Muralag Beach of Muralag Island, so to get here today I got in a dinghy on a beach where we have a crocodile trap and my husband brought me over. I have come as a member of the general public because I am aged and, I suppose, to help my community. On the island where we live we are a very small population but we have older people. We could have a facility where I could get a cleaner for two hours a week paid by the government but, because we

do not have a bridge or a ferry service or anything, we cannot access that facility. I am not the only aged person. We have people there who are older than me perhaps. I have come as a spectator to see what help is available.

How do we judge elder abuse? We live in a small community and you do not want to be going off and saying, 'There's elder abuse happening on my beach,' if it is not happening. I am really here as a spectator. I have lived in the community a long time and one of the things that I have noticed through the years is that we hate the shame. We do not want to come out and say, 'Hey, my son has my bank card,' for instance. We do not want to say those things.

I do not want to judge anybody and I do not want anybody to judge me, but I am just here to see what is available to help. We live totally off the grid. Everyone on our island is totally off the grid. A couple of years ago I went to a meeting at the Grand Hotel—some other government body—and the minister told us, 'We're going to have a \$600 rebate on power. It's going to be a great help for you.' My question was, 'How will I convert that into diesel for my generator?' The place went silent—next question! I am really just here to share with the community—a lot of us live on different islands—and see how it works on each and every one of the islands.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. It is very important to understand that we are keen to hear your stories and experiences. There is no judgement. This is simply to find out the facts, to inform and to help. This is a bipartisan committee. We have members of the Australian Labor Party, members from the Liberal National Party government, along with Nick from the Katter's Australian Party, who is a representative in the Queensland parliament. We are all here because our desire is not only to work on whole-of-government solutions but also to make sure the localised response meets the need. It is definitely going to look different in this community than it would for someone on the Gold Coast.

Mrs B Bruce: True.

CHAIR: The only way we can inform that is by listening. We have heard again and again of the shame and the stigma. I know that it is uncomfortable and very raw, but we would ask that you please share with us so we can make sure that we are looking for the solutions. There is nothing worse than someone saying, 'I have a little cut,' so you think all we need to do is give them a bandaid, when actually there is a much larger sore that they were not willing to share. We want to make sure that we are diagnosing the problem and coming up with the interventions to help. Thank you for that. That was very honest. I appreciate that.

Is there anyone else who would like to share around the existence of elder abuse and what it might look like in your community? We have heard about the challenges of intergenerational housing and the tensions and impacts it has. We have heard about domestic downsizing and issues around housing accommodation proximity in terms of geography and access to services. There was a reference to financial and family violence exposure for elders as well. Is there anything else you would like on the record for this region?

Mrs R Bruce: The service that we provide covers 11 islands in the Torres Strait. You have to catch a ferry and then a plane to get to the islands. It depends on the weather. If there is inclement weather, we do not travel. If there is sad news in community, we do not travel. To cover 11 islands in the Torres Strait and the outer islands, some services are TI-centric but that does not do justice to the outer islands. There are elders on the outer islands who are missing out on the service. We are looking at trying to get out to 11 islands. There are two communities that are a helicopter ride and the cost of the helicopter—you need an arm, a leg and whatever else to pay for the helicopter. These are the challenges in terms of providing an effective service for our elders.

When we get out there, we hit the ground running—you do one-on-one counselling, you touch base with the elders, you touch base with the key stakeholders in the community. We are out there for two days and you try to capture everything in the two days. If you are looking at some sort of intervention or everybody coming together to provide a service or provision, it is not straightforward. It is quite complex. We, as the workers on the ground, try to do everything. Sometimes it is a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul because our organisation works with elders, couples and even young people. The youth are not part of our footprint, but when they come and talk to us we try and help support them as well. We are not getting funding for young people but we intervene.

With our elders, it is not a case of you go in, they tell you this and then the problem is solved. You have to keep going back. You have to build that trust and that relationship for them to really expose what is happening for them. We are unique up here in the sense that you have to travel constantly to get the best outcome for a community. Like I said, it is not straightforward. The relationship building and the trust with our elders is really important. Even though they might know

that some are linked through blood and through family connections, it is still a matter of how are they as elders going to open up and tell us their stories? We are going in and we want to support them but it is hard to build a relationship when you are flying in and out of the community to provide a service. It is quite unique, but complex as well.

Ms McMILLAN: Thank you again, everyone, for having us. It is a real pleasure to be here and to hear your stories. If there is an occasion of elder abuse, how is that managed within the family? Is it appropriate that you go to a support person or a support organisation? Do we know who that is? Is everyone aware of that organisation?

Mrs Tekahika: I want to ask a question for my people here in the room. To whoever it is from the organisation, who is looking after the needs of the elderly people in the community? Some of our elderly people are ashamed and they are scared to reach out for help from agencies or organisations. There is nobody doing any more home visits, coming around and doorknocking to say, 'We are here from this agency. Can we sit here and have a yarn with you? Are you okay? Is everything all right? Is transport okay?' I have been struggling. I want to talk strong. I am going to fight for it. I have been struggling with transport and finance—everything.

Even on the way to Cairns for my check-up, I was struggling on the wharf, too. As an elder with low vision, I almost landed down in the water jumping from the wharf to the boat. One ferry provides help but the other ferry cannot provide help, so you have to find your way. We are struggling here on this island. I want to talk strong for my people, my elderly people. Our people is our voice. We stand up for the people who cannot stand up here now but they come to hear our story. Whatever insight you have, please put it on the table for them because they are the ones who are here to take it back to the government.

When the last group was here, I did fight for a bridge across from TI to Horn Island and from TI to Hammond Island. Elderly people coming today were struggling in a dinghy and the wharf does not suit elderly people, jumping from the wharf to the ferry. The wharf is not for disabilities—no. I would like to go over to Hammond but I do not like the set-up of the wharf. I cannot jump any more on the dinghy. The family is over there. The family is over this way. We are going that way and we are going that way; we are not going forward. We have to talk stronger to people like this team here to take our needs back and put them on the table to the government. We have to talk. We cannot sit on our hands. I always talk strong in every meeting. I fight for the elders. I am an elder. I am an elder in this community and I also look back on other elders. Being vision impaired, I cannot do anything. I tried to go that way but I had to find out myself. I pay for my taxi back and forward nearly every day. There are no elder fees for taxis around here. Everybody pays the same price. Thank you.

Mrs B Bruce: I want to back up our previous speaker about taxi fares. I can come from my island. I have to get myself here, but I can get here in a dinghy. From 9 am to 3 pm I can ring an organisation here called HACC, Home and Community Care. They will come and pick me up at the wharf, take me to the hospital and take me to do my shopping at IBIS if I need it. Many in the community do not know about it. I am 74 and I did not know about it. We have been going to HACC for maybe about 1½ years now. I went in there one day to go to the bank, but I needed to go to the toilet, so I went in there and I found this out. I said to Brian, 'Oh, I thought it was for old people.' Then he said, 'Well, you are an old person, Bev,' but many people do not know about the service.

If I go on a bus in Cairns, they know I am old and I get the pensioner rate. I do not have to flash a card. My question is this: for the pensioners who travel back and forward from Horn Island and back and forward from Hammond Island, where there is a regular ferry service—maybe not so much from Hammond but certainly from Horn—why don't they get a subsidised ticket on the ferry? I do not have a ferry service because we do not have a wharf. That is why we cannot access services like Home and Community Care because nobody can be covered by insurance—you are going in an open dinghy—and I understand that.

For people who live on Hammond Island and Horn Island, we should have the same as down south where we get a ticket for a pensioner rate. Do people agree with that? My taxi driver has just walked in the door. This is my husband, Guy. It is just something I often think about. If I go to Bamaga, I get a pensioner concession on Peddells Ferry. However, for our older ones, going to and from Horn Island, as far as I am aware, there is not like that almost free ticket that we get in Cairns to go on the bus.

CHAIR: Is there any further feedback in regard to the questions: how do families manage elder abuse? Is there an agency to reach out to? Does everyone know how to connect?

Ms Pearson: The HACC service is run by the Torres Strait Aged Care Association here on TI. You have HACC services that TSIRC also has, delivering to the outer islands. Hammond is one of those outer islands, but our elders there access services here due to our proximity. The other one that we are aware of is St John's who also provide support people for elders in the community. I think they do pick-ups. I do know that they have people going around to clean homes for elders.

The other one that I wanted to bring up is that we have our rangers in the community and they use our older people for knowledge and information in relation to cultural traditional practices. I have seen that that has been wonderful for the older people in the community because they are basically reliving how they have been brought up and are providing that knowledge for what the rangers call their traditional ecological knowledge that can only be accessed by the traditional owners. At the same time, it gives elders the ability to be out and about in community, making coconut oil, preparing gussy to make pakalolo and all of those things. It is keeping them busy. Sarah, you can talk about your program because I think it is deadly.

Ms Warri: My name is Sarah. I am the Older People's Action Program coordinator at Mura Kosker. I have been working with the elders in the community. One of the services that I deliver is the education session around elder abuse. Unfortunately, without funding, I cannot go to the outer islands. I am based here. My service is for the whole Torres Strait region, but I am based here in the inner islands here at Thursday Island.

In regard to information about elder abuse, I try to work with the Torres Strait Aged Care Association in town with the elders there, as well as Star of the Sea residents at the back. I have community morning tea sessions, trying to get to as many elders as I can to deliver information around elder abuse. I think, because of the shame factor, some elders are too shy to speak up, but I just give them the information to build courage for them to say that it is not their fault and that there are services here and so they can identify what they are experiencing. Slowly, over the years, we have had some elders ring in that have identified elder abuse because of the sessions that we have had. Some families are not aware that what they are doing is abuse as well, whether it is emotional or neglect, or things like that, going against the client's will. They are not aware that what they are doing is not right. They think it is right by the elders, whether it is because of their medical condition or memory loss, but it is not what the elders want.

I had a case earlier this year where the client's friend actually rang in and said, 'I'm just worried. Is this an abuse? My friend cannot attend the HACC service in town because she did not know the form that she signed was a power of attorney where she has no control over the decision that was made by the child—the son. Can you have a look into it?' With our little gathering, we meet up and then we have a yarn and then in the conversation it would come up. It is just being in a safe environment and feeling confident to speak about these things that it was mentioned. They have that feeling, 'That is my child. That is my son. When I am going to be ready, I will talk to him. It is not right because I thought this was to look after me, not to stop me going to places where I love to go and meet my friends and to choose another service.'

In the case of arranging power of attorney, the client needs to have a better understanding so they have a fair idea of what is happening if they still have capacity. There are other options in the community, but it is up to them if they want to report it. They may not want to, but as long as they know that there is help here and we can report it with the police. Again, it is a very sensitive situation because everybody is very private and shy, and it is embarrassing to actually speak up. With the education sessions, you build the courage. Throughout the years there have not been a lot of reports, but there have been more reports since the education sessions.

CHAIR: As a follow-up question to that, you are funded. However, the funding envelope does not allow access to the outer islands. Is it 12-month funding or three-year funding? What is the funding pool that you are funded from?

Mrs R Bruce: It is ongoing funding, but there is not that allowance for the outer islands. Needs have been identified. What I am doing at the moment is collecting data from community around elder abuse. I manage Sarah's program. I am collecting data so we can inform the department around this so we can get more funding. There have been so many inquiries about elder abuse. At the moment Sarah is just on TI, but there are needs in 11 communities in the Torres Strait. That is the need that really needs to be addressed.

Miss DOOLAN: Thank you all for coming and sharing your stories. It is really important that we have this on the table so we can take appropriate action. My question is around what does someone in your community experiencing elder abuse look like typically? Is it an elderly woman? Is it an elderly male? Is it someone over the age of 75 or even over the age of 50? What does that person look like?

Mrs Tekahika: I think from 50, going up to 60 to 70—going upwards. The younger ones are up to 50, down below. I am talking as an elder myself now. I like what my sister Sarah was saying here because she has a program for us elderly. We go there and she has everything there for us. As an elder, we sit around, we talk, we laugh and we play games. Yes, we talk about our concerns at home and all this and that. I think really we need to have individuals to sit in a group. That is my idea. Maybe make a group, sit in a group and we dot point everything and then give it to you guys. Then we will talk about it. I am full of it! I have plenty of issues of elder abuse in the community, from town. Yes, people look at you. Maybe they look at you, you look different—‘Oh, you’re young. It doesn’t matter.’ They do not know your character—who you are carrying with you, who you are, what age you are. You are doing things around to help others, to pass it on. We have bundles of issues around in our community here. This is only a small island. We have too much.

One group was here and we gave everything. I mentioned the wharf and the ferry. I mentioned the fees that we pay for the ferry, to and from, and the taxi fares. You are an elder but you pay the same fees. Yes, I am looking at it as an elder abuse—the ferry, the taxi. It is like the saying goes: where do we go from here? It is story after story after story—the same story. I could not drag my suitcase on my wheelie walker down to the wharf. The ferry comes to the wharf. Whether you like it or not, you have to follow all the way down to the bottom. Coming back you have to walk up, up and up. There must be another way for the elderly people.

CHAIR: Thank you, Aunty. Once we are finished here today, Peter might get some more details from you and we will see if we can find some past information in this field. What you are expressing is a daily challenge that is being faced by your community. We have to see if there is something that can be done. I appreciate you raising it with us, knowing that you have already raised it in the past. Let’s see if we can work together to get something done in that space. Mrs Bruce, I think you wanted to add something.

Mrs R Bruce: What was the question again?

Miss DOOLAN: My question was: what does someone in your community experiencing elder abuse typically look like? Is it an elderly woman? Is it an elderly male? Are they over the age of 75? Are they over the age of 50? What does that person look like for you?

Mrs R Bruce: It could be anyone in the community really, from 50 onwards. There is our cultural protocol that goes around what is an elder in our community. Our cultural practices go around that. Who we deem as an elder in our community is from what was taught by our parents—how we recognise our elders and how we respect our elders as well. The young people would see someone 50 and over as an elder. If their parents address us as aunty and uncle, then they address us as aka and athe, which means grandparents. We are deemed elders in our community.

You can be 50 or over. There is not an age group where we deem a person as an elder. Our cultural practice within the community is that when we say, ‘There is aka and athe,’ they are deemed as elders in our community. That is how couples teach their kids to recognise them and to have that respect. They say, ‘That is aka and athe. That is your grandparents you are talking to.’ We cannot pinpoint a number when they are deemed to be an elder. Most of the time you will find that it is from 50 and over when they are deemed as an elder in the community. I am classed as an elder in our community. They call me aka and they call my husband athe. We are deemed as elders in our community. If you are looking at elder abuse, it could be from 50 onwards to 80.

Miss DOOLAN: In terms of the people you are working with, is it a lot of elderly women who are asking for help or is it elderly males?

Mrs R Bruce: It is mostly elderly women. It is a kind of taboo subject but it is slowly becoming talked about. We are encouraging that yarnning. There is the shame factor. The approach we take is when we go into community and yarn with the elders there are other associated issues that we tap into. That is to build their trust and to get them to open up. That is when I talked about going in more than once—flying in and out of community—because you are building that trust. Eventually, when they have built that rapport with you, that subject then comes out. It takes a while because of the shame factor. Also, you could be related to that elder. Then we would talk to other staff members and ask them to go and talk to the elder. It is important to build that trust and rapport to get that topic to come to the surface. We talk about all the other associated issues within the family and then we talk about addressing that. When they feel they can open up, that is when they start yarnning about the elder abuse to us.

CHAIR: Sarah?

Ms Warria: I was going to mention age, as Rachel has already mentioned. Another thing is, when the elder reaches a point where they have a medical condition, that is when the abuse comes because they do not have that strength anymore. Especially in the Torres Strait, a lot of grandparents look after their grandchildren. As their health changes and they do not have the strength they used to have, the abuse comes. The family take advantage of the key card or they dump all the grannies because they want to go party and things like that.

Mostly in my program it is the women. Maybe that is because I am a female worker. It would be good if there was a male worker so the male folks could be comfortable reaching out to share their issues. There is elder abuse of males and females in community, but the stories that we receive are mostly from the ladies because they build that relationship and they are confident. It is a safe area where they can come or give us a call. We get a lot of calls from the outer island. With the lack of funding, unfortunately I cannot go out there.

As soon as they reach that age or that level where they have a medical condition, when they do not have the strength to stand up for themselves, the children or the family take advantage. Most families do not even know it is abuse until we tell them that this is abuse. Financial abuse is not the only one. There is emotional abuse. Physical abuse is another popular one.

They need to understand that, even if they are hurting them without knowing, it is abuse and they need to know. As soon as they become frail or because of a medical condition they do not have the strength to have the authority to say no or draw the line, the family take advantage of them. I think we need to get more education and awareness out there that elder abuse is a crime and this is what it is—identify it and report it. That answers that question.

CHAIR: Ms Pearson, did you have anything you wish to add?

Ms Pearson: Sarah hit the nail on the head. The only thing I wanted to add was just to recognise exactly what Aunty Rach and Sarah have been saying. Women are on one side and men are on one side. That is basically how we work as traditional people in the Torres Strait. The other thing is that Sarah did well in regard to hitting the nail on the head with the illnesses our elders face and how that impacts them.

I will bring up the same thing I brought up earlier: we need more residential spaces for these elders because we are a growing majority. I am going to be 62 this year. I know that my children will care for me. We probably argue a lot. Some families are good. We want to be able to support the ones that are not so good. We would like to get funding to allow Sarah to take a male with her and get out to the outer islands to pass on these key messages. It is detrimental to our elders. There are numerous elders in the community and we should be reaching out to them now before they pass on and the younger people take their space. We know that it is a changing world. Things are changing all the time, but if we can do that to benefit the elders, to minimise the abuse and to educate families that this is what abuse is, we are on the way to maintaining a grip on that issue and minimising the impact.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Ms BOURNE: Thanks so much for the messages that you have shared with us so far and also for raising those challenges in terms of taxi fares, travel allowance and the need for home visits, which I think is a great idea, and the state of the wharf. Are there any opportunities or ideas you think you can share with this committee that might improve our response to elder abuse in your community? Do you have anything further that you can think of?

Mrs Tekahika: Can I mention this. I want to bring this onboard about elderly people—70- and 80-year-olds—living in the community. They are being abused by noise. Young people are partying on all night through till daybreak and through to midday the next day. Elderly people live next door.

Another thing is animal control in our community. There are some dogs in our community. When elderly people walk to the shop, the dogs have not been tied up and they race towards elderly people and make them run as well. This is my concern now because last week I was told about an elder. I did not know that this meeting was going to happen. I wanted to write a letter to the shire council to control the animals in the community, to keep them in their yard. Elderly people like to exercise and they like to walk to the shop but they cannot. There is noise with partying all night. They do not care that there are elderly people living on that side, that side and that side. They just go for it.

I went to Cairns last year to visit my cousin. She lives in a village in Manoora. It is an elderly village where elderly people live. It is a beautiful village. I like it. It suits elderly people: it has two bedrooms and a small yard. If their family want to go and see them, they go and see them. They are there. There are no ups and downs and no noise with partying in the community.

We do not have space here for ourselves. We have to live and bunch up under the one roof. When we are unable to walk and do things for ourselves—walk around in the house; hop, skip and jump; take a taxi—of course there is an old people's home here, but we could have space for a centre for elderly people. I ask for that every time—to give us a space to go and to live on our own, but we cannot because of our children and grandchildren. We still have to live under the same roof.

As for the help needed here, I am speaking all the time in every meeting about the bridge across Hammond and Horn—to take us to the terminal, to catch aircraft out to Cairns or to go anywhere else. With the ferry business, the wharf is not suitable for elderly people because you are walking down and dragging your suitcase down to the ferry—no. We are paying the same fares as everybody pays. As pensioners, we are still paying that amount. It has to change, somewhere, somehow.

CHAIR: Thank you, Auntie. Captain Bruce!

Mr Bruce: I am not a captain.

CHAIR: I heard that you offer your own taxi service as well as a ship to get your wife to the island.

Mr Bruce: You have a good memory.

Mrs B Bruce: He is the captain of my dinghy!

Mr Bruce: It seems to me that in generations gone by children used to respect their parents a great deal. From my own personal experience, I have four kids and I do know that the older I get the less respect I get. We are very close, but I just mean the way I am spoken to. The older I get by far the less status I have. An example is just doing up a boat. I have been doing since I was 18. I am now 75, so you would think that there would be some knowledge there, but from the standpoint of my children not so much. It is only since I have got older that it is happening like that.

I wonder whether at schools part of the curriculum could be that children are taught to respect those who are older than them. We have lost all of that. You see kids going to school and they swear at their teacher when they talk to them and things like that. How on earth is that breeding respect? That will then come back through the families and through society. We need to get back to the core of it—what is going on. If parents are not teaching their children, perhaps children could be helped in schools to learn what respect is. That is my first point.

Secondly, we have a friend on Horn Island who is crippled. That happened in a diving accident about 40 years ago. He cannot get to TI, for goodness sake. Why can't he get to TI? Because there is no way he can get his wheelchair down the ramp, onto the boat and off the boat. The boats are not suitable—nothing is suitable—so he is stuck in the little house where he is living. It is appalling. It is disgraceful that this man cannot do anything. NDIS is supposed to be looking after him. I would ask you to go and look inside his house and see the status of his house and his yard. NDIS is supposed to be looking after all of that. It is just abysmal.

I really think, as this sister here said, that the transport system in the Torres Strait is awful. It is going to get worse because it is driven by private enterprise—one trying to dominate the other. It would be better if it was just a government service. As an example, if I lived in Brisbane I would be getting on a bus and paying my 50 cents or whatever it is for a day. Here, a big percentage of your pension is gone just to get to TI and back. There are no concessions. There is nothing. You just pay. If we want to go to Bamaga, I cannot tell you the exact price.

Mrs B Bruce: We do get it at half price.

Mr Bruce: But it is still a lot of money.

Mrs B Bruce: It is still \$70 return. For Guy and me to go to Bamaga for the weekend, it is \$140 and we are going 15 kilometres or whatever it is.

Mr Bruce: If I lived in Brisbane, how much would it cost me to go from Brisbane to Sydney by train?

Mrs B Bruce: \$25. You can go from Cairns to Brisbane for \$25 on the train because we have a pensioner concession.

Mr Bruce: Those are the two areas. When you get in isolated areas or not even isolated areas, how do I get across from where I live to TI? Well, you find your own way. As you get older and the waves are high on the beach, it is harder for Bev to get on the boat. I have to pull it in. There is no boat ramp—nothing, nothing at all. There has been fighting about that for 35 years that I have been here. We cannot even get a boat ramp.

We had a lady there who had an embolism in her brain. The only reason she is alive today is that we happened to be on the island and the tide was in. Had the tide been out, the boat would have been high and dry and she would be dead—this was a mother of three kids. There is no doubt about that. When we got onto the ambulance, they said, 'We're all busy,' so we had to go privately to get her to the hospital. There was not even an ambulance service that was okay for that. Those things are bad enough when you are in your 20s and 30s, but they are life threatening when you get to be over 50 and 60, depending on your physical condition. They really are.

Mrs B Bruce: We have a helicopter landing pad on our island but from where we live you cannot drive that road. The helicopter would not have landed. There are all kinds of things.

Mr Bruce: There is not even a windsock anymore. It is just hopeless.

Mrs B Bruce: I feel for the people here. We have heard today about programs these guys have got going. They have funding to visit on Thursday Island. Half the population lives on the outer islands. I think there are around 8,000 in the Torres Strait and 4,000 people live on Thursday Island, so the funding is for half the population. There are aged people, elders, on all of the islands. Only so much can be done when there is no funding.

CHAIR: Thank you for that. I come from a regional area myself, so know that that experience is replicated. There are different challenges, but that tyranny of distance and geography still plays a huge role. It has to be surely in the funding envelope when we look at these to say, 'If all we want to do is Thursday Island, then we'll just fund you for that.' If we are not going to fund you to provide the service for the whole 8,000 people, what are we doing? That is a personal opinion, obviously.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you to everybody who has spent time with us this morning. This is my second time to Thursday Island and the Torres Strait. I always think I would love to spend a month up here, but you still would not have scratched the surface of really understanding what it is like to live up here even after a month. My only apology this morning is that we are not going to be spending more than just last night and today here. Like I said, I would love to stay up here for a whole week or even a month.

Obviously, elder abuse is widespread when it comes to the ways that people are abused—financial abuse, psychological abuse, withholding food, withholding medication, finances and accommodation. I am interested to understand how prevalent physical elder abuse is in this community here. It would be very hard for people to talk about, but are elders being physically abused by young people in this community?

Mrs B Bruce: From my standpoint, I have not seen anyone physically abused but that is only where we live. We see abuse in different ways but I have not seen physical abuse.

CHAIR: Sarah, what about from your service?

Ms Pearson: I guess in confidence, yes—physical and it could be sexual as well. The thing about that is that it is not spoken about. Going back to what Aunty Rach was saying, when it comes down to growing up with respect, we all did. We all grew up with our healthy boundaries. We were never bad to older people, especially our grandparents, like Aunty Rach said, our aunts and our uncles. We were brought up with that respect. I cannot speak for every family, but I can speak for my extended family that that is exactly what we did.

My grandfather had seven sons and those seven sons always arranged to come up to Hammond and be there for a while—to change his roof, to help him with his own house, the house that they grew up in. All of that has changed a little bit within our extended family because our families have grown very big. Our families have moved away from community. They are not part of the culture and the tradition that we practise in community, so they are exposed to other things.

The other thing there is disconnection. When we speak of respect, we also have to consider how that family has discipline. Within the Torres Strait Island family, we know that the mother's side and the father's side have different roles in raising their children. The mother's side is supposed to nurture the children so they have that respect and they know who their family is, whereas the father's side is to discipline, to get the boys to do exactly what they do in providing for family.

One of the things I wanted to bring to the table was that my grandmother once said to my grandfather, 'Francis, it's Sunday. We're going to go to church,' and he turned around and said, 'Mary, I'm sorry but the Lord's not going to put the meat on the table by himself. Somebody has to go and look for it.' Those were the elders we grew up with—self-providers, people who looked after their own homes, people who kept their families connected and together. Now we have services doing that or trying to do that.

We talk about primary health services and Home and Community Care services. Out on the outer islands they exist. Social inclusion does not occur unless there is a death, unless there is a tombstone opening, unless there is a family gathering or a reunion, and all of that costs money. Going back to when we were young, money was not the issue because we had trades. If you go out to our communities, you will notice that the central islands do not have mangoes. We love our mangoes but the thing is that trade happened between communities. That was our lifestyle. That was where the respect and the togetherness was, the unity, the resilience and knowing that there was change coming.

With that change coming, we moved away from our diet and started getting things from the shop. Look at our elders today. How many of them have illnesses that are borne from having the wrong diet, not having access to the food that they sourced from the sea or from having a garden? Look at our elders—those who are big, as in obese. That is because they are buying everything from the shop. Nobody is making a garden anymore.

Our hands were always be busy. Today that is the problem: our children's hands are not busy. They are taking up this—mobile phones—and they are giving it to their children. Does this respect you? It is only a tool, but they give it to the children and the children learn that this is also a babysitter: 'I can sit on this all day. Mummy or daddy will let me.' That is where all our values are changing. The only way we can fix this is by working smarter and better with our people. I work with families. It is very hard for me to sometimes understand why the families are in this space. It is because of the changing times that we have endured through each generation.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, there are no questions from the member for Scenic Rim. We will close our hearing for today. We have the opportunity for everyone to come and join us and have a cuppa and have a chat around some of the things you raised but also just to share some of the stories and histories of your community. We would really love to share in that with you. Thank you very much for joining us. Thank you to Peter, Bonnie and Lynda for keeping us out of trouble. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I now declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 11.02 am.