CORRECTED VERSION

OUTER SUBURBAN/INTERFACE SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into growing the suburbs — infrastructure and business development in outer suburban Melbourne

Melbourne — 18 June 2012

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Ms L. McLeish
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Witness
Mr T. Coppola, senior manager,
Northern Melbourne Regional Development Australia Committee.
The CHAIR — I would like to afford a welcome to you, Mr Tony Coppola, senior manager of Northern Melbourne Regional Development Australia, established in 2009. We welcome any opening remarks you might have, but before we move to that I just need to let you know that while you are here in this time and hearing setting you are afforded parliamentary privilege, so if you wanted to say something unfettered today, that is most welcome; however, that privilege will not be extended to outside of this immediate hearing environment. Hansard is recording this. A hard copy of the transcript will be available to you in approximately two weeks for correction of any spelling mistakes. If you have some opening remarks, we welcome you to bring those to us now.

Mr COPPOLA — Thank you for the welcome. As you are aware, we put in a written submission earlier this year, so my opening remarks are really just to give a very brief overview of that and then open it up for questions in terms of issues you might want to respond to.

The CHAIR — Yes, we are comfortable with that.

Mr COPPOLA — The Northern Melbourne RDA committee is part of a federal network. There are 55 committees across Australia. The Northern Melbourne committee covers seven local government areas in the north of Melbourne, stretching from the city of Yarra through to Hume, Whittlesea and Nillumbik on the outer fringes.

The committee is made up of volunteers from business, industry and education institutions in the north of Melbourne, and I am the sole employee of the committee that basically implements the business plan and works towards the strategic priorities of the region. Obviously regional development is a very wide range of issues which impact on regional development, whether it be economic, social or environmental issues. So inevitably what we need to do to use our resources effectively is to actually prioritise what specific areas we are going to work on from year to year.

The way we operate is that we undertake evidence-based research. So in 2009 when we started up we commissioned a report entitled *Melbourne’s North — the New Knowledge Economy*. It is an assessment of where the region was at, at that time, from an economic and social perspective. It looked at trend information in relation to employment, population, what was happening with skills et cetera and actually had a number of recommendations in terms of what the region needed to do to advance its economic and social development opportunities.

The CHAIR — Do you see any movement on any of those recommendations at the moment?

Mr COPPOLA — Yes. As a committee we are able to undertake initiatives on our own part with some of the funding that we receive directly. But the other part of our work is working with state government and federal government, local councils, education institutions in terms of getting some movement on some of those activities. Would you like me to elaborate?

The CHAIR — Yes. I would like you to expand on that point in terms of any prioritisation of recommendations that have been accepted and are somehow within the system and looking for funding — either state or federal. We are looking at a bit of history now, a bit of water under the bridge since 2009. If they held water, so to speak; hopefully they have some support by now.

Mr COPPOLA — Yes, absolutely. One of the recommendations out of the report was to look at the food processing sector within the north of Melbourne because we have quite a significant number of companies in that sector. So our committee actually commissioned a strategic review of what is called the Plenty Food Group cluster, which is a group of about 140 food processing — —

The CHAIR — Yes, we know about that from our hearings within Whittlesea, actually.

Mr COPPOLA — Okay. We actually commissioned a research report and the report surveyed businesses within the Plenty Food Group, and that report has recently been finalised and has a number of recommendations on how that group can continue to grow. Members believe there is significant potential for them to increase their export capacity to China and south-east Asia and Pacific areas, so one of the things we will be doing as a result of that is actually talking with the state government through the Department of Business and Innovation to look at
what funding if any is available to actually assist those businesses to prepare themselves and pick up some of those potential export opportunities.

The CHAIR — But when we are talking about the broad sweep of food companies and looking for export opportunities, are we looking at the inputs being regional, Victorian, imported feedstock for the end product? Have we got a bias or a leaning to involving the conversion and the value adding for local produce?

Mr COPPOLA — Yes, absolutely. What the report indicates is that the growing middle class in China and India actually values Australia’s product. It is seen as clean and green, and there is also ad hoc evidence to suggest that on the supermarket shelves in some of those Asian countries if there is a cheaper local Asian product and a more expensive Australian product, quite often the middle class will actually have the Australian product.

The CHAIR — Do they actually buy it or just push it around in their supermarket trolleys and jettison it before they get to the cash register?

Mr COPPOLA — The feedback we have been getting — admittedly ad hoc — is that there is definitely a market there, particularly in China where pollution is seen as an issue even by the local population. There is a bit of reluctance to eat the local product if there is a better alternative or what is seen to be a better alternative.

The CHAIR — I certainly understand that.

Mr COPPOLA — And dairy products would be a classic example of that. So that is one area. This report referred to the knowledge economy, and obviously that relates to trying to grow our business sector and embracing latest technologies. Our manufacturing sector still is the most critical sector within the north of Melbourne and still employs the most people despite the retrenchments that have occurred over the last 12 months or so. It still employs 58 000 people, and one of the things we have found is that those businesses that have survived in manufacturing have had to embrace advanced manufacturing. In other words, they have had to invest in technology, capital equipment and so on, and while the overall size of those businesses in general has declined, there are a lot more small-to-medium enterprises that have found their niche markets, and the reason they are surviving is because they are getting smarter, they are using the latest technologies, and that is enabling them to find their niche markets and become more competitive.

One of the projects we are about to put in place is a survey of businesses right across the north of Melbourne. That survey will be asking businesses to identify their current usage of ICT services — information and communication technology — and from that survey we will then analyse where the gaps are in terms of what businesses are currently using ICT and the productivity benefits that can be generated by informing those businesses, in a second stage of the project, about how they can upgrade their technology and ICT skills within their business to make them more productive and more competitive. We are hoping we will be able to survey about 6000 businesses with that project.

The second stage of the project will involve, once we have done the analysis at stage 1, getting ICT providers together, talking to them about the findings from the report and putting in place a strategy where we work with the ICT providers to — —

The CHAIR — So you would actually broker almost an industry-based solution, and would you be monitoring the quality and the value that is provided? You have oversight for that?

Mr COPPOLA — Absolutely. Again the feedback we are getting is that particularly a lot of small companies don’t know what they don’t know, and quite often they set up their business, they might be doing reasonably okay but they have limited understanding of the ICT capacity that already exists.

The CHAIR — Yes, it is almost a terror of growing beyond that point because of the unknown.

Mr COPPOLA — That is right. In this survey the results will actually be aggregated by sector. So, for instance, if an organisation, let us say in the health sector, responds to the survey, they will be given a score card for their organisation in terms of ICT usage compared to the sector in general. So your organisation might get a score of 5 out of 10, which would indicate significant gaps in terms of ICT capability that you could pick up
compared to your particular sector. In the metal field, again metal engineering will have a different benchmarking system et cetera.

The CHAIR — So how did you cope with this relationship in terms of your internal resourcing and the other expertise coming in on a voluntary basis? How do you actually provide oversight?

Mr COPPOLA — It is a good question. We do not get involved in service delivery because we are so small and we do not want to compete with the existing organisations that already exist. We do not want to compete.

The CHAIR — No, but the skills to provide the oversight — —

Mr COPPOLA — We will be engaging a consultancy. We have actually tendered out to select a consultant who will actually deliver the project on our behalf. We will set up a project steering committee which I will be a member of, and we will also get the local Department of Business and Innovation representative from the north Melbourne committee together with some local government representation and NORTH Link, which is the business and industry network for the region. What we do is that we bring key stakeholders together to work on priorities that we all agree need to be addressed, and that is the importance of doing this sort of research. When this research was commissioned we had 14 funding partners that paid for research reports, which included the seven local governments, the two universities, the two TAFEs, NORTH Link, the business and industry network, ourselves et cetera. So by getting that sort of support to do the research, once you get the report finalised, you already have commitment from your partners to actually work on the recommendations.

The CHAIR — It is a nice way of getting them involved. I invite Craig Ondarchie, who is going to leave us in a moment, to put a question or perhaps two to you, if we can just interrupt you.

Mr COPPOLA — Yes, absolutely.

Mr ONDARCHIE — One of the things we do know in the north is that Tony’s enthusiasm is directly related to how Collingwood is doing in the AFL. Northern Melbourne RDA is to be congratulated for its most recent publication, which is an analysis of manufacturing as it stands now and what it is going to look like in the future. But northern Melbourne has a great story to tell in terms of business incubation and business development. Would you like to share with us how successful that business incubator has been?

Mr COPPOLA — Absolutely. The predecessor to the RDA committee was called the Area Consultative Committee, which was also a national network. That committee in North Melbourne was involved in setting up the Darebin Business Incubator, which is based in Alphington. That opened in 1997 and has over 40 start-up businesses on site at any given time. The purpose of business incubation is to try to inverse the small business failure rates. When the Darebin incubator was opened up research at the time indicated that about 80 per cent of start-up businesses failed within three years of commencement. What we found with the Darebin incubator is that over 90 per cent actually survive if they come through that environment. In that environment all the businesses are on the one site. They have four full-time staff who provide services to those businesses, including assistance with business planning, networking and admin support. They have common meeting room facilities, a common reception area — —

The CHAIR — Is there a mentor structure that fits in there as well?

Mr COPPOLA — If the incubator manager is able to do it, he will do it. If there are some external skills that are required, he will then facilitate external people to come into the incubator and provide those skills.

The CHAIR — Is this in a low-cost rental environment?

Mr COPPOLA — One of the requirements for making it successful is that the incubator itself cannot pay commercial rent on the site. In the Darebin instance, the City of Darebin made an old council depot available for the purpose and we managed to get I think it was $500 000 from the commonwealth at that time to refurbish the depot site to make it suitable for an incubator and create the office spaces et cetera. That was one-off funding from the commonwealth to do the refurbishment. From thereon the incubator became self-sustaining. It operates as a business in its own right in terms of the rent that it gets from the tenants from month to month.
The CHAIR — It becomes almost like a serviced office environment.

Mr COPPOLA — But it is more than that in that the full-time staff actually work with the businesses.

Ms McLEISH — Four people.

Mr COPPOLA — It is not just a matter of collecting the rent and the businesses doing whatever it is they do.

The CHAIR — Can you just give me an idea as to what sort of neighbourhood that is in, if we are thinking of council depots? That would not be connected to a shopping precinct or anything like that?

Mr COPPOLA — No, it is not.

The CHAIR — Is it something in isolation?

Mr COPPOLA — That one is in isolation. It is relatively close to the Alphington railway station. There are a couple of retail shops nearby, but nothing significant.

The CHAIR — I have seen an interesting model of this where a business incubator was actually in a setting in which urban renewal was going on. It worked a little bit like a small university campus in that the propeller heads and the people in a start-up environment actually created a whole environment for themselves in terms of restaurants and the kind of shops that were there, so around the business incubator was a kind of a funkiness. They could be looked at in the same way as any other area of collaboration which is quite intellectually driven, and therefore quite often those people attract another commercial base around them.

Mr COPPOLA — That is right. That is absolutely true. The other one we were involved in setting up was the Brunswick Business Incubator in 2002. That is an old secondary college site. It was vacant for a number of years and the buildings were going to be demolished. We managed to again get an agreement with the state government to allow us, through the City of Moreland — —

The CHAIR — Where was that? Was it in Dawson Street?

Mr COPPOLA — Victoria Street. The school had moved to Dawson Street a number of years earlier. The City of Moreland has a lease with the state government for the site until 2014. We set up an independent board of management for the business incubator, which has a sublease from the City of Moreland to run it as an incubator. That has also been highly successful. We have 66 spaces there for businesses in two three-storey buildings with a mix of light manufacturing as well as commercial office space. Again it operates as a business in its own right. It generally makes a profit every year, which goes back into increasing services to the tenants and also to refurbishing the remaining space. We still have the top floor of the main building vacant, which could be refurbished to bring in more start-up businesses. That is part of the overall plan.

The CHAIR — Craig, do you have another question?

Mr ONDARCHIE — No, I am fine. Thanks.

Ms HUTCHINS — From everything we have heard in our time as a committee, in terms of employment you guys seem to do it best in the north. Being a girl from the west it is hard for me to acknowledge that. Has there been some good modelling that you have seen around getting young people into jobs and tackling youth unemployment?

Mr COPPOLA — I think we suffer from a very similar problem in the north, particularly in relation to youth unemployment. There are definitely pockets within the region that have traditionally been very disadvantaged, when you look at West Heidelberg, Fawkner, parts of Thomastown and Lalor et cetera. It is of great concern to us that those pockets still exist. I guess one of my passions and beliefs is that we do not intervene anywhere near early enough with our young people. What I mean by that is that I think early childhood development is absolutely essential, particularly in regions like the north and west where we have a history of not getting it right with education pathways for our young people, and then school to work transition pathways.
Again the evidence suggests that a lot of our young people do not get the opportunity to go to kinder at the same levels that a number of other regions do. That means when they hit primary school they are already a bit behind. We had Professor Richard Teese from the University of Melbourne speak to our committee probably 12 to 15 months ago, and he is an expert on school outcomes.

**Ms McLeish** — He lectured me.

**Mr Coppola** — I wish I had done a course with him. He is very impressive and has just an amazing understanding. But one of the things that really hit home with me when he spoke to us was that his research shows that if a student has literacy and numeracy problems at grade 3 level, the majority will never catch up. To me that is horrifying. It basically means that by the time they leave primary school the majority of those students will still have literacy and numeracy issues, which means that by the time they hit year 7 they will struggle even more with the secondary curriculum. Secondary teachers will have less time to spend with them to help them catch up on what should really be the basic things that they should be able to cope with. To me that is a major reason why we have poor school retention and early school leaving. Once young people leave school, there is a reluctance on their part to go back into a training or education environment because they know they have issues and will struggle. I think until we address that fundamental issue, we will just be playing catch-up all the time — we are going to be patching up along the way. We will be able to help some of them, but the majority we are going to lose along the way.

**The Chair** — I suppose in some instances this might be exacerbated by families who might be disadvantaged in general, new arrivals to the country with English as a second language, and low levels of literacy in the parents, so it is hard for them to intervene.

**Mr Coppola** — Definitely. It is all of that. Just to give you another example, again about 12 months ago I went to a forum where the commonwealth department of education had done a survey of all prep students right across the nation to try to get a handle on where students were at in relation to where they should be in terms of literacy, numeracy and some other key issues. I happened to be sitting next to the principal from Fawkner Primary. I spoke to him and said, ‘How did your school go in the survey?’, and he said, ‘We were quite low’. I asked him, ‘Why is that an issue for your school?’, and he said, ‘The main reason is that we don’t have a local kindergarten’. All the kids who go to his school are starting way behind scratch. Also, lots of migrants settle in and around that area because there is low-cost housing. So he has a double whammy, if you like, of virtually no kinder but also the migrant refugee families who perhaps cannot read or write or have not had a lot of school education themselves and are unable to help their children at home et cetera. I would imagine that the west would be as bad or perhaps even worse than the north in relation to some of those types of issues.

I just get a bit frustrated when governments, whether it be at the state or federal level, put funding to deal with the end result of the bad outcome, where I think in a lot of cases it would be better to invest early on and really try to break the cycle. To me if we could get to a stage where we could say that every primary student when they left grade 6 did not have a literacy or numeracy problem, I would be quite confident that we could significantly improve school retention outcomes and year 12 retention outcomes in secondary school. But it is going to take a monumental shift along that line to achieve that, I think.

**Ms McLeish** — In view of a lot of the growth we have seen, almost like Topsy, in these outer suburban areas, do you think — answer as best you can — that all children are able to have access to kindergarten through that?

**Mr Coppola** — In the outer growth areas?

**Ms McLeish** — Yes.

**Mr Coppola** — The feedback I have been getting from the Hume and Whittlesea councils is that they are struggling to deliver the community and health services to enable that to happen.

**Ms McLeish** — Is that through a lack of spaces rather than the physical buildings, or a greater demand than there are — —
Mr COPPOLA — My understanding is that it is a lack of physical buildings and spaces.

Ms McLEISH — Because we have seen lots of developments where they have got a kinder, a primary school, and maternal and child health all co-located, which sounds as though it could address some of these things, but —

Mr COPPOLA — Yes. I think it is just —

The CHAIR — But I think you are talking about the region as a whole, not necessarily the new growth areas.

Mr COPPOLA — Yes.

Ms McLEISH — But my question was around: is that meeting it in the new areas?

Mr COPPOLA — Yes, look I have not got specific numbers on —

Ms McLEISH — No, just more of a feel.

Mr COPPOLA — The feedback I get from Hume and Whittlesea is that they cannot keep up with the community infrastructure. I think both councils are looking at a population growth of over 100 000 each over the next 10 years or so, and as councils they just do not have the financial resources to be able to provide the facilities required.

Ms HUTCHINS — I am just expanding on the point I asked before. Are there some good models that you have seen in your region that help the kids who might be at risk into employment or into pathways? Do you have any examples?

Mr COPPOLA — If I can just elaborate on another part of the problem, and then come back to that?

Ms HUTCHINS — Yes, sure.

Mr COPPOLA — What is now generally well known is that there is a significant lack of career preparation and guidance within our secondary schools. Most people will say, ‘Our school has a careers teacher, so it’s okay’. Research we did a number of years ago indicated that all our schools did have a careers teacher but they were part-time, except for one who was full-time. Only one had been trained as a careers counsellor. When we surveyed the careers teachers they all admitted that the majority of their time was spent with students selecting VCE and university subjects. The students I was talking about before who were struggling —

The CHAIR — That is quite a departure from careers advice.

Mr COPPOLA — Absolutely. I guess it can be deceptive when you see that a school has got a careers teacher. But you really need to dig deeper and find out what exactly they are doing. It is not the careers teacher’s fault, because generally they have got a teaching workload as well and they have been given that additional workload. It is absolutely not a criticism of careers teachers; it is more the system.

Ms McLEISH — The teachers are selected out of the teaching pool rather than out of people with careers expertise.

Mr COPPOLA — Yes, exactly. We really need to make sure that as early as possible, preferably from year 7, particularly with those students who are perhaps unlikely to go on to university or who may not have a real inclination to do so, we start working with them about all the other options that do exist. If schools keep offering only an academic curriculum and assisting only those students who want to go down that pathway, the other students who are practically minded and good with their hands, who might be suited to a trade area or various other pathways, are not being given that information. That means they are going to get frustrated, leave early, but, more importantly, have no idea of what they might be suited to.

The CHAIR — But it almost seems, too, that we need to engender respect and a reverence for people who have manual skills —

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Mr COPPOLA — Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR — over things from more cerebral pursuits.

Mr COPPOLA — That is right.

The CHAIR — That we need to boost their stock so they do not look like they have made the second-best choice.

Mr COPPOLA — Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR — We need to underpin that — the worth of it, the value of it, the importance of it.

Mr COPPOLA — That is right. Again it is a real challenge because if you talk to most people in the community, if you talk to most parents, if you talk to most teachers, they will say, ‘No, look the university pathway is the way to go. If you don’t go down that pathway’ — and it is not right. Look at, for instance, the manufacturing report that Craig referred to. Manufacturing is still our biggest employer in the north. Everyone I speak to, when I talk to them about manufacturing, is actually shocked that that is the case. From what they read in the paper and the media everyone is under the impression that the sector is virtually dead and buried.

The CHAIR — So if you were making a career choice in 2012, you would probably run a mile from saying, ‘I want a career in manufacturing’.

Mr COPPOLA — That is right. Again, it is not the teachers’ fault. It is the system that is not providing that information to them. In a very simplistic way I guess you could look at it in that most teachers would have gone to year 12 and gone on to university and then straight into a school environment. If in that process they have not had exposure to manufacturing or other industries, it is probably not that surprising that they have a fairly narrow perspective of what is going on out there. With a lot of the jobs in manufacturing, as I said before, because they are embracing advanced technology, a lot of people in manufacturing companies now are operating machines that are worth millions of dollars and are computerised. It is not your textile, clothing and footwear sort of dirty environment — smoky, dusty, et cetera. I went to a company, Edlyn Foods, with Minister Greg Combet about a month ago. It is absolutely spotless. It has all computerised equipment. They have increased their turnover over the past five years from $10 million to $30 million.

Ms HUTCHINS — How?

Mr COPPOLA — I guess I can cover a number of issues here. There is a program that the federal government runs called Enterprise Connect. What that involves is an adviser from Enterprise Connect going into a company and looking at their whole operation. They look at their whole management system — their financial and management system, their operational management system — and then identify gaps in their processes and how to improve their management system and operations. This particular company implemented all the recommendations out of that report. One of those recommendations was to move from inner Melbourne to a greenfield site at Epping so that they could build a larger facility, and that was planned in a way that was most effective in terms of production and output and streamlining their operations. They found that they are so efficient and so productive now they can compete that much more strongly, not only locally but also overseas.

Ms McLEISH — This is interesting because earlier we heard from a speaker who said with manufacturing the actual economic benefit and growth is greater in a lot of areas because they are being a lot more productive.

Mr COPPOLA — That is right.

Ms McLEISH — There might be less numbers but — —

Mr COPPOLA — Yes, that is right.

Ms McLEISH — This another example, I suppose, of a company that is definitely more productive in any environment, whereas here manufacturing is certainly shrinking.
Mr COPPOLA — That is right, and there are numerous examples like that, but you do not read about them; they do not make headlines.

The CHAIR — I would like to pick up what you said earlier on in terms of the stakeholders for your studies and research endeavours, that that collective included a representative from the Department of Business and Innovation. Could you describe just a little bit how that person executes their role: where they are physically located, what sort of connections there are and how they are supported — just the on-ground relationship with that person from the department?

Mr COPPOLA — Where I am based is actually co-located with the Department of Business and Innovation office at Bundoora. One of the benefits of that co-location is that you get to know the other staff. I attend the weekly staff meetings. You get a very good understanding of the work that they are doing, the projects they are working on. Similarly I feed back what I am up to, what I am proposing and also get their input into how we might go about things. The person who is working with me on that ICT project was originally with Multimedia Victoria. With the amalgamation they became part of DBI. He has an excellent understanding of ICT, a very technical understanding, much better than I will ever have.

There is benefit to me in having him involved on this project, because when we developed the questions for the survey of business, for instance, Dave has an excellent understanding of what ICT capacities are out there. Again, when we start implementing the project, when he is on the steering committee and working with the consultancy, Dave will have some very valuable input in terms of how the consultancy should be going about dealing with certain issues and management projects. It is really important, in terms of the work that we do, that we have strong networks and also what we call cross-memberships. For instance, Mick Butera, who is the executive director of NORTH Link, sits on my board, and I sit on his board.

The CHAIR — Yes, we have met him at Whittlesea.

Mr COPPOLA — Because of that, it means that we work really well together, we do not duplicate and we complement each other. If there is anything that involves directly working with business and industry, I will always talk to Mick about doing that part of it.

The CHAIR — Is there any sort of relationship where, let us say, somebody who might have retired from an eminent career in business makes themselves available as a mentor, very much on a the ground? It might be a short tenure — it might a three-year contract, something like that — but they take a particular interest, especially in a start-up or something that is wanting to export for the first time. These are historic milestones in a company’s history. Is there access to that expertise?

Mr COPPOLA — Yes. There is an organisation — I am pretty sure they are called the Small Business Mentoring Service — in Melbourne. The Brunswick Business Incubator actually uses them from time to time to mentor start-up businesses within the incubator.

The CHAIR — Is that a government body, or is it a private consortium?

Mr COPPOLA — I am not 100 per cent sure. I had assumed that they were government funded, but I got the impression that they operated semi-autonomously. I know that one of our board members on the Brunswick incubator was actually working with them, and I got the impression that they had some sort of independent status.

The CHAIR — How much area would an entity like that have to cover? Are they looking at a region or at a particular industry type?

Mr COPPOLA — My understanding is that they just make themselves available.

The CHAIR — Ad hoc.

Mr COPPOLA — Ad hoc is my understanding, yes, but I am not 100 per cent on that.

The CHAIR — But it is not as if it is actually driven to go and provide support to sectors or regions; it is picked up by those people who might identify the need?
Mr COPPOLA — That is my understanding, but I have not been close enough to it to have that technical understanding to that level. Picking up on that issue, one of the recommendations from this manufacturing report is that it actually shows that to compete in the current environment small businesses need to be able to diversify their products, they need to be able to identify export opportunities and they need to be able to embrace the latest technology in their operations.

What we are pursuing at the moment at both state and federal level is to get policies that actually implement funding for those types of activities. To give you an example, product engineers and process engineers are the two types of occupations that can actually help with that product diversification — improving internal operations et cetera. Most small businesses cannot afford to employ someone outright, because engineers are not too cheap. So one of our recommendations is that government should fund cadetships whereby engineering students as part of their degree are required to work within a company for 12 months, or whatever period of time, to actually help those small businesses to work in that product diversification area of export readiness et cetera.

That has the dual benefit of not only helping the local company but also giving the students practical, on-the-job experience in terms of implementing on the job what they have learnt from their studies. RMIT University has those students who would have the capacity to do that. We believe that with funding of about $15,000 per annum per cadetship we could make that happen.

The CHAIR — It is good to hear; that is good news. We have run out of time, Mr Coppola. Thank you very much for your input. I particularly value it; it has given us another insight into what is happening on the ground. It may be that our executive officer, Mr Nathan Bunt, needs to follow up some points with you, and there may be additional information by way of reports that you have made mention of that we might require a copy of. Are you comfortable with acceding to our request on those fronts?

Mr COPPOLA — Yes. I am more than happy to.

The CHAIR — On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your time and for coming to see us today.

Witness withdrew.