

(Thank you, on behalf of my wife and three children for the opportunity of speaking before this hearing)

I myself was born and raised on a farm in Nyabing, and spent all my life there, being left with my brother to manage our fathers' farm at the age of 15. As well as farm our fathers' property, I joined a shearing team and spent many years shearing sheep. as well as successfully operating the farm.

In 1989, I had the opportunity (with my wife and two young boys) of buying our own farm, after many years of leasing farms, and successfully raising beef and sheep in the southwest town of Donnybrook.

We found a property in the Ravensthorpe Shire, which we could see could be developed into a very good farm and asset for the future of ourselves and our two young sons. The property consisted of 800 acres of old established farming land, 900 acres of land that needed further development 300 acres of blade-ploughed country, with some regrowth, and approximately 1700 acres of virgin mallee/mort bush.

Before buying the property, we sort information from the Department of Agriculture at Jerramungup regarding whether we would be able to further develop the 1700 acres of virgin bush with regard to sensible clearing. We were advised in writing, that approval would be given to clear the 1700 acres of bush, providing rocky outcrops and creek-lines remained vegetated. We were more than prepared to leave more than the required minimum. It was on this proviso, and having a written authorisation from the Department of Agriculture, that we went ahead and purchased the property. Indeed, if we had not been advised that this was so, and in writing at that we would not have purchased the property with views of developing it into a viable farm for a growing family.

We intended to commence clearing a small portion (eg. 300/400 per year), but due to problems with collapse of the wool industry in the early 1990's, and extremely low grain prices at the time, we could not commence the clearing as soon as we would have anticipated.

- In 1995/96, we again approached the Ag. Dept at Jerramungup, and Fred Armstrong visited property for inspection. Advised we could put in an application but suggested that it would be highly unlikely we would be given permission to go ahead with any clearing, either on the virgin bush or the blade-ploughed country. We suggested growing Lucerne - still negative response.
- Spent many hours and hard work fencing and developing 900 acres to a stage where it could be stocked with sheep (poison had to be removed by hand) and stumps and regrowth cleaned up. All the cleared land has large areas of mort and mallee remnant bush, which we have left for shelter-belts and wildlife.
- In 1998/99, again approached Ag Dept, this time head offices in Perth and were put in contact with Mr. Keith Bradby, Policy Officer, Sustainable Rural Development Program, Agriculture Western Australia, who came to our property to inspect our situation with regard to clearing. He expressed a very biased

opinion, stating that we should not be allowed to clear any of the remaining 2000 acres, and expressed a very strong viewpoint that we should not get compensated in any way, saying "*don't think a Government car will come down your drive with a big bag of money, because it won't happen!*"

- Keith Bradby - our opinion was that he had a conflict of interest in this issue. He was one of the decision-makers within the Ag. Dept WA, and therefore should not have been expressing his own personal viewpoints. Our suspicions were confirmed when we read an article in our local newspaper saying how our Mr. Bradby was at the "helm" of a group of conservationists who were going around the southwest corner of WA trying to buy up farming land and privately owned bush to create a continuous corridor around the coastline of WA. Early in 2003, Mr. Bradby produced his own telemovie/documentary entitled "A Million Acres a Year", which screened on SBS, which was extremely derogatory of tanners in the south-eastern agricultural area of WA. Mr. Bradby was also a member of *The Native Vegetation Working Group*, which completed a report for the government in September 1999.
- David Hardy? Refer to book "Public Good Conservation 2001" page 154, par 6.111. (Also sat on Native Vegetation Working Group as Executive Director, Sustainable Rural Dev. Program, Ag. WA).
- Tried unsuccessfully over years to push forward with issue of further clearing of bush so as to make our property more viable. We have had to work off farm doing contract work to supplement income. We were therefore ineligible for any interest subsidy during recent drought, due to the fact that we did this work, even though we were qualified in every other way.
- Any clearing applications needed to go through Calm, Water & Rivers, LCDC, Shire, EPA and Aq Dept WA, and it was impossible to have an application approved having to go through all these different agencies. Also for an assessment for clearing to be looked at we needed to have a Hydrologist to assess the situation on our farm, at entirely our cost, with little or no chance of success anyway.
- Some neighbouring farmers were very unhappy about further development of 300 acres blade-ploughed country, let alone native bush. This was expressed to me by our immediate neighbour that we would be reported to the appropriate authorities if we went ahead and further developed this portion which was already half developed anyway. We feel very strongly that local LCDC groups should not be the ones to have any part of the decision-making process as this is a gross conflict of interest, as they could be the ones to gain the most from any administrative decisions made. Most other farmers in the area have had all their properties fully cleared and are now very proactive in planting back the trees they have cleared, and these re-plantings are being funded through Natural Heritage or Govt. assisted packages, and handed out through the local LCDC groups. We,

though, are expected by all and sundry to halt any further development of our property so as to benefit everybody else's business enterprises.

- Contacted politicians, both Federal and State - written countless letters over last few years and had varying responses, but all to no avail. Federal blame State and vice versa over the funding issues (who's going to pay). On this question, if the community wants our land, then the community should pay for it - we had to after all. This could be done by taxpayers' funds or by a levy. After all, we don't expect the public to walk out on *their* life-savings.
- Finance from banks or financial institutions for operating cash-flow impossible. Private finance had to be obtained at very high rates because of equity issues.
- Rates - have been paying full rates for 14 years on the bush (the same rate as cleared productive land). Were only advised 2 years ago by the Valuer Generals Dept that as of 1999, we could get a rate adjustment, but the Shires are reluctant to advise landowners of this option, as the Shire is keen to get as much rates as possible.
- Very regrettably, 12 months ago we had to finally give up our battle against bureaucracy, and were forced to sell our property, although we still retain the 2000 acres of bush, because the neighbour that purchased the cleared land put no value on the uncleared portion of our property and expressed that he was not interested at all in purchasing it.
- We are awaiting some sort of Government decision on this matter, as we need to have the bush subdivided off onto a separate tide. If we were to do this under the present policies, it would mean us having to place a Conservation Covenant on the 2000 acres of *privately owned FREEHOLD LAND*, before we could be granted subdivision away from the original location (cleared land). Placing a Covenant on our bush means us handing over all rights to make any decisions about the future of this *privately owned FREEHOLD LAND*, even though it is *privately owned FREEHOLD LAND!!!*
- We have lost our Superannuation Fund.
- Forced premature and unplanned sale of farm inside 15 years - capital gains problem if compensation ever paid.
- Lost income on uncleared land plus income that could have been derived from cleared land if farmed to maximum - finance not readily available due to equity issues with financiers - due to there being no value placed on the 2000 acres bush.
- We have many years of experience in the farming industry. and have had the results to show for it in the past, with fat lambs from our property being some of the best in the district according to the local Elders agent, and we topped the

market with our fat lambs from our property when sent to Katanning saleyards in October 1997.

- This has had a dramatic affect both financially and emotionally on our family (now comprising of 2 sons and 1 daughter), as we have all worked extremely hard to develop our farm as far as we were allowed to go. and took much pride in what we were able to achieve, even though we were so restricted by rules and regulations.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I have farmed all my life and know no other way of life. The opportunity came to us to purchase this property in 1989. Everything my wife and I earned over the years has gone into this property, with many years of very hard work on and off the property, with the prospect of developing the entire property into a viable family farm, and having something to look forward to in the future for ourselves and 3 children. This has now been taken from us unjustly, as we are now told we no longer have a say as to what happens to the land that we worked so hard to purchase and develop, and we get the impression the government wants to take this away from us to do with what they like, even though it belongs to us. **THIS LAND HAS A FREEHOLD TITLE!!**

Ron & Jennifer COLLINS, and children Nathan, Daniel and Rebekah.