



**TRANSCRIPT
OF PROCEEDINGS**

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PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACTS OF NATIVE VEGETATION
AND BIODIVERSITY REGULATIONS**

**DR N. BYRON, Presiding Commissioner
PROF W. MUSGRAVE, Associate Commissioner**

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

AT CAIRNS ON THURSDAY, 31 JULY 2003, AT 1.30 PM

Continued from 28/7/03 in Brisbane

DR BYRON: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to start this public hearing for the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the impacts of native vegetation and biodiversity controls. My name is Neil Byron. I'm the presiding commissioner for this inquiry, and my colleague is Prof Warren Musgrave who is also a commissioner. You're probably here because you're aware of the terms of reference, so I won't attempt to summarise all that. But I would like to say that we have spoken to organisations, land-holders, environmental groups, state and Commonwealth agencies, all sorts of people with an interest in the issues.

We've received over a hundred submissions from all around Australia so far. We held formal public hearings like this in Brisbane last Monday. Next week we're in Canberra, Perth and Adelaide and it sort of goes on after that. The purpose of these inquiries is to provide an opportunity for interested parties to formally put on the record their views and their evidence on the matters under examination. We're working towards producing a draft report for public comment that will go out in probably the beginning of December. Apart from these public hearings we will continue with field visits and going out and looking at properties and talking to everybody who will talk to us.

When the draft report comes out in December there will be a period for about two months, maybe 10 weeks, for people to read and comment on that and to correct any errors of fact or interpretation, anything we've left out that's important, anything that we've misunderstood. So that's why there's a draft report with draft findings and recommendations. So there will be more visits, probably more public hearings, we will be accepting all those submissions and then we have a month or so to finalise a report that has to go to the Commonwealth cabinet by 14 April next year.

Although we always try and keep these public hearings as informal as we can, we do take a full transcript for the record and so it's best if we don't have comments from the floor for obvious reasons. But before we finish this afternoon, as usual, we provide an opportunity for anybody else in the audience who would like to come forward and put their evidence on the formal record, comment on things that other people have said or not said, that's perfectly welcome and encouraged.

Participants don't have to take an oath, but the Productivity Commission Act does require that people giving evidence at public hearings should be truthful in their remarks. That relates to legal privilege that I understand that comments that are made in giving evidence to the commission's public hearings are exempt from defamation rules, but I don't think we will be going there. But participants do have to be truthful and relevant in discussing the matters. The transcript will be made available to everybody who has made a presentation to the hearings and copies will be available on the web site and public libraries all over Australia.

I think that covers all the housekeeping matters. The toilets are just there, the

safety exits are at the steps. I'm required under Commonwealth legislation to inform you of that.

PROF MUSGRAVE: That's more important than the slander and defamation aspect.

DR BYRON: The first presentation is from the NRM Board (Wet Tropics) Inc. So, gentlemen, if you would just like to give your names and affiliations so the transcription service can recognise your voices later and then maybe if you can tell us what you want to say in 10 or 15 minutes and then we can have a bit of a question and answer discussion about that. Thanks.

MR LOUDON: Thank you very much for the opportunity to put our submissions to you. We will be proposing to follow the summary which we have given you. First of all my name is Charley Loudon. I chair the regional strategy group which is the NRM Board (Wet Tropics) Inc. It was set up as part of NHT1, the National Heritage Trust Arrangements 1 and its role has been to facilitate the distribution of NHT money in the wet tropics region. The wet tropics region is that area covered by the catchments from the Herbert to the Daintree. I should perhaps indicate the height of my supporting material doesn't equate to the length of my presentation, but I did like to bring it along to emphasise to you the issues that we face as a regional strategy group.

As part of NHT1 we were asked to get a bit more regional focus into the way NHT money was spent and quite a lot of money was going out to lots of individual projects which didn't have a particularly strong regional focus or any relevance to one another. We've produced a thing called the NRM Board Wet Tropics Regional Strategy for Natural Resource Management. A simple little document. It had some priorities attached to it, it was very useful to people and they made a great deal of use of it. Just as a matter of interest, when we established that strategy back in about 1999 we identified within the wet tropics regions 101 - and I kid you not - strategies and plans and codes and those sorts of things which might apply to the management of natural resources.

The other document which was around at that time which we needed to make some relevance to was FNQ2010 which is a regional growth strategy. Most regions of Queensland had them. An enormous amount of effort went into producing 2010 and there was a requirement in there for some elements to deal with the elements of natural resource management. In late 1999 the Commonwealth decided that we would move away from the concepts that had been embedded in NHT1 more to a regional focus and they produced a document called Managing Natural Resources in Rural Australia for a Sustainable Future. The blue book or the purple book, depending on your colour perception, that virtually became the blueprint for the move to NHT1.

One of the requirements of that, of course, was that as we were moving to a regional focus there needed to be regional arrangements, a regional organisation and regional plan and there began, I guess, some of the problems which we have to deal with in the reality of coming to grips with this myriad of pieces of legislation and strategies and those sorts of things. We thought we could take our little simple regional strategy and beef it up to become a new regional strategy for natural resource management in the wet tropics - "Oh, that it were so simple". It became clear then that we had to take into account in developing that strategy an enormous range of other documentation, other strategies, other pieces of legislation. We started this process mid-last year and the statement of planning intent identified 138 strategies. So in a period of four or five years we'd picked up another 30 strategies that had to be taken into account when developing our regional plan.

So we do have under way now a regional plan and there's the first bits of it. There are a couple of others to come but these are the preliminary documents. There's the preliminary plan itself plus the NRM conditions, biodiversity conservation elements of it. There are sustainable resource use element yet to come and I presume one on capacity building. Some of the things that we had to take into account when we started putting that together we thought, "Well, that's a very simple process, we'll go back to our original strategy. It was simple, it worked and people made some use of it," but as I said, "Oh, it were so simple." Just to give you some idea there are strategies associated with water and water planning; there are the coastal management strategies, a whole stack of those; there is the wet tropics management plan which manages the World Heritage areas; we have the Barron River WAMP process which is also a water planning exercise which is going on throughout the region, the Barron River Catchment Rehabilitation Plan, the Mulgrave Shire River Improvement Trust, the fish resources and fish habitats of the Daintree, the Herbert River plan, master plan for water management in the Herbert River, the Johnstone River Catchment Strategy, the Tully/Murray River Management Strategy and so on and so on.

As I said, around about 138 we identified in putting that planning process together, all of them having some relationship to the need to get together a regional plan which over the next few years which will guide natural resource management in the wet tropics. Attached to that will be a regional investment plan which will direct the way investments will be made. There are a whole host of other things like mahogany glider, water quality targets and how you set them, property management planning and, of course, not to mention your own vegetation management. The amount of information which has to be processed to develop this plan is really quite horrific. We have an experienced planning team doing it and even they are having trouble coming to grips with the magnitude of it, so we can only ponder as to how much of this information is actually absorbed by people on the ground, the people who actually will make things happen.

While all of these pieces of legislation are affecting land managers and farmers, there is another layer of that still below that strategic planning level which farmers have to deal with and they relate to chemical use and all farms now are a workplace, we have a whole raft of workplace health and safety regulations. Those are governed by Queensland acts and they are added to from time to time by regulation and these are increasingly irksome and burdensome on our land managers. In mid-last year we then had the premier and the prime minister signed an MOU to establish a reef water quality protection plan and it's going to sit up there somewhere and the regional plan we're developing will relate to that and will in fact be the implementing mechanism for a lot of that reef water quality plan.

That again is a whole new raft of planning which we need to face up to. It has a very complex and detailed science report, the Baker report, attached to it and indeed your own Productivity Commission report. So the amount of information which we need to absorb and somehow or other turn into a meaningful document is quite horrendous. The other one which is likely to be particularly irksome or a particular problem for rural land managers is the Integrated Planning Act which will have a significant bearing on the way the reef quality plan is implemented.

We have attached to our submission a list of those documents and plans we were talking about and there is a hard copy of it. Those are all of the documents related to resource planning in the wet tropics which we hold in our library. It really is quite daunting to come to grips with. So I guess the major point we would want to make here is the fact that it's just the sheer burden of it and the sheer complexity of it and how on earth do you make management decisions on this enormous quantity of material. So I guess the other issues we would perhaps like to touch on and to address some of the specifics in your brief is what is the level of land-holder understanding of this, and I would suggest that it is very small purely because of the detail and the complexity of it.

It is particularly difficult because in this region we have four major industries which is cane growing, horticulture, dairying and beef cattle. This complexity and the increasing level of implementation of some of this regulation is acting as a very significant deterrent to people wishing to go into the business of farming. Two of our industries are under enormous threat, that is the sugar industry and the dairy industry; perhaps the latter is not recognised perhaps as much as sugar.

We have an ageing farming population and we're likely to see less and less young people wanting to participate in the business of farming, which you might think, well, really that's a commercial decision that people make. But what we need to appreciate is that if in our planning we don't have people able to make some productive use of that land, to be able to live there and to have a stewardship over it, what happens to it if that land goes out of production? I would suggest that the

implications of that are far greater than some of the environmental problems we currently have. It is, as I said earlier, a very distinct disadvantage and discouragement for people to continue to farm. The best outcomes are achieved if we can keep people, in the use of our natural resources, living there, looking after them, caring for it and some sense of stewardship for it.

There is the danger that people will see it as just being too difficult. If these issues are national issues and issues of importance to the state, then perhaps the nation and the state should contribute a good deal more to helping to rectify those. It's unrealistic to expect the 2 per cent or so of people who actually have the resources or stewardship for those resources to bear the weight.

That is of course not to condone any adverse or negative management practices there. I think that in terms of compensation, while there will be some specific cases where it may be necessary or even acceptable to offer personal compensation, I think perhaps the greatest compensation, if you like, or adjusting ability that the state and Commonwealth have, is to provide much greater support by way of supporting some of the sorts of things that we're trying to do to improve best practice and to do that in a fairly public way and in a way which rewards those land managers who are seeking to make the most efficient and effective use of their resources.

There has been a great deal of hope, I guess, put on the concepts of NHT2; that we might be able to get some of those sorts of resources into dealing with some of the on-ground problems that face our region. Sadly, as you no doubt are well aware, that whole process has been stalled for a couple of years. If the incoming NRM Board manages to spend - or gets it hand on perhaps \$2 million a year, then it would probably be doing very well.

It's interesting to reflect on some of the other priorities that we see around us. There's a sign just up here on the Esplanade which said that the ratepayers, taxpayers of Queensland and the taxpayers of the Commonwealth, have spent \$27 million building a fresh water pool and some changes to the Esplanade. We spend \$275 million extending the train from Rockhampton to Cairns. We spent \$280 million on a football ground in Brisbane. There are a whole lot of other incidentals, like a war in Iraq and the Solomon Islands, but we do really need to question the extent to which we are prepared to preserve and to help our land managers preserve our very precious natural resources.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much. Brad, did you want to say anything?

MR DORRINGTON: No, thanks, sir.

DR BYRON: I'll go first. Charley, it seems to me that you've made the point very, very clearly - with the aid of your pile of books there that looks like it's about to

totter over just from the height of it - that we've got this proliferation of legislation, regulations, codes, practices, plans, strategies et cetera. I can't help but agree with you that nobody is going to have all that stuff in their head when they go out to work on a property each day of the week. No doubt all those reports have something sensible to say in them somewhere, and there was probably a reason why most of them were done, but it adds up to a pretty daunting mass of stuff that's an obstacle.

What do we do about it? I'm tempted to think that sometimes, rather than address the problem, we'll spend three years doing a study on it and another five years writing a plan about it, but the job still hasn't been tackled. Rather than spend the next five years producing another pile of reports that's even higher than that pile, how do we go forward?

MR LOUDON: I think we need to understand one basic concept and that is that changes and the changes that we need to make will not be made by scientists or politicians or by bureaucrats or by environmental activists or by indigenous people sitting on a land council or by a whole range of people like that. They will be made by individual people on the ground, making individual decisions about their own enterprise or their own activities. I think it's important that we find some way in distilling out of all of this a few basic fundamentals which we can then present in language and in format that is relevant to the target audience, and that is the person on the ground who's going to make the decision and make it happen.

I think that probably is the key to how we get some change happening, if indeed we need to change. There are lots of things which we are doing which are very good, and we should recognise that. There are some things which probably need a little bit of a tweak or a little bit of an adjustment. They're probably, I think - if you were to be totally honest - there are not all that many things that have to be totally changed. It's a case of trying to provide forms of encouragement to see that those three elements of change happen.

DR BYRON: One of the things that struck me - we've gone all over the country on this inquiry - is the extent to which both Commonwealth and state governments seem to have relied on legislative prohibitions, restrictions, you know, telling you what you can't do in effect. It seems to me that just telling somebody, "You're not allowed to bulldoze a piece of bush," doesn't guarantee in any way that that ecosystem is going to be well maintained, well cared for or well looked after. In fact it may even have the opposite effect. So one of the things that we're trying to think about is ways that would give people a positive incentive to actively look after places which government and citizens think are high conservation values, rather than just prohibiting them from doing things.

You've suggested that either taxpayers at large or consumers could pay a few cents extra on our food products to make sure that there is commercial viability for

primary producers. I'm not putting words in your mouth there, am I?

MR LOUDON: No, I think that's probably - it would seem very difficult to understand how we're going to get sufficient capital to make these remedial actions in place unless we do have some form of a levy, be it a Medicare-type levy or a levy on consumers. I think there needs to be a recognition that if the protection of our environment is of national and state importance then there needs to be assistance, other than by the land manager or the landowner. How we do that, I don't know, but certainly a levy of some description would seem to be one of the answers.

DR BYRON: One of the things that's been put to us already a few times is that when governments use regulations to tell people that they can't clear natural vegetation on freehold land, for example, it's much cheaper to government than to actually buying the land and then having government staff having to manage it. You just tell the landowner that he has to continue to look after it and keep the ferals and the fires and the weeds out of it. So from a government treasury sort of point of view it's a way of achieving conservation on the cheap. But there may still be very real costs, it's just that the costs are borne by the land-holder, not by treasury.

One of the things we're trying to think through is how to actually make those costs visible, if you like, so that we actually know how much it costs to set aside an area or to tell a landowner that he's no longer allowed to do X, Y and Z on that property, because at the moment the only person who seems to know what those costs are is the person who's wearing them.

MR LOUDON: I think the other thing which agencies need to face is that there are less and less people on the ground from an agency point of view to either implement these regulations or to be of assistance to land-holders in developing alternatives, and less and less of the extension-type people, less and less of those sorts of people on the ground. One wonders quite how, if that trend continues, these resources are going to be managed in the future. Clearly if we could - and in a perfect world if we could develop systems whereby people can recognise the need for doing the right thing and then goes and does it, then it's a far better way of achieving an outcome than having someone with a big stick standing over you, because you are standing over Australians who tend to have a habit of saying "yes" while you're looking at them and then as soon as you're out of sight they'll say, "Well, you know what you can do."

So I think clearly the ideal option - and quite how you ever achieve it, I don't know - is to get compliance by voluntary means and preferably by some negotiated means. If you perhaps think back to your previous submissions we were talking to you about a thing called Primary Green that we were looking at, primarily that process where we sit down in the wet tropics with the regulatory authorities and say, "Let's come to an understanding about what needs to be done and let's sequentially

put those things in place so that we can start to get a voluntary approach to this. It's accepted that there will always need to be a big stick but keep it in the cupboard in the basement somewhere. We can go and get it if we have to but don't carry it around threatening people with it." I think there are some possibilities there to develop that cooperative approach.

DR BYRON: Thanks, Charley. I was interested in your reference to "a big stick" just then which tends to go with centralised direction and planning. There are those who suggest that maybe reliance on this is excessive. There are better ways, perhaps, of going around planning and managing resources with a more bottoms up approach driven more by the community and by communities that are more empowered in terms of statutory authority and resources. I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions about your NRM committee. In the context of that sort of thinking I was wondering if you could tell us something about how the committee is constituted.

MR LOUDON: The current committee grew out of, as I said earlier, a request to get some more regional focus into the previous NHT and prior to that the NRM programs - I'm sorry, the land care programs. It came together and the current one is based effectively on catchments. We have representatives of each of the seven catchments. We also have representatives of the major government agencies, the two regulatory authorities which are the Wet Tropics Management Authority and the Great Barrier Marine Park Authority. We have an indigenous representative and we have a conservation representative. That is an incorporated association under the Queensland act.

Each of the major constituent groups are invited to submit a representative to that committee which they do on a regular basis. The organisation has an AGM and any of those people who are on that committee can stand for an executive which runs the organisation in between general meetings, because it's a fairly big board of about 16 or 17 and so it means three or four times a year. Under NHT2 we're required to develop a new organisation which more appropriately lines up with Commonwealth guidelines. We're about to hold a selection process for that. It will be a seven-person board with the possibility of extending to 10. It will have one director and it will be housed within a company limited by guarantee, so it will have a slightly more professional and higher level of compliance requirements in terms of the Corporations Law and what have you. It will have an independent community chair and it will have a director representing local government industry, catchments, conservation, traditional owners, and coastal and marine and world heritage.

So it's a skills based board. If you want a seat on this board then you have to apply for it. There are some fairly stringent requirements for that. If you want the job you apply for it. You go to an eminent panel, selection panel, who will select that board of seven plus a chair. That board will be responsible for finalising the regional plan that I've mentioned earlier. It will be responsible for establishing

appropriate regional arrangements within the region working with the stakeholders. My personal view - and it is only a personal view - is that board ought to be something like a broker. It goes around between the stakeholders bringing them together to put together a range of projects attached to the regional plan which will set regional priorities in the area of sustainable resource management, biodiversity protection and capacity building.

There will be an investment plan which the board will determine where those funds will be invested. The major source of funds is expected to be NHT2, although the options will be there to access other funds if or when they are available. As I said earlier, my expectation is that that board will be a broker. It will indicate what sort of funds it has available and it will move around among its regional stakeholders saying, "We have this sort of money. We believe it should be invested in this area. What can you put together or commit to that sort of an outcome?" That's purely my concept of how I think it will work.

I guess the greatest concern of that is how much leeway or responsibility will actually be devolved to these regional bodies. Someone has suggested they will be kept on a very short leash and some of them were so unkind as to suggest they will be kept on a choker chain. So it depends to what extent state and federal governments to their commitment to NHT2 are prepared to devolve that responsibility to regional boards.

DR BYRON: Indeed.

MR LOUDON: I suspect that what those regional boards will need to do is to become very professional in the way they behave so that they may be seen as a genuine third partner in the deal.

PROF MUSGRAVE: When you referred to the "short leash" that could be a short leash coming from either the state or the federal government.

MR LOUDON: It's a very real concern among people that the state and Commonwealth will be keeping a very tight rein on how these funds might be expended, rather than while the expectation earlier was that, "Okay, we get a professional board up with the right sort of people and then we devolve the responsibility for that expenditure then." There's a degree of cynicism around that says that's probably not likely to happen and that there will be fairly stringent guidelines attached to how these funds will be distributed.

PROF MUSGRAVE: The strategy is a strategy for the application for and use of NHT funds or is it a more generic strategy?

MR LOUDON: I guess the grand concept is that it would be a plan or a strategy for

investment in all elements of NRM throughout the region and it would be used as the holy grail, if you like - how agencies invest money and how other people invest money or other institutions with an interest in resource management would invest their funds. But I suspect in reality that it would be primarily focused on the NHT funding.

PROF MUSGRAVE: So it's the framework for your work in relation to the gaining of NHT funds, their allocation and so on.

MR LOUDON: I think it's also the intention that agencies like Natural Resources and Mines or DPI or whoever would be conscious of this strategy in the way they frame their policies as well.

PROF MUSGRAVE: You have some resources, I understand. You mentioned \$2 million.

MR LOUDON: The indications are that the current board over the last five years has handled - the current board has distributed about \$25 million over the last five years. This is in the wet tropics region.

PROF MUSGRAVE: What about the funds that you command for doing your workload?

MR LOUDON: At the moment, because we were relatively well organised fairly early on, the chances of us being able to access that sort of money in the future is pretty limited, so we're looking at an average of \$5 million over the last five years. I would expect that - - -

PROF MUSGRAVE: Do your planning and so on, coordination.

MR LOUDON: Yes. That \$5 million is what we've oversighted or devolved to the community. We were pretty well organised early on before some of the other regions got organised, so we were able to access, some may say, more than our share. But now that more regions are getting organised there is going to be less money available.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Is that state money or NHT money?

MR LOUDON: It's a combination. It's Commonwealth money within kind support from the state. It's a state Commonwealth joint - - -

PROF MUSGRAVE: How many staff do you have?

MR LOUDON: Currently the board itself has about four or five working for it, but

within the region we have a network of catchment coordinators or subregion coordinators and some specialist staff as well. There's about 14 in total, I think, is the number. But we've absorbed into that some of that - in our current coordination we have absorbed into that some of the people that were previously directly employed by some of the Commonwealth agencies like Coast Care Coordinators and Bush Care Coordinators, those sorts of things, are now being absorbed into the regional structure.

PROF MUSGRAVE: As I gather, it's not a catchment committee or catchment authority such as we've seen in New South Wales or Victoria. But interestingly you are better resourced than certainly the catchment authority in New South Wales have been to date. Perhaps the New South Welshman would be a little bit envious. But it's interesting that Queensland doesn't have entities that are similar to those catchment committees. Have you got any comment on why that might be so?

MR LOUDON: There have been - certainly the time I've been involved as a community person - numerous suggestions from time to time that we would - we do have river trusts which are associated generally with local government and there has been some suggestions when - we also have extensive use of catchment committees, voluntary catchment committees. There has been a suggestion over time that we might move towards some principles or some approaches like statutory organisations, either statutory catchment committees or statutory river trusts but they have looked at it and discarded and quite why, I don't know. I'm reasonably ambivalent about what value they would be. My great concern about the current move to establish regional organisations is that they will become just another level of bureaucracy or governance.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Or government.

MR LOUDON: Yes. I think we would lose that commitment to communities. I think these organisations really must become the champions and the advocates for the on-ground people to be effective.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Charley, I'd like to spend a bit more time talking about that but I think that there are other people we need to talk to, so unfortunately I have to bring this final questioning to a close.

MR LOUDON: Thank you very much for the opportunity. I much appreciated that. I'll take my wastepaper away with me.

DR BYRON: I think we'll be following up with you later perhaps by email or faxes on some or this information. Thank you very much for coming.

MR LOUDON: I don't know how much money those planning exercises cost, but I

would suggest somewhere between 20 and 40 million dollars, and it really - - -

DR BYRON: In total?

MR LOUDON: Probably, yes, when you think of all the planning processes have gone on.

DR BYRON: Indeed. I'd think that would be conservative.

MR LOUDON: If we could have only spent a fraction of that, a quarter of that, on things on the grounds, then we would have had a so much better outcome. Thank you very much.

DR BYRON: Thanks very much for coming. Would you just for the transcript introduce yourself. I know you need no introduction here.

MR KATTER: Bob Katter, member for Kennedy, an electorate that takes in all of north Queensland with the exception of Townsville and Cairns and with the exception of the tip of Cape York Peninsula.

DR BYRON: What don't you just keep going.

MR KATTER: The implementation of the biodiversity policies - I can't, and I don't think anyone else here can either, go over the full ramifications of what this means, so I've just picked and highlighted a number of areas. But the first two that leap to my mind, and worry me very, very greatly, are the statement by Minister Hill which is government policy and will probably be implemented far more rigorously, it would appear, by Senator Kemp. I quote from the media release 10 September 2001, "Sediment will be reduced by 38 per cent." The scientists that know advise me that that will entail a 30 per cent reduction in the sugar industry and a 40 per cent reduction in the banana industry. A mill has to operate at a certain capacity level and if it falls below that capacity, then it closes. We have two mill closures in process right at this very moment as we speak in Queensland because they are 30 or 40 per cent below productive capacity. Arguably one is only 20 per cent below productive capacity, but if it falls to that level the mill closes and then all sugar farming in that area has to cease.

All I can say is that with the proposed deregulation of the industry and with the continuing implementation of the biodiversity principles as elucidated here - sediment reduction of 38 per cent - most people are assuming that the industry will close, and that seems to be a fairly reasonable assumption at this point of time.

Let me now deal with each of these issues. The reduction in sedimentation - it seems to me the balance and the weight of the scientific work that has been done is that prior to the Europeans coming to this country when the coastal plain was all native vegetation - the Aboriginal technology was not sufficient to cut down big trees - there was a five-tonne per hectare sedimentation run-off. It would appear that when the land was cleared and up until recent years there was a run-off of 20 tonnes per hectare. One report says 50 tonnes but I think there are four that quote a figure of around 20 tonnes per hectare; one is 15 tonnes per hectare. So the weight of opinion would appear to be we move to a 20 tonnes per hectare sedimentation run-off.

The CRC - I don't know what CRC stands for now but the Cooperative Research Centre I think is what it stands for - are a group of scientists that are paid by the state and federal governments to give us scientific accuracy, is probably the best way that I can put it. Some is financed by industry as well as by government and by the environmental departments. The CRC's figure for run-off, the latest one

that I saw, in the cane industry is three tonnes per hectare. I must make the point here with great figure that it was five tonnes per hectare in its natural state prior to any clearing. The CRC is now saying three tonnes per hectare.

That does not surprise me at all. Prior to clearing you have a tree. Grass doesn't normally grow under trees and the coastal plain was very thick with tree vegetation. So the predominant vegetation was trees; the predominant vegetation was not grass. So when the rain falls the drop does not hit the earth and disrupt it, but when he have heavy rainfall - and we're talking, in the area I represent between Townsville and Cairns an average rainfall of over 100 inches - you get massive downpours, water runs over the land and picks up sediment as it runs over the land. There was nothing to stop it from picking up that sediment when we had only trees there. There was no grass.

With cane, which is a grass, you have an enormously thick covering of the land, but previously when we harvested the land was left completely bare and hence we went to a 20-tonne per hectare run-off regime. We are now down to three tonnes per hectare because when we cut the cane now - we burnt it and then cut it and the land was completely bare. We don't do that any more. We do not burn. We cut the top off the cane and it is then put on the ground. It's called a trash blanket and it completely covers the ground.

Prior to the coming of green harvesting we ploughed the land five times a year. Now we plough once every five years because you don't replant cane. It goes in and it just keeps returning. It has during the growing season a very thick regime of grass, cane grass if you like - because that's what cane is - on the ground and then after we've harvested we have the trash blanket on the ground. So I'm not at all surprised that the CRC has come up with a figure of three tonnes per hectare. You must understand with biodiversity if it's in its natural state it's five tonnes per hectare.

The infamous statement and position taken by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to my mind completely destroyed their credibility. They claimed that the dugong numbers in Queensland had dropped clean in half and they quoted a number of sites where numbering had taken place. All of those sites were on the southern half of the reef, and very few people read the report. In fact, I don't know of anyone who read the report outside of myself. But I read the report and I was quite horrified to find out that we were flagrantly misled by that organisation, supposed to be shouldering the responsibility of looking after the reef. The dugong numbers had dropped clean in half in the southern half of the reef. The dugong numbers in the northern half of the reef had near enough to doubled, and they forgot to mention that. So a quarter of the fishing industry in the state was closed on the basis of information which was flagrantly, patently and with knowledge aforethought incorrect, deceiving and misleading.

But the interesting thing is, why did the dugong move? The only thing that any of the scientists have come up with is there was an appalling drought through all of central Queensland throughout that period and the rivers just weren't running, so there was no sedimentation going out onto the seagrass. It wasn't being top-dressed and, like your lawn, if it's not top-dressed it doesn't tend to grow good grass. Whether that explanation is correct, it's too early for science to make a judgment upon that, but if you are cutting down the sedimentation below the original five tonnes per hectare, then maybe there's a downside as well that has to be considered.

I just want to move on and say two other things. When I rang the three leading scientists in this field, one of whom had three pages devoted to himself mainly in the New Scientist magazine, one of the most eminent science magazines in the world - so he's an internationally respected scientist - all three scientists laughed at me on the issue of sedimentation. They said to me there's 15 metres of sediment out there now and every time a squall blows up it fluffs up the sediment, and the amount of extra sediment going out each year is going to make no difference to that effect that is already there, accumulated over 10,000 years since the ice age retreated.

The second element - it must be remembered that there's no sediment effect on the outer reef. I must emphasise I'm getting this from scientists. I have no first-hand knowledge myself, and also there are no reports that actually state these things. Let me just leave the issue of sedimentation completely aside - I'll come back to it and one other issue shortly - and let me move to the tree clearing guidelines.

I owned a cattle station in the gulf for the best part of 20 years, 250,000 acres, and it was called forest country because it's very heavily timbered. There is no way in the world we would ever have cut the tree down, not because we're in love with trees but because we couldn't afford to. The land is just not good enough to go into any of that sort of silly business, and that would be pretty typical of almost all of the gulf country.

But let me make these points to you. One, the City of Charters Towers is an area of 2000 square kilometres. It is so thickly covered in trees that it's very difficult to see a single roof from Towers Hill in the centre of the City of Charters Towers, and there are numerous cities and towns in north Queensland where the ground cover is as thick as that with trees - a minor point. The second point, which is a fascinating point - and we've got no science on this yet - the rainforest is expanding. It was thought that fires in the old days on the flat would start on the bottom and go up the hill and, knocked back, the rainforest just went up the mountain. Whether this is right or not I don't know, but I listened to a paper presented by Dr Baker that was speculating on this theory. But for whatever reasons, we don't know, the rainforest is expanding.

The third issue, which is really a very big and important thing that your

Productivity Commission must understand - the two major stations in the 150 kilometres between Charters Towers and Townsville are Burdekin Downs and Fanning Downs. "Downs" means no trees, means open, rolling, undulating grasslands. That's what "downs" means if you look up the agricultural dictionaries and encyclopaedias. The great-great-grandson of the original pioneer that took up Burdekin Downs - I asked him why it was called "Downs" because it's now completely covered in trees. He said, "That's a really interested question, because when great-granddad took it up it was open country. It was downs country." I find that very hard to believe because there have most certainly been trees there all of my lifetime, but then there is no other reason why the two stations would be called "Downs", Burdekin Downs and Fanning Downs. I mean, the station in between is called Virginia Park but these are called "Downs" - unless the man was an absolute fool, calling it "downs" when it wasn't downs.

But it is thought that since there are watering points now every four or five kilometres, there are enormous kangaroo populations that were not there before. In the hill behind our house in Charters Towers, a hill of about 30 or 40 acres I suppose, there are 30 kangaroos and wallabies and wallaroos that live on that one hill. They have an immense water supply and of course help themselves to our gardens on a fairly regular basis, but the point that I am making is there are heavy populations of not so much the artificial, introduced species, cattle and sheep - it would be very hard to make that case out - but of native species that now keep the grass mowed down. Before the grass was allowed to get away. It was fire-farmed by the Aborigines or naturally burnt, in which case it took out the trees. When you had a very heavy grass regime it would take out the trees. Now that we haven't got a very heavy grass regime because it's being eaten down continuously, then the trees don't get burnt out. Now, that's the theory but it's most certainly not scientific at this stage.

The final point is where trees have been cleared - and Charters Towers again is the example I use - there was not a tree left standing within 60 miles of Charters Towers. Four species have moved in. The species are chine bush and rubber vine, very, very much regarded by everyone as terrible pests, both of them, but the other two species are both native species, doolan Sally wattle trees and the albizia lebbek tree. They have moved in ginamic populations that weren't there before. So in summary, in north Queensland - I can't speak for the rest of Australian with authority but in the top-third of Queensland we have a very serious change in our environment, our ecology, our biodiversity - a very huge change, and that is tree-ification.

My final point: 7 million hectares of the downs country, which is the great inland plain of Queensland which is flat as a billiard table and doesn't have a tree, the never-ending sameness of the never-ending plain, to quote the poet - in that area now, an area the size of Tasmania, the natural grassland has vanished completely and has been replaced by the acacia ni-lotica tree, which is a mesquite tree, which is in

Texas and in Africa. It has completely taken over the area. It is not available really for the kangaroo and native fauna population. They can't reach up to it, and it loses all of its leaves late in the year, so it is a dreadful affliction. That is in 25 years. It has taken 7 million hectares in 25 years.

So we have a massively changing environment with a massive tree-ification, and you can understand how north Queenslanders feel when someone comes along and says, "You're not allowed to cut a tree down." But each cattle station owner must watch now his carrying capacity diminish with each successive year, and I asked the leading and most experienced agricultural valuer, with all due respect to my son, who's also an agricultural valuer in north Queensland - and he said on brigalow you can run one ox per two and a half hectares; on non-cleared country you can run two and a half head ox, cattle, beasts, whatever term you want to use - I've chosen to use the term "ox" here; but when you clear it you can run 10 hectares.

Now, that would not be true of my home country, the rough country around Mount Isa and Cloncurry, the rock and spinifex ridges. There would be no change at all and, you know, it would only be a madman that would think of taking the trees out. But I want to say that most station properties can benefit enormously by some clearing, and the next point I want to make - I asked Dr Baker, when he was made head of Landcare for Australia, I mean, "Is it your position that we do not interfere?" and he said, "No, I personally believe we must be proactive."

If you go and drive from right across Queensland, from Townsville to Mount Isa, you will run into the great inland plain, which stretches for 700 kilometres wide. It was once treeless. It's now covered in this dreadful prickly tree. But you will see this huge - and they are called walls. They are basalt walls. They rise straight up, 400 feet from the plain, and what happened was, in the Mesozoic period, the period of the dinosaurs, lava of volcanoes ran down the river and filled up with basalt rock. Lava, if you like, solidifies; it becomes basalt. Now, it filled up the riverbank so that you were walking over earth, then you were walking over solid rock. Now, over the last 65 million years, since the seas retreated and the Mesozoic period stopped, we now have 400 feet of that rock exposed above the surrounding landscape. So this country is in a very advanced state of erosion in its natural state, and the question becomes, do you want to stop that erosion or don't you? Do you want what we know as the Gulf of Carpentaria land mass to be under the water of the Gulf of Carpentaria, because that is what is happening here.

It is most certainly my position that God gave us this wonderful resource of the Gulf country and its massive black soil plain, which is the best soil, of course, on the planet earth, the vertisol soils, and we are allowing that to each year be massively taken to the sea, and I just need to give you one other example. There's a lot of people waiting here so I'll have to start to speed up here. I was driving my four-wheel drive over an area that I pegged out to do irrigation beside the upper river

and I nearly turned it over. I lost one wheel out in space and where my irrigation, this beautiful flat black soil plain that I had there of about 500 hectares - there was a huge river running through it. It wasn't there before. I'd lost my irrigation area. I got on a horse and I went up the river, and what had happened was a big old paperbark tree - we get giant paperbark trees, see - had got old, died, fallen over. It had fallen across the river and the river said, "I can't go that way, so I'll have to go this way," and just took millions of tonnes of topsoil out with it, you know, and the beautiful black soil plain that I had on that station property was lost completely.

Now, I don't think - we can't stop trees from growing, dying and falling over, but we can line the banks of our trees, and that's where your acacia ni-lotica tree got away. All of your weeds get away on your rivers and creeks. Now, we can line an awful lot of our rivers and creek banks, and NHT has done a wonderful job here, because we've already fenced off most of the rivers so the cattle can't get onto them, and that means that the grass can get much better hold, and so we're starting to preserve those banks a little bit. But if we could do a bit of irrigation on those banks and have pasture which holds the ground together, then instead of the banks vanishing into the Gulf of Carpentaria, they would actually increase in size, and if that pasture is mixed up with trees, our rivers will be trained, the water on either side, and again I'm quoting Dr Baker.

If you've got river and pasture on either side, then the river, the speed of the water and the centre of the stream will speed up, it will rip out, and you'll get a much deeper stream, and according to Baker, and I think that he's dead right, you will find a lot of rivers will start to run again. You'll clean them out and clean them up so that here we have grassland and trees, and here we have a river. At the present moment, there's no differentiation at all, and you can see the Flinders River in some places is seven, eight, 10 kilometres wide, and that was all once beautiful black soil plain; now it's just a mass of creeks and gullies, and it's all been ripped out to the Gulf of Carpentaria.

The other point, and I think probably I'm getting to a stage here - I want to back up strongly what Charley Loudon said previously. I mean, if you close down the sugar industry, well, what will take its place? Well, we closed down the tobacco industry, and John Gray, General John Gray, who is now the head of the world Wet Tropics Management Authority, he delivered a paper earlier this year which I had the pleasure of attending, and he said, "If we simply walk away from agriculture, then you can see the result of that in Mareeba," and they were old people, a lot of the tobacco farmers. Under deregulation, the whole industry collapsed. They live now in Mareeba, most of them on the old age pension, and their farms are growing nothing at all. They are mostly weeds, not native species; they are mostly weeds. It would be a colossal amount of money that would be required to get rid of the weeds and put that back into a natural state. So if you close down an industry and it's not a controlled and very expensive closure, then you will simply have what you've got at

Mareeba, and we're very pleased that General John Gray has been put in charge of World Heritage. It seems that he has an intelligent position.

I just want to say one other thing on the training of the riverbanks, because Charley Loudon, he seems to have gone, but the river trusts have started lining the banks with rocks, which of course is what is done in Europe, and they have been absolutely magically successful. There is an area on the Mulgrave River where we did an inspection, and there was probably five hectares had come away, and where you have a tree, when you get a flood it's shaken like that by the flood waters, and if it's right on the edge of the bank, it will take the whole bank out with it.

At this river inspection site, it had taken about, I don't know, maybe 30, 40 metres of bank had been taken out. The water was crystal clear and you could see all of the trees, and there may be 100 or 200 trees. As the bank vanished, they'd just fallen into the river. On the other side of the river, a hymenachne or one of those introduced species had taken over a bank, and that was forcing the river further and further this way. Just upstream, we had rocks and instead of putting big trees in, they put low shrubs with big root system, and it was in perfect condition, and it had been there for 10 years and been through two of the worst floods in the last century - one and a half floods, worst in the last century. So, you know, we can train our rivers, but you must understand that if we do train our rivers then that sediment level will drop even more dramatically, and maybe there's a downside to that, as I outlined earlier with respect to the dugongs.

Now, I want to turn to the economic implications of what is taking place here. The United States has already passed legislation moving to 10 per cent ethanol, and the European Commission, the drafted directive which is currently presumably being implemented, the draft directive is for a 6 per cent target by the year 2010. The Americans are on 10 per cent target by the year 2010, and both of them are moving for environmental reasons, health reasons and renewable energy reasons. Those are the reasons stated both in the European Commission draft directive and also given in the reason for the Senate moving the legislation in the United States. Looking at the health considerations, regardless of what you see in the media, Australia will be moving to 10 per cent ethanol; there is no doubt about that. Europe is doing it and United States is doing it. I think we can safely conclude that we will be doing it, regardless of what you see in the media.

Having said that, then we move to a sugar industry, one-third of which will be going into ethanol. Most of the ethanol will not be produced by sugar, it will be produced by grain, and I'm not an expert in that field. But the equivalent price of current petrol prices, \$360 a tonne, and if we move into that, then we're talking maybe about two million. There'd have to be a slight increase in sugar production. So we're talking about two million tonne of ethanol, \$360 a tonne, \$720 million - that still leaves \$1000 million coming in from sugar. There's about \$100 million a year

coming in from molasses, and since the gas will be freed up for power generation, there will be \$600 million coming in in power generation. So they would be the projected figures for the sugar industry. The sugar industry on average for the last 10 years is probably around \$2000 million, but with ethanol, it should go up to \$2500 million a year.

Now, if that area switches over to cattle, and that is what everyone is talking about that talks to me, and was once cattle areas - most of these people, their parents used to run cattle at one stage, or draughthorses. But if it moves to cattle, and we're talking about moving from an income of about 3 or 4 thousand dollars a hectare, valued to the Australian economy, down to about \$1200 a hectare, valued to the Australian economy - whilst you can make profit out of cattle, which you can't do out of sugar cane at the present moment, it's a much, much lower value to the Australian economy. So to quantify that, the sugar industry is - with ethanol will yield to the Australian economy \$2500 million a year. Under cattle, it will yield \$640 million. There will be a loss of nearly \$2000 million a year to the Australian economy if we go down this pathway.

Now, already - and if you think this is not going to happen - biodiversity has already closed down a quarter of the Queensland fishing industry, maybe 100 or 200 million dollars lost to the Australian economy. It has already closed down the timber industry of North Queensland. If you drive from Mareeba through Atherton down the Palmerston Highway to Innisfail, and down to Ingham, you can actually see from the highway 12 mills that are closed. Those mills each had an employment of about 150, on average, including timber cutters and suppliers. Now, those are the ones that you can see from the road. There's a hell of a lot that you can't see from the road. So if you think that they're not going to do it, they just came in and took out 2000 jobs in North Queensland, and the people were so angry that they did physical violence upon the minister at Ravenshoe.

The fishing industry has a quarter of it been closed down, and with the current closures in process, that will be half of the fishing industry gone. So there's no doubt in my mind that the governments won't proceed to do it. Now, I'll just reel off three other figures to you. I was the minister in charge of the founding of the prawn and fish farming industry in Australia. There were no commercial prawn or fish farms in this country, and Dr Baker came to us again from the Institute of Marine Science, demanding that we do something to get prawn and fish farming going, and so we did. We expected that we would have the same growth that Thailand had. We have much more suitable coastline in North Queensland, and a much longer coastline than Thailand, and we would hope that our technology and management is better. So we expected that our increase in production over the next 10 years, or 15 years, it was, would be the same as Thailand's.

Now, I'd like you to take this figure down, Neil, Warren, if you could.

Thailand at the time, in the mid-80s, was producing \$2000 million worth of prawns. In the latest figures that the parliamentary library has been kind enough to give me, they are now producing 6000 million a year. On the figures they have given me, we are still importing prawns, \$230 million worth of prawns a year, into Australia. That last figure, just put a question mark behind it; I'm a little rusty on that figure. But I know that we're importing prawns into this country. The industry, instead of going ahead by 4000 million, as Thailand did, has actually languished at around 200 million, and the reason for that is the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, with their principles of biodiversity, have decided that we shouldn't have any prawn or fish farming in Australia, and it's succeeded in closing more farms than we have been able to open. Now, that's pretty hard to prove - they can't prove it and I can't prove it - but not many people will dispute that figure. So Australia, by its policy of biodiversity, has lost \$4000 million in the prawn and fish farming industry alone.

With the tree clearing, on an annual growth of increase in carrying capacity, we will lose over the next 10 years \$3000 million a year. The cost in lost increased production will be 3000 million a year. The main dune at Shelbourne Bay - silicon is blowing into the ocean. The dune is already about 300 metres under the sea. It was a navigational aid. It was 200 feet high at the turn of the last century. In 100 years, half of it's gone; it's only 100 foot high now. That silicon dune, even the half that's left, is worth \$3000 million a year to the Australian economy. It's the richest silicon that we can find anywhere in the world, and therefore it's very cheap to make it into high-tech silicon, which is worth about \$30,000 a tonne, the last time I looked, which is some time ago, I must admit, and the company involved, who had - Harvard, I think, was the university in the United States that did the work, and Phillips, you know, the famous company out of Europe, did the work for them, very thick document about three inches thick, and they wanted to do 100,000 tonne and then move up to 200,000 tonne, and process that into a high-tech silicon for aircraft manufacture, for photovoltaic cells, for optical fibre, for silicon chip, all those things we use high-tech silicon for.

Finally, the losses to the sugar/ethanol industry. Even if the industry doesn't close down, which of course it must - if you take 30 per cent out of each mill, then each mill will close. They can't possibly stay open. The industry is in a very parlous state right at this very moment. But even forgetting about that, if it simply changes over to cattle, there will be a loss of \$2000 million to the Australian economy. So you can have your biodiversity, but just understand when you do that it's costing us \$4000 million a year in prawn/fish production, \$3000 million a year in beef production, \$3000 million a year in silicon production, and \$2000 million a year in sugar and ethanol production.

Finally, and the note on which I'd conclude, the prime minister of Australia, then the treasurer of Australia, Paul Keating, when the current account deficit hit 11,000 million, said, "This country is in danger of becoming a banana republic." The

then leader of the opposition, the year before he became prime minister, John Howard, said not only was Mr Keating right in his statements about 11,000 million, banana republic, but, "Unless the current account is arrested, then this country economically is terminal." John Howard, unquote, and I've got the dates of the interviews. It was \$15,000 million a year then. On the first six months of this year, it is \$42,000 million. So not my comments; the comment by a Treasurer and Prime Minister, leader of the opposition/prime minister, and also John Howard was treasurer too for a long time. That's their comments. They believe that the country was terminal at 15,000 million. We are now, on the first six months of this year, at 40,000 million.

So we're a very rich country. We can afford to kiss goodbye to \$12,000 million a year in four items, just four items alone, and we are watching every day the destruction of our land. Our beautiful landscape is being destroyed. 700 million hectares of my homeland is gone under the acacia ni-lotica tree. The rivers are breaking their banks. Year after year out west it has been carried off into the sea, and on the coasts here, the losses are really massive because of a lack of getting what Charley Loudon has been fighting for, which is some training of those riverbanks, which would make one hell of a difference to us. I admit that there can be a problem with lack of sedimentation going out the top dressing. So those are the points I want to make.

Finally, our nearest neighbour has 250 million people. 100 million of those people go to bed hungry every night. The water resources that run into the Gulf of Carpentaria are six times greater than the water resources of the Murray Darling Basin. They have 22 million megalitres; we have over 120 million megalitres, and we use virtually none of that. We go out twice a year, catch any moo cows that can't run fast enough, and set them off to market. 200 years ago, and Australians that were there then, they ran and caught any kangaroos that couldn't run fast enough and ate them. So there hasn't been much that we've done to look after the resources that God has given us, and our nearest neighbour has 100 million people going to bed hungry every night.

How much longer do intelligent, responsible people, moral people in this country, believe that the rest of the world is going to accept a continuation of this situation? I mean, do you think it's fair that one country has 100 million people going hungry and another country is sitting on resources just in the Gulf of Carpentaria alone which are quite capable of feeding 100 million people, on the Murray Darling Basin figures? Of course, they are not being utilised. Not only they're not being utilised, but they are deteriorating on an ever-increasing scale. Thank you, gentlemen, for your time, and it's very good to have some of us able to talk to some people from Canberra. That is really wonderful, and I speak for all of the people here today.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much, Mr Katter. Have you got time for a bit of backwards and forwards, or do you need to - - -

MR KATTER: Yes, but I don't want to take up too much time. I've really, you know - there's a lot of people.

DR BYRON: There's a lot of other people here we'd like to hear from, but, I mean, you've given us a lot of issues there to think about. A number of those things we've actually seen as we've been going around the country. We've spoken - pastoral properties, we've seen the timber thickening, we've looked at the south - we've been on cane properties, we've talked to banana growers. If I can have one question, because of your background as a legislator. You saw the pile of papers that Charley had before, and we talked about - you've probably heard cane growers, for example, talking about the mass of contradictory legislation and so on. It seems like you've got layer upon layer upon layer upon layer of legislation, and some of that is contradictory. We've talked about having science-based rules, and yet we've heard from lots of land owners about problems with the vegetation rates. We've heard from people who are affected by, you know, endangered species legislation, that sometimes it turns out the species isn't quite as endangered as was previously thought, when you actually start counting them. So there are questions about - - -

MR KATTER: Like the dugong.

DR BYRON: Well, other people have talked about pollen gliders and spectacle flying foxes and so on. But there's all those questions about how good is the science on which we've been basing some of these decisions, which have sort of impact we're talking about. The legislation brings out black and white rules. It says, you know, "You have to do it this way." Now, those rules might make sense if you're sitting in Canberra or Brisbane, but what we've seen, and I'm sure you've observed the same thing, there's enormous variation in this great country, and what makes sense in this valley may not make sense in the next valley, and yet because we've gone to these sort of bureaucratic rules which say, "You've got to have A, B and C," we've lost that flexibility and the professional judgment and discretion where the landowner can say, "Well, on this property or on that particular paddock, if you do A, B and C, it will actually make things worse for the environment, as well as driving me broke."

Now, one of the things we're trying to find a way through is, you know, what are the alternatives to just having these black and white rules that don't fit on a country as diverse as this one? How do we put some flexibility back into it, apart from telling every landowner, "You've got open slather to do as you like"?

MR KATTER: I think that every person in this room here, and we've got no hassles from the Gulf country here - people have fought tirelessly to look after the environment, you know, Robbie Sing and Mrs Bauer over here, to quote but two

examples - I think the answer to this is very simple: that the burden of the onus of proof lies with the person trying to stop a landowner from doing something. I mean, who is going to love the land most; the bloke that lives in the Gulf Country or the bloke that sits in an office in Brisbane or Townsville or Canberra? Clearly that bloke lives in the Gulf Country because he loves it. I mean, you have to do away with so much of this world's goods that you would have to love it a hell of a lot, you know, having been a bloke that had a station up there.

So I'm just saying to you that the old sticker you see on the cars, "No matter how much you love my land, I love it 10,000 times more" - you know, those people should know what to do and those people should be the people that would be the last people to do things that damage greatly. Sometimes we do things that are wrong. Robbie Sing and Bonnie over here will present different ways of doing things that should be seriously looked at. But in the sugar industry - and Wayne Thomas is here and I think he'll highlight this - but in the Ingham area I counted 83 what they call run-off ponds, silt traps. There were 83 silt traps. The water that's coming out of those silt traps is really crystal clear. I only inspected one. It was the first one ever done. It's 13 years old. There were five big, huge, fat barramundi looking up at me and the pond was simply alive with wildlife. That had taken the run-off from two square kilometres of cane paddocks for 13 years. The bloke is what we would call a greenie. We sort of have some fights with that bloke, you know, but it most certainly - but 83.

Also, I mean, the cane farmers are only ploughing now once every five years, whereas they were ploughing five times a year. In the ethanol - I mean, they were quite amazed, the CSIRO and Department of the Environment, because they didn't know that. They thought that they ploughed every year, and frequently during the year. They had no knowledge of the industry at all, and yet they brought out a report which was most flagrantly - but I should just make that point now. I'm sorry, I'm really starting to take up other people's time here. But I really better make this point to you.

This week on A Current Affair there was a CSIRO scientist and he said that there was no net benefit to the environment from ethanol. Now, I am holding - and I couldn't get hold of them. I wasn't in Charters Towers and the file is in Charters Towers. I am holding the European Commission recommendations that say that there is a 36 per cent - this is a country of 600 million people, you know, Europe - they have said that there is a 36 per cent benefit for the environment on dedicated crops. We're using non-dedicated crops and it is thought to be about 60 per cent on non-dedicated crops. We're not growing the crop to produce ethanol. We're growing the crop to produce sugar and we get the ethanol as a by-product.

The United States Department of Transport has done two studies. The United States Department of Agriculture has done one study. The United States Department

of Energy has done one study on ethanol. They all say between 34 and 36 per cent on dedicated crops; exactly the same figure as the Europeans. Now, it is possible that the 600 million people in Europe are wrong and the 300 million people in the United States are wrong and that "scientists" - inverted commas, question mark, question mark - at CSIRO was right. I mean, I leave it up to you to make that judgment. But I can produce for you the reports. Graboski and Wang did the major report in the United States. I can't commit them all to memory but the major report was done by them, but there are half a dozen reports over there.

So I'm just saying to you, the information that is being received in Canberra is fundamentally flawed. I use the example of the dugong, I use the example of the sedimentation and I use the example of the ethanol. Now, that report, in fairness to CSIRO, was canned. You can't get hold of that report, because they became aware of the reports in the United States and Europe. But clearly the Department of the Environment in Canberra believes that farming is against nature and that they are for nature and therefore there should be no farming. There is no way that you could possibly look at their actions with respect to ethanol without coming to that conclusion. It would be impossible. Similarly, with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority; they truly believe that people shouldn't be out there at all. That will be the way that they will move, Neil.

I didn't believe it when people said to me that all timber-getting in north Queensland would cease. I rang up seven major hardware stores in north Queensland to find the price of Australian hardwood. There was no-one working there who had ever sold Australian hardwood in his lifetime. 20 years ago all of the hardwood in those stores was Australian. So the whole industry has just ceased to exist completely. So if you think they're not going to do it, well, just have a look at the timber industry. Thank you.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much for coming.

MR KATTER: Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to have a say. The people here very much appreciate that, Neil.

DR BYRON: If you could just introduce yourself, your name for the record and the transcript.

MS BAUER: My name is Bonnie Bauer. I represent a rural commentator and research advisory service down in Tully. My particular interest is in far north Queensland. I'm grateful to be able to address the Productivity Commission in regard to the impacts of native vegetation and biodiversity regulations, but one of the questions that still ponders in my mind is the fact that while we point fingers at every farmer in north Queensland, we physically have forgotten - and not being publicly advertised - that since the 1930s federal rainforest eradication policy these farmers have done exactly what they have been told. Beyond the 1930s federal government rainforest eradication policy we had subsequent state governments up until the 1980s who continually had in place, "Clear it or lose it."

So when you question, where does the belief system in regard to why people are doing this - it has been an entrenched system. Every single farmer has done what he has been told. Beyond that - whether it's the bad advice from chemical companies as to what fertilisers be used or what herbicides. Myself, I'm an organic farmer, but I have a particular interest for working with chemical, conventional farmers. There is no point pointing fingers at these people who have done what they have been told. My advisory service has been set up for that very purpose; just to hold hands with them, to offer creative solutions for agriculture.

Coming from an organic and biological background, we have the solutions. In fact I've brought myself away from Queensland's first inaugural conference for organics. I'm on the management committee. I personally sponsored Hugh Lovell, a soil scientist from America, to come here. We have Elaine Ingham, one of the world's leading scientists on the soil food web. I know in my own personal instance, when I sought funding from DPI to bring someone of this man's stature here - we actually did workshops specifically with the conventional cane and banana industries - I didn't get that funding. But I have a particular interest to hold hands with these people. Now, \$3500 out of a widow's pension for that air fare is massive. I'm offering creative solutions. I'm not pointing fingers. We need to seriously be looking at the purveyors of bad advice to these people.

On a personal vent, talking about vegetation management - and this might seem a dichotomy, that I'm defending conventional chemical farming, coming from an organic certified background for over 10, 15 years. However, I know that my farmers in north Queensland - they're my neighbours. They're not a number. Productivity Commission makes me just have that slight smile. What is productive? What is sustainable? It's still a brick wall that we're heading for, for what they've been told to do.

Until we start to look at eco-effectiveness in agriculture, eco-effectiveness in

biodiversity - the concept of biodiversity, what does that mean to you? To me, as above, so below. We're not even looking at biodiversity in the soil. These are the major issues which lead to sedimentation and run-offs to the reef, because these people have been doing what they have been told, whether they're from subsequent primary industries departments, Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations - question the advice they've been given. Who funds these corporations? Who funds BSES? When we say industry, do you accept and do you understand that up to 30 per cent of that funding is from a chemical company? Are people offering the creative solutions that are available to stop sedimentation? Do they have a need to do that? No, because there's money to be made by pushing these chemicals on these farmers, and then we can sit back and point fingers at these people for those run-offs.

Vegetation management: when you look at those mapping systems you have still huge data gaps of no data adjacent to endangered and critical vegetation areas. Surely we need to be on the ground straightaway, looking at those no-data gaps, but we're not doing that. Myself as an organic farmer, I'm performing a public good conservative measure that benefits everyone else in Australia. I had DNR at my house last week, just trying to have me justify whether I'm an agricultural farm, because suddenly, because I have an incredible piece of land on the Walter Hill Range - it was a cruel joke actually. Anyone that survived World War I was given a soldier settler's block. They were told to clear it. Anyone who tried to do that, died. I'm the first person to have lived on it.

Having grown up there, I've spent a good 20 years telling people about the Walter Hill Range and how critical a habitat it is for a linkage between the coastal lowlands and the World Heritage areas. Bugger me if God is not a funny little character. We have a biodiversity legislation that I was the person that called in on, because the Queensland government in all its wisdom wanted to take a high voltage power line out of state forest World Heritage and plonk it smack bang on the coastal lowlands. These farmers are that rural area wedged between reef and rainforest. Suddenly the intense biodiversity value of those coastal lowlands was not important, because the government wanted to put a World Heritage walking trail in there? What is biodiversity?

These remnant coastal lowlands that survived all of these directives have more biodiversity, more remnant - I traipsed for a day with biologists, which I raised money for to present this case regarding power lines. We found critical and endangered species there that had never been listed. Are they protected? No, because vegetation management physically says that if there is a 75 - it's that 75:25 rule. If 75 per cent of this population is to be found somewhere else - ie, the World Heritage - then it's not worthy of preservation. I'm telling you what remains on those coastal lowlands in respect to that is far more critical than that 700,000 hectares that I'm the adjacent neighbour to.

Vegetation management: many of us perform public good conservative measures that benefit everyone else. I've said to you that I can't afford my rates any more because suddenly I'm deemed a speculator because I happen to be looking after my mountain and I have to justify that I'm an agricultural property, rather than someone sitting on a glorious piece of land, because we have tourists coming up buying consistently our land and my rates go through the roof.

I question before everyone, what is a landholder? Is it me, with a substantial piece of land, that farms organically? Is it someone up the cape with an even bigger piece of land? Where is the responsibility of the so-called landholder of the city, the person with the blue toilet, the false oestrogens, the hormones that are flushing out the sewerage systems, that are going out into that reef? Who is the landholder here and who is the personal responsibility to be looking after the land; farmers versus city people?

We have the Queensland government in all its wisdom deciding that these agricultural cane lands from Beenleigh to Port Douglas should be used as a kidney filter for sewerage effluent? Stephen Robertson in May told state parliament that to save local municipal councils millions of dollars of putting in tertiary treatment sewerage systems because they had identified a major nutrient run-off from them, let's use the cane farmers? Do we not know that cane land is not an effective kidney filter for the bad chemical fertiliser salt regime that they have already been handed, yet we're going to be looking at cane farms as the kidney filter? Again, who purveys this bad advice, and why should these farmers buy into it?

I tell you, when that nutrient run-off - because you will never strip hormones and false oestrogens from sewerage effluent. You know what happens with a barramundi's life cycle. Do I need to predict what's going to happen down the line with that nutrient run-off going out there? I cite an example of bringing Hugh Lovell out here. We worked specifically with cane farmers, conventional, and bananas. One fellow in Townsville summed up consistently the response I got from these people: "Bonnie, I've been farming for 48 years. Today you taught me how to farm. No-one ever told me to feed the soil. We were always told to feed the plant." When you feed the plant, you have all of these other problems which result in the chemical run-off, the sedimentation.

When you start looking at the soil, the biodiversity below - you all want to talk about what trees are above - above as below. There is a whole range of biodiversity in agriculture below the soil that no-one even wants to talk about. Sewerage effluent I have covered, and I do need to be very brief so that the people do get those chances to have their say.

There are a range of creative solutions. I was very fortunate to go to America on a farm tour last year, and from that I was appointed an alumni of a creative

solutions for agriculture team. We have geotech matting that has been happening overseas for years, which will trap sedimentation, nutrient run-off, sewerage effluent, happening over in Italy. Are any of our councils looking at this? No. But private individuals in my shire are looking at these things and spending incredible amounts of money trying to hold hands and show solutions.

We have a natural resource management board that is due to be convened and consistently farmers are asking me to put my nomination in. For what purpose? Don't you understand that people rise to their levels of incompetence? I'm not going to get a shot in there, and yet I have probably some of the most creative solutions for these problems. You will have your standard mayor that has been there for 20 years and you will have your standard councillor who has an axe to grind. These will be the people who get the positions on the natural resource management boards. These will be the people who don't hold hands with farmers, don't have a background of watching what nature is telling them and don't have the creative solutions to take us into this century that we're living in right now.

Those that have the solutions are often the least chosen to present them to you. The false oestrogenic that I touched on regarding the sewerage effluent: in Chicago the sewerage outfall is within distance of the water drinking intake for that city. You can easily get your Prozac dose for the day by drinking that glass of water. You smile and you laugh, but there's scientific research that has been released that shows this. They are absolutely horrified. Not a minister for DPI but a minister for natural resources has decided that agriculture is responsible for cleaning up - whose wastes? Society's wastes, cities' wastes.

I'm not saying our farmers haven't been responsible for the nutrient run-off and the sedimentation. I'm saying they've done what they have been told. But I'm also saying that you look wherever you've got one of those towns up the coast and you will see major nutrient run-off from them as well.

I could go for ages. I actually have just organised so I could put in a submission, which I would really like to put into the proceedings, because there are so many issues that you need to be abreast of that you will never get from me sitting here or half of the submissions today, but there are many questions you're not even looking at, many solutions that are there to be offered. Cane and bananas are one of the major carbon sequesters in the atmosphere. Do these farmers get carbon credits? Do cane and bananas offer an income stream? Is anyone looking at this for agriculture? I tell you, they're not. They perform many good public conservation measures that benefit everyone else. They've just been doing it the way they've been told to do it.

There are people on the ground that have the solutions. They're not being funded. They're doing it from their passion. Me, as a mother of five, I do it because

I have to provide a future that I want my children to live in, and it's not coming from the extension officers and it's not coming from the sugar experiment stations and it's not coming from CRCs and it's not coming from the people who fund that research, because they have a particular bent as well.

Ramsar wetlands and threatened species - these will be the last two things I speak on. Deception and liberty, I keep having in my mind. Ramsar wetlands - what does EPBC mean? Ramsar wetlands are down at Narangba. A cobalt 60 food irradiation plant was approved right beside a Ramsar wetland. So does it matter? Who's putting the application up and which one do we turn a blind eye to? I have threatened an endangered species on my coastal lowlands, that forgotten rural wedge between this God-sanctified reef and rainforest, and we can take out those threatened and ecological species for the Queensland government to build community infrastructure, high voltage power lines, that my community doesn't want, has no demonstrated need for? What does this mean? When does EPBC step up for what's right and when does EPBC turn a blind eye?

I find it all very sad, that people aren't looking at all of these pictures. Funnily enough, energy authorities which return 95 per cent of their profits back to the Queensland government are exempt from impact assessments on taking out threatened and ecological species when they want to compulsorily resume these guys' land to build a high voltage power line that gives them back 95 per cent of their profits so they can still keep doing bad coal-fired power stations. I guess on that, I should give you a quick opportunity to ask me a very quick question.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much. Warren, I should give you a turn first, if you want to take it.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Yes, thanks, Neil. Thanks, Bonnie, you've raised some very important matters here, and clearly you're very concerned about some of our existing institutions and organisations and the way information is created and disseminated. I just wonder if you could tell us something about your thoughts as to how we might go about reorganising ourselves to get improved messages through to people. Should we be thinking about reforming our system of government, more regional government or regional community groups?

MS BAUER: I would be gladly part of a reform of government. We need to seriously look at a devolution of responsibility, but God forbid, don't give it to our councils. That's not the way, because we have ineffective people getting on council. Until we have a societal change, that's not the way. We have ineffective processes that appoint mayors to natural resource management boards. These are not necessarily people who have the knowledge. Like our farmers, they're so busy doing what they're doing, they don't get a chance to work on what they're doing. They don't have the knowledge.

I guess in a way I was blessed that my husband died, because it has given me the time to spend the last seven or eight years going back to research. People that aren't in the business can see how to work on the business. People who sit in an office in a city can't see how to work on it. It has to come from people locally. It comes from the bottom up. It can't come from the top down. These guys are accepting my advice because I'm one of them. I grew up with them. They're not a number, they're a neighbour.

When someone comes from Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide - or me - which one are they going to listen to? Which one cares whether they're there? Which one accepts them as a neighbour and not a number? Which one says, "Get bigger or get out," and get bigger or get out to where; back to your city that flushes down chlorinating water? Who drinks water in your city any more? Chlorinated water to shower, to go down a toilet, to wash your car, to wash your driveway? Where does that nutrient go? Out there. Just the same as the chemicals the farmers are using, it all goes out there.

The answers are to involve local people. Every local community can target, and they will be able to tell you, who is the person you ask when you want to know something. In my area, it's me. In every little community they will go, "Oh, so-and-so, so-and-so." They're the people you need to start tapping into. They're the ones with the solutions.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Thank you. Perhaps you should have an opportunity.

DR BYRON: All right. I can't help agreeing with you that what we're looking for is creative solutions. My experience is that often it's people who are outside the box who can see more clearly than those who are up to their neck in details.

MS BAUER: They're in it, because they're surviving. These guys are in survival mode. I've spent thousand of dollars doing building rural leaders courses and polishing up all of the skills that I used to have. These guys don't have the opportunity to do those trainings, to take the time out to do the research. They clearly know that what they were told to do wasn't working. That's why they came in flocking to the soil science workshops that we held, to hold hands with them, to offer solutions. You've just been talking to the wrong people.

DR BYRON: Very well, I hope you can send some of that information to us in writing later.

MS BAUER: I will. Bless you, and thank you for that opportunity.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much for taking the time and trouble to come.

MS BAUER: No worries. Bless you.

DR BYRON: We might just take a break for a couple of minute, thanks.

DR BYRON: We're going to have to keep moving. Mr Sing, if you could just introduce yourself for the transcript and then summarise what you want to say.

MR SING: My name is Robert Sing. I'm a banana farmer, cane farmer, exotic fruit grower in the Kennedy Valley near Cardwell. I'm also a member of the Pacific Coast Eco Bananas group, which is a group that grows bananas in a lot friendlier way. It's not quite organic but it's the next best thing. We market our fruit with a red tip to identify the fruit.

I would like to thank you for letting me come to the hearing today and have a say. What I'm going to say really is probably critical of the government. The first thing is, there was a public good conservative inquiry in 2000, and 2001 the recommendations came out. There were 20 recommendations. I would just like to know what's the difference between this inquiry and that inquiry, because the way I see it, all the information is there, all the recommendations are there. The only thing that's lacking is the government hasn't acted on that recommendation.

I've inquired with the parliamentary inquiry person that's in charge of inquiries and he said that normally an inquiry takes three months - for the government to look at the recommendations. This one is sitting there over 20 months. To me, all I can see is that it's money. The government is saying the whole of Australia should pay for all these environmental problems. I've spoken to a couple of senators, and they just say to me, "Where is the money coming from?"

Now, I don't know what's going to happen with this inquiry, but the basis of it is, if you want good environmental farming and good environmental areas, the government has to put its money where its mouth is. A lot of the answers are in this book. I don't think they're going to come out with anything different than your inquiry. Really, you know, it's time to have action, not talk. That's my main concern.

I'm a farmer trying to do the right thing. We're having trouble, because if we're doing the right thing it says that others are doing the wrong thing. In a tough business world, that's not easy. It's time the government really started supporting all these things, instead of just talking about them, and actually taking action. I've got an EMS 14001 and so have the rest of the farmers in our group. When you look at that, the government put \$25 million to its EMSs. Like I said to some parliamentarians, "Go and check how much of that money was spent," and one of them did check and said, "It's been taken out because they never used it."

What does that tell you? That tells you that these environmental management systems aren't working, because they never checked on the ground how it was going to work. They put it down on paper. They put a means test on it and say basically, "If you're broke, you can qualify," and if you're broke, how are you going to spend

any money? So the maximum assistance you can get for doing any environmental work is \$3000 under a means test which you can't use. So when you do make recommendations you've really got to check whether it's going to work.

It makes me wonder whether this is all about politics and not being fair dinkum, because you've had this inquiry. It's been sitting there for over 20 months. Here we are with another inquiry nearly the same, and nothing is going to happen again, unless the government is fair dinkum. If you're fair dinkum, you will start getting out and helping farmers do the right thing, because they've been brainwashed, like Bonnie said and Bob Katter said, the average farmer has been trained not to think. I've farmed for 40 years - if it's not poisonous, it won't work.

I've been to DPI workshops where they've given us all information on toxic things to use. You get up and say, "Well, what about the safe things?" We don't get money to research for that. So is the government fair dinkum, is the question I ask, and it's about time it did. Now, you tell me where the commonsense is. To fix a problem on a farm, you use a toxin. Commonsense tells you that if you keep using toxins you will kill your soil. That's where Bonnie said the soil is a living thing and farmers haven't realised it, because you've got fertiliser companies who have got ads on the highway, "Just add soil." So the whole thinking of farming has to change, if you want to change the environment. Don't blame the farmer. The real culprits are the government and the people who advise the farmers what to do.

So you've really got to try to find a way to change people's thinking. The farmer - he uses a toxin, but nobody has convinced him or shown him that he's killed his soil. Forget about the reef. If you fix the soil, you won't have a problem on the reef or in the environment. So you've got to get to the crux of the problem - prevention is better than cure - not patch up.

Your sediment pond is a patch-up. You've got to have them now, because we've got all the problems, but the real answer is prevention. The answer to that is to change the farming methods. It might take 20, 30, 40 years, but you've really got to be fair dinkum and support the people and help them get the research and the information to change their farming practices.

A lot of it is overseas. A lot of it is in America and Europe. But you talk to the average farmer at these workshops and that - if he comes along, some of them are thinking they're just going around the bend - but if you really talk to these scientists you will change your mind. It's all about money and the chemical companies and whoever, trying to sell us a product. If we keep poisoning our soil, they're going to keep selling us that product. The government really has to think about why it's doing this, because if you don't have healthy soil you won't have healthy plants. If you don't have healthy plants, you won't have healthy food. If you don't have healthy food, you won't have healthy people. So it goes down the chain.

What I'm saying is the government has got to get fair dinkum. For environment management systems - you know, that's just a small one. But the point is you've got to re-educate the farmer. It's not an easy task, because he has been brainwashed for 50 years one way. The point is that we're trying to do that, a group of us - well, a number of people. There are lots of people trying to do it. But the conventional farming system is overtaking, and it's very powerful when your marketing comes. The housewife or the consumer is one of the biggest culprits, because if it's not shiny and beautiful and glamorous on the shelf, what do you do? They say, "We don't want that." So what does the farmer do? He goes and gets a pesticide or an insecticide or whatever. There is where your real problem is.

If you want the farmer to change, you have to change the consumer - that judging a book by its cover is not what it's all about. It's what's inside the product, and it's a long, long grind if you're going to change consumers because they want that spotless article. I have arguments with merchants and people all the time, "Use the poison, use the poison," and you've really got to start changing people's thinking. Basically that's what I'd like to say mainly.

There are another few things there, like the Cardwell Shire. I was a councillor for six years. The Cardwell Shire is 45 per cent World Heritage area. There's another 22 per cent state forest. So there's 33 per cent privately owned that the country wants to say, "Don't clear your farming land, because we want to save this vegetation," and there's 67 per cent of it locked up already. So you show me another shire - especially in the southern states, Sydney and wherever - that has got only 33 per cent of its land usable. Are you saying to them, "Knock down your buildings, let's revegetate all the creek banks where you've got all your houses along there?" You're saying that to the farmer but you're saying here, "Pay for it yourself. You do all these good things. We've destroyed and raped our places, but you pay for the rest of Australia because we want this vegetation for the environment." That's all I've got to say, thanks.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Mr Sing, just to pick up the closing point of yours, you're suggesting that farmers should be paid compensation for losses they might incur if they do - - -

MR SING: That's right. I'm saying no more than what's in this recommendation. All that is in here - the recommendations are in here - what the government should be doing. All I'm asking you to do is implement this.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Perhaps you can explain what we're about.

DR BYRON: Well, just by way of explanation - we have of course read that. That was I think a House of Reps standing committee inquiry.

MR SING: That's right, Ian Cawsley.

DR BYRON: Ian Cawsley's. I'm actually not part of the government. I have no idea why the government has chosen to do nothing whatsoever about the - well, nothing that I know of - about the recommendations of that. Our report does have some similar terms of reference. We may well come up with very similar recommendations. I don't know, we haven't started making any yet. But you know, I think ultimately it's up to the Commonwealth and state governments to either make new laws or to repeal some old laws or to change the way they do things. We will give them the best independent expert technical advice that we can, that may well look very much like that. But it's the people that we all elect and send to the big meeting all in Canberra or in Brisbane are the ones who are making the decisions.

MR SING: No, I understand that. You've been charged to deal with the inquiry, you didn't decide - - -

DR BYRON: Yes, we were given these terms of reference.

MR SING: You were given the job, yes.

DR BYRON: We didn't ask for it. We were given it. We're trying to do it as honestly and independently as we can.

MR SING: But it just makes a person wonder what it's all about.

DR BYRON: Sure, I understand that.

MR SING: Because, you know, you're just repeating everything.

PROF MUSGRAVE: I just thought we should get that clear: that we are an independent inquiry. I am a private citizen who was asked to join the Productivity Commission for this inquiry. The Productivity Commission itself is an independent body. But in relation to this question of compensation, do you see payments being made directly to farmers or do you see perhaps the use of some sort of incentive mechanisms which are rewards for particular practices being adopted as being superior?

MR SING: I'll give you an example of the red-tip banana. I'm not the brainchild of that. Frank Sciacca and Diane Sciacca are. But they developed a way to identify their product on the market against everybody else's, and it has been set at a price above the normal price because it's harder to grow and you lose production. I mean, you've got to accept the fact that if you're going to change your farming, you're not going to get that production. But what you do get is a better tasting, nutritious, and

probably a safer article.

That's just one way that somebody has found a way to identify the product, but the incentives - if you want to use the better fertilisers and things, they cost. If you want to use something that's less leaching, they cost. But when you're in a competitive world, especially in the sugar industry, you can't go and spend all that money. You've got to use the ones that are available that are cheapest, but they're not the best for the environment. This is where one of the problems are. If you've got the housewife demanding this spotless, glamorous looking article; the average farmer, what does he do? He picks up and uses a chemical. So if you want a better environment, you've really got to think about how to achieve it. That's what I'm saying.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much for coming.

MR SING: Thanks very much.

DR BYRON: You've given us a lot there to chew.

MR SING: Thank you.

MR THOMAS: I'm Wayne Thomas. I'm the manager of the canegrowers office in Innisfail. Just a bit of background. I've only been there two years. Previous to that I was senior executive officer in the canegrowers office in Ingham for 23 years. So a lot of what I've presented to you already in the note form relates to those experiences there. I also spent seven years as a secretary of a local land care group up there, and most enjoyable because I was a hands-on one. I just wasn't there taking minutes and handling the administrative side. I found it very enjoyable.

That opened my eyes up to a lot of what the landholders are really doing. Even though I was an administrative support for the canegrowers in that area, I wasn't really aware of all the good things that were going on. I think we've heard this morning that, yes, farmers were encouraged to do certain things. The old bare earth policy - the burning that went on, and as you burnt the cane field the creek went up in flames as well and you burnt off the grass and the weeds. Yes, in hindsight that wasn't a very smart thing to do, but it was an industry practice and it was an accepted thing to do. The big trees - you chopped them down because you didn't want them catching on fire and burning away. So there were a whole lot of issues that were going on - that people weren't understanding, I guess, the fundamental effect on the environment.

I'm not going to go through all the different legislation that's there. Charley Loudon has done a wonderful job with that one. But I'm sure that over the time of this inquiry you're going to quickly realise the amount there, and I think your questions have been saying that as an alternative. I guess the Environment Protection and Conservation Act perhaps might have been the start of that; to have one overall set of regulations covering aspects of the environment and what you do with the land.

PROF MUSGRAVE: You mean the Commonwealth act?

MR THOMAS: Yes, the Commonwealth act. But unfortunately that has actually created a few other barbs. We've already had an attempt to declare canegrowing as a threatening process. If you take the act to the nth, if someone decides to plough up land near a particular spot, it can be declared a threatening process. I don't think the act was intended to do that, but that's what the act says. So we've got to be careful about that one.

We've heard the comments about compensation for landholders. I'm a strong believer that if some of the last areas to be developed - and I classed north Queensland particularly in that area - we've seen development occur in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia. It's all been done. It was probably done a hundred years ago. Now this is the last area of development - and Western Australia has still large areas to be developed - but now that they are getting on to the point where they have been developed over the last 10 or so years, people are starting now

to panic and say, "We've got to stop that, we've got to save this and that."

But those landholders that purchased that land - and some of them purchased it years ago, 30, 40, 50 years ago, in anticipation that one day they would make it productive. Some actually decided to do it in a staged approach. Instead of going out and developing the whole thing at once, they said, "Right, over time I'll develop it and get on with it." Now they're finding that they've got a special piece of biodiversity on their property. All of a sudden there's an act that says, "No, you can't do anything with that, because that's a significant biodiversity area and we want to retain it." Now, who are "we"? There's I guess those that represent society saying to that landholder - who supposedly had a freehold title on that land, and I guess all he is, is a custodian for the time being - that, "You can't develop that and make it productive."

So if you talk about compensation, yes, who should pay for the compensation: the major parties who pooh-poohed the idea of an environmental levy? That would seem to be a starting point: that all of Australia funds the protection of the environment. So if a single landholder or multiple landholders are the ones now holding the last of these biodiversity parcels in Australia, then they should be recognised.

But in saying so, what we're seeing is that the government agencies are not - and have pulled back of purchasing land - they're not doing that any more. They did start with the mahogany glider habitat protection plan, to purchase land, and all sorts of bun fights started all over that. But that's not the way because, okay, they grab a piece of land; what happens to it? Who looks after it? The pigs have a good go. The weeds have a terrific time. So maybe an alternative is that the landholder - who can't make it productive because of the legislation - but perhaps they could be paid to be the ranger, as an alternative. So instead of trying to make a thousand dollars a hectare out of it, he will get paid something equivalent.

That land is then protected, it's what society wants, and he is then no - well, he probably will be worse off, because there's probably an opportunity to make much more money out of clearing the land and developing it for whatever it might be - but certainly he's then put in a better position than he was if he was just told, well, he can't do anything with it. An option.

In my notes that I gave you yesterday - I think you got it yesterday. Thanks for seeing those guys in Tully because they obviously had a few close issues that they were able to - they are at the real coalface of what's happening in that area, because like I said, those areas in the southern end of Tully, and particularly where Robert comes from - he has gone, Robert Sing - they have only been developed in the last 10 to 15 years in a major way. They have been held back. Like I said, people purchased land there 30 years ago, in anticipation that something would happen and

they would be able to take advantage.

But the unproductive land, or economically unviable land, is not being considered for protection by landholders. Now, there is a potential for that to happen. In the Johnstone Shire - since 1988 the Johnstone Shire has entered into conservation covenants - that's only protecting 1400-odd hectares, out of a potential remnant habitat still left in the Johnstone Shire of 19,500 hectares. People are not doing it because again you might do some good, and then you get whacked hard with some other legislation. What you want to be able to do is develop the productive land, and that that's not so productive or not quite economically viable, you could probably be interested in doing something with it. But because you're told, "Right, that's it," even some good land you can't develop, they back off, they're not even interested.

I know that the sugar industry seems to cop it in the neck each time. I think we're fools. We stand up. Every time there's an attack we stand up, we jump up on the parapet and try and defend what's being said. But of recent, the industry came out with some positive comments about the reef water quality protection plan. Straightaway in the Courier Mail's report everyone is saying, "Right, there's an acceptance here, they're now saying that things have been done wrong." The idea was to come out and say, "Well, let's be positive about this." But all of a sudden straightaway everyone jumps on it and says, "See, yes, you're admitting there's something going wrong, you've been doing things wrong."

It wasn't intended to be any admission, because things have gone on - in hindsight, yes, you would probably reconsider, in light of more information that we have now. But they have been going on and I think there's - certainly in my time. What has happened now is that the inability to make some changes - I mean, primary producers are out there to try and make a quid. They're not there just to go around and chase cattle or grow cane or put up banana trees and pull the bananas down. They're trying to make a quid.

Primary industries in Australia at the moment are all struggling to make a quid. So they haven't got the extra dollar to throw into some of the programs that would help put their farms and their land back in a position that would be more suitable - because a lot want to do it. There's no argument about that. The experience I had through the land care group certainly showed that - because we've got now this precautionary principle. I guess it's always good to be cautious about everything. I use it when I cross a road sometimes. A bloody big truck might come around a corner. But I think it has just gone too far. Everyone is saying, "Wu-hu, we better be careful about this."

We've seen that in the vegetation mapping that they've done in Queensland. There's just too much of concern. So basically anything that's still growing out there,

anything that has got trees on it, is now an "of concern". There's very little. If any landholder now puts an application in to do some tree clearing - well, they've all stopped at the moment anyway, so you can't do anything. But those that were making applications before - there's very little opportunities.

I use the example in my notes about the critical mahogany glider habitats. To me it was just a land grab. It only focused on - it used aerial photographs of vegetation, and land tenure as a basis to determine the habitat. That was anything that was under government controlled land, it became a critical habitat; anything that had substantial vegetation on. There was the classic example where they declared a parcel next to wetland critical habitat, only because it was next to a wetland. It certainly didn't have anything - the mahogany glider wouldn't have survived there at all.

That's it. The government agencies tend to make these decisions on other matters other than science. Verification of the vegetation classification is an example, and you've heard that already in a couple of meetings you've had. In the Herbert, a chap had 10 mango trees around his shed. Guess what they appeared on the map: "endangered vegetation". Okay, it might be an isolated example, but there was certainly a range of people coming in and looking at the maps that were produced and had those sorts of things. So I don't think it was isolated. Again it was done by aerial photographs, no ground tree thing. The Queensland Herbarium is struggling to catch up to verify. Again, lack of funds.

Bonnie mentioned the impact on the reef. We've got this new proposed plan about the water quality. There's a lot of things that can be fixed up by money - simple dollars. There are six local governments in the coast here who have got a permit to discharge tertiary treated sewerage in the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. That could be fixed tomorrow, with a chequebook, but obviously it's not a solution that the government is prepared to take up. If the Great Barrier Reef Authority were adamant to clean up all water quality issues they'd ban every two-stroke water motor tomorrow. But no, it's easy pickings, "Put legislation on those working on the land, let's control it, they're easier targets, you know." What's the alternative for a primary producer - walk off his land? Well, it's starting to happen. People are now abandoning their farms because they can't make a go of it; become unequally viable. Now, I don't know what safety net is going to catch them but I guess the general welfare net that's out there provided by the federal government will catch them sooner or later.

But I think the important thing I've placed on is the ability to - the burden of providing this conservation. At one stage, I think it was election before last, John Howard started to talk about making Cape York a conservation area. It didn't get up because of the cost involved. I remember back in the 80s Logan City Council just south of Brisbane, between Brisbane and Gold Coast, coming out here and

making green areas around the city. Pretty good idea, rate payer - yes, everyone supported the idea until they said, "It has to be funded. We're going to raise the rates." People dropped the idea very quickly. It wasn't such a smart idea after all. So it's hip pocket stuff and people are just not prepared to fund something that - well, it would be nice to have but really they can do without.

But unfortunately what's happening in the primary producers' area, throughout Queensland - are being asked to carry that burden. One time in the Herbert an area of one hectare was cleared, of mangroves was cleared down near the port of Lucinda. At the same time 100 hectares were cleared adjacent to the Brisbane international airport. There was a hue and cry about the one hectare. There was nothing said about the 100 hectares. So sometimes the value put on protection of particular environment and biodiversity is a bit skewed.

I have placed a lot on the backing of the submission by Canegrowers and you guys have already met Eric and Diana, I think. Basically that's the submission - I've just tried to add a bit more from this area here. I hope I've done that. It seems that the wet tropics is a major area of focus because of its biodiversity. I don't think there's any more area in the south Johnstone - or the Johnstone Shire, sorry, that's available to massive clearing or development than what's there now. Particularly even along the coast from Babinda through to, up here, Mossman, there's certainly some more potential south of Tully but we've pretty well got to where we've got.

There was concern during those expansion years of the threat to wetlands. The biggest threat to wetlands right now is hymenachne and feral pigs. On those two issues there, there doesn't seem to be a lot of effort being done. I was a member of the group that formed the national strategy for hymenachne. It has just been approved though, and I was on it when I left Ingham so that's over two and a half years ago. It is a weed of natural significance. But all the freshwater wetlands along the coast in the Herbert, in the Ingham area, have got hymenachne. One area, you could walk across the wetlands where there used to be clear water. There doesn't seem to be such a worry about that. They're worried about cane farming and the sediment run-off and the nutrient run-off all going into the wetlands.

When there's a good, decent rainfall in the Johnstone area, the Johnstone River and north Johnstone particularly just turns to mud, because the banks of the Johnstone have just all been rooted up by the pigs and they're just running rampant, particularly in the World Heritage area. So it's quite funny. I didn't realise this. We have two different worms. We have the native worm and the European worm. The pigs are actually spreading the European worm, because the eggs get in between the hooves and as they go into the rainforest they're taking the worms with them and the European worm is displacing the native worm. The native worm works on top and that helps decompose the leaf matter, whereas the European worm works in the soil. So pigs are actually affecting the biodiversity of the wet tropics area. So that's

interesting. I wasn't aware of two different worms, but there you go.

There are issues about the chemicals and run-offs. Interesting - I thought Bonnie was going to mention the great decider - God decides a lot of things for us, but I think a partner in crime in that is Mother Nature. Mother Nature decided to send a cyclone into the Mission Beach area. That area has still never recovered. The damage that that one cyclone did to the environment and the ecosystem for that area, the reefs, it's more damage than any farmer has done up this way. Mother Nature will decide to go whack.

That's one of the things that hit me when I was actually working for Landcare. You do all these good things and you try your best to replace what was there, and Mother Nature will decide, "No, I've got a different idea." The floods that happened in Townsville back in - gee, so many floods - 98, I think, the Black River. The Black River has got no agriculture either side of it, but all the trees were ripped into it. So it wasn't farming that caused the trees to collapse into the river. It was just Mother Nature and the velocity of the water pulling the banks in.

So we can always pinpoint figures. Another classic example is the Diamantina River. You know, at the turn of the century they tried to impose European farming in that area. It didn't work. That's how dumb we were; we thought we could apply European farming in Australia. But they will never, ever put the Diamantina River back to what it was. They can sink as much money as they like in there but they're never going to do it. I think that's what Bob Katter was pointing out, from the river systems we've got. We can try, but we're never going to put them back in the position they were.

That's it. It's short. It's hopefully precise, and I've given a range of things. But like I said, originally I wasn't going to do a submission. I was going to sit there and feel and just observe. But initially - on I think last Thursday - no submission, so I thought I'll put something together. So it has been short and precise.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much for making the effort to do that, Wayne, and speaking to us today. Just while you were talking it did occur to me that there's a real good news story with the green trash blanketing that I don't think has been heard very far outside of the cane areas themselves: that as Mr Katter said earlier, there's an enormous change over the last 10 years in terms of the adoption of that. I think it's almost a hundred per cent now. But that seems to be an example of something that's clearly benefiting the environment, and I understand it also saves money in harvesting costs. So it's one of those things that's not too expensive to adopt.

MR THOMAS: There is still some burning. It's not quite a hundred per cent in the whole industry. There are some areas that have got concerns about leaving the trash, because of moisture and that.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Not in the irrigation areas.

MR THOMAS: And the Burdekin, particularly with irrigation - but there is some green. They are learning to work around it and develop ways to still irrigate, still using trash blanket. It certainly was a step change. Burning came in many years ago because of the wheels disease or lepto. The cane cutters demanded that the cane be burnt prior to harvesting. That's really where it started. It just became an industry practice and it burnt off the leaf.

But prior to that - that was in the 30s - so prior to that it was all cut green. So we've really gone back. But keeping the trash, yes, it acts as an ability to trap the sediment movement that might move down the drill. You don't need as many - well, there's an argument there. Some people say they do more chemical spraying than they did before, but mainly on the wetter sites, to control the weeds. But it certainly was a step change.

The other one that we often argue about is putting more trees in the banks to stop sediment traps. The best one is grass. Grass growing on the end of headlands and that is probably a better trap of - that's in normal rainfall. Once you get the big stuff, all bets are off. Often, if you see some reports that show high nutrient run-off and sediment run-off, you've got to look at what's happening at that time. During the wet season here there's a huge amount of rain, huge amount of flow on rivers. As far as I'm concerned, that's when all bets are off. There's not much we can do.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Thanks, Wayne. You talked about errors in interpretation of aerial surveys. You gave an example of one you've encountered. I might say we have encountered several in our travels. Could I just ask you - you get to talk to a lot of cane farmers in your area, I presume. Have you encountered instances of inconsistency in agency attitudes, between agencies and within agencies through time?

MR THOMAS: You do. Often one officer will say one thing and another officer might say another.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Sorry, I meant specifically in relation to vegetation clearing and biodiversity.

MR THOMAS: At one stage it was very difficult to get an answer out of an officer. They were all protecting their butts, in case they said the wrong thing. It took a while for the Queensland government to get its act together and centralise. At one stage all permits were being handled by a chap out at Hughenden. So you know, I mean - - -

PROF MUSGRAVE: Close to the action.

MR THOMAS: Yes, it's close to the action, and it was getting difficult to even get a permit for anything. Now, the act does allow specifics to happen. I guess they brought the act in and said, "Well, we've got an act now." But they didn't have any verification of vegetation types. The mapping is still being done. The plans - they brought groups together to work out vegetation management plans for bioregions. So they had the law first and then decided to build the road. So they said, "Oh, you can do a hundred kilometres down this road, but we've got to build the road first. We don't know what corners will be in it, what bridges." So that was the biggest problem that occurred.

Of course, those that have been - and we've seen not particularly along the coast here but certainly out west, an ability to still - and the word, the old regrowth. What is regrowth? I think that's the biggest concern we've got now. We've got now some saying, "Oh, regrowth is just as good as native remnant habitat." A lot of the clearing out west that has been highlighted has been the regrowth, and yet the media particularly has portrayed it being, you know, "Oh, more clearing." Then they show a clearing that has got nothing to do with what's actually going on. We saw that particularly during the fight with the World Heritage area here, where we saw a mass of clearing but it was no photographs from up here - you know, of broad clearing. It wasn't going on at all. Selective logging was going on. There's no argument about that. But yes, sensational, looks good, catches a story, you know, gets people watching the news - that's what it's all about, unfortunately.

But right now you can make an application but it's not going anywhere. All applications are held. So there's nothing happening. Maybe it's a way for the government to catch its breath, to catch up. You would have also seen the two - there are two reports out. The Queensland government has got one report that says that the compensation level is only 150 million, whereas there was another report saying 500 million. Now there's another government report that has contradicted the 500 million one. I don't know where that's going to go. But certainly as an industry we support the 500 million compensation one, of course. We believe that that had the grass roots inputs, because it was made up of the officers closer to the coalface than those that made up the other report.

DR BYRON: Thanks very much, Wayne.

MR B. STEWART: Good afternoon. Bob Stewart is my name. I'm the project manager for the Johnstone River Catchment Management Association. The Johnstone River Catchment Management Association is an integrated catchment management group with many stakeholders, of which Ian Stewart to my right - no relation, just the same surname - represents the dairy industry. Wayne Thomas, who spoke before me, represents the cane industry on the JRCMA. Charlie Loudon, who started off this proceeding this afternoon, also is a stakeholder in JRCMA, with cattle and papaya interests. So what I've got to say at the moment is not really my opinion; it's an expressed opinion of JRCMA.

The bit I want to say I hope is going to be pretty short, because a lot of my thunder has been stolen. Also, we didn't have a lot of time to prepare for this hearing. As I find out now, it was released in April, it was coming but we found out less than a week ago so that's perhaps our fault - I'm not sure, but anyhow.

PROF MUSGRAVE: We'll try and make sure that it doesn't happen again.

MR B. STEWART: I guess so. As a catchment group - we've got conservationists, we have industry, we have farmers - we obviously have a fairly diverse opinion, but something in this particular issue, something which we've held in common for many years, is the position of who should pay for eco-sustainability and how it should be paid for. They're just the two issues which I'll address over a few minutes now.

The environmental footprint that agriculture and other users of natural resources makes on the land and the seascapes is bigger than the landholder, because the landholder provides essential food and fibre to feed and clothe the nation, which is an essential service like that of the military and we all have to pay for that. Although the landholder does bear some responsibility, how do we share this burden of costs; that is the burden of costs that are not immediately obvious, the costs of farming in an environmentally sustainable way. Compensation? This is one approach and it has been discussed a little bit already, but it is politically unpalatable and apart from when land is acquired there is no mechanism for paying compensation at present.

In my experience, and generally those of the catchment centre, are that farmers are not usually seeking compensation. They want a fair return for the produce that is produced, and produced in an ecologically sustainable way. A couple of examples I've used here have been used before. Maybe what Bob Katter said may be slightly contradicted here, but I think it's true to a degree. The agriculture industry is highly regulated, but it is emerging as highly profitable, because there are some farms being established in the Johnstone catchment.

Complying with the regulation is no catwalk, but the operators are prepared to enter that catwalk because there is significant profit at the end of it. So they're going

into a highly regulated industry, and where there is profit they are prepared to do it. Every other agricultural industry in the Johnstone has lost profit due to the government policy of deregulation. But the push for further deregulation continues unabated.

At the same time, new policies are regulated to make farm practices more eco-friendly, which by and large the Johnstone catchment centre would say is a good idea, but this also generally makes farming more expensive. So why can't policy-makers make the link between the need for higher incomes when they insist on more regulation, which despite the rhetoric almost always increases unit costs and thus reduces unit profitability.

For example, the deregulated dairy industry has lost 40 per cent of its income, but they are required to farm in a much more regulated eco-friendly industrial environment, especially with respect to irrigation, record-keeping and the use of chemicals and fertiliser. There is a bottom line to this. If we have no viable farmers, there will not be any need for regulations. That makes it easy, doesn't it. But do we want that? Should not our aims be to market what the consumer wants? If the consumer wants the eco-friendly produce, let the consumer pay the price for the production of eco-friendly produce and not impoverish regional communities in the so-called national interest to sustain resources.

What I mean by that is this is beyond the farming community. Shopholders, pubs, other people like this lose their profitability too, when farmers don't make any money. I certainly know some - no doubt you do - who live in agricultural communities, who run shops and have gone broke simply because they went in on 'a high' of good dairy produce, good cane prices, and the bottom fell out of the market and nobody had enough money to go to the pictures or eat out of town. Let our nation retain its self-sufficiency economically and ecologically in food and fibre. The USA and Europe do that.

Moving on, farmers are told to get big or get out. That was used a little bit before. Economic theory would agree with this. As profitability reduces, the only way to maintain income is to increase production. But that often means expanding onto more marginal lands. The Johnstone has lost 95 per cent of its lowland wetlands. Why? Greed? Yes, of course. But if decent prices were paid for the product there would be no need to expand onto marginal country in order to eke out a little extra profit, and regulation to prevent the farming of wetland would probably be accepted - grudgingly perhaps, but at least accepted. After all, growers are used to restricting legislation. In the 1980s cane farmers could only supply from 75 per cent of their assigned land.

A final paragraph. Prices paid for goods need to reflect the true cost of productivity; not just the variable costs of the day, plus a little for fixed costs and

perhaps profit if the farmer is lucky. If people want food produced in an environmentally sustainable way, with little to no off-farm impact, food must be priced accordingly. The whole of Australia benefits from environmentally sustainable practices, so the whole of Australia should pay the true cost of producing food in an environmentally sustainable way. Likewise, imported food that is produced in non-sustainable ways should be subject to an import tax at a level that reflects the unpaid environmental costs. Actions along these fronts would require dramatic changes to government policy.

That is not a prescription but it is a plea. There have been examples in the past. Now I put my own hat on at the moment. I farm for some hay and seed production. Does that mean I'm looking for a fair price for that? I'm not so sure about this, but there were - certainly in the big industries in the north, the dairy and the cane farming industry, which did have a well regulated industry which did guarantee a reasonable productivity, in very recent history. I think the abandoning of that, as you impose greater restrictions on farming, is just stupid. I think Ian perhaps would like to say a couple of words about the dairy industry before we finish.

MR I. STEWART: Just if I could, just following on from Bob's example of the deregulated dairy industry. We're losing farmers. You always do. In most industries we've been losing farmers for a long time. In the last 20 years the tableland dairy industry has lost 70 farmers. In that time most of them have just simply retired. We're all getting too old for that game. But in the last three years we lost 56. So we're 70 for 20 years; of them, 56 went in the last three years. The price has gone down 19 per cent under deregulation. The farm product - farmer product from each farm - has gone up 25 per cent. Those that have left have tried to sustain themselves by getting bigger.

There's one other interesting little statistic and it's the cost of compliance that we have from government regulation. This is all fields of government regulation. It excludes income tax and GST payments, because that's something that we understand is very essential. It has to exist. But the cost of just preparing income tax, GST, meeting workplace health and safety and so on, has risen in the last 10 years from about 25 per cent to its figure now of 35 per cent of the gross product. We feel this is now getting beyond anything we can bear. We know there has to be a cost of compliance, but I think governments have to come to a decision what that is and it has to be something that farmers can meet.

In our own mind we probably feel that 25 per cent is an agreeable figure, but 35 per cent is just beyond our control. It's something that most farmers have now reached the stage where they are failing to comply. That's the problem. It's just beyond what they can do, especially with the lowered cost. This includes environment and everything else. As many people have said, as soon as the profitability goes out of farming, so does the care of the environment. This is one of

the big problems.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much, Ian. I think that last point is an issue that we've heard repeatedly; that the country needs to be looked after and if you're going to do it and if farmers aren't there as viable farmers, you know, goodness knows who's going to actually manage the country, even if it's just controlling the ferals and the weeds and bioprotection and that sort of thing.

MR B. STEWART: Look at national parks and things. There's a lot of problems there, and I'm not knocking QPWS when I say that, the Parks and Wildlife. There's just not enough bodies to go around.

MR I. STEWART: We have, by the way, asked our farmers on a number of occasions how they would like to see this occur. It's quite interesting that the vast majority want nothing to do with subsidies. What they want is a fair price for the product and to be made profitable that way. They don't see it as something that governments just simply have to come up with handouts. That's not the way to do it.

DR BYRON: A fair price for the product, that enables them to manage the land the way it should be managed, without having to cut corners all the time.

MR I. STEWART: Yes.

DR BYRON: Another point that you've reminded me of: many people have said to us if you're going to have an internationally competitive industry, you can't do it with your hands tied behind your back with red tape; that we've got to make sure that we don't have excessive regulation and the sort of compliance cost that you were talking about. So if it's gone up to 35 per cent - I mean, even 25 per cent of gross product seems to me a pretty high number.

MR I. STEWART: It's pretty high, that's right.

DR BYRON: We all know that we need to have governments but - - -

MR B. STEWART: Do we need them that much, hey?

DR BYRON: Maybe I shouldn't go there.

PROF MUSGRAVE: In asking this question, please don't think I didn't hear what you said. I did hear what you said and I've taken note of it, but I just would like to invite you to talk a little bit about your organisation, what it is and how it's constituted.

MR B. STEWART: How it's constituted, okay. Well, integrated catchment

management was something which was considered in perhaps the late 80s, early 90s; that we needed farmers, industry, other things. Like in the Johnstone just for example, just to explain ICM, we've got fishing interests, both recreational and commercial. We have agency interests, particularly the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, but the Department of Primary Industry also has a look in, and the Environmental Protection Authority. We have industry, such as Ian who works for the dairy factory, and we have dairy farmers. So they've got dairy affected in both ways.

We have cane industry, such as Wayne Thomas representing farmers, and we actually have the millers involved. Tourism gets a look in. Aboriginal interests get a look in. The papaya industry, the banana industry, cattle - I think I mentioned environment. So this is sort of an amalgam. In fact there are 17 stakeholders with the ICM group in Innisfail.

Now, the other groups - Bruce Corcoran over there represents with the mulgrave. He's like in a similar position to me, with the mulgrave. I'm not certain how many stakeholders there are in his group but he would have something similar to that. The concept is that the catchment is a natural unit. It moves outside - I forgot to mention, shire councils also are interested. In the Johnstone we've got two of them. There's the Ipswich Shire and the Johnstone Shire, so the councils are on it as well. It goes beyond the shires. It is a catchment which focuses on the land, the use of the land, drainage of the water, then draining to the mouth of the river.

I think it's a way of listening to different ideas, because I might think farming is terrific but if the fellow at the mouth of the river - I'm putting the fishing industry out of business - I mightn't have even considered it. So it becomes a forum in which we can sit and discuss. I forgot to mention, there are environmental groups on it as well. So Landcare, just general greenie groups, are also stakeholders of the Johnstone River Catchment Management Association. So it becomes the forum in which we can discuss things - such as a joint paper like this tries to get put together - of a common interest.

The major ones which I can come up with in short notice was this one on the actual - the value paid for produce is the major issue which we consider at the moment, which we can perhaps universally raise the flag, without an argument of one thing against the other.

PROF MUSGRAVE: But is it a voluntary organisation?

MR B. STEWART: Yes, it is. I'm paid as a catchment project manager, which at the moment is funded from NHT money. But yes, it's a voluntary organisation. But it is constituted, it is an incorporated organisation. It was constituted through the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, and they are a stakeholder. They don't

run it. But it has got a formal constitution. Being an incorporated body, it is eligible then to hold funds for funding particular projects, which can be available to sustainable agriculture and environmental improvement works. So we are managing projects such as that. Some of the river improvement works - we're involved in developing river management plans, as well as doing actual on-ground works.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Thank you very much.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much for coming, Bob and Ian.

DR BYRON: Okay to go?

MR SING: Okay. My name is Neil Sing. I'm the president of Longan Association Australia. There are around about 100 longan growers, spread from northern New South Wales up to Mossman. One of our - if not the major threat - to the longan industry, besides the import risk assessment that's presently under way by AQIS, is the spectacle flying fox. With regard to industries like lychees and rambutans - who are sort of like sister industries for longans - they are in much the same position. The longan industry is worth around about 5 or 6 million dollars, the rambutans about the same, and the lychee industry is about 12 to 15 million dollars. Those figures are all pretty rubbery, because there's no sort of strong statistics on those, other than estimates.

I guess the question I'm really raising to you is, what is a reasonable level of the duty of care that you should have to the environment. Some people suggest that everybody has a duty of care and that as a result we've all got to bear our own burdens in that regard. Could I just suggest to you that there are always limits to everything in society, and this is one area which should be considered.

Just to take my own situation, which I think is a reasonably good example, we've got the land worth \$80,000. The fixed farm assets on it are perhaps another \$40,000. I've had a quote to put a netting structure on that place and it actually comes to \$129,000 without the labour required to put it up. So you see, you're talking about, in this case, slightly over a hundred per cent of the value of my place could be required to actually erect a netting structure, which would allow me to completely meet my duty of care towards the spectacle flying fox. Obviously I'm not going to do that. I don't think it's worth the risk, also given the other things that are happening in the industry, such as the import risk assessment.

The other fact that has to be taken into account is that that netting only lasts 10 years and this is a cyclone area. So you know, I can expect to - the chances of me not getting a cyclone in that 10 years is probably zilch. I'm sort of away from the coast so I'm less at risk, but for longan and particularly lychee growers that are on the coast, netting is a pretty high risk operation. Some of them are sort of heading down that way, but it's sort of putting them financially at risk by doing so.

Because of the threat that we saw with the flying fox - and from time to time they do counts of the population. So my wife and I decided that we would sort of take part in those counts. Having a scientific background, one of the things that we wanted to know was what was the methodology that was behind those counts. Well, unfortunately, despite our earnest sort of requests for some methodology to be set up, there isn't any. If you go to a count, which we do near Atherton at Tolga Scrub, it's organised for a certain day. We have suggested that a good day would be a day of a full moon. That's not quite always possible, evidently. It makes it easier to see them

of course.

You go there. There may be eight people that first night. The next night there's a different eight people. The next night, third night, there's a different people again. They go to different places. Some have got a pencil and paper. Some have got a counter. It's a very haphazard sort of operation. But to make it worse, they don't actually count all the camps. The spectacle flying fox will move between camps from night to night, and they don't all move out of the camp. There's a huge number of sort of variables in there.

Now, I can understand the conservationists getting concerned. We're allowed to have permits to shoot. They believe that there's no real control over that method, because once you get to a certain point, what is to stop you shooting. To a certain extent that's a valid point. There are two things which go against that. I mean, I've got a permit to shoot. You've worked for 13 or 14 hours that day, because it's during the harvest season that this is all on, and you go out to shoot. When you're tired at the end of the day, the risk is actually who is going to get shot: is it you or the flying fox. As a result, I don't shoot too many.

The real main issue of course is that, okay, the permit to shoot is based on 1 per cent of the population, but no-one actually knows what the population is because they don't count all the camps. What we're really asking for, if it really is a threatened species, then please have some rigour in its approach to its definition as a threatened species or endangered species. If it is threatened then perhaps that means that the flow-on effect is that we have to do something about it. Perhaps the community may want to do something about it. What that is, I'm not exactly sure. Is it measures through the taxation system, which perhaps would allow more than a hundred per cent or something like that? I don't know what it is. I don't believe compensation is going to be an argument that's going to go successfully, although that perhaps a 150 per cent deduction is compensation by another name.

I think the whole issue with regard to the flying foxes actually calls into account with regard to the natural resource management issues in this area. There's 160 - I think it is - threatened or endangered species in that natural resource management plan that Charley Loudon referred to earlier. I have no idea how many really are threatened species. But I know from my experience with flying foxes that there's more emotion in the science than there is actual data. That's all I wanted to say.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much, Neil. I think you made that point very clearly.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Would you write that down for us?

MR SING: Yes.

PROF MUSGRAVE: Sorry, when I say write down, perhaps a bit more detail on your experience.

MR SING: Yes, I realise what you mean.

PROF MUSGRAVE: I think that's quite important, thanks.

DR BYRON: We can follow that up with you later perhaps, by email or fax or something.

MR SING: Okay.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much for making the effort to come.

MR CORCORAN: Bruce Corcoran from Mulgrave Landcare Catchment Group based in Gordonvale. I'm actually a cane farmer as well as the catchment group coordinator. I fulfil the same role that Bob Stewart does. I'm also speaking as the catchment group representative today. We operate under the same system as Bob in integrated catchment management. We consider that being the best model for natural resource management, most human activity ends up being transported or flushed away by water; where the water goes, so does results of all that human activity. To go over what somebody else said regarding the level of biodiversity within our wet catchments, Mulgrave is 64 per cent world heritage, 11 per cent state forest, so 75 per cent of our catchment is undeveloped. Once again it's a figure not many people may realise. Comments I'm making regarding biodiversity, very little additional land clearing goes on in our catchment, it was all done years ago.

I'll launch off saying that the understanding by landowners of the regulations and the implications of those regulations are extremely low, mainly due to the complexity and plethora of various plans and strategies. There is a resistance to these regulations. That resistance is reinforced by uncertainty and a mistrust. That mistrust is based primarily on the fact that the regulatory agencies are, some people would say, either inexperienced and some people would say incompetent in the management of those regulations. There's also amongst landowners and others a fear of the irreversibility of any biodiversity regulations that come in. Everybody knows that sometimes good ideas get put up. Time and expense showed that some aspects are not particularly good but then they're hard to change. So flexibility in that regard would certainly be a good idea.

The loan cost burden mentioned previously also applies. Previous incentives that were in place years ago to assist landowners in particular to improve their management are now disappearing. It could be as simple as free tree programs that often provided the catalyst for landowners to move along that pathway of environmental improvement. Soil conservation officers that were once a part of the normal function of the Department of Primary Industry or now DNR have been taken away which is an absolute ridiculous situation in an era when the Great Barrier Reef was screaming at landowners for putting sediment upon the roof. They've taken away those people who could most ably assist.

Rates relief has been tried in the most ineffectual manner possible. A very quick example: a very good conservation farm in our area applied to council for rates relief; they inspected this property for a couple of hours and came up with a figure of \$30, the equivalent of one carton of beer. So the government's opinion was that the biodiversity on his farm was worth a carton of beer. There are other more direct disincentives: one is that people that over the years have taken the trouble to preserve biodiversity upon their land are extremely easy targets for the first - I was going to say "assault" but that's a confrontational word. They are easy targets for such legislation. A family that had an environmental conscience and has preserved a

corner on the property for whatever reason, whether it's margin or not, whether it's a purely heartfelt effort, that piece of land that they've set aside through good conscience to me looks like money in the bank. It's something that you feel is a good thing to have, so you put it aside and the intention always being that when things change you can use a bit of it.

An example of this in our local area is that 34 acres, 16 hectares of bush on the corner of the property, has been preserved over three generations. The time came to do a farm management plan, it was obviously the soil conservation contouring or contouring for soil conservation and for water management - would benefit by removing 18 trees out of 34 acres. That was not allowed. So the situation was those people put that money in the bank, they put those trees in the bank. When the time came to make a small withdrawal for a damn good purpose it was not allowed. This will lead into one of my main points in that the bad application of good rules is a major problem in the environmental field.

The myriad of overlapping plans has been mentioned many times. No-one has a copy of all the plans, let alone an understanding of what's in them all. It's obvious that it has to be rationalised. The catchment management model we feel is the way to go to manage environmental improvement but it's not allowed to operate because there is this major overlap between local government plans, vegetation management plans, you name it plans. The management of those plans and nearly everything else that we come up against, depends upon the practical application by regulatory agencies. What we feel is missing is for the top operators in those regulatory agencies to have discretion to assess a situation on its own merits and make a decision.

Too often we find that those operators, for whatever reason, do nothing because the legislation or the regulations are too complicated and too easy to hide behind. We feel this is a major point that we ask the commission to address, please. The disjointedness of funding to bodies trying to carry out biodiversity improvement is a major problem. Under NHT1, things really happened. Since NHT1 finished the momentum and gains made over many years have been lost. That's no small thing because it took many years to build up the confidence or trust of landowners to engage in environmental improvement and then when the funding and momentum and the people that they trust suddenly disappear it's just gone and it's very hard to get back. Industry must face similar problems. If good people go, it takes a long time to rebuild.

The commission is asking for the way forward. We consider individual stewardship of the land is very important. Everybody recognises that has to be encouraged. It has to be assisted by incentives. Direct financial incentives can take many forms, an example being the soil conservation officer I mentioned before. There's also a controversial point regarding legislation. No-one mentions it, nobody

wants to mention it, but this is a minority view in our catchment group. Being a democratic organisation, I have to mention it. There is a point we feel for some legislation to be brought to bear where the example is glaring and in need of attention.

In regards to sedimentation you would not legislate against diffuse, gradual sedimentation. In a case where there's extreme and neglectful soil erosion through bad practice, that's a point where legislation should be able to be brought to bear to force that landowner to do something about it. That also equally applies to a local council that allows poor water quality to be coming out of stormwater drains. It could equally apply to a developer - unacceptable amounts of sediment come off his developments. It could also apply to Queensland Rail and diesel spills. There is a point where legislation is the most effective means but that obviously has to be used judiciously.

Someone else's point was you have to determine the extent of the government's commitment. It basically comes down to dollars, not just the total dollars but those dollars that get on the ground. As mentioned previously by somebody else, \$40 million worth of reports was sitting here and that's just something that volunteers that try and get trees in the ground and sediment traps going and fish in the rivers hate to hear because they're the ones giving up Sunday afternoons, and they are the basis of the catchment management model. They are the basis of Landcare, they're the basis of the environmental movement that probably started back in the 60s. To see money wasted on more reports, more strategies, more commissions, very disheartening and eventually the movement is in danger of losing that grassroots support.

If the government wants to go to private enterprise to put that on the ground that may be another issue. If you're relying on the community to do it, you have to get your act together and get the dollars on the ground. I'm approaching the end of my talk. There are three points probably to sum up. We feel that the regional NRM arrangement that is in the process of setting up is a very good idea. It's a good model and a good way to rationalise all the plans to get someone to prioritise things that have to be done and to apportion money to good projects. In regard to that, that will only work if their plan becomes "the" plan for the region, not one of the many plans. But we're back to that rationalisation of plans and strategies again.

For that to function they still need to have the regulatory agencies, which is the EPA, DNR, et cetera, having practical people at the top of those organisations who have the flexibility and the experience to make those regulations work in the way they were meant to, not the way they can be read. Finally, we would suggest that it's such a simple issue really to trade assistance to agriculture, assistance to landowners, assistance to local governments, assistance to almost anybody, for biodiversity outcomes. It's the most basic and easiest incentive. We will provide a free soil

conservation service for this area if you guys put some trees down the creek. We're just amazed that this simple attitude is overlooked by nearly everybody. Thank you.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much, Bruce. That's great. There's all sorts of questions I could ask you but I reacted to your references to the importance of local community involvement of trust and the rationalisation of plans and strategies. In relation to the catchment based management of natural resources and community involvement in it, do you see potential in strengthening community bodies such as yours? Do you think an arrangement whereby such a body was given greater statutory empowerment and greater resources in order to employ expertise to enable the catchment organisations to play the sort of part you describe, and the empowerment perhaps goes to the extent that that body, having the ability to oversee the implementation of a plan, do you see a scope for that or would you be concerned about such a development?

MR CORCORAN: Our job is the implementation of those plans.

DR BYRON: Do you have resources to really play an effective part in bringing that implementation about?

MR CORCORAN: NHT1, we feel we probably did because our group is also a fairly early and well resourced group under that scheme. The money was available, it was available for a 12-month project in which that time we could do some works. What's happened since then is that with NHT failing to materialise, the funding has been disjointed, very short term, coordinated and people charged with taking those plans, turning them into projects and putting them on the ground, have been turning over. As I said, the momentum has been lost to a certain extent.

As far as empowering groups at our level with - I'm not sure if it would have meant legislation but some sort of "T", no, because that is probably more the function of the NRM board that Charley is involved with, and even the regulatory agencies who we are critical of, that really is their job. Our job is to put things on the ground which is where it's got to happen. What we're asking is that the process by which we get direction and money is more simplified and more direct.

DR BYRON: It would seem to me that the very uncertainties involved in the NHT funding would make it difficult to get the impetus maintained in pursuit of your objectives - a steady and more constant stream of revenue would be pretty useful to you, I would have thought.

MR CORCORAN: Absolutely, yes.

DR BYRON: Okay, thanks very much.

DR BYRON: Roz is the last one.

MS BURTENSHAW: Yes.

DR BYRON: Thanks very much for coming, Roz. You were the first person here and last on the program.

MS BURTENSHAW: Okay. My name is Roz Burtenshaw. I'm from Mount Garnet. I'm a grazier. Like two or three others I appear to have been on the catchment. I've been a catchment member for eight years. I was on the chair and I've held various executive positions. I have a different perspective from my other members. I actually believe that it's very important to engage the stakeholder. I also believe that stakeholders, ie, because I'm from a dry area, that we don't want handouts. I don't want NHT2 money, not to do the work that I see that needs to be done. I acknowledge that there are areas of public interest where perhaps public money should go. But we're pretty feisty, independent sort of people.

What we'd like to do - this is purely from my own perspective - I'd like to see more research and development, I'd like to see the ability to access extension people. We're having our extension people diminished just so rapidly that we don't have that professional advice that we need. I also don't believe that all catchments are comprised of sufficient stakeholders. DNR, they go out and they select the people that will go onto those committees and what areas they represent. I've often been to meetings where there might be two producers and 14 government people. So I don't actually - I think there needs to be a balance. I think there needs to be an engagement of all producers. You can't get people from in town telling someone who's got several hundred square kilometres of country how they need to run their property.

Having said that I just want to say that this is my view of the way forward. I've listened to everyone today and I guess from a producer's point of view we really need, first of all, secure access to our land and water. I don't consider myself a custodian. I've paid 8 or 10 million dollars for my property. I'm not a custodian. I mean, you're not a custodian of your houses. So why am I a custodian? Because of the Oren system of land tenure that's how you're speaking of me. My family have put generations into their land and I believe we're very good managers. Like every industry we've got a few bad eggs, the same as bureaucracy has a few bad eggs and the government has a few bad eggs but, you know, we're really trying to address that.

I guess one of the things that we're actually addressing as graziers is ground cover. We're actually measuring how much grass we can have on our ground with the assistance of DPI which is actually halting run-off which is actually keeping our soil together and having an impact on the purported downturn on the water quality, so I guess secure access to our land and water. Security of our tenure: Queensland is

between 60 and 70 per cent leasehold land. So those people that have spent 8, 10, or 2 or 1 million dollars on their property, they want security of that access. When you've got your leasehold land review and you've got departments saying, "We need to have environmental outcomes and indigenous outcomes attached to the renewal of your lease," it is totally unacceptable. Even in a commercial lease you might have a three by three by three-year lease, so you have an of-right use. That's one of the areas.

Another area I believe that's really important is the accountability of the bureaucrats. Until we have the bureaucracy subject to the same laws that people are subject to and when they make perverse decisions - and I'm just speaking from my own particular instance. I've been 15 years working on an upgrade of tenure and that tenure has been described as a mismanagement of time; in other words, a bureaucratic stuff-up. So they're the sort of issues we're dealing with. Another issue: the whole of Australia wants really good environmental outcomes so we're looking for public benefit. The public has to pay. We can't have 2 per cent of Australia doing the feel-good thing for the rest of Australia. I guess I've said, research and development, they're absolutely imperative in our industry. Without research and development we're going to be left behind.

We've got an enviable clean, green position within the world of agriculture, and I want to stay there. But, as I mentioned before, I've got a son who wants to buy another property and I'm saying, "Hang on. You can't buy east of the divide because we've got the reef water quality protection plan, and we can't buy the other way because I don't really believe that the government is totally committed to keeping farmers sustainable, to keeping farmers there." I really need to know where the direction is. However, saying all that, I think that we also need to have very sound science. We need peer-reviewed science, some of the science that's been coming out that has suited particular areas or perhaps government positions or government agendas. It's pretty shonky, and that science needs to be peer reviewed.

One other thing, too, is that in any business you can only have one boss. A producer can't have all the bureaucracies coming and saying, "You will do this, you will do that, you will do something else." You can only have one manager, otherwise your whole system falls over. You can only have one boss. I guess what I'm really looking for is the ability to remain sustainably on our property for generations to come. That is what I want, and I guess that is what all of the people that I see for many generations are looking for.

We want to be sustainable. Yes, we've had drought and we've had flood and we've had fire and we've had various governments telling us what we must or we must not do, but underneath it all I think we're basically good producers. We're some of the best in the world. We'd like to say that way, but with the raft of legislation coming over us I don't know that we can do that. We need a balance and we need

people to understand where we want to go. But thank you for giving me the opportunity to say what I feel. It wasn't prepared, but thank you anyway.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. We do have a pretty severe time constraint, so I apologise if any of you feel that you've been rushed through this afternoon. I'm sure that we could have talked for hours on some of the subject matter that you've raised. Is there anybody here who wants to get the last word in before we ask the transcription service to switch off and pack up? Neil Sing, could you go to the mike, please.

MR SING: There's just one item, and it's really the balance between the amount of resources you might put into measuring water quality and the amount of resources you might put into do something about it. There doesn't seem to be any willingness to put any resources into doing something about it. There's a suggestion that industry should pay for itself, but there seems to be quite a willingness to put money into resources to measure water quality. I think you'd be aware from your previous work with the Productivity Commission that one might suggest that measuring water quality now and then measuring it in 10 years' time is all you need to do; you don't need to do much in between because it's going to take that long to show anything. I think the issue of how you balance those two out needs to be resolved, and I don't think it's been worked out.

DR BYRON: I think you're right, but perhaps the counter argument is that before we go spending millions of dollars fixing the problem, we should make sure that there really is a problem.

MR SING: Yes. I'm saying you've got to know where you're starting from.

DR BYRON: Yes, and one of the points that have come up quite often with the biodiversity and with the native veg maps and so on is that the basic information there for making sensible policy isn't really up to scratch. It's not really been adequate and so it's possible that we've sort of rushed in to try and fix a problem without actually even checking that there really was a problem, nor have we really diagnosed very carefully are we sure it really is a problem and are we sure that rushing in in this particular way is going to fix it. Have we thought about all the other options that might address it?

I think it's possible that some of the legislation that is creating the perverse outcomes, the opposite of what it was intended to do, may be because it was rushed in before the good diagnosis had been done and before people had thought through all the options. But ultimately there's no point in doing the diagnosis unless you've got the money to put in to doing the treatment as well. So I guess I'm agreeing with you, that we need to both well, both analyse the problem and do the on-the-ground stuff.

MR SING: I realise that, but I guess from where we're all sitting up here, we've read the draft report of your protection plan. People came up here, they sort of announced that they were putting a cabinet submission up for extra money for water quality monitoring, but when people asked what was going to happen about extra resources, doing something about it, it was thrown back at them that they had to do it. Another example is up at Douglas Shire - you may not be aware of this - they've been recently \$2.2 million for water quality monitoring work. SRDC has actually granted them \$300,000 for work in implementing best practice. The balance just isn't there in what's happening.

DR BYRON: Thanks very much. We've only got a few minutes.

MR THOMAS: Yes. Wayne Thomas. One of the points that has been raised is the rates system and that does seem to have a perverse effect. Obviously, if you've got a block of land you want to try and develop as much as you can because the rates are there and you're paying rates on every square inch. Over the years I've had a thought that councils need to get away from using the unimproved value system as the basis of rates and go to a land use system. Every shire has, they call it a town plan but a local plan, and land could be marked off as being for particular land use and that category would attract a dollar value. It then gives the opportunity for someone who wishes to mark off an area of wetland, creeks, rivers, repair areas, and they so define it, and that then gets rates accordingly, which would be zero or minimal rating. What we've got now is a system where you've got to develop all your land, because you're getting charged X per hectare, otherwise it breaks the bank. It's as simple as that.

DR BYRON: A good point. Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your participation this afternoon. I'd like to call to a close this public hearing of the inquiry. Thank you again for your participation.

AT 5.00 PM THE INQUIRY WAS ADJOURNED ACCORDINGLY

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