



**TRANSCRIPT  
OF PROCEEDINGS**

**SPARK AND CANNON**

Telephone:

Adelaide	(08) 8212 3699
Hobart	(03) 6224 2499
Melbourne	(03) 9670 6989
Perth	(08) 9325 4577
Sydney	(02) 9211 4077

---

**PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION**

**DRAFT REPORT ON IMPACTS OF NATIVE VEGETATION AND  
BIODIVERSITY REGULATIONS**

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

**TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**AT TOOWOOMBA ON TUESDAY, 3 FEBRUARY 2004, AT 10 AM**

**Continued from 2/2/04 in Mackay**

**DR BYRON:** Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the public hearings of the Productivity Commission's national inquiry into the impacts of native vegetation and biodiversity legislation. This is the second round of hearings after the release of our draft report in early December. My name is Neil Byron and I have been appointed as the presiding Commissioner for this inquiry. My fellow Commissioners are Dr Brian Fisher on my right and Prof Warren Musgrave on my left. The purpose of this round of hearings is to obtain feedback on the draft report and to facilitate public scrutiny of the Commission's work. If there are any errors of fact or interpretation in our draft report we need to correct them.

Following these hearings we will be having similar hearings in Sydney tomorrow, Dubbo the day after, Adelaide, Albury, Hobart, Perth, Geraldton et cetera. We have to report to the Commonwealth government no later than 14 April after having considered all the evidence that has been presented at the hearings and in the written submissions, as well as the information that we have obtained from field visits to properties and so on. All the participants in the inquiry will automatically receive a copy of the final report once it's released by the Commonwealth government. They release it, not us. They normally release an inquiry report within 25 sitting days of the date we give it to them.

We always like to conduct our public hearings in a pretty informal manner but we do take a full transcript of the evidence and for that reason we can't accept comments from the floor; people need to speak into the microphones. We always ask anybody in the audience, at the end of the day, who wants to make any comments, or anybody who has previously given evidence who wants to come back and add to what they had said before, to do so. We will be giving people an opportunity to do that.

Participants are no longer required to take an oath but the Productivity Commission Act says that those giving evidence should be - I think the words are "truthful in their remarks". We don't usually have any problems with that. Participants are free to comment on issues raised in other submissions or by other speakers during the day, whether you want to agree or disagree with them. The transcript will be made available to the people who have given evidence so that they can actually check that there hasn't been a mistyping of what they said and little words like "not" haven't been left out; it changes the sense of things quite a lot. Transcripts will also be available from our web site and from - there are order forms up the back. Submissions and so on are also available.

The first evidence we've got is from Tamborine Mountain Landcare, if you would like to each introduce yourselves. The way we normally conduct is if you want to summarise the submission which we have all received and read, thank you very much for that, and then we can have a bit of a question and answer session and

you can elaborate on some of the issues in the submission. Thanks very much.

**MR LYNCH:** Thank you for the opportunity of being here. We represent, of course, Tamborine Mountain Landcare of which I am the president. The submission itself was put together by three individuals: a fellow called Mike Russell who was, is now retired, a university lecturer specialising in grasses - in fact, at one time he was lecturer here at Toowoomba; Bob Lake, who specialises in the rural field; and myself. I have a military background but I am now in my second career and I am a land manager responsible for the very large training area of Canungra. It's a 6000-hectare area. That's my current occupation. I still work. As I mentioned, it's a composite of three individuals in the one submission.

Tamborine Mountain Landcare is a fairly relatively new land care group established in 2000. It arose out of a thing called an escarpment strategy which went for about three years. A lot of money was spent on it to look at the environment of Tamborine Mountain, which for those who don't know, is just inland from the Gold Coast. Formally a farming area but farming has been overtaken to a large degree by the fact that it's now very much a touristy-type area and residential area. There are still, for that part of the world, reasonable-size farms on the mountain.

The area around there is sort of the Gold Coast hinterland which features things like Lamington National Park, Springbrook is well known, Tamborine Mountain itself. Formerly it was a timber area and initially a subsistence farming area but now very much a rural type, small acreage type part of the world, and one of the fastest developing areas in Australia in terms of development. So that's the area. The Tamborine Mountain Landcare group itself has about 80 members. It is doing very well. It has its own web site. It has its own newsletter. We think we're a group that's doing quite well, following on the information that was provided by the escarpment strategy. It's had a considerable amount of money spent on it.

In the reply some of the content addresses the recommendations of the report in a fair amount of detail. I think, generally speaking, the best way we would like to approach that is to take questions because it's all there and to go through it point by point would take some considerable time. We appreciate the problems that farmers do have in trying to comply with all of the legislation which confronts them in terms of what they can and cannot do on their land. We can well appreciate that. I would not like to be in your position in trying to accommodate the environmental wishes and the wishes of those who are trying to make a living from the land. It has always been and probably will always be a compromise.

However, we also are of the view that there is an awful lot of legislation and the legislation, of course, is not consistent across Australia. There appears to be too much of it. It's too difficult to follow and a fellow who is trying to make a living

from the land would probably go berserk trying to understand all of the things that he has to do. However, there are a number of key issues that concern us. I have no doubt you've heard this consistently, it appears consistently in the document, the draft, and that is we turned our attention mainly to the western part of Queensland along the Murray-Darling and that area. We are very concerned about water and the lack of it, and salinity problems which are caused by the clearing of vegetation. One would have to be rather ignorant if one denied that science says that you just can't clear large areas of vegetation and not have the repercussions of salinity in our waterways.

One would also have to recognise that the area to the west of us is not noted for its abundance of water. You either have a drought or you have a flood and it's the flood rains that are very, very important to the inland of Australia in terms of the environment. To cut off water supply which has historically run down these streams, as it is doing now, and not allow it to take care of the environment further downstream would be rather foolish. There are situations out there where large-scale clearing is not in the interest of the environment, nor the economy in the long term. We are now sort of looking at quick returns, or fairly quick returns, for the sake of environmental longevity.

It's an old continent and we can probably ruin it entirely almost within a lifetime, certainly within a couple of hundred years, which in terms of the life of the world is no time at all. So our concern is that whatever the findings of the Commission are, we should be looking not for gain in the short term but for economic and environmental long-term benefit of the nation. We believe that land should be categorised as to what it can sustain. There are areas that are being - and I eyeball mostly on cotton - cleared for grains - going further, include wheat in that perhaps - but for grains which required fairly flat land, fairly clear land and a very reliable supply of water.

Once it's cleared and once that happens, of course, it's a forever-type thing and we just can't sustain that sort of treatment. So we believe that before any land is open for agriculture, that it needs to be assessed on where the water is coming from, what's going to happen to the biodiversity and it should be categorised as suitable for one thing or another or somewhere along the line. We believe the pastoral industry is much better suited for a lot of this land where, in fact, trees can be left and we don't need large-scale clearing. So our views are that yes, the farmer has to make a living but the farmer has to accept that the environment has to be protected and that includes the environment throughout the whole area and not just his particular area.

So that's principally our concern and I would rather stop there and accept questions and expand on what we may have said and Julie, of course, is quite at liberty to make response as well.

**DR BYRON:** Ms Lake, would you like to add anything at this stage?

**MS LAKE:** Only very briefly. How could I improve on anything so excellently put? I am a horticulturalist; currently a horticultural consultant. I have a rural background. I think perhaps one of the reasons we wanted to be represented here today was that the Commission be aware that there is concern in the wider community on this whole issue. I think we are concerned that basically agriculture is still a 19th century mentality: "I've got it. It's mine. I can do what I like with it in this country." That is no longer acceptable to the wider community and long-term sustainability or, as Don has pointed out, long-term economic productivity depends on long-term sustainability rather than short-term goals, which is really just accentuating what Don said.

**DR BYRON:** I should probably explain that the Productivity Commission is required in everything we do, in every topic that we're instructed to investigate, to take into account environmental, social and economic implications and to ask what is in the long-term best interests for the whole of society, not just what is in the best short-term interests for one particular vocal interest group. In this draft report I think the Commission has been trying to say, "How do we work towards the balance of land uses that will be sustainable and productive in the long term?" I think generally we're very much in agreement with where we're heading to - where we want to get to in the future.

But, as you've probably noticed in the report, we're asked in our terms of reference to see whether or not the way the tree-clearing controls and biodiversity protection legislation are being applied at the moment - whether that's having particular hardship or effects on land-holders or other groups, including mining infrastructure and whether there might be ways of achieving those same long-term sustainability objectives, and the biodiversity conservation outcomes that everybody seems to agree on, but at much less cost to either a particular group, such as those land-holders who have lots of remnant native vegetation.

So the issues that come up and where we're still looking for further information in order to continue to improve on our draft report is, as it said in your submission - the factual basis on which land-clearing controls are exercised - we've had lots of evidence of people saying, "Well, the maps are wrong or the underlying science" - the research either hasn't been done or is being contested. We've had lots of debate about what is being cleared completely - particularly in western New South Wales and South-West Queensland.

I probably confess that my original understanding is that we were talking about old-growth forest that had been there for hundreds of years. We've received a lot of

evidence from fairly eminent scientists arguing that in 1788 a lot of that country was actually grassland and the vegetation that's there now is actually eucalypts and acacias colonising land that may have been grassland for thousands of years before that; the timber thickening argument.

The data from the Queensland Statewide Landcover and Trees Study - SLATS - suggest that a lot of the land that is being cleared at the moment is relatively young and was land that - as recently as 15 years ago - was classified as treeless. So I must admit that is influencing my understanding of what is actually being cleared; whether we're clearing 20-year-old regrowth, or whether we're clearing 200-year-old forests.

You have particularly emphasised the salinity and the water quality and water yield issues. Some of the scientists that we've been speaking to have been saying that as more of the grasslands become colonised by trees, the water yield into the Murray-Darling catchment will actually decline, because the trees transpire more than the grasses do. So we're trying to sift through all this evidence from all different points of view about: is the hazard of broadacre land clearing, particularly in South-West Queensland, uniformly serious, or are there some areas where a certain amount of land clearing would do relatively little harm?

I think that's one of the first questions that we have to ask: is the problem so universally clear-cut that the best way is to just have a blanket prohibition, or is there evidence that in some areas you could have a bit more clearing without actually causing serious environmental harm? Would you like to respond to that? I haven't actually put a question there; I'm sort of groping around.

**MR LYNCH:** I will respond to that. Do we have - we've been taking aerial photography in Australia for a long, long time and I would imagine that aerial photography would be available going back at least into the 40s, when there ought to be - that's 60 years ago now, 50 to 60 years ago - do we have access to aerial photography, which would indicate in fact, factually, what was there? Is that sort of stuff available?

**DR BYRON:** I believe it should be, but people have pointed us to the diaries of Leichhardt and Sturt and Mitchell and people like that, who describe going across seas of grass.

**MR LYNCH:** Large, open land.

**DR BYRON:** In areas that are now ironbark or cypress pine forest.

**MR LYNCH:** Brigalow and that type of stuff. Yes, I would like to see some factual evidence that that was so, apart from the writings of Sturt and Mitchell and

co. The reason I say this is - and I don't disagree with you - where I work there is a mountain called Beechmont and there's a mountain called Tamborine Mountain. Now, Tamborine Mountain from my observations of aerial photography has not as much vegetation as it might have had a hundred years ago, but what's happened of course is that a lot of it was cleared for farming but is now regenerating, because the requirement to farm isn't there any longer and trees are being allowed to grow and, in fact, people are planting them.

My experience from looking at aerial photography, around where I work, is that historically what happened in that part of the world was that the timber cutters came and cut the timber, followed by subsistence farmers who were required to clear the land to stay on the land, and that took place in the early part of last century, through to the 20s, 30, 40s and from around about the period where the subsistence farmers went broke and their land was bought up by development, and then the environmental people became involved. In fact, if you look at aerial photography and photographs and so forth, the early evidence is that it was covered in trees, then there was a long period when it was cleared and we now have a situation where native and exotic trees are coming back to the point where it is no longer an issue of lack of vegetation.

So the point I'm trying to make, I suppose, is that I agree with your point - history tells us that the whole of that part of the world, particularly down there, was grass-covered land with, I suppose, patches of trees and particularly long watercourses. But I'd just like to see, apart from the writing, some circumstantial evidence that this was so. Does that account for the areas further to the south, where salinity, further down the river is a problem? What was there historically? Was that grassland or was it timbered? Because once they took the timber off the land further down, of course, we know we've got an awful problem down the bottom end of the Murray-Darling and so forth.

**MS LAKE:** May I make a further point on this - just listening to Don. The regulations are focused very much on tree clearing, but speaking - clearly, from a botanist's point of view, grassland communities are important, too, and are incredibly complex and much less well understood than, say, woodland communities. So I wouldn't like to see all - I may be getting this wrong - I'd hate to see all areas with no trees basically written off as marked for agricultural development merely because they don't have trees on them. Presumably that would be taken into account as well. I know clearing has focused on trees, but clearing is - this is from a biodiversity point of view.

**DR BYRON:** That is an excellent point, and in Victoria a number of people pointed out to us that the most threatened ecosystems in Victoria are in fact the natural grasslands.

**MR LYNCH:** I wouldn't disagree with that.

**DR BYRON:** And also of very high conservation value for brolgas and other birds and so on, the biodiversity. You get the really perverse situation where people are being compelled by law to plant trees on native grasslands which were, in fact, themselves endangered. People are assuming that more trees is always the answer, but in fact if you are wanting to protect a native grassland for its habitat and biodiversity values, you don't want people planting Tasmanian blue gums or something all over it. It's a problem that we could very easily slip into, thinking that this inquiry was about tree clearing when, in fact, it's about all native vegetation, including grasslands and biodiversity.

In South Australia they have pointed out to us that seagrasses are also native vegetation that is protected by law, so we have to keep reminding ourselves that we're not only talking about trees.

**MR LYNCH:** Yes, that's right.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** We're very anxious, if possible, to first of all test whether our recommendations and findings are appropriate and accurate and so on, but also to see if we can develop our recommendations further than we have. You have a number of comments in your submission in relation to that. I was particularly interested in two aspects: one was a number of references you made to the desirability of providing public funds for farm adjustment, for retirement of farmers out of the industry in order to minimise adverse impacts on the farming community, of the regulations. I wondered if you had any more detailed thoughts on how such funds could be employed in actually going about adjustment.

The second one relates to the role of regional and community groups. You seem to support the participation of such groups in the regulatory process. I'm interested in any comments you have on the success or otherwise of such efforts already in Queensland and the way in which it might be done better. Do you have any thoughts on that? I wonder if you could make any comments on those two headings?

**MR LYNCH:** Addressing the first point, which was to do with compensating or removing farmers from barely viable land, for a farmer to make a living in that part of the world, he needs a considerable tract of land.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Which part of the world?

**MR LYNCH:** Well, for a farmer to make a living in an area which has not much



water, poor rainfall and poor soils, he needs a considerable amount of land to make a living. Particularly if that living is agricultural rather than pastoral, it's not possible to make a good living, a sustainable living, from small acreages of land. That's self-evident. I think there needs to be some scientific approach to what amount of land is required in this particular part of the world to make an economic living, rather than a killing in the short term, if you want to put it that way. So there needs to be some science which determines which land can be used for what purpose in this area or that area or the other.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Are you suggesting the government should do this?

**MR LYNCH:** I'm suggesting that it should be done.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** The government has a very poor track record in this country for doing this.

**MR LYNCH:** Yes, they do. Well, it has to be done, and I don't know - as government is the regulatory authority on Australia, then it has to be government that should do that. So a science should do it. They won't do it themselves. They will probably employ someone else to do it.

Landcare is an organisation, as you know, which was formed out of an amalgamation between farmers and environmentalists, but I'd say that the farmers were, in the early stages at least, the dominating force in Landcare. So it does show that farmers have always been concerned, and the conservationists are onside with them. But in terms of using voluntary groups, I have a lot to do with an organisation called the Green Corps. I've had long discussions with politicians about the best way to use that organisation, which I don't think is used very well, to be truthful. Where I work, I've had nine of my own groups working for me, plus I've had a number of other groups through that I've supervised and so forth.

I think Green Corps is a political thing which is not used to the best end, in terms of it's a six-month term, and they employ young people, and they give them an education which I don't think is adequate. I do believe that Green Corps is obsessed with occupational health and safety. They're terrified of accidents. As a consequence, in my experience, they don't teach them worthwhile skills. They will teach them how to plant trees, and they will teach them how to do the simple things, but they won't teach them how to operate machinery or to operate chainsaws, or to operate anything which has any chance of hurting them.

So I think that the use of voluntary groups such as Green Corps, or call it what you will, is a good move if it were looked at more seriously. The Green Corps organisations tend to work on council land, government lands, and I don't think

they've done an awful lot on private land. Now, there's no reason why an organisation using the unemployed - and I'm not talking here about young people, I'm talking about of any age - cannot be a viable alternative for working on private land, and we should perhaps be looking more at raising an organisation - you can give it any name you like - which has a six-months training period, which then offers viable employment as an extension for two years or whatever, once you've taught these people usable skills - in other words, the sort of skills that you as an individual, if you had to pay for them out of your own pocket, you would. That is a big difference. If you have a guy who just knows how to plant trees and a few little basic things like that, they're not really employable if they've just done six months of planting trees.

My view would be to look at the opportunity to employ young people and older people in a scheme which is firstly educational, but then offers ongoing assistance to the private sector for two years, or whatever time it takes, on a reasonable wage, a wage which would attract them and keep them there, and I think that sort of force, if properly developed and properly managed and properly supervised, would be something which may be of some assistance to the community at large, not necessarily to the organisations that currently use them.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Thanks for that, but when I was talking about regional and community organisations being employed to make the application of regulations more effective, I had in mind improvements on the activities of organisations such as the native vegetation committees. Yesterday up at Mackay we were told about two situations which, I think, quite graphically describe the potential for community groups to be more effective in this work. One was the case of a cane farmer in an area which was largely cleared, except for his farm which had a substantial proportion of the farm centrally placed which was still vegetated and - if I could use the verb "to pink" - his farm was pinked. That is, a decision was made on the basis of the maps that are employed, to prevent him from clearing what he has, his superannuation block of land. From what he told us, this devastated his business. His was the only farm in this area which was affected by the regulations. There was very little communication to him about the reasons for this, or advice as to what he might do to ameliorate his situation. It occurred to me that people who have an intimate knowledge of that area, that is, people in the local community, if they'd had articulated to them clearly the objectives of policy with regard to that area, they might have been able to advise the government how to achieve those objectives without devastating the business in the old age of that cane farmer.

I wonder if you've got any thoughts as to whether we could imagine a situation where the community could do that. I might remind you that in our report, we're quite critical of the poor enunciation of the objectives of policy, and that's not just the enunciation of objectives at a statewide or national level, but also the deduction from

broader levels of policy of regional and local objectives. I think that cane farmer's situation is a good example of the dilemmas that can be produced as a result of such inadequacies in policy.

The other case was quite a different one. There was control of a woody weed, Parkinsonia, where policy was implemented in such a way that the ability of local Landcare groups to take action to control this weed was effectively nullified by the decision of state officers to prevent the use of weedicides and mechanical devices because it might injure trees. So we had an instance of policy objectives under one act being in conflict with policy objectives of another act, both acts being administered by the same agency; community people who were well aware of the dilemma and had suggestions and thoughts as to how this might be overcome, but no apparent effective way of impacting on the decision processes of the state agency to, once again, ameliorate the difficult situation in which they found themselves. Now, have you got any thought about how we might empower such regional groupings to enable us to reduce the incidence of such unfortunate outcomes of this regulatory activity?

**MR LYNCH:** Well, the only point I'd make is - you're right - the draft elucidates very well the problems that exist in legislation. There are so many acts and so many things that you've got to abide by that it is impossible for a farmer who is concerned with making a living from the land to try and comply with legislation which is conflicting, which is difficult to understand, which is expensive and which can have repercussions on him, even apart from making a living. So I think one of the first things that has to be unravelled is someone to look at all the legislations of all the states and have a common legislation which is easy to understand.

In my job, I have to read this sort of stuff and land management plans and all sorts of stuff, and there's certainly a potential for science and consultancies who are paid to put these things together to produce documents which are, for the major part, plagiarised from somewhere else, not well groundproofed. I'm aware in my business that consultants use junior people to put together stuff which, on my reading, on the ground, is nonsense. Now, I'm sure this occurs nationally, and I think that there has to be greater consultancy with local groups and that the people who put these things together have to be made to get away from the computer, to get away from models, to come up with consultancy with local people, and actually go on the ground, which they are prone not to do. I know that to be the truth. I see it so much.

People should be forced to produce their own information, by their own surveys, and not rely on stuff which was produced some years before, and may be of some doubt, depending where they plagiarised it from perhaps. I know it happens. I've read it, and I have great difficulty, as a land manager, coming to terms with some of the stuff which is produced and I'm sure farmers have greater difficulty, because

there's just so much of it, and it can prove to be so expensive to them. So there has to be some effort made to get people who are actually doing the work on the ground and to consult with the people who in fact have the knowledge, and live there, and have the historical background, and can provide essential information to the people who are producing these documents.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Well, perhaps if the state gave the funds which they use to hire the consultants to the regional groups for the regional groups to hire the consultants.

**MR LYNCH:** Yes.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** And they could perhaps ensure that the consultant does what you see as being desirable. Thanks.

**MS LAKE:** Can I make just a comment here?

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Yes.

**MS LAKE:** It doesn't directly answer your question but, listening to you both, it does remind me that what we're dealing with here, apart from anything else, but it's not spelt out here, is also the economic health, or lack of it, of our rural communities. I mean, there is a perception here when we think about land clearing, in truth, it's only rich, successful farmers who can go out and clear large areas of land, or corporate farming operations. What we have out there - and I don't think we should forget it - in the farming sector, for every successful farmer are thousands of little farmers who know nothing else, who are not educated to do anything else, who are living and operating sub-economic units out there, and who probably, if they were given an opportunity, would do something else if the government, if the Commonwealth, was able to provide a lead in this.

Maybe we should be thinking more regionally - because in a sense, there are towns dying, as we know, whole communities are dying - and maybe bearing in mind that the Commonwealth government through Centrelink does at least acknowledge today - in a way that it didn't in the past - the role of the volunteer in contemporary civil society. That applies to older people and, of course, it applies to the young. I think it would be possible, with the will, to revitalise these communities, by doing the sort of thing you're talking about, which is by communicating at a regional level. That regional level also understands its own vegetation and clearing requirements, perhaps, more clearly than can be done with the top-down approach and would in effect, by mobilising those communities, such as what's left of them, perhaps be able to repair - if you're talking now about Landcare repairing the land in those communities - and making them work together.

I can see a possibility of doing that if the Commonwealth had the will to implement it.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Yes.

**MR LYNCH:** Can I just make one more comment to that? Historically there's always been difficulty between the environmentalists and the landowners. They've had different agendas and we haven't always done well in bringing the two agendas together. I think there's an element of distrust which comes out in the findings. I think that until we get honest and involve local people, the local consultancy, whether they be environmentalists or landowners, they have to meet on common ground. While ever you have distrust between any two groups, then all the paper that you want to write, all the doctrine you want to write will be of no use at all.

**MS LAKE:** I agree.

**MR LYNCH:** Because people look at it from a jaundiced point of view, and say, "Obviously a Greenie has put this together," or something like that. Now, whilst I say that, I also say that it's a difficult task.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Yes, indeed.

**MR LYNCH:** And it must be done locally.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** In your submission you recommend that interested parties, other than farmers, be involved in such regional groupings. But the fact is that where we've had such representation from a range of stakeholder groups, such as in the vegetation management committees in New South Wales, many of them - most of them - have become dysfunctional as a result of the conflicts that have arisen. How do we deal with that?

**MR LYNCH:** That's part of the problem, isn't it? You've also got to be very conscious that as technology gets better and as education gets better, people tend to want to concentrate on the technology and the science of it all, when some of the things that confront us are not that difficult to understand. If it requires someone to sit over a computer all the time and work that out, that in my view is not essential. The essential thing is to get the people who matter - the local people who matter - on the ground looking at it from what might be seen by some people to be a simplistic point of view, but let me add that a lot of this stuff is fairly simplistic, really. It doesn't require a great deal of science. It has to be there but rather than employ consultants at a million dollars an hour, we might do better spending our money on local people, looking at local issues which, in fact, is what Landcare is all about.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** But that is not that simple and I think Dr Byron can comment on the experience of the Fitzroy Basin, where it took a group eight years to get to some degree of coherence.

**MS LAKE:** What were the constraints, may I ask?

**DR BYRON:** The way the members of that association told it to me was that when they started off with every single interest group you can think of, from cotton growers and pastoralists and Aboriginal communities from Woorabinda and environmental organisations from Rockhampton, they said for the first couple of years it was like cats in a sack. But eventually they got to the point where they understood each other's positions and then they got to the point where they could actually work together, and after seven or eight years they could come up with a program that not only did they all agree with, but they were all very proud of. But it took time.

You can't just put together a committee of six people and say, "You've got six months to work out what to do for native veg in the whole of South-West Queensland, or the whole of northern New South Wales." It takes time for people to build up that sort of trust and mutual understanding and to be able to work together. The general proposition is that the people who live in the region have both the local knowledge and the incentive to try and get it right, but they do that within a general set of rules that comes from the state government or the Commonwealth government. That says basically, "We want certain outcomes in terms of long-term sustainability and productivity and society and so on." But then you allow the people who live in the region to work on the detail, because they're the ones who actually know, rather than somebody who lives in head office.

**MR LYNCH:** Yes, I agree with that. It's probably unarguable that you have to have guidelines before you can start, which have to be set by someone. They can be amended at any time, but you have to have local input to make it work. Of course, the more diverse the input, the longer it will take to reach agreement as to the way to go - and eight years seems reasonable.

**DR FISHER:** Yes. Thanks, Mr Lynch. I just had one follow-up question to Prof Musgrave and that was that earlier in the discussion I think you were suggesting that what we required was some simplification of the legislation and perhaps some overarching federal legislation. But, at the same time, you're suggesting that we need more involvement of local groups so that people can actually understand what's on the ground.

Let me preface what I'm going to say by the fact that under the constitution, much of the responsibility for these issues actually rests with the states rather than

the federal government - rather than with the Commonwealth - so that makes things a little bit more complex in the federation. But, that having been said, here in Queensland we seem to be getting evidence, or we've received evidence that suggests basically that a lot of the community effort with respect to the vegetation management plans have been confined to the wastepaper basket. This has led to a lot of concern in local communities with respect to the community's ability to have some influence on the process and, at the same time, we've received evidence - in the inquiry yesterday - of conflict within a single agency and an inability, it seems, to effectively administer the legislation that actually exists.

So is it your view that we actually need new legislation, or do we actually need more appropriate and better administration of the current programs, such that local communities are better involved?

**MR LYNCH:** You'd probably be aware that there have been some problems with Landcare, for example, in Queensland in recent times, where they've changed the method of funding and all that sort of stuff and there was a period of time when - it's still going or it's just opened up a little bit - there was no funding available. That is an issue where the federal government has moved the goalposts and all that sort of stuff. There appears to be a lot of goalpost moving, depending upon the current political situation.

One thing we don't seem to have is any consistency, either between states or even within states, because of the varied input of the organisations within the state and within the Commonwealth. There's a whole bunch of people, at Commonwealth level and at state level, trying to make things work. I suspect that they're not really talking to each other enough and they are coming up with legislation, first of all without consultation parallel across the thing, and then consultation down in particular. I don't think there's enough of that.

But we have a definite need to simplify the whole damn thing because currently it's just - you know, you can pick up something like that and read it and you reckon you understand it, but there's another conflicting "refer to this, refer to that, refer to this and consult this department, and consult that department, and this is Commonwealth and that's state". I can appreciate the problems between state and Commonwealth legislation, but I don't think enough effort has been put into cross-consultation between Commonwealth and state and there are just too many people wanting to move the goalposts, in the hope that if they change it, it will work better. But it doesn't always do so.

All it does, in fact, is create confusion amongst the farmers who have to try and understand all this. It costs them more money and I just think there is too much of that stuff and it's not common and it does conflict. I don't know how you do it, and it

will take a lot of effort and a lot of goodwill to make it happen, but unless you make that simpler - any sort of legislation simpler - then as you mentioned a minute ago, it's confined to the wastepaper basket because it's too difficult to understand. I would much rather read something that size, than read something that size.

**DR FISHER:** Can't understand why!

**MR LYNCH:** And I have more time to read that. I don't have time to read something like that, but I do have time to read something like that.

**MS LAKE:** I would have thought the legislation, as it stands, was adequate. It's just that it's the implementation that seems to be still not well understood and perhaps not done as well as it could be done and not perhaps communicated as effectively as it could be. But surely changing or bringing in new legislation is just going to transplant or complicate matters, where we haven't really perhaps given a fair go to what we've got.

**MR LYNCH:** Even ego comes into this, too, of course. Everyone wants to make a name for themselves. If you haven't made a name for yourself you consider yourself to be a failure. That's a common, natural trait. Anyone who comes into a job or into a position, likes to leave their mark. They often change things before they really understand things. That's not a good thing. But you're dealing now with people who have egos, who want to do things, so that needs to be controlled, both by the individual and the organisation for which that person works. Don't change things just because you think it might be a better idea, based on your observations over a short period of time.

This goes back to local people being involved. If you want to change things talk to the local people and reach compromise and then change it, but don't change it without groundproofing it and making sure that it's got a better chance of working than that which you already have.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Just quickly, and perhaps in closing, I draw your attention to the Australian Conservation Foundation's submission to this inquiry, where they do actually outline a possible form of arrangement of relations between the federal government and the states borrowing from national competition policy, actually, which I think - you may have looked at it, but I do think that's shining a light down the tunnel for us all. It's unfortunate that in their submission they're mute on regional and local groups and how they fit into the scheme, but I think it's a very interesting suggestion in relation to federal and state relevance.

**DR BYRON:** I think we are going to have to wrap this up shortly, but if there are any closing comments either of you would like to make, before we go?



**MS LAKE:** I have a question.

**DR BYRON:** Please.

**MS LAKE:** Is that appropriate?

**DR BYRON:** We'll see.

**MS LAKE:** I'm going back to words you used earlier - the word "hardship". I'm looking at it here. It's not really defined. How does the agricultural sector, as individuals, define "hardship" and how do you take this into consideration? I'm just going back to the basics of what we're talking about here and to vegetation care. What are the parameters of "hardship"?

**DR BYRON:** It wasn't defined for us. I don't know that we've attempted to define it, but in the case of a few individuals who appeared at previous hearings, when the value of their property drops to one-quarter of what it was previously and they're bankrupted overnight because somebody has declared that the vegetation on that property is now remnant and therefore can't be touched, I think most people would agree that for someone to be bankrupted overnight is - - -

**MS LAKE:** And are there such cases?

**DR BYRON:** There are.

**MS LAKE:** Well documented and - - -

**DR BYRON:** Reasonably well documented, yes. There have been all sorts of claims made to us, not all of which we have been able to assess in detail, but when land in western New South Wales, for example, was previously worth \$100 a hectare and is now worth \$1 a hectare, the people who own a few thousand hectares of that feel themselves to be suffering hardship. Now, fortunately, we don't have to - as a tribunal - decide on that, nor to write a cheque. But what we have ascertained, in looking at the likely cost, is that it is extraordinarily difficult to calculate even for an individual what the losses, if any, may be. But that's - if I conduct the question - a problem for someone else at some future point in time. We're simply asking the question: is there significant hardship? Without putting a number on "significant" it seems that in some cases there has been.

**MS LAKE:** I wondered then - the second part of my question to you was, as an economist, is it possible to set up economic parameters that measure that hardship quotient? I suppose that is what I'm getting at here, because to some extent it's the

crux of this whole question.

**DR BYRON:** Rather than get bogged down in that, we are looking at process issues and asking: are there different ways of achieving the environmental outcomes that governments and the community at large say they want at much less cost to anybody; rather than dwelling on the current system and trying to document precisely how great the costs are, to cast the net more broadly and think about: are there different ways of doing it that might impose substantially less costs on everybody? That's where we explored in the draft report some of the possibilities of covenants or easements or voluntary agreements and so on, that have been used on a trial basis in a number of jurisdictions. But the focus, of course, is on the regulatory approach that is the predominant one at the moment.

**MS LAKE:** Yes, because I'm concerned that poor farming and economic management practices may take the blame for - it may be that they will use the vegetation clearing as - put the blame on that rather than their own poor practices and - - -

**DR BYRON:** No.

**MS LAKE:** - - - I can see that, even reading through this, it's still a very real danger.

**DR BYRON:** That's absolutely true and there's no doubt that some of the people who are complaining that the native veg legislation put them out of business, would have gone out of business anyway, because they were not particularly good farmers, or the result was marginal.

**MS LAKE:** I've seen a few examples of this, yes.

**DR BYRON:** So, yes, we are quite conscious of the fact that the legislation can be used as a scapegoat or as an excuse.

**MS LAKE:** And is indeed being so in some instances.

**DR BYRON:** Yes. But the question that Prof Musgrave asked earlier about - if there were programs to take marginal farmers off the land, the question still arises: well, who is going to look after that country?

**MS LAKE:** Yes.

**DR BYRON:** If you make it national parks, then the taxpayers are going to have to pay for park rangers to look after it. If you just leave it as vacant crown land, who

controls the ferals and the weeds and who is responsible for fire protection on it? Would it be smarter to leave the people who are already living on it there but, say, instead of trying to grow marginal bales of wool or bags of wheat that you can't sell at a profit, manage it for biodiversity, which society is willing to pay for. I think we're trying to be creative in thinking of what will give the best social, economic and environmental outcomes, rather than just saying, "Well, let's get all those farmers off that land because they're not making any money and they're doing damage" - because you've still got to solve the problem of who is going to look after that country afterwards.

**MS LAKE:** That absolutely certainly concerns me.

**MR LYNCH:** I think there's a follow-up to that. Once we develop a science to assess what the land can do, and once we set up the legislation which allows us to do it, we then shouldn't permit intensive farming, other than grazing lands, in those areas where financial viability is doubtful due to environmental constraints, development and running costs, climatic conditions and all of those factors, particularly in future market returns, because abandoned or poorly managed ventures simply add to land degradation, but neither can you turn them into national parks. As you say, someone has got to look after them in the long term. Maybe education is the key; educate the people to manage the land better within prescribed parameters as to how land should be used. I'm not suggesting national parks as the answer at all.

**DR BYRON:** Sorry, that was a long wind-up. I really would like to thank you very much for coming. I realise you've travelled a fair way to get here. Thank you very much for the effort that you've put into the written submissions and for ploughing through all 500 and something pages of the report. You deserve a medal for that, I think.

**MR LYNCH:** It's not big enough.

**DR BYRON:** I propose now that we'll break for 15 minutes for smoko and resume after that with Mr Turkington, if he's here. After that, if we've still got time before lunch, we might have opportunities for other people to join in, making statements on the record. Thank you very much.

**MS LAKE:** Thank you for listening to us.

**DR BYRON:** Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. We'll resume the public hearings with Mr Russell Turkington, if you could just sit down and make yourself comfortable there, Russell. We try and keep things pretty informal. If you could just introduces yourselves for the transcript on the record, they will recognise your voice. Thank you very much for the submission. We've all read it very carefully. If you'd just like to sort of summarise on the main points, then we can talk about it. Thanks for coming.

**MR TURKINGTON:** Thank you. My name is Russell Turkington. I've had the best part of 20 years involved with ICM and Landcare and I've been on a multitude of committees, latterly the veg management committee for the Brisbane River and also Glen Rock management committee. All through this time, I've taken an active part and I think I've been proactive. With this here today, my main objective is trying to defuse the situation and get everyone going together without anyone feeling that they're being got at, I suppose.

Basically, what we've done - my wife here has helped me. She's been a support and held the fort, and I appreciate what she has done over many many years. What I've done here, as a result of being on the vegetation management committee and the confusion with that - I had a property management plan that was superseded and we redeveloped another property management plan and this is using the actual extracts of the act in Queensland to, hopefully, be within the law. We've done that. If you've looked through it and seen it, it's pretty comprehensive. I've got a bigger copy here, if you're interested, to show the thickening on our part of the land. There are aerial photos from the government, when I did put contour banks in to show - and even I got a shock, you know, with the timbers increasing.

This is a thing, I think, that at the present time they're trying to make one rule to fit all the country. Well, you know, if you get coastal country and the high country, it's thickening all the time and perhaps in western places it's different altogether. I wouldn't have an opinion about that, but there are photos in this thing here - before and after - when my grandfather first come there in 1890, when photos first come out. You know, it coincides. In 1860, they moved the Aborigines off the country. The big Pilton Station got it and they put cattle in. It resulted there that they couldn't muster the cattle and the ground got really degraded. As a way of bringing the country back, they went and rung all the big trees. You know, 1000 trees, every big tree, with the result that when my grandfather got it in 1890 it was - you know, you couldn't run one house cow basically.

Through the years, it's improved. All the blue grass and wild oats and that have come back, and we think that we have been good custodians of the land. I've done a fair few addresses with biodiversity committees - three of them in the last three years - and they seem to agree to a point, but there seems to be a bit of barrier

there between the so-called feel-good greenies and the greenies that own land. I think that's a bit unfortunate. This plan is here and I just wanted to - - -

**DR BYRON:** Can I have a look at that?

**MR TURKINGTON:** Yes. Do you want one copy?

**DR BYRON:** Can we just see those photos that show the change?

**MRS TURKINGTON:** The better ones are in with them.

**MR TURKINGTON:** If you'd like to look at the big one here, it's a lot clearer. Later on, after we've finished, if you'd like to have a look at - - -

**DR BYRON:** Okay. I don't want to interrupt you.

**MR TURKINGTON:** My reasons for being here are this: the property management plan as a submission to the Commission in response to the draft report. We believe property managing planning will embrace land-holder stewardship of the natural resource outcomes for community benefit. The enclosed plan and landscape stewardship plan is proposed to deliver three major outcomes: (1) build better relations between rural land-holders, local government, state government and the community by identifying natural resources in the landscape and designating an appropriate management regime to suit a particular property's role in the landscape. (2) deliver landscape outcomes that add value to the general community and ensure that these are monitored and self-assessable, thus retaining accreditation of the particular property plan to ensure certainty of future planning for the land-holder. (3) a platform of marketability for eco services by maintaining an accredited plan.

Overall, achievement of a win-win situation, both for the community and the land-holder, rather than a planning, banning and prosecuting mentality, to quote my wife Beverley. The latter will only divide the community more and result in great losses of valuable natural resources such as unmapped vegetation, which is the vegetation currency in a landscape such as ours. If you own freehold country which has trees on it, you are penalised as a result. If, on the other hand, you have cleared everything, you are in the white and you are not even encouraged to put back a bit by way of reforestation appropriate areas such as steep or unstable land. We want to look after the whole landscape, not practise cosmetic protection.

My family and I feel that it is long overdue for government to work with people, building bridges of understanding and respect. Our previous property management plans were nullified by the present legislation. We have presented this plan in good faith to the minister's office as a self-help educating process, which will

gain greater commitment to sustainable landscape outcomes at a significant cost reduction to the country. The accuracy of the mapping is another serious concern. With approximately \$8 million in the last budget allocated for compliance and prosecution, land-holders could not be blamed for thinking they are ducks in a shooting gallery. Adoption of this plan, or something similar, will help to make land-holders feel that they are part of the future, allowing for a united move forward, restoring some hope and not exacerbating despair.

The reason that I've come to this thing here is basically this: as land-holders, we feel that no provision has been made to recognise that some of us have been or are attempting to manage land appropriately. Instead of recognition or some credit being given, highly inaccurate maps are being imposed on land-holders who have a proven track record of doing the right thing. In some instances, the mapping not only inhibits best practice but also threatens land-holders with prosecution because the maps don't accurately relate to what is on the ground. Plenty has been printed about the dollars which will be spent on compliance and prosecution. We should be hearing about correcting mapping and cooperating with land-holders. It is not difficult to gain the impression that land-holders are presumed guilty and the right to remain silent apparently has been taken away.

If you have a look at this government map here that I got from them, there's a disclaimer on the bottom that makes it valueless. If I go and work on that and maintain and do things on my property, they can come in and fry me still. I can't use that as an excuse, but they can put that on it. The thing I've found over a lot of time is that they won't really commit themselves. You ask questions and you don't get an answer, but I must say that the minister's office was very receptive. The minister wasn't there, but there were people there and, hopefully, we might get an approach from them to try and make a way forward. When you read the Queensland Country Life and the newspaper, you know, land-holders feel that they're starting to be a villain in the piece and most of them are law-abiding citizens.

When you start tampering with freehold rights and all these things - I agree with vegetation management. I think trees are a necessity, and the best grazing on our place always through these droughts is where there are scattered big trees, because it makes a mini environment and the grass is protected from the sun and the wind and nature made, and when it made it, that's what it was, as far as my early relations say, and it's mapped on some of the old deeds. I think that this going all the way - we don't hear anything about grass. I think grass is a more necessary thing than trees, because in the war years all our men were away at the war and we were there - the womenfolk and I were there. I was only a bit of a kid, but every time you got a storm you got mud in the creeks. There was no grass cover, and there weren't many trees - only pest species like rosemary and that. The land was trying to protect itself from the over-utilisation from going back to Pilton Station. If you go there

now, all the blue grass and that has come in.

We've sown it, and we rotationally graze it and our carrying capacity and the diversity of species are increasing a lot. You know, it's not just a small amount. When I was a small boy, if you saw many animals or a wallaby, you'd gallop home and tell your mother, but now all these things have increased drastically. I feel the place is better now than when I was a young bloke. My philosophy is I'd like to see it a lot better before I hand it on to the next generation.

I think this vilification and the whole thing that's on now - it can only get worse. You've got to have some way of sort of defusing the thing and get everyone on the same line. I don't know how you do it, and I don't know whether this is the way, but failing anything else it's the only - it groundproofs what's there and, hopefully, it can lead to a way forward that will develop trust and understanding between all the parties, and I think we need that. Thank you for listening to me.

**DR BYRON:** Thank you very much. Mrs Turkington, do you want to add anything to that?

**MRS TURKINGTON:** No. I'm being supportive with my husband. As you can imagine, on a small farm such as ours, economically to improve them and maintain them requires very often an off-farm income, which my husband did for many years. He's a marine engineer by trade. So the children and I caretake the property. It's required me to attend meetings for him - Landcare meetings and that sort of thing - but I also have the benefit of coming from a country that I can draw a lot of parallels - from southern Ontario in Canada - where subdivision and conservation has been a big issue, because of the pressure from subdivision.

Indeed, in 1997 when my husband and I were there visiting relatives, the last farm in the Niagara Peninsula was sold because of rural subdivision. It was in an area that has a unique climate and geography, similar to what you get between Toowoomba and Brisbane. There is wall-to-wall subdivision from Hamilton through to Niagara on the lake, and it is a crime to see good agricultural land where none - nothing like it exists anywhere else in Canada, because of the climate. They could grow crops there that they couldn't grow anywhere else, and now they have to import them.

We've got a similar situation between Toowoomba and Brisbane. Already the Redland Bay, as many of you know, is now a concrete jungle. Our biggest problem where we are is the pressure from rural subdivision. We've been forced into buying several other farms adjacent to us because we're worried about the effluent problem, the visual pollution, fire management and it goes on and it goes on. This has been an economical strain on the family. We would be financially better off if we sold up

and retired to the Gold Coast, but we have four children - two sons, two son-in-laws. The two sons are interested in carrying on and coming home and keeping on the continuity of the family property, historically owned by one branch of the family since 1890. It wasn't given to us. We had to buy in and we had to work for it.

Having said that, it worries me about this plan, ban and prosecute mentality. They brought that in in Canada, and tried very hard, but the sheer pressure from rural subdivision has beaten them. Even in areas hundreds of miles to the north, in what was wilderness country, the desire by affluent people to have a lake-front cottage and a weekender where they don't care whether they make money from it or not - it's just a nice place to go - has ruined the conservation values of the area. I don't think that plan, ban and prosecute will work. There's always someone that can wave a chequebook and get what they want. I think we stand to gain more by working hand in hand - government and land-holders - through education and some form of recognition and accreditation for people that are trying to do it right. If it means individual property management plans, I think that's the way we should go. Thank you for your time.

**DR BYRON:** Thank you. This property management plan is a very very impressive document. I've looked at a lot of plans, and I don't think I've seen too many that have as much documentation as this. Have you ever tried to work out how much time or person days of effort has gone into bringing all this together? The second part of the question is how valuable has it been to you and was it worth all the effort that's obviously gone into it?

**MR TURKINGTON:** It's most certainly a valuable document, as I see it, for a lot of reasons. You can give that to any government bureaucrat and he has some understanding of what you're about. Land-holders and government people speak a different language. They might speak English, but completely different conclusions come out of it. I see it as a way of trying to bring people together. We talk about recognition and that. I don't want any recognition. If I thought something like that would bring a good solution to all the people that I know - land-holders - the government and the people in the city, I'd be happy and I wouldn't want my name in even the smallest print in a corner.

That's my sentiments and I'd like to see something - what are you going to do? If we don't try and do something, we're going to be poles apart and everyone sniping at each other and the fear of being fined, hung, drawn and quartered all the time. Even if you want to do something, I found it very difficult to get any clear answers at the present time, because there's a moratorium and we've got an election on the wind, but when it cools down I'd like to think that something like that could maybe bring the various sides together and get something - it would groundproof all their so-called GIS maps which are, to say the least, not very accurate.



If you've got broken country like we have, it's very difficult to just put colour over an area, because it's a mixture of all types. There are open areas there and, you know, what have you got to do? If we don't manage our country, we've got exposure to about five kilometres of country that's infested with parthenium. If we can't keep it in a reasonably open manner, there are going to be dire management problems. I think the nature itself - you know, I think trees need enough space to grow. They say that trees - that's the paramount thing. Well, I agree with it to a point, but you've got to have good ground cover - grass. If you've got well-grassed country, you can get a storm and you're not going to get any topsoil loss. We've got all our cultivation - contour banks and waterways. There's no doubt about it, you've got to try and help nature, if you can.

**DR BYRON:** But is this the way to explain or demonstrate to outsiders, whether they're in state or local government or in a conservation group, that you know what you're doing and you've got reasons for what you're doing - you've got all the facts, the evidence and the maps. Has it been effective in doing that and being able to convince people that, you know, you're not a cowboy and that you've got a very clear, sensible plan for the long-term sustainable management of the whole property there?

**MR TURKINGTON:** I've got no problem convincing them when they come and see the place, but to convince them in a group like this or in these sorts of surroundings is nigh on impossible, because you feel that you're - you know, it all goes down to trust and building some sort of trust. I've been on a lot of committees with greenies - extreme greenies, as I call them - and I've ended up good friends with them, once they see that you're genuine and you're not trying to rip something off or want something for yourself. That plan there is not - I don't want any special treatment for myself, but I want a solution out of this situation we find ourselves in now.

**MRS TURKINGTON:** If I can intervene, a more tangible example might be - with a plan like that, we've been able to show the regional fire director, for instance. We have a lot of problems with fire management - wildfires. Rural subdivision people are frightened of fires. We can pull that map out and show exactly - we've got maps there that show you what the topography is, where the fences are, where the geographical barriers are, what's the best way to approach it. It's been quite an assistance.

We had a director there one night - rural subdivision people in the next valley frightened of fires. Word came through the fire had to be stopped at all costs. A man arrived at 10 o'clock at night. We'd been fighting a fire all day. Here's a black and white map they've got, just a mud map. "It's only a short distance from here to

here, we should be able to put a bulldozer in." You'd need some sort of a helicopter to - a bulldozer hooked up with a crane or something. It's a sheer drop. No idea about the regional geography or the topography they had to deal with - not sensible, not practical. From that angle, it has been useful for that. It's a good illustration of what geography they're dealing with, where the fences are, where the roads are, where the water points are, where they can get water. They don't have to go back to the nearest township.

From another angle, people that are worried about remnant vegetation - we've been able to show in there where we have put aside land for remnant vegetation and, indeed, we've got many hundreds of acres that have been set aside. We did get a grant to fence it off, take it out of production and it is land for wildlife. We can illustrate that. We've got the aerial photography. I think this is not just of value to us, this is a regional - it's a community value. We've had the Toowoomba Bushwalkers out, we've had Trek out, people that are - this has got a community value, it's a regional value. It does, in some ways, make management practices easier for us. If we're employing someone for mustering, they know they don't have to go in there, because it's been taken out of production. That's been set aside for wildlife. It makes mustering easier for us, so there is a bit of a win-win both ways. It does have practical applications, and we have been able to use it.

**DR BYRON:** Thank you very much for that.

**DR FISHER:** Mr Turkington, this is very interesting. You've created this very comprehensive plan of the farm to solve a problem. Can you just outline for us what you perceive to be the problem that you're trying to address - I presume with respect to the government - by producing this document?

**MR TURKINGTON:** One thing that I think is most important is to try and get some form of trust working between people. Also that map there - it was a way where there doesn't seem to be any way forward. For all this committee work I've done, you just felt like you were bumping your head against a brick wall. I think myself, in view of the deficiencies in mapping and all these things, you've got to have something like that. If you wanted to go and get a permit to do anything now, you'd need something like that to have definite reference points.

There are colour lines in some of it there. We tried to find this line of colour in our country, and I went with two people from the department up there and we got roofing tech screws and stamped them. We stamped hundreds of them and went around what we reckoned the perimeters were, but it was a wasted effort because the land itself is such that you've nearly got to have an individual plan to understand where you're at. You've got to have reference points. Geographically, the land forms its own different systems, you know - tableland, gorges and that - but I find it

difficult to understand the legislation on the ground. I think most land-holders would have that one thing. There's confusion and, with this fining and banning and that, there's a fear that someone's going to appear out of the woodwork and take you to the cleaners or make it very difficult for you.

We've seen instances - I've got people that I know that went and got permits and still ended up in the firing line. There's no consistency, I don't think, right across the board in the department with people that come looking for - you know, handling the applications. The types of vegetation - if you see our place there, when I was a young man there was no timber on it. You can go out there now and you'll see no big trees on the more manageable country. It was open country, as it was in the Aboriginals' days, with just an occasional tree here and there. Now it's grown shut and in this dry weather - where we've thinned in the timber, there are massive logs there - mill logs - and we get rid of a bit of timber on the side, as we always have done. Where we haven't thinned, you want to see it. I'd say 70 per cent of it's dead. There's not a decent thing there any more than that round.

We've got a shortage of hollows. The wildlife is increasing in population but, by virtue of having a lot of young timber there, there are no hollows. We go around the house there and there are parrots and that building in the freshwater heater - in the irrigation pipes - and, you know, there's a definite shortage. With that property management plan there, I put in there that we needed a program for nesting boxes and things like that to address that. I can see that as a holistic plan that lets everything fit in - biodiversity, cattle production and, in the future, ecotourism and all that. I don't see any conflict between land use and how its managed. If you manage it sensibly, anyone can use it - bushwalkers, you can graze cattle. If you don't do it sensibly - all the country that I'm ashamed of, they've put in the colour - the orange and the red. It's the worst country I've got, and they're saying it's the most valuable to them.

Now, I can't see that because all the topsoil has gone. When I was a young man, it was all bluegrass and scattered trees; now it's just completely gone. The bluegrass has gone and the soil is washing away, but because it was coloured, I can't touch it. I had ideas of fencing that off, keeping the cattle off it, and I had two chaff bags of bluegrass seed, which was originally there, to go through and take out the rubbish timber, leave scattered big trees and bring it back to what it was. I would have thought that would have been improvement but, you know, as it is there now, you just leave it and let the topsoil wash away. Well, you know, it doesn't seem to be sensible. Probably wants commonsense. That's what I feel.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Mr Turkington, is it your thinking that all the properties should have a plan such as this, and this is an example of the sort of plan that could be produced? I see that you refer to the Wentworth Group and I'm getting the

impression that you feel that this is the sort of plan that the Wentworth Group would like to see developed by farmers.

**MR TURKINGTON:** In that plan I've got an extract of some of the guidelines of the Wentworth Group, but I think that that's what we've got to go for, something like that. I think I said to one of your gentlemen I was talking to, I've been advocating a Medicare-type levy for land care for a long time. I think land care is too important a subject - the health of the land - to be left to political whims. That's what I find difficult now. If we have a change of government, say six years down the track, they're likely to go completely the other way to the extreme degree, and you're going to have - you know, it just doesn't work. You've got to care for the land every day. When you go out and look around, it's something you live with. You just don't go and have a look at it and then forget about it. This is what I think we need to do. I think people should be educated to have a love of the land, like the Aboriginal people.

**MRS TURKINGTON:** There would probably be some land-holders that would be ready to hit us over the head, but we cannot understand why the focus has been on people that have got something worthwhile, and that's left. If we've been there over a hundred years and there's still something worthwhile, why is the focus that way, when surely a holistic approach would also be on the wide areas and perhaps some requirement for people to put something back. But there's no focus on that. If we're really going to get serious about land values, it should be a holistic approach.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** So you have a plan here which has clearly articulated objectives and then you identify strategies for pursuing those objectives. Do you feel that there is a set of regional objectives which you can sit this in?

**MRS TURKINGTON:** Definitely.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** They do exist?

**MRS TURKINGTON:** Yes, I think so.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Who developed those objectives?

**MRS TURKINGTON:** There has been a push for a long time. It started off with SEQ2001. It has come forward in many different forms but it has always been desirable from the top down that there be a green corridor established south of Brisbane through to the foothills of Toowoomba. We fit in, smack bang in the middle of it. We're on the bicentennial horse trail. We are also on one of the feeder roads through to Glen Rock national park. It's not a national park. I stand to be corrected, but it's a regional park. This sort of thing allows graziers to be there, but it

also allows the community to use it. Maybe somewhere in an ideal world, local people will have some way to subsidise meagre farm incomes. With production costs going up all the time, there's a limit to how much you can make on small acreages, and maybe this sort of thing, in the middle of a green corridor, will allow for some types of cottage industries to flourish, hand in hand with grazing as a management tool, to keep down undergrowth and allow a natural landscape to exist.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** So you would envisage a situation where all of the farmers in your region have a plan such as this, which would help to achieve that objective of, amongst other things, a green corridor?

**MRS TURKINGTON:** Definitely. For your benefit as well as theirs.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Okay. Just coming back to ask you to perhaps expand a bit further on your answer to Brian Fisher's question: someone looking at this can say there's a lot of work in this, and I would say it looks to me like a labour of love, amongst other things. Perhaps not all farmers would share your dedication and love to the extent that they would want to put the effort into producing a plan such as this for their farms.

**MR TURKINGTON:** I disagree with that. I think if a plan like that could give you some certainty, and give you some comfortable relations with the powers that be, like state governments or councils - the way it is there now, I think there are a lot of anxious farmers getting around, and I think if they could get some document like that - we've been breaking new ground with that.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Indeed.

**MR TURKINGTON:** We've had a lot of assistance from people who are better qualified and you can see the results of that. Basically I think I've been peddling farm planning for, what, 15 years. I've seen that as a way of not having the situation where we've got a Vegetation Management Act. If the authorities could have gone through with the larger land-holders - and I've already got a lot of our neighbours there, and we've addressed this subject, and they're quite happy with this, but they want some assurance that it's worth something. I had a pretty good property management plan before, and it was null and void. They suggested to me it might be of some use if we get a change of legislation, but it hasn't happened that way. The question I ask: this thing here, even if it's accepted, how long is it right for? This is what we want. We want some certainty, or if they can't trust us to manage the country like our family has done for the last 114 years, what do they want in the future? Where are we going?

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** The Wentworth Group thinking, of course, has been adopted

as policy in New South Wales. I guess what's worrying Brian and me is if there was a person, a farmer, who didn't want to put too much of his or her own effort into producing this plan, and they were to employ some consultants, say, to come onto the farm and draw up the plan for them, how much would it cost them? Can you have a guess at that?

**MR TURKINGTON:** I would think it would be very expensive.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Yes.

**MR TURKINGTON:** But they put \$8 million down for compliance and prosecution. Wouldn't a good percentage of that \$8 million come up better with something like that?

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** I have a feeling you might be right.

**MRS TURKINGTON:** I'd like to see the dollars and cents figure representing what has gone through Landcare groups. They have done a lot of good work in many instances, but a lot of the time they are frustrated with insecurity regarding funding and continuity for projects. If something like this could be done, and it had some formal recognition, you could get things on the ground as a working model and example. It would encourage other people to do the same. Boy, there has been a lot of money and consultancy people tied up with Landcare over the years. I'm not putting it down. Don't get me wrong. They've done a lot of good work, but by golly there's a lot of frustrated people with them too, because instead of doing what they've been trained to do, they're wangling how to balance budgets and get more funding, and they shouldn't have to do it. If a plan like that had formal recognition, and it could be implemented through your Landcare groups, that sort of thing - yes, I think you'd get plenty of people interested. Why work for something that's got no - you've got a tiger by the tail? At the end of the day, a lot of work and no recognition.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Okay.

**MR TURKINGTON:** Excuse me butting in, but I think a plan is likely to prove cost-effective for the government too because if they're going to go in with heavy boots, people will want compensation, but if they get a sensible plan that doesn't interfere with - and I'm not talking about clear-felling or anything like that; it's in the plan what we hope to do - surely to diffuse the situation would be beneficial to the local government politicians, the lot. You know, there are a lot of land-holders who feel that they're no longer a part of society, because when you look back, they feel that the government doesn't worry about them. I don't think you could blame them for that because the bush is hurting, and this is the biggest drought we've ever had, and this sort of thing is coming in at the same time, plus water control, plus all these

things. With the power of trying to keep up with it, I could fill this table here with literature I've got. As you said before, big manuscripts - you go through it and you probably miss half what there should be. There should be summaries there of a few pages you can run through and get what you really want to address.

I think this consultation and all these things don't ring true, because they have all these consultations and community inputs and at the end of the day, they throw it in the bloody wastepaper basket. You wonder what their motives are, that's all. Is it to pacify you while they've got another agenda on? I don't know. I'm not making any accusations, but my family and I will feel a lot bloody better if we can get something that we see a future in, and without conflict with the government.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Well, I wouldn't dare to speculate on the nature of the public mind. So you feel in your hearts confident that, if the necessary circumstances exist, you could get 100 per cent of the farms in your area producing a plan such as this?

**MRS TURKINGTON:** You couldn't get 100 per cent of the farms in our area, because unfortunately a lot of the farmers I think have given up and sold out to subdivision, and it will subdivide all up.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Excuse me. I'm sorry. When you say "subdivision" do you mean for urban or hobby farms?

**MRS TURKINGTON:** Yes. I think there will be a lot of places between Toowoomba and Brisbane that would be under the same pressures, and you get people with a different set of values.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Indeed.

**MRS TURKINGTON:** You get rules for farmers and graziers and landowners and it's a different set of rules for a developer. You can go in as an entrepreneur and it's a different yardstick for him.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** So to get the sort of outcome that we want - let's say in relation to that green corridor - and if we need a certain quantum of plans from relevant farmers to enable us to plan this corridor in an effective and efficient way, we might need to have an element of coercive power to get some land-holders to participate and develop their plan.

**MR TURKINGTON:** I think if you can show a land-holder that there are benefits to a plan, and there's some certainty and less worry - it's like land care and things like that, with clearing Lantana. If you go in there in scrub country that you can't walk through, if you can bring them back and say, "Well, we've cleared that Lantana. It

has cost us so many thousand dollars, and the productivity of it will reimburse us that in 12 months," and you've got that asset then continually working for you for the rest of the way - land-holders are like anyone else.

**MRS TURKINGTON:** There need to be incentives.

**MR TURKINGTON:** There need to be incentives and the main incentive, I think, is people look at them if they're worth something, as a human being. This is what's sadly lacking. It's deteriorating, put it that way. I'm an optimist by nature, but I talk to a lot of the people I've known all my life, and they're very disenchanting with the whole system. They reckon they understand the land. They've lived there all their life, but you can get someone fresh out of a university who has learned all his skill in an airconditioned office, he can tell you where you're going wrong. Well, in instances he could be right, but generally speaking, the experience I find the most beneficial is if you put your finger in the bloody fire and it will get burnt. If you know it's going to cost you a fair bit of money, you know you don't make that mistake again, and I think you can't completely remove experience from the thing and put it down to science.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** A plan such as this is the way in which the person who has put his finger in the fire can communicate with the person in the airconditioned office.

**MR TURKINGTON:** I think to myself with the cost of the committees I've been on and that, they've got all the GIS maps. I've been assisted - you'll guess where from - with political things, the information that I've used is there, and it can be used readily now. We're getting to a stage the GIS is there in place, and once they had a format of what they want, the document can be a lot less than this, or maybe more. Those overlays there - if you find there's another problem comes up, you make another overlay, and you don't have to throw it out with the dishwater. If you've got an accurate thing to start with, you can adjust it to meet any eventuality. Firefighting is one. In our area there are not too many roads, and they said to me that one thing they liked about it, it showed where they could get out if they got cut off. That country - once you go in there, unless you know the roads out, you're in a lot of trouble.

I think all these things, if they collectively put them together and got everyone onside, I think there wouldn't be too many land-holders there. There are always rednecks in everything - that's politicians, Greenies, land-holders, call it what you like - that don't want to bend or don't want to associate themselves. I think consensus is the way we've got to go and I think that we've got to cooperate. If we don't cooperate, all this biodiversity and land care is doomed, because I can destroy land biodiversity tomorrow if I want to. I just follow the same philosophy as they do



down in New South Wales and Canberra. Don't do anything with it. Don't do any mosaic burning like the Aboriginals did, that has proved over thousands of years, and let it go to one wildfire that destroys what they're trying to protect. I don't think that's sensible from a lot of angles. You destroy all your fences. You kill all the wildlife. It moves too fast. I know because I nearly got burnt a few times in my lifetime.

If you manage the thing after rain, you can get rid of a lot of combustible material. We've got green paddock growing up to the edge of scrubs. We go around just after rain and drop the match and it creeps around and it protects the scrub. It burns a few chain away from the patch of scrub, and then you leave a more severe fire - if you want to burn rubbish and that - till later. But if you drop the matches straight off, and this is the thing: this rare and endangered pink boronia. We lost about a hundred acres of first-class scrub in one hit, and nearly our lives - my uncle and I - and we were on horseback and we were galloping and we were just staying ahead of the flames. So, you know, if you don't manage country and you don't try and reduce the flammable material on a regular basis, you're going to end up with an inferno that you can't control. We've got a mosaic of roads in our place and even if it's a bit difficult to find it, you can go back to the next road and let it backburn into it and you've got a hope of controlling it. In a lot of places they haven't got that. They haven't maintained their roads and once the fire starts, she's gone.

I'm not downing New South Wales, but every now and then, down there are massive fires and I would have thought they'd have learnt from history, from the Aboriginal people, that you can't do that. The place has developed from fire over thousands of years. If you take that out, what have you got? The Aboriginals weren't stupid. A lot of people try and decry them but they managed this country pretty well. They lived and they didn't destroy too much. Well, they probably did things that they regret too, like everyone else, but no-one is perfect. We want to try and work together to get something that will work, with good relationships and make people a little bit more confident in the future, I think.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Thanks very much.

**MR TURKINGTON:** Thank you.

**DR BYRON:** Well, I think we're going to have to move on, with the time, but I think that was probably a pretty good summing up of what you came here to say.

**MR TURKINGTON:** I probably said it all twice over, but you can see the drift of Beverley and I - where we're going from.

**DR BYRON:** Absolutely.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Thank you very much.

**MR TURKINGTON:** Thank you for giving us the opportunity.

**DR BYRON:** Thank you very much for all the time and effort you've put into coming and for the written submission.

**MR TURKINGTON:** Mr Fisher, if any of you would like to look at the bigger plan here, you're welcome to.

(Luncheon adjournment)

**MR CLIFT:** Colin Clift is my name. Mr Chairman, there are a few things I would just like to bring to your attention. I'm one that has seen probably as much of Queensland as anybody. I have been from here to Thursday Island, to Camooweal, to Birdsville, Cunnamulla, Thargomindah, Coolangatta and most places in between. Now, when it comes to tree clearing I will only deal in facts; I don't deal in opinions.

Going back 80 years ago, when I was afoot, 90 per cent of the country, from Goondiwindi to Claremont, was brigalow scrub. You had a few little patches of open country: the Brookstead Plain on the Darling Downs was one, the Jimbour Plain north of Dalby was another. The rest was timbered country, brigalow and belah and box scrub interspersed with strips of useless country. When I say "useless" I mean black wattle, spindly pine, cabbage gums, et cetera: basically sand.

The Darling Downs was originally 90 per cent timbered country, when Cunningham came up here. Not necessarily thick scrub; those fellows drove a wagon through it. Now, Leichhardt, in 1844 or thereabouts, took his wagons and so forth up through the Dawson Valley. When I first went to the Dawson Valley, in 1935, it was a wall of scrub as far as you could see. You would be flat out - a lot of it - getting through with a packhorse and not a wagon.

90 per cent of the grain of Queensland comes from what was once timbered country. A lot of the inner downs here is being used for more intensive crops: soya beans, chickpeas and so forth; cotton where it's irrigated. The big grain-growing areas are in what was brigalow scrub. I've lived in various parts of Queensland over the years.

You will hear evidence given about salinity and watertables. I have not seen a watertable between here and Birdsville. None. The Riverina country, in New South Wales, is a different story. That was once a salt lake, and there is underground water there fairly close to the surface on a lot of it, very salty water. That's a somewhat different story. I know the Riverina fairly well.

The productivity of that brigalow and belah scrub, 70 or 80 years ago, was wallabies and death adders. That was it. Nothing else. It ran a few scrub cattle. Valueless. When it was cleared it was some of our most productive country. There was talk here a little while ago about living areas in the west. There have been living areas documented for 60 years that I know of - an area that would run X number of sheep or cattle, as the case may be. So there's nothing new about that one.

I do agree that there has been country that has been over-cleared. I have seen it. There is probably a lot of the hard, mulga country in the south-west of Queensland that probably never should have been settled. It's economically hopeless. It had soil about that deep, to start with. When it was first settled it was an

open mulga forest with grass between it. Over the years sheep and erosion destroyed that cover and it blew away or washed away. A lot of that now is a dense mulga scrub that you can't ride through. It was economically hopeless to start with because there was no depth of soil.

Land, to me, is not something that is two-dimensional. Land is that way, that way and that way. The stuff that's a couple of inches deep is best left alone. The pick of the Darling Downs here is 100 feet deep - a different story altogether. One acre of that is worth a thousand acres of the rubbish. A good friend of mine in Toowoomba here, Dean Stahmann - you may have heard of the Stahmann pecan farm at Moree, at Pallamallawa - his father, who was one of the smartest agricultural men in the United States, said to me 35 years ago - he said, "Good country is seldom too dear. Poor country is seldom cheap enough." That's very good advice

With these tree-clearing laws that have been brought in, where do we define a tree? Six inches high, six feet high, 60 feet high? Brigalow country, left to its own devices, will go back to scrub at about a foot a year. 10 years, 10 feet high. Where I lived - at Tambo - for the last 25 years, out in the central west, there was a big property called Caldervale immediately east of me, owned by an insurance company. The country there had been pulled 30 years ago. It was regrowth higher than this ceiling, thick as a liquorice stick.

They ploughed at least 100,000 acres of that country a few years ago; 50 bucks an acre to plough it. They had eight or nine D9s and HD41s out there. The transformation had to be seen to be believed. You went from poor, poor cattle to fat cattle and many more of them. Now, that country was not destroyed by that blade ploughing. When it rained the whole lot went in. A very different story from a heap of brigalow suckers.

As I said, there has been country that has been overdone. At Tambo I pulled several thousand acres of virgin scrub there 25 years ago, and I went to a great deal of care to leave every wattle tree, with a few trees around it for protection, so that the chain did not hit the trees. If a tree is damaged by a chain when you are scrub pulling it will die. Instead of burning that scrub - and the fire will kill the wattle trees - I stick-raked that in cold blood. It wasn't cheap. Then I burnt those windrows at 8 or 9 or 10 o'clock at night on a cold winter's night, so the heat went straight up. I'm probably the only one in Queensland that ever did that.

I saved 99 per cent of the wattle trees. That country today is a buffalo grass park with wattle trees all over. There's nothing else to compare with it in the west. It wasn't cheap. I don't know how much I went through - probably 100 grand. So what? I was running sheep and cattle and running them successfully.

If a radical ban on land clearing is to be carried out in its entirety, then all that brigalow and belah scrub country will be relegated back to where it came from 80 years ago. Certainly there is room for care in between, but I don't want to see it get carried away and the people driven off the land by laws and regulations. A good friend of mine, Ashley McKay, at north-east of Orgathella - it has cost him \$300,000 up to date, fighting the government over land clearing. They started off on 50 pine trees or something, and he has gone 100 yards outside of his permit area.

He won the first case in the Magistrates Court and the government appealed it in the appeal courts. He has been to the court three times and he started again yesterday for the fourth time. He is a bit like me: he doesn't go quietly. I should know a bit about this because I've been instrumental in shifting three magistrates out of western Queensland; they were alcoholics. I don't go quietly. I would just like to leave those thoughts with you, as far as clearing is concerned. Thank you.

**DR BYRON:** Thank you very much.

**DR BYRON:** I think we still have some time before lunch. Do you want to come up and say a few words?

**MR SMITH:** Just a few words, if I could?

**DR BYRON:** Please do. If you would just introduce yourself for the transcript.

**MR SMITH:** My name is Stephen Smith. I am here today representing Boonah Shire Council, and I pull my well-prepared notes out of my pocket. I have been fascinated by what I've heard this morning. I'd just like to take up a couple of points that have been raised. One was talking about regions and the size of regions. It's my belief - and the belief of some others - that we need much smaller regions. Looking at things on a regional basis is all well and good, and I know the federal government likes looking at things that way because it's easier to disburse money that way. The region - certainly in South-East Queensland - runs from somewhere up near Rockhampton to the border. There is such a diversity of land types and needs in that area that it's far too big a region.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Steve, can I just interrupt? Is that a natural resource management region?

**MR SMITH:** Well, in all sorts. You have some people doing regions on a catchment basis and you have other people doing it on a vegetation-type basis, a soil-type basis.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** That's correct.

**MR SMITH:** You have the police doing their regions on the basis that Toowoomba looks after some people. You have health doing different regions. You have different regions everywhere. The first thing you need to do, if you want to make any progress - I believe - is to get the government to get some clarity about where the regions are and I believe that the regions need to be smaller to be effective in delivering whatever service you are trying to deliver.

We have a difference in our shire, as far as land types go. Even within the shire, of course, we have scrub country, we have volcanic soil, we have alluvial soil. We have a vast, different range. Each one requires different management techniques to look after. We have creeks that would benefit from riparian fencing. We have creeks where that would be the worst thing you could do. You can't have a one-size-fits-all basis. A lot of people, particularly those that have never been involved much in looking after land, seem to think you can have a one-size-fits-all basis. Of course anyone who thinks they have all the answers for looking after land is quite at liberty to go and buy some and have a go themselves.

The other thing that I'd like to take up was the point that was made about property plans; you were asking about whether they would benefit. It's my experience - and I've been involved with the United Graziers Association, or AgForce as it's called now, for a long time - that many farmers have property plans inside their heads. Many are far too busy to articulate them to others or indeed to write them down or would benefit from some help in writing them down.

It is quite staggering how some of those that would be perceived by outsiders to be the most gung-ho about being able to do what they want on their property have got a patch of scrub that they preserve, because grandad said to and they have carried on that tradition. Or they do like to keep this area here because that's where the rock wallabies live, or whatever. They do resent being told they have to, and as Mr Turkington said - and I couldn't agree more - you need to bring that together.

There are a lot of property plans out there that simply are not down on paper and I think that's where a government should look to spending some money, to enable people to get those plans down where they can be presented to those people that need to see them. I think that has always been the case and I think a lot of farmers have been their own worst enemy in not wanting to articulate those plans, because of the fear factor: that once you tell someone about it you may not be allowed to do what you want. That is really all I wanted to say and I thank you for the opportunity of saying it.

**DR BYRON:** We've had people tell us before that they know they have got nesting sites for rare parrots or they have got a rare species of plant down there, but they're not going to tell anybody from any government agency because there's no good thing that can come out of it. All they're going to get is constraints and harassment or being told all the things they're not allowed to do. So there's a certain degree of under-reporting of various species. The landowners claim that they know it's there. They're managing to look after it and protect it but they don't want to let anybody from authority - you can sort of understand why people might take that attitude, but it's probably not what you'd want to see in the best of all possible worlds.

**MR SMITH:** Well, I know in my own experience probably it's best illustrated where all real people are very critical of ABARE and the statistics they bring out. It's only when you talk to other rural people that you find that we're all telling lies to ABARE when we fill out the ag census. It never surprises me that their forecasts aren't worth two bob, because they're based on dodgy information. In fact, in the last 25 years - or going back, in 1973 I think ABARE was recommending the best in beef for the future looks rosy for as far out as you can see and that was just before the beef crash. That was probably based on the dud information we were giving them back then. You don't tell government departments too much.

I'm sure there are far more-highly-paid people than me here and I'm sure they're scrupulously honest on their tax returns, as I am. That is a problem and, indeed, when the veg management maps first came out, on my own property there were some pink marked and I know the country pretty well. We're the fourth generation to be there. I discovered that what was marked as pink was actually a farm forestry plot that I had put in because in the type of country it is, between Boonah and Beaudesert, for those of you who know that country - long, cleared, lots of regrowth, lots of wattle - from a satellite this farm forestry plot - of course very dense with heavy tree cover and it looked like a bit of remnant scrub, which it wasn't.

The answer to that, of course, and it has already been raised here this morning, is the absolute necessity to groundproof what is done. Now, no-one wants to do that much because it's horrendously expensive but without groundproofing you will never have any support from rural people because they've seen maps with gross inaccuracies, errors, and it looks like it's done by a preschool class with a pot of paint. Without the groundproofing you won't get any support. So you have to bear the brunt and carry the cost of groundproofing. It's actually during the groundproofing process that you can have some interaction between the ponytail graduates from Griffith and the people who have been on the land for four or five generations and yet find out that they are real people, maybe with a different point of view, but there is some common ground.

**DR BYRON:** That is a theme that has come up in just about every hearing, every meeting we've had in every state, that there are maps that are produced off satellites and landowners lose all confidence in the system because the maps are wrong. You know, you've got wetlands mapped on the top of a ridge or you've got Lantana marked as old-growth forest, or something stupid. There doesn't seem to be a mechanism for having even an agreed common database. If you are going to make sensible planning decisions the first thing you have got to do is have accurate data. If we haven't even got the maps right then how are we going to get anything else right? You are right in saying it's expensive. What would you suggest is the least expensive way of trying to make sure that we're working off accurate maps?

**MR SMITH:** People always reinvent the wheel and I mean, everyone is obsessed with the Internet. You think by publishing something on the Internet or making some pronouncement on the Internet that, automatically, all rural people will know about it. That's not the case. We won't get into telecommunications infrastructure in the bush. That's a different subject which the Productivity Commission would be well advised to look at. The only real way to do it, I believe, is on a personal basis. Lots of people won't come to meetings but they will go to a field day. You could hold a number of field days on smaller areas again, where people are much happier to go to a field day because they don't have to dress up. They don't have to wear a



collar and tie and they feel they're in a group of their peers, rather than being placed in an artificial situation. I think we need to look at different ways to disseminate information.

Really, there is no other way to groundproof an area, other than to walk the country. Just in my own property I can think of a couple of features there - one a massive wedge-tailed eagle's nest. I mean, my family and people I show it to are the only ones who know it's there. That's not going to show up from a satellite photo. Indeed, like other people here have said, our property is used by pony clubs, people who ride motorbikes, people who do this strange thing called rogaining where they run around the bush with a compass scaring wildlife, and scouting groups. I think most people are willing to open up their property to a vast array of groups but we don't seek credit for it. We don't get recompense for it.

We love the place. We want other people to love it, too. I think that goes largely unrecognised in the community by people from Brisbane who think all farmers are out there waking up in the morning thinking, "What can I chop down or destroy today?" But not every day is one of those days. That's all I wanted to say.

**DR BYRON:** I was just thinking again of your original point about the size of regions. I think that the region for Natural Resource Management Fitzroy is an area that is about half the size of Victoria. The Burdekin catchment is again about half the size of Victoria. When you have to travel for a couple of days to go the length and breadth of a region it's pretty heterogeneous and you can't assume that everybody knows everything about it, or all the neighbours. That's a lot of territory to cover.

**MR SMITH:** If you just look at the region in the south-east of Queensland you've got a region that includes the Brisbane Valley, the Lockyer, Boonaroo-Beaudesert area; then you've got the Gold Coast and the Gold Coast hinterland down there. If you've got money going into that region that's being spent in the Brisbane Valley, the people in the other parts of that region see no community of interest really with people of the Brisbane Valley other than the fact that they are farmers like us; you start to get resentment building in a region.

You've seen this very recently with the NHT money that's going to get spent on salinity. They say, "Oh, there's no salinity problem in the Logan catchment. Everyone agrees there is one in the Lockyer. None in the Logan catchment," and yet their own maps show the Logan catchment is an area of high risk for salinity. So that causes friction between different groups within a region, which probably all have a common goal, that being to get your hands on some federal government money.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** You see regions being a matter of horses for courses. Each problem has its appropriate region.

**MR SMITH:** I think regions are a great idea because the federal government has most of the money and the regions doing things on a regional basis allows you to go around the state government, who are pretty useless when it comes to spending money. It has been mentioned here, too, this morning, the uselessness of consultation. There is no-one who consults worse, in my opinion, than BNRM. They pride themselves on how good they are at it and yet if you talk to the people who they're consulting with they all feel aggrieved at the end of the process.

Now, if your aim at the end of a consultation process is to have everyone unhappy, they're beauties; but if your aim is to get some consensus, they're useless - because you've got so many special interest groups that really, unless the report comes down to the way they want, they say, "Well, that report was rubbish." Then they put in a minority report which makes their constituents happy but it's not advancing the common good at all.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** But regions should be more than just a grouping of people to get access to the Commonwealth trough.

**MR SMITH:** Yes, they should be. Probably the best people working on a regional basis at the moment are local government. You've seen that with the regions where you've got various ROCs, you know - the West ROC, which is the Laidley, and Toowoomba is in that, as well as being in the Darling Downs one. Probably the best one is SEQ ROC, which is all the councils between Noosa and the Gold Coast and out as far as Toowoomba. Now, that's a pretty powerful group when it comes to lobbying, to either the state or indeed the federal government. They have had a number of successes in a wide variety of areas in presenting that region's case up the line.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Actually, the thing about local government is that it can come together and go apart on a needs basis, can't it?

**MR SMITH:** Yes, that's exactly right.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** They can combine and add and - - -

**MR SMITH:** The other thing about being an elected person in local government is you can't hide in local government. We hardly ever see our federal member, lovely lady though she is, but I walk down the street every day. People can get at me if they're unhappy. I think local government is far closer, and much better able to respond, to the needs of the community. You saw that when we had all the Roads to Recovery money that went straight to local governments and was spent.

**DR BYRON:** With appropriate accountabilities.

**MR SMITH:** Of course you've got to have that, yes. It goes without saying.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Even with local government, should we be satisfied with the present boundaries? There is an argument that we should go for a local government which has catchment boundaries.

**MR SMITH:** Local government boundaries don't really have any rhyme or reason. They're just a historic fact and you get minor tinkering at the edges. Really, most catchments would go across a number of local governments. Then again, with catchments, we've spent years and years doing water allocation plans and right when they were about to sign off on the one for the Logan River - same government. Didn't even have to change the government. The same government changed its mind and said, "Throw all those out because we're renaming those now. We're going to start again from scratch." You don't have to change a government to throw out one lot of work. The same government can have a change of direction. I'm not sure why - policy or some other perceived need.

**DR BYRON:** It doesn't do much for trust and cooperation.

**MR SMITH:** It hasn't done much for trust for the people who were on that consultative group on the Logan catchment, I can tell you. They're not too keen to saddle-up again. They have been there a long time and they could see - I think someone else mentioned here. I think it was you, Mr Chair, mentioned it took eight years to get - - -

**DR BYRON:** That's right.

**MR SMITH:** That's nearly how long we've been going in the Logan River and you can't beat around with someone for eight years glaring hatred across the room at them. Sooner or later you've got to say, "How you going?" You know, "What are your kids like? Mine are rats. Are yours rats, too?" and they say yes and you find you've got something in common. So that was starting to happen. Now, a number of those people have said, "I don't want to be involved again." Farmers are fairly busy people, particularly given the drought and all the other things that are sent to try us.

**DR BYRON:** Do you think we've got a long way to go before we - - -

**MR SMITH:** I hope this report won't take eight years to come down. I daresay it's got a finite reporting period. I think we have got a long way to go and I do think we need to give recognition to the good work that has been done. I think the farming community deserves some recognition. The reason people are now desperate to

preserve it in South-East Queensland and have green space is because it has been so well looked after for so long. If it's so terrible, why do you want to preserve it? Compared to some of the farming community and how its been looked after, the farming land, to some of the national parks and we have seven national parks in Boonah Shire so we know a fair bit about national parks, and no resources to manage them. Okay. I've gone on far too long. Sorry.

**DR BYRON:** No, it's terrific. Very good. Thank you.

**MR SMITH:** Thank you very much.

**DR BYRON:** I think I'd better adjourn now for lunch and we should have somebody from AgForce here about 1.30, I believe. Thank you.

(Luncheon adjournment)

**DR BYRON:** Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. We resume the public hearing of the inquiry into the impacts of native vegetation and biodiversity regulations. The next evidence is from AgForce, so Mr Acton, if you could just introduce yourself for the transcript and then summarise your submission for us.

**MR ACTON:** Thanks, chairman. My name is Larry Acton and I am representing AgForce and I have Amanda Parker, who is one of our research policy officers, with me. We have obviously presented a detailed submission initially to the inquiry and we have obviously had a good look at the draft report. We're very impressed with it and we believe that it has certainly recognised a lot of the inconsistencies and unfairness that the current legislation in Queensland and the administration of that legislation in Queensland - that has been our experience, and certainly our membership.

I apologise that our written submission wasn't sighted by the Commissioners prior to today. It was sent last week. We have provided a copy this morning. I guess, in summary, in terms of our response to your draft report, we believe that the recognition of the inconsistency, the unfairness, the administrative process, the delaying tactics with a lot of the government departments in terms of administration and the impact on families and the social and economic impact is very clear in terms of your draft report.

What we are trying to do is to go to the next step now and suggest what we believe needs to be part of the recommendation to parliament in the next few months. I think there has been some public comment by people like Peter Corish from the National Farmers Federation and myself, over recent weeks, about some sort of a process to take us forward. We very strongly believe that there needs to be some intergovernmental agreement under the auspices of COAG and similar to what happened with regard to the water reform process in the last 18 months, driven obviously with involvement by stakeholders, but an intergovernmental agreement at COAG level that recognises these problems with the administrative process and the impact on land-holders particularly.

That intergovernmental agreement needs to recognise the cost to individual land-holders and a process to develop some basic underlying principles for compensation - and I want to come back to that in a moment - so that we don't have a situation in the future where different governments at different levels are changing the rules, impacting on people's prosperity and potential development and the succession planning in families; that there is a process to compensate people who are affected by legislation that has been introduced supposedly in the public interest.

What we have put in our submission is a brief comment about including that as part of a process. We haven't got the solution. We haven't got the economic model

to develop that. What we are suggesting is a process whereby those underlying principles are developed as part of the intergovernmental agreement that I spoke about. We also believe that there should be a transparent appeals mechanism for people who are impacted by decisions in the future with regard to vegetation management and biodiversity issues.

In the current environment we have got a very aggressive prosecution process with regard to government handling of the monitoring and regulation of current state policy and, for that matter, our national policy, but we don't have a land-holder friendly and cost-effective process for land-holders to appeal those decisions or to put their point of view - it's a very costly legal process - so an appeals mechanism is very important in that, as well. Other problems that have occurred are the difference in the description or the categorisation of remnant vegetation and regrowth vegetation and the thickening process - how that's interpreted - so the lack of transparency of those processes, and we believe that as part of the intergovernmental agreement there should be a process to clarify that. Obviously mapping and information data and the systems that are available for government, but also, more particularly, for land-holders, are a very important part of that, as well.

Can I just come back to the compensation issue, and one of the questions raised by the Commission in the draft report was: what response do people have to the quantitative assessment that was done in a couple of shires - one in Queensland and one in New South Wales - and we speak here about the Murweh Shire. I have to be honest and say internally we don't have the economic expertise or the professional expertise to address that in a detailed way and there is some comment made in the draft report about the process that has been used in terms of economic assessment prior-to legislation being introduced. The impact of thickening - the natural thickening process - and the loss of economic production that relates to that, and there are a lot of our people who, I think, would support that a formal process in relation to that.

In the report the comment was made that others would argue that the loss of market value of the property is an alternative mechanism to doing that and I think the point was made in your report that that may be influenced to some degree by market fluctuations, conditions obviously in overseas markets and so on, particularly for the wool industry and the cattle industry. Our assessment would be that the same could be said for the loss-of-production approach in that it would be very difficult, I would argue, in a situation, for instance, in the early 90s, where the wool industry in South-West Queensland, particularly in the Murweh Shire, to get a proper assessment - what I guess I am saying is that there is an opportunity for massive variation in the production potential from that same area of land because of what happened in the wool industry in the early 90s.

We don't have the expertise to put the framework - or the economic model -

forward, which is why we are suggesting that there should be a process to bring together people who represent, even in a professional capacity, the interests of the federal and the state government, land-holders and, obviously, people with expertise in valuation in the marketing area, to have a look at or to develop underlying principles that could underpin a future compensation regime that should be part of the intergovernmental agreement that we spoke about earlier.

In the brief response we made there's a range of other things. We really are only reiterating in them the problems that were raised in the initial report regarding the inconsistency of some of the information systems, the complexity and inconsistency in administration, the access to mapping and other data, the reliance upon prescriptive regulation. One thing that I haven't mentioned perhaps is the regional approach to planning and the decision-making process. We're very supportive of that. We believe that perhaps the final report could build a bit on the comments that are in the draft report with regard to the regional process.

We believe it's crucial. I think if you, with your experience in terms of the trips that you have done in North Queensland during the last hearings, and South-West Queensland, and obviously in South-East Queensland - a great diversity in land type, in vegetation type, in climatic conditions and all those sorts of things, the expert knowledge that you get from land-holders and other community people in regional areas - we believe and we put forward to both the state and federal governments a detailed proposal about managing vegetation, even though it mightn't seem so in terms of the announcements by the current government in Queensland with regard to this election campaign, but we put forward a very detailed proposal that is based a lot on regional involvement in determining guidelines at a regional level within a statewide framework. I don't think I can add too much more. I would only be repetitive in terms of what we put forward to you before. Thanks for the opportunity to present and we are obviously happy to discuss with you some of those comments or any questions that you might have.

**DR BYRON:** Thank you very much.

**DR FISHER:** Mr Acton, you mentioned your ideas about a process which would attempt to bring together federal levels and state levels in a comprehensive way. Are you thinking of something under COAG? Is that what was in your mind? Can you elaborate on that?

**MR ACTON:** Yes. I guess what we have thought about is to try and put it in its context: that there needs to be some agreement between the states and the federal government on managing vegetation regulation and biodiversity management in the future, so that's the overriding framework. Within that framework there needs to be a number of principles and one of those is a system of underlying principles that would



underpin a compensation process, so within that COAG process we believe there needs to be a committee - if you go back to the water agreement, there were four or five working groups set up after the initial overall framework was agreed to by the federal and state governments, to go away and look at specific areas, and one was pricing and one was trading and those sorts of things with regard to water.

In terms of vegetation we believe that one of the working groups that should be set up to go away and look at the specific issue of principles to underpin a compensation system is the best way of doing it that we can see. The problem we have is that at the moment the state government has a view about how it should be calculated and they have come up with a figure. Nobody, I believe, could answer the question, "So how have you arrived at that?" If I was asked to go away and do it - or AgForce was - I would use a system that we believe is the best and we would go away and calculate it, but there are no agreed underpinning principles that everybody knows that they can go away and have a chop at this in a reasonably balanced and regular way, so, yes, we believe a subgroup or a working group set up by COAG should be given the responsibility of looking at that particular part of a COAG-intergovernmental agreement.

**DR FISHER:** And do you think there is enough commonality between the states and the issues in each state to make a COAG process strong enough to work?

**MR ACTON:** The National Farmers Federation, as you are aware, I think, from the last hearings - I chair the National Farmers Federation vegetation task force, as well, and I made the NFF presentation. I have spoken with Peter Corish, the president, and others, in the last few days, and the NFF are going to be arguing or will be submitting a very similar process to you. I guess the difficulty we have is that in the water issue there were driving reasons why the states needed to come to some agreement with the federal government.

There are probably less driving reasons in terms of the vegetation process. One of the things we have talked about at NFF - and we're still looking at it in detail - is a mechanism to be able to pull the states into that process by, for instance, the federal government providing a lot of the resourcing that would allow for more accurate mapping to be put in place for the whole of Australia and a better national barter system for vegetation management.

At the moment I think we're probably in one way more fortunate in Queensland and in one way at a disadvantage, because our mapping systems in Queensland are probably better than the other states, but they've still got an awful lot to catch up on, and we're trying to come up with a mechanism that would pull the states in. I can't answer it any better, I don't believe, except that we obviously need the federal government's support and we'll be endeavouring to do that, but if we can find a

mechanism that is encouraging, or an incentive for the states to be in that process, then we're looking for that.

**DR FISHER:** Thank you.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Thanks, Larry. I'd like to have talk a little bit further about the regional comments you made. Interestingly, we had a bit of discussion before lunch with Stephen Smith from Boonah Shire, and this was focusing on - well, Stephen made the point that there are a myriad of regional entities that exist for a myriad of reasons, some of them related to agriculture, but some of them related to other activities in the community. It's not clear that there is an appropriate region - - -

**MR ACTON:** Appropriate regional structure?

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Structure in the context of natural resource management, I think we could say. Apart from - Stephen suggested, and he's not of course alone in saying this - local government. So I'd be interested to hear your thoughts on an appropriate regional body and then we might just talk a little bit further about this.

**MR ACTON:** Our view would be strongly that none of them are perfect at the moment. Some of them are very much wanting. You are right in that there are a myriad of these local catchment groups and Landcare groups and resource management groups and vegetation groups and so on. We've looked closely at the New South Wales model, that's just been agreed late - - -

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** The new catchment management authorities, yes.

**MR ACTON:** Yes. We've looked at that, and in the context of the whole agreement in New South Wales, and we've talked about that in relation to the system that we have in Queensland for vegetation. There were 24 regional vegetation groups set up across Queensland about three years ago. We mentioned that regional planning process. The unfortunate thing - and I think one of the things that maybe the Commission needs to recognise is that those 24 groups over three years, in varied ways, and with varying acceptance by land-holders, depending on where it was in Queensland, came up with a draft report for their region, their area. Those 24 draft reports were available for comment, if the Queensland government had been prepared to release them, about March or April last year. But they didn't release them. They released seven, from memory.

In our thinking, whilst there is some discomfort with some of the regional group output, because of the differing degree of control within the group - and I have to say that we have been accused of pushing the regional vegetation groups in

Queensland as our answer to this, because supposedly they're controlled by land-holders. I made the point to the media many times, late last year, that there are something like between 500 and 700 - depending on whether you want to look at the people who have been regularly involved in those meetings, or those that have come and gone a bit - across the whole of Queensland; out of those, 56 were land-holders. Some of them were local government representatives who were also land-holders, so there would have been a little bit of cross-pollination.

But in the main, in discussion internally in AgForce, our view is that process was the best over and above the regional resource management committees that are now set up, over and above the catchment management groups, and our concern with those is that there is money involved in that process. There is federal government and state government money that is available for distribution supposedly, by the resource management groups in Queensland and the rest of Australia and others, through NHT and various other funding programs.

Unfortunately, what that means is that the focus of a lot of those groups has been on setting up structures and providing jobs for some governmental people that previously were employed by the Queensland government, and actually the focus on developing good policy at that level hasn't happened. Our argument with the regional vegetation groups is that they haven't had any of that funding. In fact, those poor people have actually done this out of their own pocket in most cases.

So our view is that they are the ones that are being focused on the outcomes, much more than the other groups. I really can't help you much more than that. But that is a clear part of the reason. We've discussed it at NFF level. We've discussed it with both the Prime Minister's Office and the Premier's Office, because we believe that a lot of the funding that could be usefully used in the management of the vegetation inequities and unfairness is actually being swallowed up in this - what a lot our people would call - bureaucratic process where they are building structures and they are employing ex-government people and so on, and not actually delivering the resource management outcomes or the vegetation policy, or any of that sort of thing at a local level.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** But, say, if these vegetation management committees were to be converted into the sort of broader community that you have in mind - - -

**MR ACTON:** Yes. Let me just clarify. We are not suggesting that those groups have a much broader role than they currently do. We're focusing on vegetation and biodiversity at the moment. We do believe that there needs to be some financial recognition of the role that they play.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Yes.

**MR ACTON:** There needs to be much better resourcing of the process. I guess the other thing that we've looked at is how they fit into the rest of the process. We have not gone to the extent of what New South Wales did in terms of their recommendation, or moved to set up the catchment management authorities. Whilst we liked their initial idea about local residency, my understanding is that that has been diluted significantly in the final process, through the legislative process and so on.

So we believe that, in terms of the resource management committee process in Queensland, the vegetation committees that are currently in place - even though their draft report has been put in the cupboard for 18 months - those people have the best knowledge; they've been involved in this process. They're in the best position to be able to manage this into the future, but if they have an additional role - sorry, and their recommendations, if they were adopted by the government, should feed into the local resource management committees as the vegetation portion of their resource management policy.

There's no doubt that some of our people believe that there could be a greater role for those committees in terms of local assessment. Part of our alternative proposal to the Queensland and federal governments late last year on vegetation management involved those groups taking a more active role in accrediting property level vegetation plans rather than having the officer from George Street giving the final tick, or a graduate from university two years ago, doing it at the Emerald Office, or something like that. If that's the case then they need to have additional authority. We talked to the state government about that and I'm not sure where that will go after this election. But, yes, certainly they should have the key role. They should be resourced better. Their recommendations should feed into the resource management groups' overall policy.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** Right. Just finally, in our report we're fairly critical of the lack of articulation of objectives.

**MR ACTON:** Yes.

**PROF MUSGRAVE:** I conclude from what you're saying that these vegetation management committees would need guidelines from the state government reflecting the state government's objectives for that region in relation to vegetation management which that regional committee can use in assessing those property players you're talking about.

**MR ACTON:** This is an interesting issue, and it's one that I'm probably going to be talking to the media about after the hearing here today. We're in the middle of an

election campaign, as you know, here in Queensland. We have tried since the start to get some acknowledgment, first of all, of rural and regional issues and, secondly, for both alternative governments to provide us with some sort of a vision for rural Queensland. At this stage we haven't had any luck, but certainly in terms of objectives, at the moment - let me go back a bit.

The current legislation requires the protection of endangered vegetation on all land and of-concern vegetation on leasehold land. We're debating at the moment with the government and the election campaign is certainly saying that all of-concern should be protected on freehold land as well, and they've gone to the extent of saying any remnant vegetation. This issue of clear objectives is part of our problem with this whole process. The premier has said that, "We will allow managing of thickening, the natural thickening process. We'll allow the managing of regrowth." But there's a little qualification, if you look at it properly, and it says, "under certain circumstances" or "depending on the definition". There is no clarity about it at the moment.

It's interesting: when we took the premier into western Queensland late last year, we took him to an area where we knew it was actually regrowth, but it was on the verge of converting or reverting back to remnant, under the state definition. We had the media there and showed him and them. One of his advisers knew where we were going and he checked up. On the actual vegetation map it was not remnant, it was regrowth. So the premier sort of put me on the spot in front of the media at the time and said, "But our maps say this isn't remnant; it's regrowth."

The vegetation officer walked over and said, "No, I wouldn't, because it doesn't comply." I guess that's more an example of the interpretation of the law, but the clear objectives certainly aren't there. Our alternative proposal that we put forward late last year would have gone a long way towards clarifying that, by putting in time lines where a country that has been developed after a certain time would be regrowth forever; similar to what they have done in New South Wales. I'm happy to say in front of this Commission and in front of all the media, we have no confidence of knowing where we are going to be if this current government is re-elected here in Queensland in terms of those sorts of issues. I'm sorry, that's longwinded.

**DR BYRON:** Thanks very much. Can I come down a level. I think where Warren was going is that you imagine very high-level general national airy-fairy sort of statements and then within each state there's a framework of guidelines of what the state want to see and then, at a regional level, land-holders and other interested parties get together and work out what is best in terms of vegetation management in its region.

**MR ACTON:** Which would have to meet the objectives of the state - - -

**DR BYRON:** Embedded within - - -

**MR ACTON:** Yes.

**DR BYRON:** The state one is consistent with the national one and all the regional ones have to meet the sort of general broad rules at the state level. When you come down from a regional level to the individual properties - - -

**MR ACTON:** The property level.

**DR BYRON:** Yes. If the regional native veg committee has decided that a particular area of native vegetation qualifies as a remnant, it has high conservation value - - -

**MR ACTON:** Or needs to be - yes.

**DR BYRON:** Yes, whatever. What process do you envisage happens there? We have eliminated all the argument; everybody agrees that, yes, that's high conservation value and it belongs to Farmer Smith. What happens next?

**MR ACTON:** I guess it very much depends on the process that we talked about earlier with Commissioner Fisher, about the underpinning principles for a compensation regime. I believe that it needs to look at market based incentives; to provide land-holders with a real genuine financial incentive to protect some of those areas. There are going to be all sorts of degrees and that is where I think there is some body independent of AgForce or the Queensland government or the federal government, but probably incorporating all, that needs to go away and look at some underpinning principles that would make some judgment about when somebody needs outright compensation in a situation like what you're talking about, when some sort of market based incentive might assist and a range of the other what I would call compensation options, might be available.

Let me qualify all of this. When we first presented to you, we were in a process of discussion with government and whilst we raised all the administrative and regulatory problems, we were in a process of discussion and negotiation with this government about an alternative proposal to manage vegetation. On 16 January or whenever it was, that all went out the window. I have to say that I, along with every other member of AgForce and most of the rest of Queensland land-holders, don't have any confidence that we are going to be able to get back in the tent and get something workable and reasonable out of this; but we will try.

Assuming that there is a willingness to do that on the part of the government and AgForce and its members, then one of the things that we would have to look at is what our input - if we could get that COAG process - to that would be. We have said publicly that there are some land-holders to whom we know we cannot give a guarantee that they are going to be able to do any further initial development of remnant vegetation. They are going to be impacted. They have to be compensated in the appropriate manner, but, I'm sorry, Neil, I can't go any - - -

**DR BYRON:** I guess I'm wondering - I think it was South Australia and Western Australia when they first brought in their heritage agreements 20-odd years ago. From memory, what they said was that they weren't going to talk about compensation in a sort of a backward-looking sense.

**MR ACTON:** Yes.

**DR BYRON:** They were looking forward to say, "Well, we know that you are going to now have this native vegetation that you are going to have to look after and we realise that's going to cost you, so we will help pay for that."

**MR ACTON:** That's right.

**DR BYRON:** "It's not a cash payment because we've taken something away from you. It's a cash payment because we want you to do something in the future and we're going to help pay for it."

**MR ACTON:** The reason why I would say we're different in Queensland is the level of development that has occurred in those states compared to Queensland, which is why we believe that there needs to be a range of different levels of financial adjustment, however you want to term it - compensation, financial adjustment, market based incentives - where you are managing, for the government and the rest of the community.

There needs to be a range of those mechanisms, because we're talking about a totally different situation here. The level of development in Queensland is a little bit like the difference in the climate and the soil type and everything else. That's why the COAG thing needs to recognise the broad framework and we need to come down from there.

**DR BYRON:** It occurs to me that it would be extraordinarily difficult to even agree on the rules for compensation, let alone to actually calculate for a particular property exactly how many dollars somebody should be given. I guess as part of a reaction to all that complexity of calculation and formulas and things, to say, well, maybe a deal could be struck where if the government agency thinks this area is really not a

conservation packet of land, the landowner knows what the land is worth from a production sense, and somehow or other a way of negotiating a deal, where, if it's done voluntarily and there's no coercion or compulsion - - -

**MR ACTON:** If you go back to the voluntary issue for a moment, one of the things that we put forward before in the initial submission was the way voluntary covenants are being used. They are not voluntary at all. We have got numerous examples in Queensland where departments have said, "Well, you can renew the lease if you sign up to no further development in 60 per cent of the place." The voluntary covenant process has been an abject failure in most instances to my knowledge.

**DR BYRON:** Just the other day I was watching an old Landline program - about two or three years ago - where a property owner out around Karrabin way in Central Queensland - - -

**MR ACTON:** Yes, I know the one.

**DR BYRON:** - - - had got \$10,000 or something under the Queensland Parks and Wildlife setting. When the interviewer said, "Well, how much does it cost you to fence off this country and not use it all?" - "Nothing." He thought it was \$10,000 for old boots, you know. It was money for jam.

**MR ACTON:** I think one of the things that we would argue is that the trigger at the moment seems to be the regional ecosystem mapping in Queensland. If you want to do something, that's the Bible, and mostly it's wrong. What we're saying is that the trigger should be - if I want to go and develop a new area, there needs to be assessment done of that within the state objective, which might be to protect certain conservation areas or whatever. That would be the only trigger for any sort of compensation process, or if I decided that instead of that I wanted to protect a certain area on my place - I wanted to actually fence it off - that there be a funding mechanism to help me with that. So, yes, I'm not sure that we're on a different wavelength.

**DR BYRON:** Okay, yes. I knew we were pretty close.

**MR ACTON:** But the underlying problem that we have is that there hasn't been any of that. If you want this, this is what you do and there's no help or assistance or recognition of the impact.

**DR BYRON:** That brings back the question you raised at the beginning, about an affordable and transparent appeals process.

**MR ACTON:** Yes.



**DR BYRON:** I'm not certain of what the situation is in Queensland, but it has come up in every state where we have had hearings: "Do we have to go to court?". That's very expensive.

**MR ACTON:** Yes.

**DR BYRON:** In some states the courts don't even have the power to overrule the state vegetation committee.

**MR ACTON:** Is that the case?

**DR BYRON:** Have you got any more ideas on this appeals process? Hopefully after the first half-a-dozen cases or whatever, the precedents would be set and people would understand what you are likely to get or not get.

**MR ACTON:** Yes.

**DR BYRON:** It might be one of these sorts of tribunals that after a couple of years you could abolish it, because it wouldn't have any more work to do.

**MR ACTON:** That's right. That would be the ultimate, obviously. We put a lot of thought into that prior to, once again, our alternative proposal being put to the federal and state government last year. The best that we could come up with was - call it a tribunal or whatever you want. In Queensland we have a Land Court. Some people would argue that they are not happy with the outcomes of the Land Court, but in the main they have been a land-holder friendly jurisdiction. Until recently, minimal cost. You can represent yourself in that court process.

There were members of the Land Court who we believe had a good understanding of the management of resource generally across the state pretty well. That is disappearing, obviously, but those people are there. Our suggestion to the two levels of government was that this tribunal - if that is what it is to be called - should include a member of the Land Court; probably at least one land-holder or representative of land-holders; somebody with an understanding of government administration of the land, so probably a retired person either from this state or interstate, but preferably from northern Australia, who would provide that mechanism. We have also talked about a resource management ombudsman. I think probably a combination of both of those is something that needs to be thought about. There's an awful lot of opposition to either of those from this state government at the moment, or certainly some of the departmental advisers. Alternatively, there is some support for it.

**DR BYRON:** I haven't heard the idea of the ombudsman before, but it strikes a bit of a cord, because a number of the people who we have spoken to in hearings and visits and that, have said, "We don't know even know to complain to."

**MR ACTON:** That's right.

**DR BYRON:** And in their case there's no point in complaining to the state government agency, because - - -

**MR ACTON:** Well, there is a state ombudsman in Queensland and we have actually taken up some cases with him. He doesn't understand resource management issues, so it's very difficult. We believe that there needs to be some body with that knowledge.

**DR BYRON:** The only other point that you have raised in your introductory remarks that I wanted to come back to is the economic modelling and the preliminary work that we did on the Merway Shire that's in the appendix to the report.

**MR ACTON:** You're going to test me now.

**DR BYRON:** No, I'm not. I was just going to say that we had made arrangements to try and get as many people from outside the Commission who have that sort of detailed knowledge and the data, independent sources, to come and we will be having a special technical meeting just for the people who have got - - -

**MR ACTON:** Professional people?

**DR BYRON:** Well, the people who have got the statistics or people who have got independent facts and figures on this and other economic models to just check that what we have got in there is sensible or try and improve it, either in terms of the way we have tried to do the calculation or the numbers that we put into it, but as you probably saw in the draft report, all those numbers were very provisional.

**MR ACTON:** Yes.

**DR BYRON:** Highly qualified and indicative.

**MR ACTON:** We appreciated that and we were very appreciative of the attempt that you made.

**DR BYRON:** But my point is that it's really hard. You can make 1001 different assumptions, you've got different people with different data and you have people arguing different techniques for doing it.

**MR ACTON:** Which is why we believe there needs to be some process to try and arrive, hopefully to arrive, at some underpinning principles that we can all agree on and go forward - we won't all agree on, sorry - that we can use to go forward. Internally we have this debate still. There are a lot of our people who would argue that potential productivity ad infinitum should be recognised in this process, or loss of productivity, sorry - loss of economic return. There are also those who argue that the only realistic and simple way to do it is on market value prior to and after, and there are others everywhere in between and, as I said earlier, I think there's a lot of argument either way that could be justifiably supported. We need to remember at the end of the day that the simplest system that we can arrive at will be the best.

**DR BYRON:** Yes, I think we agree on that. I can't think of anything else I wanted to ask you at the moment. Is there anything else you want to say by way of conclusion?

**MR ACTON:** No, I don't think so. I will just say that I've been talking, as I said, to the National Farmers Federation people. There will be a very brief letter come in from them. Basically it's along the same lines as I've talked to you about, and I doubt that I will be making the effort to travel south to talk to you this time.

**DR BYRON:** But the purpose of this round of hearings is firstly to correct any errors of fact or interpretation in what's in there, and also to try and improve and firm up the draft recommendations, so that if we're heading in the wrong direction we want to be told, or if people have good, constructive suggestions on how to do it better or smarter or faster, we'd really like to hear that.

**MR ACTON:** I guess that's why we've sort of tried to focus on going to the next level. I mean, as I said, we were very encouraged by the draft report and we believe that the only way is if we can lock all of the states into this process. As I said, we are still searching for a fishing line or a pool, that we can help drag particularly the states into the process. Thanks very much.

**DR BYRON:** Thank you for coming.

**DR BYRON:** Is there anybody else who would like to come forward and say their piece for the record? We still have plenty of time; no compulsion, of course. Going once, going twice. Well, in that case, Mr Clift, did you want to - - -

**MR CLIFT:** I would like to make this point when it comes to land conservation.

**DR BYRON:** Okay. I think it's best if you can do that near a microphone.

**MR CLIFT:** Mr Chairman, I'm one who's been on the land all my life and I love the land. 15 years ago at Tambo, a civil servant with the name of a policeman went into the sheep business and subleased a special lease without the consent of the minister for lands, which he should have had; ran a separate business without the consent of the Commissioner of police, put four times the legal number of sheep in that paddock for three years. There's what happened.

I issued an official complaint. The sheep had eaten the bark of every vine tree in that paddock, and vine trees are the ones that grow on the open downs in the west, and once they're eaten off, that's it - ate the bark off, killed the lot; starving sheep. Now, droughts happen. This was no drought. That bottom photo is through the fence of the stock route. Grass that high. I issued an official complaint. The inspector didn't want to know about it, violently hostile, so I left a copy of the official complaint with radio station 4BL in case I was to not get home. I lived 200 K out of town.

Radio station 4BL faxed that to the Courier Mail, who sent out a reporter, published half a page the next day. I copped a defamation writ. And for trying to publicise what this fellow was doing wrong cost me \$350,000, the highest defamation writ in Queensland's history. Pratt was the judge. You may have heard in the Fitzgerald inquiry Pratt and Vasta were brought up before parliament to show cause why they shouldn't be thrown out for corruption. Vasta was thrown out; Pratt wasn't. But since then, through public ridicule, I forced his resignation. I got even. But that's the other side of the coin when it comes to land degradation. There is that bottom photo, taken six years after this one, still there, destocked. It's still there, wrecked for many many years to come.

So I've got fairly strong views about land management. There were two courses: one if you're a lease-holder and one if you're a civil servant in the pay of the government and the government sets you up to break you. I've not been very happy ever since. You can understand the position. I left a property out there, one of the best set-up ones in the whole of western Queensland, and when I sold it five years ago it realised the highest price per acre of any block of land in the west. I put a lot of work into it, spent 3 million fixing everything. I'm not in the business of raping land. Thank you for your time.

**DR BYRON:** Thank you very much for that. I think on that note it's time to call it a day. Thank you very much. I'll now adjourn the public hearing and we will resume tomorrow morning in Sydney. Thank you.

AT 2.45 PM THE INQUIRY WAS ADJOURNED UNTIL  
WEDNESDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2004

## INDEX

	<u>Page</u>
TAMBORINE MOUNTAIN LANDCARE: DONALD JOHN LYNCH: JULIE ELIZABETH LAKE	1084-1101
RUSSELL TURKINGTON BEVERLEY TURKINGTON	1102-1116
COLIN CLIFT	1117-1119 1141-1142
BOONAH SHIRE COUNCIL: STEPHEN SMITH	1120-1126
AGFORCE QUEENSLAND: LARRY ACTON AMANDA PARKER	1127-1140