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Committee Manager,  
Standing Committee on Natural resource Management,  
Parliament House,  
Macquarie St.,  
SYDNEY. NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

I noted the media report asking for submissions to this committee, on the sustainable management of natural resources in New South Wales.

I am a retired tertiary educated farm manager/agronomist, who worked for 40 years in N. NSW, mostly in the grains industry. I served on numerous grains and environmental committees, the most significant of which was a 9 year term as a Northern panel grower member of the Grains Research and Development Corporation.

I was 24 years in Moree, and was the foundation Chairman of Moree Conservation farmers Association serving from 1985 to 1999. The aim of the Association is to promote the adoption and use of conservation farming systems on the NW Plains of NSW. As such, the Association promotes the use of minimum and no tillage farming systems, reducing the reliance on cultivation as a farming management tool in grain production in the area.

The result of advanced conservation farming systems is the greatly reduced incidence of soil erosion (normally > 90%), less soil degradation and increased water use efficiency. This consistently gives increased and more stable crop production, with the farmer enjoying better profits.

Over the 14 years I was involved with the Association, we actively promoted the conservation ethic. Others, including staff from NSW Agriculture, CSIRO, Agribusiness, NSW Dept. of Land & Water Conservation, NSW Farmers Association, and numerous other groups repeated this message. From 1991 to 1999 we also had NHT (Landcare) funding to employ a project officer to co-ordinate and arrange all types of Extension and publicity activities.

In summary we had numerous Government, Semi- Government, and Private enterprise staff from all sides of agriculture all 'singing from the same hymn sheet' in unison on this topic. However despite all this unified approach, we have had overall adoption of conservation farming on the

NW Plains move from 1% in 1981 to 10% in 1991 to an estimated 50% today. In a 20 year period we have around half of the farmers converted, with no dissenting voices whatsoever.

Contrast this with the current state of environmental policy. We have the active Landcare movement, community and farmer groups, and some Government and other organizations attempting to motivate the farmers and other interested citizens to repair the environment. On the other hand we have repressive laws, policing, coercion, threats, inconsistent decision-making by bureaucrats, and other ridiculous posturing by those who think they know best, to try and force the farmer into changing his environmental standards and now 'look after' the environment.

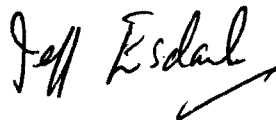
If after 20 years, with all on side, we have 50% adoption of a conservation farming practice, how long is it going to take to have even partial adoption with the current dissention? I suggest to the committee that if the current attitude of Government and its current Departments handling environmental matters continues, you will never have a significant adoption of such environmental progress.

Farmers will only carry out the minimum requirement as required by law, and no more. There must be a complete change of attitude and outlook by all sectors of Government and the associated departments. An enormous 'carrot' approach must be adopted, with practically no 'stick'. Government advisors must work with farmers and not against them. The profit motive for the farming community must be emphasised. Farmers must be told, and it must be practically demonstrated to them, that they will make more money by adopting sensible environmental practises. Facilitators and others must work out a schedule involving all (Govt. Semi-Govt, agribusiness, CSIRO, Universities, farmer groups, community groups etc) so that ultimately we are all 'singing from the same hymn sheet' again.

Since SEPP 46 was introduced in 1994, there has been an enormous loss of credibility by Government, and in my opinion, it will take the best part of a generation to repair. The current farmer population must learn to trust again the words of other stakeholders in the community to work together to repair the environment. Until this happens we will see no great strides in addressing the environmental situation. Even if it does happen, and trust is restored, expect a very long lag phase before we see a significant advance in seeing outcomes of the circumstances. Farmers have long memories.

Please let me know if you would like more details.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R.J. Esdaile". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

R.J. ESDAILE.